



City on a Hill

Jonathan K. Dodson | Titus 1:5-9 | April 26, 2020

We're seeking to be a people of peculiar goodness. Last week we observed that societies are integral to goodness. Character is a community project. It's in the relational push and pull, exhortation and encouragement, that real virtue is worked out. *What* does goodness look like? *Character*. *How* does it get worked out? *Calling*. What makes us good? *Conviction*.

Calling of the Church

Churches are called to be little societies of goodness. Jesus described them as "cities on a hill" radiating moral light into the world in visible goodness (Matt 5:14-16). St. Paul writes to Titus about these, "[This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you](#)" (5). He says, "set right what is lacking." What's lacking? Clearly there is a need for elders/leaders, but from the context, there's also a lack of moral and spiritual light, which is why *godly* leaders are so desperately needed. Goodness is worked out when these churches work vigorously together to turn up the light. This requires, like any organization, **leaders** and followers. But the job description for leaders is unlike most organizations; it's largely a vice and virtue list. Qualifications are 90% character. *Great organizational leadership is no substitute for character. Excellent preaching no substitute for godliness. Skilled city group leading no substitute for virtue.* In a phrase, church leaders must be "above reproach," repeated twice. Why? Church leaders are to be exemplary in character and conviction. Now, what if you're **not a leader**? Your responsibility is two-fold: to support and *imitate* godly leaders. Chapter two describes this imitation dynamic between older and younger men and women. The main thing there is not age but godliness. Those younger in the faith imitate those older in the faith. Whose example are you imitating? Many of you have people you imitate in your career: follow them on social, seminars. But who are you imitating in character and faith? In the age of the big Me, we value career more than character. Don't be duped into thinking your career is more important than your character. I honestly can't think of a reason apart from pride to not do this. Don't be duped. Your leaders are character examples not just to admire or criticize from a distance but to imitate, which makes this message incredibly relevant for every, single one of us. The other responsibility of the church is to *support* your

leaders. Hebrews says, *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (13:17)*. Are you a joy to your leaders or a groan? Do you have a list of critiques or a list of character traits you're imitating? Follow their instruction, obey their teaching, reflect their character. Don't gossip about them; glean from them. Why support and imitate? Scripture tells us and godly leaders are dim reflection of Christ *devoted to your highest wellbeing, keeping watch over your souls*. When elders and the church work together—exemplary in character and conviction, in support and imitation—the city on a hill gets brighter. Moral goodness is turned up, good works spill out, and people give glory to God. This, Paul says, is why *the grace of God appeared, to train us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age (2:12)*. Like the Island of Crete, we're in a moment. This present age. Question: Will I seize the grace of God allow it to train me in godliness or just let the moment slip by?

Character

To discern a person's character you begin in the home. Why? If character is real, its lamp burns wherever it goes—at home, work, in church, online. The light doesn't get turned out at home. Those closest can tell. 6: An elder is to be *the husband of one wife*. This can mean, no polygamy or unbiblical divorce, but that sets the bar pretty low. The Greek says, "a one woman man" implying a single-minded devotion to one's wife: emotionally, physically, spiritually attentive to her needs. If you can't care for your wife, you not qualified to care for Christ's bride. No dabbling in pornography, FBing old girlfriends, scrolling actresses. *His wife isn't an afterthought but she fills his prayers morning and evening. Why? Jesus is a one-woman man, fully devoted to his Church*. An elder's *children are believers not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination*. This sounds daunting. One of my kids hasn't expressed faith in Christ. Does that disqualify me? The word *faith* can also mean faithfulness. The point here isn't to squeeze a confession from each child. *It's that children are generally a reflection of their parents*. If they lack respect for adults, it's likely they lack discipline at home. If they cower in fear, it's likely they lack love at home. *Children put our parenting on display*. If we neglect discipline when it's needed, we tell kids they rule the

