Good morning everyone and happy Sunday. The title of my message is **“You Must Hold Firmly To The Trustworthy Message”** based on Titus 1:1-16. Today we will take a look at the apostle Paul’s letter that he wrote to his younger associate Titus. This letter helps Titus to have the understanding and support he will need to fulfill the job of appointing godly leaders on the island of Crete. We will also look at the characteristics that make a good spiritual leader, including the most important qualification which is holding firmly to the trustworthy message…which is the gospel.

Titus chapter 1 is the beginning of the apostle Paul’s letter to Titus, who was Paul’s disciple and spiritual son. Paul begins his letter by introducing himself based on the calling and purpose of his life. First, let’s look at verse 1: **“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness”**. Of all the titles Paul could use, he first chose “a servant of God.” I like that the NJKV writes, “Paul, a bondservant of God”. If Paul had a modern-day business card, that would be his title on the card. The term bondservant was used in ancient Greek culture to describe a person who was a slave by choice. The apostle Paul also describes himself as **“God’s elect”**. These are people who God has chosen from the billions of people in the world to receive His salvation. We can identify God’s elect because they respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ and live their lives based on that gospel. To say it in simple terms, many are called to God, but few are chosen. Secondly, Paul was also motivated by faith and knowledge. Because he said for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. Paul’s motivation was the faith of God’s people and their knowledge of the truth. **How do we know what is truth?** Well, it’s simple…truth comes from the Bible and must lead us to godliness. Paul’s third important purpose was to inspire believers’ hope of eternal life. Everyone needs hope. Now there are all kinds of hope in the world, but hope is eternal life is the most important thing.

Next, verses 4-5 say: **“To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. 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.”** Let’s take a moment to learn about who Titus is, where Crete is and what challenging task Paul was giving him. The Bible doesn’t write extensively about Titus but we can learn a bit more about his character and personality from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. First, Titus was one of Paul’s converts, he was a Greek, and Paul had taken him to Jerusalem to show that salvation had also come to the Gentiles without circumcision (Gal 2:3). Titus was a partner and a fellow worker with Paul. 2 Corinthians 8:23 says: **“As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our**

**brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ.”** Also, after his third missionary journey, Paul and Titus preached together in Crete. Paul had to leave, but he left Titus on Crete to finish the work.

Now Crete is the 5th largest island on the Mediterranean Sea. It’s around 500 km south of Greece. It is home to the oldest civilization in Europe, the Minoan civilization, which existed from 2600 to 1100 BC. Today, Crete is part of Greece, but in Paul’s time, it was under the Roman Empire. There was already a thriving community of Jews on Crete in the time of Jesus.

Paul left Titus behind to complete two important tasks: to straighten out what was was left unfinished and to build stable churches with mature, qualified pastors for the people. This was especially needed in Crete because the people of Crete were a wild bunch, well known as liars and lazy people. Titus had to find and train capable leaders for the Christians of the island of Crete in every town. This was a big job because Crete was famous for having many cities.

Next, the apostle Paul gives Titus a detailed description of what he must look for in the appointment of leaders. Titus 1:6-8 says: **“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. 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. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.”** Paul lists out 12 characteristics that Titus must use to select the new spiritual leaders. What’s interesting is that Paul listed 5 bad things that leaders should not do. Then, in verses 8-9, he listed 7 good things that leaders should do. Many of these personal traits are quite obvious but let’s take a closer at a few of these requirements.

1. An elder must be blameless. There must be nothing in the life of the leader that others can take hold of and attack his life or the church. Basically, an elder must be a righteous person who lives to please God
2. An elder must have faithful children. The leader must have raised his children well. His ability to lead the family of God must be first demonstrated by his ability to lead his own children. Here the emphasis is on the idea that his children are believers also.
3. An elder must not be greedy to get more money. The leader must not try to get money in ways that are not honest. People who love money turn away from God. Instead, a leader should be content and generous. This one was very important that he must not be like the people in Crete, who were greedy for money (Titus 1:11).

What’s interesting about Paul’s qualifications for leadership is that they have nothing to do with giftedness or natural ability. Paul didn’t say “Hey Titus, go out there and find the most gifted men”. What we can learn from the apostle Paul’s list is that:

* **Going to seminary school doesn’t make one qualified for spiritual leadership**
* **Being a good talker doesn’t make one qualified to be a pastor**
* **Natural or spiritual gifts such as teaching, encouraging or generosity (Romans 12:6) do not qualify one for spiritual leadership**

What qualifies a man for spiritual leadership is *godly character.* This standard of spiritual leadership was established by God in the Old Testament days when for example the prophet Samuel was given a similar assignment to anoint a new king over Israel. As Samuel looked at Jesse’s oldest son Eliab he thought, **“This man sure looks like a king. This must be the one God will tell me to anoint. That’s a good choice, God!” (1 Samuel 16:6).** Samuel saw a tall, good-looking young man who looked like he would be a great king and leader. But the LORD said to Samuel, **“Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”** **(1 Samuel 16:7).** We see that what God cares about most is character and spiritual maturity, which can only be developed from walking with God over the years.

