

An Introduction to Elder Leadership

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Titus 1:5

Preached on: Sunday, July 28, 2013

Truth Community Fellowship

Creation Museum

2800 Bullittsburg Church Road

Petersburg, KY 41080

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Now it's time for us to come to the teaching of God's word which we love to do. We call ourselves Truth Community Fellowship because we love the truth of God which is found only in his inspired word, the 66 books of the Bible. We are in the process of studying the book of Titus for those of you who that are new to our fellowship and I would invite you to turn to the book of Titus as we open this morning God's word together. This is a critical series of messages that are coming up over the next 2 or 3 weeks and I'm delighted to be able to open God's word with you this way because we're going to see the foundation of leadership in the church. This message today is an introduction to elder leadership in the church and we're going to be studying Titus, chapter 1, verses 5-9 over the next 2 or 3 weeks. We'll just focus on verse 5 for this morning and I'd like to read that passage to set it in your minds as we begin here. Titus 1:5-9 as the Lord we trust will bless the reading and teaching of his word here this morning in northern Kentucky. Paul writes to Titus and 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.

So Paul is writing and we've spent the past 5 or 6 weeks studying the introductory four verses of chapter 1 and if you haven't been here, I'm sorry that you missed it. We really had an enjoyable time of looking at some deep things from God's word as we did that. The introduction is important for setting the stage for what we are about to study over the next 2 or 3 weeks. You will remember, those of you that have been with us, that Paul set the foundation as he established his authority to write and to instruct churches how they should operate and how they should be established. He wrote as "a bond-servant of God," in verse 1, "an apostle of Jesus Christ." One sent with authority, commissioned to

establish the work of the gospel during that first century time. Paul made it clear what the point of his apostleship was in verse 1, it was to establish the faith of those who were chosen of God. It was to establish the knowledge of the truth. It was to proclaim the hope of eternal life that God who had promised even before time began, God had planned all of this out before time even began. So Paul is writing to establish and to further the apostolic commission that he had from our Lord Jesus Christ. You can see in verse 3 that he felt a sense of stewardship as he did so. He said, "I was entrusted with this proclamation according to the commandment of God our Savior." So as Paul writes, he writes as one conscious of having authority but he also writes as one being under authority, one who has been commanded by God to carry out and to establish what Christ came to accomplish in his Incarnation. In his life, death, resurrection and ascension, Christ was purchasing a people for himself that would serve him throughout all the days of eternity. And so, whatever Paul has to say, here's the point for this morning: whatever Paul has to say in the rest of the epistle of Titus, is designed to further that purpose that we've been studying for the past few weeks. This isn't a sudden change of direction in one sense as we enter into verse 5, but what Paul did in those introductory four verses was lay a foundation for everything else that comes. So we remember those things even though we can't review them all, we remember those things as we enter into verse 5 and we see as Paul writes to Titus, he's explaining what he wants Titus to do.

Apparently, Paul and Titus had ministered together on this island of Crete. Crete is an island in the Mediterranean Sea. It's southeast of Greece. It's a large island; easy to find if you check on a map. Paul had left Titus in Crete as his representative. He said, "Titus, I'm going to leave you here. I have things that you must do in my absence. There are things that you must carry out," and he tells him in verse 5, he kind of gives an overview of what it is that Titus is to do there on the island of Crete. Look at verse 5 with me again he says, "For this reason I left you in Crete," what reason Paul? Well, I'll tell you, it's this reason, this reason that I'm up about to explain: I left you in Crete because you have to set in order what remains and you have to appoint elders in every city as I directed you. So Paul had spoken with Titus, they had ministered together on the island of Crete and Paul had evidently left him behind as Paul went on to other ministry and now what Paul is doing as he writes this letter, is he's giving Titus instructions on what he wants to do and this is very important to what I'm about to say. It's not just that Titus would read this letter but this was going to be a blueprint for the rest of the church to understand and obey as well. Look at the end of Titus. This is important for you to see that this wasn't merely a private letter from Paul to Titus, this was meant to impact the entire congregation, the entire body of believers that were there on that island. In chapter 3:15, Paul ends with these words, "Grace be with you all." You would almost think that Paul was from Kentucky in the southern part of the United States, right? Grace be with y'all. And so the point of that is that it's a plural reference. The entire congregations were expected to read this. This was something that was going to fall onto the ears of everyone, not just Titus. As Paul wrote this letter, he is authorizing Titus to act. He is instructing Titus on what to do and giving him authority and as we see that the rest of the believers were going to see this also, that authority is extended to them as well. Not the authority to act, but the authority that is over this letter, extends not only to Titus but it's

over the congregations that were there as well. So Paul was writing with authority, instructing Titus in particular, but it extends to the rest of the church as well.

