

We Need Elders

Everton Park: 15th June 2008

Today, we as a Session, have called for more elders for the church, here in Everton Park.

With that in mind, I want to preach on the matter today so that we all know what we are looking for, when we go looking for elders.

If we were back in high school, electing the final year prefects, then maybe we would just treat this a popularity contest. But I trust we all understand that this is not a popularity contest.

If we were electing office bearers in social club or society, then maybe we would think in terms of, “O, so-and-so hasn’t had a go yet. Let’s give him a go.” But I trust we all understand the eldership is not a matter of just giving everyone a go.

(That was the mistake King Uzziah made, wasn’t it, that we were looking at in the Bible studies recently. He felt it just wasn’t fair if everyone didn’t get to have a go at being a priest in the Old Testament – especially if you were king !)

If we were looking to elect leaders in a business organisation today, then we would be look for certain organisational skills, and expertise in various business matters. But the church is no ordinary organisation, it is not a business in that sense; and ordinary organisational skills are not what we are looking for here.

It is: The Church of God !

So, what are we looking for ?

First we are looking for elders.

1. We need elders in the church today

Why do we need elders at all ?

Why not just have one leader – the benevolent dictator ? It would, after all, be far easier to manage (for the benevolent dictator, at least) if you didn’t have to always be consulting with others.

Or why not go to the other extreme, and just have a pure democracy, where everyone gets equal say ? After all, the institution of democracy is a worthy institution: It’s right up there with “apple pie and motherhood”, isn’t it ?

So, why do we have just a small group of men, known as “elders” to care for the church ?

Well, we do so because that is what the Word of God directs us to do.

If we are to care for the Church of God, we are bound to do so according to the Word of God.

When Paul was on his 1st Missionary Journey, he visited Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Asia Minor, preaching the gospel, and making many disciples.

And then, once those churches had had opportunity to become settled, it says (Acts 14:23), that Paul and Barnabas “*returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch... and appointed elders in every church.*” Then they “*prayed with fasting, and commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*”

His first duty in caring for these churches, and providing for their ongoing welfare, was to see that they each were under the oversight of properly qualified elders.

Or, look at what Paul instructs Titus here:

- v 5a

The gospel had come to Crete.

Churches had been established in every city.

But still something was lacking – what was that ?

- v 5a

→ v 5b

As long as there were no elders in these churches, something was seriously lacking.

They needed elders to care for them.

It was not enough that they function as some sort of democracy. The Biblical pattern is care of the church by functioning elders.

This doesn't mean we don't all have a responsibility for each other.

There are many passages in Scripture that remind us that we are all to look out for each other.

Heb 3:12-13, *“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”*

Or, what Paul says to all believers in 1 Thes 5:14, *“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.”*

... to mention just a few.

We are not to abdicate our responsibility in this regard, and leave it all up to the elders.

But, nonetheless, it is the elders that ultimately must care for, and answer for, the state of the church.

One other important truth you'll notice here is that Paul tells Titus there are to be a number of elders set apart in every church, in every city:

- v 5

God's purpose for the church is not to have a single elder – pastor, minister, bishop – whatever you want to call him, in every church; but a number of elders in every church.

Nor can you say (as they do in some churches), “Yes, you might have many elders; but you only have one bishop.”

Rather, you can see here, that the term “elder” and the term “bishop” refer to the same thing; they are exactly the same:

- v 5

→ v 7a

Paul is not distinguishing “elders” and “bishops” here.

Rather he is saying they are the same thing – whatever you might call them.

If you call him an “elder” you are alluding to his experience.

I realise that is a relative term. But whoever we set apart as elders should, at very least be, recognisably men of some experience.

On the other hand, if you call the man a “bishop”...

The word “bishop” simply means “overseer” – so you are emphasising his function.

The “bishop” oversees the welfare of the souls in the church.

So, already, we are saying something about what sort of men we are looking for:

- We are looking for men with some experience.

- We are looking for men who will take seriously their responsibility to care for the souls of those in the church.

- We are looking for men who can work with other men, other elders; the eldership is no place for the individualist who cannot work with others.