Let’s continue with today’s passage by looking at 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.”** Let’s take a moment to go deeper into this verse. First, He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message. This means first that the leader must be sure of the true message about Jesus for himself. Paul dedicated his life to preaching the gospel and he further spoke about the need for teaching this trustworthy message in Titus 2:13-14 **“while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”** When a spiritual leader brings the gospel of Jesus to people he must bring it with confidence and authority, not mixed with theological speculation and academic doubts. *Hold firmly* also means that an appointed leader will stick to the message of eternal salvation through Christ, instead of a focus on worldly trends or only saying things that church members want to hear. Secondly, As he has been taught (NKJV). The apostle Paul was saying that a proper spiritual leader has been under the teaching of someone else. A qualified leader doesn’t necessarily need to go to Bible college or seminary, but they do need to be taught and discipled by someone, not just themselves. Thirdly, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. The reason Godly leaders are appointed is so they will use his solid foundation in God’s word to encourage those who are living rightly in the eyes of God. The leader will also use it to rebuke (correct) those who are living wrong before the Lord, those who refuse to believe, listen or obey God’s word.

When I read the 12 Godly characteristics that Paul mentions in this passage, I fail to meet several of them. Not overbearing, I fail this one. Not quick-tempered, I fail this one as well. Preaching and defending the gospel, I feel inadequate to do both. So **“why did I fail?”** The reality is that everyone fails to meet the standards of God. Romans 3:23 **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”**. Titus chapter 1 helps me realize just how weak and sinful I am without the saving grace of Jesus. If I had read this passage 10 years ago, I would have failed every requirement. This is just evidence of how the gospel has influenced my life. Before surrendering my life to Jesus, I was a drifter who wandered aimlessly through life. I made all my decisions and choices based on my feelings and sinful passions and my purpose in life was to have fun and seek pleasure. It was only when I cried out to God at my lowest point, repented of my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord did God begin to transform my life from the inside out.

Now you might be thinking to yourself **“Yeah, this is a nice list of character requirements but I don’t have a desire to be a pastor or an overseer.”** Or you might be thinking **“This list only applies to men who were called to be leaders, not women so I don’t need to listen to this stuff”**. If that’s your thinking, I want to challenge that because all true disciples of Jesus are called *to be leaders* in some capacity within the body of Christ whether it’s children’s ministry or being a group Bible leader. But most importantly, we’re all called to proactively lead people to Jesus through the message of the gospel. Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20 **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** Making disciples reminds us that disciples are made. Disciples are not spontaneously created when a person accepts Jesus into their life; they are the product of a process involving other believers. The making of disciples is the power of spreading the gospel. However, this can only be done effectively when our lives and actions reflect Christ living in us.

The last part of this passage focuses on why it was important for Titus to appoint these qualified leaders. Look at verses 10 and 11: **“For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach-- and that for the sake of dishonest gain.”** There are many rebellious people who would not submit to God’s order of authority. These problem people make themselves known by their unwise speech and by their deception. Paul was particularly concerned with the negative effect of those who called themselves Christians, who taught that the key to eternal salvation was keeping the Law of Moses. This teaching was especially dangerous because it teaches that God’s saving grace was not enough, and human effort by following all the rules and regulations is needed. But the truth about eternal salvation is written in the Bible, Ephesians 2:8-9 says **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”** Titus had to train the elders he chose to refute and oppose these false doctrines because if they failed to do so, these false preachers would distort and destroy the faith of Christian families, homes and the church.

Lastly, let’s look at verse 16: **“They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.”** These difficult people Titus had to deal with were all the more difficult because they talked like Christians. They spoke as if Christ was in them, but by their actions they deny Him. We can’t just go by what a person says “Yes, I’m a Christian”. We have to also look at how they live. As the saying goes “Actions speak louder than words”. Paul describes these rebellious Cretans as detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. Wow, these are harsh words, but Paul means it. These difficult people probably pretended to have a higher spirituality than Titus or other godly leaders. But Paul saw right through their spiritual façade and wanted Titus and all the Christians on Crete to see through it as well.

This leads me to ask this question:

**How can we be righteous people who live to please God?**

Through today’s message, we see that Paul gives us that answer in verse 9. Let’s read it together again **“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.”** May God bless all of us to have deep personal gospel faith, and help us to hold tightly to His word so we can properly preach the gospel and defend the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let’s pray.