

God's Delivery Service

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[0:00] Our New Testament reading is from Titus 1, starting at verse 5. The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

Just so far, this is the word of God. The children may now leave for their program as we hand over to Nick. Good morning, everyone.

Nice to see you as we continue the book of Titus that we started last week. And so I invite you to keep your Bible open there as we continue this study through the Apostle Paul's letter to Titus, but we know that this is God's word to us as well.

[1:34] Even though it was written thousands of years ago, God has preserved it over the years for us to read and study because God's truth is in it. And that truth is what's going to give us life. And so let's pray and ask for God's help as we study his word.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can come before you. We thank you, Lord, that you have inspired words to be written down in history.

You have inspired events to happen that we can have and read about and that speak to us today. And that's give us your truth for our lives. And so we pray, Lord, that as we listen to you, as we study these words, you'd be present with us by your spirit and that you would guide our thoughts and help us to put into practice what we hear today.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I want to start by asking you to imagine something. Imagine that, and it's not a nice thought, but imagine we had another global pandemic.

All right. But this one actually was far worse than the last one in 2020. This is a deadly disease that is covering the world and it's spreading and millions of people are dying.

[2:58] It's a very, very fatal pandemic that's covered the world. And now for months and months and months, all of the world governments get together and work together on finding a cure.

And then after a number of months and many millions of deaths, the news breaks that they've found a cure. They've been able to manufacture a special cure that can fix this disease.

And of course, everybody celebrates. But the news report continues, there's a catch. The catch is that this cure cannot leave the lab it was created in.

And there's actually no way to give it and send it to the people who need it. That's a bit of an anticlimax, right? That there's a cure, but nobody can get it.

You see, it's the same for any cure. For any cure for any disease. And, you know, over the years, we can thank God that medical science has discovered a lot of cures for a lot of diseases. But even if a cure for a disease, a sickness, is 100% effective, it's pointless if there is no delivery mechanism for that cure.

[4:12] Just as important as the cure itself is a way to get the cure to the people who need it, right? Well, exactly the same is true for the cure that God has made for our sin and our death.

Which we know is the truth about Jesus, His Son, and what Jesus has done. And we learned last week at the beginning of this letter to Titus that this truth, this particular truth that God entrusted to these apostles to write down and to pass on, when we hear it, and when we take it into our lives and actually believe it, we begin to change.

God begins to give us new life and we get connected to eternal life. And this is an amazing truth, right? We learned, again, I'm just reviewing last week, the key essential truth that we are saved

from sin and death, not through, as many people think, our religious effort.

We're not saved through our religious effort, but we're saved through hearing, taking in, and believing a particular truth. And that is amazing, that there's a truth that is available, that when we take it in and believe it, it saves us, it changes us, it gives us new life.

That is the gospel truth. But, that particular truth that saves people is pointless without an effective delivery mechanism.

[5:45] And that's what this next section in Titus is all about. We're going to learn what that delivery mechanism is, as Paul explains to the young minister Titus, what is necessary for this life-changing truth to be distributed on the island of Crete, where he is assigned.

But, even though that was 2,000 years ago, what we're going to discover as we read it, is that the same things are essential today for this life-giving truth to reach you and me and the people in the world who need it.

And we're going to discover there are two parts to it. And so, the first part that we see in this passage that is necessary to this truth being distributed in the world is a well-ordered church, or well-ordered churches.

We see this, actually, in verse 5. Have a look at verse 5. Paul writes, The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

Okay, so the word elders is a word you often find in the Bible in the New Testament, and that's what the Bible uses to describe leaders of churches, leaders of local churches.

[7:04] And the word here that Paul uses to Titus is to appoint these leaders. To appoint, it could also be translated, ordain or designate.

In other words, Paul is, in this verse, telling Titus to publicly authorize certain people to fulfill certain roles in an official capacity.

In other words, you could say that Paul is telling Titus to create an organization. Because that's really what an organization is, right?

It's an, any organization, any company, is a collection of people who are organized in a certain way with authority and roles and responsibilities and a structure and different positions.

That's exactly what Paul is telling Titus to do. He's telling him to create an official organization with certain roles and positions. Now, these instructions, we also find similar instructions in 1 and 2 Timothy.

[8:06] Over the years, different church traditions have structured their churches in different ways based on these scriptures. So you've got these, you know, different denominations.

You've got Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican. And each of them structure their churches in slightly different ways with different roles called different things. But typically, in the church, in any church, you've got three, what we call, offices, positions that are biblical, which are deacons, elders or presbyters, and bishops.

