

Looking for a Few Godly Men in God's Word (Titus 1:9)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on June 8, 2008

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Our theme for three weeks now has been the few good men God is looking for to lead His soldiers, the few *godly* men that the Scripture refers to as elders or overseers or pastors. These men do not have different **requirements** of character, or a higher “**rank**” or superiority, but there is a higher **responsibility** and a different **role**: leading and feeding, the oversight of shepherds, who must not only tenderly and lovingly lead and guide the flock, but who must also be willing to use the rod and the staff. These men must drive away whatever threatens the flock from the inside or outside.

Titus 1:9 says this of the man of God, the elder, he must be:

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. (NASB)

The Reformer Martin Luther said: “A preacher must be both shepherd and soldier. He must nourish, defend, and teach; he must ... be able to ... fight.” *That’s the clear message of Titus 1:9.*

And that’s the clear example of our Lord. Turn to Revelation 19

The imagery of soldiers, and armies, and warriors is an image that begins in the first scroll of Scripture written by Moses and continues until the final scroll of Revelation.

The first time the word “warrior” appears in the Bible, we read in Exodus 15:3

“the **LORD is a warrior**, the LORD is his name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his **army** He has cast into the sea”

Psalm 24:8 (NASB95) “Who is the King of glory? The LORD **strong and mighty**, The LORD **mighty in battle**.”

This is how Jesus is described in Isaiah 42:13:

“The LORD will go forth **like a warrior**, He will arouse *His* zeal **like a man of war**. He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a **war cry**. He will prevail against His enemies.”

Zephaniah 3:17 “The LORD your God is in your midst, **A victorious warrior**”

This is the image we are to look forward to seeing of Jesus when He comes again, not this time as “gentle Jesus, meek and mild” or the sanitized safe picture we have of Jesus – Rev. 19:11 says He comes glorious and victorious and valiant as an invincible warrior on a white horse with His mighty army and He “makes war”:

¹⁴ And the **armies which are in heaven**, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. ¹⁵ From His mouth comes a **sharp sword**, so that with it He may **strike down** the nations, and **He will rule them with a rod of iron**; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. ¹⁶ And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

... ¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and **their armies** assembled to make **war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army**. ²⁰ And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. ²¹ And **the rest were killed with the sword** which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Why am I beginning our message in Revelation 19, when our passage in Titus 1 doesn't seem to have much to do with the Second Coming? I'm concerned many have a wrong or low or incomplete view of who God is, and as a result, we have an inadequate view of what it means to be a man or woman of God.

Why is it important we know Jesus is a mighty soldier, a warrior-commander who goes to battle? Because He's our Commander whose orders we must follow and it's important we know that although Jesus was meek and calls us to be meek, that doesn't mean *weak* - we must remember He's always been a *warrior*.

- He is merciful AND mighty. Both lamb and lion of Judah.
- He came the first time more as a Servant and as a Shepherd, but He comes again especially as Sovereign Master of the Universe before whom all will bow.
- He was Kind, but He was and is the King of Kings.
- He is loving to all His children (and even extends long-suffering to enemies to repent), but He's also Lord of Lords
- He is a patient gracious forgiving Savior, but for those who have not bowed to Him before that day, He comes treading the fury of the fierce wrath of the Almighty for all unrepentant sinners in the hands of an angry God.

This aspect of our Lord is not emphasized enough in the modern church's sentimental or superficial or shallow views of our Lord, but Christ the Man, as fully God, is also a warrior. And those who are Christ-like will join in fighting the good fight, keeping the faith as Paul says. We serve meekly, but not weakly. God is not looking for wimps (there's plenty out there). He's looking for warriors, spiritual ones, prayer warriors, and shepherds as well as soldiers.

The Bible calls us to stand firm in this war, to be strong in the Scriptures. Christ calls all His saints to go to battle spiritually, with weapons that have divine power to demolish strongholds of our spiritual adversary. We are to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ our Commander. Christianity is not a playground, it's a battleground. We are to put to death, not our physical enemies, but to put to death our own sinful lusts, we are to mortify the enemy within. We are called more than conquerors through Him who loved us so.

And our passage in Titus 1 describes the few good men, the few godly men our Lord calls to lead by example in the Lord's army, to lead the charge, which all soldiers are to follow.