What is it that he wants him to do? I want you to set things in order which says that there's a degree of disorder that's going on there. There were problems that needed to be corrected. God is a God who wants things to be done decently and in order we learn elsewhere in Scripture. And so he's generally supposed to set things in order and specifically he supposed to appoint elders. Appointing elders for Titus was one of the chief ways, one of the chief points in setting things in order. When you're setting things in order with an organization and in a spiritual realm of God's kingdom, in the realm of the church, you need to get the right men in authority so that leadership can lead this where it needs to go. So Paul was appointing Titus, instructing Titus to set the right men into positions of authority. In some ways, everything else is secondary to that. So that's what's on Paul's mind as he writes to Titus. He says, "Titus, we've got a work started here." If you want to think about it in terms of, "There's a garden that's started here, there are some seeds that are planted, but oh Titus, there's weeding that needs to be done. There are things that need to be established so that this garden can flourish. Titus, if we don't do this, weeds are going to run over the place and it's going to be infected and nothing good is going to come out of this initial work that has begun." So he says, "Titus, here's what we need to do in order to get things right and so that this work can take root.

It's because we're a young work here at Truth Community, that we wanted to study Titus. We want to take root here. This is just so important for you to understand. Those of you that come regularly, have heard me say these kinds of things many times, but we want to take root here. We're not interested in being a flash-in-the-pan ministry that makes a big splash in media and direct mail marketing and gathers a lot of people together only to see it all dissipate in a year or two. That would be an utter waste of everyone's time. Not only mine, but yours. We don't want that. We want to take root. We're planting a tree here that we intend future generations to be able to take shade under. We're planting and we're growing and we're working with the intention that this is a work that's going to stand the test of time. We want this church to be here 50 years from now, long after I'm in heaven, as a place where the word of God is preached, where the word of God is honored, so that a people yet to be born would come and receive the benefit of the work that we're doing now. We want this to last. Well, if we want this to last, we've got to do it God's way. We have to establish it according to biblical principles that transcend time and have the power to resist the inevitable opposition that will come to such a thing as this. So we're thinking long-term as we teach and minister and fellowship together week-by-week. So we see that we're in a place where there is not leadership and membership formally established yet, that will all come in time, but what we want to do is we want to be able to take root and the way that we do that is to honor what Scripture says and to establish things according to scriptural priorities.

Today is an introduction to elder leadership and I'm only going to answer two questions: first of all, I want to answer the very simple question, what are elders? What are elders? And the second question we're going to answer is: what do elders do? What are elders

and what do elders do? We'll leave some of the other questions for future times of teaching but today it's very simple what we want to do and the first thing that we want to do is answer the question: what are elders? Now, the people that are represented in this room, I realize that we come from a lot of different spiritual backgrounds. Some of us have come from churches where the word "elder" wasn't even used to describe someone in leadership. Others of us have come from elder churches but we found that the elders sometimes left things to be desired with perhaps their wisdom or their leadership. What I want to do today is to put your mind at rest and to give you a sense of what elders are according to Scripture and what it is that we're looking to establish here.

Let me just tell you a little personal story, a little bit of background that I'll start now and then finish at the end of the ministry. When I became a Christian some 30 years ago or so, and I started to get involved in a church in the Bloomington, Indiana area. I walked into that church and on their bulletin they had a list of their elders. I had never heard the word "elder" in a church context before and I want to tell you, it intimidated me. It made me uncomfortable. It was unfamiliar to me. I didn't know what these elders were supposed to be and it was rather imposing and I found at the time that I was hesitant to embrace that because I didn't know what it involved. I had no idea what an elder was and so if you are here today and you're not used to the term "elder," if it's something kind of new to you, I want you to know that I thoroughly sympathize with where you're coming from because that's where I was not all that long ago.

