

Elders of the New Testament

Let us turn to our Bibles to 1st Timothy chapter 5. 1st Timothy chapter 5, verses 17-18. 1st Timothy 5, 17-18, I'll move from the question of the church and its relationship to widows and the family and its relationship to the church and the widows as well and their responsibilities to church officers. Let us listen attentively to the word of God.

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture says you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain and the laborer is worthy of his wages. Let us pray.

Hear God we read of Paul explaining to the young pastor Timothy the various things he needs to teach and his ministry and to practice and hear what the duty of elders are and he explains this leadership Lord in this letter for us today as well. We pray that we would relearn these lessons and if they are new Lord to listen carefully to the word of God you would guide my lips to speak the truth therein and apply it we pray by the effective power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now talking about church government, church discipline and church officers I'm sure is not the most interesting to most people. It is not unlike I think taking civics in high school. I remember doing this over here in Arvado West.

It's something you had to take to get by otherwise you're just not interested in it. And that's fine as far as it goes because we can't all be equally interested in the same things and so there's no judgment upon you in that regard. However it is enough in this case to know that God has given an organized structure known as the church and what that organization does entail.

It's here. It talks about elders. In fact it mentions one type of elder and another especially those who labor in word and doctrine.

It's meaningful then because it's here before us in the word of God we must learn about it and exercise in accordance to it in our Christian life. So I have these points here, three points. There has been much ink spelt on this topic in the last couple hundred years and so I'm going to take a broad overview from the Old Testament Era to the New Testament Era.

I think this is probably one of the best ways to explain it and you'll see why I hope with respect to natural revelation or natural law. This is what made it click for me in this regard.

Elders of the Old Testament

So the elders of the Old Testament is the first point because they're there and they're used often and they're also there, although it's the Greek word, it's the same idea in the New Testament as well and in both cases the elders pop up on the scene.

They're just there in the book of Exodus and they're there in the book of Acts. Like what is going on here? Where did these guys come from? I didn't read about these elders in the church. Why are they there in the church in the book of Acts? I missed that.

Is that in the Great Commission? When you realize something interesting is going on here and you go back and have a firmer grasp on natural law, it all makes sense. I hope it makes sense to you. So here in 1 Timothy chapter 5 verses 17 to 18 in which we read about the elders who rule well, especially those who labor and were in a doctrine.

These elders existed already in the Old Testament and the Old Testament church in particular. Suddenly on the scene after 400 years in Egypt, that's a long time, that's many generations, Moses presents himself to this leadership. He doesn't go to a bunch of random people, random Jews and say I'm gathering you all together.

But where does he go? Exodus 3.16 we read Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob appear to me saying I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt. And it continues on there in. And God directs Moses not to a democracy where he just try to gather together, they estimate I think it was a couple million people and talk to them, but to their leadership, their elders.

So God is validating that this office of elders that are there on the scene and been there a long time presumably is legitimate, it's okay. What's the meaning of the word elder? As I pointed out in the Greek, the New Testament you read the word Presbyterian sometimes or Presbyter in the KJV. It just means elder.

When he's talking about Presbyter, singular, and the translation is often elder there in the New Testament. The Old Testament is also elder as well. It's a good translation.

It means old person. But it doesn't mean old person so far as everyone uses it and see it, it means old person. But that's its historical root and over time it obviously meant something more than just an old person.

It meant a church officer or a civil officer as we'll find out in the Old Testament. You had elders in the civil society as well in the church. These are men set aside and recognized as leaders in the church.

It makes sense that they were called elders because typically if you're older you have lots of experience and if you're godly and older that's a double blessing. With all that experience and godliness you ought to be a leader. That makes sense and that's what happened.

Everyone agrees historically that's how it developed one way or the other. There's some ways you can trace that historically but we kind of do that today. We know that intuitively.

That's simply what the word and the root is and what it is in practice. It is an office eventually often in the Old Testament but not always. Depends on the context of course.

Now what's the function of these elders? I already gave you an idea there and their description. It's of course determined. One way you can determine what they do in particular is by their title and how they are described separately at times in various texts of the Bible.

