

Christian author... Eugene Peterson... in *Run with the Horses*... tells how he saw a family of birds teaching their young to fly.

Three young swallows were perched on a dead branch that stretched out over a lake. "One adult swallow got alongside the chicks and started shoving them out toward the end of the branch--pushing, pushing, pushing. The end one fell off. Somewhere between the branch and the water four feet below, the wings started working, and the fledgling was off on his own. Then the second one.

"The third was not to be bullied. At the last possible moment his grip on the branch loosened just enough so that he swung downward, then tightened again, bulldog tenacious. The parent was without sentiment. He pecked at the desperately clinging talons until it was more painful for the poor chick to hang on than risk the insecurities of flying. The grip was released, and the inexperienced wings began pumping. The mature swallow knew what the chick did not--that it would fly--that there was no danger in making it do what it was perfectly designed to do.

"Birds have feet and can walk. Birds have talons and can grasp a branch securely. They can walk; they can cling. But flying is their characteristic action, and not until they fly are they living at their best, gracefully and beautifully.

Let me be blunt with you for a moment. It will help explain why I have selected the next sermon series that we begin this morning. ... I have been a pastor long enough to notice that many people who fill our churches today... have been given a purpose for their life... by God. (It is the air into which we have all been born. It is the action that was designed into us before our birth.) ... But the many who fill our churches... try desperately to hold on to themselves... to live for themselves. They look so bedraggled and pathetic doing it... hanging on to the dead branch of minimal risk... for dear life... afraid to imperil themselves on the untried wings of serving the Lord... in the way they know... that He wants them to.

But the sooner we start... the better... for we are going to have to give up our lives finally... and the longer we wait... the less time we have for the soaring and swooping life of grace.

How many of us really know who we are and why we are here? ... Of course... we all have names and our own personal histories. ... We have goals... dreams... and characteristics... which we feel give us a special identity... and these things are certainly to be valued. ... But when we think about reason for being... personal identity and meaning in life... do we do so with God... and His will in mind?

Paul's letter to Titus... (the book for our new study)... lays that challenge... among others... before us. ... Much of the letter encourages rather ordinary believers... who occupy all walks of life... to consider their lives (in every facet) - as an expression of the will of God. ... In fact... once life is considered in this way... the thought of "ordinariness" departs from Christian thinking about life.

As a Christian... no matter what path God has given you (individually) to walk... you are intended to be a vital piece in God's **missionary plan**... to reach the rest of the world. ... Each "piece" has meaning... every believer has inestimable value and usefulness to God... and this realization is a tremendous source of joy... satisfaction... and peace. ... But to comprehend this... we may need to make some adjustments in the way we view life. ... One of those modifications... might be to see yourself MORE... as a servant... a slave of God. (I'll talk more on this in a moment. But right now... let's get started in our study of the Book of Titus... with a look at the background to this Epistle... and then we will see how Paul defined his own

life. ... Although he was an apostle... the pattern of his thinking ought also to be ours.)

Here is the background to the letter we are about to study...

Paul wrote three Pastoral Letters during the years 63-67 A.D. to two of his spiritual sons... Timothy and Titus. These two men... whom Paul led to Christ... represented Paul and the apostles in different churches. ... They collected offerings for the starving in Judea during the famine... They were peacemakers to the churches... they carried letters... they gave instructions to the churches from the apostles.

Paul instructed Timothy to appoint elders in Ephesus... and **Titus** to appoint elders in Crete.

Crete is an island about 75 miles south of Greece. Cretans are descended from the ancient tribes of the Philistines. ... You remember them. These are the people who bothered King Saul... King David... Samson... and so often Israel's army so much. Apparently... their descendants became great sailors and pirates... So... as a people group... they kept to their evil and menacing ways... that we see in the Old Testament. Next week we will cover verse 12 in Titus chapter one... that says...

Titus 1:12 (ESV)

One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

Crete was known as the mythical birthplace of Zeus... it was also famous for the fabled creature... known as the Minotaur... a half-bull and half-

human monster... Furthermore... Crete was deeply immersed in worship of the Roman emperor as universal savior. ... These fledgling congregations on the Island of Crete needed serious attention... and they needed it quickly.

