

# An Introduction to Elder Leadership

By Don Green

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**Truth Community Church**  
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45255

**Website:** [truthcommunitychurch.org](http://truthcommunitychurch.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm)

Well, the content and the schedule of our pulpit is sometimes driven by the flow of church life and the things that are happening within the body and this is one of those times this week and next week, because at the end of the service next week, we have a very significant event taking place in the life of our church. We are going to have the privilege and the opportunity to install Nathaniel Pringle as an elder at Truth Community Church. That is a significant event for a church of our size. To give you a sense of perspective, it's been 5 ½ years since we last installed an elder based on congregational affirmation, in response to the recommendation of the existing elder board. So this does not happen often. It's an answer to prayer for some of you and certainly for us as a board. We've been praying over the years, "Lord, send us men that are qualified for leadership," and next week we will see the outworking of God's gracious answer to that prayer and it will be a wonderful time, it's a blessed time, it's a very important time in the life of our church.

Now the elders agreed that I should take this week and next week to review the biblical teaching on elders to prepare for that time. You know, many of you are relatively new to our church and we're glad that you're here, we welcome you, we are delighted that the Lord has brought you, but we're mindful of the fact that maybe some of you, maybe many of you are not really acquainted with what the Bible says about the office of elder in the local church. Those of you that perhaps grew up in liturgical traditions or in the Catholic Church, something like that, this is brand new to you and you need some perspective on it. So we're going to do that today and next week, and we'll come back to our series on the 10 Commandments after that but this is worthy of taking a pause and giving instruction from God's word on the office of elders.

So I invite you to turn to the book of Titus 1 for our text for today. Titus 1. I'm going to be reading from verses 5 through 9 and this will also be our text for next week as well. Titus 1:5 says,

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not

addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

What we see in this text at a very basic fundamental level is that the office of elder is appointed by God. We see this and we know this because this writing comes from the Apostle Paul, Paul who was appointed as an apostle to the churches to be a medium of revelation for the will of God and the will of Christ for the church for whom Jesus Christ died.

Look there at verse 1 where he says, "Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ." Paul writes, Paul spoke, Paul taught as a uniquely authorized representative of the Lord Jesus Christ and what Paul wrote is commandment for the churches. You see that in other places in the New Testament that the apostles spoke with the authority of Christ. They spoke on his behalf. God and the Lord Jesus Christ revealed his will through the ministry of the apostles in the first century and that office was a one-time event, there are no apostles in the world today despite the claims of others who try to appropriate that office for themselves. The apostles were a unique first century institution that the Lord appointed and when they had completed their writings and the Canon was established, God had revealed in a final form his will for the churches, and part of that, we see, is that the office of elder is a part of God's design for the church.

Look there at verse 5 with me again. As the apostles were going about doing their ministry, obviously there was a time of transition as churches were being started and being built up. You know, people were evangelized, the Spirit of God brought people to faith in Christ, and there needed to be organization brought so that there would be a perpetuation of the church going forward and that's what Paul is addressing here in verse 5 when he says to Titus, his disciple, he tells Titus, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you." Most of you know that Crete is an island in the Mediterranean Sea. It sits southeast of modern-day Greece. What Paul had done in Crete was he left Titus there as his representative to organize the churches. They needed to be set in order, there needed to be structure established so that the work could go on and grow and flourish, and what Paul tells Titus in that disorganized state is that elders are central to the order of the church. This is the first order of business is for a church to, was for Titus to establish elders in the churches.