They are called elders of Israel a number of times and therefore by that description they are what? Representatives of Israel. They stand in the place and work in their stead as we have here in America. We have a representative of democracy they call it or a republic or it used to be a republic.

The title elder as well itself as I pointed out and the word judge is used at times to describe what an elder does. They make judgment calls. They make discipline there before them.

Other times they're described as the head. The head of the people. The chief heads of the people.

The chief leaders we would say today. The old word head it just means ruler and are even officers at times. So it just depends on the text but mostly in the Old Testament it's almost always it seems a lot of times just elder and in the context you can tell it means those who represent their exercising authority and power and the like.

So you can tell by their names and the titles what's going on there and the technical use about a hundred times in the Old Testament. The word is used for elders there with respect to various functions. They judge the people.

We read this in Deuteronomy 19 and elsewhere with respect to disputes and murders in particular. They listen for the people. Exodus 19 7 and elsewhere they're told that you're supposed to bring this news back to God's people what you hear from Moses.

They spoke for the people. 1 Samuel 8 4. When the people wanted what? With Samuel the prophet. We want a king like the Gentiles and all the other pagan nations.

And who told them this? All the Jews got together and no it's too many people at once. They sent the representatives, their elders. And they covenanted as well for the people.

2 Kings 5 3 and elsewhere you read a number of times where the kings are established not only by God through the prophet like Samuel and others but the elders are there representing the people and agreeing to him being their king. And of course the king by implication has to agree to this arrangement. So you have a three fold covenant that way.

Three parties involved when you include the prophet slash God. And those, most of those descriptions there, I haven't gone through all of them, are civil. I mean murder matters are clearly a civil matter.

Although they're a church matter in so far as if you're a murderer and you're not repentant you'll be excommunicated. But they're also ecclesiastical. And this distinction between the civil or political we may say today, we don't usually use the word civil I think, and ecclesiastical or church function of elders and different leaders is clearly seen in 2 Chronicles 19 8. 2 Chronicles 19 8, one of the classic passages that reminds us the Old Testament church slash Jewish nation relationship was not commingled.

They were overlapping. Yes, they wore both hats. They were both a religious Jew, the Old Testament saints, and a political or cultural or ethnic Jew as well.

They wore both hats. And we do that today. It's okay.

They didn't mix them up because we have clearly here in 2 Chronicles 9 two courts of appeals. Two distinct courts of appeals. Two judicial differences here.

One a spiritual judicial difference. The other a political one. Moreover in Jerusalem we read, for the judgment of the Lord and for controversies, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and priests and some of the chief fathers, there you have another description of elders, when they returned to Jerusalem.

So the Old Testament elders here were described with respect to the functions of the Lord, but it also talks about the matters of the King in verse 11. In the matters of the King he established other chief heads of Israel that were non-priestly rulers to deal with these things in Jerusalem. So you had the priests and the like dealing with the judgments of the Lord, then you had the judgments of the King.

Those are two distinct categories. One is spiritual and one is earthly. The elders during Christ's time.

So here under the first point, elders in the Old Testament. I know we put, and we have the stories of Jesus in the New Testament, because that's the way we distinguish the literature of the Bible, but before Christ's ascension they're still under what? The Old Testament ceremonial mosaic law. So up to that point even though you're reading the New Testament, they're still what? Old Testament.

They still have to follow the mosaic law. That's why I put this here. So during Christ's time we read a number of times in the Gospel of elders.

Matthew 21, 23. Now when he came into the temple, that is Jesus, the chief priest and what? The elders of the people. There you go again.

Elders of the people or elders of Israel. Confronted him as he was teaching and said, By what authority did you do these things and who gave you this authority? They're still functional there and making decisions and the like. And what's interesting is that Jesus never said where did you elders come from? Because there is no text in the Bible in the Old Testament where God establishes ruling elders or elders.

You have it for a priest. God set up the Aaronic priesthood explicitly. For a king, God said fine, I'll give you a king.

Of course he uses it for his own glory to represent Jesus. But the elders, they're just there. They're just there.

Because they've always been there as we'll see in other cultures as well.

Elders of the New Testament

So the second point, elders in the New Testament. So we're coming into the New Testament era.

