

Titus 1:5-9: The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. ⁶ An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷ Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸ Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

It seems we have been talking about pastors and their work a lot this summer. You might think that it's because we are getting a new pastor. The real reason is that these lessons just happened to be in our normal series that we follow. But with a new pastor coming on board, it's good to review what a pastor does and the relationship between a pastor and his congregation.

In my work as our district president, I provide call lists for congregations and assign graduates. Before I do that, I meet with the congregation ahead of time to determine what kind of pastor they want. They all want the same kind of pastor. They want someone who can do absolutely everything and do it very well. They especially want someone who can preach really well; someone who can lead the congregation; someone who is good at doing outreach; someone who is good working with the youth; someone who is faithful in visiting shut-ins and the sick; and the list goes on. In fact, if you look at the slide on the wall, you would see everything a congregation wants their pastor to be. Every congregation wants a super-pastor.

My experience has been that such a person just doesn't exist. In fact, no pastor looks in the mirror and says, "I am fully qualified for this ministry into which God has called me." Moses didn't think so. Neither did Jeremiah. Timothy surely felt inadequate, and probably Titus as well. If you are looking for the perfect pastor, you will always be disappointed. But if you are looking for a man of God who can bring God's Word to you, Jesus will not disappoint you. So what are you looking for in a pastor?

Are you looking for the perfect pastor?

I. Great expectations

Paul wrote these words to Titus to help him with some unfinished business on Crete. Paul was like a missionary I knew named Loren Steele. He pioneered Hmong ministry in our district and was the brain child of our Friends of China program. Loren was always one step ahead of himself and needed people to finish his unfinished business. Friends of China was his brainchild, but it was Marcus Birkholz who had the organizational skills to make it work. I think Paul was like Loren Steele. Paul writes to Titus: **"The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you."** The elder in the New Testament was another name for the pastor. In some churches, like ours, the congregation chooses their next pastor. In others, a bishop appoints the next pastor. We can't say either method is right or wrong.

Paul gives Titus a list of qualifications in what he should look for. Remember, there was no seminary. Paul would come to town and do a lot of evangelism and gather a small Christian congregation, and then he would move on. Sometimes he was there for weeks and sometimes for months. In Ephesus, he stayed a couple of years. From this group of Christians Paul gathered on Crete, who months before were worshipping idols, Titus was supposed to pick out a pastor for each group. What kind of person should Titus look for? That's why Paul writes these words.

“An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.” We don't have time to go into every detail of this list this morning. We will in our Bible class. Remember that these men were chosen out of a pagan background, where having a wife and a mistress was common. Paul was really telling Titus to choose someone who was a good family man and who could model what a Christian family life was all about. Was he kind and gentle with his wife? Did he discipline his children with love and pay attention to them? No one has a perfect family, and neither do pastors. At the same time, a Christian pastor should model faithful parenting to his congregation.

Next, Paul says: **“Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.⁸ Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.”** Here Paul uses another word for the pastor. He calls him an “overseer,” someone who watches over his people like a shepherd. It also says that he is entrusted with God's work. In the Greek, it uses the word that refers to the head manager of a person's household – like Joseph was for Potiphar in Egypt. The point is that the office of the pastor is a position that carries a lot of responsibility. A surgeon has a person's life in his hands. A pastor has the souls of God's people in his hands.

He also uses the word “blameless” for the second time. Paul is not saying that a pastor should be without fault. Who could possibly be such a pastor? The word refers to his reputation. Does he have a reputation for being mean and violent or for drinking too much? Is he kind to strangers and people outside the church? Does he have control over his sinful desires and is he living an upright life? Again, the pastor is not a perfect human being. Then no one would qualify! The point is that the pastor leads his congregation not only by speaking the Word of God, but by the example he gives with his life.

Paul continues:⁹ **“He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”** For Titus appointing pastors in Crete, this last qualification was extremely important. He would pick the man who had the most knowledge of God's Word and had shown ability to teach and defend it. The men trained in our seminary have studied God's Word and shown their ability to teach it. At the same time, it is important for every pastor to continue studying God's Word the rest of his life. You expect a doctor to keep up on his stuff. The pastor should do the same.

II. Greater expectations

But are these qualifications for a pastor enough for today's congregations? Let me go back to the slide of all the things a pastor might be expected to be – many of which are not in Paul's list. People want their pastor to be a visionary and a goal-setter. But not every pastor I know has those gifts. Some

expect him to be a good strategist and planner. Others may expect him to be a good office manager and publicist – someone who can come up with fancy brochures for mailings. You may expect him to coach the kids' soccer team and to lead camping expeditions. Congregations often expect more of their pastor than just being their pastor.

