

The Role

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much one and all for leading us in our worship to join. It's great to have you with us, John. I really appreciate you stepping in and helping out with Azeen until you're at our way. And thanks for leading the service, Gerald, and also thanks for intercessory prayer and for the kids talk. It's nice to be with all you pumpkins here this morning. But that was a very good kids talk and the intercessory prayer. I must confess I'm very impressed by the amount of work that people put into intercessory prayer. You don't just stand up and just say whatever comes into your head. It's well thought out. And that is very impressive. That's not always the same in a lot of churches. So that's great. It's really good to hear that and to be part of that. Turn with me, please, to 1 Peter, 1 Peter chapter 5. If you're a regular here, you would know normally we would look at Philippians. But we're not doing that this morning. We are moving the Philippians series for the next couple of weeks at least, probably till the end of the year. We'll finish Philippians probably early in January, I would think, run about that time. Because there are two other series I'd like to do between now and the end of the year. One is on eldership, to look at the role of elder and the qualifications of eldership. And I'll tell you why. And that will become hopefully clearer why that's such an important topic to look at this morning. So we're going to read this in a minute.

But can I say something about Wednesday as well? It's nice to see so many people out on Wednesday. And we'll study the Bible again. We'll look at another topic about pastoral care, about how to care for each other. We looked at being a good friend. This Wednesday, I was going to look at the battle with sin. And that's a good topic to look at, how we habitually sin and how we can maybe break that habit. But I've left that for another week. I've chosen to look at the topic of unemployment of all things. And I thought, really, unemployment? Most of the folk here are maybe retired.

But the issues of unemployment also affect those who are retired. We are created. We are created to work. And when we do not do this, this throws up so many problems in our life. And as a church in an area like Western Hales, we will encounter many people who don't have meaningful employment. How do we understand? How can we appreciate what they go through? How can we maybe help them? So it's an interesting wee study. Ideally, I'm going to have to actually decide what we're doing on the before the Wednesday, so that when we do that, I print out the Wednesday stuff, or the stuff for Wednesday on that Wednesday, and you'll get it the following Sunday. Does that make sense? I don't have the stuff printed out for you this morning. Might be able to do it after the service. Failing that. Come on Sunday, Wednesday, you'll get it. It's not desperate. You need to do the homework for this.

You'll be able just to look at the questions. It's not rocket science. But it is good if you can take the stuff away normally beforehand. But in this case, it should be okay. Anyway, 1 Peter chapter 5.

1 Peter chapter 5. Just going to read the first four verses. My version of the Bible has the heading, To the elders and the flock. To the elders among you—this is Peter writing—to the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings, who also will share in the glory to be revealed. Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be, not pursuing dishonest gain, 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. We'll end our reading there.

[4 : 01] Let's come before God. Let's seek His help. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank You, Lord, for not only saving us this morning. We thank You, Father, for Your love and Your grace in our life on a daily basis. But, Lord, as we were considering Psalm 23 not that long ago, where Jesus Himself is our good shepherd. We thank You, Lord, that in Your wisdom You have chosen under shepherds to care for Your flock. We remember the words, Lord, that You spoke to Peter of old, Do You love me? Feed my sheep.

Lord, we come to look at this important topic, Lord, of the church elder, those in charge, Lord, of caring and feeding Your flock. So, Father, we pray that we might begin to appreciate, Lord, the wisdom in this, and perhaps even the challenge of this to those of us who are elders. And we do just ask, Father, for Your leading and for Your guiding this morning as we consider this important topic. So, Father, be with us, we pray. Warm our hearts, Father. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

I wonder what comes to mind when you think of the word elder. Maybe it's this image here. Most people think church elder. It's these guys, dry and dusty. In those days, moustaches must have been compulsory.

Next week, we'll look at the qualifications. I don't think moustaches is, but in those days, I think you had to have a moustache to be an elder. I'm sure thinking, Pastor, why are you not doing Philippians? We're really enjoying Philippians, and we're looking forward to how we can shine as Christians. Why are you doing this? It seems dry and dusty. Eldership is very relevant. Here's another image of elders. I like that picture of elders, young and old men on fire for the Lord, not sitting around looking austere and miserable, but pumped and ready to serve the Lord. Young guys, older guys, with experience and so forth, all working together to help serve the local church and to progress the work of the local church. Elders are a great gift to the church when they function as they should.