- No retreat, no surrender, no defection, no turning back
- Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war
- These few, the humble, God's spiritual marines, these few men the text calls elders or overseers, are to wield the sword of the Lord, which is the Word of God.
- To keep their weapon in the scabbard while the battle is raging would be treason. In fact, Titus 1 (as we've been seeing the last two weeks) gives several areas where if these men fail seriously and repeatedly in their duty, it can lead to a dishonorable discharge.
- These elders must be soldiers who *hold fast* to the Sword of Scripture and who *handle properly* the Sword, in our day of spiritual warfare against the Word of God and the church of our Lord. But it's not for them only; they are to lead by example in the Lord's army of how we ALL should aspire to handle the Word. Elders teach, they equip, they lead the charge, but all soldiers (all of you) are to follow in the fight

Just to review the context briefly, Paul is writing to Titus who he left on the island of Crete, and v. 5 says there are some things in the church that need to be set in order. First and foremost and the focus of chapter 1 is getting a few godly soldiers called elders or shepherds leading and feeding each church. His recruits must be:

Verse 6 – Be Faithful in the Home

Verse 7 – Be Free from Vices

Verse 8 – Be Following after Virtues (that’s all review)

Verse 9 – Be Firm in the Word

How is a man of God to stand firm and be strong in the Word in the midst of a spiritual warfare zone like Crete (or California)?

I. HOLDING FIRM TO BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

Look at the text of verse 9 again:

holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching

That word translated “teaching” in verse 9 (or some Bibles render it as what “has been taught”) is the word that the KJV translates as “doctrine” all 29 of the other times it occurs. Doctrine or teaching consistent with the faithful Word or message must be held fast.

Several translations use the word “firm” for this grip on the Word and doctrine - “he must hold firmly” or “a firm grasp of the word”

This word for “hold” has the sense of cleaving to, strongly adhering to, or holding firmly to God’s faithful word. It can express a strong attachment to someone or something with devotion or an ardent, loving loyalty, an unwavering commitment.

This word only occurs one other time with this sense in the N.T., when Jesus says (Mt 6:24, Lk 16:13):

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or **he will hold to (cleave to, holding firmly to, devoted to)** one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

The OT equivalent is used when our LORD says about Job:

"there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And **he still holds fast** his integrity, although you [Satan] incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause." (Job 2:3)

How could Job hold fast under such spiritual warfare? Job says:

"I have **not departed from the command** of His lips; I have **treasured the words** of His mouth more than my necessary food." (Job 23:12)

Job held fast to his integrity because he held fast to the trustworthy word of God [treasuring it and desiring it more than his food] and so too must those who feed God's flock from God’s truth.

The Civil War General Ulysees S. Grant said.

‘Hold fast to the Bible as the ... anchor of our liberties; write its precepts on your hearts and practise them in your lives. To the influence of this book we are indebted for the progress made in true civilization, and to this we must look for our guide in the future.’

The church's shepherds and teachers must (and all of you must) continue to cling tenaciously and uncompromisingly to the faithful Word even in the face of opposition and the temptation to abandon it for something more "palatable" or "ear tickling" (2 Tim 4:3-4).¹

Acts 2:42 tells us that right after the church was born on Pentecost, all the believers were “**continually devoting themselves** to the doctrine of the apostles” – similar word and concept, to adhere and attach themselves with strength, even in the face of opposition

Titus 1:9 uses this word “hold fast” implying sense of opposition. The soldier of God must cling to the sword of Scripture, adhere as if glued firmly to and so to hold on tightly and tenaciously.

2 Samuel 23:9 And after him was Eleazar ... one of **the three mighty men with David** when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there for battle, and **the men of Israel had retreated.**

2 Samuel 23:10 He arose and attacked the Philistines until his hand was weary, and **his hand stuck to the sword.** The Lord brought about a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to plunder.

Our King today still needs some mighty men like Eleazer, men strong in the Scriptures, whose hands cleave to the double-edged sword of the Word, who will not let it go, and who will stand firm even if all the rest of Israel retreated like in that day.

The Son of David also wants mighty men who wield this weapon so much that it sticks to and becomes an inseparable part of them.

As one writer has said, we must ‘*stick to God’s word, instead of [fastening ourselves to] fads and programs for the church. If a man will not first stick to the word, and will not then stick with the word of God, he is not qualified for leadership in God’s church.*’²

Matthew Henry had it right on 300 years before so much of the modern nonsense: ‘Ministers must hold fast, and hold forth, the faithful word in their teaching and life. *I have kept the faith*, was Paul’s comfort (2 Tim. 4:7), and *not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God*; there was his faithfulness, Acts 20:27.’³

So we must first be holding firmly to biblical doctrine, now secondly, the man of God is to be strong for spiritual warfare by

II. TEACHING & APPLYING SOUND DOCTRINE

Look back at the text: “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.”