In Reach, South Africa, our denomination, for example, those are the three offices we have. Those are the three official ranks, if you like, that our denomination uses.

Deacon, presbyter, and bishop. And it's different in different denominations. But the point is, whatever the details are in any given church, the idea that there are positions and an authority structure is God's idea, not ours.

All right? We might interpret differently exactly what that looks like, but the principle that God wants His church organized, that's His idea.

[9:20] It's evident that God wants structure and rule and organization in His church. Church is more than just a group of people who love Jesus coming together to hang out.

It's an organization that God has put together. But why? Why does it have to be? Why can't it just be a group of people who love Jesus coming and singing songs and reading the Bible together? Why can't it just be that? Why do we need these structures and these roles? Why is it necessary? It sounds so organizational. It sounds so unspiritual, doesn't it?

It sounds so worldly. And really, is that important? Isn't the important thing that we just come together and we read the Bible and we love Jesus? Why do we need all these structures?

Is that really important? Well, I guess you could ask the same question of your body. Why does your body need a skeleton? Right?

[10:21] I mean, the important things are your heart and your lungs and your brain. Why do we need these bones? Don't they just get in the way? Of course not. Of course, I mean, imagine for a second your body without a skeleton.

What would that be like? That would be pretty gross. You'd be like a pile of organs in a sack of skin on the ground. Okay? We need a skeleton in our body to give us structure, to organize all those things that are important and make sure they're working well together, to keep them in order. And it's the same with what Paul is telling Titus here. In fact, he says, he uses that word, put in order. Did you see that? The reason I left you on Crete was that you might put in order. And the reason that God wants his church ordered in a particular way is actually because of who he is. Think about our God.

Think about our creator. We heard about creation when Janice read from Genesis. And we realize, just reading those words, and we look around and we look at science and we study biology and we realize that the God who made this is a God of order.

[11:28] He's a God who loves order. It's one of the things the Bible teaches us about our God, that he's a God of order. We see, for example, in Genesis that order was actually the key to life coming into this world and flourishing.

So creation started as just this disordered chaos, we're told, this dark, disordered chaos. But God then started to order things. He started to separate things, separate light from darkness, separate land from sea, separate the seasons out.

And when he did that, the more God created order and put order into the world, the more life could come and flourish. Order was the key to life flourishing.

And the same is true in our lives today. When our lives are in chaos, they do not flourish. When they are ordered, they start to flourish. And in the same way, as God brought life into the world originally, he brings new life into this fallen world through an ordered church that carries his life-giving message into the world.

Now, let's move on to the other stuff. Why am I sticking on verse 5 and talking about an ordered church? Why is this important for us to hear? Well, I think it's important for us to just sit on this for a few minutes.

[12:53] Because especially in today's world, I think many people tend not to like organized Christianity. Right? There's this tendency to push against organized religion.

And just to be natural and to be organic. I don't know why it is. But there's this push against organized Christianity.

People prefer just to have a relationship with me and God and that be it. But this passage is teaching that God has actually arranged this organization.

He's arranged his church to be organized. These leadership structures. And they are necessary as the means to give you his truth and his life and bring you into this living relationship with him. And so, while many people might not like the idea of organized religion, organized church is God's idea. And it's the means that he gives you life. And so, what that means for you personally is, firstly, if you don't yet have eternal life, or you don't know if you do, if you don't really have a real relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and the life that that brings, both now and in eternity, if you don't yet have the hope of eternal life, well then the way you will get it is not by going to YouTube or by hanging out with your friends.

[14:23] It's by coming to church. It's by coming to this organization that God has put in the world for you to hear his life-changing truth. And what it means for you if you are a Christian is, if God has created this organization, then it means be an employee in it.

Get on board with what this organization is doing that God has made. Submit to the leadership and the structures of the local church and be involved in what it's doing.

Don't resist, for example, being on a roster because you don't like organization. It's God's idea, actually, that you're on a roster. Or don't decide to do your own thing and minister in your own way. That's pushing against the plans and the structures of the church leadership. Rather, get on board with. So we work as a team. We pull in the same direction of where the leadership is headed in a local church.

Now, that's not perfect. Those plans are certainly imperfect because we're imperfect. But it's those plans and structures and leaders that God has chosen to work in and to distribute his truth in Cape Town as it was in Crete 2,000 years ago.

[15 : 38] Now, before we move off this topic, I do need to acknowledge that this might be difficult for some people to hear, especially those who have been burned by church leadership and structures in the past.

