

# GODLY LEADERSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

The next three editions of MET Connexion will be reflecting on this wonderful letter from Paul to Titus and the gems that it contains. In Chapter 1, Paul's primary focus is on the need for godly leadership - something that our Church and world so desperately need.

Titus is a Gentile (Galatians 2:3), an apprentice of Paul, visiting Corinth with him amongst other places (2 Corinthians 7). Now he's on Crete (Titus 1:5) seeking to establish good leaders for the church. Paul has visited Crete (Acts 27) and on the day of Pentecost, Cretans heard the gospel (Acts 2:11).

Paul (Titus 1:1), an apostle i.e. 'sent one' is sent by a reliable and trustworthy God to God's people to further and build up their faith. As knowledge of this faith increases, it may lead to godliness. What matters for Paul is not that people have 'right' belief, but rather that being informed of the truth of the gospel might lead to a godly life worked out in the life of the community. We are to live out the truth of what we believe and apply it in every aspect of our lives, so that the world is transformed to God's glory.

Paul emphasizes the truth and reliability of God (v.2). This isn't just a passing description, but an important evangelistic and theological statement. In the Greco-Roman world, where paganism was the dominant worldview, there were lots of gods for different purposes - for weather, fertility, health, financial prosperity - and one sought the relevant gods and appeased them to gain favour. The gods were notoriously unreliable and unpredictable. Yet Paul states the One true God can be relied upon. His character is true, his behaviour is true, his nature is true, he is thoroughly reliable, and Paul is saying 'I represent that God. That's whom I'm sent by; that is the One who sends me to you; that's the One of whom I write'.

## REFLECTION

*To what extent do you feel sent under the command of God into your mission field?*

## GODLY LEADERS

I have the privilege of serving on the Ministerial Candidate's Selection Committee which assesses all of those who believe they are called of God to serve as an ordained person in the British Methodist Church. I never cease to delight in the people that we meet who are offering themselves to God. Occasionally I hear people objecting to the need for training. 'The disciples didn't need it', they say. I am very much pro-training, and theological education, but Paul is making clear that the best education will never, ever make up for a lack of calling, commissioning or a sense of anointing from God.

V.3 sees Paul speaking of his commission and authority. We too are appointed to herald the message and proclaim the gospel by the command of God our Saviour. People can have a strong sense of anointing or commissioning from God, but without proper discipline, accountability and training they would be a disaster and probably cause harm to themselves and others. What's clear is that Paul would rather have no leader at all than somebody ill-fitted for the role. That's a good lesson for any of us in recruitment. Sometimes we can feel like it's better to fill a role with anyone. Whether it's in a community organisation like the church or whether it's in employment, it's better to have no-one than to have the wrong person. Paul agrees.

In v.6 we hear about the role of elder from the Greek 'presbyteros' where the term 'presbyter' originates and, in v.7, the word overseer, literally 'episkopos', meaning 'oversight' but sometimes translated as 'bishop'. Paul is more concerned about the character that is needed to inhabit those roles.

In the ordination service, there is a wonderful moment when the congregation is asked whether we consider the ordinands worthy of the role to which we will ordain them. The congregation replies, 'they are worthy'. Paul sets out what a worthy leader is like. He is concerned with the fledgling Christian movement and doesn't want Christians to be scandalised, brought into disrepute, or misunderstood, so there's a responsibility, particularly on the leaders of this

community to conduct themselves well (v.6). They must be above accusation, faithful, with no 'skeletons in the closet'. We need to be able to rely on the character of such people.

Paul goes on to speak about an elders' family (v.6). In the context of the first century AD, when the church is just beginning to make its way, Paul is saying: don't select people who may end up drawing the wrong sort of attention to the church, because that's only going to bring them and others harm.

Although this is a highly patriarchal society, we live in a very different context now and I'm grateful that in Methodism, we see these gender-specific requirements as contextual for the first century and not universal. It's important to remember all of that as we hear these words.

Paul continues the character requirements in v.7. 'Overbearing' is sometimes translated 'arrogant' and, if you are that, as well as the other qualities to be avoided in v.7, there's no way of being 'blameless'. For Paul, it's vital that the character of church leaders is reputable. In fact, it's not just about not doing some things but actively doing others - church leaders must be hospitable, must be people that love what is good and must be able to lead themselves before seeking to lead others.

All this reminds us that we should choose character over competence in leaders. We would have both if we could, but if I had to choose, I'd always have godly character over high competence. I would much rather have godly people who are at the Lord's disposal than highly gifted people who aren't godly. The church needs good and godly leaders like it has never needed them before.