So Titus had that responsibility and what Paul does in this passage as you go on in verses 6 through 9, is he lists out the qualifications for elders so that Titus would know the quality of men, the type of man that is to be installed into that office, and that's what we're going to examine next week is the qualifications for being an elder. Today, we're simply going to do a biblical introduction to elder leadership to set our perspective in a biblical mindset, and so what we see is that qualified elders are central to established order in a true church. In a biblical church, qualified elders are central to the foundation

of everything else that happens. You need the right men in authority. Everything else is secondary to that. It's like in any other organization, in a business, in a university, leadership is going to determine the direction of the way that that organization goes and so it is also in the church of Christ, the right men in authority is a matter of highest priority to the Lord Jesus Christ and you can see it by the mere fact that Titus receives this instruction from Paul and this is the beginning point of what he is to do, is to establish elders in the churches. So as I said, for a church of our size to appoint an elder and to add an elder to our board is something that is deeply strategic. There is a reason why we've taken years to get to this point, is because this is a decision and this is an installation that you do not take lightly. It's better to appoint an elder, it's better to appoint a man a year too late than it is a year too early. You need to have a track record. You need to have a knowledge of the man and to have opportunity to observe him teaching and to observe his life before you establish a man as an elder.

A little bit of history about Truth Community Church. When we started, which was 10 years ago, next month we'll celebrate our 10 year anniversary, you know, a month from today, when we started our church, we did not call ourselves Truth Community Church because we did not have elders at the time, and so we called ourselves Truth Community Fellowship, a recognition that we were not established yet as a church, that we did not have established leaders, established elders in the church, and so we gathered together, we taught God's word, we grew, we established a doctrinal basis, and from that the Lord gave us men to establish elders, you know, maybe three years into the process. So this is something that you take seriously and you take it slowly in order to do your best to get it right. You know, as I observe and interact with people in ministry, it always strikes me that when a church plant is started, there is something in my judgment that is a little bit out of whack, to establish elders right at the beginning of that. How can you do that? How can a new people coming together, how can they ever begin to establish a man as an elder right from the start in a church plant when they've had no opportunity really to observe his teaching, to observe his life? How can you ask a people to come into a brand-new church and say, "These are your elders. These are the men that you're accountable to," when there is no context, there's no track record to do that and to ask them to come in and to, you know, to follow men that they have just met in the very recent past? There's something obviously amiss to that in my humble opinion. So we've tried to approach it differently, we've tried to take our time and, you know, and even when we called Nathaniel, those of you that have been with us for a year or more, just notice the fact that we did not bring him in and establish him immediately as an elder. We wanted him to be with us, we wanted him to teach, to move and to be about you for a significant period of time. Then and only then did we ask you, the membership in our recent email, to affirm him as an elder. And there has to be a context for that. It's because it's important. It's because it matters who is an elder and that's why we're taking time to consider it today.

So I just want to do two things here today in today's message, just answer two very simple basic questions. What are elders? And secondly, what do elders do? Then next week we'll answer the question who are elders, you know, what are they by character and things of that nature. But for now I just want to establish a context for understanding the

office of elder quite apart from any of the men that hold it, whether it's in our church or in other places. Answering the question, number 1: what are elders?

Now if they're leading the church, it's obviously important to have some kind of sense of that and I just want to say this, for those of you that are new to the Bible, maybe you're a new Christian, you've only recently come to Christ, or you are new to our church coming from different traditions, the term "elder" may be new, it may seem strange, it may seem even imposing and a little bit threatening. It certainly was that way for many many years ago, you know, as I became a Christian 38 years and one day ago, and when I first entered into a biblical church, I was exposed to the concept of an elder for the first time. I had never heard that term used in a church context. I knew about pastor, I knew about deacons, but elder was something new to me and I was reluctant to embrace it. I was a little bit suspicious at the start, you know, something new, I'm kind of slow to embrace that particularly in the frame of mind and what I was doing at the time. Well, in that condition as a Christian only for a few short months, the Lord brought me into what at the time was a very good, solid, biblical church. I was greatly blessed to be a part of this church in Bloomington, Indiana as a young Christian. I had no Christian friends. I had no prior Christian training. I had no idea of what I was getting into. I just knew that I needed to be at a church and someone invited me to this one. So as a young Christian, I was skeptical when I saw in the printed bulletin the names of elders. What's this? And you know, this is not a common term and so it was new and I was untrusting. And if there are some of you that are new to our church and maybe you have reservations about that, listen, I understand that completely. I am perfectly sympathetic with that and that's why we always encourage people who are new to our church, it's one of the many reasons why we encourage people that are new to our church don't rush into membership. Take your time. Get acquainted. Ask questions. Get to know people. You know, there's no hurry on membership. You know, I mean, membership is important but it's not something that should be rushed until you have a sense of what's happening here and what's going on.