And sadly, there are many people who have had bad experiences with churches and church leaders who have been maybe bullies. There are often church leaders who throw their weight around and force people into things.

And people have just had bad experiences or structures that sideline people. And they've been hurt. I recognize that. Lots of people have actually been hurt by organized church.

And they don't want that anymore. And it's actually stopped them from coming to church gatherings. Well, if that's you, if you're here, then I really appreciate that you came.

If you're listening to this, then I've got two things to say. Firstly, I want to apologize to you on behalf of the church. That shouldn't have happened to you.

[16 : 45] And secondly, I want to say that's not how church should be. That bullying organization where people feel sidelined. God doesn't actually want those types of people leading His church, even though sadly it often happens today.

What we read in the next section is exactly God's antidote for those kind of situations, which is why it's so important for us to read. Because we see that this truth that God wants delivered in this world doesn't only come through well-ordered churches, it also vitally must come through well-ordered lives.

People who have well-ordered lives. And that makes sense, because this truth actually changes people, right?

We learned that last week. We saw, if you look back at verse 1, the very first verse of Titus, Paul said that this is a truth that leads to godliness.

It leads to godliness. It's a truth that changes people from the inside out. It causes them to start living the way God intends for them to live, according to our Creator's will.

[17 : 59] And so if that's true, if this truth actually, when it gets in, actually changes us, then it makes sense that those who deliver it have themselves been changed by it, right?

Otherwise, will you even listen to it? So let me put it this way. If you go to gym, you'll see at the gym there are these people, they're really tight, so they're wearing these tight T-shirts, and they've got the gym logo on, and they're really well-built and fit, and they're the personal trainers.

Their job is to help other people to get all fit and well-built. And it's important that they themselves have done good exercise and resistance training that they're teaching other people to do.

Because imagine, for a second, imagine you went to a gym, and you were assigned a personal trainer, and he comes along, but he's overweight, and he's out of breath, and he's unfit. Now, would you like that person to be your personal trainer?

I don't think so. You're not going to trust them. In the same way, teachers in the church, teaching this truth that apparently leads to godliness, surely they must demonstrate godliness themselves.

[19 : 13] Doesn't it make sense? And that is why these next few verses are so important. And why here, Paul, from verse 6 onwards, what he's indicating to Titus is, this is how you will know that the truth has gone into someone.

Which is necessary, especially if they're going to lead the church. This is how you know. These are the indicators that the truth has actually changed them, that the change has actually happened. And we're going to read these requirements for church leaders, but as we do, I do want to mention, it doesn't only apply to church leaders.

Because Paul is listing the attributes of a changed life, this is actually a list for all of us to check whether God's truth has actually got in and changed us, but especially those of us, of course, who teach the word.

And there's three parts to it. There's three parts to this changed life that Paul points out. Firstly, it's ordered families. Ordered families.

Look at verse 6. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

[20 : 31] Okay, so the first indicator that truth has really taken hold is it changes families.

This is one of the most powerful things about God's truth, is that when it gets into a home, it transforms a family, and it transforms family relationships. Firstly, Paul says, in marriage, marriages that are changed by God's truth are marked by faithfulness and sexual purity.

Exclusivity. Because exclusivity and security and permanence in a marriage, which is the foundation of a stable home, is part of God's design.

God didn't design sex to be outside of marriage. He designed it for the exclusivity of marriage. And when a person takes God's truth on board, their whole sexual sort of instinct starts to change, and it starts to work the way God intended.

And faithfulness and permanence, things that are very contrary to how our world works. But that is how marriage changes when God's truth gets involved.

[21:46] And secondly, parenting as well changes. That's another major result of God's truth in a family. You see in the next few verses, discipline is a thing in families that are changed by God's truth and respect for authority.

That you see here. A man whose children believe, they follow, as long as their faith is under the responsibility of their parents, before they leave the home, they are following disciplines that their father, their parents lay down for them.

And they are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. They have a respect for authority. Even if they don't like it all the time, they respect and they submit to authority because the home has an authority structure that God has made as well.

And these are the attributes of a family that is changed by God's truth. And what you'll notice is that they are all very rare in our culture today when we look around.

We don't see sexual fidelity. We don't see faithfulness. We don't see discipline. We don't see respect for authority. In this fallen world, these and in Titus' situation, in Crete, these would have been very rare as well.

[23:07] So these attributes of godly families stand in contrast to the culture around them. But this is what God's truth does to families.

