

The under shepherds (elders)

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[0 : 00] Well, what we're going to be looking at today is to continue the subject of the progress of the church, the way the church grows and is built up.

And we're going to be looking at the subject of elders. I put on the screen what we looked at last time. I don't think I was particularly impressed by my presentation of it last time.

But what we were trying to perhaps squeeze into rather a short period was looking at how God grows his church. We looked at gifts and the body and people.

And I said, first of all, that Christian salvation is in its nature a gift. And the word charisma is used for that in some places in the Bible.

But God also gives gifts to his people to enable them to function in God's purpose. And that was what we were looking at. And I tried to draw that out in some points.

[1 : 00] Number one, that gifts and service comes from God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

One spirit who gives gifts. One Lord who is served. The working of one God, which I think is quite a profound thought. And then we looked at the fact that gifts is not something for the spiritual upper class.

You know, the spiritual super, super race. Everybody has a gift. Everybody is a gift because everybody is a part of the body. And every person being a part of the body has a function in the body.

Now, there are various functions. Huge amount of variety. But there's also a oneness because there is a unity in that.

And then I also said that being gifted, you also need to be rightly motivated. So you could do a multiplication sum.

[2 : 12] The value of your gift is the gift multiplied by the love. And if the love is zero, then actually the value is zero, even if you're intensely gifted.

And then I was trying to say that there are various lists of gifts in the New Testament. But we shouldn't just read them off and try and say, well, I'm that or that or we need this and this.

They're not just flat lists that we tick off like a shopping list. So there's the fact that there is a foundation and the subsequent building.

We're told about the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And my understanding of a foundation is you lay it once and then you build on from there. And I said there's certainly a historical development.

It gets into controversial areas. But certainly the gift of writing the Bible, since the Bible has now been written in the course of history, for sure God no longer gives the gift of being able to write the Bible.

[3 : 17] So as history progresses, that gift is no longer there. And I said that I think also you can see a historical progression in the way that tongues operates, if you look from Acts through to Corinthians.

And I think you could also say that the nature of prophecy must be different now, seeing as we have a complete Bible, than in the days when there wasn't a complete Bible.

Now how different it is, I think it's probably a matter for discussion and we could possibly disagree about that. But I don't think it can be exactly the same as it used to be. And then the list of gifts.

Paul says, seek earnestly the higher gifts, the better gifts. And he's always moving us in the direction of what is useful for building up the body.

And the way he works with that is to say, is it understandable? Is it truth? Is it edifying? And that's the direction he keeps on moving his readers.

[4 : 29] So if I may be controversial, the ministry of dance, shall we say, in the church. I know people have ministries of dance and they're very gifted in that area.

But I have to say that if we put that under the spectacles of scripture, we would say it is actually a more useful gift if you can say something in words that people understand than being able to dance wonderfully.

I'm not unappreciative of people being able to dance. But I think the New Testament is quite clear. It's much better if you can say something in words that somebody understands.

And also putting on at the end there that gifts can change and be moulded and develop, stir up the gift that's within you. And presumably if you don't stir up the gifts within you, your gifts can dwindle. So that was a very quick overview of that last time. And to say that the Bible says, how does the body grow?

[5 : 39] Well, Ephesians 4.16 says, Ephesians 4.16 says, From him, from Christ, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

So that's last time. I'm conscious that there are a number of questions that are raised. And that's why I've set aside this coming Wednesday.

If you have questions that you would like to discuss, please let's use that time on Wednesday to do so. But I'm going to move on from that now because we're going to do a survey of the New Testament teaching on one particular gift.

That is the gift of elders. So, are you ready? Because here we go. So, first slide. It's an ancient role. Genesis 50 verse 7. Joseph went up to bury his father and with him went all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house and all the elders of the land of Egypt.

[6 : 57] So back in those days they had elders. Presumably they were the senior men, the older leading men. Israel had, I say Israel, it's that, the house there had, no, the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house.

I'm thinking that's Joseph's house. Am I right? There's certainly elders in the land of Egypt. As the nation develops, they certainly had elders.

There's a number of references. There were elders in Israel in the time of Jesus. So, Mark 14, 53, they led Jesus away to the high priest and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.