Well, in my situation in that early part of my life and I was involved in this church and I didn't know what elders were and I was suspicious of it frankly, the Lord did something remarkably special in my life and it's going to be hard to restrain my emotions as I remember this and tell you about it. The Lord brought an elder into my life at this local church. His name was Morris Robertson. He's now in his 80s. The last I knew he was still living. Morris Robertson was an elder and he took an interest in my life. He taught me in a small group setting. He had me into his home. I watched him interact with his wife and with his family. I saw how he responded to life. I saw how he responded to a terrible accident that gave him serious burns over most of his body, and watched him respond to that. And it was through Morris that I learned, through Morris I learned, "Oh, this is what Christians believe. Oh, this is how Christians live. Oh, this is how Christians interact and how a man leads his Christian family, how a Christian man leads his family." And through his position as an elder and through his life, Morris introduced me and guided me into my early understanding of what it meant to be a Christian and I learned something important there, that the office of elder was not a threat, the office of an elder was a means of the blessing of God in my life. And I give thanks to this day for the Lord

bringing a man like Morris Robertson and his wife Esther, what a dear family, oh, so grateful that my footsteps were established by a man like that.

You know, what I'm about to say I say again with sympathy and with a smile in my heart if not on my face. You know, one of the things that is very common here at Truth Community Church when I ask to meet with someone in the congregation and, you know, we're walking to an office or something like that, everybody, everybody says the same thing almost without exception. They say, "Oh, I feel like I'm going to the principal's office," and you know, there's this sense of fear and dread that, you know, that something bad is going to happen here. And you know, I sympathize, I sympathize with that sense, but the spirit of the office of elder is not designed by God to provoke that kind of fear but rather a sense of trust and love and transparency because elders are given by God to be a mediation of his blessing to the church. So, you know, we kind of betray ourselves, we let ourselves out when things like that are said and it's okay. I'm not upset with anybody that says that to me. I understand the sentiment but the whole idea of teaching on elders is to kind of move us away from that reluctant spirit into more of what Scripture would have us to understand the office to be.

So the important thing for us is not to evaluate the office of elder by what we knew in the past, what we knew in other church traditions or to evaluate it by our ignorance or our fears, the important thing is to start and asked the question what does the Bible say about the office of elder, because, and this is really really crucial and this transcends the subject matter of the day, the point of being a Christian is to conform our minds and to conform our lives to Scripture, to conform them to the word of God rather than our past which may not be biblical, rather than according to the traditions that we know, the object of being a Christian is to conform our minds to the will of God as he has revealed it in his word. So we don't simply, we don't reject and we don't show suspicion against an office simply because of what we have known in the past, rather we come to God's word and see and ask the question what does it say, what does it say about this office, and then we began our thinking there. So that's what we're trying to do with this brief two week series.

Now the term "elder," generally speaking, is one that refers to an older man. You know, an elder, you're an elder, you're an older man, but in Scripture it is also a technical term for a church leader. It is a technical term for a church leader and so the question becomes, then, well, what then are biblical elders? What are biblical elders according to the Bible? Okay, that's the only question I care about answering. There's a sense in which, you know, there's a sense in which we don't care about what our past traditions are as we come to God's word here today, we simply want to open the Bible and answer the question what does the Bible say about the office of elder. Certainly that's a legitimate question for a church to ask and answer in the course of its church life and it's a very critical question.

