



Titus (Part 2) – Shepherding Like Jesus

Zach Lee – August 3, 2014

Good morning, Village Church. How is everybody doing? Good to see you. Welcome. My name is Zach Lee. I'm one of the ministers here on staff. I have the pleasure of chatting with you out of the Scriptures this morning. Let me open with a quick word of prayer and just beg God for help, and then we will get started. Let's pray.

Jesus, we want to lift you high. I just confess that I feel far from you this morning. I thank you, though, that my feelings are liars and that the Scriptures say you love me. Would you encourage me? Would you give me wisdom? May we lift you high in here. You are, as the Scriptures say, the image of the invisible God. In you all the fullness of God dwells in bodily form.

You are the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. You take the name *I Am* in the Gospels. You forgive people for their sin. People worship you. We cannot lift you higher than you are. In relation to God, you are him. In relation to the Father, you are Son. We give you glory. Would you help us? Would you send your Spirit to give us wisdom and guidance? Thank you for your Word. It's in your blessed name we pray, amen.

Let me start with a little story to get us kicked off. We have a guy on our Dallas Campus staff whose name is Brenton. Brenton is from Australia, and he speaks with an Australian accent very unlike how you just heard me say the word *Australia*. I don't know why I did that. It always comes out either Irish or Indian anytime I try to do an accent.

So Brenton is from Australia, and one day he was sitting down with Isaac Wimberley, who's at our Plano Campus, to have lunch. As the waitress is coming up to the table at Chili's or somewhere, Isaac says really loudly, "Bro, don't try to trick her with your fake accent thing. She's not going to buy it." The waitress hears that. He's trying to say that loudly to put Brenton in a pickle where he can't get out, because that's just how he talks. He can't not talk with an accent.

So he's saying that really loudly, and the waitress hears it, and she walks up to the table to take their order. Brenton starts ordering, and the waitress is like, "That's not even good. That doesn't sound real. You're not from Australia. You can't trick me." The more he protests, the more it seems like he's trying to trick her.

He's like, "No, no, I *am* from Australia. I have parents there." It sounds like he's trying to trick her, because Isaac had just set him up for failure. That has nothing to do with the sermon; I just thought it was a funny story I wanted to share with you. I was just thinking to myself, "You know who would enjoy that story? Everyone." So there you go.

So Titus, chapter 1, starting in verse 5. We're going to be continuing our series in Titus that Josh began last week. He went through Titus 1:1-4. I'm going to go through Titus 1:5-9. Please grab a Bible. If you don't have one, there should be one in the seat back in front of you. If you don't have a Bible, that is our gift to you. If you do have a Bible, please don't take it and sell it on Amazon. Thank you.

Today we're going to be talking about elders and church government. Doesn't that sound exciting? There's a tendency when we hear we're going to be learning about elders and church government to instantly feel as though this might not apply to us and this is going to be really boring. I mean, how many people have had their lives changed by a sermon on church government? You leave and you're like, "Did you hear what the pastor said about elders and deacons? I think I just forgave my father." That doesn't usually happen in a sermon like that about elders and deacons and these kinds of things.

I actually want to fight that mindset. I think the Bible has a lot to say about this topic here in Titus, in 1 Timothy 3, in Acts, all throughout the New Testament. This is something God considers to be very important. There is a reason the Bible is bigger than John 3:16. There are some other things God wants us to know, and this is one of them. So I want to encourage you in that.

I want to mention a few things sort of as a preface before we get started. First, some of you in here are interested in church leadership. Some of you in here are wanting to one day be elders, you're wanting to be in ministry. I've talked to some of you who are in seminary and are training for that. I myself am not an elder here. I joyfully serve on behalf of the elders, but I am a soldier; I am not a general.

I'm one who aspires to church leadership, so this is a helpful text for you and me if we feel this calling to be in church leadership. It's something we can put our lives against and learn to grow in these things. That's a good thing to desire. The Bible says if you aspire to the office of elder you desire a good thing.

The second thing is you have a role as a congregation to also watch the elders. There's sort of a go-between, a slight checks and balances, if you will. So go the elders, so goes the church. I've seen churches that were not doing really well, and they got the right guys in leadership, and they just flourished. Conversely, I've seen churches where the congregation seemed to be doing great, and they got the wrong guys in leadership, and they just tanked. So we have a responsibility to know who these elders are and these kinds of things.

Lastly, just to make this very applicable to all of us, we're about to look at some requirements for elders, but just to be clear, these aren't requirements for elders only. It's not as though an elder can't be a drunkard but you can be, that an elder has to be faithful to his wife but you can sleep around, that an elder has to not be quick-tempered but you can be a jerk and flip people off while you're driving. That's not what we're talking about.

These are actually not requirements for elders; they're requirements for all Christians, and the reason you can't be an elder if you don't meet these is that you're not walking as faithfully as you should as a Christian. These are requirements for all of us. Now a helpful word also is what I'm about to read through is going to be a list of these different requirements that elders should be.

