

Church: Authority and leadership in God's local church.

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[0 : 00] Good morning. We're going to read the Bible now. There are two readings. Please turn with me. First one is in Timothy, 2 Timothy 3, verses 10 to the end of the chapter, and then the first five verses of chapter 4.

And then the second reading we're going to read is in 1 Peter 5, and that's going to be the first seven verses. So, 2 Timothy chapter 3.

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, which persecutions I endured.

Yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 23] All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom. Preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itchy ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Our next reading is from 1 Peter 5, verses 1 to 7. So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.

[2 : 43] Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

Well, good morning, everyone. One of the things I learned and was reminded of again this week at the conference, I was at least that I need help to speak and you need help to listen.

So let's pray. Lord, reshape our hearts to hear your word. Make us delight in your word.

[4 : 00] But more than that, Lord, delight in you who has spoken your word. Make us long to be like you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Well, how should we be governed? We've been talking now for four weeks.

This is our fifth week talking about the local church. How should decisions be made in our local church? Two weeks now we've looked at God's agenda. Christ has a very clear agenda for the church.

But who's responsible for implementing that agenda? Who's responsible for making sure that the church stays faithful and consistent in that agenda?

Big questions to wrestle with, actually. A pastor friend of mine once said these words. He said, you know, David, the greatest conflict in my ministry life, his ministry life, and that was a long one.

[5 : 03] The greatest conflict in my ministry life was not about doctrine, but about the nature of authority and leadership. In short, he said, I find that people just don't want to be led, according to God's word.

That's a seriously sobering thought, isn't it? Of course, most Christians recognize the need for some form of leadership in a local church, like ours, a community.

But the big issue is about the distribution of authority and leadership across the church family.

That's where it comes down to. How much authority do church leaders like myself have?

And then what authority and input do those who are not church leaders, which, after all, is the vast majority of a community like ours, what authority do you have in this local church community, this local church family?

And it's that question, getting that right, which has been responsible for so much confusion, so much hurt, dare I say, so much passive, aggressive rebellion in local church families against leadership.

[6 : 37] And indeed, even sadder to say, it's been responsible for some open warfare against leaders in the local church. And at one extreme, some Christians give not much more than lip service to the concept of leadership.

But secretly, they resent it or they ignore it and actually just do their own thing, as much as they're able to. Or perhaps they secretly hanker for a democracy.

That is, well, all we need is the body of Christ, and therefore everybody should have an equal input, equal authority. We're just the body. And at the other extreme, then, some Christians expect the leaders to take all responsibility for the health and well-being and longevity of a local church family. Not just all the responsibility, but all the blame when things don't go well. While they remain passive and unthinking, or selectively involved just in the bits they like to be involved in, or, perhaps worst of all, while they sit on the sideline and critique and criticize.

And again, I'm trying to be fair in this sweeping everybody into this, some Christians, and this is a terrible sadness, some Christians have been deeply wounded and traumatized by heavy-handed leadership.

[8 : 12] What I call magisterial leadership, acting as if, you know, they're the king, they're above the law. And that sort of thing has left them wounded, as I say, traumatized.

And at a practical level, left them deeply suspicious of leadership. And sometimes, even after many years, people have been unable to move on from that.

And so, practically, they might be in a totally different context, but they still struggle to have a positive engagement with leadership. Very quickly and easily sort of default back to combative engagement with leadership.

Friends, with every other aspect of church, as we've been thinking about it, authority and leadership must be examined and established from Scripture.

And this morning, I hope to give you a clear, but unfortunately it has to be necessarily brief, overview of what I believe the biblical structure of authority and leadership in our local church family ought to be.

[9 : 20] If you've got your bulletin with you or you've got it on your phone, you can maybe switch between pages or look at that. There's a diagram there. I love diagrams, but I'm not terribly good with the technology of putting them together.

So it may or may not be helpful to you. I think it's a wonderful diagram, and I'm sticking to that story. You can do whatever you like. The first three or four points here this morning.

The first point is this, a very basic point. We've been saying it for four weeks now. When we think about the distribution of authority and leadership, we need to establish first things first. And the first thing to establish is that it's Christ's church.

Christ is Lord of his church and the chief shepherd. That's how he's described, and we'll see that in 1 Peter passage we're looking at this morning. In fact, we're going to look at it now.