But, we can say more than this:

2. We need elders whose heart is in the work

1 Tim 3:1

Our English Bibles there, twice use the word “desire”.

In fact, in the original, they are two different words.

But they are each very powerful words:

The first word, “desire”, there: *“If the man desires the position of a bishop...”* means to “reach for”, or to “stretch out”, after something.

Mr Vine says, “It signifies the mental effort of stretching oneself out for a thing, of longing after it.”

O.K. ?

You think of someone drowning, reaching out with all his might, with almost superhuman effort, to grasp a rope that is thrown to him.

He really wants that rope; he is stretching out for it.

The second word, “desire”: *“...he desires a good work”* – is even more descriptive, if that is possible.

In fact, it is often translated in a bad sense, meaning to “covet”, to “lust after”.

It usually describes something you want passionately want, you’ve just got to have it.

I’m not suggesting either of these words is used with quite this extreme force here – or that you are not fit to be an elder if you don’t have this all-consuming, passionate lust for the office.

In fact, I think if that were the case, there would be something not quite right.

As with all words, so these words can be used to express something of a range of intensity.

But I do think, at very least, they tell us that no man should be set apart to the eldership whose heart is not in it.

A man who says he’ll “become an elder”, but he “doesn’t really want to”, but, yes, if he “has to...” – and generally plays the reluctant maiden...

... certainly should not be in the eldership.

If you are to become an elder your heart must be in it.

And, if it isn’t, please don’t pursue it.

Because, I can assure you, no man lasts long in the eldership who enters upon that office anything less than wholeheartedly.

But it is unrealistic to assume that your heart will always be in it to the same extent.

It doesn’t take many discouragements in the eldership before you begin to lose heart, and maybe even want to give up.

I’m not saying it is like that all the time.

It shouldn’t be like that all the time.

But there will be times when you do just want to give up.

→

3. We need elders who will persevere even when (at times) their heart is not in the work

And Paul reminds us of this in a rather oblique way, by another requirement he gives – which is in both 1 Tim 3, and Tit ch 1:

I.e. *“A bishop [or, “elder”] must be the husband of one wife...”*

Or (there's no word "the" there...
He must be (lit.) a "one wife husband."
Or (another way you could put it): a "one woman man".

This expression has been variously understood over the centuries.
Some interpretations we can deal with fairly quickly:

Some would say you can't make a single man an elder if he is not married, or if his wife has died. But that would exclude Paul or even Jesus, from the eldership – so we can dismiss that interpretation.

Certainly it is a great advantage to be married; it is very hard to be an elder if you are not married.

But we can't say a person who is not married couldn't be an elder.

Others would say this excludes a polygamist from being an elder.

In other words, if the gospel comes to a society that practises polygamy (as was the case where we were in Kenya) then you would admit a polygamist who was converted into the church; but you wouldn't allow that man to become a leader, or an elder, in the church.

I don't disagree with that; and we certainly upheld that principle when we were in Kenya.

But again, I doubt that that is what Paul particularly had in mind here. Because even in the culture Paul lived in when he wrote this, polygamy was not common; and certainly there is nothing to suggest that Christians anywhere practised it.

Others suggest it may apply to those who are divorced, and have remarried.

But again, the Bible is discriminating in this matter. Elsewhere it clearly distinguishes between the guilty and the innocent party in divorce, and equally clearly allows the innocent party to remarry.

So it is unlikely that that is particularly what Paul is speaking about here.

But, when it comes to the guilty party, that is another question.

What Paul is emphasising here is the importance of faithfulness – proven faithfulness in his marriage – in the man who is to be made an elder.

He has made a commitment to his wife...

And he is going to stick by that commitment come what may...

He isn't quick to abandon a commitment he has made, even when his feelings are up and down, or all over the place, or even (sometimes) not even there...

He sticks to his commitment...

That is the sort of man you make an elder.

You can see then the relevance of this to the eldership.

Just as in marriage:

- sometimes your feelings burn passionately for your spouse: you desire her, you "stretch out" to her, you (whatever the Christian equivalent of) "lust after" her is...

- at other times, your feelings ebb: maybe you're not getting on so well, she's done something to offend you, she's rubbed you up the wrong way...