Titus was a Greek... (a non-Jewish convert) who became something of a "test case" for the gospel... (specifically... the fact that one does not need to become a Jew... and be circumcised... in order to be saved.)

Titus had a special relationship to the troubled church at Corinth... His work there... and here on the difficult island of Crete... revealed Paul's confidence in him. ... Playfully, we can say Titus was Paul's "*hit man*"... his "*Green Beret*"... his "*spiritual Navy Seal*"... who could go into the hard places and set things in order... get things fixed... make things right.

Titus is less prominent than Timothy in Paul's letters (in Acts he is never mentioned at all). ... But Paul regarded him and treated him with the same fatherly affection. The father-son relationship was a spiritual one... the result of sharing in the common faith of God's people.

Now we are ready to see how Paul defined his own life ... (the pattern of his thinking that ought also to be ours.)

Titus 1:1-4

I suspect one of the greatest joys of the Christian life is when we thoroughly understand who we are in the sight of God, what are our spiritual gifts, and what is the message which we proclaim to the world. Then we have spiritual rest and contentment.

Paul is laying out his credentials. He calls himself "a servant of God" in verse 1. ... He is saying, in effect, *"I am a slave of the God who created the universe. I'm held captive by him. I once was held captive by Satan, by sin, shame and guilt, but I have been set free by Jesus Christ, transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light so that I'm free to serve the Living God."*

I had a friend in seminary who would say to others... *"I don't mind being called a servant of God; I just don't like being treated like one!"*

The word Paul used for "servant" here actually means "bond slave." Paul says that he is a bond slave of God. ... We know from the Old Testament that a bond slave was one who chose to remain a slave of his master for life.

Paul says that he was *a slave of God*. This is striking, for the last thing that a person wants to be... is a slave to anybody. ... Yet this is exactly what Paul claimed. In fact, he proudly declared that he was the slave of God. What did Paul mean?

He meant that he was totally possessed by God. God had looked upon Paul and seen his degraded and needful condition... God had seen Paul in the slave-market of the world... held in bondage by sin and death... the trouble and trials of life. ... And God was moved with compassion toward Paul. Therefore... God *bought and purchased* Paul. ... Paul was now the slave of God—totally possessed by God.

It also means that Paul was completely subservient to God and owed total allegiance to the will of God. Greek scholar... Kenneth Wuest says... "*His will was swallowed up in the sweet will of God.*"

A third meaning Paul had... by calling himself a slave... was that he had the highest and most honored and kingly profession in all the world. ... Men of God... the greatest men of history... have always been called "the servants of God." ... It was the highest title of honor.

The believer's slavery to God is no cringing... cowardly... or shameful subjection. ... It is the position of *honor*—the honor that bestows upon a man the privileges and responsibilities of serving the King of kings and Lord of lords. ... Anyone who calls themselves a slave of God is in good company:

- Moses was the slave of God (Deut. 34:5; Psalm 105:26; Malachi 4:4).
- Joshua was the slave of God (Joshua 5:14).
- David was the slave of God (2 Samuel 3:18; Psalm 78:70).
- Paul was the slave of God (Romans 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1).
- James was the slave of God (James 1:1).
- Jude was the slave of God (Jude 1).
- The prophets were the slaves of God (Amos 3:7; Jeremiah 7:25).

AND...

Christian believers are said to be the slaves of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:18; 1 Cor. 7:22; Ephes. 6:6; Col. 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:24).

The great need today is for men and women to see themselves as *slaves* of the Lord Jesus Christ... and to *behave* that way. ... We must become His slaves and do what He says. ... Then and only then will the world be reached with the glorious news of eternal life. ... Then and only then will the desperate needs of the world be met.

Paul also saw himself as the Apostle that God called him to be. Paul's two-fold reference to himself ("bond-slave" and "apostle") combines humble obedience with confident authority. But he is not being braggadocios here. The reason that he asserts his apostleship is that he is going to give instructions to the organized church. These instructions come from an apostle... the appointed writer of the Lord. You see... Jesus was now communicating with His church through His apostles.

Having shared who he is... Paul shares his purpose... in the very same verse... and that is... first... *"for the faith of those chosen of God."*

Titus 1:1

Paul knew in God's sight... he was a sweet aroma... a fragrance to those who were in the process of being saved. ... Paul understood that he was chosen... and that he was chosen to go and to work among those who were also chosen.

