

Titus 1:5-9; I Tim. 3:1-7; The Office of Elder I. The Need for Elders II. The Marks of an Elder

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, why do we need elders? I mean, could a church function properly without this governing body? Or I could ask our elders- why does this church need you? What would happen to this church if all our elders decided to go on a permanent holiday? As we return to Titus 1 this evening, we remember that we are still very early in the age of the NT church. We are close to the end of Paul's life- and the baton is being passed to the next generation. But already now, surprisingly, we find the call to good order and structure within the church. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ establishes elders in every church for the sake of His body! A church without elders would be like a house without walls. Without the supporting structure, the protection, defence and comfort provided by the house is minimal! But with elders, as a house with walls- there is comfort and protection for all who dwell under that roof.

### **I. The Need for Elders**

In our first point we consider the need for elders. Interestingly, after the introduction, the first thing that Paul instructs Titus to do is this- appoint elders! It seems today that elders are far from the mind of those who plant churches. Pastors seem content to go at it all alone for years before church government is considered. But the ordination and installation of elders is of primary importance- it cannot wait and must not be delayed! Every church is to have their own elders- and it is for that very reason that Paul left Titus on the island of Crete! This was of central importance- for Titus cannot fulfill his office and work of a preacher unless he is surrounded by a body of elders! Preachers cannot faithfully and fruitfully minister- unless there is a body of elders who serve along side them! And as we will see, it is dangerous for a church to not have elders. We could say- can a church really be a church without elders who are serving? This installation of elders is compared to putting things into order. Or to place things in their proper place- installing elders is setting things in their proper place. This same word for putting into place is the same word used to describe the setting of a broken bone. There will be no strength and healing in the church if there are no elders- like a broken bone unset is a church without elders! And what of this word- "order." Some people hate that word- order. We live in a world that devolves into chaos

and confusion- that revels in the anarchy- but here we read of order, structure and proper place! As I said in the introduction, elders bring order and structure to the church. There is a good blessing of order that elders bring. As you know, our God is a God of order as Paul wrote in I Cor. 14. Good government- that everything is done decently and with proper process! In fact, not only is good organization a blessing- it is commanded by Jesus Christ for His church! So in other words, structure and order are pleasing to God! Elders ruling in a local church is a command of Jesus Christ! We are not free to organize and run a church anyway we see fit- there is a proper church government that we should expect to see in each church- and that is the structure of a plurality of elders. This protects the church from being at the mercy of one man. Indeed, as BC art. 29 put it, one of the marks of true church is that there are local elders who are exercising church discipline. And that aspect of elder's work is our next focus.

Paul begins by making it very clear that elders are very important- a first work that needs to be set into proper place. But why does every church need elders? Why is their work so important? Well, let's look at what Paul says about the world in which the church finds herself. V. 12- Cretans are always liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons. We need elders because there are enemies out there who want to attack and undermine the church. But, more than that, there are wolves that can be found in the flock itself! Look at v. 10- there are many who are insubordinate- empty talkers and deceivers. Even within the church, there are those who are rebellious- who long to throw off authority! Those who sow conflict and confusion- who flout the rules and flaunt rebellion. We need elders because people are deceivers- empty talkers. People who do not mean what they say- or say what they mean. Those who teach false doctrine- worthless words that confuse and do not build others up. And others- as v. 11 says- teach for shameful gain. Who teach things that are not true- profit driven scoundrels that have little care for the church. Now notice- this is not just a description of people out there- this is a description of people found within the church as well! So stated briefly, the reason that the church needs elders is because the world in which we live is no friend of grace! The people of this world love to lie and they hate the truth! We need elders- because there are wolves that hide in the skin of sheep! We need the walls of church- for protection! We need watchmen on the walls who can sound the alarm- and we need shepherds who can tend to

the sheep of Christ's flock! So, knowing what kind of world we live in- and the sin that is hiding in our own hearts- what must these elders do? Well, we need elders because the elders will silence the false teaches as v. 11 says. Men who will muzzle these wild beasts and put them in their place! We need leaders who will rebuke the idle talkers- as v. 13 puts it- who will rebuke those who are teaching falsely- rebuke those false teachers sharply! Or as v. 9 put it- men who can rebuke those who contradict the truth! But we not only need men to be the walls- to protect. We need men who will comfort and ministry! We need men who can as v. 9 says- give good instruction in sound doctrine! And again in 2:1- who can teach sound doctrine! We need elders who will teach the flock- so that the church might be mature! So to summarize this point, we need elders who can teach what is right- to defend the truth! And who also refute what is false- correcting error! Discipline and discipleship! And here is where we find our application- Jesus Christ has given elders to the church for the good of the church! To protect His body- but also to build up the body in the truth! Jesus does not leave the church alone- nor does He expect His people to make it on their own. He gives us elders- in each church- who are called by Christ to strengthen what is weak- rebuke what is wrong- and defend when attacked! Like a house with solid walls- protects from the elements and provides as place of comfort and rest- a church with faithful elders will find both protection and nourishment from Christ's hands! Elders are gifts from God for our good!