1 Peter 5, verse 2, talks about Jesus being the chief shepherd in verse 4. We are a local expression of God's church.

[10:22] We've established that over four weeks. We are, in another term, a flock, one of the flocks of Jesus, and he is the chief shepherd. We are the sheep. And he rules for us and cares for us.

The church is precious to him. It is the means by which he does his work in this world. It is the context in which he means he's died for people to come to maturity.

We've established all those things over recent weeks. And that's repeated across Scripture, from one end of the Bible to the other end of it. We started four weeks ago, Matthew 16, 15.

No sooner has Jesus been identified by his disciples as Messiah than he actually articulates what he's come for as Messiah, and that is to establish and build his church by dying for his people.

Inseparable to the role of Messiah is the building of his church. Colossians 1, verse 18. You can look it up if you're able to, or I'll read it to you.

[11:29] I assume I can find it, of course. Colossians 1, verse 18. It says that wonderful paragraph about the preeminence of Christ. And Christ is the head of the body, the church.

It is through the church, as much as anything else in this world, that Christ will be preeminent.

Christ is supreme in every way. Ephesians, we've seen in the last few weeks, from start to finish is about Christ's church. Christ's church is God's big idea. His one building project in the world, we said a couple of weeks ago.

The gathered community of God's died for people, gladly serving and worshipping God. And so we could go on and on and on about the church being Christ and the preciousness of the church to Christ.

But here I just want to move on quickly from this point. Friends, here's the problem with that. Given the verses I've referred to and dozens more we could consider, it is so sad.

[12:39] that so often Christians in local churches act as if the church is theirs to do with as a place. Act as if they have supreme authority.

And in brackets, if they take supreme authority, then they're also taking supreme responsibility to care for it and protect it and nourish it and build it. But that tends to get cut off. People just want to say, well, we can do, we can make this church wherever we want it to be.

It's our church. And that's the language we use. And it grates on me no end when, and I heard it, I don't know how many times it was come from this week, oh, tell me about your church.

And my standard refrain was, and people thought I was just weird, I don't have a church. I minister at, but I think people just thought I was being a wally.

Anyway, move on. But it's Christ's church. And that's a crucial thing to get right to start with.

[13:42] Secondly, Scripture is God's voice into his church and the world at large. Turn with me to 2 Timothy 3. We'll come back to 1 Peter 5 in a minute.

Turn with me to 2 Timothy 3, verses 14 to 17. In these verses, we have a comprehensive statement about the authority of God's word and its place in the governance structure of the local church.

And we're told here, the Bible is God-breathed. It is God's words in men's words. It is God speaking into his church in real time.

In living words. Powerful words. The fact that it's God-breathed gives us both the source of the authority, sorry, gives us the source of God's word and the authority of God's word.

It's all God wants to say into his local church. It's all God needs to say into his local church and into his world at large. His church in particular.

[15:05] It's through the living, breathing word of God that we begin life as Christians, as the Spirit takes that word and applies it deep in our hearts and minds.

It's through the living word of God that we move towards maturity or as we've seen in other passages, grow up into salvation in Christ. What's that?

Well, we're about to say in a minute, being fully equipped for responsible, wise, consistent Christian living. Verse 14, Paul's speaking to Timothy, giving him instructions as a young preacher, young pastor.

As for you, Timothy, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.

That's a bit of family history there. And how from childhood, you've been acquainted with the sacred writings. Here it comes. which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16:11] Want to apply God's agenda? We need to be students of God's word. All scripture.

Do you hear that? All scripture. Not just the bits we like, but the bits that are convenient. But all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable.

It's hard to believe how some churches who turn their back in God's word can actually read that verse. They've obviously decided it's not that profitable at all.

And there's something better to be front and center with in church. Profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

That's the messy stuff of growing to maturity. We just need to learn to start with. And then as we learn God's way of doing things, we will stubbornly be stuck in our way of doing things.

[17:18] So we need, we need, you know, to be knocked around a bit by our fellow believers. To be corrected. To be challenged. Why?

Not because anybody takes delight in showing up somebody else being wrong. But because it all moves us as part of this training in righteousness. Which is that the man of God or the person of God, that the believer may be competent.

Competent. well, competent means to know God's word, to know the concept of grace, to be able to apply grace to other people's lives, to be able to live in grace in my own life, all the while aware of my sin and struggling to deal with it.

That's what it is to be competent in God's word. And that then leads to being equipped for every good work. That is, being skilled and equipped to live as God wants me to live.

