

# The Essential Framework of the Church Part 2: The Nature of Elder Leadership

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Please open your Bibles to 1 Peter, Peter's first epistle, chapter 5. This is going to be a place that we start this morning. We're still doing a topical series on the church, set aside our normal exposition of Scripture for a number of weeks as we completed Ezra-Nehemiah and now this is our seventh week on this subject of what the Lord says about the church, ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, what are we called to be and to do, and we've looked at the foundation of the church and seen that the foundation of the church is the certain canon of Scripture and the church is to be built upon the word of God. And last week we began looking at the title of the message, it's the message this morning too but the title of the message for this little subpart, subseries in the larger series on the church is "The Essential Framework of the Church." The essential framework of the church. This morning, the subtitle is "The Nature of Elder Leadership. The Essential Framework of the Church: The Nature of Elder Leadership."

Last week, we looked at "The Essential Framework of the Church: The Necessity of Spiritual Leadership." We saw that the New Testament presents that the picture of the church that Christ is building as the gospel goes out through the world in the ministry of the apostles, one of the things they begin doing is appointing leaders in the church. Paul in his first missionary journey, Acts 14:23, he and Barnabas are appointing elders in every, elders, plural, in every church, singular, plurality of elders in every church. That's his first missionary journey, his third missionary journey he calls for the Ephesian elders in the church, a passage we'll look at a little later, Acts 20, where we're going to read from the Apostle Peter, chapter 5, and when he writes this letter he's writing to groups of churches all throughout basically central Turkey, what's now central Turkey, Asia Minor at the time, Asia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, he talks about in chapter 1, verse 1. He's writing to these churches and you're going to see he assumes they have elders. The same thing is true of James, a passage we'll also look at, James 5:14. He's writing to churches spread throughout the Roman world and he assumes they have elders because he gives instruction "to the elders among you," just like Peter does.

So the New Testament pattern is clear, the church needs leadership and we saw there's two offices, it's elders and deacons, because we saw in Acts 6 one of the things that happens is the 12 need the help of the deacons so that they can stay focused on their ministry and they're basically proto-elders, the 12, the apostles, and those deacons, the

servants that are appointed in Acts 6 are proto-deacons. I mean, the church is evolving, the Spirit is working, Christ is building his church and what he does is he shows that the pattern is a two office leadership structure. The ground is level at the foot of the cross, we all come to God without a priest, we talked about this last week, we go directly to Jesus, we're a kingdom of priests, all of us have access, yet God has ordained that even though that is true, there's this complementary reality that he works through leadership and it is a necessary reality. It's essential to the framework of the church. So the foundation is the word of God, the framework, the framing of the temple is the leadership offices of elder and deacon, and so for a church to be healthy, we all are living stones being built but we need to be built on the foundation of the word of God and into the framework of godly leadership. This is the way the New Testament presents this and this is necessary for all of us. We all need leadership. We need to be under authority. We need to be under the authority of elders and under the authority of deacons. It's essential.

Last week's message was about the essentialness of it, it's necessary. This week, we answer the question what kind of leadership do we need? What is the nature of the leadership that God presents in the New Testament as his ideal for the church? And we're going to look this week and, Lord willing, next week, we'll look today the nature of elder leadership and we plan next Sunday to look at the nature of deacon leadership. How are we to be led? What are we to look for in the leaders that God is placing over us? So the title of the message is "The Essential Framework of the Church," this morning, "The Nature of Elder Leadership."

Now if you were here for the announcements, you heard that we are taking nominations right now for the office of elder and deacon, and you're encouraged to consider the biblical qualifications, the biblical guidelines, and to nominate people for these two important offices. Then we, as elders, vet them, talk with them, train them, and then if the Lord continues to confirm them through the process, then we present them back to you for your vote, and if the Lord confirms through the vote three-fourths majority for elder, two-thirds majority for deacon, then they are installed.

And so today we're talking about elders, so I would mention that there are five active elders. This was pointed out to me that not everyone knows who our active elders are. We have five active elders in addition to myself. Ted Guthrie, our worship leader, is an elder. James Rouse is actually our elder chairman. Charles Walker leads our men's ministry. John Blackburn, my dad, is the fifth elder. So the five of us are active elders. We have three other men who have been ordained as elders but who are not presently serving actively as elders but can rotate back on at a point in the future. But right now five active elders that this particular passage speaks to and about.

