

Eldership - a practical study (1)

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[0:00] Well, the plan is for the next two Sundays at least, certainly I've only just thought of two really, to do two practical studies. And the aim is to help us finding the will of God regarding future ministry at Calvary Church. And I thought what we'll do is just go right back to first principles. Imagine we know nothing about this. What does the Bible teach us about this?

And I've looked very carefully in the Bible, I haven't gone through the whole thing page by page, but does the Bible, if we looked in the right text, tell us the name and address of the next future paid elder?

And the answer is unfortunately not. But God does promise to guide and provide for his people in accordance with his word and by his spirit. So presumably that is a better way than God's hiding in the Bible the email address of the next future paid elder.

What could possibly be better than actually putting the email address somewhere in the Bible?

Well, for one thing, this method makes us pray and we ought to be people who learn to be praying. This way makes us think. It makes us examine ourselves. It makes us think what, as a church, do we need?

[1:30] What do we need to be doing God's will in the situation where we are? Who do we need? We examine ourselves and our situation. And of course, one big thing is it teaches us to trust God.

Now, that's just a very simple sentence. But am I alone in thinking it's actually a lifetime's work to learn to trust God?

Because it's so much against our natural way of doing things. God fixes it so that we have to learn to trust him.

And we learn about his ways, not just by reading what happened to people long ago in a different part of the country and missionary books, but we learn for ourselves how God really does keep his promises and really does guide his people.

And presumably God says, well, that's a better method than me just telling them the email address of the person concerned. So, I hope we will touch on the following things.

[2:42] Well, not necessarily in this order, but why elders? We're thinking about elders and eldership. Why elders? What are elders? What do they do? What do they like? How do you get them? I'm just going to paint that with a broad brush.

And the way my thoughts are arranged, if you could dignify it with so grand a title, is number one, it's not just the New Testament that has elders.

Two, the New Testament church did have elders. Three, the elders had descriptive titles. And four, Jesus is the ultimate elder. That's as far as we'll get today. So, it's one of these things where you put the outside pieces of the jigsaw in first and then build in towards the center.

So, those are the things that we'll look at this morning. So, number one, it's not just New Testament churches that have elders.

Okay, you're with me so far. This is what we're going to do. Yeah, okay. I was looking for a response. Didn't quite get one. But, yeah, I think that's what we're going to do. So, here is a press release that I found on the internet which says, May the 7th, 2018 in Kabul, security officials in Afghanistan are working with local tribal elders to trace the seven Indian engineers kidnapped reportedly by Taliban gunmen in the rest of northern Baghlan, Povest Media Report said today.

[4:02] From which we learn that even today, or May the 7th, in Afghanistan, there were local tribal elders. So, they have elders in Afghanistan.

Get your Bible ready. Ancient Egypt had elders. Genesis 50, verse 7. So, I'm saying elders isn't just a peculiar thing that only churches have.

We're tapping into something that is much broader and wider than that. So, Genesis 50, verse 7 says, So, Joseph went up to bury his father.

Do you know, I have lost another slide. I'm so sorry. I'm just thinking. I've lost another slide. Unless I've put up the completely wrong.

Let me just tell you what the... What I was going to say was, and maybe it will pop up in a random order. I'm going to say two things to start off with.

[5:14] And the two things were, if you're visiting the church today, this is a sort of in-house thing. This is something that's particularly relevant for our church's life.

But what's relevant for everybody is that we can trust God. And that's one of the lessons we've been learning from the book of Isaiah, that we are to trust in the Lord.

And if we don't stand in faith, we don't stand at all. And off the back of that, one component of faith is waiting. And there's a verse in Isaiah, Isaiah 40 verse, something I wrote on there, I can't remember, 31 it might be.

Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. It's translated hope for or wait for, but it's...

Let's take the wait translation as it's in the authorised version, those who wait for the Lord.

Trusting in the Lord, one of the things it can definitely involve is waiting. So let's hold on to that thought.