Well, the spirit of the office, the spirit of the office is found in the gospel of John 21:15 to 17 and I invite you to turn there with me. John 21 in verse 15, and in this passage, Jesus is restoring Peter to his office after Peter had denied him three times, and it's appropriate for us to look at this passage as a foundational look at the spirit of the office because as

we're going to see later in today's message, Peter refers to himself as an elder in some of his apostolic writings in 1 Peter 5. But here Jesus is commissioning Peter to his office as an apostle, one which Peter later described himself as a fellow elder as he wrote to the churches, and so we see the spirit of the office, we see what Christ wants the office to be like in this passage. This is after Jesus' resurrection. It's shortly before his ascension and he is gathering together his apostles to commission them to the work that he appointed them to do. So in John 21:15 we see this, "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me,' the third time corresponding to his three denials before the crucifixion of Christ and so that was a painful point of restoration to him, but what did Peter say? He said to him, "'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'"

There are two aspects about the man of an elder, the character of an elder and the purpose of an elder that Christ establishes here. First of all, he clearly established Peter's heart, Peter's character. He said, "Peter, do you love Me?" Three times, "Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me?" The repetition not only being corresponding to Peter's denials but showing emphatically by the repetition how important, how central that is to leadership in the body of Christ, it all starts with a love for Christ, genuine conversion that has issued into a genuine love for Christ, love including a pattern of obedience to him as well. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you'll keep My commandments," in John 15. And so he says, "Peter, do you love Me?"

So an elder is, first of all, one who is marked by genuine conversion and one who is marked by a proven love for Jesus Christ. Why is that so critical and so important? Why is that so important? It is because of this: the church belongs to Christ. The church belongs to Christ. He purchased the church with his own blood. He is the one who is the Savior of the individual members of the church and he is the one who is accomplishing his purpose. The church exists for his purpose. The individuals in a church are designed to live to the glory of God and therefore the church is to be an expression of the purpose, the will and love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and that means that the people who would be in a leadership capacity in the church must be aligned with Christ. They must be filled with the Spirit of Christ. They must follow Christ and they must have – watch this because this is so critical in the day in which we live – they must put the interests of Jesus Christ ahead of their own personal interests because in the church they are existing in a realm, elders exist in a realm that does not belong to them but it belongs to Christ himself and therefore elders are merely to be agents that are carrying out his will, men that are expressing the love and will of Christ and what they do and in the leadership that they provide. So obviously a man must be a man of Christ before he can be an elder in the church.

So Christ here with Peter establishes this principle, this point of love. This is part of what elders are, they are men of Christ. Now beyond that, you also see in this passage what the responsibility of elders are. Three times in similar ways, Jesus makes the same point when he says, "Peter, you love Me, fine. Tend My lambs, shepherd My sheep, tend My sheep." The responsibility of elders is to be a physical and a spiritual means by which the sheep of Christ are cared for. That is their responsibility. Not to advance their own agendas. Not to advance their own careers, their own popularity, their own prosperity. You know, the elders, Christ appoints elders to care for his sheep – watch this – in his physical absence. Christ is ascended, he is in heaven, and he appoints elders as his representatives on earth to care for, to shepherd, to love his sheep and to make sure that they are protected, that they are fed, and that they are led. That's the purpose of elders as seen in the way that Jesus establishes Peter in the office that Peter held.

So what are biblical elders in light of that? Elders, then, are men who belong to Christ first and foremost themselves, and they are the men who are responsible to lead and to care for a local church. Christ leads his church, Christ cares for his church through the elders that he establishes in a local body, and that means that elders have authority and elders have responsibility to make decisions that shape the life and direction of a local church. Let me say that again: elders have the authority and the responsibility to make decisions that shape the life and direction of a local church. So it's a pretty important office, the office of elders. We're not talking about individuals, this isn't about personalities, it's not about your elders so much here today is what we're talking about, we're talking about the purpose of the office, and the office – watch this – the office is ordained by God. The office is sanctioned by Christ. This is his established way of leading the local church.

