

Offices of the Church: Elders

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Date: 12 April 2026

Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0:00] This week and next, we'll be taking a break from our normal verse-by-verse exposition of John's Gospel. I do promise we will get back to it eventually. We believe that normatively, this is the best course of action, verse-by-verse, through a book of the Bible, and it is normally what we do.

However, from time to time, and for a specific purpose, it can be helpful to take a beat, summarize, at least in some measure, what the Bible teaches on a given topic.

And so, we're going to take two weeks to think together about the offices of the church. Two weeks, because there are two offices. Two weeks, particularly because we really need to think about the office of deacon.

This office has been neglected in the life of our church, and I want you to hear that I will be the very first to admit that this is to my shame.

We should be doing better at this, and I have led the charge in not doing well at raising up and installing deacons.

[1:14] However, before we get there next week, this morning, I want you to lead you to think about the office of elder, and how the office of elder works alongside the congregation.

That's going to help us next week as we think about how deacons then assist in all of that work. The church of Jesus Christ is precious because it is purchased by his blood.

His universal church finds its expression in local churches. We exist because of his redeeming life, death, and resurrection.

He loves us so much that he lived and died, was raised and ascended for us.

He loves us so much that he has not left us alone. He sends his helper, the Holy Spirit. He has given us his word, and he has given us the church.

[2:17] He loves local churches. I'm so glad that Jesus is the head of the church, that he loves us far beyond our comprehension.

He certainly loves you more than I could possibly love you. Amen. My love will falter and fail. His never does. He loves local churches such that he has given us instruction for how we are to govern the local church.

The Bible says things about this, and because of his great love for us, we should pay attention to what it says. We call this polity. Every church has a polity.

This word is from the Greek word for city. It means simply governance. How are we arranged, and how are we to operate together?

There are all sorts of polities out there, the Episcopalians, the Presbyterians. We are congregationalists, which also breaks out in all different types of polities.

[3:28] Some churches will function congregationally. The congregation is a sort of democracy. Everything is brought to a vote, which tends to mean that nothing much happens at all.

Some congregational churches are governed by kind of a corporate board type of model. Some have a single pastor, and then they have a deacon board, kind of quasi-elders, and they're either over that deacon board, or they're integrated within that deacon board.

We don't think any of these models are biblical. We think the Bible model is elder-led congregationalism.

Elder-led congregationalism. I think that the people who hold to these polities are Christ's, and I'm not throwing too much shade at them.

But it's sometimes important to know that there's some things out there that may not be as biblically faithful as they ought to be to try to drive us to, well, then what does the Bible say?

[4:43] Does it have something to say about this? And we think that the Bible teaches elder-led congregationalism. And I want to add, as I think it may help us in these two weeks, we probably won't use this terminology very often, but I think it may be helpful to us to say elder-led, deacon-assisted congregationalism.

Right? So, we're going to go to a number of texts today. We're going to start in Hebrews chapter 13. I'm going to read verse 7, and then ask you to flip to verse 17 and 18.

But before I read those, let's pray for God's blessing on our time. Father, we recognize humbly that you have saved us into a local church.

And we are glad that we belong here if we are in Christ and we are members of this church and that you've given us instruction for how we are to govern for our good and for your glory.

We also recognize that we need your help if we're to rightly understand this at all. So, help it to be important to everybody here, not just those who are given charge and have to lead, but also the entirety of the congregation, that they would see that they have a part to play in how we're meant to function together.

[6:10] And we pray all of this in the name of Christ. Amen. Alright, so Hebrews 13 and verse 7. There the author of Hebrews writes, Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

And then jump to verse 17 and 18. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience desiring to act honorably in all things. Our church, as I've said, believes that the most biblically faithful form of polity is what is called elder-led, and I'll insert deacon-assisted, congregationalism.

I will unpack that deacon-assisted part next week, but you see from the title of this position, and more importantly from today's text, that God intends for there to be some measure of leadership in the church, and we will do well to consider the leadership of elders alongside the responsibilities of the whole congregation.

It brings it into focus to think about it all together at the same time. So we'll do our best to get through that in the time we have allotted this morning. These two passages in Hebrews give us six exhortations toward church leaders, right?

[7:45] Your leaders. Remember, consider, imitate, obey, submit to them, and pray for them.