This is a series that I'm doing here just for three weeks. I've done this in every church I've been in, so it's not that I'm seeing a problem here and we have to deal with this. It's not. It's just such an important topic, and that's what I want us to look at over these three weeks. Why are we looking at this? We're looking at the role of elder because of church health. I've mentioned in a sermon or two before that churches very seldom rise above the spiritual temperature of their elders.

[6 : 43] It can happen, but it very seldom ever happens. If you've got godly men serving the Lord, functioning as they should, a church not always will tend to rise to that temperature. They will see their elders. They will follow their elders. If the elders are seen to be lax, they will become lax.

It's very much related to the health of the church. I've known this from experience. I've been in, this is now church number six, some of the churches I've been in, they've struggled with their eldership, and this has come through the church. So, it's a challenge for church health. This was always the problem if you know your Old Testament. The shepherds of the sheep didn't care for the flock, and because of that, their flock were led astray. It's such an important thing. That's why you really need to pray for your elders in the church. The other reason is a challenge to the existing elders, and I include myself in that very much so. As we look at and we remind ourselves of this high calling, this noble task that the Lord has called us to, that we perhaps think, maybe I need to do a bit more. Maybe that's a challenge, and so forth. And I very much include myself in that. It's also a challenge to the men in the church to aspire to become an elder or a deacon within the church. The qualifications are very similar. I'll look at that next week. But 1 Timothy 3, here's a trustworthy saying. If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. It's not something to run away from. It's something to be embraced. And you don't have to be 95 with a mustache. You can be one of these guys, a younger man, a godly man, and that the church looks for such, the Lord sets apart such. So, there's a challenge to the men in the church to perhaps aspire to this noble task. Also doing this for the sake of church members, that we know how to relate to our elders, that we rejoice in the fact that the Lord gives us elders, and so forth. So, we're going to look at this on week three. This week will be the role of elders. Next week will be the qualifications of elders.

And next week after that, something that you don't often see in studying eldership is how the church is to relate to elders. I've been in various induction services where the pastor is being inducted, and the charge is given by the preacher. You're now the pastor of this church. This is what you have to do. And I'm sitting there thinking, he probably knows. I'm speaking from 30 years' experience. He probably knows what he's to do. The problem is the church don't always know how they are to relate to the pastor. And one of the churches I was in, they did something that was very good.

I don't know how you will induct your next pastor. But to have two preachers, it was very good. They only spoke for 20 minutes each. One was a charge to the church. One was a charge to the pastor.

It's not good just to charge the church and forget the pastor and not remind him what he's to do. But when it's only one-sided, he leaves feeling, wow, I've got this to do. And you're saying, yeah, we know what you have to do. But just how they relate to each other. And it's worth spending a sermon on that. And we'll look at that in two weeks' time. So, that's where we'll go. This week, the role. Next week, the qualifications. And then the last week, the third week, the church elder and the church member, how they are to relate to each others. When we understand the role of elder in the church, it's very impressive. The Lord has given us—at one point, I thought about doing the whole doctrine of the church, how the church is formed, how it's put together, all the administrations within the church. I love the church. I love the local church. I love the nuts and bolts in local churches. I just love how the components all work together. I love the Sunday services. I love the Wednesdays. I just—the finance-y stuff. I don't do all this. But I just love all the components.

[10:53] And they cause it to work. It is quite something. And a major component in the church is the role of elder, to feed and to care for the flock, which we'll look at in a minute. But let me remind you of Ephesians 4. It is he, Christ, God, who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers—and by pastors, I'm talking also about elders—to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Therefore, if the church is to be prepared for works of service, to be united in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, we need elders to help us to do this.

And that's why it's worthy of study, to appreciate the role of elders and your existing elders in this church. For this sermon, you could spend ages on this. I'm going to assume certain things. I'm going to assume that you're convinced of the role of elders. Some churches don't have elders. They just have deacons, and the deacons function as elders. To my mind, that's a recipe for disaster. If you're not qualified to be an elder, you can't function as an elder. It's very difficult. Leadership is male.