[6:22] Sometimes we have to wait. Same thing that I was going to say on one of these other disappearing slides was, we do have a great shepherd, the Lord Jesus.

And in my choice of songs, I wanted to emphasise that, that elders are shepherds, as we shall see, but we have a great shepherd. And Jesus is the great shepherd.

And he leads his people. He looks after his people. He provides for his people. So our confidence rests in God and in Jesus Christ, the good shepherd.

So when we talk about human leadership, let's put it in that context, that God is our provider, the one in whom we trust, and Jesus is our good shepherd.

So frustrating, isn't it, that these slides haven't done what I thought they would do. Right, let's now get back to looking at what the Bible says about elders.

[7:21] And my first point was, elders are not only a New Testament thing. So ancient Egypt had elders. Genesis 50, verse 7 says, Joseph went up to bury his father.

All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him, the dignitaries of his court, and the dignitaries of Egypt. Do you have dignitaries in your translation?

Yep. Good man. He's got elders. He's got elders, because the word dignitary, I looked it up, in Hebrew it's the word to mean elder, or older person.

And when it was translated into Greek, for people who lived later on, the translators took the word in Hebrew, and translated it presbytery, if that's how you pronounce it up there.

That's the word that is in the Old Testament, Greek translation of Genesis 50, verse 7. The Egyptians had presbytery, elders.

[8:34] And would anybody like to win a gold star by saying what modern day denomination is linked with that exact word, because it means, what do you think it means?

Presbyterian. Yeah. Presbyterians have presbyters. They have other things as well, of course. And a presbyter is this exact word, which means elder.

That's what it means, somebody who is older than other people. So right back there in Egypt, we've got a link to what is nowadays one particular aspect of church leadership.

Now, ancient Israel had elders. Would you like to look at Exodus 24, verse 1? which says, this is going back to the days of Exodus, the Lord said to Moses, come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel.

You are to worship at a distance. So God said, I want you to bring up representatives of the people. You can't bring all of them, but you're going to bring up the important representatives, and that will be yourself, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel.

[10:05] And that's the same word again, the Hebrew word is that one, which means older people, and when they translated it into Greek, they said presbytery elders.

Israel in the time of Jesus had elders. So look at Matthew 27, verse 20. And you probably, like me, have read this, but not actually clocked exactly what it says.

Matthew 27, 20 says, the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and have Jesus executed.

So back in those days, important people in the community, the chief priests, and as important people, they had elders back in the time of Jesus.

And finally, on this one sweep through the Bible, there are elders in heaven. Revelation 5, 14. And again, you might have read past this without noticing that it contains this word.

[11:30] Revelation 5, 14 says, the four living creatures said, Amen, and the elders fell down and worshipped.

It's the scene in heaven, the scene of worship around the Lamb. And there are four living creatures there representing something, no doubt. And there are four elders, and the presence of elders also signifies something, no doubt.

Probably perhaps creation and the church. But we just notice that according to this description, there are elders in heaven. So, it's not just the New Testament church that has elders.

It's a broader thing than that. And my conclusion so far is that the societies, the human societies referenced, needed and accepted this leadership.

It appears to be part of human wisdom and part of the human condition that societies don't function properly without some sort of leadership.

[12:37] And the way that worked in those societies was to have elders, whatever they were, but they had them. And that, to take that a little further, that God uses this and God endorses this.

So, he doesn't just use something that is not that brilliant, but he endorses it. He says, this is a good way of leading and governing. And you could almost say God expects this.

So, if we come into, let's leave Egypt out of it and let's leave the Afghan tribes out of it. But in the nation of Israel, God expected elders.

And the fact that they're in heaven means that, yeah, there's something significant about elders. Okay, second conclusion thus far.

The word elders means that they're older. That's what it means. It just means older people. So, elders are called elders because they are elder. Okay?