So when we talk about establishing an elder and installing an elder at our church, what I want you to see is that we're not just gladhanding a man because we like him, there is a sacred vertical dimension to this, there is a sacred vertical dimension to the reality of what we're doing, is that we are recognizing, as the elders have recommended and as you have affirmed, we are recognizing a man and we are saying that we believe that this man is sanctioned by God to serve in this important role as a representative of Christ in the local church. So this is significant. It's a blessing but it is significant. There is an aspect of this that definitely has a holy sacred dimension to it as we engage in doing this because, you know, we're saying that here's a man to care for, to add to the care for, to add to the leadership of the body of Christ and so it's pretty important based on what the office is.

Now with that said, let's go to a second question here: what do elders do? What do elders do? We said what are elders, they are leaders in the local church in the most simple definition of the term. They are leaders in the local church and, secondly, what do elders do? Who are they, what do they do? We are trying to make this as direct and simple as we can and as I look at Scripture as I've studied it over the years, I think that the role of elders and what they do can be well expressed in three primary ways. What do elders do? First of all, they oversee the church. They oversee the church.

Going back now to the book of Titus to our text for this morning, Titus 1, if you would turn back there with me again. Titus 1. Paul told Titus to establish leaders who could oversee the work, who would be responsible for oversight and care. So Titus 1:5 again, Paul says, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you." Elders are part of the way that God sets a church in order. Through their leadership, through their judgment, through their teaching, God sets a church in order through biblical elders and you see that as you go on, you know, the charge, I should say, was to set things in order. "Titus, things are disorganized. You are responsible to set things in order." And how is he to do that? He's to appoint elders to have the responsibility to do that.

Elders are also called overseers in Scripture, those terms are used interchangeably, and if you look at verse 7 in Titus 1, you'll see this stated again, "For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward." Stop there for a moment. The elder, you see his responsibility there is to oversee the church and I want to reinforce to you what's easy to overlook in this, is that the overseer is the steward of God. He has a stewardship that is given to him. He acts on God's behalf. He's directly accountable to God. He will give a higher level of accountability to God than people who are not elders will do. We see that in the book of James 3. So elders are to set things in order, they are to oversee things and they are to see themselves as what they are, they are stewards of what belongs to God. They hold it in trust. They hold their office in trust and on behalf of God, on behalf of Christ in order to do with it what he wants, in order to do with the church, to lead the church as Christ wants it to be led.

That is a greatly greatly serious responsibility and so this is why we take time for it. I mean, think about it, think about it from the perspective of the Lord Jesus Christ, think about it in terms of what he has done for his people. The Lord Jesus Christ loved his people so much that he left heaven in order to come down and live life on earth, to live a perfect life to fulfill the law of God on behalf of his people, and then he went to the cross and endured the wrath of God on behalf of everyone who would believe him and this was a matter of infinite suffering for him, this was a matter of infinite cost to him, his infinite precious blood was shed on our behalf all because this was the purpose of God before the foundation of the world that Christ would come and purchase a people that would belong to him. Christ sacrificed for us. Christ shed his blood, his blood was the purchase price of the church, and therefore what happens to his people is of great consequence to Christ himself and therefore to be temporarily a steward of the well-being of his people is a matter of great consequence to the Lord himself and sets forth the responsibility that elders have and the great account that they will give for what has been entrusted to them.

Look over at 1 Timothy, turn back in your Bibles just a couple of pages to 1 Timothy 3 where you also find elder qualifications listed out, and in 1 Timothy 3 we read this and what we're illustrating here is the responsibility to oversee the church. 1 Timothy 3 beginning in verse 1. "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money."



Now watch these next two verses in particular. "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)." My point here is that the man establishes himself in the management of his own household. You look at his family life to see if there's some measure of respectable order in it because the family life gives you an indication of how he will handle the leadership responsibilities in the church, and the management of a household prepares him for the administration of responsibilities in the local church. There is an oversight capacity that is given to elders and they are stewards who have responsibility for what happens in the church and that is significant.