That's a big topic. If you're part of FIC, and this church is, whether you've all signed up to it or not, leadership being male within the church, that's the scope of another sermon. That's not this sermon. So, I'm just going to assume that. And the elders include the pastor. The pastor is an elder, and elders are pastors. They're one and the same. The pastor is usually the first amongst equal, the prime mover in many things, but we function together. We are elders. We are leaders in the church in that way. And also, the plurality of elders, that when Paul established church, she didn't put one elder in place. That's why sometimes the pastor is often seen as, what should we do, pastor? And the elders sit and we just wait. It's elders lead the church in that way.

So, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each church, plural. He says to Titus, appoint elders in every town. So, there's wisdom in having more than one elder. Not all elders have all the gifts, especially in terms of practical ministry. I've been in elders, elderships, where one elder is very good theologically, sharp as a tack, can understand the doctrines, can understand the times in which we live, but not so great pastorally. They can see doctrines, but maybe not people, and others can see people, but just struggle with a lot of the doctrines and trying to get their head. They can do it, but they're not quite as gifted. And we're gifted in other ways as well, in our careers and the things. We bring that into the eldership, whether it's admin and what have you as well. So, plurality of elders is good. We complement each other's. If you wanted to study this more, here's a book here. You can fire it up there. There's many books on leadership, tons. I have whole shelves of this stuff. I've cleared it all out. But this one here has stood the test of time, biblical eldership, an urgent call to restore biblical church leadership. It would cure your insomnia a wee bit.

I must confess, some of it's quite heavy, but I've used this with elders before. I don't intend using it with the guys here, but it's a good book on eldership, all the role and the qualifications. So, Alexander Stroch, I commend his book to you. As I says, it stood the test of time. So, let's look at this passage or the topic, the role of elder. Hopefully, you'll get something from this.

[14 : 51] Five things. I want us to note five things. The role of elders is very much shepherding. It's interesting. This is a slightly different one from Psalm 23. You'll notice when we had a similar image with the good shepherd caring for the sheep. It's amazing how the Lord gives the church under shepherds. And Peter mentioned this right at the start, didn't he? I appeal to you as a fellow elder, verse 2, be shepherds of God's flock. That is how God has ordained things. He raises up men in the church to shepherd, to protect and care for the flock. So, let's look at this together very quickly.

First of all, the role of shepherd is to feed, is to feed God's people. That is this whole area of shepherding. Be shepherds of God's people, Acts 20. Watch out for yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God. That's Acts 20, verse 28. Shepherding is a major thing. It's a function. Peter was told us, wasn't he? Do you love me? Feed my sheep. You're a shepherd. Feed my sheep. So, how do we feed God's people? This is such an important thing. You need to be fed spiritually. God raises up men to feed the flock through preaching and teaching. Matthew 28, go and make disciples of all nations. And then it says, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. So, teaching is a major thing. 1 Timothy 5, 17, the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. So, here's a function of the elder that

Paul mentions to Timothy, 1 Timothy 4, this time, until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture and to preaching and teaching. Here is—this is, to be honest, this is the only difference between an elder and a deacon. Deacons don't have to be able to teach, but elders have to be able to teach. We must hold firmly, Titus 1, to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, 1 Timothy, Titus 1, 9, so that he may encourage others by sound doctrine, refute those who oppose it. Teaching is viewed very highly in Scripture. The church's first appointed apostles, second prophets, third teachers.

Teachers is—teaching is such a big thing. We are to teach the whole counsel of God, Acts 20. So, therefore, the elder is to feed the flock by preaching, by teaching. Difference between the two.

Teaching is just here are facts. It might not necessarily be applied, but once you teach, every preaching should have teaching. You teach, but in preaching, you apply it. This is what this means to us today. Go and do likewise. Wednesdays is mostly, perhaps, sometimes just teaching, and if it's only teaching, that doesn't fail.

[18:01] People need more than sermons. We need to be taught the things. But also, in a moment or two, we'll look at protecting the flock. Apologetics. We need to know how to defend the faith against all the attacks that come our way. So, this doesn't mean that every elder has to stand behind the pulpit. They might not have a public teaching ministry, but they should have the acumen that such that if there's a problem in scripture or a threat or something that needs to be explained, you should be able to go to your elder.

Not that they can give you the answer like that. They might have to go away and research it, but they have the ability to research it and have the ability to try and communicate that to you. That's what it means to be able to teach. What does the Bible say about this? Leave it with me. I'll go away.

Chat with other elders. Look at the stuff on that and come back and be able to teach you. If you didn't have elders who could do this, your church would be ravaged by all sorts of heresy and so forth.