So the important thing for us to do as we're answering the question what are elders, we need to ask a simple question. We ask a very simple question: what does the Bible say? We don't need to be driven entirely by our past traditions. We want to conform to Scripture and we want to establish things according to Scripture. We want to be a biblical church. If you want to know anything about Truth Community and the direction that our church is going to go in the future, understand that there is one primary drive-train in what drives what we do and it's that we want to be a biblical church. Everything else comes under that umbrella. We want to preach the biblical gospel. We want to honor Christ for who he really is. We want to know truth according to the Scriptures. We want to be a church that is as separated as we can be from the philosophies and thinking of the world and have our minds and our philosophies informed by Scripture. Why do we do that? Why do we do that? It's because it's what's Christ bought us for. Look at Titus 2:14 as I once again remind you of this crucial verse in the book of Titus. You see, if you're a Christian, then Christ has bought you for himself and he's bought you for a purpose that he would use you according to his will. Well, multiply that by the many dozens of people that associate with Truth Community and you have a sense of what our collective purpose is supposed to be as well. We are to be a people that belong to Christ and that are zealous for what he wants us to do. Titus 2:14 says that Christ "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works." Well, part of being a people of Christ's own possession is to honor what he wants leadership in the church that he died for to be and so we're not trying to do anything other than be biblical in what we want to do. We even use biblical terms to describe our future leaders.

So let me define the term "elder" for you and then we'll get into it. We'll get into their responsibilities here in just a moment. The term "elder," the original word "elder," was originally used simply to refer to an older man. He's an elder statesman. He's somebody that's been around for a while and therefore there's an idea of age and experience that's communicated in the term "elder" generally speaking when it's used that way. But "elder" is also used as a technical term in the Bible for a church leader and that's the way that Paul is using it here in chapter 1, verse 5. Look at it again with me. He said, "I left you in Crete so that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you." They are going to be appointed. There is a formal installation of them into the office that will give them the authority and the responsibility to act in the church. So when we ask the question, what are biblical elders, let me give you a real simple answer, it's very, very simple to understand in general terms what a biblical elder is: the elders are the men who are responsible to lead a local church. That's it. The elders are the recognized leaders of the local church. They have authority and responsibility to make the decisions that shape the life and the direction of a local church. It's like, in one sense, it's like any other organization: you have men who have authority to make decisions and determine the direction that an organization goes. That's just the very nature of leadership. Well, biblical leadership in the Bible is referred to by the term "elders" and that's what elders are. They are simply the men responsible to lead a local church. That's the simple answer to our question for this morning. That's what elders are.

Now, that brings us to our second question here and this is going to be quite encouraging to you, I trust. Secondly, what do elders do? What do elders do? We're going to save their qualifications for next week and maybe the week after that depending on how it goes, all that we want to see today is what is it that elders do so that we have a common understanding, a shared understanding amongst ourselves about what it is that elders are supposed to do. Right now, just so you know, there is a sense in which I'm functioning as an elder here in the church but other than that we don't have formal eldership yet. We haven't installed elders at Truth Community Fellowship, church is coming a little bit later when we have elders. But there is a reason for that. There is a reason that we haven't done it that way. We wanted to take the time for all of us to be able to see this and to study it together so that we're coming at it from a common understanding, so that we know that we're on the same page, as it were, when we talk about elders and what it is that they do and what their qualifications are and what their responsibilities are and so we've postponed that to take our time, to lay a good foundation and then be able to step into this. Well, now in the providence of God, here we are. This is the passage that the Lord has brought us to.

What do elders do? I'm going to give you a three-part answer to that question. First of all, what do elders do? First of all, they oversee the church. Elders oversee the church and we see that in verse 5. Titus needed to establish leaders who could oversee the work. Look at verse 5 with me again. This is also clear and evident right on the surface of Scripture. Paul said, "I left you in Crete so that you would set in order what remains," that means that there are some things that are out of order, right? If some things need to be set in order, there are some things that are out of order. That's okay but the question is: how do you go about addressing that in a spiritual enterprise like the church? Paul

says, "I want you to appoint elders in every city as I directed you." Now watch this, we'll have a lot more to say about all of these things in the week to come. This is just an overview; it's an introduction. First of all, notice that it's plural, that Paul says, "There need to be elders in every city as I directed you," and so the idea of a local church is not one man with absolute authority acting as a dictator determining everything that happens, there is meant to be a plurality of elders where there is a shared responsibility and accountability in leadership. That's to be the mark of it. The pastor is not a sole, single man in charge of everything that happens. He shares the leadership with a group of elders. Plural. And you can see that it's in every city. Crete was an island with multiple cities and so there were evidently local congregations in every city, each one of which needed plural elders involved.