That is, every good work. Doing that which is pleasing to him. Doing that which is kingdom building. Quite literally then, God's word, God's living word, is spoken into our local church here to shape us in every way possible and imaginable.

[18:51] And that includes me as a Christian leader. Even Christian leaders are to be under the absolute authority of God's word. It's to be the basis of every decision I make as a leader.

Every action I take as a leader. Every structure I urge on the congregation as a leader. Every program that we adopt as a leader. And all of us included every conflict resolution in our church family life.

The Bible must stand over reason. I.e. what I think is right. It must stand over experience.

What we feel is right. or what we'd like to be right. What makes me happy. Or what works pragmatically. The Bible must stand over our culture.

What our society says is right. Popular or desirable. My friends, that's why God's word is and has been and hopefully always will be central in the life of our church family.

[20:02] we read it and we encourage you to teach it. Read it. Sorry, we read it and we teach it and we encourage you to read it and learn it. Both in this community and its subunits as we meet during the week but also in your biological family in the home day by day, week by week.

We're constantly encouraging God's people to dig into God's word. Why? Just because it's something that we get the hots for? No, because God's word is so central to who we are as a people, as a community.

We cannot be the community that we call ourselves God's church apart from being competent in God's word. Expanding our understanding of it and applying its wisdom and truth to your life individually and the community life of this local church family.

Now, again, let me just pause there before I move on to the next point and just ask a question. The question comes down to a very simple one, that is, does God's word have that much authority, that much immediacy, that much importance to you?

Make it really, really practical. Does God's word shape your determination and your thinking as you walk in that door every Sunday morning to be in community, the community we call the church?

[21:51] It should. But I have to confess with probably the rest of you, it doesn't shape me like that as I walk in the door some morning.

I'm shaped by, you know, something not sitting right on me. I'm shaped by things that happen during the week. I'm shaped by interactions with people.

I'm shaped by fears. I'm shaped by lack of understanding. I'm shaped by a desire to be liked. I'm shaped by a whole heap of things. To my shame, I confess that to you.

when I should be shaped by God's word when I walk in that door. Determine that every word I speak is sourced in God's love and God's grace and unity.

See, the church, this series is called Church, a Forteist of Heaven. Well, what do you think is going to govern and dominate with such beauty and sweetness and delight in heaven?

[22 : 54] God's word. We're going to hang on it in a way that we've never been able to hang on it here in this life. So if we want church to be a Forteist of Heaven as people come in the door, let's be seasoned by God's word.

So the question remains, does it determine your commitment to and involvement in this local church family?

so that everything you're involved in and committed to, you do so believing those things to be helpful in moving us to competency as Christians, moving us to maturity as Christians, moving us to be equipped for God's word and good works?

Does God's word ultimately drive how you operate in relationships? Does it drive you when you need to seek to repair relationships?

Because let's face it, the longest relationships can be broken just like that, can't they? And don't we find it so easy to live with broken relationships?

[24 : 19] When God's word is full of the very things that we need to repair them. But we like to hang on to our hurts, don't we? More than we like to go to God's word to have things repaired.

Third point then, moving on. Christ intends his people to be nurtured in structured communities. With the primary authority of Christ and God's word established, we can now sort of zone in or zoom in a little bit on the leadership structures in the church.

But commonly, in a sermon like this, that would now zero in on the role of elders. And you might well expect a lecture on elders and your responsibility to them.

And I'm not going to disappoint you, but maybe not the way you think. The focus would go on elders or bishops or shepherds or what's the fourth word?

I can't even see me. Pastors, there you go. Sort of four words used in the New Testament that essentially can be used interchangeably. And that's where that diagram on page two comes in.

[25 : 34] And so, here's what the nuances have to start. It's clear that the scriptures have a fair bit to say about elders and the role of elders in the structure of leadership in a church.

church. But, equally important, there's another structure that often gets overlooked that's spoken about just as strongly in the concept of leadership and nurturing in the church.

And that concept is the interconnectedness or the interdependency of believers. I like to use the term the priesthood of all believers, but people don't really understand that.

So, it's the interconnectedness of the body of Christ. We've looked at that metaphor of the body over the past few weeks. And to have a healthy body, all the parts need to be working in sync.

If you get some parts of the body that just aren't functioning, then you've got a distorted, terrible shape of a body, haven't you?

[26 : 42] You would say, well, there's the consequences of sin in our world. The interconnectedness of the body of Christ, which we also need to display in total balance with the role of elders.