So, we need to be able to feed the flock. It needs to be a balanced diet. All scripture is given by inspiration of God. So, usually when I'm looking at a preaching program, one might be Old Testament.

We've been in the Old Testament. Let's go into the New. Or it might be carrot stick. You need cajoled, but you kind of do that all the time. You get hugged from the pulpit, encouraged. You need both. You need the whole counsel of God. And that's the job of the elder, and certainly the pastor and the preacher.

[19:31] It is very important, and we must—this is something we need to take on board—elders must be aware of neglecting the importance of feeding the flock and being clued up with things apologetically and so forth. And I don't know how many times I've been in elders' courts where it's very easy for the elders to be dragged away onto something that's not their ministry. Can I just say, as you get a new pastor, that you ring-fence your pastor, but also the elders' ability to focus on the Word, to study, to be able to be in a position where they feed you. You remember in Acts 6 when the Twelve, we are told, gathered all the disciples together, and there was a problem about feeding, and the Greek widows and the Jewish widows, we are not being fed, and the elders get sucked—or the apostles get sucked into this. They said, it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God. We will give our attention to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. Encourage your pastor, encourage your elders to be involved in that. Give yourself to the ministry of the Word. If there's nothing else that will suck the life out of your pastor, it is admin. It's great that some churches have an admin thing.

I mean, I'll photocopy the stuff, but while I'm photocopying and doing things, I'm not doing other things. And it's not that we're above these things, but to focus, and to focus on these things.

I notice Paul, for instance, has been at the door. We need to drag him back in here and get somebody else to—you can't take your turn. But we give ourselves to the ministry of the Word.

Paul and I are off to the FIEC Church Leaders Conference in Blackpool a week tomorrow, and I notice there's an EGM, Extraordinary General Meeting. One part of that—usually, it's pretty boring. This one's a wee bit more exciting. You're getting to change some of the Constitution.

You get to vote. Usually, you vote on behalf of the church. Strictly speaking, anything that we vote as representatives of the church should be run by the church. We don't vote for what we think. We vote for what the church thinks. And churches are never great at that, to be honest. The pastor, and somebody goes along, and we just go, yeah, whatever. But it's interesting. They want to make a change to the role of women in the church, and they want to look at this—it's the eternal functioning subordination of the Son of God. And I thought, what on earth is that? How do I get my head out? What's the problem with that? What's it about? The eternal functioning subordination of the Son. So, Paul and I have to decide whether we vote for that or whether we don't vote for that. And it's basically a clause you want to take out that is related to that particular doctrine. But before you can vote, you need to know what that doctrine is. So, this is why your elders need to be clued up, because there are subtle things come into the church. It's not just singing kumbaya when we come together. There needs to be research and stuff behind, stuff that you perhaps don't see.

[22 : 50] But you need to trust your elders. Your elders are on top of this, and that we know roughly what's happening. Here is a quote from 1 and 2 Timothy by John Piper. I'll need to go through this fairly quickly. I won't read the whole quote. You'll get the gist fairly on. Talking about the pastor. I would say any elder. He says this about how you are to relate to your pastor. Fling him into his office. Tear off the office sign from the door and nail on the sign study. Take him off all mailing lists. Lock him up with his books and his typewriter.

You can see this was written yesterday. And his Bible. Slam him down on his knees before text. Force him to be the one man in our communities who knows about God. Shut his mouth from forever spouting remarks and stop his tongue forever tripping lightly over non-essentials. Burn his eyes with weary study. Make him spend and be spent for the glory of God. Rip out his telephone.

Burn up his ecclesiastical records. Put water in his petrol tank. Give him a Bible and tie him to the pulpit and make him preach the Word of God. Test him. Quiz him. Examine him. Humiliate him for his ignorance of things divine. Shame him for his good comprehension of finances, game scores, and politics. Laugh at his frustrated efforts to play psychiatrist. Raise a choir and form a chant and haunt him night and day. Sir, we would see Jesus. It goes on like this for another ten minutes, how you're supposed to do this. And he says this, Corner him with questions about God. Cover him with demands for celestial wisdom.