Now there's something important for you to recognize about that, especially in a church of our size as we've grown and we thank God for the growth. Look, you've got to know as a pastor of Truth Community Fellowship, I am so profoundly grateful to God for every one of you that are a part of our fellowship. I understand you've got your struggles and your weaknesses; I understand that you are not all that Christ would have you to be yet, you know what? That's part of the problem with your pastor too. I'm not all that Christ would have me to be. We're growing together. Christ is working and sanctifying in us together. But with a church of our size, as modest as our size is, you have to understand that one man cannot do the entire work of the ministry in a single place. That's why you need elders, plural, who share in the ministry together. There is too much to do. There are too many things to oversee for one man to do it all by himself and so God's pattern is for elders to share that load together with equal authority and with equal responsibility for the oversight of the church. Elders. Plural. And it's a recognition that the church is not supposed to be a one-man show. Each elder, just like the entire body, brings a different diversity of giftedness together to serve the entire thing. It's the same idea in the leadership with the elders that each man who is an elder would contribute something to the overall plurality of the group of leadership.

So that's the idea. There are elders that are there in every city and what do they do? Look at verse 7. We said that they oversee the church, here you see it in verse 7. Paul equates elders with what they do, they are overseers, he says in verse 7. Some of your translations may say bishops, the bishop is to be above reproach and that's not a bishop like we're used to thinking in the Catholic or Episcopal churches. There is none of that hierarchy in the first century. The term is properly translated "the overseer." So they oversee the work. How are things to be set in order? You put qualified men in positions of authority and responsibility so that they can oversee what's happening and make it what God wants it to be. They are meant to be stewards of the work. Elders oversee the church in the sense that they direct it, they provide direction to what is done. They are concerned and they are involved and they are shepherding the souls of those who come and providing spiritual direction according to biblical principles so that individual Christians like you can flourish in your Christian life. That's the idea. They oversee the work and provide direction to it. It's more than administrative responsibility, elders have pastoral responsibility to care for the souls of those in the local church. When people are struggling with sin, elders come alongside and help them. When they are grieving, they

come alongside and comfort them. When they are feeling weakness, they come alongside and pray. There is a spiritual aspect to this work that elders are called to do and they oversee that in the flock that God has given in a local place.

With that in mind, just by way of cross reference, turn over to 1 Timothy 3 for just a short cross reference here. Paul uses a different phrase that helps us get a sense of the term of an elder, an overseer. Look at chapter 3, verse 2, Paul says, "An overseer, then, must be above reproach," so he's talking about the same thing that Titus was in Titus chapter 1. As he speaks about the overseer, he says in chapter 3, verse 4, this overseer, this elder, "must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity," and then note this little parenthetical comment that he makes, "(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he ever take care of the church of God?)." I added the word "ever" but that's the point. That's the emphasis that Paul is making. He says, "Elders prove themselves in the more limited realm of their home life and then once you see that a man knows how to lead his own household, provide direction and care and organize his household in a constructive way so that it's going in the right direction, then you might have a Christian man who is in a position to expand that and do the same thing on a broader scale in the church of God." You prove yourself in the household, you manage your household well and then if you've done that, then an elder is established in that way, then he expands and he takes care of the church of God. He oversees the church of God. That's what an elder does. He provides that pastoral care. He has the responsibility, the elders collectively have the authority to set the direction of the church.

All of this, mind you, all of this so important to understand, all of this under, watch this, oh you've got to watch this, all of this under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ whose authority was the cornerstone of the opening section of Titus, right? "Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ," and so Paul is under the authority of Christ as an apostle says, "Here's how the local church is to be established. Titus, I want you to appoint elders." But all of this, all of this is under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ who owns the church. He bought it with his own blood and he has revealed in his word what he wants the church to be like. Elders are not independent agents. They are not acting for their own sake, acting for their own authority. They are acting under the authority of Christ, the one who laid down his life for the church. In a similar like pattern, elders lay down their lives for the church as well because they are under the authority of Christ who gave himself as a ransom for those who would be saved. So that spirit of self-sacrifice that animated Christ in dying for the church and buying it for himself, is the same spirit of self-sacrifice that animates elders as they operate and oversee the church of Christ under the authority of Christ. So they oversee the work of the church.

Secondly, what else do elders do? They oversee the church. Secondly, they teach the church. They teach the church. It is evident that the church in Crete was young and needed help and they were plagued by troublesome influences, let's say. We could say that. Turn back to Titus, I think your Bible may still be open to 1 Timothy, turn back to Titus now. Elders oversee the church. Secondly, they teach the church. Now, what was

going on in Crete at the time? We don't have to speculate, we know something of the problems that were there and we know something of what needed to be said in order because we keep reading and we see something in verse 10 of chapter 1. Paul said, "Titus, I want you to set things in order." "Why Paul? What needs to be set in order," as if Titus didn't know. Verse 10, set things in order, why? "For," here's why it needs to be set in order, "there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision," there was a large Jewish influence on the island of Crete. We'll look at that some time. "There are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced, Titus. These men must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain." Verse 12, "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.'" Paul says, "That prophet was right." Verse 13, "This testimony is true. Cretans are like that."