Now, again, you see, Christians tend to go to extremes in the practicalities of leadership. One extreme is the outright denial or an ignorance of the need for any functioning leadership structure in the church.

Call it eldership or a leadership team or a pastor team, whatever you want to call it. And again, I'll go back to what I said in the introduction. Lots of Christians might say, well, what's all that about? Why can't we just have the body of Christ? The other extreme is to adopt an eldership or leadership structure which operates with such a controlling authoritarianism that any concept of the body is either totally obliterated or is just tokenism.

So one extreme says, hey, what's your problem with leaders? All we need is the body of Christ. The other extreme says, hey, you sit down and be quiet.

It's the elders that have the wisdom and the insight in this congregation. It's the elders that will decide what happens in this congregation. It's the elders that decide what this congregation is going to look like. You just sit down and wait until you're spoken to.

[28 : 22] I can take you to churches where both those operate very successfully, well, not very successfully, very openly. The key for distribution of authority according to biblical structure, I

believe, is a harmonious balance recognizing both, valuing how they complement one another.

The interdependent body or the priesthood of all believers is an obvious and central structure to be displayed in the local church. If you want to turn with me to Hebrews chapter 10, I'm going to jump through a few verses now, so you might just want to listen.

Hebrews chapter 10, well-known passage, verses 22 to 25. The writer in Hebrews says to the believers, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

In other words, let's draw together very conscious of who we are in Christ. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Let's draw together, let's gather together conscious of who we are and conscious of what we will yet be as we look to the future. And out of those two things, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds.

[30 : 11] Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another. And all the more as you see the day approaching.

Since the church community believers are Christ's new priesthood, like the priests of old, we have a duty of care for one another.

priests needed to pray for the people and care for the people. And the one another, the together idea in there is there for us. We're to pray for one another.

We're to care for one another. We're to nurture one another into full assurance. We're to help one another keep our eyes fixed on the hope that's before us.

We're to demonstrate and extend love, unity to one another. Together, we're to have a lifestyle which is played into the Lord and kingdom building.

[31 : 38] Ephesians 4, 1 to 16, that body matter. In a very real sense, we stand or fall together. If part of the body is not well, is not functioning, then the body becomes grotesque.

And we can't just say, well, that's an arm or a leg. I don't need that bit. I'll just press on with my little finger part of life.

Galatians chapter 6, verse 1, 1 to 4, 1 to 3.

Galatians, Ephesians, here we go, we'll get there eventually. When was the last time you thought about this? Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him.

What doesn't it say there? Well, that's the job of the elders. If those people fall off the edge of the track as Christians because they've fallen into sin, those elders just aren't doing their job again.

[32 : 56] Typical. You who are spiritual, that is, we are our brother's keeper. You have a responsibility for every other you.

And I don't want to offend, where's Vicky? Don't want to offend Vicky again. So it's you all. Is that it? Instead of you's. You all have a responsibility for you. For one another.

I don't know how that all works. Anyway, yep. Restore him in a spirit of gentleness. kindness. We know what we need to do and we know how we need to do it.

And we need to recognize the danger in doing it. So as we have humility, lest we fall into the same trap. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. That's our attitude of coming into helping one another.

Bear one another's burdens. Well, of course, I just don't have time to listen to all that claptrap that people have.

[34 : 07] Stop whinging and get on with life. I'm too busy. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

I am my brother's keeper.

The interconnectedness, the interdependency of believers. Ephesians 5, verses 15 to 21. I'm not going to read that through, but it speaks there of the mutual submission that there needs to be in Christ's community.

Why? Well, go and read it for yourself. For the benefit of all. So I need to be able to submit to you.

Yes, even as a leader. Expecting that the Lord at times will use me, when necessary, will use you to speak into my life.

To reprove me. To correct me. To discipline me. And you need to be able to submit to me. Believing that my speaking into your life is designed for your good, your spiritual well-being.

[35 : 23] When we've had part-timers and staff, they have witnessed that first of all, years ago, and then Martin and Jeremy and others, the deal always was, or when I meet with people one-on-one for a Bible study and prayer, the deal always is.

Yes, I'm 66. I've been in ministry more years than you've been alive. But if you can't come into this relationship with me, and the expectation that the Lord might use you with your limited life experience to speak into my life with a massive amount of life experience, if you can't do that, then I'm not interested.