Give him a chapter and order him to walk round it, camp with it, sup with it, come at last to speak it and say about it things which ring to the truth of eternity. And when he's burnt out by the Word, when he's consumed at last by the fiery glaze blazing through him, and when he's privileged to translate the truth of God to man and finally transferred from earth to heaven, then bear him away gently and blow a muted trumpet and lay him down softly. Place a two-edged sword on his coffin. Raise the tomb triumphant, for he was a true soldier of the Word. And ere he died, he had become a man of God. I'm sure you get the drift. Get the drift. Shield your pastor and encourage him. Don't have him cutting grass and doing things. It's not that we're against these, and these things are sometimes good. But make sure you shield your pastor and also your elders. Free them up. Don't have them doing menial things. And don't be too quick to vote for me, and I'll do the thing.

I know we don't have a lot of people here, but the elders need to really focus on the ministry of prayer and to the Word. Admin. I like admin. I must confess, I'm a bit sad that way. I don't mind admin.

[25 : 39] But if you spend all your time in admin, nothing will destroy your time. So here's the first one. Feeding. Know the Word. Get into the Word. Read the things about the doctrines. Be clued up on what's happening. Second, protecting. The second aspect of the role is to protect, to protect the flock. Paul instructed the Ephesian elders in this way. Acts 20. Keep watch over yourself and all the flock which the Holy Spirit had made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard. That's one of the main reasons why Paul placed elders in his churches when he left because they needed to protect the flock. Not just to feed them, but protect them from who would come. How do we protect them? We protect the flock through the teaching, through God's Word, so that we know what to believe and we know heresy or difficulties when they come. It's the main aspect of an elder that we're qualified to teach. Refute others by sound doctrine. Refute those who oppose it. Titus chapter 1. We are to discuss these things. You remember in

Acts 15, the apostle and elders met to consider the question, which was to do with circumcision. After much discussion, they decided what to do. Elders get together. We chat these things through.

So we are to be, we are to teach. We are to be spiritually alert. The attacks of the devil are very subtle. And we are to watch. We are to be aware of these things. Be on your guard. Remember that for three years, Acts 20, 31, I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

And this is becoming more difficult. The battles that pastors and elders have to fight now are different from C.H. Spurgeon's day. I mean, the whole conversion therapy, transgender things, the issues that the elders have to try and get their head around now are big, big topics. And we need to be clued up with these things. And this takes a lot, an awful lot of effort. Government legislation, what they are doing. We praise the Lord for Christian Institute, but we can't leave it all to Christian Institute. We need to be able to distill these things through the church. And it's always been this way in every church, through the whole of Christianity, that things will come in. And we need to be aware of these. Elders need to be aware. Social trends, current theological thinking. We have not to be naive. We need to be aware of these. But as we read earlier, sometimes the threats are not just outside the church, but they can be inside the church. Things that can come in terms of forms of teaching and so forth that can discourage the flock. We need to be aware of them.

Three things come to mind that's been my experience. Wherever you go to certain areas or certain localities, I don't know whether it's just that church, but usually it's the churches round about.

[28 : 53] One is creation, teaching on creation, how the world began, young earth, old earth. That's a big topic. The second coming. There are certain churches you go and you preach on the second coming.

You just divide folk. And even if I even thought about this in a couple of the churches I've been in. Well, I won't just say this is what I believe. I'll say, well, some folk believe this. Some folk believe that. Pre-mill, post-mill, A-mill, whatever that is. And then you would say, but I'm maybe more convinced of this. They just pigeonhole you. If you just know quite what they believe, they just go, nutter, cycle. That's where they put you. And it's very difficult. Threats that come in that can cause disunity. Israel is one as well. I've encountered this many times, as well as creationism, second coming. Unless you believe everything that they believe, your church can, as I said before, often implode. Churches don't explode, they implode. We can do it. We're great at doing a lot of damage to ourselves. Elders need to be able to deal with these things when they come. We need to be courageous.

Remember Jesus said when he said he was the good shepherd, how did he describe the haggard hand? He says, he sees the wolf coming. He abandons the sheep and runs away. Elders can't put their head in the sand and go, I can't deal with that. It's just to, we have to grab the bull by the horns. We have to do this. And some elders can be afraid of the sheep. It's amazing in some elders' meetings when you're discussing. Maybe a name comes up. They're a high-profile person in the church. Oh, we better not deal with that. Others, we're happy to deal with. They're easy. This person is, if we touch him, we touch all these other folk. So we become afraid of the sheep. That too is not good. We cannot have that. That cannot happen. We don't become an elder to be popular with the sheep. We shepherd the sheep.