home. This won't fare well for them when they're grown because it's a gross misrepresentation of reality—Jesus is king not kids and babies. I have a tendency to correct my kids for being kids—yelling, bouncing around. But even our heavenly Father doesn't pounce on every *sin*. Love. In verse 7 we're told an overseer is God's steward. It appears Paul is using the terms elder and overseer interchangeably, as he does elsewhere, but the accent here is on his accountability to God. A steward recognizes this God's church not my church. So while his emotions may rise and fall with the struggle of the church, his worth does not. That is secure in Christ and is reflected in how he leads. 5 vices are to be avoided. First, **arrogance**. Two forms. *Platform pride is preoccupation with your own thought*, more interested in yourself, your work, than Christ and his church. It's the church leader who frequently says, "I like to say.." or "This is how I do it." He speaks condescending and rarely admits fault. *Perception pride is preoccupation with how you're thought of*. You walk away from conversations continually evaluating how you are perceived. Did I impress or disappoint? But the humble person is self-forgetful, preoccupied with Christ, enjoying what he thinks of them. Second, **quick-tempered**. Anger can be hot-headed or ice-cold. Everyone has to fight it. The emphasis here is in how easily anger is roused. A quick-tempered person is quick to withdraw or criticize. A patient person ask questions and weighs the response. A **drunkard** reaches for a drink to get a high or medicate a low. It's an addictive pattern that substitutes food, drink, entertainment, shopping with Christ. But Jesus is more satisfying and forgiving than our addictions. The **violent** person has something to prove because they haven't settled into their proven worth in CHRIST. They don't want Christ's righteousness; *they* want to be right and will take it out on you if you don't agree. Your sin was taken out on Jesus, so repent and ask him to make you gentle. **Greed** uses ministry for income. It loves the power and security of wealth and shoos away the deeper security in Christ. Now the virtues! The first two, hospitable and lover of good, have a prefix on the word that means love: lover of stranger, lover of good. *Love is the gateway into character*. You are what you love. If you love yourself, you'll curve in and distort your character. If you love Christ, you'll curve out and radiate with his love. **Hospitality**, literally love of stranger, embraces inconvenience to accommodate and serve others. John and Amber Mulikin do this well. They stuff people into their home, break out chairs, sit on the edge, coordinate meals, without a single complaint. Why? Hospitality: the

want people to be welcomed into a society of goodness. Leaders should be hospitable. This goes hand in hand with **lover of the good**. A person who loves what is good can't help but share it with others. The last four pair up nicely. **Upright** and **holy** refer to a moral rectitude that comes from *walking with God*. Its not good for goodness sake, or to be seen as good. Its good *because God*; he rubs off on them. A **disciplined** person does what it takes to get close to God. She exerts self-control over her natural desires. Not a binger. If you wake up and don't "feel" like praying or meditating on Scripture, being hospitable, often you'll do it anyway because you know *you are what you love*. The disciplined person *forms habits that form holiness*.

Conviction

The final requirement [He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it](#) (9). Here the elder is called to instruct and rebuke in sound doctrine. To teach and correct according to God's Word. In the age of the Big Me, nobody wants to be **corrected**. Few are willing to correct. We're curved in. But a godly leader will correct and a godly person will see it as a kindness: [Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head](#) (Ps 141:5). Correction and instruction. We must teach, not our opinion, but God's Word, a trustworthy word. The trustworthy word is teaching of the apostles which was being formalized into the NT. The Word that Jesus died and rose to give us. And Paul exhorts us to "hold fast" to the trustworthy word. He is saying cling to the Word of God like you cling to the car in a roller coaster as it takes a sudden dip. Hold on for life. But not merely to survive. The word hold fast means *devoted*, stuffed with affection. Jesus himself calls for this kind of devotion, ["No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other](#) (Lk 16:13). You are what you love. If you love Christ, you will be like Christ. Are you devoted to Jesus Christ, the living Word? In a word, we must be people of conviction, people who don't apologize for the truth but cling to truth. A person without conviction is like a drunk, swaggering back and forth no real direction. But people of light stand on the word and hold out the light for all to feel its warmth and see its light. Church, this is our calling, to be a society of light, a city on a hill, holding fast to trustworthy Word!