That's the way it is. Somebody coming in with limited ministry experience can cut through all the baggage and rubbish that I've accumulated over the years and get to the heart of things.

Cold would stop having yourself on. Philippians 4, verses 2 and 3.

Remember that episode dispute in the church? Between two ladies, I entreat Euodia and I entreat Sinkte to agree in the Lord.

[36 : 44] There's a problem that needs to be resolved for the sake of the church. It needs to be resolved. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have laboured side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

If you read around that, this is written into the context of a community. Two ladies with a problem? Solution involves the whole community.

Not the whole community in the same way at the same time, but it needs to be the context. Help them sort out the problem and support them back into productive gospel witness.

Hebrews 13, 7 and 17. You think I'm laboring this a little bit? Good.

You're getting the message. Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

[37 : 55] Verse 17, obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Now those verses occur in chapter 13. If you get your Bible like mine, the heading for the chapter is spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

Sacrifices pleasing to God. That is, actions and attitudes in the community of God's people which delight the Lord.

And among other things, it lists this mutuality in respect of leadership. Leadership is to be offered in the context of grace and love and concern to build one another up.

And it's to be received as that. It's to be responded to in godly ways. And that package, when it works well, is a sacrifice that's pleasing to the Lord.

[39 : 10] So, zooming in even more, elders in the office of elder is fundamental to churches across the New Testament. And today it's even more in focus for us because we're adding three more elders to our eldership team here.

Now, Christ has bought his church. It's been a massive investment on his part. And he has secured his investment by appointing managers, if I can call them that, or elders to act on his behalf.

Now, back to 1 Peter chapter 5. Verses 1 to 7.

And not surprisingly then, since an elder is a manager or an undershepherd serving under the chief shepherd, it's not surprising then that the chief shepherd gives very clear parameters in which his undershepherds need to work and function and act, both in terms of what they do and in terms of the attitude and character in which they do it.

Verse 2. Shepherd the flock that is among you. That's a picture word.

[40 : 30] It doesn't need much explanation, does it? Shepherding. In the days of Jesus, mostly a shepherd would be in front of the flock saying, come on, follow me. And the flocks were small and not like broad agriculture here in Australia, but the flocks were small, so that's literally what happened.

They'd follow the shepherd. But every so often the shepherd would need to be behind them, driving them forward. And the wisdom of the shepherd would be revealed in as much as he knew which place to be at which time.

But his authority is always limited whatever he's doing because he's an undershepherd. An elder can only work with delegated authority as one who will give account to Christ, the chief shepherd, for those entrusted to our care.

So contrary to what some might think, that eldership is not a blank card in terms of control and power. I labor all the time under that concept of that I one day will give an account for you people here in a way that you won't have to give an account for one another.

That's a sobering thought. In verses 2 and 3, attitude and modeling is critical, fundamental, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you.

[42 : 23] Not for shameful gain, but eagerly. It's not about me. It's not about my remuneration. It's not about my nest egg.

It's not about that which will advantage me. It's about that which will be good for God's people. And in a real sense, my life has no account before you other than that.

That's the nature of a servant. Not domineering over those in your charge.

How easy is it when you're in charge to take charge by manipulation, by control, by demandingness, by being examples to the flock.

my job is to be a model of grace and a model of Christ to those you whom the Lord has given me charge of.

[43 : 47] Nothing more. Nothing more. Nothing more. Nothing more. Nothing less. And responsible for direct teaching of God's word, both formally when we meet, informally through counseling and personal interaction.

Responsible for active oversight that is setting a lead in a whole range of issues which I call wisdom issues. Issues that may not necessarily have a verse or a principle you can go to, but you take a principle and a verse and you work out then the application and a wisdom base.

Well, I think this would be a good thing for us to do as a church. That wouldn't be such a good thing for us to do as a church. And so as elders we need to be able to identify clear principles of scripture. And then we need to be able to propose and encourage and direct and draw people into what's helpful and wise, practical applications, strategies, which will take us all together in a spiritually healthy direction.

To put it in a colloquial country term, we just need to make sure that the herd is heading west. And all of the herd is heading west. No stragglers left behind. We don't shoot or are wounded.

[45 : 02] We're responsible to model clearly what we teach as a visual aid for the congregation to follow.

But all the while recognizing that as I'm called to be a leader, I'm never more than a sheep. My authority is never absolute.

My authority is only ever delegated and is to be exercised in full awareness of my ongoing failure and sin. So I have very much limited authority under shepherds of Christ.