Those who believe... are "God's elect"... meaning their eternal status is determined by the love of a heavenly heart and not by the work of human hands. ... To be chosen of God should create in our hearts a sense of security... gratitude... and well-being. It should create in our hearts a sense of humility and a sense of responsibility.

So Paul's purpose is *"for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness."* Paul wanted people to come the full knowledge of who God is... to not only get the facts but to fully experience the very life of Christ Who was living in them.

Observe in verse one that it is... faith (**then**) knowledge (**then**) godliness. The order is absolutely essential to note. The gospel... (fed by knowledge of the truth)... should always lead to godliness. In other words... what I believe... will affect how I live... and how I live... will demonstrate what I believe! Our relationship with God (that the gospel faith establishes) leads to righteous actions.

Vance Havner... commenting on the church's failure... to move from faith to knowledge to godliness... said... "*We are challenged these days, but not changed; convicted, but not converted. We hear, but do not; and thereby we deceive ourselves.*" ...Wouldn't you say that this is an unfortunate but truthful characterization of evangelical Christianity today...? ... We are that family of birds... challenged by truth... yet we are desperately holding on to the dead branch.

Here is the theme of this letter to Titus... that we not only see (here) in Paul's opening... but we will continue to see as we study through this book: **Life must conform to doctrine**. The message is the same for leaders and servants... parents and children... male and female... young and old: Grace should produce godliness.

In verse 2... Paul mentions something else that should produce godliness – "hope of eternal life."

Titus 1:2a

This word hope means different things to different people. Often the way we use it ("I hope tomorrow will be a nice day," "I hope I get the job") implies uncertainty. But Christian hope has an entirely different quality

about it, for it is grounded on the promises of God. The remainder of verses 2-3 provide the certainty of Christian hope in eternal life.

Titus 1:2b-3

Paul gives two reasons for the certainty of our hope. First... before time... God made the promise of eternal life. That is... it was part of his eternal will that His people would enjoy eternal life. Second... God's promises are not like human promises... because God cannot lie.

Apparently lying was commonplace in Crete (which Paul indicated in verse 12... that verse I showed you earlier... which we will come to next week). ... But Paul made it clear at the start... right here... that God does not lie. ... The foundation of our faith is trust in God's character.

Christian hope is built on the promise of God. That promise is good (1) because God does not lie and (2) because he sent his Son to keep his promise. ... God made this promise before sundials... watches... or Google calendars were made. ... This was all in God's plan long before there was a sequence of Monday... Tuesday... Wednesday... Thursday... January... February... March... or 2015... 2016... 2017. ... He thought about it before we came into time and space--"long ages ago." ... In his love and mercy God chose us "before the foundation of the world." The hope of eternal life rests on the truthful character of God and his eternal promise.

Here is what J Vernon McGee wrote:

Sometimes we believers almost make God out a liar by the lives we live. We say we believe something, but we don't really believe, and we act as if we don't believe. Paul says God cannot lie.

I have often wanted to preach a sermon on things that God cannot do. This is one: God cannot lie. Do you also know that you see something every day that God has never seen? You have seen your equal; God has never seen His equal. Why cannot God lie when we can? Well, you can do something God cannot do. You see, God must be true to Himself. He is holy and He is righteous -- that is His nature, and there are certain things He cannot do because of His nature. It is not because it is impossible for Him to do it; but because God is true to His nature, He cannot do it. He is righteous, He is just, and He never deceives. He is One you can depend upon.

Titus 1:3-4

“Grace and peace” were a normal part of Paul’s opening greetings in his letters. When persons become absolutely convinced that their standing before God is based entirely on his grace and not on any goodness in themselves... peace comes.

This peace that Christ's reconciliation provides... is not only the end of hostility between a rebellious heart and its Creator. ... Full understanding of grace also provides relief... from the constant striving for status and affection... that characterizes the natural human state. ... Assessments of who is more deserving of God's affection... or approval... go away in the recognition that "all ... fall short of the glory of God". ... Competition for recognition and regard fades in the realization that all the rewards of grace are unearned. ... We become equal members of the fellowship of those whose condition is desperate apart from Christ... and this humbling realization is the foundation of Christian harmony.