Sometimes it can start to feel moralistic or legalistic, so let me just encourage you in this. The gospel has already been preached in Crete. These are men who already have trusted Christ by faith alone, been redeemed, been saved, been forgiven by God, and they're growing in their faith. They're being transformed. They're being empowered by the Holy Spirit.

They're not doing this to earn God's favor. This is not a text we read and say, "Man, we fall so short; we're just awful." It's a text we read and say, "Man, we fall so short; we're just awful, but Jesus was perfect and therefore we're seen as perfect by the Father." The gospel has already been proclaimed in Crete, so don't use this to beat yourself up.

Also, when it comes to church government, this is not a major doctrine. It's not like the Trinity or the resurrection or something like this, but it *is* one that is important. I do think the Bible gives us

advice on how we should do church. I *will* make fun of some things. I feel like I have biblical warrant to mock stuff, because Jesus mocks the Pharisees, Paul mocks the Judaizers, Elijah mocks the prophets of Baal, and God mocks people. Mocking is in the Bible. Some mocking is bad; some mocking is good. So I'm going to mock some things because I feel like I have biblical warrant to do that.

With that in mind, let's jump into verse 5. "**This is why I left you in Crete...**" Paul visited this island known as Crete probably after his first Roman imprisonment. What he did in Crete is he started churches. He told people about Jesus and planted churches and started getting churches set up. He writes this letter to his disciple, his sidekick, Titus, telling him what to do in Crete.

Paul is an apostle. Titus is not an apostle, but he's not an elder. He's sort of this weird in-between thing for this temporary time. He's what's known as an *apostolic delegate*, one sent by an apostle. He's an apostle sidekick. He's not Batman. That's Paul. He's Robin. Robin can still kick your tail, but he doesn't get to wear the cool suit. He sort of looks like a Christmas ornament, with shiny green and stuff.

He's not Paul, he's not an apostle, but he's the sidekick of the apostle. Paul is giving him instruction on what to do in Crete. Crete is a little island off the southern coast of Greece. That's not crazy important. I just didn't want you to think it was near Kentucky or something. So that's where we're at. Verse 5: "**This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order...**"

He's saying, "Titus, the reason I left you in Crete was to finish what I started. I established some churches, I planted some churches, I did evangelism, but there's still work to be done. The churches are not ready. They're not good to go. I left you there to put them into order, and here's how you're going to do it." "**...and appoint elders in every town as I directed you...**" "You're going to put the churches in order by instructing and putting men in these positions of leadership known as elders."

Let's talk a little bit about how a church should be run in the New Testament. Are you ready? A church is not to be run by one single guy, where you have one single pastor who's the hotshot who makes all of the decisions. His power goes unchecked. If he feels like God is leading him somewhere, that's just the way the rest of the church goes. There's not really a check on that. He gets exhausted and can't spend time with his family because he's one guy trying to do the job of ten men. That's not how you lead in the New Testament.

A church is also not run by deacons. Deacons in the New Testament are a serving body. They are not a governing body. Their job is to serve underneath the elders with practical needs. Deacons go on hospital visits. They feed the poor. They help practically on the ground to free up the elders to do the spiritual care, the pastoring, the governing.

Churches are not led by one guy who's over multiple churches, where you have a priest and then a bishop and then an archbishop and you go up in this hierarchy to where you have one guy ruling over multiple congregations. You don't have that in the New Testament. You have it in early church history, but you don't have that in the New Testament.

The way a church is to be run in the New Testament is by appointing men known as *elders*. They're a group of men who stand unilaterally to one another. They share authority. Matt Chandler has equal authority here with Josh Patterson. He has equal authority with Brian Miller. He has equal authority with Jeff Haley. He has equal authority with Brian Walck or any of our elders. They work together as a group.

Now let me get into some even more nerd stuff. Are you ready? The Greek word for elders is *presbuteros*. It's where we get the term *Presbyterian*, because they have a plurality of elders. When you hear the term *elder*, you have a tendency to think someone who's old. Am I right? Sometimes in Greek literature that's how the term is used, but the idea is not that they have to physically be old. Jesus is in his early 30s. Paul in the book of Acts is called a "young man." Paul writes to Timothy and says, "Don't let them look down on you because of your age," because he was young.

The idea is not that they have to physically be old and always have an ache in the knee or something like this. The idea is that they have to spiritually be old. They have to be spiritually mature. They have to have walked this out for a little while. They have to know the Scriptures. They have to love Christ. Actually, in another letter, in 1 Timothy, Paul says you can't be an elder if you're a new convert. You haven't walked in it long enough.

So the idea is not that they have to be physically old; they have to be spiritually mature. You can have young elders and what I call "elderly elders." You can have both, and that's okay. This is a common pattern in the first century. The Jewish synagogue was led by a group of men known as elders. The Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin, was led by a group of men known as elders. In Greco-Roman society, in the Senate, for example, you had a group of men known as elders who helped lead in decisions in the city.

This is a common pattern, and you see the same thing here in the New Testament. Now let me ask you this. He says, "**...put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you...**" Is that word *elders* in the singular or the plural? What was that? Plural, okay. For a second there I was like, "Wait a second. I went to public school and I know *this*." It's in the plural.