In a sense, this verse sums up the rest of the book of Titus. Paul seeks to uphold firmly the Word in accordance with the apostolic teaching or doctrine. And most of the rest of the book Paul is either exhorting Titus positively in sound doctrine, or he is urging him negatively to refute the contradictors (described the rest of chap 1).

God’s Word describes itself as a double-edged sword, and here there’s a two-sided, twofold task – the first one is “so that he will be able to exhort in sound doctrine.”

Last week I gave you a handout that compared Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 and the qualifications of elders and deacons, and this is the most notable one that sets the elder apart. If Acts 6 is the prototype or pattern for later deacons, some may teach (ex: Philip and Stephen) but all elders *must* be able to teach, and some will be more gifted than others. As 1 Timothy 3:3 says, they must be “able to teach” and Titus 1:9 further explains what that means.

The word “able” here (*dunatos*) refers to power of ability, strength, sufficient or necessary might, means, skills, or resources. TDNT notes the nuances include **capable** (ability to perform some function), **adept** (highly skilled or well-trained implying aptitude as well as proficiency) or **competent** (being what is necessary; having requisite or adequate ability or qualities).

This is not just sheer natural talent or gift, though. Paul speaks in 1 Timothy 5:17 of elders who “labor in the word and doctrine” – who work to the point of exhaustion. And he tells Timothy to study / be diligent to present himself approved unto God, an unashamed workman who accurately divides or handles the word of truth.

This word translated “able” in Titus 1:9 is used of Moses

“And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of **power** (*dunatos*) in words and deeds.” (Acts 7:22)

This word is used of Jesus who was “**mighty** (*dunatos*) in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people” (Lu 24:19)

The word is used of Apollos, who “was **mighty** in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24)

What does Titus 1:9 say God’s men must be “able” to do? Not only hold firmly to biblical doctrine, as the first part of the verse says, but verse 9 says the overseer must also be able to exhort (implies teaching and applying) sound doctrine.

Many churchgoers today think doctrine isn’t practical, but Paul couldn’t have disagreed more. Doctrine is inherently practical and must be taught as such, and if you try to give people “practical” tips or principles for life without a doctrinal biblical foundation, it’s like building a house on the sand. All the self-improvement topical sermons in the world will not ground God’s people enough for storms to come - we need deep doctrinal truth put into practice. Paul warned of a time when people would not endure **sound doctrine (same phrase)** but would accumulate ear-tickling teachers to give them what they want (and in our day we see audiences swell and TV ratings soar for ministries like that).

Even true Christians often don’t want to be bothered with doctrine, they think, it’s not relevant to them whether or not God is totally sovereign or whether or not man is totally sinful and depraved. But it *does* impact how you live and how you pray whether or not you believe God’s sovereignty extends to human wills. Many don’t clamor at Christian bookstore for books on the attributes of God but that’s exactly what we need most, to know God as He is.

Many don't want to be bothered with big doctrinal words like propitiation or justification or imputation or atonement or regeneration, but these multi-syllable truths are to make a big practical difference in our trust, security, prayer, and praise.

Warren Wiersbe said the 'naive church member who says, "We don't want doctrine; just give us helpful devotional thoughts!" does not know what he is saying. Apart from the truth (and this means Bible doctrine), there can be no spiritual help or health.'⁴

A leader is a reader, a constant student of **sound** doctrine. The Greek word translated "sound" in this verse is the word we get hygiene from. It's the word for healthy, wholesome, as opposed to diseased or destructive doctrine that Paul said spreads like gangrene, and the next several verses of Titus warn against further.

Titus 1:13 This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be **sound** [same word as v. 9] in the faith,

Titus 2:1 But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for **sound doctrine**

Titus 1:9 says that biblical teaching is not just dispensing doctrine or reading out of a textbook, but he says the man of God must "exhort in sound doctrine" or some translations have "encourage."

The Greek word means 'literally to call alongside of for the purpose of giving strength and help. *Parakaleo* described a defense counsel in a court of law who served as the accused person's advocate and who pleaded the cause of the accused [You are on their side, you're for them, even when you're challenging them it's for their good. The word] displays a wealth of meanings but in the present context seems to [emphasize] teaching which was encouraging, comforting, and edifying to the believers, especially in light of the false teachers alluded to in the subsequent passages.