So, it's not a new thing to have elders. Elders back in the days of Israel, there were elders in the time of Jesus. Although these elders weren't much help to Jesus, they just agreed to have him executed.

Jesus foretold the existence of his church, but it doesn't appear, as far as I can see, that he explicitly foretold or decreed the existence of elders.

[8 : 08] So, in Matthew 18, where he does envisage local churches, assemblies of identifiable people, he says, if there's a problem with your brother, and you go and address your brother directly and the person won't listen, and then you bring somebody else and if they still won't listen, you, if he shall neglect to hear them, the final court of appeal, this issue where you think somebody's at fault in error, in sin, you tell it to the church.

And if he neglects to hear the church, let him be as if he's not a Christian at all. So, Jesus didn't say, tell it to the elders.

He did say, tell it to the church. So, it seems to me he has a high view of the assembled church, and that's the place that Jesus mentioned.

However, he didn't mention elders specifically, but it's very clear that in the early church, there were, it was a regular pattern to have elders.

And I am going to ask you to notice that elders are virtually always addressed in the plural.

[9 : 33] Plural, meaning not one guy who's in charge of the church, one elder, but it's always men, plural.

Plural, one, two, three, four of them, one, two of them, one, two, three, four, five, six of them. We don't know the number, but plural. Keep your eyes open. If you can spot an exception to that rule, do let me know, because I haven't been able to spot one yet.

So, here are some texts in the book of Acts. You're welcome to look them up if you'd like to see the context, but I'm going to look them up, just to make sure I'm telling you the right thing.

But I've put the quote on the screen. Acts 11. This is to do with the church in Antioch.

In verse 27, he says, During this time, some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world.

[10:39] This happened during the reign of Claudius. The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.

This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. So, by the time we've got to Acts chapter 11, the church has elders, and they're the people who were receiving this gift of financial help.

Acts 14.23, rather significantly, Barnabas and Saul have been on a missionary journey. They go off and they evangelize and plant churches, and then they make a return journey.

And on the return trip, it says, They go back, Acts 14.22, They returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples, encouraging them to remain true to the faith.

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God, they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church, and with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust, and off they go.

[12:00] It seems to me quite significant that before Paul and Barnabas go back and say, Job done. They go back and they make sure there are elders in each of these new congregations.

And you might be saying, How could they manage to do that? Because there were no theological colleges. They didn't have time to send them off to be trained. How could they possibly appoint elders just after whatever it was, a few months or weeks?

And I think the answer is this. That there were people in those congregations who were originally Jewish people, who knew their scriptures very, very well.

You know, they'd been trained up in that. And when they became Christians, they just made this connection. What's all this in the Old Testament about? It's about Jesus. And they knew their Old Testament very well.

And when you made the connection, it's all about Jesus. There's a whole stream of things that suddenly fall into place. And my suggestion is that these men, who actually were very well trained, when they saw that Jesus was the Messiah, were actually quite adequately equipped to lead the churches.

[13:21] So that's a thought on that. Acts 15.6. A question had arisen.

A difficult question. And interestingly, even in those days when the Bible had not been completely written, there was not a prophetic word to answer the dispute.

You know, here it is. What they did was, in Acts 15.6, the apostles and elders met to consider this question. And after much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them.

So I noticed with interest that even in those early church days, it was right to get together, to consider things, to weigh things up, to discuss and perhaps to debate.

And the people that were involved with that. And the people that were the apostles, were the foundational founders of the church. We don't have apostles now in that sense.

[14:31] And the elders who, as I think we're seeing, are the local leaders, the mature spiritual leaders in the various congregations.

15.22. At the end of this discussion, this is what's written. 15.22, Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

They chose Judas and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. And with them they sent the following letter, The apostles and elders, your brothers, to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.

Greetings. And he goes on to say in verse 28, It seemed good to us, Sorry, it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, not to burden you with anything beyond as follows.

So they came to this decision in a corporate way, with the church and with the Holy Spirit. So I'm simply pointing out that elders were a part of that.

[15:42] Titus chapter 1 verse 5. So Titus was the apostle Paul's representative.