So here's the situation that Titus was facing as he looks at these believers dispersed throughout the island of Crete. They were being influenced by men who were not submissive to the gospel. They were rebellious men who carried about in them the animation of the spirit that marked the culture of their day: rebellious, lazy, evil, wicked men. He says, "Titus, there are men like that, especially the ones who are Jews, that are influencing the church. They are upsetting entire families. Their teaching is all wrong. Titus, you need to get in there and straighten that out. You need to appoint men who can get in there and help you straighten that out." And part of the problem was bad teaching. They were teaching things that they should not teach. Well, part of the responsibility of elders is that they teach the church. Look at 1:9, he's still listing the qualifications of elders and he says an elder must be someone who is "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching," the apostolic teaching that Paul had given. "These elders, Titus, they have to be able to hold fast, they must be ones who hold 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."

Look, you think about what elders are responsible for, this is really sobering. This is really sobering and I want to tell you, it weighs on me either consciously or just below my conscious thought every time I step into a pulpit that elders are uniquely responsible for the teaching in the church and they have to uphold, listen, they have to uphold the truth that Christ died to deliver to his church. They have to uphold and defend the truth that prophets shed their blood for in the Old Testament. They have to defend that body of truth that has been given to the saints and they have to be faithful to it and they have to get it right. That's a lot of responsibility because you know what, James 3 says, "Let not many of you become teachers because you're going to face a stricter judgment when you do." When I stand before Christ and give an account of my life at the Judgment Seat of Christ, I'm going to face a stricter judgment as a result of having been a teacher of God's word. That's true of every elder. This is a sober responsibility that elders have to presume to teach the word of God to the people of God. That's what elders are called to do. Look, if you've never felt a call to teach or a responsibility to teach, it's not something that you really wanted to do, you don't need to apologize for that. There is a sense in which you could thank God for that that you don't carry that responsibility that

you will one day give an account for. Especially young man. They come and they see a guy up front and they say, "Hey, I want to be like that." Sometimes motivated simply by wanting to be upfront. Well, when that's the motivation, guys aren't getting it at all. You know, when you realize the responsibility that comes and the fact that God has commanded us to handle his word with faithfulness. That's a heavy responsibility. If that's not on you, that's not something to regret or to feel bad about or to feel inferior about. There are only some men that God has called to this and the ones that he's called are going to give a stricter account as a result of it.

So part of the responsibility for elders is that they teach. Here is another aspect of the responsibility of it. Look at the end of verse 9 with me again. He says, "They have to be able to exhort in sound doctrine." There are going to be teachable, receptive believers that are the delight of every elder, every pastor that's ever been around. To have people that are teachable and receptive is the greatest joy that a pastor has but it's not all joy and roses and sweet perfume for the man of God. He also, look at the end of verse 9, has "to refute those who contradict." That means he's going to be engaging conflict over the proper interpretation of the word of God. He's going to be engaging sometimes people with great influence, great authority and far greater followings than what this particular man himself has to deal with and I know some of you feel that and carry that weight in your own individual ministries and you know what it's like. You don't have a whole lot of people on your side. The big voices are arrayed against you and challenging you. That's the way it is for elders. That's the way it is for teachers of God's word and the elders have to be able to step up to that and say, "I understand what you say and here's why you are wrong." The thing on top of that is that an elder has to be able to smile when he does it.

So elders have to teach and that's a great responsibility. Look at chapter 2:1, and you'll see this teaching theme throughout Titus and also throughout 1 and 2 Timothy. We won't go into the other ones. Titus 2:1, Paul says, "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." Sound doctrine is at the heart of being a true elder. Verse 15, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." You have to teach sound doctrine. "Titus, these elders have to be able to teach sound doctrine. They need to speak it with an air of authority so that the people have the sense that the word of God is serious, the word of God is true, and they respond and submit their hearts to its authority." Look, this is part of the reason why a pastor can't be a jokester and a comedian in the pulpit and you guys have all seen these comedians and these jokers with their million-dollar smiles but the pastor, an elder, can't be a comedian because if you're a comedian, do you know what? People don't take you seriously. The whole point of being a comedian is that you're telling people, "Don't take me seriously. I'm here to make you laugh not to instruct you with authority."