If you are a church leader, I hope you sense a fresh challenge. If you are not, then pray for those that are, and that God would raise up more godly leaders for our church. Pray for your church leader; pray that they would increase in godliness and increase in the sense of the anointing of God that they carry. Pray even if you don't think that they anywhere near match up to what the New Testament requires of elders. Pray for them before you criticise them. Pray that God would raise up people, lay and ordained, who would also carry some of these competences and carry some of these character traits, that the church might be equipped, built up and strengthened with godly leadership. We need it for such a time as this.

#### REFLECTION

*When was the last time you prayed for your Minister or church leader?*

#### LEADING FOR UNITY

Leadership was much needed in Crete because there was division in the church. It came by way of the 'circumcision

group' (see also Galatians 2:10) - a group of Christians who were insisting that Gentiles needed to become Jews first, and then become Christians; they needed to take up the Jewish cultural laws and food laws, as well as accepting Christ. The next logical step was for separate groups to form within the church. Some, who considered themselves the 'true believers' because they set themselves apart from people for religious purity and because they only ate certain foods, considered themselves the 'really pure Christians' and so therefore began to isolate and distance themselves and became an increasingly elitist bunch.

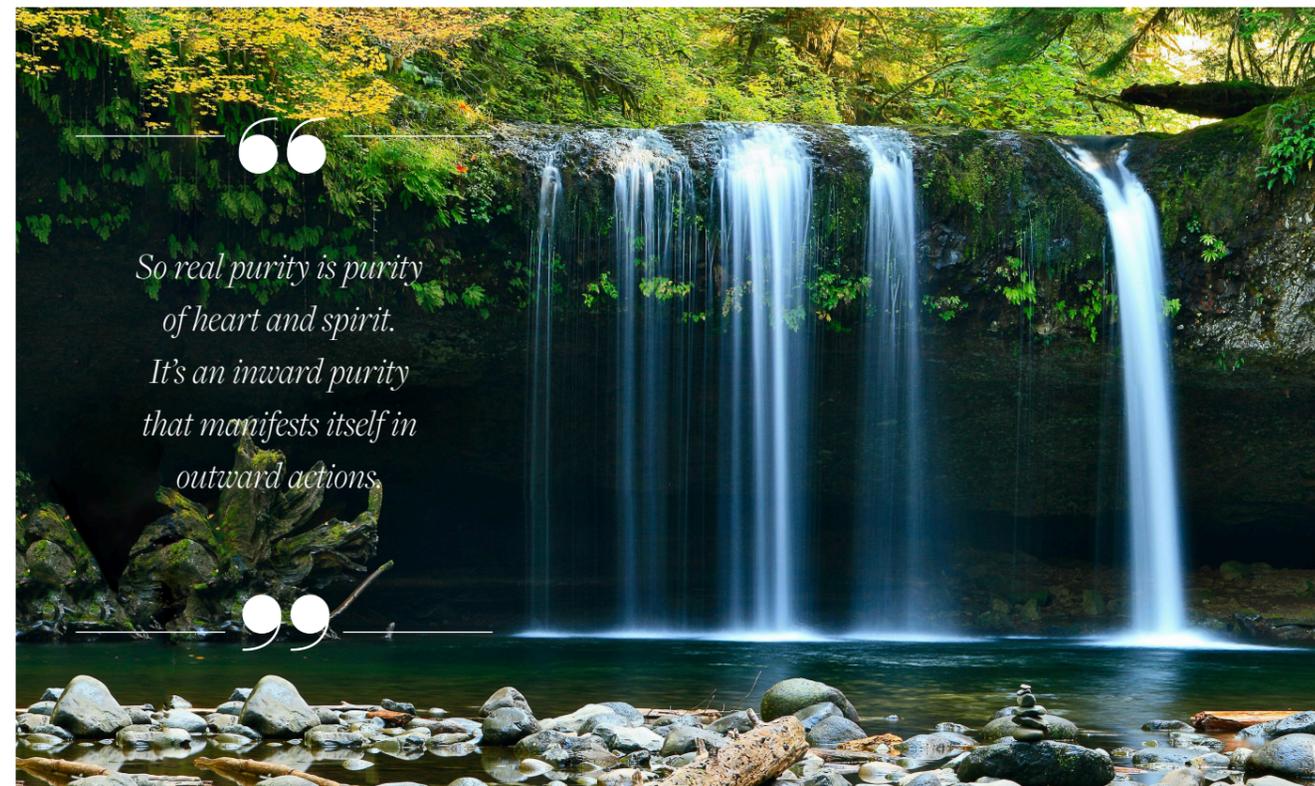
This is false in Paul's eyes because it 'adds to Christ' in terms of that which is needed for salvation. It is not Christ and eating certain foods, or Christ and keeping certain company. Salvation is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and pleading that over our lives; it is that which causes us to be adopted into the family of God and accepted as God's children. We bring nothing to the party. We cannot do certain things to make us more acceptable to God. Any sense of trying to add to what Christ has done by keeping certain religious rituals begins to deny the unique sacrifice of Christ. So, it falsifies the gospel and it creates this elevated group of Christians which leads to division. Paul wants the body of Christ to live together in unity and to express such unity to a world that is full of different cults and sects and divisions. It's worth just pointing out that, centuries on from this letter, we too can unwittingly add our own cultural laws to the gospel. How many people have been put off the life of faith because Christians have expected certain things of them that perhaps they weren't expecting of themselves? How many folk have been kept from the church because of unspoken 'laws' about dress, conduct, etc?