We deal with the difficult cases. We talk, and we are to protect all the sheep. Elders are human. We have our favorites. You have your favorites. There'll be people in this church that you think, I got on great with them. Others I struggle with. We cannot have favorite sheep. I've been in elders' meetings. Maybe I've done it myself. A name comes up and we go, oh dear, they're high maintenance.

And then we just, and it's not good. Really, you can have a favorite in the church. It doesn't matter. You've got a close friend. Elders cannot do this. We have to care for all the sheep equally. Not to have our favorites. There's nothing wrong with having a friend in the church, of course. But when it comes to caring for the sheep, we can't write folk off and care for them and not for others. We can't have our favorite sheep. We are to care for all the sheep equally. Can you imagine a shepherd who doesn't know how to feed his sheep, who is afraid of the sheep, and who neglects sheep to the exclusion of other sheep that he likes? That wouldn't be much of a shepherd, would it? So, a shepherd is to feed and protect all his sheep. Thirdly, leading. We are to lead. The elder is called an overseer, a manager, a director, if you will. 1 Timothy 5, 17, the elders who direct the affairs of the church, well, are worthy of double honor, especially those whose word is in preaching and teaching.

[32 : 26] We won't go into a lot of detail, bishop, overseer, elder. They're basically interchangeable. They mean roughly the same thing. An elder describes the dignity, like the first image I showed you, dignified, suits, moustaches. They look the part. They're older men, and that word really is referring to the dignity of the elder. The word bishop really has to do with the function and the duty. They're overseeing. Bishops oversee various churches in an area, and so forth. And the word pastor means to shepherd and to care. But elders really is all-compassing in all of them, and that's what we read earlier in 1 Peter 5, verse 1 and 2. The elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder. Be shepherds of God's flock under your care, serving as overseers. We're standing there with a crook, and we're overseeing the things in the church. Acts 20-28, keep watch over yourselves and all the flock which the Holy Spirit has made you an overseer. So, we are to feed. We are to protect.

We are to direct the affairs of the church. We should have our finger on the people in the church. We should have our finger on the ministries of the church. And I know from my own perspective, that's not always the case. Don't always know what's happening in the Sunday school. Don't always know what's happening with the music ministry. Don't always know what's happening with individuals.

It's a big job to try and oversee everything that's happening. That's why a plurality of elders is good. I've known churches that almost divide up the membership. You're in charge of this bunch, you're in charge of that bunch, and that's the way that it works. We have to be able to watch and evaluate and to make decisions. We're like a manager. It's one of the qualifications we'll look at next week that an elder must be able to manage his own family well. See that his children obey him with proper respect. If you don't know how to manage, direct your own family, you'll never direct the church. I've seen elders who fail that qualification, but they're still made elders, and it's a disaster, absolute disaster, when their children don't respect them. You won't get the church members to respect them. There's some flaw there that they lack, and that's why the qualifications are serious. So, we perhaps lead projects. We vision cast. When a church has vision and an aim, it can often come from the elders through input from the members, but the elders don't rely on the members to steer the church. It's the other way around. We should be looking at strategy, plans, where are we going. We are to direct the affairs of the church, and we are to, so, as I said, lead projects, lead people, initiatives. We oversee these things. We are to lead with authority. The elders, in a sense, it's a rule. It says, how do the sheep relate to the elders? They are to obey them. I'm glad this is in the scriptures, in case you thought it was just me. 1 Timothy 4, command these teachings. Okay, the authority, in that case, is the authority of God's Word, but Hebrews 13, obey your leaders and submit to their authority. Couldn't be much clearer. Not that we have authority in and of ourself. It comes from the Lord as we expound the scriptures, but we need to look at this and take that seriously. 1 Thessalonians 5, 12, now, we ask you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord, and who admonish you. So, it's very clear. Sad to say that most churches look at their elders and think, sometimes, they're dumplings. They really don't have a clue. I could be an elder, but they're elders. But my job is to keep them right and to make sure they're toeing the line.