Elders are still there. Functioning in the Jewish church. And I want to summarize here these three points of the warrants for the New Testament ruling elder.

It's one, based upon the light of nature. I've already made an implicit argument for that when I point out that they're just there in Exodus. They just pop up out of nowhere apparently.

Of course they were always there. And then based upon divine example of the whole Bible and based upon divine text of the New Testament, which I'll unpack in a later point. So the light of nature we see, for example, the church and worship assumes natural law.

For example, family and societies are not destroyed when the church comes on the scene. The church is there's that word again, super added or given on top of the existing natural relationships we have as humans even though we're fallen. That hasn't changed.

You still have families. You still have businesses. You still have society and communities and laws.

And the church comes along and the change it makes of course is especially upon the soul. It redeems men. But with respect to society those relationships are still there.

They're even reinforced by Paul where he says, submit to these rulers and Romans. Presumably because the Christians were thinking, I don't have to submit to them. I'm a Christian.

I'm under the law of Christ. He's like, no, you've got to submit to them. And submit to your husband and the like.

So it is there in other ways and therefore I would argue a little more detail here that the elders are part of this natural way of doing things. The ancient Near East practice of that era everywhere you dig up all the archeology that we've done for the last couple hundred years from Egypt to the Moabites to the Hittites to the Canaanites to the Greeks to the Romans to the Babylonians, they all have elders. They all have chief rulers and men come upon them.

They're not kings. They're different. They're a collection of men.

Because as we read in Proverbs, for example, and the counsel of many is wisdom. And again, Proverbs has a lot of common understandings, moral ways of thinking that you'll find in other societies in their own Proverbs. Very similar in many regards.

Because it's what? Rooted in common law. Natural law. The natural law of creation that God has given us.

Genesis 50, verse 7 we read, So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh and the elders of his house and the elders of the land of Egypt. Same word. Because they're everywhere.

Just like you have families everywhere and you have a collection of families, some will stand out more, the men. And they'll be elders or rulers. They might have different names but the same idea.

And again, the Old Testament elders predated the covenant of Moses. So they're not uniquely tied to the ceremonial law. That's the significance there.

So secondly, so the first one is it's based on natural law, I'm arguing. I can unpack that further but I won't. Secondly, based upon divine examples of the whole Bible.

And we have a lot of those. That's why partly I went over that in the Old Testament there that teaches us these things. And then thirdly, based upon divine texts in the New Testament where it's mentioned explicitly.

Like, I don't know, 1 Timothy 5, 17. Here we are. And you notice, Paul doesn't say, you know, let me tell you, you gotta have elders.

He's just like, there obviously are elders and since they're there, you better honor them. They're just there. And that's exactly what we find in Acts 11, 30.

This they did in the church and sent it to whom? The elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. Lo and behold, the elders are all of a sudden in the church. Where did that come from? Now the old way of thinking of this, at least I was taught, was, well, they were following the synagogue.

You can kind of say that and I would say, well, it's because the synagogue is following what? Natural law. They would have done it anyways, even if there was no synagogue. So, here's the elders.

They are used already with church functions and they are coordinated with the apostles, in fact, like in Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council. They are exercising church authority therein. So, the New Testament, like the Old Testament, assumes these men and leaders in the church.

And so, again, a reminder there that in the New Testament, the New Testament gatherings were often early on where? In their own houses, of course. If they were rich, they had a big building. Maybe 100 people you could put into it.

But they also met elsewhere. The synagogues. They met in the synagogues and presumably worshipped with them until they separated over time because of what? The Jews kicked them out and they were angry with them and they were persecuting them.

And how could they participate in that worship? Because it wasn't ceremonial. The synagogue didn't have the killing of the animals. It was not temple worship.

It was natural worship. And thus we have it all tied in together. I hope you see, as I taught on worship, that idea of natural worship that we all can participate in.

And because of that, because they were following this, in fact they followed the pattern of discipline. Matthew 18. We all know the Matthew 18 passage.

Bring it to the elders. If you have a problem between the two of you, you can't deal with it, you bring it somewhere else, you can't deal with it, bring it before the church. That's the pattern of the synagogue.

Because it's a natural pattern. You're going to have an appellate court. Because you know families can have sins and you get together and you have a bunch of families and they help each other.