So the elder has to be a sober minded man who can handle the word of God, who is evidently in love with the word of God. It's obvious to everyone and he has a skill and an ability to handle that so that people learn when he teaches. That's the responsibility of an elder and Paul tells Titus, "Titus, I want you to appoint elders who know how to teach, who can refute this false teaching that's infecting this group of believers on the island of

Crete. Titus, they are undermining the gospel. They are upsetting entire families, Titus. Get the right men in there so that they can be strong and fight for the truth." And as part of their oversight responsibility as elders teach, as they minister, as they refute false teaching, do you know what happens? Do you know what starts to happen? Families that used to be upset start to settle down. Families that used to be in conflict start to find themselves more at peace because the truth of the word of God, when you drive out error through true teaching, it has a settling impact on the souls of everyone that's under the sound of the voice of those teaching elders.

One of the things that you see in this and Paul says in verse 11, look at verse 11 with me again, he says, "They are upsetting whole families, Titus. These empty talkers and deceivers are upsetting whole families." You see, that hints at that oversight, that pastoral oversight role that elders have. When families are upset by false teaching, elders step in and say, "Let me clarify this for you. Let me help you with this." And they say, "Oh, oh, oh. I'm so glad you helped me with that," and the upset families turn into peaceful families which says something. It means that the families in the church in the first century and here in northern Kentucky, the families in the church and their demeanor, it matters. It's important. Families are meant to be cared for under the oversight of biblical leadership so that they are not upset but they are calm, they are peaceful and they are in a position to grow. The responsibility for that falls on the elders and so they teach in order to protect the gospel, advance the gospel and to be a means and an avenue of blessing to those that are under their leadership.

Now, third thing here: elders oversee the church; secondly they teach the church; and thirdly, what do elders do? They exemplify Christian living. They exemplify Christian living. They show by their lives what a Christian looks like. That's what elders are responsible to do. Now, obviously those in Crete had much to learn about Christian living. Look at chapter 3, verse 1. Paul tells Titus, "Remind them," speaking to those who would receive his teaching, these people that are scattered throughout the island of Crete who were known by culture to be empty talkers and evil beasts and liars and lazy gluttons. Boy, wouldn't you hate to be a part of that and have an apostle call you out and say, "You come from a culture and you guys are evil beasts and lazy gluttons. What's the matter with you?" Well, there was a lot of carry-over and baggage from their culture and their prior lives and so they needed help. They needed instruction. They needed a model. In chapter 3:1 you can see this. Paul says, "Titus, remind them of some things. 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." That's a long laundry list. He said, "Titus, they've got a lot to learn and you need to remind them of these things."

Well look, beloved, it's not just through the didactic teaching, it's not just through an oral instruction that that takes place. God's design in the church is for elders to be an example that the rest of the church can look to and say, "Oh, I see. I see it in his life what a Christian is supposed to be like." Look at chapter 2:6, in the sense that elders are to exemplify Christian living. Paul says, "Titus, urge the young men to be sensible," and then he pivots and in verse 7 he says, "in all things show yourself to be an example," a

pattern, 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." He says, "Titus, you've got to go in there and you've got to live a godly life so that your life will be an example that illustrates the teaching that you give from the pulpit," so to speak. A man's life is to illustrate his teaching when he is a teacher inside the church. That's what an elder does and so that's why we read earlier in verses 6-9 all of these character qualifications of an elder which we'll look at some next week but you see the character qualifications are there to make sure that the life that the elder manifests is consistent with the doctrine that he teaches. He's supposed to be an example. Not merely a mouth, not merely a talking head, he's supposed to be a living example. Do you know what else that means? If you're going to be a living example as an elder, you've got to be in amongst the people to whom you're to be an example. That's why it couldn't possibly be correct that this is referring to people who are in a remote headquarters a thousand miles removed someplace and that those are the bishops. It can't be that way because a man that is a thousand miles away can't be an example to you of daily Christian living. So elders are meant to be local in the assembly, not someone who is remote and removed and walks around in long flowing robes but doesn't know you from Adam. That's not biblical eldership at all. That's a fabrication of men who love power more than they love Christ.