[Preaching or teaching is more than just dumping a bunch of data or doctrines on you, the] purpose is to admonish, strengthen, encourage the saints, enabling them to understand doctrine. This Biblical exhortation becomes the foundation of spiritual living, building the believers up in the faith.'⁵

1 Timothy 4:13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to **exhortation** [*parakaleo*] and teaching [doctrine].

Note the prominence of this for the church – along with public reading and scripture. Note also that doctrine and encouragement / exhorting application should both be present. Many places do not give attention to the public reading of Scripture, but that's something we try to apply here, reading with reverence and with the respect and attention and honor it deserves.

So we must first be holding firmly to biblical doctrine, and we must be teaching and applying sound doctrine with exhortation or encouragement, now lastly we are to be ...

III. REFUTING BAD DOCTRINE AND THINKING

Look back at the text: “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.**”

The KJV has “convince the gainsayers” (old English word for those who say against, i.e., talk back, speak the opposite, who oppose, the obstinate who deny, contradict, refuse, reject the truth)

Titus 2:7-9 (NASB95) ⁷ in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, *with* purity in doctrine, dignified, ⁸ **sound** in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us. ⁹ *Urge* bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not **argumentative** [same Grk word as Titus 1:9]

The opponents of Jesus Himself used this same word against Him in John 19:12 when they told Pontius Pilate that if he let Jesus know, he would be no friend of Caesar, because anyone who claims to be King like him “**speaks against** Caesar” (NKJV) / “He **opposes** Caesar” (NASB)

Paul used this word in Romans 10:21 describing unbelieving Israel

²¹ But as for Israel He says, “ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.”

A related noun is used by Jude to describe "the rebellion of Korah" (Jude 1:11)

These rebellious divisive factious men with heretical views Paul later tells Titus to reject after a first and second warning. The shepherds of the flock must exercise church discipline to keep that influence from spreading and infecting unsuspecting sheep.

Titus 1:9 speaks of these obstinate ones continually (present tense = habit, lifestyle) contradicting, disputing, opposing, speaking against and taking issue with biblical truth. You know who they are ... these men are in every church and the overseers need to be men of the Book in order to counter their divisive arguments that seek to discredit the Book! And *you* need to be on guard as well.

How are they to be dealt with? The word translated “convince” in some of your Bibles is not merely an intellectual convincing or persuading, it has stronger connotations like better translations “convict” or “correct” or “rebuke” or “refute” – if you keep reading through verse 11, it has the idea of **silencing**, shutting down false teachings. Heresy and harmful doctrine is not to be given a platform, it needs to be shown the backdoor.

You may not be able to convince the sinner to give up his hardened views, but the Scriptures must be brought to bear to confront. Bad beliefs lead to bad behavior, so it’s not at all unloving to challenge serious error – in fact, it would be unloving not to. With every truth, there is opposing error that must be counteracted, even in the minds of genuine Christians. With fellow believers, of course the goal is to educate them in God’s truth, and if Scripture is their authority, hopefully they will listen as you show your loving concern for them so they are convicted by the truth spoken in love.

“Encourage and refute” in Titus 1:9 is the twofold ministry of the Holy Spirit, who is sometimes called the *Paraclete* from John’s gospel, that word that’s related to the word for “encourage” in Titus 1:9. John’s gospel also says the Holy Spirit **convicts** (same word) the world of sin. With God’s elect children, that reproof leads them to repentance, but even with unbelievers, there is a conviction in their conscience. Where God’s Word is at work in the hands of a man of God (or a woman of God) ... we can be a tool used by the Holy Spirit to do His work.

Some will contradict sound doctrine taught because of ignorance or poor teaching or past church experiences (or numbers of factors) but Paul is also warning Titus of some who contradict who may be *false disciples* and/or those who want to bring *false doctrine* in.

Titus 1:10-11 (NASB95) 10 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,

11 who **must be silenced** because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.

... 13 This testimony is true. For this reason **reprove them** [same word as “refute in v. 9”] **severely** so that they may be **sound** [also same word from v. 9] in the faith, 14 not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.

Verse 9 reminds us that faithful ministry is not only having sound doctrine and holding fast to it, and encouraging or building up, accentuating the positive. It is also taking on the negative, tearing down false and unsound teachings and thinking of people.