This is what's going on here. So the church enacts elders. The church enacts a hierarchy of courts, what we call a Presbytery or Presbyterianism.

Acts 15 shows us the highest part of that. The General Assembly over all the church. So it makes sense that the office of ruler would be used.

So that's all inferences and logical deductions. Explicit text. 1 Corinthians 12.28. 1 Corinthians 12.28. We read there that, but the manifestation of the spirit is given to each one for the profit of all, verse 7. In verse 28 we read of a list of functions and officers and one of the functions and officers listed there is government, depending on your translation.

The word is government. And it's interesting there, that word government in verse 28 means steering, the idea of a helmsman. It's used in fact in Acts 27.11. We know of course he's not saying, there's a special office for a guy who does boats in the church.

That's not what he's saying. He's saying he governs or directs the church. He has this function.

That's a ruling. Elder. Romans 12.6-8 is even more explicit.

Having then gifts of differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. Right? We have God has given us various and sundry things and what you'll find in the list in Romans, 1 Corinthians 12, excuse me, and here in Romans 12, both chapter 12, another way to memorize these things, is a mixed list. It mentions supernatural and ordinary or extraordinary or ordinary gifts.

It mentions some limited gifts and others more expansive gifts, because his point wasn't to give us an exhaustive list, but to highlight like he does here, you have these gifts each one differing according to the grace or the mercies and the gifts that God has given you but you should use them. Let us use them. What? To the edification of the body of Christ.

That's the point. That's the highlight here in Romans 12.8 and he gives a list of some of the things apparently they weren't doing very well and he wanted to emphasize the point. If prophecy, let him prophesy in proportion to our faith.

He who leads with diligence. He who shows mercy with cheerfulness. Boom, boom, boom.

He's making a distinction between those who have mercy and of course all of us should have mercy. So apparently he's pointing to something more specific than just, well of course we should all have mercy, an office like a deacon. He has mercy exercised and before that he who leads with diligence.

And you can't have everyone lead in a church like the old saying is you have too many chefs in the kitchen, you gotta have some servants. And so some are leaders, others are not. And so Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and naturally 1 Timothy 5.17 where it explicitly talks about, as well as Acts, a number of passages in Acts, mentions these guys called elders.

What do they do? His sister tells us what they do. They rule. Verse 17, they rule.

And they out of course rule well and as such you should give them double honor. If you give them double honor you especially give those kind of elders who labor in word and doctrine all the more. What we call pastors.

Now it's not expounded of course much detail it just simply isn't. There's no list. You ask yourself why is there no list like there is a bishop in chapter 3, deacon as well, nothing about an elder.

A ruling elder is what we've described to make it clear that they're not a pastor. Because they're just assumed from the Old Testament. You know what ruling elders do? They rule.

They make judgment calls. And the ruling elders, that is elders, know that they're not all specially gifted to teach. That's a unique gift.

They're called pastors. And they would never have made pastors unless Christ established them in the New Testament. He does there explicitly in 1 Timothy 3. But he didn't do it for rulers because rulers are part of natural way of living, that is elders.

The nature and duties of the ruling elder overview, the nature of function and responsibilities to rule of course, to judge and administer over large or small issues, that is more precisely significant issues it may seem small to you but they're significant enough to rise to the occasion that the elders of the church have to pay attention to it, to represent. It's still there in the church. At least it's there if you're Presbyterian because we send an elder to the presbytery and he represents our church.

If you're a Baptist or that is an independent, I guess he only represents your church locally within the section or something. They're all a little different of course. And the necessary characteristics therefore for one who rules well, in fact it's mentioned there at the beginning of Deuteronomy where Moses sets aside elders and rulers in the church of the Old Testament.

Knowledge, understanding, wisdom. These are things you expect in everyday life anyways from any kind of leader in any kind of business, cultural, society, clubs. You don't want incompetence.

You don't want the worst among us. You want the best. And you would know this.

Even unbelievers know this. So that's why the list isn't really there. Everyone knows this.

What to expect of ruling elders. The nature and duty in particular their existence is proven already but those verses illustrate their power. They rule or govern.