#### REFLECTION

*Does your church have any 'unspoken rules' with which people have to comply before fitting in? Think hard about this before moving on.*

Paul calls these errant believers 'rebellious' (v.10) - the same word used to describe children in v.6. In other words, don't be seditious or undermining or chaotic. These false teachers are disruptive (v.11) for their own reward. They need to be silenced because they don't have at heart the concern for the unity of the church. Rather they have a concern for their own power, their own status and potentially for receiving some kind of offering from people. Contrast that with the qualities listed in v.7. Leaders are not to pursue dishonest gain. They are to be hospitable. They are to be disciplined. It is the opposite of the qualities that Paul points out, that are present in these false teachers.

V.12 is curious because Paul appears to collude with a stereotype. He is being ironic, being tongue-in-cheek even. He's saying, 'you know everyone says this about the Cretans



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and it's proved to be true'. A TV comedy sketch recently derided 'northerners' from the perspective of 'Londoners'. It was a subtle cultural portrayal of people in London who have largely kept themselves to themselves and northern people being outgoing and not reading cultural cues 'down south'. Cultural stereotypes exist. V.12 seems to be saying: 'everyone knows that the Cretans are like this' and Paul is piggy-backing on that to say the Cretans need strong leadership and guidance. They need to be clearly rebuked when they step out of line, in order that they might become sound in the faith (v.13). The false teachers also need a prospect of redemption. Those that have been sharing a false gospel, perhaps those that have been taken in by it, need to have a way back. So is it the task of all of us to rebuke those that we consider false? No, because that would also lead to chaos and just as much division. That's why Paul has set out to Titus why godly leadership needs to be established (v.5).

Paul returns to the issue of Judaising Christians in v.14 by addressing what he calls 'Jewish myths'. By the first century AD, there were stories circulating of old Jewish biblical heroes. The Jewish diaspora meant that there was plenty of culturally applied Judaism present in the region. Jewish stories were well-known and sometimes the story was embellished and become somewhat apocalyptic. These stories were falsely applied to justify the need for certain religious and cultural laws. This whole issue, although ostensibly it's about what you eat and with whom you associate, isn't the real issue. This is less about religious purity and more about power and control (v.15). If people were really pure of heart, they would be much less obsessed with which meat they can eat and more concerned about the centrality of the gospel and the heart of the Christian message. But because they're obsessed with these external and peripheral things, this shows they don't really have a concern for the gospel, and are not really pure of heart.

So real purity is purity of heart and spirit. It's an inward purity that manifests itself in outward actions. Whereas the people who were pressing this kind of Judaising cause were more worried about the outward purity, Paul says, 'No, it's the other way around'. When you are inwardly pure, that overflows into an outwardly pure life. How often have we become very fixated about peripheral matters, that just happened to be our own hobby horse and the things that we care about? We can end up elevating them to a level of importance that God has never intended, whether it's about church music, the gender of church leaders or matters of sexuality. We can get so focused on those things that we miss the main thing. Paul is saying: make sure that you focus on what matters here, and the role of godly leadership is to make sure that the church focuses on its primary mission of keeping Christ front and centre. In the famous saying attributed to St Augustine, 'in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity'. In other words, let's focus our energy and effort on what is central, that is: Christ and Christ alone.



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