Now it's not just an administrative responsibility in terms of, you know, making decisions about budgets and those kinds of things, there is that responsibility often delegated to others called deacons, there is an administrative component to it but more importantly elders have pastoral responsibility to care for the souls of the members in the local church. That is their responsibility and so what you want to see proven in a man, somehow established in a man, is that there is an element of order in his home that shows the capacity to care for others, and then that is carried over into the church if there are other qualifications that he meets. So elders have responsibility to oversee the church. The authority in a biblical church, in our judgment, rests with the elders.

Now let me just draw a point of distinction here so that you understand exactly what I'm saying. That is in distinction to the model of church leadership that believes that the authority rests with the congregation, and that the congregation is the ultimate authority in the church. We don't believe that that's the case. The purpose of elders is to lead a congregation, not to be dictated to by the congregation, and if you think about it, it really couldn't be any other way. In the fullness of the congregation, you have people that are at all kinds of different levels spiritually. You have some that are not even believers. You have some that are new believers without any spiritual experience. You have others that have perhaps been Christians for a while but they live in a carnal way and they're not godly, they're not biblically oriented, they're not concerned for the sheep but just concerned for what they can get out of the church and what the church can do for them, and they get that and they keep the church at arm's length otherwise. And that's okay, in one sense, you know, we're all being shaped and formed and we're in different processes of sanctification, but spiritual leadership requires spiritual maturity. The people that lead the church should be the ones that are judged to be the ones that are qualified for that based on what God has laid out.

So the congregation does not dictate things to the elders, rather the elders lead the congregation, love them, serve them, communicate with them, interact with them. You know, it's not a position of a dictatorship but it's a position of leadership, leadership that is motivated by love, motivated by care, motivated by devotion to Christ, and that is something that spiritual maturity requires rather than placing it in the hands, ultimate authority in the hands of a congregation. Now look, I understand that there are people that disagree with that and, you know, would not endorse that. That's okay. You know, they can do things their way in their church but this is the way that we understand

Scripture at Truth Community, this is the way that we lead at Truth Community. We are an elder led church, not one that is governed by the congregation.

So the elders have responsibility to oversee the church as we've seen from Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3. Now secondly, what else do elders do? Secondly, they teach the church. They lead the church, they provide oversight to the church, secondly, they teach the church. And if you go back to Titus, you'll see this emphasized in what we've already looked at. In the context of Titus, it was evident that the church in Crete was young. They needed help because they were plagued by troublesome influences.

Look at verse 10, Paul said, "I want you to set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city," verse 5. Why does he want that? Verse 10 he explains his reason. He says in verse 10, "For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain." Part of an elder's responsibility, part of the collective responsibility of an elder board is to teach the word of God to the people so that the people can understand, so that the people can grow spiritually and be more conformed to the likeness of Christ. And you see this in Titus 1:9 as Paul is laying out the responsibilities of an elder, he gives an entire verse, recognizing the verse divisions didn't come until much later, Paul emphasizes, he says, a man to be an elder must do this, he must be like this, verse 9, "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." There is a truth element to Christianity. The Scriptures must be taught and they must be taught rightly, they must be taught accurately, and a man to be an elder in a position of leadership of the church must have that proven demonstrated ability to be able to do that, and that he's not teaching wild theories of his own, he's not teaching error that has been refuted again and again over the course of church history since the coming of Christ. Rather, he shows that he understands Scripture and he has a God-given ability to explain it to others in a way that they can receive, that they understand, that they embrace, and that they grow by. This is central to the function of an elder and you see this emphasized again in chapter 2, verse 15, chapter 2, verse 15 as Paul speaks to Titus, he says, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." There is a speaking element, a teaching element to the role of an elder in a local church because Christ loves his sheep, because Christ wants his sheep, wants his children to be properly taught, and so Christ sets apart certain men to have that responsibility in the local church. Not everybody is gifted to teach. That's okay, but an elder must be.