Now, let's pull all of this together. I'm going to summarize it all here. What do elders do? They oversee the work in the church. They teach the church. They exemplify Christian living to the rest of the body through their character traits which are required there in Titus 1. Now, those three points are summarized in other passages that I want to show you real quickly just so that you can see as we let Scripture illuminate Scripture, we see that this is what Scripture teaches about leadership in the church. Turn over to Hebrews 13:7. I'll give you just a moment to turn there. It shouldn't take too long. Hebrews 13, where at the end of this long epistle that has exalted Christ and glorified and spoken about the superiority of Christ, the writer of Hebrews says in verse 7, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." All three of the things that we said that elders do are wrapped up in that one verse. "Remember those who would lead you," that's the oversight. "They spoke the word of God to you," that's the teaching. "Considering the result of their conduct," that's their example. It's all right there. Those are the three primary responsibilities of an elder: to lead, to teach and to exemplify, to be an example of what Christian living is supposed to be like.

Turn over to 1 Timothy 4. We've got just an extra moment so I'm going to include this one in here as well. Timothy, another apostolic representative of Paul's. In 1 Timothy 4:11, Paul says, "Prescribe and teach these things." There it is, the teaching aspect of it. Then he says in verse 12, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe." He says, "Timothy, teach them and despite your youth, manifest in your speech and your conduct, in your love and your purity, show them what it looks like to be a Christian. Be an example to them with your life, not simply with your lips."

One more, 1 Peter 5, just after the book of Hebrews and just before 2 Peter for those of you keeping score at home. 1 Peter 5, beginning in verse 1. What do elders do? What are they accountable to God for? What will they face a stricter judgment at that Judgment Seat of Christ for? Oversight. Teaching. Being an example. Chapter 5, verse 1, Peter says, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you," do you see the plural again? He's writing to these churches that are scattered around, "I exhort the elders among you," plural, "I exhort the elders among you as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ." I think for Peter to call himself a fellow elder is a great statement of humility and it also gives you a sense of the shared responsibility of the office of an elder. Peter was an apostle and he writes to these men and he puts himself on their level and he says, "I'm just your fellow elder, witness of the sufferings of Christ. And a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed." We all share in this together. Peter doesn't lord it over them.

What are you to do? What is it that Peter is exhorting the elders to do? That's what I want you here in Truth Community to see here today on July 28, 2013. That will date this message. What do I want you to do? Verse 2, "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; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be," there it is again, yet again, "examples to the flock." Peter tells him and he says, "Look, this is what you need to do. You need to shepherd the church. You need to oversee it. Not as though you're their lord and master but to be an example to them. You lead them through your example. You lead them through your teaching. Not a raw exercise of authority," Peter says to him. "Don't lord it over them." You see, this is what's really, really important for all of you to understand, for all of us to understand, first person plural, not second person, this is what we all need to understand and anyone who ever aspires to leadership in Truth Community is going to be challenged on this point very, very closely so that the eldership is reserved to those who really need to be there, who really should be there. This point is so important: true elders, biblical elders, are not on a power trip. They are merely the human instruments through whom God leads the church. True elders, biblical elders, understand that their authority is given to them so that they can be instruments of dispensing the blessing of God upon the body of Christ. They are not there to accumulate power to themselves. They are not there to rule people's lives. They are there to oversee, to teach and to be an example. Have men abused the office of elders in the past? Sure. I've known elders who I thought were some of the most foolish men I've ever met but we have to understand, we have to say, "What does the Bible say about the leadership? What title does it apply? How is it that we see this office and how do men hold this office and lead through it?" Oversight. Teaching. Being an example. Not lording it over the flock.

Now, I told you that when I was young I was skeptical when I first heard the term "elder." I went into that church and I stayed there for a while. It was new to me. I was a brand-new Christian and I was very un-trusting. I mean, not only had I not ever seen it before, I was a law school student and so you're just un-trusting and probably untrustworthy yourself. You know, there's all the this skepticism that was wrapped up in my whole demeanor, my whole persona. Very skeptical young man. I was very, very uncertain about what this was going to be like and I was reserving judgment as to

whether this was going to work or not. Elder, I had never heard that term before. What does that mean? And you know what happened? You don't? I'll tell you. The Lord brought one of those elders into my life, a man named Maurice Robertson. As far as I know, he's still living. I haven't talked to him for a long, long time. Maurice was probably in his early 50s at the time. What a great age that is. He was a lay guy in the sense that he wasn't paid staff. He worked at Naval Weapons Center over there by Bloomington at Crane and do you know what Maurice did? He taught me. He led a small group Bible study and taught me and some other people some of the basic fundamentals of Christian doctrine. You know what else he did? He had me into his home. I watched him interact. I did not have a Christian father like many of you have never had a Christian father. I watched him interact with his family: how he spoke with his wife, the affection that he showed toward his kids. I watched how he responded to life.