## **II. The Marks of an Elder**

Now that we understand why the elders are needed in every church, in our second point we move on to consider the marks of an elder. What kind of person should we look for- what kind of man does Jesus want to serve in this office? And before we begin, remember that these marks are the marks of a mature Christian! We should all aspire to look like this- because this is the man after God's own heart! But of elders particularly- this is what we must see. We will be considering these character traits under 3 headings- first of all we will look at his personal character, second his family life, and third his social standing. So first of all, what is the personal character of this man? What is he like as a person? An overseer- also called an elder or a ruling pastor is to be above reproach. He must live a godly, decent and consistent life. Following in v. 7 we find he will not be proud or arrogant- rather

he will be humble and self-controlled. He will not be easily angered, but rather patient and long-suffering. He must not be greedy- not a lover of money- but rather he must be generous and a lover of people! Hospitable- loves fellow man and shows compassion towards those in need. He is to be holy, upright and discipline. Not given to excesses- but moderate and self-disciplined. He is to know the truth- holding firm to the trustworthy word and v. 9 says- and able to give instruction. He knows the truth, loves the truth, and is able to teach others and defend that truth! So again- as we have seen- right doctrine and right living! Elders must be consistent, dependable and faithful within the household of God! If an elder is not mature in the faith- how can he teach others? Asking someone to teach what they do not know and believe is like asking a person who can't swim to coach a swim team. Without experiential knowledge, it is really hard to teach. So elders must know and love the truth- and live a consistent life. But not just in their personal life- also in their family lives. So the second category is that of his family life. He is to be the husband of one wife in v. 6. Meaning that he is a one, woman man. If he is married- he is faithful to his wife. Not an adulterous person- he will not be visiting the brothels or idolatrous temples which were common back then. That is not to say that every elder must be married as both Paul and Titus were not married- but if elders are married, they are faithful to their wife. And his children- as v. 6 continues- must be believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. Now the actions of an elder's children has been debated over the years. What is Paul saying here? Well, basically this verse is saying that if an elder has children in the home, those children must be raised in a manner consistent with the Scriptures. The children who are still at home have certain character traits- they display the order and morality instilled in them by their fathers. Fathers are to raise their children in the fear and knowledge of the LORD- to teach their children the way in which they should go. So this man's children will not be wild, rebellious or unruly. Rather, his children will be faithful and well- behaved in a general way. That is not to say that the children of elders will be perfect- but rather the elder is to show his ability to lead and discipline in the way that he raises his children. As a steward of God's grace- as a manager in the household of God- the way in which this man relates to his wife and children will show what kind of a leader he will be! If his children are wild, ignorant and undisciplined; he will likely not be a good leader. If he does not love and cherish his own wife, he will not be very

adept at loving the bride of Christ! In many ways, the family is the proving ground for future leaders. Is he faithful to his wife and children? His marriage and parenting skills are the focus here. As I Tim. 3 expands- he must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive. For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? Will he be able to teach others if he does not even teach his own family? So those within his man's home must act in a manner that shows faithful headship in the home! And the 3<sup>rd</sup> category is that of his social standing. How do others view him- what is his reputation in the world? I Tim. 3 put it like this- he must be well thought of by outsiders. Our passage says it like this in v. 7- God's steward must be above reproach. He is to have a high morality- so that others would think well of him. That is not to say that elders must have a high social standing- he does not need to be known by everyone or be a very public figure on the town council. No, this is a reference to his character. He lives in such a way before others that they cannot charge him with wrongdoing. So his neighbors- do they see him as a dependable, trustworthy and kind individual? Do his coworkers say that he is on time- that he works hard- that his speech is without reproach? Does he lead a blameless life- with high moral standards? If he meets these marks- if he fits this mold- then he has the marks of an elder. Now there is no elder here who can read this list and think- easy- I have done that! No, there is no such thing as a perfect elder who is always consistent in every way. However, we should expect to see the pattern of consistent godliness and a high, moral standard of holy living in the lives of those who are considered for an appointed to the office of elder. Elders not only represent their own faith, they represent the church they serve within!

To conclude, the office of elder is an important part of the church. Jesus Christ has seen fit to rule His body by way of this particular office. But these men are also a gift to us from Jesus- for our good! Jesus Christ establishes elders in every church for the sake of His body! Like a house with walls that protect and support- we find both comfort and correction from the mouth of these men! As they know, embrace and teach the truth- as they disciple and discipline- Christ is using them to build His church! To sanctify His people in the truth! So may those called to serve in this way, faithfully discharge that office! And to those who reside under these men- may we all receive them as ambassadors of Christ whose office is worthy of honor!