Sometimes it means getting specific – Paul often named names in his letters – and he was specific and clear enough that those in opposition to the truth were offended and upset with him.

John Stott points out that: ‘The negative aspect of this teaching ministry is particularly unfashionable today. But if our Lord Jesus and his apostles did it, warning of false teachers and denouncing them, we must not draw back from it ourselves. Widespread failure to do it may well be a major cause of the doctrinal confusion which prevails in so many churches today.’⁶

There is both a positive and negative side of teaching with the double-edged two-sided Sword of Scripture. There must be encouragement of sound doctrine and application, but all unsound doctrine must be discouraged and disproved/reproved by the Word.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable **for teaching** [or “doctrines”], **for reproof**, **for correction**, for training in righteousness;

2 Timothy 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort** [same words as *Titus 1:9*], with great patience and instruction.

I think John Calvin’s comment is appropriate here:

‘The pastor ought to have two voices: one, for gathering the sheep; and another, for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves. The Scripture supplies him with the means of doing both; for he who is deeply skilled in it will be able both to govern those who are teachable, and to refute the enemies of the truth.’⁷

Acts 20:17-32 (NASB95)

¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how **I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable**, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ **solemnly testifying** to both Jews and Greeks of **repentance** toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

... ²⁶ “Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ “For **I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.** ²⁸ “**Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock**, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to **shepherd the church of God** which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ “I know that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;** ³⁰ **and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.** ³¹ “**Therefore be on the alert**, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to **admonish each one with tears.** ³² “And now I commend you to God and to **the word of His grace, which is able to build you up** and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

*Verse 28 is a key text we reference in our revised Constitution

I want you to look back at Acts 20:28 for a few moments.

I’ve been speaking of “a **few** good men” leading each church. Why a few? Why not one? Paul is not speaking to a senior pastor or solo pastor, this task of shepherding God’s flock is always addressed to a team of elders. Paul says “Take heed to yourselves.” This is important, because although elders must be spiritual men, they are not perfect men, and they need accountability. “Take heed to yourselves” includes each other, your fellow brethren. Paul tells elders in 1 Timothy 5 to reprove the sins of fellow elders as well.

This is a practical reason why plurality and parity of leaders is so important, not a one-man show, but a team of godly men. I’m not saying a very small church or church plant cannot have only one elder for awhile or in the beginning, I’m saying that’s not ideal and should not be the sufficient goal or the norm as some churches insist. It’s unhealthy to have one man (even a good man) at the top by himself. In the words of Titus 1:5, that’s unfinished business, or things that remain that still need to be set in order. Paul tells Titus his work is not done on Crete until there are elders in every church.

Besides the fact that there is no clear biblical precedent for a solo elder, let me give you of some benefits of a council of equals:

English historian Lord Acton (1834-1902) said “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

Robert Greenleaf, author of *Servant Leadership* writes:

To be a lone chief atop a pyramid is *abnormal and corrupting*. None of us are perfect by ourselves, and all of us need the help and correcting influence of close colleagues. When someone is moved atop a pyramid, that person no longer has colleagues, only subordinates. Even the frankest and bravest of subordinates do not talk with their boss in the same way that they talk with colleagues who are equals, and normal communication patterns become warped.⁸

Even Solomon, a true monarch and absolute ruler King, knew of this danger when he wrote things like:

“Two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4)

“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Prov 17:17)

“In multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov 11:14, 24:6)

Proverbs 18:1 (NKJV) “A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment.”

This is one of the recurring patterns of the Old Testament. The Kings did not follow after God, and the few good men in their nation’s history of leadership did well when they were surrounded by godly men who they received counsel from, men who spoke God’s Word to them without fear. And even the best Kings did not do well when they departed from this accountability and counsel.

Daniel Wallace summarizes several benefits of plurality of leaders:

- The quirks of personality: a church becomes like its leader (a student becomes like his teacher [cf. Luke 6:40; or OT principle “like people, like priest”]). By having several leaders, the church is more able to take on the personality of Christ rather than the idiosyncracies of any one man.
- The emphasis in scripture on doing the work of the ministry in company with other [co-laborers as their brother, not boss]: e.g., Paul never went on a missionary journey by himself (Barnabas, Silvanus, Sosthenes, Timothy, Luke were especially his traveling companions) ... Jesus sent his disciples out two-by-two ... the *ideal* is ministry [together].
- Accountability and our sin natures. Each leader knows that he lacks complete balance, that there are things he continues to struggle with. Further, even beyond the sin nature factor is the personality factor. Some pastors are detail men; others are big picture men ... All of us together contribute to the way the body of Christ works. But a church that follows in lock-step with the personality and foibles of one man will always be imbalanced.