Those who understand that God's love for them will be compelled to love Him and serve Him. ... They will do so not out of obligation but out of gratitude - "gospel gratitude."

A man who is captured by the love of his wife... will return that love not because he has to... but because he wants to. ... The same is true of a wife. ... What woman would not want to submit to a husband who loved her as Christ loves the church...? ... A person captured by the love of Jesus will love Him in return... not because he/she has to but because he wants to. This leads me to say that those who are not regularly serving the Lord – do not really know Christ. They don't know the love He has for us.

He saved you that you might serve Him. He saved you that you might enjoy Him.

Titus 1:5

"Set in order what remains," Paul instructs Titus. *"Set things straight, make sure things are running right, that things are done correctly",* he is saying. Then, *"appoint elders in every city as I directed you."*

Now Paul is about to list several qualifications of an elder in a church. ... There are several ways we can benefit from this information. ... The first practical use for what we are about to get into here... is that we have our annual meeting coming up in 2 or 3 weeks. We will be presenting to you a list of names and asking you to affirm (or deny) them as God's choice to lead our church. How will you know God's choice? ... By this list of qualifications.

The second (and most immediate) use... is that God may be calling you into church leadership of some sort or another (now or in the future.) I hope that God has been using the first five verses of Titus to have you evaluate your commitment of service. Many are being called by God to be

ministry leaders. ... These are great qualities for any leader in the church – not just elders. ... And I hope (most of all) that these qualifications will be used by you as a measuring tool... a place to begin to check your own level of Spiritual maturity... I hope you will do this... whether or not you are moving into leadership. ... What we have... in the qualifications for an elder... is Paul's description of spiritual maturity. ... What is your level of spiritual maturity...?

Titus 1:6-9

God believes leadership of the local church is so important that He addresses the issue in detail four times in the New Testament: Acts 20:28-38; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Here in Titus (Titus 1:5-9); and 1 Peter 5:1-4.

In each of these lists of qualifications... it is easy to note... that among the Christian leadership qualifications... there are no mountains to climb... no alligators to wrestle... no pilgrimages to make... no prophecies to utter... no ancient manuscripts to decode... no visions to conjure... no tortures to endure... and no miracles to perform. ... You don't even have to speak "Christianeze" using all the right lingo... that looks spiritual. The standards for Christian leadership strictly relate to one's example of living before others.

Understanding that the requirements for elders relate primarily to how one lives before others... helps explain Paul's use of the phrase "*must be above reproach*" (the very first one... at the top of the list... and then repeated in the next verse... verse 7) ... The Greek term is a technical word meaning "*not chargeable with some offense.*" A person who is

"above reproach" ... is one... whom others have no obvious reason to accuse for living *inconsistently* with his faith commitments. ... Paul's "above reproach" standard is based upon what others in the church see and observe. ... It is not so much a standard for one's own internal assessment (which **would be** required if Paul used a word such as *sinless* or even *good-intentioned*.) But "above reproach" reflects the assessment of an external community observation.

Reputation in the non-Christian community is also relevant (as Paul makes clear in another list found 1 Tim 3:7). Church leaders should seek to live... so as to avoid others' concerns that they are guilty of Biblical offense or neglect.

When "above reproach" is properly understood as relating to one's community reputation... comfort may result for some... and distress for others. ... There is comfort for those who realize that they are not disqualified for church office... simply because their lives are not *perfect*... or else there would be no church officers. ... At the same time... there may be distress for one who does not want to be held accountable for what others think about how consistently he lives according to Scripture. Such accountability grates against an independent spirit. "*Why should I have to worry about what others observe and think?*" someone might question. ...And I would have to say... such a sentiment displays a disqualification. Because we are responsible for the spiritual welfare of others as well as ourselves, we should seek to make the gospel credible to others by our example. A life that is above reproach is a life worth copying... and example worth following.

But we still don't have a clear picture of what "above reproach" means... What we have seen is that others in the community are the judge. ... But what are they to look at...? ... So Paul expands on the concept. Everything that follows on this list fills out this idea of "beyond reproach."

We only have time this morning to look at the first two. We will cover the rest next week. But Boy! This first section has created quite a lot of controversy in recent years. He starts with family qualifications – and this is a good place to begin... although it is so debated... because that is where character is truly seen.