By the way, every time elders are designated in the New Testament, it's always in the plural. The only time you have a singular elder is if it's just generically talking about, "Hey, this is how an elder should be" or an elder writes a letter. Every time they're designated, they're designated as *elders* and appointed like that in the New Testament. We're told, for example, for sick to go to the elders (plural) of the church and they pray for us.

Do you see any wisdom with having several guys at the top instead of one lone hotshot? I almost feel like our doctrine of sin, that we're born broken and sinful, necessitates that we have to have several guys making decisions so one doesn't go astray, so they can check each other, pray with one another, encourage one another. That's what you have in the New Testament.

All right, we've seen we're to have elders. We've seen a little bit about what they are. What is their character to look like? Verse 6: "**...if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.**" Here's what the Bible wants to say first. I think this is very important.

It's going to say when selecting elders, the first thing you look at is not, "Do they have a PhD?" It is not, "Were they successful in business?" It's not, "Are they a doctor or lawyer?" It's not worldly success. The first thing the Bible is going to say in looking for an elder is, "How do they look in society, and how do they look in the home? What is their reputation in society, and are they leading their family well?"

Are they above reproach? When we put a candidate here, we need to know if he's a scoundrel. We need to know if he's a corrupt businessman. We need to know if he's the guy who's kicking puppies when nobody is looking. He has to be above reproach. Additionally, he has to lead his household. The Puritans used to say you can't lead the big church until you can lead the little church. You can't lead the assembled congregation until you can lead your household. That's your training ground for ministry.

Let's break this down. Verse 6 again: "**...if anyone is above reproach...**" One commentator says a good synonym here is that an elder should be *unimpeachable*. He's not the kind of guy you can bring charges against. When you hear that someone is an elder, you should think, "Yeah, that guy should absolutely be an elder." You shouldn't think, "Him? I went to a party with him, and he woke up the next day dressed like Zorro in a dumpster, and he didn't know he got there. That's not the guy we're looking for."

We scrutinize the lives of our elders. If you're an elder candidate here, we go talk to your family. We talk to your employer. We talk to your friends. We look at your Facebook. If we're going through your Facebook and we see pictures of you doing Jell-O shots with Lady Gaga or something, you're out. You're gone. (I don't know where I got that. I'm sorry. It has been a long weekend. We had the Groups' conference, and I'm exhausted. This is the fourth one.)

We are looking for men who are above reproach. We're not to care what people think about us when we're following what God has told us to do. We're not to have a fear of man. We *are* to care whether or not people think we're godly. We're to avoid the appearance of evil. We're to bring glory to Christ by our actions to the outside world, not bringing disrepute to his church. "If anyone is above reproach."

The next part says they also have to be the husband of one wife. Now here's my question to you, church: What the heck does "the husband of one wife" mean? Does it mean they have to be married, that you don't want a young elder, that no one is going to listen to him if he's not married? "He can't even get a girl, so why am I going to listen to him?" Is that the idea?

Does it mean they can't have ever gotten divorced and gotten remarried? Does it mean he just can't be a polygamist? What does it mean by "the husband of one wife"? There are four basic interpretations, and I'm going to go through these and then show you which one I think is the most correct, which is the fourth one.

The first interpretation says that to be an elder, you have to be married; that "the husband of one wife" means you are the husband of *a* wife, that you must be married. I don't think that's the best interpretation for a few reasons. First, neither Jesus nor Paul was married, and any rule that would keep them from being leaders in your church is a bad rule. Could we agree?

Elsewhere, Paul is going to write and say sometimes for the sake of ministry it's *better* to be single. He says not better like godly or closer to God or something. The idea is that practically, doing ministry sometimes is easier if you're single because you don't also have to care for a family. You can spend all your time on your spiritual family.

If you want to say this text means you must be married, then not only do you have to be married, but you have to have a kid, because it's going to mention kids. Not only do you have to have *one* kid, but you have to have more than one, because *children* is in the plural. Then they have to be of a certain age so you can know whether or not they're submissive and obedient to you under your roof.

If you want to take that passage that way, now you have to be married, have kids, they have to be a certain age, you have to have more than one kid, and they have to be obedient. So as soon as they move out to college and you can't really check on them anymore, sorry, you can't be an elder anymore. That's not what this text is saying.

The second interpretation is that "the husband of one wife" means you can't be someone who has gotten divorced and gotten remarried to somebody else. That was a very common interpretation in the early church. When you read the early church fathers... (That makes me sound like such a nerd, by the way, as I say that. "When we read the early church fathers, which I know we all do on our Friday night..." How I ever got a wife as beautiful as I have is unbeknownst to me.)

In the early church, when you read a lot of the early church leaders, they took the passage this way, that you could never have gotten remarried. I don't think that's the meaning of this text, primarily. I want us to wrestle with that, but I don't think that's the primary meaning of this text for a few reasons. First, if Paul was trying to say an elder can be someone who has never been divorced, there's a much easier way to say that in Greek. He *didn't* say that. He specifically mentions "the husband of one wife."