So who are your leaders? If you are a member of this church, then your leaders are those men that you have deemed qualified to inhabit the office of elder.

If you are not a member of this church, I hope you are a member of a gospel-preaching church, and perhaps this will prod you to think about who your leaders are.

Or, if you're not a member of a gospel-preaching church, perhaps you should be considering this.

How are these commands relevant to you if you don't know who your leaders are?

Gifts given to you for your good and for God's glory. Now, these exhortations are fairly self-explanatory, but two of them need special attention.

[8:51] And for today, this is what we'll spend a little bit of time on. The first is obey. Obey your leaders. This Greek verb carries the idea of being persuaded by them.

Remember verse 7. Remember, your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

We don't want to read verse 17 apart from verse 7, because the author of Hebrews is saying, these are men worth listening to. So not just any old thing that they say, but they're a type of person that we ought to be paying attention to.

There's a type of authority called referent authority, and that is from every point of reference, every perspective, the person deserves your obedience.

Paul writes in Titus chapter 1, verse 7 through 9, of this office of elder, they're here called overseer. An overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach.

[10:08] He must be arrogant, or quick-tempered, or a drunkard, or violent, or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine, and also to rebuke those who contradict it. Will an elder ever be a perfect man? Not this side of glory, right? But when we look at those qualifications, and Titus, this is a man worth listening to, being persuaded by, and that's what's carried in that word.

The other exhortation we should note is to submit to them. This Greek verb is found only here, in the New Testament, but it's often used in extra-biblical Greek literature.

It connotes obedience to a person in a position of authority, such as, in some extra-biblical Greek literature, a colonel taking orders from a general.

[11:23] So, in this case, here the author is referring to positional authority, right? They've been put into this place, so both are this referent authority, they have the quality worth following, but also, they hold the position, and have been placed in that position, and we believe that the Lord helps us put the right people into those spots.

So why should you remember, consider, imitate, obey, and submit to your elders? Well, first, they should, they have, faithful lives worth imitating.

Not perfect lives, as I've said. I think it is appropriate to think of elders as elder brothers who lead by example.

Both in holiness, out ahead, right, taking up God's word and pursuing righteousness, and when they fail in repentance.

Elders are at their very best when their lives display the gospel of Jesus Christ, which means there is no pretense for perfection, but a genuine, honest, earnest pursuit of righteousness, forgiveness, and then when there's failure, a modeling of what it looks like to ask for forgiveness.

[12:52] Pick up, dust ourselves on, and press on in Christ, right? Have a confidence even before you that because we're bought with such a great price, we can rest in Jesus' completed work.

Secondly, why should you remember, consider, imitate, obey, submit to your elders? There in the text, they are keeping watch over your souls as those who have to give an account.

Well, I can tell you that the men of our church that you've installed as elders, I can certainly speak for myself, take this very, very seriously. A weighty task, a grace-imbued task.

Jesus is the great shepherd, we are merely under shepherds, but we all recognize that we will stand before God and give an account for your souls. So we want to do this with great care.

Will we be perfect? We will not. But we really want to labor to do this, which is why you should remember, consider, imitate, obey, and submit to your elders.

[14:07] Paul, when he is saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20 and verse 28, says this, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood.

What a charge given to lead in a congregation. But to what extent is the author of Hebrews expecting his hearers to obey and submit to their leaders.

Certainly not in everything. Certainly not outside the bounds of the Bible. But if he only intends to have them obey and submit to the Bible, why not just say that?

I think because there are matters of application of the Bible, gray areas that require careful navigation and decisions that must be made.

The Bible says nothing at all about our property. There's things that have to be carefully thought about. The Bible says nothing at all about what the appropriate set of programs might be for children at any given stage in the life of a church.

[15:32] There's decisions that need to be thought about and made. 1 Timothy chapter 3 verses 1 through 5 qualifications here. Paul gives to Timothy the saying is trustworthy.

If anyone aspires to the office of overseer he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well with all dignity, keeping his children submissive for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? There's lots of detailed decisions that need to be made. And so I've said to you before and I'll say again, I think that in matters of prudence, wisdom, like taking up biblical data and understanding what the scripture says to us, but then thinking about how do we put that into action in the life of our church, so matters of prudence, wisdom, and also in matters of preference. So we don't have a members meeting and ask and vote on what time a meeting might start. This would be a simple, fairly benign example. But your elders are thinking about what would be best for the congregation.