Even if there were no decisive biblical arguments for plurality of elders, he argues that the practical arguments and evidence for this model are overwhelming [in addition to biblical arguments]

He writes:

‘in consultation with others (especially church historian, M. James Sawyer at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary), the following principle seems to be true:

Churches that have a pastor as an authority above others (thus, in function, a monarchical [eldership pyramid structure rather than parity]) have a disproportionately high number of moral failures at the top level of leadership.

In other words, it is less likely for a pastor to fall into sin if he is ... not spirituality ... elevated above the rest of the church leadership. Thus, the case of multiple elders in the local church is solidly based on biblical, historical, and pragmatic reasons.⁹

As I've said before, this is important not just for elders, but for all of us. If you want to be a godly man (or a godly woman) you will surround yourself with godly people for the purpose of accountability or discipleship. And at least one or a few close godly prayer partners who you humble yourself before and are transparent before. All of us should be doing that, not just elders.

Paul's words in Acts 20:28 ("Take heed to yourselves") are just as needed today. Not only must men guard or take heed to the flock of God, but we must first and foremost all guard ourselves. We all need to not only encourage others, we ALL need to encourage ourselves in God's truth, and rebuke *our own heart* in God's Word.

One of the books that has done that and challenged my own soul is by the Puritan Richard Baxter,¹⁰ who spends an entire book expounding Acts 20:28, and spends much of it on the command "guard yourselves / take heed to yourselves" – this duty of taking heed to or always guarding, reforming our own heart before God.

Take heed to yourselves, lest you be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to the effectual working of that gospel which you [speak of]. Beware lest, while you proclaim to the world the necessity of a Savior, your own hearts should neglect him, and you should miss an interest in him and his saving benefits. Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish, while you call upon others to take heed of perishing (p. 53)

... Take heed, therefore, to yourselves first, that you be that which you persuade your hearers to be, and believe that which you persuade them to believe, and heartily entertain that Savior whom you offer to them. (p. 54)

... O brethren, watch therefore over your own hearts: keep out lusts and passions, and worldly inclinations; keep up the life of faith, and love, and zeal: be much at home, and be much with God. If it be not your daily business to study your own hearts, and to subdue corruption, and to walk with God—if you make not this a work to which you constancy attend, all will go wrong ... Above all, be much in secret prayer and meditation. Thence you must fetch the heavenly fire that must kindle your sacrifices: remember, you cannot decline and neglect your duty, to your own hurt alone; many will be losers by it as well as you ... therefore, look to your hearts. If a pang of spiritual pride should overtake you, and you should fall into any dangerous error, and vent your own inventions to draw away disciples after you, what a wound may this prove to the Church (p. 62)

... Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hindrances of the success of your own labors ... One proud, surly, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action, may cut the throat of many a sermon, and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing. (p. 63)

... Take heed to yourselves, lest you live in those sins which you preach against in others, and lest you be guilty of that which daily you condemn. (Rom. 2:1) ... If sin be evil, why do you live in it? If it be not, why do you dissuade men from it? If it be dangerous, how dare you venture on it? If it be not, why do you tell men so? If God's threatenings be true, why do you not fear them? ...

Do you “know the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death;” and yet will you do them? ... Take heed to yourselves, lest you cry down sin, and yet do not overcome it; lest, while you seek to bring it down in others, you bow to it, and become its slaves yourselves: ... O brethren! it is easier to chide at sin, than to overcome it. (2 Peter 2:19; Rom. 6:19) – [p. 67-68]

¹ http://preceptaustin.org/titus_19.htm#1:9

² David Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentary*, Tit. 1:9 (online ed).

³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), Tit 1:6.

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1989), Tit 1:5.

⁵ http://preceptaustin.org/titus_19.htm#1:9

⁶ John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth : The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 178.

⁷ John Calvin. *Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (175).

⁸ Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership* (New York: Paulist, 1977), p. 63

⁹ Daniel Wallace, “Who Should Run the Church? A Case for the Plurality of Elders”

(http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=414)

¹⁰ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth, 1999 Ed. By William Brown), Puritan Paperbacks series.