Secondly, these are not talking about qualifications ever in your life. Here's what I mean. This text is not going to say, for example, you can't be an elder if you've *ever* been drunk; you can't be an elder if you've *ever* been quick-tempered. Before Christ, we all lived pretty wickedly. It's talking about your life now in Christ. When I look at your life now, do I see a semblance of godliness? That's what it's talking about. So I don't think it's talking about you can't be divorced and remarried.

Another strong reason against that, by the way, is that would also mean if your spouse passed away, they died and you got remarried, you couldn't be an elder. If "the husband of one wife" means you could never have been remarried, you could get married young, your wife maybe unfortunately passes away due to cancer or something, you get remarried, and now you can't be an elder for some reason. I don't think that's the meaning of that text.

The third interpretation (and I think this one is true, but I don't think it's the primary meaning) is that you can't be a polygamist. That's true. Let's just be clear. Let's put our cards out there. If we're interviewing somebody to be an elder here and we're like, "Oh, we'd love to meet you and your wife at dinner," and they're like, "Which one?" they're gone. No questions asked. Do not pass "Go." They're out.

There are a lot of things described in the Bible, but that doesn't mean that's what God is wanting for you. If you read the Bible, you'll see things like polygamy, incest, rape, slavery, all kinds of terrible stuff. That doesn't mean you go, "Okay, God, I'm going to go do all of these things." Those are negative examples. Those are in God's Word to show you what *not* to do and show you how people are doing it incorrectly.

When Jesus is asked about marriage, he specifically points back to the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve and says, "That's the pattern." He says to get remarried after an unbiblical divorce is adultery, because he doesn't see you having this idea of having more than one wife. Because Jesus is not a polygamist. He only has one wife: the church. So yes, it is true that this text would exclude a polygamist from being an elder. Polygamy was a little more common in Jewish society in the first century, so I think there's some truth to that.

Here's the interpretation I think is the most accurate (it's the fourth one): that "the husband of one wife" means you are one who is sexually faithful to your spouse and not promiscuous. In Greek, this phrase actually is *mias gunaikos aner*. It means one-woman man. As an elder, you need to be a one-woman man, a one-wife husband. You're not looking at pornography. You are not flirting with your secretary. You are not sleeping around. You are faithful to your wife. You're the husband of one wife.

I think to give that even further credence is where it's located in the context. It says you're to be above reproach, and one of the ways you do that is not sleeping around on your wife, and it's going

to talk about your leadership in the home. It's going to talk about your wife and your kids. I think it's describing how an elder is to lead and be in the home, that he's to be the husband of one wife.

Here's a funny story about this, by the way. Steve Hardin, Pastor Steve... I love him. He's the campus pastor over our Dallas Campus. He one day was teaching on the biblical role of elders, and he was trying to teach through this passage and say that an elder must have eyes for one woman. They're not sleeping around. They have eyes for one woman. They're faithful to their spouse.

But do you know what he kept saying on accident? He kept saying, "An elder has to be a one-eyed woman." He just kept saying it. He's like, "They have to be above reproach. They have to be a one-eyed woman." Everybody is like, "None of us are qualified. What does that mean? You have to be some sort of lady Cyclops to be an elder?" What he was meaning to say, though, was right: that your eyes are for your wife. Your heart is not astray. You're being faithful to your spouse. So what we're looking for here at The Village are one-eyed women.

Now it's going to talk about his kids, if you'll see there in verse 6: "**...and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.**" What it's saying is that you need to be able to look at an elder's life and see how he leads his home. Right here where it says their children must be believers? That's an okay translation. That word can also be translated as *faithful*, and I think that's a better translation.

In fact, if you're using the ESV, I think if you look at the bottom of the page it'll even have a little text note that says, "Or faithful." That's a better translation there. The idea is not that your kids have to be regenerate trusters in Christ. What if they're 2 years old and they can't do that yet? What if you raise them in the faith and they just decide to depart from it? You can't control whether or not the Holy Spirit will open their hearts.

The idea is not that they have to be regenerate; the idea is they have to be faithful, and I think that's further clarified by this next clause: "**...and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.**" They are submissive. They are obedient. You can tell you have led them well as a father.

Now listen. Lest you beat yourself up and heap shame on yourself, we can always do better. I get it. I read through that... We can always be better husbands. We can always be better fathers. The Bible is not looking for perfect men; it's looking for faithful men. There are times you are faithful to teach

your kids about Christ and the gospel and they still depart and still go off the rails. We're just asking, "Are you being faithful?" We're looking for a general pattern of faithfulness.

Your family is like a garden. If there are thorns and thistles, sometimes that's an indicator of the gardener and what he has neglected. Conversely, if the family is blooming, that might be an indicator of the gardener and whether or not he's causing that garden to flourish. That's what we're looking at. If you can't lead a wife and a few kids, you're not going to be able to lead a congregation of thousands of adults. At least with kids, when they act up you can spank them. When they get older, it gets a lot weirder when it's adults. It's harder to do the church discipline that way.