[13:46] Elders are called elders because they're older. That's why they're called tribal elders. So, the assumption behind that is, no, this is true, isn't it? The assumption is that long life, experience, the wisdom that comes from that are needed.

that's why the Afghan tribes have elders because they are older people who are wise and have experience and they say, these are good people to be our leaders.

That's the way it works, isn't it? That's the logic behind it. That's why they're called that. Now, why did I put respect there? I think the idea is that whatever process they had of appointing elders, they ended up with people that they respected because of their experience, wisdom.

I'm not saying that every old person is wise. wise. My brother sometimes pointed out to me, there's no fool like an old fool. He said, not every older person is wise, but this idea of eldership sort of assumes that there is a wisdom that is only achieved through life and experience and that that's where you look for, that's the group you look for to have that.

I also conclude from this that the assumption that these people are wise is not always correct. So the elders in the time of Jesus were blatantly wrong to demand his execution, weren't they?

[15:25] So they weren't wise, they were in the position of elders, but they acted foolishly. And I also conclude that being old certainly doesn't automatically disqualify an elder.

I just pointed out it's sort of stating the obvious, but it's sometimes worth stating the obvious. So we think about retirement as a concept because somebody's getting older.

But the idea of elder is actually you want older people to be that because that's what the term says, older and wiser. So being old doesn't automatically disqualify an elder.

Okay. So those are some conclusions so far. So let's now go to the New Testament and say, we've said that it's not only the New Testament that has elders, but the New Testament does have elders. So let's look at some examples of this. And here we are in Acts chapter 11 verse 20 and onwards.

[16:30] And this is regarding the newly formed church in Antioch. So the church, Christian church is spread from Jerusalem.

And in Acts 11 verse 19 it says, those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, good for them, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

And the Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. So here's a new situation. Instead of true faith just being within the boundary of Jewishness and Hebrewness, it suddenly you find that there are Greek people believing in the God of Israel and a large number of them it says.

Verse 22 says, news of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem. So they send somebody. They sent Barnabas to Antioch.

[17:43] What's going on? There's people here who don't speak Hebrew. People here who haven't read the Old Testament. What are we going to do with this? They sent Barnabas. So he could have gone and said shut it down.

We don't want this sort of thing. You can't trust that. That's going to get us into huge trouble. But actually what he does is he sees it and verse 23 he says, when he arrived he saw the evidence of the grace of God and he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

He was a good man full of the Holy Spirit and faith and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Now I'm just building up. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus.

So we've got a church which is growing and it's got people in it who haven't read the Old Testament perhaps who certainly don't know the details of Jewish orthodoxy like all the previous people had and Barnabas says, this is a situation and what we need is somebody who can really help us in this. I know we need Saul of Tarsus. So Barnabas goes to Tarsus to look for Saul and when he found him he brought him to Antioch and for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people and the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

[19:14] So this is just building this picture up. In Antioch they were assisted by the church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas. A great number of people were converted and Barnabas goes to get Saul as he then was called that's St. Paul same person to be a vital part of this team.

Now the bit that I'm really trying to quote is onwards from this. During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and through the spirit signified or predicted a severe famine would spread over the entire world the Roman world.

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. And the point of that long quote is that I think that is the first mention of elders in the New Testament church.

That's the first mention of elders in the New Testament church. And what they do the Antioch people send their gifts to the Jerusalem people or the Judean people and the way they do it is to send their gift to the elders.

[20:37] So they've got elders in that church and that's who they send their gift to. It's the first quote which I've given you quite a lot of context of. Let's now go to Acts 14, 22 and 23.

So going on in the history of the early church Paul has been on a missionary journey and people have been converted and they go back and revisit those churches and this is what they do in

revisiting these believing communities.

Acts 14, 22. They returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch strengthening the disciples and encouraged them to remain true to the faith.

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God they said. So they tell them stuff and this is a sort of summary of what they said, they probably took longer to say it than that, but they strengthened the disciples and encouraged them and they tell them things so they have the word of the apostles, the apostolic word, but they don't just stop with that.