So we're going to look at this passage of Scripture and we're going to look at a lot of what the New Testament has to say. We're going to really just start here and then we're going to go throughout the New Testament and look at what the Bible says about the nature of elder leadership. So let's look, first, at 1 Peter 5:1-4. Again, Peter writing to churches in Asia Minor about three decades after Pentecost, not long before he is taken home, dies a martyr's death, he writes these words, 1 Peter 5:1,

1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we come to You this morning to praise and exalt You and, Lord, to hear from You. We desperately need Your word. As Jesus Himself said when He was tempted, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." So Lord, speak by Your Spirit through Your word, Your servants are listening, and help us to love our Savior more. We pray in His name. Amen.*

So the essential framework of the church, the nature of elder leadership. So the pattern is, the New Testament pattern that is clearly established as you read through your Bible and I encourage you to do this, once you see things, you'll start seeing it everywhere and we're going to see a number of passages today but you'll see it, I'm not covering everything, there's not time, there are so many other passages that we could look at but the New Testament pattern is a plurality of elders leading each church, singular. So it's elders, plural, over each church, singular.

For our outline this morning, I think a way to help for a way to organize this is around the three key words in the New Testament. There are three key words that refer to the same office, they are different aspects of describing this same office. The first word is elder; the second word is shepherd; and the third word is overseer. Now all three words are actually in the text I just read to you that shows that these are one and the same office. Peter is writing to the elders and it's interesting, he says, "I exhort you elders as a fellow elder." Here again, another case that shows that Peter never claimed to be a pope. He's one elder among all the elders.

But he's talking to the elders, that is the word elder. The word in Greek presbuteros, transliterate that, p-r-e-s-b-y-t-e-r-o-s, the "y," presbyter, presbytery, presbyterian, transliterates the Greek upsilon, looks like a "y" but it's really a "u" so there you have presbuteros is the translation or how you say the word. But translating it is elder, it means elder. He writes to the elders but he says to them what are they to do? They're to shepherd the flock. The word shepherd, that's the verb, that's the work that elders are called to do, to shepherd, and there's a second aspect of it, exercising oversight. Those are the three key words. It's in the verb form as well, exercising oversight, but the three words, you're going to find them throughout the New Testament, you're going to see them a number of places we go today, all three of them together, but presbyter, elder, that's one word, elder, presbyter. Shepherd is the word poimen, p-o-i-m-e-n. And overseer is the word

episcopos. Overseer is the word episcopos, e-p-i-s-c-o-p-o-s. Episcopos. You see Episcopalian in that.

So we're going to talk about the fact that these three words really help us understand the nature of elder leadership, what an elder is called to be and to do. In fact, there are three points this morning and the first is what an elder must be, and this is going to revolve around the word elder itself, one of the three key words to describe this office. Elder means older, right? It means an older person. In the Bible, the idea of being older is being wiser. The concept here is maturity, spiritual maturity. An elder is to be an exemplary Christian and being comes before doing. We're going to see that. The emphasis of the New Testament is big on this, being is more important than doing. You've got to do too but you have to be before you can do. Doing without being is useless.

And this idea of the word elder speaks to spiritual maturity. An elder must be an exemplary Christian. To answer that in just a phrase, an exemplary Christian, a Christian who is a model of what faith looks like. An elder is called to be someone who can say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." And you can tell they're out front in looking more and more like Jesus. We're all called to be conformed to the image of Christ. We're all called to become more like Jesus every single day. That is God's purpose. That is God's will. Do you want to know what God's will for your life is? This is what God's will for your life is: to become conformed to the image of Christ. That is his will. Romans 8:29, right after that very familiar verse that many people have memorized, "we know that all things work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose," great comfort in that verse, right? Everything is under the control of God, accomplishing his purpose, but what is his purpose? Verse 29 tells you, "For those whom He foreknew, He also called, those whom He called He also justified, those whom He justified He also glorified that we might become conformed to the image of Christ." He wants us to be completely like Jesus and an elder is a person who's making progress on that way, a man who is exemplary in his faith.