Now after seeing how we're to have elders and this is what they're to be in society and in the home, we now see what an elder is not to be. I need to mention a quick word here. Verse 7: **"For an overseer..."** Some people see this term *overseer* as a separate office from elder. They think it's a different office completely from elder. I just want to dispel that. This is the same office. There are deacons and there are elders. A pastor (a *poimen* in Greek), an elder (a *presbuteros*), and then a bishop or an overseer (an *episkopos*) are all the same office.

A bishop is not one who's over several churches and over several pastors. This is the same office. It sounds like I'm splitting hairs, but it is important to realize there is one office right there, that an overseer is equivalent to an elder. Elsewhere in the Bible, Paul will say to the elders, "God has made you overseers of the flock." It's the same term. Bishops, if you will. It's all the same office. There's not that hierarchy. There are elders. There's this same office there.

"For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach." That's so important. It mentions it again. It's like, "Listen. Just in case you didn't hear me and you want to put the scoundrel up there, no. Above reproach." Then it says what he's not to be. **"He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain..."**

This list is convicting to me, someone who wants to be in leadership, because it lets me know what things I need to put to death by the grace of Christ. When I look through that list, I see, "He's not to be arrogant," and I'm like, "Oh no, I am extremely arrogant." As Josh Patterson has said, "I love me some me, and I can't get me off my mind." I have this propensity to think I'm awesome, despite the fact the Bible is going to say I'm *not* awesome.

What I need to do, though, is learn to put that to death as I aspire to leadership. Just to give you a little window into my soul, the reason I'm arrogant is I don't feel like God loves me, so I exalt myself to try to get love from other people. There's the deeper root. If you struggle with it, maybe there's a deeper root for you as well. An elder is not to be arrogant; they're to be humble. Christ, though he is God himself, washes feet. They're not to be arrogant.

They're not to be quick-tempered. They're not to have a short fuse. God is said to be slow to anger. Elders are supposed to be slow to anger. There are times where I hear of something going on in the church, where there's a guy cheating on his wife or abusing his kids or something like this, and my first thought is, "Man, I want to punch that guy in the neck." That's why I'm not an elder, you see. Not quick-tempered. The elders will address sin, but they do so lovingly. They do so graciously. You pastor and shepherd sheep; you don't punch sheep in the neck.

Not a drunkard. The Bible does not forbid elders from drinking; it does, however, forbid them from getting drunk. Can you see any wisdom in that? That the guy making all of these decisions for your church shouldn't show up to that elders' meeting plastered? Do you see some wisdom there? You go try to meet with an elder to get some counseling, and he comes in smelling like Jack Daniel's. He's like, "Susie, it's good to see you again," and you're like, "My name is Tim. I'm a man." Do you see the wisdom there? Not a drunkard. They're to be run by the Spirit, not by their liquor.

They're not to be violent or pugnacious. They're not to be greedy for gain. Not just in the sense of monetary gain. If you aspire to eldership, that's a good thing. Some people aspire to eldership for the wrong reasons. They're wanting to exalt themselves. They're wanting to puff themselves up. They're wanting to have leadership and prestige and power, and that's greedy for gain. You're here to serve Christ and his bride. You're not here to puff yourself up. They're not to be greedy for gain.

Now after we've seen what an elder is *not* to be, let's see what they *are* to be. Verse 8: "**...but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.**" I'm not going to break down all of these phrases and words because I feel like a lot of them are pretty self-explanatory. The idea, though, is that he's a godly man. He's a humble man. He's a gracious man. He's a disciplined man. He rules his passions; they don't rule him. That's what we're looking for.

Let me ask you this. Up until this point, when talking about what an elder should be, have there been any talent attributes or anything yet? Have there been any skill sets or anything yet? No. It has actually all been godliness. It has all been morality. This is what God cares about: holiness,

godliness. That's the most important thing he wants to tell us about elders. That's the thing he wants to start with. "Let's look at their lives. Let's look at their character. Let's look at their home."

Now we're going to get into something they *do* have to be able to do, though. Now we're going to get into what is the job of an elder. Verse 9: **"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."** Here's the job of an elder. Are you ready? Drumroll. It's theology. It's Bible. It's doctrine. It's teaching. It's rebuking those who have false teaching, false thoughts about God. That's what it is.

When you cut an elder, they don't bleed blood; they bleed Scripture. Like you cut them, and pieces of paper fall out of their arm, and you're like, "What *is* that? Romans?" That's what happens. They are saturated with Scripture. Their job as a pastor is to be a talking Bible. Yes, they govern. That's secondary to theology. Yes, they counsel. That's secondary to theology. They're to be about teaching. They're to be about rebuke.

When it says they have to be able to teach, this doesn't mean they have to be eloquent. This doesn't mean everybody has to be as talented, for example, as someone really talented like Matt Chandler. It doesn't mean they all have to teach the same amount. The idea is they're able to sit down with somebody and get them from point A to point B using the Bible.