And I tell you, I think the scripture and I'm now doing one of those wisdom applications, I think we can only command authority. This has been my ministry experience and my ministry pattern.

I've only tried to command authority not by virtue of the office. Now listen here, I'm an elder. But by virtue of my ability to handle scripture and the strength of my life lived among you.

[46 : 25] In all its ups and down points I think that's where respect comes from. And I don't think I have a right to command respect solely based on the office.

Even though lots of leaders do. That's another one for you to think about. Now the big question is how do we balance these two things, eldership and interconnectedness, interdependency of the body?

Well the heading there on your outline is servant leadership in the context of the interdependent body. And we're almost finished if you're despairing. As an elder I must lead.

That is my brief from the chief shepherd. But always as a servant. Now those things don't seem to fit together if you look at the general operation of a big company.

But that's exactly what we have to fit together here in our local church. My lead always has to be as a servant and always therefore as a servant for the good of Christ's people.

[47 : 38] And never, never to advance my ideas or my reputation. And my success will be measured not in terms of how great you think I am, popularity, that's probably just as well, or how you measure my giftedness.

But in terms of how well I serve you by pushing you into the arms of the Lord Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. For grace and mercy.

And pushing you to have a life shaped by trust and delight in his beauty. And as an under-shepherd going before you and saying, hey, follow me, this is the good life this way.

As an elder I must press you, actively press you to live in the light of God's word individually and in our church family life. But I'm never free to be arrogant, manipulative or dismissive of you. Or to be controlling. Pushing you around as just pieces of furniture to be arranged in a big room. And sadly, that's where some leaders fall.

[49 : 03] Well, but equally true, my leading as an elder does not allow you to be passive in this church family.

Our church is not like a bus with one driver and everybody else along for the ride. As part of the body, you must be engaged and you must be doing what the Lord has asked you to do in this local church family.

Friends, what I'm saying here is that the essence of authority distribution is that we must not play off one command against the other. We must sync them and have them in harmony.

You are responsible for the leaders to accept, submit to, and relate positively with the elders in this church. But of course, that doesn't mean you can't disagree with us and challenge us.

To have one without the other would be imbalanced. Wise army officers will always be open to ideas and suggestions from the soldiers.

[50 : 26] I think likewise, godly, wise elders will welcome challenge and correction based on God's word. wisdom or welcome ideas that come from our collective wisdom.

I hope you know if you've been in this church long enough that we love that bottom-up surge of interest and involvement and ownership. Collective wisdom.

Friends, this is a really difficult area. It's difficult to speak about. It's been hard for me to actually talk about this this morning without a sense of self-promotion.

It's a difficult area, but I'll tell you this, it's an area that Satan loves to exploit. He just loves to bring churches undone over this very issue. And he'll be able to do that in a way he won't be able to prize us away from theological distinctives.

God's word. God's word. God's word. God's word. How do we stand against it? By keeping the bounds of God's word. If we, I, am a godly, wise elder, then I will be happy to serve, and I will resist any temptation to dominate, intimidate, manipulate, or treat with derision.

[51 : 58] Because that would be at odds with serving you. Likewise, if you are godly, wise, you will not allow yourself to focus on the short faults and the short comings of us elders.

We are but sheep. We are sinful men. When we first became elders, the day we take our last breath as an elder, we are sinful, failing men. So you will not allow yourself to focus simply on our faults and short comings.

You will speak into our lives to address those faults and short comings, and you're invited to do so.

You have a compulsion to do so before the chief shepherd yourself. You are my keeper.

You cannot simply reject us when we disagree with you. You cannot simply withdraw from us. God will be at odds with maintaining deep holiness and love and unity in the body of Christ.

My friends, my final sentence is this. Going to either one of these extremes will seriously weaken and even threaten our church. The truth is at both extremes.

[53 : 15] pray with me again. Lord, help us to avoid building our own little empires.

It seems to be the thing we just default to all the time. We just want to be big fish in small ponds. and we fail, Lord, when we're chasing that dream, we fail to see how ugly it is.

And we fail to see, Lord, how grossly it is with the very purpose of you dying for a community that would be marked by your characteristic of servanthood, love, and unity.

Help us to care for one another. Help us to encourage one another. help us to submit to one another. And help us to do all these things, Lord, not for personal gain or acclamation, but that together we might grow up into Christ and be competent and equipped for every good work.