It's interesting, we're going to look at the three key passages, we just looked at one, that talk about the qualifications for elder. 1 Peter 5, there are three qualifications for elder. In 1 Timothy 3, I count 16 qualifications for elder. In Titus 1, there are 18 qualifications for elder. That makes a grand total of 37 qualifications for the office of elder. Now there's some overlap, there's some, you know, some repetition to make the point. Two of the 37 are related to skills. Two out of 37. Thirty-five out of 37 are about character. It's what an elder is. It's what an elder, what a man must be as an elder. Thirty-five out of 37. It doesn't mean that the two aren't important. No, they're essential, they are absolutely foundational but the two that relate to skill which is basically skill in the word, knowing the word of God, that's not going to be the kind of leadership the church needs unless the man is also becoming what he is teaching.

So what an elder must be, an exemplary Christian. 1 Peter 5, you see these three qualifications here are related to the motivation. Why does this man want to do the work? He exercises, he shepherds the flock of God exercising oversight not under compulsion but voluntarily according to the will of God. He's not doing it out of some kind of false

sense. He's doing it voluntarily to please the Lord. That's the first one. Then secondly, not for sordid gain but with eagerness. He's not doing it for some kind of financial benefit or for some kind of benefit of esteem or honor of men. No, he is doing it with eagerness. Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, he's not on some kind of power trip, he is proving to be an example to the flock. We've said he's an exemplary Christian, you see it right there, elders are called to be examples to the flock, to be types of Christ that others can follow.

Let's look at the other passages. 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and then we're going to look at Titus 1. I want to give you a little prep because there's so many of them we're not going to have time to go through them all, and I want to help you kind of think about the way the groups, they kind of group under four headings. We've seen this in the study we've been doing on Wednesday nights. We've been teaching on Wednesday nights a course for all of our men and our teenagers, teenage men, young men, on what's an elder supposed to be like, and we've decided we can do that and even having our teenagers and men who will never be elders because an elder is essentially what every Christian should be wanting to be like because an elder is just more like Jesus and everybody is called to be more like Jesus. But in that study, you have these 37 qualifications broken down into four headings, or these 35 character qualifications broken down into four headings. Remember I mentioned there's three in 1 Peter, 16 in 1 Timothy, 15 of which are about character, there's 18 in Titus, 17 of which are about character, so 35 total about character. It breaks down under four headings.

What's an elder to be? It talks about, first of all, integrity. There's a sense in which you look at the man's life and it's integrated. His faith is integrated into all of his life. There's consistency with what he says he believes and how he lives. Now this is not perfection, of course. Every man is still a sinner but there's a sense in which you see that there is a real sense of integrity in the life of this man. You'll hear these qualifications speak to integrity: above reproach, that is, without obvious stain; has a good reputation with outsiders; he's respectable; devout; sensible. So integrity categorizes those.

Then you have a look at his personal life. What an elder must be, this would be B. A) was integrity. B) is personal. What he must be personally. You'll hear things like this: loving, he loves what is good, he has a love for what really matters; he's prudent; temperate; not greedy; not a drunkard. He's a man who has his personal soul under control.

So integrity, his personal life, thirdly, his family life. He said look at his family life if you want to see if a man is being set apart by the Lord unto elder. And we're going to hear he's a husband of one wife, literally he's a one-woman man. This speaks of his character of his life at the present time is he's a man devoted to one woman and he has a track record of that for a number of years. You'll hear he keeps his children under control with dignity. He manages his own household well.

So look at his personal life, look at his integrity, his overall presentation of just the man you see, look at his family life, and then the fourth area, D) is relational. Look at his relational qualities. You'll hear this: gentle; peaceable, not quarrelsome. He doesn't enjoy

quarreling. Now he has to confront false teaching, he has to do it with strength but it's not his disposition to want to quarrel. He's gentle, peaceable, not quick-tempered, not pugnacious, not prone to fighting, and not lording it over. He doesn't lord it over, he proves to be an example. He's humble as a leader.

So being is before doing. I want you to hear, I'm going to take time to read these passages because I want you to hear each one of them and just hear the emphasis. 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Paul is telling Timothy, the young pastor, interesting again these are two passages from the pastoral epistles written to Timothy as a pastor, Titus, we're going to look at Titus 1, as a pastor, and emphasizing, "Listen, if you want to lead the church well as a pastor, make sure that you have the right kind of men in the office of elder, overseer, shepherd, and in the office of deacon/servant." We're looking at elder/overseer here. 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

1 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. 2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. 4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), 6 and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Turn over in 1 Timothy just past 2 Timothy and you'll find Titus, Titus 1, Paul writing again to another young pastor. He says in verse 5,

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

The character of the man, being like Christ. The elder can truly say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Again, not perfection but the direction in the sense that these men are out in front.