Just to encourage you, our elders teach in Home Groups. They coach Home Groups. They do Bible studies. They do marriage classes. Some of them teach from the stage. Some of them do Communion. They're in the business of Bible. They're in the business of teaching. That's what our elders do. That's their job.

And they rebuke. If you are a Christian, you *will* get rebuked if you're walking in community. We need correction. We don't know what we don't know. You can't see your own blind spots. So people *will* rebuke you, or you're not in community or you're being a liar. You *will* get rebuked. That's part of the job of elders. Here's the thing: it's not divisive and it's not mean; it's loving. To correct somebody's theology, to correct somebody's action, is not mean; it's loving.

I've been rebuked by some of the elders. When you get rebuked, you get rebuked. When I get rebuked, I could lose my job. They'll call me aside and be like, "Zach, we love you. You're arrogant."

I'm like, "I knew it. I know that. I said that to the congregation when I preached. I knew I was arrogant. I'm sorry. Help me. Help me put it to death." Because they love us.

Now I want to get on a soapbox really quickly. I'll try not to yell, but it's something I'm passionate about. Look at verse 9. I want you to look at an important phrase of something elders do. **"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word..."** What are the next two words there? **"...as taught..."** Let me rant.

Do you know why you can't just say, "I believe the Bible"? Because a Mormon will say that and a Muslim will say that and a Jehovah's Witness who denies the deity of Christ will say that. Every sect, cult, and heretic in all of church history will say that. It's not good enough to say, "I believe the Bible." You have to interpret it using the Bible. You have to interpret it correctly. You have to interpret it as it has been handed down to us. You have to interpret it as it's taught.

Here's how you do that. The Bible is not beyond you. Let me encourage you. The Bible says the Scriptures are written to make wise the simple. Even the simple can understand. Here's how you interpret the Bible correctly: use the Bible to interpret the Bible. If you want to know what the gospel is, see what Jesus says it is in the Gospels. Do you want to know what the gospel is? See what Paul says it is, for example, in Romans and Galatians.

Do you want to know what the gospel is? Look in the book of Acts and see how they preached the gospel. That's the trustworthy Word as taught. It's the gospel as it's given to the apostles. The church is founded on the prophets and the apostles. They're dead. What we have, though, are their writings, and that's the trustworthy Word as taught, as it's given in the Bible, as it's given in the New Testament. That is the trustworthy Word as taught.

You don't interpret the Bible according to the Book of Mormon. That is not the trustworthy Word as taught. That's when an angel comes to a guy in New York in the 1800s and says, "All of Christianity has gotten it wrong. Here's new revelation that contradicts the Bible." You don't interpret the Bible according to the Qur'an. That's not the trustworthy Word as taught. Again, when an angel comes to a prophet and says, "Christianity has gotten it wrong. Here's new revelation from God that contradicts the Bible."

You don't interpret the Bible according to secular humanistic philosophy. That's not the trustworthy Word as taught. You look at what is going on in the first century as described in the

New Testament, and that is the gospel. That is the trustworthy Word as taught. That's why if you go to our webpage, under the "What We Believe" section, we don't just say, "The Bible." That's not helpful. We say exactly what we believe the Bible teaches and what it means by those texts.

If you don't do it that way, then you have divine warrant for something God didn't actually say because you've misinterpreted it. So what the elders do is hold this Word as taught. Jesus promises Peter the gates of Hades will not overcome his church. There has never been a time where there hasn't been a remnant of true believers.

Let me give you some other texts that say the same thing. Second Thessalonians 2:15 says, "**So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.**" We don't have their spoken words. They've passed away. We have their letters. That's what most of the New Testament writings are.

Galatians 1:8: "**But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.**" It's the Greek word *anathema*. It means damned, literally. "Let him be damned by God." God takes the preaching of a new gospel or a different gospel or a non-biblical gospel very, very seriously. There's one gospel, the "once for all delivered to the saints" gospel, is what it's actually called in the New Testament. There's one gospel. There has only been one gospel. That is the trustworthy Word as taught.

Now there are two kinds of elders to avoid, and then I want to get into what the gospel is. The first is the one who's not godly but he can teach. Maybe you've known this guy at some point in your life. He's the guy who's not godly, but he's talented. He's charismatic. He may even know the Bible. He's funny, he can stir a crowd, but he's not godly. The Bible is going to say he can't be an elder.

Here's another kind of person who can't be an elder, and I think this one is more subtle. It's the person who *is* godly but can't teach. He loves his family well. He loves the church well. He is kind, he's humble, he's a servant, but he can't get you from point A to point B using the Bible. The Bible is going to say, "Don't allow that guy to be an elder."

"But he's a great shepherd." If you can't feed the sheep, you're not a great shepherd. That's important. Al Mohler, the president of Southern Seminary, says, "The pastor who is no theologian is no pastor." That's like saying, "I have a really great doctor."

"Did he help you with your disease?"

"No, but he's really nice."

"Wait, did he help you with your cancer?"

"No, no, but he's very pastoral."

"Does he know anything about medicine? Does he have any knowledge of medicine?"