You know, he was in a really bad accident and he was horribly burned. I don't even remember how long he was hospitalized but he came back still showing the scars of that burn accident, not apologizing for his appearance. I'm going to lose my emotions here if I'm not careful. Maurice came in and he sat down just like he always had before the accident there and didn't call attention to himself. He didn't call attention to his injuries. He didn't talk about his accident. But he got choked up and you could tell that he was in physical pain and that there had been a long, hard process for him and he came to the point and he started to talk about it and he started to cry. He started to cry. I'd never seen this. The only thing that I had known growing up was, you know, the model of men who was a strong, dominant, unyielding power and here is this man that I respected, probably more than anyone on earth at that time, weeping over the trials that he had been through. He looked at us and he said, "Let's just bow in prayer." He poured out his heart in prayer, tears going down his cheek.

Beloved, that's an elder. That's an elder. You know, it was through Maurice Robertson that I learned, "Oh, this is what Christians believe. Oh, this is how Christians live." I had only known this other unsanctified thing from being with a non-Christian father. "So, you act like that? That's how you deal with your wife? That's how you deal with your kids? You actually love your daughters and hug them and all that? Wow! This is something new. I'm starting to get it. I compare what I see in Scripture and what you've been teaching us in this small group and I see it in your family and it all connects. It makes sense. This is the direction I want to go as a young Christian."

Do you know what I learned in that process? Biblical elders, both words being important there, biblical elders, Maurice Robertson in particular, was not a threat to me at all. Maurice Robertson was an instrument of the blessing of God in my life. His position. And he never, ever beared the arm of his authority in any of his conversations with me. It was not even on the surface of anything that we did. His authority, his influence came through his example, through his teaching, through his loving oversight not only of my life but of his fear of that wonderful church at the time.

So when we're talking about elders here, that's a picture of what biblical eldership in Truth Community is going to be like. We're talking about the spiritual leaders in a local

church who oversee the ministry, that teach and live lives that serve as an example to the rest of the flock. What you have to know from the Scriptures because God is the one who appointed this, right? This comes from Scripture. This pattern comes from Scripture. It comes from the very Christ who shed his own blood to save us from our sins. The Christ who has all authority said, "This is how I want it done in our church, in my church," speaking as Christ. I know the pronouns get confusing there sometimes. But see, biblical eldership is an instrument of God's blessing to God's people and as we go forward in the future and over the next couple of weeks, we're going to ask the question how do we know what man to appoint to that position? How do we know that we can trust the men in that position? I'm going to answer that question. How is it that a congregation interacts with elders? We're going to deal with those questions. Those are all important questions and all things that we must answer thoroughly before we move forward and become a church instead of a fellowship. All I want you to see today is: what is an elder? A church leader. What does he do? He oversees; he teaches; he serves as an example. What's the result of that to the people in the congregation who aren't elders? Blessing. Blessing. This is how God leads his church, it's through men who love Christ and manifest proven character over time and take up the mantle to be a blessing, not to lorded over, but to serve and be a blessing to those who are there. That's what elders are. They are not a threat. They are the instrument of blessing to God's people.

Let's pray together.

Father, even as we've talked about this, we thank you for your word which reveals these things and we seek to honor your word and give prominence to your word. Father, we pray that not only now but in the months and years to come, you would raise up these kind of men to be elders at Truth Community Fellowship. Lord, help us to recognize them and to affirm them and let them minister with great effectiveness. Father, all with the design to establishing and setting order into this place that is reflective of what you would have it to be.

Father, I would be remiss if I didn't personally thank you for the life of Maurice Robertson. Lord, I thank you that you brought a biblical elder into my life as a young believer, a man who loved me, spent time with me, taught me, prayed for me and then released me to move on into other areas of life. Father, he was an instrument of your blessing to me and I thank you for him and for Esther. Lord, I pray that that kind of pattern of what you blessed me with so many years ago would become the kind of pattern that is established here in Truth Community. Raise up men like that who would shepherd and care for your people in a way that would please you, that would be an instrument of blessing for many years to come. Father, men who could give an account before the Judgment Seat of Christ and hear a response from our Master, our Lord, that says, "Yes, that was well done you good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master now."

Father, we ask you for these things knowing that we don't have the capacity to make it happen on our own. We need the help of your Spirit so may your Spirit be our teacher,

may your Spirit be the one who leads us. Father, also that Christ could be glorified in our midst. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

You have been listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church. For more information about our ministry including Pastor Don's blog and our location and service times, please visit us at truthcommunitychurch.com. You will also find Don's sermon library where you can download free messages on many biblical passages and topics. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.