This is why it takes time to see this, that's why it's not a new convert. You don't put a new convert up in front of the church because, as 1 Timothy said, it exposes them to the

temptation of the devil, to the same condemnation incurred by the devil, that is, that they will think more highly of themselves than they ought and that they will become, through pride, deeply hurt in their walk with God. But you also need to see these things evidenced over time.

What an elder must be, that's key. The church needs to be led by elders who are like this, what an elder must be. The second point, though, is not just what an elder must be but what an elder must do. We're looking again at the three key words. What an elder must be that we just finished, point 1 was about elder, the word elder and the maturity of the believer. Point 2, what an elder must do, the word shepherd is the key word here and this speaks of responsibility. What's the elder responsible to do? What is the work of a spiritual shepherd? Or that's what an elder must do, he must do the work of a spiritual shepherd.

Interesting, let me just make one point of clarification here too. The word pastor is actually in English, what we've done is we've taken a Latin word, the Latin translation of poimen, poimen means shepherd, translate the Greek word poimen, the New Testament word for shepherd, everywhere you see it it's poimino or poimen, poimen the noun, poimino the verb, we translate it into English shepherd. Well, what happened is it got translated into Latin and you had pastor, and what happened then in English is we got the Latin word and the Greek word but they both mean exactly the same thing. It's two ways of saying the same thing. Now in our culture, pastor has come to mean something different, hasn't it, because meaning is use, meaning is what, you know, how you see a word used, but in reality the way we think about the word pastor needs to be informed by the Scriptures. Essentially elders are pastors because elders are shepherds. Pastors are elders. Elders are pastors. So you can make it, you know, essentially the three Greek words elder = shepherd = overseer, those three key words we're looking at. And where you have shepherd you can put another little parenthesis in there and put pastor. Elder = shepherd/pastor = overseer. These three words, three words for one office. And this word shepherd or pastor means the responsibility, the work of an elder. And pastor is a shepherd, a shepherd is a pastor. Elders are pastors.

Now what I want to do is as we think about the work of a shepherd, and we're going to look at some Scripture passages that show us this as well, but a shepherd's work can be thought of in four key tasks, four fundamental tasks that define the work of a shepherd. So here point 2, what an elder must do, there are four subpoints A through D.

The first thing that an elder must do if he's to shepherd the flock is he must feed the sheep. That's the first subpoint, A) feed. That is the work of a shepherd. You could put in parenthesis teach, obviously, because to feed the sheep is to teach the word, to feed the word of God because as Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." More important than the food we eat is the word of God taken into the soul. And so when Jesus in John 21:15-17, remember when he recommissions Peter after Peter had denied him three times? Peter denied him three times and the cock crowed and Jesus and Peter looked eyes across the courtyard and Peter was just grief-stricken, exactly what Jesus had told him, "Before the cock crows twice, you'll

deny Me three times." Peter's denied him three times, brokenhearted, dejected, he leaves. After the resurrection, sometime after the resurrection before the ascension Jesus appears to the disciples when they're out in the boat. He's on the seashore, he calls out to them, "Have you caught anything?" They haven't caught anything. He tells them to put the nets to the other side. They're coming in, they're done, there's no fish, they're all skilled fishermen, there's no fish, "We've been out here fishing, we know when there's no fish." He says, "Put the net on the other side." They put the net on the other side and, "Okay, let's give it a try." They pull fish in and they know it's the Lord and John says, "It's the Lord," and Peter realizes it's the Lord, he jumps out of the boat and he swims directly to the shore. He doesn't wait for the boat to get in there, he goes to meet Jesus.