But you hang in there...

You're not like some starry-eyed Hollywood bimbo, who bails out of a marriage, because (she says), "But I'm no longer in love."

"I mean, how can you stay in a marriage when you no longer feel love for the other...?"

No, you hang in there:

You rebuild the relationship. You rekindle the love.,

Why ?

Because you are committed to the relationship, that is why !

The relationship is feelings. But it is not just about feelings.

You are a “one woman man”, and you’re going to see it through with this one woman.

If that is your relationship to your wife in marriage, then you are suited (at least, in that respect) to the eldership.

You’ll keep going, even when your heart isn’t in it – because you know that a relationship like this, or the relationship you sustain to the souls in your care, doesn’t just depend upon where your feelings are.

A relationship like this is greater than your feelings.

A relationship like this is a commitment that transcends your feelings.

By the way, I’m not saying that it is never legitimate for a man to retire from the eldership.

I believe that is legitimate when you get too old, or too infirm.

But normally, apart from that, the on-woman-man keeps going even when the going gets tough.

4. We need elders who know how to communicate what they know

i. Elders need to know

There is a certain body of truth that elders need to know.

The principal function of elders is:

- to teach the truth in teaching situations,
- to apply the truth in pastoral situations.

In Eph 4, v 11 elders are referred to as “*pastors and teachers*”.

Both those functions, pastoring and teaching, require the elder to know the truth he is teaching, and the truth he is applying, in pastoral situations.

In Acts ch 6, the apostles, foreshadowing the later work of the elders, contrast their work with that of the deacons.

And they say: “Our work, that we must apply ourselves continually to, is the work of prayer and the ministry of the word.”

And here, in both *Timothy* and *Titus*, Paul emphasises that one of the qualifications for the eldership, is that a man be “*apt to teach*”.

He then expands on this in *Titus*:

- v 9

Note that qualification: “...*holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught.*”

The NASB is perhaps more accurate there: “...*holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching.*”

Paul refers to a specific body of teaching there – that the elders were to know and be familiar with.

This would be the teaching of the apostles which, by the time Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus, had become an identifiable body of instruction.

In his Epistle to the Romans Paul refers to this as “*that form of doctrine to which you were delivered*”; and “*the doctrine which you learned*”.

In *Timothy* and *Titus* he refers to it as the “*doctrine*” or the “*the teaching*”.

Or sometimes: the “*faith*”, or the “*truth*”.

Or, see: 2 Tim 1:13

Then, 2 Tim 1:14...

NIV here: “Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”

There was a “deposit” of truth around, even at this early stage in the church’s history, that embodied the teaching of the apostles, and was variously known as: as the “*doctrine*”, or (as here, in Tit 1:9) the “*the teaching*”, or the “*faith*”, or the “*truth*”, “*the pattern of sound words*”, “*the deposit*.”

It was this “body of truth” that lay at the core of the church’s teaching.

And it was this “body of truth” that lay at the foundation of the pastoral counsel that pastors gave to souls in need of help.

It was required therefore that anyone who was to be set apart to the eldership be familiar with that body of truth.

He had to know it, love it, and hold fast to it.

Today there are various ways the church has sought to summarize that body of truth – notably in the various historic Confessions of the Faith that have come out of the church down through the ages.

We, for our part, have sought to summarize that body of truth in our own Westminster Confession.

And we therefore require, of any man who is to be set apart as an elder in this church, that he subscribe to the Westminster Confession as embodying the key doctrines of Scripture.

But, as we see here, it is not enough that a man just know the truth:

ii. Elders need to know how to communicate what they know

A man might be the most knowledgeable Christian in all the world...

He may have a string of letters after his name from every university in the world...

More importantly, he may be thoroughly conversant with, and committed to, this “body of truth”, this “teaching”, we have just been referring to...

But, unless he can clearly communicate that truth, he will be useless as an elder.

Because his work as an elder will principally revolve around being able to communicate the truth to souls under his care.

He must be “able to teach”, as it says here.

And unless he has that gift of clear, concise, communication (as I say) he will be useless as an elder.