It changes families into these things. Families that there's order and there's life and there's respect and there's love that comes out of that.

These are the kind of families God wants. And you know what's really interesting is as you read the Bible, especially the New Testament, but the old as well. God gives many instructions in Scripture to families because God's truth must change families from what the world is to what God wants.

He instructs families quite specifically in what children should do and what parents should do and what brothers and sisters should do which creates order in the family.

Now, this is God's truth and it is vital for families to work. So, if you do not know what those instructions are, if you do not know what instructions God has given families, if your family maybe is in chaos, maybe family relationships aren't working well, maybe there's tension, maybe you dread, you know, Christmas lunch together when the family gets together because it always causes fights.

[24:27] If that's your family, you need to hear these life-giving instructions in Scripture that God has given for families. We actually did a series not too long ago called God's Design for the Family where we looked at each of the passages that God has given instructions for the family.

If you weren't there, if you missed it, if you don't know what these instructions are, your family needs this and so, go to our sermon library and listen to this. I think it's five talks.

We've also put a link on our Connect app because this is God's truth and this is what's going to change. This is what's going to give life. But the point here, the reason why Paul mentions families is because if a father is not leading his family in that truth, then how can he lead God's family, the church, in that truth?

So it makes sense. So that's the first attribute of a changed life is ordered family. Secondly, a life transformed by the truth is seen with an ordered character, an ordered inner character.

Again, we see how, in contrast, these next few attributes are to the world around us. Have a look from verse 7. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

[25:56] Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

Okay, so look at these character attributes of someone who's changed by the truth. Firstly, not overbearing. What does that mean? Well, overbearing means a person who always wants to get their own way, and they always think that their way is better.

Another translation is arrogant. They always push their way onto other people because they think that they're cleverer than everyone else. Do you know the type? Overbearing people.

But you see, people changed by God's truth are not like that. People changed by God's truth actually listen. They realize, maybe I'm not always right. They listen to others.

They consider the views of others. They respect others, even if they disagree. So that's the first trait. The second is not quick-tempered. Not quick-tempered.

[27:00] A person who is transformed by truth actually starts to get control over their temper.

That's another way you can see that the truth has taken hold. Because when God's life enters them, when God's Spirit is actually at work in them, they have a new power.

And this power is the power of self-control. It's one of the fruits of the Spirit. It's one of the ways you can see the Spirit working in someone. It's that they get control over the things they didn't have control over before.

I do want to pause as we're going through this list, by the way. Obviously, me sitting in my study reading this greatly convicts me as a church leader. And I must point out, this doesn't say that church leaders have to be perfect in all these things.

Else, if that was the case, no one would be able to lead churches, right? We all slip up, and that is why every week we all have to, myself included, come and confess our sins.

But notice what Paul says twice in this passage is an elder must be blameless in these areas.

Another translation is above reproach. Not perfect, but above reproach, blameless.

[28:25] In other words, what he's saying is that leaders must stand head and shoulders above the world and be noticeably growing in each of these things. And that's why I had to read this this week and ask myself, am I growing in these things personally?

Am I becoming more patient? Am I being more considerate? Am I more self-controlled now than I was last year at this time?

These are questions I need to constantly ask myself, but we all need to as Christians because that is proof that God's truth is in us and changing us is that we are progressing in each of these areas.

Are you? Next, Paul says, an elder must not be drunk, violent, or greedy. Of course, because these are not consistent with someone the Holy Spirit is working on.

rather, verse 8, he must be hospitable. He must be hospitable. Now, that doesn't mean that he must be able to cook a great spaghetti bolognese and have a whole lot of supply of red wine so that he can invite guests to supper.

[29:45] By the way, this church does have an advantage that your pastor does happen to cook a great spaghetti bolognese. But that's not what it means hospitable here actually means the original word is one of my favorite words in scripture.

It means love for the stranger. Love for the stranger. In other words, Christian hospitality is an ability to love people who are different to us.

An ability to love people who we don't necessarily gel with naturally, which are normally the people we would gravitate to and love. But God's truth allows us to love people who are different.

That's what this word means. And then the next is a love for what is good. A love for what is good. Not just a I'll do it because I have to, but the good things.

Obedience to God are things that a person changed by truth desires to do. They're not legalistic. They don't do it just because they have to, but they want to.

[30:49] They desire to live the right way. And then a person who is upright, holy, and disciplined.

You see, all of this, this whole list, all of them is evidence that God's truth is really working in someone. This is evidence that God's truth is working in you. It's a great list to go and diagnose your own life on a regular basis.