Well, then you find suddenly he doesn't seem to go right up to Jesus. You don't hear of a conversation right away. The next thing you hear is they're eating breakfast. Jesus was cooking fish on the shore too. They got this massive catch of fish but he's over there cooking fish. He eats with them. The resurrected Christ eats with them and after breakfast he takes a walk with Peter. John, kind of lingering behind on the walk, and Peter is asked by the Lord one penetrating question, "Peter, do you love Me?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love You." "Feed My sheep." He asks him a second time, "Peter, do you love Me?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love You." "Shepherd My sheep." "Peter, do you love Me?" Peter exasperated that the Lord asked him a third time the same question, "You know all things. You know that I love you." He said, "Then feed My sheep." It took some time for Peter to realize that what he had done is he had given him the opportunity to reverse that threefold denial by three affirmations, "Yes, I love You. Yes, I love You. Yes, I love You." Complete reinstatement but what is the mission? "If you love Me," what are you to do? You're to shepherd the flock but the first verb and the last are the word that means feed, "Feed My sheep." Secondly, it's poimino from which we get poimen, "Shepherd My sheep." And the third is, "Feed My sheep."

The essence of shepherding is to feed the sheep, to teach the word of God. In fact, think about Psalm 23. We're called to be shepherds. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He's the Chief Shepherd as we saw in 1 Peter 5:4. The Chief Shepherd. But God himself is a shepherd. Quite likely the most favorite passage of Scripture probably for the church in all time, if we were to take a survey of all believers that have ever lived in every place, Psalm 23 would have to be in the top two or three. Probably, I would think maybe number 1. Think about what it says, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures." The first thing about the Shepherd, God, is he makes you lie down in green pastures. There's rest and there's food. There's abundance. He knows that what the sheep need is to eat. They need the word of God. We need the word of God more than we need anything else.

1 Peter 2:2, Peter exhorts those new believers, the same epistle we read from earlier, in chapter 2 he says be like newborn babes and earnestly desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow up in all respects of salvation. You need to earnestly like a baby desires milk, you need to desire the word and the church needs men who are set apart to teach the flock, to feed the flock. The great times of blight on the church are when there are no shepherds who teach the word. To experience what Amos talked about, God

speaks through Amos and says there will be a famine in the land, a famine for what? Not for food but for hearing the words of God.

So an elder must feed the sheep. He must do the work of a shepherd and the first aspect of shepherding is to feed. The second aspect to shepherding is to lead, to lead the sheep. You could put in parenthesis here, guide, provide guidance, lead. The idea is that the shepherd is out front. One of the wonderful things about this beautiful metaphor is that sheep are not driven, they are led. You drive cattle, you even drive a herd of horses, but you lead sheep. I mean, except in Australia where you put a dog and they chase them around, but the sheep have got to be a lot unhappier in Australia and New Zealand and everywhere else where they do that. Sheep need to be led.

You read about the Palestinian shepherds and how the bond of the shepherd and the sheep is such that the sheep know the shepherd's voice just like Jesus said in John 10, "My sheep know My voice and another they will not follow." You talk about like two or three shepherds gathering at a waterhole, their sheep are following them, they walk down, they lead them beside still waters. Take them to green pastures and they lead them beside still waters, they come to drink and then you'll see the sheep, three different flocks just become merged into one around the watering hole. "Oh, my goodness," as one guy talks about having witnessed this, he's like, "How are they ever going to get these three flocks back separated?" Simple, they're each going to make their call and they're going to walk away from the watering hole and each flock follows its respective shepherd. And the guy watched this unfold right before his eyes. They made their call, they called their sheep, and the sheep followed them.

So elders are to be leaders, they're to be saying, "Follow me as I follow Christ." There's a key word that's used, in fact, 1 Timothy, back to 1 Timothy for a moment, chapter 5, verse 17, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." Rule well is the word translated rule here literally means to stand in front, and it is used in such a way that it pictures authority, it pictures leadership, but it also is interesting even in the word itself it pictures being out in front. The same word is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 where it talks about have charge over, but in reality the idea is you're leading, you have charge over but you're out in front.

So elders are to lead the sheep but it also speaks of guiding the sheep, it's being aware of where the sheep are, and it's calling to them particularly at times, "Hey, wait a minute, you're off to the side." Sheep need to be reminded and so we all need to be in a church that has men who are leading like this, who are feeding us and who are leading us. That means that we have, you know, life is complicated, isn't it? Isn't it amazing how complicated life is? Like once you work through some really complicated issue and you figure it out, biblically you work through it and you labor through it, and it never happens again, like you're ready for it and therefore you never get it again. Maybe somebody else will need it and you can share it with them but it's like you're never going to come back around because God's already taught you that, he has other things to teach you.

But we find ourselves in difficult situations. You know, a woman, her husband is in an ungodly way mistreating her, what is she to do? Appeals to her husband, talks to Christian friends, at some point looks to the elders to help, for guidance. A man's wife has gone wayward on him, what is he to do? Well, the counsel of the elders is available. In fact, when you really understand it, the way we define or the way God teaches us through his word is that concepts in the Old Testament, we often don't think about this, you'll find sometimes word study books will focus too much on just the New Testament Greek usage of a word, I think it's a pitfall here because the writers of Scripture were all Jewish, I mean, almost all of them, and the ones that weren't were associated closely with Jews like Luke who was closely associated with Paul. So they thought in Jewish thought forms. They thought in Old Testament concepts so when the word elder comes out, it's not just the word presbuteros like dropped in, parachuted into their understanding, no, it goes along with all the Old Testament understanding of what an elder was. The Old Testament understanding begins back in Exodus 3 when God appears to Moses and says to him, "You're to go to Pharaoh and you're to go to talk to the elders of the nation of Israel and tell them that God has appeared to you. You're to go to those older, more mature Jews in the nation of Israel because if you talk to them, they're the ones the other people will follow."

So you have this concept and you see as you read through actually the rest of even Moses' ministry, you have this in Exodus 18 and Numbers 11 where God puts, in Numbers 11, puts the spirit that he had on Moses on the elders, 70 elders to help Moses shepherd the people. God's ideal was always for there to be leaders and maturity and we all have to grow up and we all need to be led. I mentioned last time, one of the things that's reality for us as elders is we all have to be under the authority of the other elders. We have to look to the other elders to guide us otherwise we're not being biblical and we are disqualified from being an elder. If you're not under authority, you will not be in authority. God is not mocked.

But leading and guiding, that's the second aspect of what an elder must do. He feeds first, secondly he leads, thirdly, a shepherd guards. Turn with me to Acts 20, another one of the key passages that shows the work of an elder but also shows, again, how these three words are all interchangeable, they all are one office. Acts 20:17. This is Paul's third missionary journey, probably 10-12 years after his first journey, probably 6-7 years after he planted the church in Ephesus. He now is in a town not too far away, Miletus, about 20 miles, and he calls, he sends a word to the Ephesian elders to come visit him in Miletus. So we see the church in Ephesus that he planted, he made sure they had elders too. But an elder is supposed to guard. In verse 17, "From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them," he started talking to them but we'll skip on down to verse 28. He's still talking to them when he says this in verse 28, "Be on guard for yourselves," that's an imperative, a command. This is what you must do, you must on guard for yourselves "and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God." You see all three words again. It's elders, he tells them they're overseers and they're called to shepherd.

But the important thing is you must, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Why must you be on guard? Look at verse 29, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." Wolves, what is that? Look what he says next, "and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." He says the danger is false teaching. That's what wolves are. That's what destroys the church is when false teaching comes into the church, and the elders are charged with being on guard for themselves and the flock, to not let false teaching into their hearts and their lives and not let it into the church. Verse 31, "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

Guard the flock from false teaching. When we read from Titus earlier, Titus 1, we stopped at verse 9, if you read on it's quite instructive. Remember all the qualifications from 5 to 9, verse 9, the last qualification is actually one skill basically, "holding fast the faithful word," they are men of the book. Elders must be men of the word. They hold fast the faithful word "which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." You see, that's dealing with the false teachers, that's guarding against the wolves, that is driving out the wolves from the flock.

The idea of protecting is in Psalm 23 too, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." The rod and the staff are the shepherd's instrument of defense. That's what he kills, David killed the bear with, killed the lion with his staff. The shepherd knows how to drive away the predator, to club the predator. Now spiritually, of course, that doesn't mean we really do that, we don't club any false teachers, we don't beat them up with a stick but, listen, we beat them up with the word of God. You speak the word and you expose the error and the goal is to bring them to repentance. It's to be done in humility but it's to be done with the kind of strength and at times a sense of ferocity even.

But I love what Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:24, in fact, it's just a page over from where you are right now. You can just turn back one page or maybe it's right across from this, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged," look what he says, "with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." One of the things that the elder knows is the false teacher is in the snare of Satan and the real enemy is Satan himself, not even the false teacher. The real enemy is the devil who has deceived this poor soul. But that said, you must protect the other sheep from that man, from that teaching.

We all need to be protected, we all need to be fed, we all need to be led, we all need to be protected, and elders are called to do that, and there are times where we call out false

teaching and as members of the church, we do well to listen to our elders. We call out things that you may not think are problems but you need to search the Bible clearly to see if we're in error and if we are, correct us. And if not, give the benefit of the doubt to the elders because God has put them in place to see things that the sheep don't see. The elder knows the way of the wolf. God gives that grace.

Now let me say one thing. We're all called to shepherd one another. This is one of the beauties of, like I said, there's this tension between the reality that the ground is level at the foot of the cross where all direct access to God, we're all called to be, we're all actually called to shepherd every other believer. When Cain asked that question to God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" He expected a no, but in reality if God had answered directly it would be yes. And the New Testament makes clear we're all responsible to look out for people around us. Hebrews 3:12, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God, but encourage one another." It's not just saying about you, yourself. Of course, don't let an evil unbelieving heart be in you but he's saying, "Take care, brethren, that it not be in any one of you," plural. That's one of those places where if English had followed our superior way of speaking in the South, it would be "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of y'all a sinful unbelieving heart." Because it's plural. It's the idea of look around you and make sure that there's not a sinful unbelieving heart in one of those around you. That's why Matthew 18:15 says, "If your brother sins go to him." Right after verse 12-14, Matthew 18, "If any man has 100 sheep and one of them strays, does he not leave the 99 and go after the one and rejoice more over the one when he has restored that sheep than over the 99 that have not gone astray?" Yes. "I tell you, my Father in heaven is the same way." And then he says, "If your brother sins go."

So he says you and I, when we see a brother in sin, we have a shepherding responsibility to go and so it means we all are called to shepherd but we are called to shepherd as we follow shepherds. Do you see that? We're all called to shepherd because we're all called to be like the Good Shepherd, Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. We're all called to be more like him and we're going to see next week, we're all called to be servants too. Every one of us need to follow the example of deacons. We're all called to serve just like the deacons are serving as they lead us in what it means to look more and more like Jesus who is God's ultimate servant, the suffering servant of Isaiah. The key passage, one of the most high honorific titles, it doesn't seem like that initially but it comes to be clear that that's it. He is the servant of the Lord, Jesus, the preeminent servant of the Lord.

So shepherds, then, are to guard and to protect. They're to feed. They're to lead. They're to guard. And then D), point 2, what must an elder do? Feed, lead, guard, and tend. Tend or you could put fold. It's hard to really give this one a good title. It needs a little explanation. The idea is that elders are responsible to look after, account for, count, check on, bind up wounds, mend hurting distressed sheep. They are to counting. If there's 100 sheep, we need to make sure there's 100 here. If there's only 99, we have a problem. And the elders are to help the body to care for one another that way and we're to help those who are in distress.

James 5:14, I mentioned this verse earlier. James, just like Peter, assumes there are elders in the church. He says, "Is anyone among you sick?" James 5:14, "Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him." So when someone is in distress, unable to come to worship, they can call for the elders of the church and they are to go and to pray over them, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The idea is physical healing can happen but even more than that, as we saw when we preached this a few years ago, the idea really is that the prayer of faith is helping that person to find out what God is doing in their life and to submit fully to the will of God and to give glory to God to the ultimate in that circumstance. And the elders are called to help that person to do that. We're all called to do that, again, though, right?

So elders, the work of an elder is to shepherd. A shepherd feeds, leads, guards and tends. What an elder must be we looked at, that's the word elder, what an elder must do, shepherd. Thirdly, our final point, what an elder must answer for. What an elder must answer for, the word overseer. This word overseer, episcopos, means literally to oversee. That's scopos, scope, to scope out, to see, to watch. Upon is what epi means, e-p-i, to watch upon, to look upon, to watch over, to oversee.

The word came to mean in contemporary usage at that time a manager, a leader, someone who was accountable for certain resources and the church, as we saw in Acts 20:28, when he says, "Be on guard for yourselves and the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers," to shepherd the flock, the idea is the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, he's put you over the church and you must give account for the church. This is one of the most frightening parts of this, I say as an elder. Essentially what an elder must answer for is the spiritual well-being of the entire flock of God under his care. The spiritual well-being of the entire flock of God's people under his care.