[16:59] How do we think and order us so that we can accomplish the goals that the Lord has put before us? So we might decide on one time over another because we think it best.

Prudence, preference. So elders have authority, a kind of authority. They are to teach the Bible and they are to make judgments in matters of gray areas of application according to Bible principles. elders exercise an authority but it is not a coercive authority. It's a persuasive authority. Come along with us. We want you to go where we're going. We love you. We're looking out for your souls. Framed that way, isn't it a wonderful thing to have leaders?

Let's look now at another text. So turn with me, if you will, to Ephesians chapter four. I want you to see here leaders given to the church and the way that the church is a congregation is to function with leadership.

[18:22] I'll begin reading in verse 11. Just before this, Paul talked about Jesus ascending, also though that he descended and that he gave gifts to men, where it leads us up to verse 11.

And there Paul writes, and he, that's Jesus Christ, gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we have to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

A beautiful picture of the church in action. Now this text begins with Jesus Christ giving gifts to the church. You see these in verse 11, the apostles, the prophets, a brief aside at this point, there's a lot of disagreement about these gifts in Christendom.

I don't intend for this to be an exhaustive exposition of this passage, but an aside I think is helpful here. I believe that the apostles and prophets that Paul is referring to were modern apostles and prophets who were in the process of writing the New Testament and the Old Testament prophets as the books of the Old Testament were referred to as the prophets.

[20:15] I think that's what he's talking about. He's talking about those who were writing the canon at his time as well as those who had already written. If you look back a bit at Ephesians chapter 2 verse 19 and 20, there he says, so then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but your fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

so I believe that the apostles and the prophets of Ephesians 4 and verse 11 for us are the Old and New Testaments, our 66 books of our canon, which we ought not belittle, but as I believe Paul is doing, magnify as a gift to the church.

I think this is what he's communicating in verse 11. As he starts out, he gave the apostles, the prophets. We have the scripture. And then he goes on, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers.

Many of you are using the same translation that I am this morning, the English Standard Version, and you may note that each of these roles are separated by a comma, but not shepherds, or you could insert pastors there, and teachers.

You notice the commas? We know that ancient Greek did not have equivalent punctuation to our English, so this was a translative decision. The translators decided where to put the commas in, and they did not put a comma between shepherds and teachers.

[21:57] Now, I am very happy to say that the ESV translators are not anti-Oxford comma. If you know what I'm talking about, and you disagree with me, we can debate later.

Oxford comma is a good comma, and it should remain in the English language. If you don't know what I'm talking about, that's fine, but this is a translative decision because the Greek word translated and can also be translated that is, or in particular.

It can be translated various ways. So, it could read shepherds that is teachers, or shepherds in particular teachers, which is a little clunky, but does give us a better idea of who these men are, these gifts given.

Many simply say of this role that they are shepherd teachers, shepherd dash teachers, or pastor dash teachers, and we have further evidence that this is Paul's meaning in 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 17.

There he says, let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor. I think in this case he's talking about both the honor of respect and position, but also income for their living, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

[23:18] Elders, teachers. So, evangelists and elders are gifts given to the church by Christ, but for what reason?

Why? Why are they given? Verse 12, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Now, notice, once again, a translator decision to not put a comma after the word saints. If you were to look at that part of verse 12, that I just read, to equip the saints, what if it said to equip the saints, comma, for the work of ministry, comma, for building up the body of Christ.

If they were to punctuate it that way, one of the tasks given to these evangelists and these pastor teachers would be the work of ministry. So, why, why can we know, why did they make the translative decision to not put a comma after saints, and then we read, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, right?

And then, for building up the body of Christ modifies that. What is the work of ministry? It's the building up the body of Christ. How can we know this just looking at it?

[24:40] Are they just arbitrarily putting commas where commas feel good? No. No, because Paul keeps writing. We've got to look at the context of what's happening here.

What happens beyond this in the text, right? There's this aim, verse 13, of attaining the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

That we would grow into maturity. That we would be people who are not children, tossed about by waves and carried about by every doctrine, human cunning, craftiness, and deceitful schemes. Beloved, do we not see a world of professing Christians thrown about, back and forth, by the waves, carried about by every wind of doctrine.