23. 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.

[22:04] Now that's significant. They encouraged and warned the disciples and they appointed elders in every church. So they obviously thought that was important.

To finish our work, they're believers, yes, and we tell them the apostolic message, but we're not going to leave them without making sure there's elders in every church.

That's significant. And I looked up the word for appoint, appointed elders. It doesn't really tell us a huge amount how they were appointed. The word is whatever that says on there, *chiro tonio*, which comes from, I looked it up, I think it's *kira* is the hand and the next bit is stretch.

So they hand-stretched elders. Now what does they mean by that? Does it mean they stretched out their hands in a vote? Does it mean they stretched out their hands to lay their hands on them?

The commentators are divided, but there was a method of appointing. And you notice that the appointment was accompanied with prayer and fasting, verse 23, with prayer and fasting.

[23:20] I'll give you my thoughts on that. Prayer, I think we understand what prayer is. So when these elders were appointed, it wasn't simply a political process.

It was a prayer process. They appointed these people with prayer. And the fasting bit, we don't particularly do fasting in our culture.

Some cultures people do fasting, so at a funeral, in a Greek funeral today, you won't eat until a certain period after the committal because you are sad.

And in my view, fasting is not to do with saving time, it's to do with being sad. And it demonstrates sadness, or the next door to sadness, seriousness.

seriousness. And I think what we learn from this appointment of elders is that it was a matter of prayer and seriousness. They took it very seriously to appoint elders.

[24:26] And Paul and Barnabas said, this is a very serious matter. We're not going to just either stretch up our hands that way or stretch out our hands this way. we're going to pray and we're going to show the Lord in whatever form is appropriate to us that we are taking this with extreme seriousness.

Okay? Now, in subsequent generations, we don't have a Paul and Barnabas to go around and appoint elders, so presumably there is a way that churches can appoint elders that doesn't depend on having Paul and Barnabas come and do it for us or help us to do it.

Presumably there is a way of now appointing elders in every church because it seems to be very important to have elders in every church and it doesn't depend on first generation apostles or second generation apostles being with us.

Does that make sense? I hope it does. Here's a third thing which is saying the New Testament church had elders. So we're now going to go to Titus 1 verse 5.

This is the Apostle Paul writing to his lieutenant, his helper Titus.

[25:58] So we've got the apostle first generation and then we've got his helper, second generation. And this is what Paul says to Titus in Crete.

So this is Paul's letter to Titus chapter 1 verse 5 and he says, the reason I left you in Crete was so that you might have a nice holiday and come back on easy jet.

It doesn't say that. Trying to keep you on your toes there. The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

I think that's a significant thing. He says, I'm moving on, I've got other things to do, but there is unfinished business in Crete. There are little communities of believers in every town.

Well, I don't think, I mean, I think it means every town where there is a community. I don't necessarily think that every single town in Crete had churches, but perhaps it did.
[27:07] But he says, there's something unfinished and my work is not finished. We are not done until elders have been appointed in each of these places.

That's what it says, isn't it? It doesn't say deacons. You can have a finished church without deacons, but it does say you can't have a complete church without elders. That's the correct conclusion from that, isn't it? It's unfinished business until you appoint elders. And interestingly, as we come into the New Testament, he doesn't just say, look at the list of dates of birth, pick off the top three oldest people in the church and appoint them elders. Because the idea of elder has now moved from simply being wiser and older to be suitable, to be appropriate, to be the right sort of person. And there's a number of qualifications here and it's worth looking at them. Verse six. So, an elder must be blameless.

[28:17] That is not the same word as sinless, because you don't get sinless elders. They're sinners the same as everybody else. blameless means that there is no outstanding major sort of public crime attributable to them.

So, they haven't been arrested for fraud or bigamy or cheating on their taxes. That's what it means by blameless. You know, you can't say, no, et cetera.

Blameless. The husband of but one wife. So, I think he's meaning maritally exemplary. He's not saying that all elders have to be married.