You see this also in 1 Timothy 3, go back there with me. It's not emphasized as much here as it is in Titus 1 but he says at the end of chapter 3, verse 2, he says an elder must be, an overseer must be able to teach. This is central to the function of an elder. It's one of the reasons why, beloved, and just bringing this into our local church context here, it's one of the reasons why before we asked your affirmation of Nathaniel as an elder, we had him teach multiple multiple times so that you could hear and judge for yourself is this man gifted by God to teach the word of God. And by your response, the unanimous affirmation is, yes, he is. And I certainly affirm that myself. But again, this is not so much

about Nathaniel or an individual for the office but what the office requires. Throughout the course of the church, throughout the centuries of the church, errors have assaulted the church, errors that contradict and undermine the gospel, errors that lead people astray from right to Christian living, and those errors have to be understood and refuted biblically in order to protect the sheep of Christ. This is what elders are responsible to do.

So Titus, Paul tells Titus, "You need to appoint elders who are able to silence the false teaching that is disrupting the church and upsetting entire families." You see, false teaching is not just a matter of a difference of opinion, serious false teaching is demonic, serious false teaching destroys families, destroys lives, destroys souls and leads them into eternal destruction. The gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone, that must be taught and upheld and reinforced in a local church if it's going to be a biblical church, and the understanding and the ability to communicate that in a way that others receive is central to the office of being an elder. You see, the office of elder is not just for someone to say, "Oh, I'd like to be an elder," and go up and just grab the office for themselves. No. No, there's a whole, you know, there has to be a proven life and a proven set of doctrine that the man adheres to and with ability teaches to others for an elder to be in place.

So the role of elders, then, is to oversee the church, teach the church, defend the gospel, and protect the flock. Protect the flock, you know, and just thinking back to my early days with Morris when I was so vulnerable, I was still so carnal and there was so much I didn't understand, and to have an elder like that formed the clay, so to speak, point me in the right direction, get me started, this was a great blessing from God in my life to have a man who had the character, who had that ability to teach, and who loved enough to do it for others, not just me.

So, again, when you remember that the flock belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ who bought them with his own blood, you see what a lofty and significant responsibility it is to hold the office of an elder. It's critical. You know, as I've gone over this material and reviewed it to preach today, you know, you see it and you just kind of shrink back and you say, "Well, really? You know, with all the remaining sin in my own life, all of the ways that I fall short and I would hold this office? This is frightening. This is serious." And the only way that an elder can adequately do it is to be equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit. No one has the ability on his own to do this and to live this. This is something that must be produced by the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in time over a man's life. This does not happen overnight. There's a reason why the term "elder" tells us something, it points to a man with some experience, a man who is not a new convert, a man who, we'll set aside the exception of Charles Spurgeon who entered ministry when he was 19, but in our day and age the pattern is not for men to enter into this office when they are 19, 20, 21 years old. Men need time to learn doctrine. They need time to prove themselves. They need time to show themselves in family lives. This is why they're an elder, it's because there's been a process to it all.

Now thirdly and finally for today. We've said, first, what do elders do? First of all, they oversee the church. Secondly, they teach the church. Thirdly, they exemplify Christian

living. They exemplify Christian living. This is what elders do, they oversee, they teach, they exemplify Christian living. Those in Crete in Titus's day, they had much to learn about Christian living. Look at chapter 3, verse 1. Apparently there were contentious people in the church at Crete and Paul tells Titus what to do with them, how to lead them, how to shepherd them, how to tend the sheep. He says in chapter 3, verse 1, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." Beloved, in our politically, this is an aside, but in our politically charged days in which we live, all of us need to come back to this and see what the foundational spirit is that God calls us to come and we should not be replicating the spirit of what we see on news channels or on talk shows on radio or angry podcasts. This is how God wants his people to be. This is how God wants his people to live in the midst of an ungodly society.