When I first came to St. Peter, the church council told me that the pastor always cleared the snow after a snow storm. I can remember getting up on Sunday morning at 5:00 AM and starting the snow-blower. Frankly, I was either too dumb or too inexperienced or too afraid to say, "No." Maybe your pastor likes to go camping and maybe your pastor is good strategic and maybe he even likes to get up at 5:00 AM to blow snow. But should you make that an expectation for his ministry?

And the most unrealistic expectation of all is that he should be able to preach like Mark Jeske. I love my brother, Mark Jeske. I roomed with him in college. My dad listened to him every Sunday and I think that Time of Grace has a great ministry. But quite frankly, I don't know if I would want Mark Jeske at my side when I am dying. Every pastor does not have the same kind of gift for preaching. Nor does Jesus make that a qualification for being a pastor. Paul confessed to the Corinthians that he was not a good speaker. What should we expect of a pastor? He should hold to the Word of God and be able to teach it and refute those who oppose it.

What's the result if we impose unrealistic expectations on our pastor? Paul said in Hebrews 13:17: **¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.**" The more unnecessary things you add to your pastor's job description, the more you keep him from doing the main thing he is supposed to do – and that is to watch over your souls. And when he doesn't have enough time to study and word and watch over your souls, he will always be looking in the mirror and thinking, "I'm not cut out to be a pastor. I just can't get it all done." And that would be unprofitable for you.

I've seen pastors get to that point where their ministry became such a burden that they fell into deep depression because they couldn't meet people's expectations. I've seen congregations expect their pastor to teach the Word, but then criticized them harshly for rebuking their children when they fell into sin. I've seen pastors just run out of steam because they were expected to pastor a congregation of 700 souls with no associate pastor and very little secretarial help. I've seen pastors who were good pastors, but who weren't particularly adept at managing a large staff in their church fall under severe criticism.

I can't say that about you, for the most part. You have been kind to your pastors. I have not seen you compare one to another as if everyone had to have the same skills. I have experienced gently and constructive criticism from you, which is healthy and good. Once a member quietly suggested to me that I make eye-contact with members when I shook their hands at the door, rather than looking at the next person in line. She said it with loving concern for a little detail that would make me a better pastor. That's the way it should be.

But have we never had unrealistic expectations of our pastor? I confess that I have. This sermon has called me to repentance and reminded me that we do not all have the same gifts. It has called me to repentance so that when I work with our new pastor, I accept him for what he is – a gift of God and a man of God who has come to bring us the word. And I am sure that these words have reminded you not to expect your pastors to be perfect in every way.

But you do have a perfect pastor who meets your greatest expectations, and that is Jesus!

III. Greatest expectations

In the Old Testament, you see some great spiritual leaders for God's people, and none of them were perfect. There was not a greater prophet in the Old Testament than Moses. Even though he complained to God when God called him that he was a man with stuttering lips, this not-so-eloquent man led God's people for forty years. Yet, he wasn't perfect. He wasn't a very good organizer, and Jethro had to show him how to organize the people in groups, with lay people to administer each group. There was the time that he misrepresented God by striking the rock, when God told him just to speak to the rock. By that act he called attention to himself, which is one of the things Paul's words tell a pastor not to do. The word "overbearing" in our text really means arrogant or filled with self-importance. You can see faults in almost all the prophets of the Old Testament. Why does God point out their faults? Because he promised them a prophet like Moses, but only greater – namely, Jesus.

You have Aaron, who was the first high priest in the Old Testament, a man who represented God in the tabernacle and performed the sacrifices. On the great day of atonement, he stood before God and he alone made the sacrifice in the Most Holy Place to atone for the sins of the people. Yet, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, he gave in to the pressure from the people and made them a golden calf to worship. Was there no perfect high priest? Not one. Every one of them had to sacrifice first for his own sins before he made the sacrifice for the people on the Day of Atonement. But when Jesus shed his blood, he was perfect and needed no sacrifice. His sacrifice was complete for all people of all time. And he lives at God's right hand to intercede for you.

There were great kings in the Old Testament, and every one of them was flawed. Think of David, who committed adultery. Yet God called him a man after his own heart. Is there no perfect king to rule over us? There is. Jesus is the King of kings. He is the one who will rule over us forever. He is also the perfect shepherd who watches over your souls. He is your pastors' pastor, and he holds them in his hands. But if you are looking for the perfect pastor, you will only find him in Jesus.

It's o.k. to have great expectations of your pastor. Jesus wants your pastor to be a godly man who models a godly life for you and who brings you God's Word. Be careful that you don't have greater expectations and expect your pastor to be a super-pastor in every way. Finally, remember that your greatest expectation is fulfilled in Jesus, the shepherd of your souls, who will never let fail you. Amen.