But what he's saying is that in the area of their sex lives, their marital lives, they need to be above reproach. So, their husband of but one wife.

So, in this case, presumably, some people there had several wives. And he says, that's not on for a church leader. A man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

[29:30] So, this man needs to have what would nowadays be called a traditional view of family life. That children obey their parents. Children are not crushed and squashed and abused.

But they do learn politeness. They do learn obedience. they do learn respect. And it is the parents' job to teach them that. And these parents have done so.

When it says believing, I think it means faithful. And that does not necessarily mean that an elder's children must remain Christians when they have grown up.

I don't think it's saying that. but I think it's saying that the elders must be capable of teaching their children faithfulness, reliability, respectfulness, that sort of thing.

And a man whose children believe are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Verse 7, since an overseer, and we'll come to that word in a moment, assuming that I haven't lost the slide that says that on there, an overseer is entrusted with God's work.

[30:57] It says he is the household manager for God. That's what that phrase means. He's God's household manager. And where am I?

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.

This is a list of all the people who shouldn't be elders. So they must not be overbearing. I looked this up, it's something about they please themselves and always have their own way because they please themselves on things.

Quick-tempered I think is simply the word for angry. Not given to drunkenness is a word which means sort of alcoholish, that they're quick to take to the bottle, they're always drinking.

Not violent, now I haven't got that, I didn't look that word up, not pursuing dishonest gain. There's a dishonorableness of gain and he says that that person should not be an elder in the church.

[32:14] And then there's some positives, he must be philoxeni, philo meaning lover, xeni meaning stranger.

So we have the English word xenophobia, xenon meaning stranger or foreigner, phobia meaning fear. Xenophobia is a fear of strangers or a hatred of strangers. Philoxeni is a lover of strangers.

So that's the word hospitable. And he's also, I can't remember, philo, philagatha or something, a lover of what is good or a lover of good people perhaps.

He really does love that sort of thing. It says this person must be self-controlled. It's a word for the mind. It's healthy minded, sound minded.

Upright is the word for just. Holy is an unusual word for holy but it means somebody whose behavior fits with what it ought to be in the face of God.

[33:18] And disciplined, I can't remember, I think it means something like to have power over oneself. So we would say self- self-controlled.

So this is not somebody who is just led astray by their emotions and governed by their emotions as somebody who can be in control of themselves.

And also says he must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught. So he is to hold firmly to the faithful word or the trustworthy message that he himself has been taught.

That's interesting that he has been taught. so that he can encourage others by healthy teaching or sound doctrine.

He can exhort or encourage others by sound teaching, healthy teaching, sound doctrine, and refute, that is to oppose, to argue with, and win, to refute those who oppose it, the anti-teachers.

[34:31] So that's quite a list actually, just a few sentences, but you see this is all over the New Testament, but here's a good example of it. So he says, your church isn't complete until you've got elders.

It's unfinished business. And you don't just peel off the three or four oldest people in the congregation. You actually look for the people with these qualities. They might be older, they might be younger, but these qualities are the ones that we want.

And I think I've got a summary of this, which is this, elders. The apostles did not think it was enough to give them the apostolic words, but they needed people, elders, in place for the future of the church.

It's a significant truth. A church without elders is an incomplete, unfinished church. So Chaley Evangelical Church is an incomplete church because they haven't got elders as yet.

The elders did not get hired in from Bible college. So Paul doesn't say to Titus, put an advert in evangelical times or evangelicals now.

[35:41] He doesn't say that. He assumes that there are most likely men in the congregation who are able to do this.

And I have to say we should bear in mind that in those New Testament times, Paul would have evangelized the synagogues and there would almost certainly be Jewish people converted who knew their Bibles probably better than some theological students.

So let's bear that in mind. Think of people who had been taught the scriptures and knew them almost off by heart and then they realized and was told that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God and they said, yeah, I understand all that now.