He did what the apostle Paul directed him to do. So it's a matter for discussion and debate whether we think that there are Tituses now.

It seems to me to be a little questionable, because Titus was the apostolic representative. So Mark Lloyd and I had a robust discussion about this, because he would see Titus as being the forerunner

of an area bishop.

And I'm saying, well, I don't think he was. But anyway, Titus 1 verse 5. So what is there unfinished in the churches there in Crete?

Well, what is unfinished is that I want you to appoint elders in every town as I directed you. And then he gives some criteria for elders.

[17:08] Let's read it, verse 6. An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe or are faithful, and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Since an overseer, episkopos, no, this one's steward. Okay, since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by healthy teaching, sound doctrine, and refute, that is to prove wrong, those who oppose it.

So Titus' job was to straighten out what is unfinished, i.e., to appoint elders in every town. Still plural, you notice, not one elder per town.

Appoint elders in every town. Okay, you with me so far? We're just surveying this material. So elders in the New Testament. An elder, so let's begin to look at the words.

[18:39] So presbyteros, it means somebody who is older or senior, and you get, I think you get people who are presbyteros, and they're nothing to do with the church, they're leaders in other ways.

So the original meaning is to be older or senior, but there are other words. One of the words that is not used is priest.

Okay, so the leaders of the church are not priests. And why are they not priests? Because a priest is somebody who offers sacrifices, and the priests in the New Testament are but two.

One is the great high priest, Jesus Christ, and number two is everybody else, because there is the priesthood of all believers.

There isn't a third group who are particular leaders in the congregation. So what word we use is not priest.

[19:45] So again, I would differ with some of the denominations who would appoint priests. I'd say, well, you're not a priest. You're a pastor.

Or something. Okay, so words, not priest. Let's look at Acts chapter 20, verse 17. So that was what was read to us in Acts chapter 20.

It's very instructive. I'm afraid we don't have time to go into all the implications of it. But what we're looking at this morning is the leadership of the church of Jesus Christ, and the church needs good leadership, and the leadership, in a sense, characterizes the church, and so the leaders should be characterized by Jesus Christ.

Acts 20, verse 17. From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for whom? The elders of the church.

So he's made this appointment to meet up with these blokes, and they are the elders of the church. Please look at verse 28, when he says to them, keep watch over yourselves and all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

[21:25] Okay, so this time, they are addressed not as elders, but as overseers. Yeah? And the word is episkopos.

Episcopos. You think that that sounds like some English words, episcopalian, episcopacy.

Episcopos. And episkopos is somebody who does skopos, epi.

Epi means on top of or over, and skopos is to do with looking or seeing. So a teleskopos is a long-distance seeing. It's a telescope. So an episkopos is looking over, over, an overseer.

And through some extraordinary contortion of translation, the word bishop is derived from episkopos. So how you would do that, you'd have to make the P into a B at some time, because you sort of have bishop at the moment, don't you?

P-I-S-K becomes P-I-S-H. But that's where the word bishop comes from. So when I used to go down and speak at the Chapel Royal, when dear Mark Redhouse used to, from Holy Cross Church, Anglican, lovely Anglican minister, used to lead that, and he laughingly introduced me as the Bishop of Brighton.

[22 : 52] But I said, that's fine with me, because that's what an elder is. An elder is an episkopos, which is a bishop. Elders and bishops are the same thing.

I don't know whether he laughed at that or not. Then Acts 20, verse 28, Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

So they're overseers. And then the next word is a verb. Be shepherds of the church of God. In other words, do the action of a shepherd.

Shepherd the church of God. And there's the words for this, and I'm not quite sure how to pronounce these. It's pimenow.

Pimenow. There's a verb, poimenow, and there's a noun, poimen, meaning to shepherd, the verb, and being a shepherd, shepherd, the noun.

[23 : 59] And in English, there's a link between shepherding and pastor. That's the equivalent. A shepherd is a pastor. A pastor is a shepherd.

So if you get pastoral music, I think it's to do with, I don't know, fields and sheep and stuff like that. Pastoral scene.

You know, fields and sheep. So please notice that in here in Acts chapter 20, we are shown, I think, without trickery, without trickery, that the elders are bishops, and the bishops are pastors.