It's just astounding to me, the things that people believe as they come out of Christian leaders' mouths. So anti- Bible.

[25:51] Are you catching? This is congregational work, right? We're supposed to be speaking the truth to one another. I'm also a congregant. Speak the truth to me. I don't want to be a child.

I want to grow up into Christ-likeness. I want to be steady in storms because I know the truth. And Paul's saying, we do that with one another. Let's not be this immature thing, but verse 15 says, rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow, so that it builds itself up in love.

That is the essence of congregationalism. Us helping every Christian, helping every Christian in the local church grow in Christ-likeness.

What a compelling picture that should be for all of us. And I want to commend you as a church. You do this well. Just before we met, I had a conversation with a brother who's grieving, another brother in unrepentant sin, and he's asking the question, is it time for me to take a next step with him, to press upon him?

He said with tears welling, I'm not sure that he's in Christ. I'm concerned for his soul. What a conversation to have with a congregant. A wonderful thing to think and talk and pray about next steps to happen.

[27:22] So this is the work. This is the work that's going on. It's equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Elders lead by teaching, in word and in deed, giving theological foundation and example of application so that the church as a whole does this work of ministry, this building up of the body of Christ.

It bears repeating. Elders exercise in authority, but it is not a coercive authority, it is a persuasive authority.

It's an authority of counsel. Come to the word with us. We want to show you the way of God, how we should pursue, what we should say to one another.

It also bears saying that the evangelists share the gospel, that the church would increase through conversion, and that the church as a whole would share the gospel for that very same end. The evangelists help equip us that we might share the gospel.

But while evangelists are a gift to the church, we do not hold that it is an office of the church, a formal position found here. Evangelistic people most certainly are a gift to the church.

[28:39] Now I hope that I have sufficiently shown you the authority of counsel that an elder holds, right? But what about the authority of the congregation?

congregation? Does the congregation hold any authority? Yes, it does. The congregation or the church as a whole is doing two things in this text.

Number one, teaching the truth, right? Teaching the truth, attaining the unity of the faith, the knowledge of the Son of God, verse 13.

This is a pushback against doctrine blowing people around. So the congregation is teaching the truth and applying the truth.

Verse 15, we're growing up in every way into him who is the head. Then you see all this activity in verse 16, these joints held together doing this work.

[29:37] Right? So teaching the truth and applying the truth. So the congregation, the local church as a whole, is responsible for discipling, helping people grow in their pursuit of Christ, and they're responsible for doctrine.

What is that truth? Being led by the elders of the church to disciple and to hold sound doctrine. the congregation has a different authority from the elders.

The local church as a whole holds the authority of command or, if you like, coercion set against persuasion.

I don't love it. I like counsel and command personally, but persuasion and coercion works. God delegates authority, and it always has limits, and it is always subservient to the one who delegated it.

Bad authority is always bad. Most of us have had some experience with bad authority. If you haven't, live a little longer. You're going to see authority not exercised properly, but that doesn't mean we should throw away authority.

[30:59] authority submitted to God is always good. Always good. It's aimed at blessing for us. So, I want to take you to some additional text to show you the two areas that the congregation holds authority in, our discipling and doctrine.

We're going to do this at a clip, because I'm really supposed to be talking about elders, but I want to show you what are elders leading the congregation to do together. discipling. Matthew chapter 28.

Go ahead and join me there. I'm going to get water. I've got to get ready for this fast reading I'm about to do. So, Matthew 28.

This is the Great Commission. Jesus came and said to them, verse 18, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. There's that ultimate authority. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold, I'm with you always to the end of the age.

On the heels of Ephesians chapter 4, do you see the church's work in the middle of that text? I hope you do. This is a commission given to the church and how do we do that in visible expression?

[32:30] In local churches. So we, as a church, are meant to go, make disciples, baptize them, welcoming them into the membership of the church, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Right? Grow up into Christ-likeness. Don't be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Right? Now, turn with me backwards in the book of Matthew to chapter 16.

I'll begin reading in verse 13 because the context has some relevance. Now, when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is? And they said, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He said to them, but who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Way to go, Peter. Knocked it out of the park. And Jesus answered him, blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you. Right? It's by grace that he gets that answer right.

[33:41] But my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, that truth that he is the Christ, I will build my church. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Right? There's our confidence for Matthew 28. Jesus is with us to the end of the age, and he has all authority. He's building his church, and so go and do this work.