"No, but he reads books and listens to podcasts from guys who know about medicine. That's the doctor for me." Nobody does that. So in addition to being godly, they have to be able to teach. Again, that doesn't mean they're really eloquent. That's not the idea. They need to know the Bible inside and out.

When we present an elder candidate to you, we need you to tell us if he's walking in some type of sin we need to know about, but here's the other thing you need to tell us. If he can't teach, we need to know that. If you've been in Bible studies or Home Groups with that guy and he's not able to teach, he's not able to explain the Bible well and accurately, we need to know that.

Now let's talk about the gospel. Elders are great, but we're given more in the Scriptures than just Titus 1:5-9. This passage occurs within a much larger Book known as the Bible. Let me give you the gospel and how this links to that. I don't want you leaving here being like, "Okay, we heard about elders. I'll probably never be an elder, so let's just go to Chili's." I don't want you doing that. I want you to see the bigger picture of what God is doing in the world and why this biblical eldership is important.

Here's the gospel. Here's the Christian message, the "once for all," the gospel as taught. There's one God and only one God. The Bible is not ambiguous about that. There are no gods before him, no gods after him. He is eternal. "From everlasting to everlasting you are God." There's one God. He is a Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit. He has always been a Trinity, will always be a Trinity.

This God creates everything for his glory. He creates galaxies and stars and the earth and us as humans and trees and animals and everything for his glory. In the same way a painter creates a

painting and steps back and looks at that painting and says, "Brilliant," so God creates the stars, he paints the earth, and he steps back and says, "Brilliant." Creation declares the glory of God.

At that point, we would say God's kingdom has come. His kingdom is established. He's ruling and reigning over everything, and because he's a good God, everything goes well. He creates a garden. Kings would often do this. The king of Babylon would have the hanging gardens of Babylon. Kings in the ancient Near East created gardens. God creates a garden because he's a King, and he creates the garden of Eden.

He creates mankind to honor him, to worship him. We are not God. We will never be God. We are made of dust. We are creatures. He is Creator and eternal, but he creates us to give him glory, to image him well. We're not God, but we're more like God than anything else he has created. We're there to give him glory, to honor him, to subdue the earth. He's a King; we're going to be like little kings, and we subdue the earth.

But in Genesis 3, here's what happens: mankind turns their allegiance from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of Satan. Mankind rebels against God, takes the fruit, tries to walk in something we value a lot as people but God really hates, autonomy, and in so doing gives themselves over to the kingdom of Satan. Now you have two kingdoms in conflict.

If you've ever wondered why there are bad things in the world... "If there is a God, why are there earthquakes and cancer and rape and all of these things?" Well, it's not because he doesn't care and it's not because he doesn't have a plan. It's because mankind turned our backs on him and walked away from the source of all good, all life, and all joy, and that's what you get when you do that. The world became broken when Adam and Eve did that, and that's why the earth groans. It's broken because of sin.

We were to steward creation, so when we fail as its caretakers, it becomes broken as well. But because God loves us, he sends his eternal Son Jesus to get us back to Eden, to fight against the Devil's kingdom. That's what Jesus does. In his ministry, he preaches, "The kingdom of God has begun." What he's saying is, "I'm here to fix it. I'm here to get us back to Eden. I have come to 'destroy the works of the Devil.'" He has come to stomp out the Devil, to tie up the strong man, to fight against his kingdom.

When Jesus casts out demons, it's an act of war. When Jesus heals people, it's an act of war against the Devil. When Jesus raises people from the dead, it's an act of war. Jesus comes to start putting the world back to rights. One of the ways he does that is by providing a way where we can have salvation. See, we've rebelled against God, just like Adam did. So what Jesus does is he follows God's law perfectly, because we didn't, but we need to. Because we didn't and because we can't, Jesus has done it for us, so we can be seen as law keepers by being in him.

Jesus also takes the punishment from God the Father. God the Son takes the punishment from God the Father so we don't have to take it. When you rebel against a king, you get beheaded. We deserve that, but Jesus takes it for us on the cross. We deserve the wrath of God, and he gets it, so we don't have to take it. Our bill has been paid. God raises him from the dead, showing he *is* God's Son, he *is* reversing the curse of death, sin *has* been paid for, he *is* the Messiah, and one day he's coming back.

In the meantime, do you know what he does to care for his bride? He has elders over churches. Because he loves us, while he is gone, if you will... Not only have we been given the Spirit, but in his love he has assigned these "under-shepherds," these pastors, these elders, to care for his flock, to care for his bride.

I'm going to say something that's really profound. Are you ready? Authority is not bad. Good authority is good (that makes sense), and bad authority is bad. We have a natural tendency to sometimes hate authority. I want to reshape that. Abuse of authority is bad. Bad authority is bad. Hitler being in charge is bad. But a good authority is actually good for you. It's a gift to you.

We don't like authority. First, because we're sinful humans and we like to do what we want to do. We want to be our own gods. Second, because this is America. We hate being told what to do. We don't like our tea taxed unfairly. "Give me liberty or give me death." I would rather die than not be able to do what I want.