Because that's what he says. Here are the elders. God has made you overseers. Shepherd the flock of God. God. So it seems to me clear that those three words are equal.

A presbyter is an elder, is a shepherd, is a bishop. Are you with me on that? Yes. Okay. My wife is, so that's good.

[25 : 16] And all the way through, it's all plural. Keep watch over yourselves and the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Be shepherds of the flock of God. It's all plural. So what about the term pastor? In the singular, I put there, if you want to cheat like I regularly do, looking things up in the Bible, on the computer, all the foreign words have got numbers.

It's really easy to look up the numbered word. And the numbered word for shepherd is 4166. So you can just look up word number 4166 in your computer system.

The one place where it's singular, the pastor, is only used of Jesus.

The pastor, the poimen, the shepherd, is only used of Jesus. As I read, you were as sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the pastor, the bishop, the episkopos.

[26 : 44] And who is the shepherd? It's Jesus. And we've got a distinction I'll try and make, draw out in a little while. But if we're thinking of the shepherd, the good shepherd, that's Jesus.

And our hearts and our affiliation and our love is meant to go to the shepherd. And that's the role of elders under shepherds is to make sure that people's trust is put in the shepherd.

and their love is turned to the shepherd. The one of whom it's, who said, I am the good shepherd. I lay down my life for the sheep.

He's the good shepherd. He's the pastor with a capital P if you like. Here, where it's used.

Otherwise, it's plural. So in Ephesians 4.11, he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, word 4166, some pastors and teachers.

And it's linked very closely to being a teacher in that list there. Good shepherds with a small s lead people to the good shepherd with a capital S.

[28 : 06] I think it was Barbara Doust that said that on one occasion who she was a member here and I've remembered it ever since. I think that's a good, good saying. It's, it's characteristic of the false shepherd to lead people after themselves.

They lead people astray after themselves. I think that was said in Acts 20. From your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

But the real shepherds draw people to Jesus Christ. Christ. And just to follow that up, when there's a team of elders and one or other is full time, perhaps we might label that person pastor for convenience, for filling in forms and things like that and I think that would be fair enough.

But in the New Testament, the pastoral care of God's people, as far as I can see, without exception, is by a team anyway.

Right. What sort of things do these people do? Forget the bit at the bottom which has clicked in early. What sort of things do these people, these elders do?

[29 : 20] They preside. So there's a word which says stand at the front and lead. So they preside and they speak the word of God and they set an example to follow.

So let's look at some examples of this. Hebrews 13, verse 7. Hebrews 13, verse 7.

Says, remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

And verse 17, it says, obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy and not a burden for that would be of no advantage to you.

So in Hebrews, the work of these leaders is to set an example and to speak the word of God. and in verse 17, they keep watch as men who must give an account and it's the job of the flock to fall in with that.

[30 : 43] Now I think there's a subtlety here in that I don't think the leaders are meant to command people what color to paint their bathrooms so they have to accept the elders' decision on that.

And there's all sorts of things that is beyond what an elder is legitimately to command. I think basically what the elders command is what God says. But the elders can also give good advice, wise advice and it's looking at a situation where there's a sort of harmony in that and people aren't always complaining about the elders and taking no notice of them and criticizing them behind their backs and so on and so on.

So that's in Hebrews chapter 13, 7 and onwards and then in 1 Peter chapter 5 from verse 1 to the elders among you says Peter I appeal as a fellow elder a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who will also share in the glory to be revealed.

Be shepherds of God's flock shepherd God's flock that is under your care serving as overseers episkopos I think not because you must but because you are willing as God wants you to be not greedy for money there's quite a few things in the New Testament about the dangers of money in Christian ministry you know making a lot of money out of it.