And then he says, in verse 19, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Right? This is the symbol of the authority given to the church. But we don't really fully comprehend what he's talking about at this point. Okay? We're given keys, we're binding, and we're loosing. We don't have to go far to understand. Go to Matthew chapter. This will feel disjointed for just a moment, but hear it out. Beginning in verse 15.

[34:44] If your brother sins against you, go and tell him it's fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. Do you see Ephesians 4 in this?

Speaking the truth and love to one another. Do you see it in there? Your brother sins. You go show him his sin. We all need help doing this. We all have blind spots. Like, we're going to do things. We're going to err. We're going to realize it at times. We're not going to realize it at times. We need to be approached that we might repent and press on. Right? This is how we grow in Christlikeness. Verse 16.

But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. You make it more serious.

Multiple people come and they say, no, no, we see this issue too. Right? We want to speak the truth and love to you that you may grow in Christ. And there's another opportunity for repentance.

[35:43] To listen. In verse 17, if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, right?

So there's a step here where the church now as a total is speaking to this person saying, this is not the way of a Christ follower. Then the church is to let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. That is to say, to put them outside of the church. Right? This is the process we often call church discipline. Right? But I think every step in this is discipline.

It's discipling. Right? We are teaching the truth that a person might faithfully follow Jesus. And if we find that they're not in Christ, then the loving thing to say to them is, we don't believe you're in Christ.

Now how does this connect back to Matthew chapter 16? Verse 18 of chapter 18. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.

[36:50] And whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. The exact same phrase. Keys of the kingdom. Doing this careful work.

So if you didn't hear Ephesians chapter 4 through that, maybe you'll hear it the other way around. Right? So back in Ephesians 4 verse 11, he gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherd teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Right? Working us together, verse 16, the body would grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Right? This is the discipling work given to the congregation, all of us, together. William Gurnall, a 17th century Puritan minister, once said this, God would not rub so hard if it were not to fetch out the dirt that is ingrained in our natures.

God loves purity so well that he would rather see a hole than a spot in his child's garments.

Secondly, doctrine.

[38:13] The church, as a whole, is meant to defend doctrine. Paul writes in Galatians chapter 1 to the church in Galatia, but even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. This would be an exercise of the keys.

The truth must be preserved and defended. David Gibson in an article entitled Assumed Evangelicalism, some reflections in route to denying the gospel.

Quote, you may have heard the story of the Mennonite Brethren movement. One particular analysis goes like this. The first generation believed and proclaimed the gospel and thought that there were certain social entailments.

The next generation assumed the gospel and advocated the entailments. the third generation denied the gospel and all that were left were the entailments.

[39:40] The practice but not the gospel itself. The whole congregation defends doctrine.

Again, back to Acts chapter 20, Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders. I read verse 28 already, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood.

I know, he goes on, that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock. And, this will make you shudder, from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Why did he say to pay careful attention to the flock? Because there will be people from outside and people from inside that will lead people astray.

Jude writes in verse 3 and 4, Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

[40:56] For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

So we're to defend doctrine. We've talked long, too much, I'm going to skip it today, I've got a whole bunch of notes about it, about theological triage, but let me just sum it by saying we are confessional people, it is important for us to take up the word, understand what it says, write documents, decide those things that are worthy of dying for and those things that can be debated. We think it's important to make truth claims concerning what the Bible teaches on any particular topic. topic. So elders are given as gifts to the church to lead the congregation in the important work of discipling and defending doctrine.

But, what does elder-led congregationalism look like in action? If you're totally unfamiliar with this polity, how might it be observed and this in closing?

You will notice sermons preached and classes taught, discipling relationships where the Bible is read and studied and applied, earnest prayer for one another, sin confronted and corrected,

discipline processes carried out when necessary, evangelism and missions to the end of the earth to all peoples, welcoming new members through the ordinance of baptism, celebrating the Lord's supper together regularly with joy, confessionalism and all that is in tales, all this careful work of theological triage, I could go on.

[43:05] but note that you, the congregation, the church as a whole have a profound and precious responsibility and God has given to the church elders to help.

May we continue by grace under the authority of the giver of all good things to govern ourselves according to his word for the good of his people and for the witness of the gospel to the glory of Christ.

Let's pray.