Paul develops that further here, in Tit ch 1:

- v 9a

→ v 9b... (lit.) “*that he may have the power, the might, the ability...*”

→ v 9c

There is a double ability there, isn’t there:

There is the ability to teach, to persuade, to exhort, to convict.

And there is also the ability to do so “*by sound doctrine*.”

- Not by cheap and meaningless phrases – such as get bandied about in cheap and meaningless psychology circles today; and which are being increasingly picked up in so many cheap and meaningless (so-called) “Christian” books today.

- But by counsel which is firmly grounded in, and is based upon, the “sound doctrine” of the

Word of God.

But, basing what he has to say upon such sound doctrine, the elder then must have the ability to express himself in such a way, to communicate, that he is able both to “*exhort*” and “*convict*” – yes, even those who contradict, who may be less than ready to hear what he has to say.

And, if that is so, how much more he should be able to communicate with those who do want to hear what he has to say.

Of course, with those who oppose him, he may not always win the day.

The fact that he fails to convince them doesn’t necessarily mean he lacks communication skills.

Paul put it this way, in 2 Tim ch 2:

- vv 24-25a

→ vv 25b-26

But that leads us to another qualification we look for in elders:

5. We need elders who can rule themselves

The first, and most important, qualification for someone who would rule others is that he can rule himself. He must be able to control himself.

And, by that, I don’t just mean control his actions.

He must also learn to control his feelings.

This comes out in what Paul says to Timothy, there in ch 3, v 3:

- “*temperate*”

- “*sober-minded*”

In Titus, Paul says the elder is to be “*self-controlled*” (in v 8) – a word which means (lit.) “inward strength.”

To rule yourself – your actions, your feelings, your passions – requires the greatest inward strength.

It says, in Prov 16:32, “*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.*”

In particular, Paul lists the Big Five of self-control, in the previous verse:

- v 7

- “*not self-willed*”: Leadership brings with it power, and power gives you the opportunity to get your own way – you are to bring this under control.

- “*not quick-tempered*”: The meaning is being irritable, or impatient.

- “*not violent*”: On the contrary, being gentle – as Paul puts it in Timothy.

- “*not given to wine*” ...

This is the one area where Paul becomes quite specific, where an elder must exercise self-control – and that is, in his use of alcohol.

In both Timothy and Titus, Paul says a requirement of the eldership is that a man is not to be “*given to wine*”.

Please note that this is saying more than simply, “An elder is not to be drunk”. If Paul had wished simply to say that, then there was another Greek word (a word which he often uses elsewhere) which means just that.

But, instead he uses this peculiar expression: an elder is not to be “*given to wine*”.

Or (lit.) an elder is not to be “beside wine”, or “at the wine”.

The elder is commanded not to be “at the alcohol”.

What does that mean ?

Whatever it does mean, at very least it has to mean that an elder is to have thought through, soberly and deliberately, what a responsible use of alcohol is... “wine” being the alcoholic drink (if not the only alcoholic drink) of the day.

It would be good, in fact, if not only leaders in the church, but all Christians thought through this question: soberly and deliberately, as to what is a responsible use of alcohol.

Sadly, the sum total of many Christians’ thinking on this matter today is something like:

- “Jesus drunk [or, they assume He drunk] wine at the wedding in Cana back in His day; so it is O.K. for me to drink alcohol today.”

Or:

- “Paul told Timothy to take a little bit of medicine that had alcohol in it; so it is O.K. for me to drink copious amounts of alcohol socially today.”

Well I guess I can take that sort of reasoning from an untaught Christian.

But if you are going to be a teacher in the church I expect better than sloppy exegesis of Scripture like this.

Jesus also rode down the main street of Jerusalem on a donkey in peak hour back then. But I don’t think we should exegete that passage to justify riding down the main street of Brisbane on a donkey in peak hour today.

Of course you have a right to do so. Of course I cannot say it is morally wrong to do so.

But when it comes to the use of alcohol, or riding down the main street of Brisbane in peak hour on a donkey, there are broader questions to consider than simply whether or not you have a right to do so, or whether or not it is morally wrong to do so.

Or even whether Jesus did so, in another culture and at another time.

(Obviously, if it is morally wrong for all time that settles it for all time.)