I'm thankful for those things, but I just want to explain this to you. You *will* be under some sort of authority. You either belong to Jesus or you belong to the Devil. There is no in between. You belong to authority. You're a slave to somebody. "I'm not a slave to anybody."

"Are you hooked on drugs?"

"Yeah."

"Can you stop?"

"No."

"Not even if you want to?"

"No." Then you're a slave to that. We're slaves to something.

What I'm encouraging you is you'll find freedom in being a slave to Christ. What's ironic is you actually enslave yourself to sin by trying to be free, but by enslaving yourself to Christ you actually *become* free. If you don't know Christ, my encouragement to you is to trust him, to rest in him, to call him Lord and Savior. Ask him to save you. Throw your burdens, your cares, your worries, your concerns, your sin on him, and let him do his thing. Let him make you a citizen of his kingdom.

Second of all, I want to encourage you in this: be involved in a local body. Maybe The Village, maybe somewhere else, but be involved in a local body. This idea that I can just be this "Lone Ranger" Christian and just do Christianity on my own... You can't. The Bible commands you to take Communion. Are you going to do that by yourself? The Bible commands you to confess your sins one to another. Are you going to do that by yourself? The Bible commands you to submit to elders. Are you going to do that by yourself?

The Bible commands you not to give up meeting together. You can't do Christianity apart from a local body of faith, apart from the church. So fight against that desire to just do autonomous Christianity. You don't get to do that. The other thing is to see elders as a gift to you. See their leadership as a gift to you, and listen to them. They don't have final authority; the Scriptures do.

If you feel as though the elders have done something wrong or are doing something wrong, when we do our covenant membership renewal at the end of every year, there's a place on there where you can let us know. "Hey, I have a question. I don't understand the direction we're going here at the church." Let us know. That's a non-aggressive way to do that.

But let me just tell you guys, the vast majority of the time, the elders are going to be pointing you in the direction of the Scriptures, and when they're speaking and giving you Bible, you have to follow that because it's Bible. Not because of them, because it's the Bible. Hebrews 13:17 says about

elders, **"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."**

Use our elders. Ask them questions. Submit. Hear them out. I've been a part of a ton of church discipline cases at this church, where all we're asking the people to do is to stop for a second in their sin and just talk with the elders. We're not even saying you're in trouble yet. Just don't run. Just talk with the elders. If you think we're wrong, tell us. Let's have a talk through the Bible.

But what people do day in and day out is this. They say, "Well, my lawyer told me to do this. My brother who has been divorced five times...this is the advice he has given me for my marriage. I went to a Christian counselor..." I've heard this multiple times. "I went to a Christian counselor, and the Christian counselor said though I don't have biblical grounds for divorce, I should get it, and I shouldn't listen to the elders of the church."

Well, tell your counselor to keep their forked tongue behind their teeth, and listen to the Scriptures. Listen to the elders. Pray for them. Encourage them. We are thankful for them. They are a gift to the church that Christ has given to help shepherd us. Christ is the chief Shepherd. These are "under-shepherds" given to assist the church.

Now here's how I want to end before we do Communion. I want to pray for our elders. I think that would be a great thing to do. They pray for us constantly. We have elder-led prayer. I want to pray for our elders. They're going to go ahead and put their names up on the screen. A lot of them are gone, by the way, just so you know. This week we have Family Camp. So because they're the husband of one wife and they have faithful children, they have taken their kids to Family Camp. But I want to spend some time praying for them.

Jeff Haley, are you here? Are you doing Communion? Oh, there he is. Jeff Haley is here. He's one of our elders. He's going to lead us in Communion, because that's what elders do. Are there any other elders who are here at this service? Again, most of them are gone. I don't know. There were a few in some of the other services we prayed for. Okay, you get all of the prayers, Jeff. So we're going to pray for you. Pray for these guys. Don't just hear me pray, but pray for these men constantly. I just want to encourage them in their leadership.

Even with Jeff earlier... I'll tell you this. I was feeling really condemned and stuff backstage, and he just came and encouraged me in the gospel, just lovingly. "Hey, here's what you need to know. You don't have to carry it." Just that encouragement. Right after he did that, I thought, "Huh, that's an elder. That's what elders do." So I want to pray for him. We can pray for him, because he's one of the elders here at the services this weekend, but be praying for these others as well. Let's pray, and then he's going to lead us in a time of Communion.

Father, we thank you for your goodness, and we thank you for your grace. I pray for our elders. I just ask that you would pour out your wisdom. You say that if we pray for wisdom, you'll give it. So through your Spirit, would you give them more wisdom? Would you protect them from worldly ideas of leadership, from worldly ideas of church? May they be men of the Book. May they love your Scriptures, love your gospel, love your Son.

Would you encourage them on the days when they're weary, when they're walking with couples where things are tough? Would you encourage them and bear them up? I pray that you would protect them from the Enemy who would seek to fire lies, who would seek to fire false doctrine, who would seek to fire condemnation their way. Would you protect them? Would you help them and be with them in their decisions? I thank you for them. Would you bless them just for their faithfulness? We love you. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen and amen.