So he's laid it out and so part of an elder's responsibility is to be an example of what Scripture calls Christian living to be. So look back at chapter 2, verse 6. Titus 2:2, he's speaking more broadly but obviously if this is what the congregation is to be like, this is especially what the elders are to be like. Titus 2:2, "Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance." Then down in verse 6 as men are coming up in the ranks, young men are coming up in the ranks he says in verse 6, "Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us." This is what the pattern is to be for all Christians: sound in speech, temperate, dignified.

Well, what does that look like? You know, let's say you're a young man, you're recently saved, you didn't grow up in a Christian home, where are you going to learn that from? Where do you see that modeled? We need not only the didactic instruction, we need living examples to show us what it looks like. Well, the role of an elder is to exemplify that, to exemplify Christian living to the rest of the body. And this is summarized in other passages. Look at Hebrews 13 just the next book to the right after Philemon. Hebrews 13 and you see a full summary of what God intends the office to be like. In Hebrews 13:7 the writer says, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." He said, "These men led you," looking there again at verse 7. These men led you, that's oversight. They spoke the word of God to you, this is teaching. Then he says imitate their faith, that's the example so that you see the total package wrapped up in a single verse. This idea of imitation means that you have men there to learn from and to learn how do you deal with difficulties in family, how do you deal with difficulties in life, how does a Christian respond to bad situations in society. Well, God intends elders to be those who exemplify that for you.

You see this also in 1 Peter, turn over to 1 Peter with me, continuing in the right to your Bible beyond the book of James to 1 Peter 5 and the Apostle Peter, playing not the role of pope but the role of a fellow elder says in chapter 5, verse 1, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you,

exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness," verse 3, "nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." Scripture lays this out that that is part of the responsibility of an elder is to live a life that proves to be, that others in the flock can take to be as an example.

It's interesting, you read on in verses 4 and 5, you get a sense of the way that Christ would have the church respond to the elders. He says in verse 4, "when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." Verse 5, "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Beloved, elders, true elders, biblical elders, godly elders, are not on a power trip, rather they are human instruments, flawed human instruments through which Christ chooses to lead his church.

So what are biblical elders? They're leaders of the church. What are they to do? They're to oversee, they're to teach and they're to be an example. And you know, a church that has biblical elders, whatever anyone may think of us, we are speaking principles not personalities here, a church that has biblical elders is a church that is blessed by God. For Christians to have a place where they can come and experience spiritual oversight that is designed for the good, to receive biblical instruction and to have examples before them, this is how God intends, this is what God intends a local church to function like, this is what God intends elders to be and to do. And with all of that, beloved, we can simply say this: biblical elders are not a threat, biblical elders are intended by Christ to be a means of blessing to his loved ones. And that strategic position means that it is vital for a church to appoint qualified men, to appoint the right men to the office. And how do we know which men to appoint? How does a congregation interact with elders? That's what we'll address next week as we continue in Titus 1.

Let's pray together.

*Gracious God, we thank You for Your wisdom in establishing order in the church. Lord, You know more than anyone how those that hold the office of elder, they fall short. Father, ministry is about grace, we all need to grace and we pray, Father, for a greater effusion of Your Holy Spirit upon those elders throughout the world, those elders in our country, those elders in our church. We pray for a greater work of Your Spirit to conform them more closely to what You would have a biblical elder to be and, Father, You can start it with the man in the pulpit. So we pray, Father, that You would bless our church not only with the elders that You have given us, but bless us by raising up men within our body who desire the office, who could grow into this, and send us men who are qualified, Father, for this great task that You appoint elders to do. In the meantime, Father, we offer You our praise and our thanksgiving knowing that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the church, He is the shepherd of the sheep, and all of our trust and repose ultimately is in Him and in Him alone. It's in His name we pray. Amen.*

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