But if not, there are still questions that relate to the times and circumstances we live in today.

Questions like:

- Am I likely to get hurt ?

- Am I likely to hurt others ?

- Will my example likely encourage another to hurt himself, or hurt others ?

Paul’s own attitude (in Rom 14, v 21) was, (whatever his rights): *“It is good neither to eat meat, nor drink wine, nor do anything by which your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak.”*

Today, alcohol is a massive problem in our society.

It is a massive problem, we know, in Aboriginal communities – where it contributes significantly to child sexual abuse, wife beating and family neglect.

But it is also a massive problem amongst young people right throughout Australia (as anyone following the news lately will realise):

- 80 % of teenagers under 18 drink,

- 50 % binge drink,

- around 10 % of 12-year-olds drink regularly.

- 4 % become alcohol dependant while still in their teens.

So great is the problem that even our secular governments are now panicking.

As long ago as 1977 the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare found alcohol was the biggest drug problem we have in Australia by far.

- Up to three times as many young people die from alcohol consumption as from all other illicit drugs put together ! Parents are horrified if they hear their kid has taken the illicit drug ecstasy. But last year ecstasy killed less than five people in Australia, while alcohol killed over

4,000.

- 1 in every 5 of our hospital beds is occupied by a person suffering, directly or indirectly, from the adverse effects of alcohol.

- 2 in every 5 divorce cases in Australia, or separations, result from alcohol induced problems. Alcohol is associated with half the serious crime in Australia.

Between crime, ill health, lost production, road accidents and trouble at home, problems with alcohol cost Australia a massive almost \$2 billion every year.

No leader, whether in the church, or even in the community, can afford to ignore these things when he is working through what his own attitude to a responsible use of alcohol will be.

No leader can make his decision simply on the basis of saying: "I've got a right to do this, it's not morally wrong – so I'm going to do it."

No leader, worthy of being called a leader, would ever make a decision on this issue as though he is an island, ignoring the effect of that decision on his children, and on everyone else who may look up to him.

I really admire the leaders in those Aboriginal communities (sadly, mostly women it would seem) who have simply said, "Enough is enough. It's time to say, 'No'."

I admire them, because they are among the few leaders in our nation today who are actually giving a positive lead on this issue in their own lives, and who are prepared to make a stand, and not worry about whether they will be called "wowsers", or "narrow minded"... or the 101 other labels those of us who take a similar position get labelled with today.

This is a massive social problem in our culture today.

And any leader must take that into account when deciding what his own position will be, and how he himself will give a lead in it.

In the Old Testament, leaders were discouraged, in some cases forbidden, to drink wine:

In Num ch 10, priests were forbidden to drink while on duty; apparently because this lay at the root of Nadab and Abihu's foolishness when they offered strange fire before the Lord and died.

In Prov 31, kings and other rulers were not to drink, or they would "*forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted.*"

Magistrates were warned (in Isa 5, v 22) that, if they wanted to be "*mighty men at drinking wine*", as likely as not they would end up "*justifying the wicked for a bribe, and taking away justice from the righteous man!*"

Or, in Isa 28, v 7, prophets "*erred through wine*" and found that they were unable to teach.

I cannot tell you, you must never drink.

Even if you are nominated as an elder in this church I cannot say you must never drink.

But if you are nominated, I will ask you how you have, soberly and deliberately, worked through this issue, so that it is evident you have responsibly thought it through – not just in terms of your own rights, but in terms of the effect you will have on your children, and on those you lead.

I will do so, because God Himself tells me, in *Timothy* and *Titus*, that you are to be held accountable in this matter of being "at the alcohol"

6. We need elders who are people-persons

Another way an elder is to rule himself is by being a "people person".

Again in both *Timothy* and *Titus*, Paul puts this by saying that one of the qualifications we are to look for in elders is that they are "*hospitable.*"

The word here means (lit.) is that they are "*lovers of strangers.*"

So that the elder is not only to be a people-person when it comes to those he knows well, and

who are members of the same church.

But he is also to go out of his way to be hospitable to strangers and visitors who might come into the church.

Or, even those who don't (at first, any way) come into the church.

There are lots of lonely people out there. And sometimes the Lord brings our paths to cross and we have opportunity to show hospitality to such.

This will require a further exercise of self-control on his part.

It will require him:

- to have time for people.
- to take a genuine interest in other people and their problems, and not just his own.
- at times, to be talking to people... instead of going off to have a nap when other people are at his house, and leaving his wife to do all the talking.

Sometimes it comes easily.

But sometimes it takes an effort to be a people-person !

7. We need elders who are experienced

We've already noted that from the very fact that they are called "elders".

The very term "elders" implies that we are looking for men with some experience.

But, in other ways as well that comes out here.

Eg.

1 Tim 3:

- v 4

→ v 5

Normally an elder will already have had some experience in ruling, caring for, others because he has been ruling and caring for his own children.

(I say "normally" because that would assume he is at least married.)

Or,

- v 6

A man should not be nominated for the eldership unless he is an experienced Christian.

"Not a novice" Paul says.

The danger is, if he is only a novice, he will not control the pride that wells up within him – being so young, or so new to the faith, and already holding office in the church.

Again, the word: *"to become puffed up"* there is a very apt translation.

Originally it referred to a "puff of smoke", or a "cloud of smoke."

The idea is that the novice goes off, floating away in a puff of smoke, or cloud of smoke.

He lives in 'cloud-cuckoo-land', in the a realm of self-centred fantasy.

Such people soon go astray, and become prey to the devil.

For their own sake, as much as for your own, do not nominate those who are inexperienced, or who are wet behind the ears when it comes to the faith.

8. We need you to seek out men like this

There are three pillars undergirding putting men in the eldership:

i. The desire of the man himself

We've already looked at that.

We've seen what sort of man he must be.

The man must, himself, have a desire for the work; his heart must be in it.

ii. The call of God

In Acts 20, Paul addresses the elders from the church in Ephesus, and says to them:

"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers..." – or "bishops"; again "elders" and "bishops" are the same thing there.

But notice that it is "the Holy Spirit" who "made [them] overseers".

An elder should be able to say, with confidence: "The Holy Spirit has made me an elder, and put me into this church, to care for His people."

"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers... to shepherd [or, "to pastor"] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

Again, you'll notice there that "elders", "bishops" and "pastors" are all the same thing.

And, in Eph 4, the Bible says that:

It is Christ who appoints "*pastors and teachers*" in the church – along with (back then) "*apostles, prophets and evangelists*" – "*for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...*"

Pastors and teachers, elders and bishops, have their appointment from Christ.

But the third pillar of this process is:

iii. The choice by God's people

It is for you, the people of this church, to choose whom you will have as elders to rule over you.

A man might have all the passion in the world to be an elder, he might think he has all the gifts...

But we dare not put him into the eldership unless that is recognised by the people themselves.

You are a vital link in this whole process.

Paul notes – once in *Timothy*, and twice in *Titus* – that a man who is suitable for the eldership must be "*blameless*".

That does not, cannot, mean he is without sin, or there would be very few elders in the world today; none, in fact.

But the word "blameless" there, refers rather to a man's reputation.

It refers to what others see, his observable conduct.

- again, not that they can see no faults.

- but that they can see that, yes, here is a man who basically measures up to the qualifications that are required for the eldership.

This is where you come in.

You have observed, you can see.

You are the ones who must recognise whether or not a man is suited to this work.

These are the three pillars for putting a man into the eldership:

1) Does a man desire the work ?

Yes he may. But he may also be wrong.

2) Has God called him to the work ?

Yes, perhaps; he may genuinely believe so.

But again he may be wrong.

3) Does the congregation recognise in him the qualities that Paul speaks about, here in 1 Tim 3, and Tit ch 1 ?

Yes, they may. Though, again, they may be wrong.

But put all these three together:

- the desire and passion on the part of the individual,
- the call of God that (as far as he knows his own heart) he believes he can testify to,
- the concurrence of the congregation...

(And, yes, we may still be wrong...

And, sometimes, we have been wrong...)

But mostly, hopefully, we will be right...

... and God will thereby provide for the proper, Biblical oversight of His people.