He says not greedy for money but eager to serve not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock and when the chief shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

[32 : 39] I think it must have been quite a difficult thing in those days to be an elder it was at times of marginalization and persecution and when the authorities come out after the church they probably come after the elders first and he's encouraging them yeah do do that work and don't begrudge it I also have suffered says Peter be the shepherds do that work you're not bossing the church around you're largely just setting them an example and there's a reward in it it says there amazingly yeah and we could think of the work of the elders as falling into two sorts of category so we're going to look in 1 Timothy 5 verses 17 to 20 where Paul speaks to Timothy who is also organizing the churches as

Paul has directed verse 17 of chapter 5 he says the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor especially those whose work is preaching and teaching the scripture says do not muzzle the ox while it's treading out the grain and the worker deserves his wages so I think at least part of this is financial so directing well deserves honor and he certainly goes on to talk about wages things and he says especially those whose work is preaching and teaching so he seems to say that there are some elders who are largely sort of directing the affairs and that there are some elders whose work is especially preaching and teaching and sometimes churches have said teaching elders ruling elders and I don't think we have to be completely watertight in those distinctions but that seems to be the sort of way that he's thinking if you go back to chapter 3 he says there are certain people who ought never to be elders and if you think about a small church perhaps in a difficult situation with slender resources there might be all sorts of pressures to put somebody into a leadership position who actually isn't suitable and I can see this in some of the congregations

I visited in Sri Lanka there would be a pressure to well he's a good chap he's a local businessman well known got a lot of money behind him everybody else respects him why can't he have a position of an elder in the church and things like that and so we got a list here not saying if somebody is these things he automatically should be an elder but I think really saying if he doesn't have these things he should never be an elder so 1 Timothy chapter 3 here's a trustworthy saying if anyone sets his hearts on being an overseer he desires a noble task now the overseer must be above reproach the husband of but one wife temperate self-controlled respectable hospitable able to teach not given to drunkenness not violent but gentle not quarrelsome not a lover of money he must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect if anyone does

not know how to manage his own family how can he take care of God's church he must not be a recent convert or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil he must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap so some people should not be elders no matter how gifted they are or how popular or whatever you know they might well be you know even if they were the chairman of the golf club if they don't fit this they should not be elders so if they're if maritally they have not got it right I put maritally dysfunctional they should not be elders I don't think if you put it into context I don't think he's saying every elder must be married I don't think he could possibly be saying that because someone like Paul was not married but I think he's saying that their married life must be exemplary so the husband of but one wife we don't want any sort of difficulty there and all these other things

I've turned them into negatives he must not be an impatient person he must not be an angry person he must not be dodgy in business doesn't do his VAT returns properly he must not be unapproachable so temperate self controlled respectable hospitable the opposite of hospitable I think is unapproachable he must not be unapproachable he must be apt to teach so somebody who is ignorant and can't teach you the Bible and incoherent so when he teaches you've got no idea what he's talking about that person should not be an elder!

[39 : 08] Holocaust! Holocaust! Holocaust! Holocaust! Holocaust Holocaust! Holocaust Holocaust!

Holocaust Holocaust Holocaust Holocaust! situations. They're lovely people, but they can't teach the Bible for toffee. They shouldn't be there, to be honest. They shouldn't be people subject to addictive behavior. So here he says, not drunk, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, somebody who's able to lead the family. And I think we probably have to make a distinction between the family situation when the children are at home and under the roof and growing up, and when children have left home and have become grown-up individuals themselves. I think we can hold the elder accountable for the first situation, but the second situation, I think, is not something that comes under the remit of these verses. He must not be conceited, and he must not be notorious. So I've got stories from Sri Lanka of people in church influence who forged documents of sale, and, you know, you think, don't let people like that be elders, whatever you do. That's just anecdotal. I'm not naming names by any means.

And, so now we're in 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 11, and around there. Since the church is meant to model what society ought to be, now, there are expectations on the church which you could not lay on your office or on a school that you work in or a business that you're in.

You wouldn't lay this on that because that's in the world. There's Christians and non-Christians. It's part of the kingdom which Jesus says, my kingdom is not of this world. Since the church, either only the church or especially the church, is meant to model society according to creation principles, elders have to be male, men, blokes.

[41 : 50] And 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 11, says this. A woman should learn in quietness, reverence, quietness, full submission.

I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but she must be quiet. I think silent is perhaps an over-translation there.

For, excuse me, for Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

Adam's sin was not that, or weakness was not that sort of deception, it was just an outright disobedience. But the deception came in via the woman, that's what he's referring to.