This first two descriptions has confused a lot of people... especially in recent years when we have seen families decline and divorce rates climb. ... "The husband of one wife" sure looks as though anyone who has been divorced cannot be in church leadership. ... But then... if that is what Paul means... then you would also have to say someone who has never married is also unqualified. (They are just as much - not the husband of one wife – as a person who is divorced.) ... And what about a godly man who had the misfortune of having his wife pass away...? Should he be kicked out of leadership because she died and he is no longer a husband of one wife...? ... And come to think of it... if this is what Paul meant... Paul disqualified himself from leading the church. Most scholars agree that either Paul never married... or if he did... she must have died before his extensive missionary travels.

I have done quite a bit of study on this qualification that we find here in Titus and in 1 Timothy. Unfortunately Paul's original wording in the Greek keeps getting translated as "husband of one wife." That is not the closest

rendering to what Paul actually wrote... and it turns Paul's qualification AWAY from being a character qualification into being the only historical qualification we find on any list for leadership.

In the Greek... Paul wrote "mias gunikos anar." "Mias" means "one." "Gunikos" means "woman" – not necessarily (in fact, uncommonly) "wife." ... And "anar" means "man" ... not necessarily (and uncommonly) "husband." ... So the Greek actually says "*a one-woman-man.*"

That is a character trait. It is a person who is devoted to his wife (if he is married.) He only has eyes for her. He is not a skirt-chaser... womanizer... or involved in fantasizing about other women. He is not an adulterer or wishing that he was... or caught-up with pornography.

If this qualification was a historical qualification mandating that a church leader must have no divorce in their past... then a man who regularly delves into pornography and chases after other women... can be a church leader – so long as he does not divorce his wife. ... I reject this very low bar as a qualification... and I do not believe it is what Paul had in mind at all. ... No... This... like all the others is a character qualification... not a historical qualification.

Closely associated with being faithful to your wife... is being faithful to your children. Once again... I am not satisfied with the way my ESV translation that I am using... translated the original Greek. I think that the most literal translating is what Paul meant. The Greek most literally reads "having faithful children." ... The qualification of "having faithful children" addresses the importance of family leadership. Indeed the family is the

proving ground for leadership in the church. Raising respectful and law abiding children speaks of the character of the parenting. No father can guarantee the conversion of his own children... but he can ordinarily ensure that they act in a “faithful” way. ... Also... the parallel passage in 1 Timothy 3 says only that the children must be well-behaved... not that their conversion is a requirement for their father to be an overseer.

1 Timothy 3:4-5 (ESV)

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?

If we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture... and if we believe Paul meant the same thing when he gave the qualification to Timothy that he did when giving it to Titus... then the concern in our passage is that the children behave appropriately and are not open to the charge of depravity or unruliness.

By encouraging us to examine the faithfulness of all a potential leader's children... the apostle is charging us to take stock of the home as a whole. ... We are to make an assessment of leadership appropriateness on the basis of overall patterns. A leader must have faithful... well behaved... obedient children. ... A godly leader... (a godly dad)... will do whatever is necessary in terms of time and attention... to nurture his children in the training and instruction of the Lord.

... ..

We will have to resume our study of elder (or Christian leader) qualifications next week.

But as we began this morning... I challenged you to think about the purpose that God has for your life. ... We looked at Paul's thinking... and how he came to understand his purpose. ... And then we moved on... as Paul laid out the qualifications of an elder.

Following God's purpose for your life will require assessing from time to time... where you are spiritually. That is why I am encouraging you to treat Paul's list of qualifications for an elder... as a tool for assessing where you are spiritually.

Is God calling for you to live more according to His purpose for your life?

Ernest Hemingway... born in 1899... was the epitome of the twentieth-century man. ... At age 25 he sipped champagne in Paris... and later had well-publicized game hunts in Africa... and hunted grizzly bears here in America's northwest. ... At the age of sixty-one... after having it all... (wine... women... song... a distinguished literary career... Sunday afternoon bullfights in Spain)... Hemingway chose to end his life... leaving a note saying, "Life is one [expletive] thing after another."

Ecclesiastes says this is what seeking after ultimate meaning through pleasure is like. ... The writer wants us to wake up to this fact before we're sixty-one years old... and realize too late that our lives have had no meaning and fulfillment.

Our greatest fear should not be of failure... but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter.