

1. Background

(start with some context scriptures - Jesus as the Chief Shepherd and then discuss our role as under shepherds. We must always remember that it is his flock, that he is the Good Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd, and we only take on our role as elders and pastors under Him and we are answerable to Him):

a. Matthew 9: 35-36:

“35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

b. Mark 6: 34-44:

34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

35 By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. 36 Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

37 But he answered, “You give them something to eat.”

They said to him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”

38 “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.”

When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.”

39 Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. 42 They all ate and were satisfied, 43 and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. 44 The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.”

c. John 10: 1 -16:

“1 Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5But they will

never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." 6Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

7Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. 9I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.^a They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

11"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

14"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

2. What is a church?

- a. The word church in the Bible comes from the Greek word "ecclesia", which means a called out company or assembly. Wherever it is used in the Bible it refers to people. It can be a mob (Acts 19:30-41), the children of Israel (Acts 7:38), and the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22; Ephesians 5:25, 32).
- b. We see the word church used three different ways: First, as the body of Christ, **the church is often defined as a local assembly or group of believers** (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1-2). Second, it is defined as the body of individual living believers (1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13). Finally, it is defined as the universal group of all people who have trusted Christ through the ages (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:23-27).

3. Why have elders in a church?

- a. The Bible says that elders should be appointed in every town (every church fellowship in every town) - back in the early days of the church each town just had one church just like they just had one Jewish synagogue. As the church grew more church fellowships would or should arise through growth of the church in those towns, not because of denominationalism:
- b. Titus 1:5:

"5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished **and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.** 6 An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. 8Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright,

holy and disciplined. 9He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

c. Acts 14:23:

“23 Paul and Barnabas **appointed elders for them in each church** and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.”

- d. Note that the elders were appointed by God through the Apostles. In the modern church today elders should first be recognised before their appointment by the church as being qualified for the role. However, they should only ever be appointed by God.

4. What is an elder anyway, and why should I care?

- a. According to the New Testament, elders are responsible for the primary leadership and oversight of a church. The function and role of an elder is well summarized by Alexander Strauch in his book *Biblical Eldership*: “Elders **lead** the church [1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1-2], **teach and preach** the Word [1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9], **protect** the church from false teachers [Acts 20:17, 28-31], **exhort and admonish** the saints in sound doctrine [1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:13-17; Titus 1:9], **visit the sick and pray** [James 5:14; Acts 6:4], and **judge doctrinal issues** [Acts 15:6]. In biblical terminology, **elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church**”.
- b. “Elder” and “pastor” are not two different offices. As John Piper argues in section five of the booklet “Biblical Eldership,” they are simply two different words for the same office. He gives three reasons. First, in Acts 20:28, elders are encouraged in the “pastoral” duties of overseeing and shepherding. Second, in 1 Peter 5:1-2, elders are exhorted to “shepherd” the flock of God that is in their charge, which is the role of a pastor. Third, in Ephesians 4:11, the one time that the word pastor occurs in the NT, pastors are treated as one group with teachers. This suggests that the chief role of the pastor is to feed the flock through teaching, which is a primary role of elders (Titus 1:9). Hence, the NT seems to indicate that “pastor” is another name for “elder.” An elder is a pastor, and a pastor is an elder.
- c. Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 is also instructive on the role of elders:

“28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God,[a] which he bought with his own blood.[b] 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”

d. According to Paul's speech then elders are to:

- i. **Keep watch** - both over their own lives and the lives of those in the church where they serve as elders;
- ii. **Shepherd the church** - there is much that this word implies and we should unpack it in a moment;
- iii. **Guard against "distortion of the truth"** - this involves teaching correct doctrine and protecting the church from doctrinal error.

e. There are four Greek words used in the New Testament to refer to elders as follows:

i. **'Ruler' (prostatis; noun form) 'Rule' (proistami; verb form)**

- Several different Greek words are translated in our New Testaments by the one English word "rule." Prostatis/proistami is one of these words. Prostatis means to assist, to join with, to protect, to represent, to care for, to help, to further (Kittle, p. 700-703); to stand before as a defender, to be guardian or protector of, to champion (Liddel/Scott, p. 1526, 1545).
- 1 Timothy 3:4,5 KJV: A bishop must be "one that ruleth (i.e. protects; takes care of; causes to stand) well his own house, ... (For if a man know not how to rule [i.e. protect; take care of; cause to stand] his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)."
- 1 Timothy 5:17: When proistami is understood as "upholding, caring for, and causing to stand," the context of 1 Timothy 5:17 suggests a meaning that, though not conveyed by our English translations, flows naturally from the preceding verses. Verse 17 - **"Let the elders that rule (i.e. protect; take care of; cause to stand) well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine"**.

ii. **"Bishop" (episkopos; noun form - episkeptomai; verb form)**

- The Greek word episkopos, often translated "bishop" or "overseer," means "one who looks upon, considers, has regard for, is concerned for, or cares for something or someone (Arndt/Gingrich p. 298-299; Kittles, Vol. II, p. 599f).
- In the King James Version of the English New Testament, the word "bishop" occurs about six times with virtually no contextual clues as to its meaning. Examples are Philippians 1:1 ("Paul and Timothy, ... to all the saints ... with the bishops and deacons ..." KJV); 1 Timothy 3:2 ("... a bishop then must be blameless" KJV); Titus 1:7 ("a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God ..." KJV). Other occurrences include Acts 1:20; 1 Peter 2:25; and 1 Timothy 3:1. However, other texts contain clear clues as to the meaning of episkopos.
- Acts 15:36 NIV: Paul and Barnabas "bishops" the churches they had established: "Let us go back and visit (i.e. care for) the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."
- Acts 6:3 KJV: Paul told the early church to "bishops" themselves: "look you out (i.e. consider) among you seven men of honest report.... "

iii. **'Pastor' (poimaino; verb form - poiman; noun form)**

- The Greek word *poimaino/poiman*, often translated "shepherd" or "pastor," means "one who feeds, leads and guides with tender care and nurturing."
- Ephesians 4:11 says:

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers"
- In Ezekiel 34, Old Testament leaders were condemned as shepherds who plundered the flock: "You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally" (verse 4). Prophetically Ezekiel speaks of a day when God "will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them" (verses 23, 24).
- David is the biblical prototype of a good pastor shepherd who is willing to give his life to protect his sheep (I Samuel 17:34f).
- John 10:11 & 14: In these verses Jesus accepts Ezekiel's prophecy as speaking of Himself: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."
- Much more is involved in shepherding than merely feeding the sheep. The Greek word *"bosko"* means simply "to feed" as the prodigal son did for the hogs in Luke 15:15. However **"poimaino" includes the full realm of caretaking that a shepherd does for the sheep - feeding, caring for, guiding, guarding, and protecting** (Trench, p. 85; Arndt/ Gingrich, p. 144).
- In the familiar exchange between Jesus and Peter in John 21:15-17, Jesus asks Peter to both **feed** (*boske*) and **shepherd** (*poimaine*) His sheep:

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"
Peter: "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."
Jesus: "Feed (*boske*) my lambs."
Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"
Peter: "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."
Jesus: "Take care of (*poimaino*) my sheep."
Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you love me?"
Peter: "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."
Jesus: "Feed (*boske*) my sheep."

iv. 'Elder' (*presbuteros*; noun form - *presbeuo*; verb form)

- "Elder" (*presbuteros*) is a generic noun used frequently in the Bible and secular literature to refer to the age of a man. This older one could have been good, bad, or indifferent. For example, in Luke 15:25 KJV, the Prodigal Son had an elder brother.
- Strong's Greek 4245 *presbýteros* - "properly, a mature man having seasoned judgment (experience); an elder."
- The NT specifies elders are men. The feminine singular of the Greek word, *presbytera*, never occurs in the Bible. The feminine plural, *presbyteras*, occurs in 1 Tim 5:2. It refers to aged women, i.e. not women with an official church office or title.
- Paul (Ephesians 6:20, Philemon vs. 9), Peter (I Peter 5:1), and John (II John, vs. 1) each referred to themselves as elders. Paul called himself, "an ambassador (i.e. old man) in chains" (Ephesians 6:20), and "an old

man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus" (Philemon 9). According to human judgment, Paul was a powerless old man in chains; but Paul, the elder, was powerful in his portrayal of Christ by example of life.

- Over the years, the word "elder" took on the additional meaning of an honorary title used for a member of the Sanhedrin, the group of religious leaders who ruled Israel at the time of Christ (Mark 11:27; also see Kittles, Vol. 7, p. 659-660).
- The Elders in the Sanhedrin bought and paid for the betrayal (Matthew 27:3) and perjured testimony that killed Jesus; they oppressed the powerless as their predecessors had done in the time of Ezekiel. Peter, Paul and John all warned that even within the church some leaders would become corrupt, dominant people who would intimidate and oppress the powerless (I Timothy 4: 1-3; II Thessalonians 2:1-12; II John vs. 9-10; Acts 20:17, 28-31).
- Peter wrote: "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers -not because you must but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being an example to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (I Peter 5:1-4).

5. What are the qualifications for eldership?

a. 1 Timothy 3: 1-7:

"Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. 2 Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full[a] respect. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. 7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."

6. Can women be elders of a church?

- a. This question is answered differently by different churches as it involves an interpretation of passages over which different theologians have taken different views.
- b. The elders of Northern Hills Church are all men. That position is consistent with:
 - i. A conservative and literal interpretation of bible passages such as 1 Timothy 3: 1-7 (eg an elder must be "faithful to his wife"; "he must manage his family" - the word "he" is used and the context is that the elder is always a man).

- ii. The practice of the first century church. The first century church that Peter, Paul, Timothy and the Apostles managed only knew of male eldership. It would have been a completely foreign concept to them to have a female elder.
- c. So whilst we recognise that other churches today have women elders that position requires an interpretation of scripture which seems to contradict the literal interpretation of the key passages on the qualification for eldership and is at odds with the practice of the first century church which is the model God has set up for us to follow.