Is God's truth changing you in these areas? Do you see change? Is it evident? Do you see a changed character?

Because that is the ultimate sign that God's truth has taken hold. Have you become kinder? Are you becoming more patient? More controlled? More considerate to those around you?

Again, if you don't see evidence of that in your life, then you need God's truth still to come in and take hold and change you. You need to sit under God's truth until it does.

[31:53] And then keep sitting under it so that it continues to change you. And especially before you can ever bring this truth to others, you need to ask has it worked in you first?

And then thirdly and finally, the attribute that is necessary for church leaders here is ordered beliefs. So it was ordered families, ordered character and now ordered beliefs from verse 9.

Notice though that Paul puts this, a person's beliefs and doctrines, at the end of the list. Which is surprising because we would think if you're employing a church leader, if a church council is putting together a job description for the type of person they want preaching and leading their church, you would think they put doctrine right at the top of the list, but actually Paul puts it at the bottom.

Not that it's not important, but the fact is character and all these other things are just as important. But so is, of course, what this person really believes.

So verse 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.

[33 : 11] He must hold firmly to truth. Hold firmly. What that means is to treat it as something that is precious, that cannot be misused, that needs to be respected.

This is a teacher, for example, who doesn't just decide what to preach on Saturday night, but actually sits the whole week and studies and uses knowledge of the original languages and scholars and scholarly opinions and different understandings of this text to make sure that when he stands up here, he is preaching something that is true.

That is what it means to hold fast, to treat as precious, and also not to mix it with his own ideas.

Which so often happens. But imagine you were entrusted with the cure for a deadly disease, right? Now they could get it out of the lab, and it could now go to the people who needed it, and they gave you the task of taking it there, and they give it to you in this very important container, this cure is there, and on the way though, you go, okay, well, I don't think this is enough.

I think I'm going to add some of my own ingredients because I think the people will like that. Some of my bolognese spice, I don't know. Now what happens if you change the cure because you think that people will like it more, you're going to make it ineffective.

[34 : 44] That's what people do unfortunately with the Bible all the time. They try to change it so that it appeals to people, that they can draw a crowd, that they can entertain people, or whatever they want to do, become more popular.

But so many people do that. They actually are preaching their own ideas. If you listen carefully, people will preach their own ideas, and then they'll proof text. They'll find verses to support what they want to say.

But that's not a responsible way to handle truth. That makes the medicine ineffective, and that ends up not changing people. And that's why we need teachers, especially today, who do this.

They hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been originally taught. They don't change the message entrusted to them to be more relevant, or to be more politically correct, or to create a church that's vibey.

They don't change the message to make people like it, but they keep the original message intact. And only then when they do that will they be able to encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

[35 : 58] But again, this criteria of doctrine, right beliefs, ordered beliefs, is something that everybody changed by the truth needs to guard. Everybody needs to hold to this truth, which means be careful what you believe.

Have you ever exercised care and protection over your doctrines, of your beliefs, or do you just listen to anything and take on anything because the person who said it looked cool or was entertaining?

How do you decide what to take on and what not to take on in what you believe? Be careful what you believe. Don't just believe something because you've always believed it, or because you like the sound of it.

Let people who can teach you change what you believe if it's wrong. Don't just cling to it because you've always believed it. But of course also then, the application to this is be careful who you choose to teach you God's word.

Who are you going to choose to teach you God's word? Because there's so many options, right? Especially in today's world, on the internet, so many churches available. How do you choose?

[37 : 14] Well, I think this passage is here to tell us. Because, and this is vital, because if godliness, as the beginning of Titus says, if godliness comes through hearing truth, if our lives are changed when we hear and take in the right truth, well then, your godliness is in the hands of the people who teach you God's truth.

life. And so don't choose who to listen to based on their popularity or the fact that they entertain you. But choose those who show evidence that the truth they teach has actually changed them and is still changing them.

So that you too can be changed through this life-giving truth and live the life that God intends. let's pray that this would be the case in our church.

Will you bow as we pray? Lord, we thank you for your truth. We thank you that you have not only given us a truth that is 100% effective to save us from sin and death, but you have established a means of delivery in history through your church that this truth can come into our lives on a regular basis.

Lord, help us to love your church the church you've made. Help us all to be unified as we work together in your local church to make the truth known to others.

[38 : 51] But Lord, would you help us also to ensure that your truth has changed us and continues to change us as we progress in this godliness and as we look forward to eternal life.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.