They would be prime candidates for elders in the New Testament. them. But there is the counter example, isn't there, of the church in Antioch where Paul said we need leaders here and we haven't got the men that we want.

We need somebody with the experience of being able to teach the Greeks and has thought through the Hebrew scriptures from the point of view of what that says to Greek people.

[36:57] We need to get Paul. So he goes all the way over to Tarsus to Professor Paul, who was a theological student, and says, we've got to get you down here. You've got to come. We need you.

And so Paul comes along and teaches the church in Antioch. The requirements for eldership were not just age, not only age, not even age, but the whole of life, because it touches on family life, how the people from outside see you, whether you've been up in court, whether you've been sued or bankrupted or whatever.

That I'm taking to mean character. When I use the word character for that description, I don't mean personality. Personality is whether somebody can tell good jokes and is a good mate and has you laughing and that sort of thing.

that's personality. He's not talking about personality, he's talking about character. And character in this sense is the consistent track record of the way this person lives in the church, outside the church, in the home, just in ordinary human life.

So that is required and, says Paul to Titus, doctrinal faithfulness. That's right, isn't it? Because he must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and contradict those who don't believe it.

[38:39] So it's whole life and doctrinal faithfulness. And I've got something else to say on this, which I hope I haven't lost. But we also noticed, and I'll just remind you of this, that appointing these men was a serious matter.

hence the fasting bit. They prayed and they showed they're taking this very seriously. Okay? So that's the second of my points.

Now the third one, which I invite you to just take a breath and follow me into this third one. My third one is the elders have various descriptive titles.

And we're going to go to Acts 20. So if you look to Acts 20, and while you're doing that, I'd ask you to reflect upon this assertion that elders are always addressed as plural.

I tell you, I'd invite you to check whether this is true. When there is an address, he never addresses the pastor, singular.

[39:48] He always addresses the elders, plural. plural. And that's consistent in the New Testament. So in Acts 20, 17, which Ruth read to us, Paul wanted to speak not to the pastor as a single individual, but to the elders as a group.

From Miletus, Acts 20, verse 17, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. church. And this is the word presbytery or presbytery. Yeah. Is it still working?

Good. There was a first. Let me see if I can attach it to my belt more securely this time. I shouldn't get so animated, should I? That's the trouble. I'm jumping around too much.

Right. There we are. So let's go to verse 28, which is a very concentrated little bit of advice to the elders.

And he says, verse 28, keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of God.

[41:19] So first thing he says is you need elders to watch yourselves. So again, this is a matter of seriousness. Take watch over yourselves.

Just watch yourself. Watch the habits you get into. Watch the way you use your time. Watch the pattern of thinking that you get yourself into. Watch the way you walk with the Lord.

Take heed to yourselves and to the flock. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock. And the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

So let's, there's lots of things in there, but let me just point out the word overseer. Forgive my fascination with words, but it is the word episkopos, which is made of two words, epi meaning over, and skopos meaning to do with looking.

So a teleskopos, or telescope, tele is long and skopos is looking. So a telescope is something that you can look a long way with. And an episkopos is somebody who looks over, hence, in English, overseer.

[42:33] And that is another word for the elders. The Holy Spirit has made you overseers, episkopos. And at some point, I'm going to say that in English, this has rather tortuously come to be the word episkopos, episkopos, bishop.

It's very tortuous, isn't it? But our word bishop comes from episkopos, meaning overseer. Doesn't sound like it, but that's where it's come from.

So if it was to say the Holy Spirit has made you bishops, that would be correct. So I was once introduced by an Anglican brother as the bishop of Brighton.

And he thought it was a joke. And I said, no, that's right. And then it goes on to say, be shepherds of the church of God.

So the word, it says be shepherds, that's two words in English, in the original it is one word, it's a verb, to shepherd, shepherd the flock of God. And the word here is pimenos, which is the verb, and pimen is the noun.