And I won't do the next verse because that leads us into all sorts of extra complications. But what he does say is, the human race was designed with equal value, equal value, but different roles.

[43 : 02] Like the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Equal value, but different roles. The Father makes his will known to the Son, the Son delights to do it.

It's never the other way around. There's a headship of the Father, and a falling in with that willingly of the Son. And in the human race, I know there's a subtlety to it, but you can't boil it down beyond this.

It's saying that in the human race, there's a headship of the male, female, and the female assists, fits in with that.

I don't want to try and make it crude, and say it wrongly, but it does say something, doesn't it? I do not permit a woman to teach in this, as I put it there, to teach with authority.

And he's talking about in the church. So he's not saying there shouldn't be lady head teachers, not saying there shouldn't be lady MPs, but he's saying in the church. When it comes to teaching, he's not saying teaching Greek, he's not saying teaching how to do, you know, all sorts of things, but what he's saying is when you're teaching the Bible, when there's one person standing up and saying, this is what it says, this is how you should live, this is what you should do, he says it's not right for the woman to be in that position, saying that to the men.

[44 : 47] And his reasoning, you see, and this is the bit we can't get around, he's not saying, because the Roman culture would think that that was unseemly, and he's not saying because Greek culture would think that's unseemly, he says it's not to do with your culture, it's to do with creation.

Now we might find the reasoning a little bit tricky to follow, but that's what the reasoning is, for Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not the one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived.

He takes it back to actually creation and the fall, and he says, for this reason, the people who stand up in front of the church and tell them what's what should be blokes.

You understand what I mean, blokes, men? So the elders are to be men, and all the way through, he's been talking about men. Now I realise that goes against the grain of today's society, and I think we've incurred comments on the internet of criticism for saying this, but it is what the Bible says.

And we, you know, if that puts us out of step with society, it does, there we are. But that's what the Bible says. So let me just rub it in and say, I don't think it is right to have lady preachers, and I don't think it is right to have lady pastors.

[46 : 38] That's the leadership, the headship, there we are. I don't want to keep on saying the same thing over and over again. I've said it. So that is a quick survey of the New Testament material.

And I, seems to me that if we think of that in our own context, God has been so gracious to our church in supplying elders over the past half century plus.

So my memory doesn't go back all that way. But I know Pastor Les Hill before me and Pastor John Cropley, good men, good men.

it's a great source of stability to a church to have a good team of people leading and God has been very gracious to us.

next point. Christians need elders and ought to value them and profit from them.

[47 : 56] So he says, doesn't he, you know, value your leaders. Now of course, some people say, oh I can live the Christian life, I don't really need to belong to a church, I get all I need just directly from the Lord.

It isn't really the way the Bible looks at it. The Bible says, I want you to be engaged with a community of people and that community of people not just going off in all directions, you know, group says this, some people say that, somebody says this, a very strong personality says that and we go off in all directions.

But a group that's structured, not highly structured, but structured enough to have a team of people who are recognized in their maturity and leadership and ability to teach God's word and that every Christian ought to be profiting from that, ought to be settled in that situation saying that's good, I appreciate where God's put me in that.

But, not to worship the shepherds, but to worship the shepherd. not to idolize Christian leaders. So, you know, there's a, we can fall off the horse on either side, can't we? We either say, I don't need anybody to tell me what to do, I'll make up my own mind, don't want any Christian leaders.

[49 : 25] And then the other side is, I think, you know, so-and-so pastor, so-and-so is wonderful. Whatever he says, I'll believe it and whatever he tells me to do, I'll do it. And that's to go the opposite extreme, isn't it?

We hope that pastor, so-and-so, is a good man of God, but he's going to get some things wrong and if he tells you to believe every single word that he says without testing it by scripture, he's a bit foolish.

Follow them, don't worship them, don't idolize them and don't follow them rather than the shepherd. Those pastors, they should be the sort of men who if you do follow them, you are following the good shepherd.

And as we're grateful, we are praying and making provision that God would continue to provide such leaders in future years.
and that's what we're thinking about and working on at this moment. Finished.