I kid you not. And where you have this, where you have children, if you go into a family and you see children constantly telling their parents what to do, you would think, wow, they have problems within that family. Why is it any different in the church when the Lord has said, I have appointed these men, set them apart to lead, pray for them, support them. They will give themselves to these things, support them in it, obey them, submit to them in that sense. And it makes sense. And we are, the Lord's anointed in that way. A pastor is inducted to the eldership, slightly different from other elders. They come up, lay hands on them. It was great that Gerald and John and Paul did that with me. They recognized that, Lord, lead this guy. Well, not perfect. We are certainly not perfect. We'll look at this under qualifications. But we have a role to do, and our job is to help and to support our elders. We are to lead under this leading with gentleness. Be shepherds of the flock under your care. Not, verse 3, not lording it over those entrusted to you. Jesus, never a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoking flax he will not quench. We are to lead with gentleness. This is not always easy. And elders are flawed in this. I include myself in this. It's one thing to know it's right to do. It's another thing to know how best to go about this. So, we need to lead with gentleness.

It requires a great deal of humility to be able to do that. We are to lead by examples. 1 Peter 5, 3, the passage, we're being an example to the flock. We are not just to tell folk. We are to demonstrate it and what that means. If elders lower the standards, this is what I'm saying, the church will lower the standards. I don't need to go to the prayer meeting because the elders don't go to the prayer meeting.

[38 : 27] And we take our standards from our elders. This is why it's important we lead by example. If judgment, they say judgment begins with the house of God, it will be, if that's true, and I believe that is true, it will begin with the leaders in the house of God. And if it begins with the leaders, it will begin with the pastor. If the Lord decided to return and judge His people, I'd be in the front of the queue, followed by the elders, followed by maybe ministry leaders, followed by—this is a fact.

Alongside any role comes responsibility and how we cope with this. We are to lead by examples. We are to lead together, united. It's important that the elders move as one. In my experience, the elders don't always agree on everything, but on the important things, we do not move unless we are united. And the elders will kick it around for a while and try and agree. In my last church, there was only two elders, myself and another man, and it wasn't ideal, just two of us. And so, if we didn't agree, you'd 50-50 split. But you try and reach a consensus of opinion. If it's a small thing, we're going to say coffee, you want to do coffee or do tea. That's not a big thing. You just go, yeah, whatever you want, guys. And everybody says, yeah, just do your own thing. But on matters of doctrine, I think the last thing that we couldn't quite agree in elders, not in this church and another church, was COVID.

I remember having that debate. And we'd looked at it for a while. Was it right to have communion online or did it have to be in person? And we didn't always agree. Some says, no, we have to be in person. Can't do communion. Where men are gathered together, blah, blah, blah. It was all different.

And we didn't agree. And we steered a course as best we could through that. But it's not just the job of the pastor. The elders don't come and say, pastor, what are we to do? The elders lead alongside the pastor. We all bring something different to the party. Some ways it's foolish. You're constantly going against your pastor, the elders are, and the church. You think, well, we've chosen the wrong guy here. He's never coming up with anything wise. So, sometimes foolish, as I said, sometimes go against your pastor, but he's not infallible. And your elders are not infallible as well. So, we lead together. Fourthly, caring. Going to go through this very quickly. We are to care for the practical needs of the flock, helping those who struggle. It's not just all theology. We are to comfort others. We are to visit the flock. We must be hospitable. That's one of the qualifications.

So, we need to know the flock, move among the flock, care for the flock, not just teach them theologically. We need to help the sick. Is any one of you sick? Call the elders of the church to pray over him, anoint him with oil. That's something that's often neglected in churches.

[41 : 17] Is that a ministry? Often in churches I've been in, if you want it, the elders will come. We won't volunteer it on a Monday afternoon that it's going to happen. But if folk want that, call the elders, and that might be the case. So, we are to care for people, body and soul.

Fifthly, and with this I'll close, loving. The role of the elder is to love. We are not policemen. I remember being in one church where an elder really struggled. He used to, everybody preached, a number of times they used to call his congregation, well, a portion of the congregation, onceers. Some of you are just onceers, they said, which meant that you came only once on a Sunday.

And I'm thinking, hmm, you don't have a biblical mandate to have people coming twice. Forsake the, do not forsake the assembling of yourself together. If you come in a Monday morning or a Monday night, you've fulfilled that, to my mind.

You've, you've done that. If you, you've another opportunity to come twice, whoop-de-doo, grab it with both hands. You're going to be fed. You're going to be protected. You're going to be cared for. Why would you not want it?