The government or the ruling of the rudder of the ship of the church there in 1 Corinthians 12. And then he who rules let him rule with diligence not to be lax or lazy in his responsibilities before the church of God. And then of course 1 Timothy 5.17 where the elders who rule well where it's explicitly mentioned again.

They gather together in particular what we call a session. That is the ruling elder with the pastor to make collective decisions for the local church and to deal with these matters that need to be dealt with. But what functions do they have in particular as we go more specific here? One they represent the church before the presbytery and before the General Assembly for example.

They can help with counseling issues of conscience. What you'll find is in many churches over time the pastor tends to be the young guy. He comes in and the ruling elders have been around a long time.

They have a lot of experience and age. And they can help him with a lot of experience things that he doesn't have. Discipline of course.

Formal and informal discipline in the church of God. Oversight of public church activities especially public worship. Oversight of public morals of course in the church.

Not to as I point out micromanage you guys and figure out what you're going to feed your kids for breakfast. But of course if it becomes a serious enough matter they will have to deal with it. An oversight of organizational matters and monies in the body of Christ as well.

Honoring Elders of the New Testament

And thirdly, lastly then we come to honoring elders of the New Testament era. Of course by implication elders everywhere in life. Now the first thing we have to realize here in 1 Timothy 5.17 is there's a confusion and debate in our circles at times still with us to this day.

Although it's not talked about very often. Some people argue that a pastor is an elder and an elder is a pastor. And it just happens to be that pastor just has a little bit of extra gifts that the other elder doesn't have.

And so you have one ordination for elder, one ordination for deacon. I mean functionally when it comes to ordination that is a public setting aside for public responsibilities. That's all it is.

Not magical hocus pocus. They are functionally acting like Baptists. And that's what they have.

They have two offices typically. I know some have three so it's kind of strange. But they typically have two.

But historically there has been three offices. There's three explicit ordinations. We have that in the OPC.

If you're a pastor slash bishop slash teaching the elder. We don't usually use that in our circles. The PCA uses that more often than we do.

And then other, minister and parson and things like that. Ruling elder is a different ordination. You're a ruling elder and you become a pastor.

You get ordained to become a pastor. You don't just keep your office and you keep doing the same thing you just now happen to teach. That's not how Presbyterians ever functioned.

So all that to say here is one of the texts people think well look it says elders and so pastors are elders. They're just elders who labor in word and doctrine. That's true but it's not true in this sense.

How is the word elder being used then in this context? I think it's being used the same way Paul uses it elsewhere. Or Peter uses it elsewhere. Paul calls himself a deacon.

Do you know that? He calls himself a deacon and the word deacon simply means servant. Sometimes it's used like a capital S as the office of servant. And other times it's used simply as an adjective.

Lowercase s. And nobody thinks the apostles are a bunch of deacons. But what? We do believe and think they can exercise the office of deacon if need be. And so in Acts 6 that needed to be the case and they were like we can't keep doing it and so we need to make deacons to do it so we can go back to what is our primary responsibility.

That's what's going on here. Peter himself in 1 Peter 5 calls himself a fellow bishop. But nobody believes that he's a bishop slash pastor slash minister slash teaching elder.

Nobody believes he's merely or only a pastor or bishop. He's an apostle. What all this is saying is the larger office always has the lesser office underneath it.

He can do some of those responsibilities. In fact he can do all of them although he does it as a pastor. So a pastor does rule but he also teaches.

A ruling elder does or can assist. If your church is small enough, you don't have deacons, the ruling elder is going to do the deacon work. That's a smaller sphere of responsibility and it's underneath that consecutive circles there.

That's the difference. It's the usage of the word. It's not saying specifically the same office as such but the same responsibility generally speaking.

You can call him a deacon, you can call him a pastor, but we all know that they're actually apostles. And so that's the same thing in this sense. They're the concentric circles of responsibilities.

The largest circle, the apostles, have the greatest amount of ability, responsibility, and power and authority. And so here, that's how I take it and that's the distinction there. We read especially.

That makes that kind of distinction there. Especially. We read that specific word.

It's a very specific word there. Earlier, do good to all in Galatians 6.10. Especially to the household of faith. Right? He's the savior of all.

