

The Office, Qualifications and Function of Pastors

Introduction

- A. A survey of congregations in North America reveals a variety of viewpoints on the nature of the pastoral office.
 - 1. Some local churches and denominations believe that a local church is led by a solo pastor.
 - 2. Depending on the congregation/denomination, pastors are called “pastor,” “reverend,” “minister,” “bishop,” and other titles
 - 3. Sometimes the titles churches use are more culturally determined than they are biblically determined, e.g., trustees, financial secretary.
- B. Titles are important
 - 1. Titles convey important assumptions about the person to whom the title is given.
 - a. Assumptions about calling and qualifications
 - b. Assumptions about authority
 - b. Assumptions about duties and functions
 - 2. Titles convey important assumptions about the people they lead
 - a. Assumptions about accountability
 - b. Assumptions about responsibilities

Key Biblical Terminology

- A. **Elder** (πρεσβυτέρους) – *presbyteros* – someone older. The term is used in both the Old and New Testaments of those who because of age, life experience and (assumed) accumulated wisdom, were looked to for leadership.

“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the **elders** (πρεσβυτέρος) of the church to come to him . . . 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.” (Acts 20:17, 28)

“Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and **elders** (πρεσβυτέρος) who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.” (Acts 16:3-5)

- 1. Elders were present in the leadership of the Early Church
- 2. Elders were brought into decision making with the Apostles
- 3. Elders were looked upon as sources of wisdom and counsel

B. **Bishop** (ἐπισκόπου) – *episkopos* – an overseer, supervisor, guardian, one who rules

1. Jesus is called an overseer

*“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and **Overseer** of your souls.” (1 Peter 2:25)*

2. Elders/pastors were called overseers

*“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of **overseer**, he desires a noble task.” (1 Timothy 3:1)*

3. “Elder” and “overseer” are interchangeable terms

*“Let the **elders** (πρεσβύτεροι) who **rule** well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” (1 Timothy 5:17, 18)*

C. **Pastors** – (ποιμένας) *poimena* – shepherd, pastor

*“He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he 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” (Ephesians 4:10-12)*

*“So I exhort the **elders** (πρεσβυτέρους) among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: **shepherd** (ποιμένας) the flock of God that is among you, **exercising oversight** (ἐπισκόπους), not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1-3)*

The Office of Pastor/Elder/Bishop

A. These three terms refer to one office

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.”- 1 Timothy 3:1

B. The office of pastor/elder/bishop is a God-ordained responsibility

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.” (1 Timothy 4:13-15)

C. The office of pastor/elder/bishop is a weighty responsibility

“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.” (Hebrews 13:17)