But if you don't turn up, you're not called a onceer. You're, you're, you're still fulfilled. And, and this particular elder was just a policeman. Elders can easily become policemen, but we just watch people.

[42 : 38] They're not living right, and we'll be, we'll be down on them. Tim Keller, if you've heard of Tim Keller, he ministers to thousands. He was reminded, he, he went to a church.

He returned to one of the churches that he pastored, and, uh, people had to say what they appreciated about his ministry. I think from his perspective, he wanted them to say, he's a great preacher.

He's an amazing preacher. But that's not what they said. The, nobody mentioned any of his sermons. They, they said, what they appreciated most was he loved them.

I'm sure if there's one quality of all of these that you would want from an elder, if I said to you, what of these five would you want from an elder? It should be the fifth one. It should be, because if that's right, everything else will be right.

If your elders love you, your pastor loves you. Not on your case, not as a policeman, not, but you think, one thing about the elders in our church and the pastor of our church, he loves us.

[43 : 39] Uh, even if he's not the best preacher in the world, and they convey that, that to us. Jesus says, I am the good shepherd of the sheep. I lay down my life for the sheep. He expects the same thing of his under shepherds.

Not just to sit in an ivory tower and to tell them off, but to love the flock. That is very difficult. We're only human. And that's why you need to pray that your elders are able to do those five things.

So here then is the blueprint for the church. It is, for the church elder, it is a noble task. Let me read 1 Peter 4.

It talks about verse 4. When the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that never fades away. It really is a noble task.

Maybe you're here this morning, and if you're a man, and you look at them and think, well, I can't do that. That's a good thing. That's a very good thing to try and aspire to care for God's people in this way, the doctrine, the teaching, the loving, the caring, the visiting, and so forth, the analyzing, their culture, trying to do it.

[44 : 47] That is a difficult job. I hope that some ways I've showed you something about the size of the role, the difficulty of the role. If nothing else, you'll get a new pastor, and he will be able to, you'll be able to appreciate the hurdles that he has to cover.

Pray these five things for your elders, and especially for your pastor. Help him to feed us. Resource him that we might be cared for in these days. Next week, we're going to stand and we're going to look at the qualifications, but we're going to stand just now.

We're going to sing, The Church is One Foundation. The church is a great thing. It's a great institution of the Lord where God's people are cared for. There is difficulties.

There are problems that we face, but we press on together. I hope you found this interesting. As I said, I'm not doing this to cajole anybody here. I do this in all the churches, but eldership is such an important thing in the church.

It's like a wee engine. If that functions well, the rest will go. We're tinkering if we don't take it seriously. So let's stand and we'll sing this together. The Church is One Foundation is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[46 : 09] She is this new creation by water and by word. From heaven he came and sought to be his holy bride.

With his own blood he bought her and for her life he died. He likes from every nation yet on our holy earth.

Earth, chart, tour of salvation, one Lord, one faith on birth. One holy hymn she blesses for days, one holy food.

And to one hope she presses with every grace endued. Though with a scornful wonder and see her soon oppressed, by shoes of trust, the thunder, by heresis distressed.

It's saints that watch are keeping, their cry goes upon all, and soon the night of weeping shall be the heart of song.

[47 : 47] Mid toil and tribulation and to the world of her war, she wins the consummation of peace forevermore.

Till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blessed and the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union with all the three in one and miss this sweet communion with those whose rest is one.

All happy ones and all in the world. In prayer, our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord, for not only saving us, but placing us in families.

We thank you for the local church that we see represented, Lord, and mentioned throughout the New Testament, Lord, individual local churches. We thank you for the government of those churches, however their decisions are made and so forth.

[49 : 08] We thank you, Father, for the role of deacon and for the role of elder. Lord, we do just pray, Father, as we're considered the role of elder, that you will be with our existing elders.

Lord, be with each one of us. Help us to be the men that we should be, fulfilling the role that you have given to us. Lord, where we lack, we pray that you will resource us. And Father, we pray that we would feed and protect and care and love the flock placed under our charge.

So, Father, give us the resources, give us the grace as individuals to be able to fulfill that task. And at the same time, Lord, help your people to support us. Lord, as we move forward in the days that lie ahead, that we might be that church which is strong and united, where you add to this church daily those whom you might draw to yourself.

So, Father, we commend our church. We commend, Lord, its ministries into your hands. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you, folks. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[50 : 23] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.