We read in 1 Timothy 4. He's the savior of all. What? Especially of those who believe. And so in both those cases, you're supposed to do good but a special good to the church of God.

And you're supposed to, that is God has a general deliverance and a saving or a goodness towards mankind but especially he saves, that is efficaciously, his own people. There's clearly a distinction there in the word especially. The commonality is very general but the specific is all the difference in the world between the elect and the non-elect.

Between the church and the not church. And therefore how you function and do good to the world compared to how you function and do good to the church. And the church will feel it because they'll see how you act it or don't act it as the case may be.

And so it is with this. Both officers are elders and should be honored but that honor is especially for those who labor and work in the word and in doctrine. And so that is a double, double honor as it were in verse 18.

It continues here, for the scripture says, you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. And the laborer is worthy of his wages. Pay the man.

Or support him somehow. Doesn't always have to be money. We talked about this the other day with Pastor Smith, the OPC there up in Hamel, South Dakota.

And they get paid the food. A big chunk of pig and cow and their freezers filling up. That's fine.

They're recognizing that he's doing work amongst us. Godly work for their souls. And at the very least we give him material support for his body.

This description here, Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 9. I finished 1 Corinthians earlier this year. And there in chapter 9 he makes the same argument about supporting himself as an apostle. In this case as an apostle who teaches like a pastor.

He has that office underneath his broader office. And he says you're supposed to support him. And he has that same quote.

Hey, you're going to feed the ox while he's working out the grain. And the implication of course not being the pastors are a bunch of oxes, but we're more divine than oxes. We're more significant than oxes.

And you ought to therefore pay us. If God's concerned about the animal, how much more is he concerned about you? There's the implication there. And he does the same thing here.

He makes it short and to the point by using this forming illustration from Deuteronomy and of course the broad principle that even unbelievers understand and practice. The laborer is worthy of his wages. Pay the man.

The nature of all offices of course is to serve Christ through the church. And leaders in particular are supposed to be the servants of God's people and not pride and arrogant with the authority that God has given them. And thus Christ in Luke 22 we read, now there was also a dispute among them, that is the disciples, as to which of them would be considered the greatest.

And he said to them, the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And those who exercise lordship over them are called benefactors. But not so among you.

On the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger and he who governs as he who serves. He was tamping down on their pride. He wasn't saying, don't exercise your authority as an apostle.

They clearly did it often in Acts and in the New Testament, even to the point of discipline. So that idea of servant leadership that you hear today, unfortunately it gets twisted. It's not what it means.

It means the authority that they have been given is supposed to be exercised not for their own aggrandizement, but for the good of those in the body of Christ. That's the point of Luke 22. They're not supposed to be glory hounds, in other words.

And so ruling elders have a moral authority to admonish and encourage, but they ought to do so of course with a heart of humility before Christ, but do it nevertheless. You members, you're supposed to, as we read here, honor your leaders, especially the pastor, but insofar as especially he means here, feed him, pay him. That's what he means.

Not like we're super special compared to the ruling elders. They discipline us. They discipline pastors.

They're there to watch over the pulpit as well. But you all, the ruling elders are there and they should be thought of as the chief fathers of Israel. They are fathers in the faith for you.

They have a role like a father in the family. That's the illustration we saw in 5 verse 1 of 1 Timothy. It's a beautiful picture, the family picture of God.

They are supposed to love you and have care for you, even if that means discipline, and you should respond in kind. Hebrews 13.7 and 17 we read, remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Verse 17, obey those who rule over you and be submissive.

Watch out for your souls as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief for that would be unprofitable for you. Brothers and sisters, pray for your ruling elders.

Pray for your pastors and ask that the Spirit of God will raise up more godly men here and elsewhere in the vineyards of the Lord. That the flock of God will be protected and guided for the Lord's sake. Amen.

Let us pray. Indeed Spirit of the Lord, truth and life bring, we pray, more such men into your fold and that the church would recognize them and support them and not hold them back. Gracious God and Savior, protect your flock as you have blessed us Lord with leaders and that these are a good thing when they are good leaders.

We ask God that you would continue, we pray, by your Holy Spirit to guide us in accordance to your will. Amen.