[44:00] So pimenos is to shepherd, or perhaps feed or tend, and pimen is shepherd. And our word pastor is linked to the idea of shepherding.

A pastor is a shepherd. And so you might say here, keep watch over yourselves and the flock of God, over which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops, pastor, the Church of God.

So the elders are overseers, of course Episkopos is bishop, and their work is pastoral, is shepherding, and the fact that it's a plural indicates to me that Paul expected a team of people working together.

So here are these three titles which are actually interchangeable. Elder is an overseer, an overseer's pastor, so pastor, bishop, overseer, elder is just lots of words meaning the same thing and giving you different angles on the same work done by the same people.

And we also notice, I'm just going to give this a bash, we also notice that it says the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

[45:30] So as Paul looks at the church in Ephesus, he says, well you were appointed, and I don't know whether you were appointed by stretching out the hands of a vote, or stretching out the hands like that, or you did it internally, or somebody helped you, but however you got to be elders, the bottom line is the Holy Spirit made you elders.

elders. It's the work of God to make elders. And I also conclude from this, just going back to that word at the beginning, keep watch, that this is a demanding task.

It's not something that can be done in a casual way, it is a demanding task. So that was the descriptive titles, and that was the third section.

So I go on to the fourth section, that the real shepherd and bishop is Jesus. And I'd like to give you a couple of texts on this.

John 10 says he is the good shepherd, he is the good pastor who lays down his life for the sheep, he's the pimen, the shepherd, the good shepherd, the Lord's my shepherd, is the truth behind that.

[46:48] But would you like to look at 1 Peter chapter 2, where very specifically Peter says, 1 Peter 2, verse 24-25, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed, for you were like sheep going astray, but you have now returned to the shepherd, the pimen, and the overseer, the episkopos, of your souls.

Jesus is the shepherd and the big, real bishop. He's the overseer. I think there's tremendous comfort in that, isn't it, that Jesus is our bishop.

Jesus is our overseer. And going over to 1 Peter chapter 5, looking at verses 1 to 4, I'm going to aim for verse 4, but let's go through the other verses to get there.

1 Peter 5, to the elders among you I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings, and one who will share in the glory to be revealed. So he says, I'm a presbytery with you, your presbytery, your elders.

[48:24] Verse 2, he says, shepherd, pastor, pimen, I guess, the flock of God that is under your care, serving as overseers, episcopo, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be, 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, the archipimen, like archduke is the chief duke, and here's the arch shepherd, the archipimen, when the big shepherd himself appears, you little shepherds will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

This is a great promise, isn't it? So, some conclusions so far. Number one, it's right and necessary to be concerned for the future church to have elders.

The right thing. And, as I understand it in the New Testament, this isn't appointing a single person, but it is having a team.

Being old is not a disqualification, but neither is being young. quality of life matters. Quality of doctrine matters.

[50:02] So, there are some churches who have just appointed good people with a good heart, but Paul is saying, actually, you have good people with a good heart, but they're not suitable for elders if they don't have doctrine.

They need to be able to teach the teaching of the Bible, the doctrinal matters, accurately. And, not only to teach it in a theological manner, but to deploy the message.

When I say deploy it, I'm using it in a sort of military sense, to use it as a weapon to impact people. So, to be able to encourage and exhort, to be able to land the message home so that people are encouraged and motivated to do things, and to deploy the argument to knock down those who don't agree.

So, it's not just enough to be positive and say all the nice things, but to be able to say the controversial things, not just to be controversial, but some things are controversial, and it should be possible to say those in a way which shows the rightness of the right thing and the wrongness of the wrong thing, to be able to deploy the argument to contradict the false teaching.

The appointment of the elders is via the apostolic word, it's via the congregation, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit, and it is a serious spiritual matter.

[51:43] And my final point for our comfort and delight, Jesus is the ultimate elder, overseer, shepherd, and how glad we are that that's the case.

So, we'll continue this next time, God willing, and we're going to sing number 598. Thank you.