A verse that expounds this, if you're still there in James, just turn over one book previous to that to Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." So the call to be under authority is rooted in the fact that the elders are accountable for it. They keep watch. Another way of saying it, not exactly the word episcopos but the same idea, they're watching over and they're accountable.

One of the reasons that we, I think, biblically apply the biblical principle of church membership, it's not something you find in the Bible. You may have heard people say you don't see people signing a membership. Well, no you don't but you do see in the New Testament the clear understanding that people who come to Christ become a part of a clearly identifiable flock, a church. And it's true, if you don't have the church for your mother, it's questionable that you have God as your Father. I can't remember if it was Augustine, I think somebody else said that before he did, but anyway it's true. If you come to Jesus and you don't love the church, there's something wrong with your

relationship with Jesus. Now it doesn't mean that every single person that you find the case isn't a believer, but they should be willing to hear God's voice and when you tell them the truth they should understand, "Hey, Jesus is building His church. This is what He's doing in the world." So you need to be part of it.

Well, one of the ways that we think that that applies in this particular day and age is through church membership. When someone works through the membership class, they find out about the church and then they have a testimony of their own personal relationship with Christ, they've been baptized as a believer and they want to unite with our fellowship, they come under the authority of the church. They basically say, "I am covenanting with all of the other believers here to shepherd one another and to follow the leadership of the leaders in the church, the elders and the deacons." In fact, the fourth question in the membership class is basically the wording is, "Do you promise to support the church in its worship and ministry, and do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of this body?" That's the fourth membership vow. You'll hear that next week. There's someone joining next week, a couple joining and so you'll hear that, and that's what we're talking about, we're submitting to the authority of a church and the elders are then accepting a special responsibility for those who have come under their care.

Give an account, he says, have to answer. Who is adequate for these things? This is one of the challenges for us as elders and I find it with other pastors I talk to, the way to lead the church, you know, God gives his word with such clarity, the broad strokes are here, the broad brushstrokes are here but the actual, what does it actually look like? How do you do this? Pray for us for wisdom. We've tried different ways through the years. We had, used to have all the families divided up among the elders. Then we decided that wasn't really tenable as the church grew. We didn't have enough elders to really be able to do that and so now our elders are leading various ministries and they shepherd through that, and the idea is we do talk about spiritual needs when we get together for meetings, we pray for those that are in, trying to spend more time doing this in our meetings, we've realized that this is something that's key, but we're to oversee the affairs of the whole church. We meet twice a month usually for about 3-3 ½ hours each time. Wednesday nights, first and third Wednesday we're usually back there until...we always talk about getting out at 10 or 10:30 and it never happens. If it does, we'll send out an alert to everyone. It will be, Jesus is about to come home, come get us and take us home because it's never happened.

But the work is so important and even as we read, as I prepared this, this week, I'm hit with even greater the weight of the work. It's much more serious and I tend to forget how important it is. So pray for us to be earnest in our work. Pray for us to have the heartbeat of Christ, to realize the church is precious. He purchased it with his blood, every soul. And to have the tenderness and compassion that beats for the weakest believer who's suffering under the weight of trials or under the weight of sin, and just to be able to speak the word, to shepherd the word, to love, to speak the truth in love. And then to help all of you, all of us become better at that. The beauty of God's design, it is glorious but the carrying out of it unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. So

God must do this. May God help us to be this kind of leaders and may God raise up others to join us.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we give You praise, honor, all glory, because Your ways are so exceedingly wonderful and marvelous. When we look at the way that You deal with people, You don't treat us as our sins deserve, You made a way to deal with our iniquities, take them off of us and to put them on Christ, to take our punishment, the suffering Servant to be crucified in our place, getting what we deserved so that He then may give us what He has merited, what He has deserved, acceptance and love in the presence of God, and You bring us to be a part of a body, to be a part of a worshiping community, to be a temple that's being edified and built up and to a place to offer spiritual sacrifices to the Lord, and we come and we realize how far short we fall. O God, help us. You are able, Lord, to make us what You want us to be. Help us to seek You more fervently with all of our hearts, to pray more earnestly. We pray for the men that You are setting apart to the office of elder, those who are now presently serving, others who You will be bringing on. May they be men of Christian maturity, may we all be men who take the responsibility of the work of a shepherd with great seriousness and solemnity and may we understand that we will give an account and may we be faithful. How grateful we are for the promise faithful is He who calls you, He also will do it. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*