

The Pastor – Christ’s Gift

...and some as pastors and teachers. The ποιμένες and διδάσκαλοι are distinguished from the former orders as being connected with particular churches, resident and not missionary or itinerant. The absence of the τοὺς δέ before διδασκάλους indicates also that the ποιμένες and the διδάσκαλοι were not two distinct orders, but designations of the same men (cf. the πρεσβύτεροι or ἐπίσκοποι; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 2:25; 1 Peter 5:2), in different functions, the former defining them according to their office of oversight, the latter according to their office of instruction and guidance. The ποιμήν would naturally also be a διδάσκαλος; but there is not the same reason for supposing that every διδάσκαλος would also be a ποιμήν. Nothing is said here of πρεσβύτεροι, ἐπίσκοποι, διάκονοι. The absence of such official terms points perhaps to the comparatively early date of the Epistle.

The pastor reflects the Father’s skills in maturing believers. John 21 articulates three distinct responsibilities of the shepherd. He is to feed the lambs, shepherd the sheep and feed the sheep. Each is a distinct skill for different periods of the sheep’s life. God is a tri-generational God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The pastor reveals the Father’s heart for the new believer to not only mature, but also to move to the point of reproduction.

One would hope that the senior pastor is not the only person in the church who is doing shepherding. Pity the church where that is so. Rather, every small group leader should be actively engaged in shepherding those under him, and the senior pastor is in charge primarily of mentoring the shepherds under him in the art of shepherding. This is a fathering role.

In order to fully understand what Scripture teaches about the office of pastor, we need to understand three key Greek words. In the Greek language they are **(1) *poimen*, (2) *presbuteros* and (3) *episkopos*. They are consecutively translated (1) *shepherd or pastor*, (2) *elder*, and (3) *overseer or bishop*.**

The word *poimen* is found eighteen times in the New Testament and is translated *shepherd* seventeen times and *pastor* once. The verb form, *poimaino*, is found eleven times and is most often translated *shepherd*. The Greek word *presbuteros* is found sixty-six times in the New Testament. Sixty of those times it is translated *elder* or *elders*. Finally, the Greek word *episkopos* is found five times in the New Testament, and is translated *overseer* four of those times. The King James Version translates it as *bishop*.

All three of these words refer to the same position in the church, and they are used interchangeably. Whenever the apostle Paul established churches, he appointed elders (*presbuteros*) whom he left to take care of the local congregations (see Acts 14:23, Tit. 1:5). Their responsibility was to act as overseers (*episkopos*) and shepherd (*poimaino*) their flocks. For example, in Acts 20:17 we read: And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the *elders* [presbuteros] of the church (emphasis added).



And what did Paul say to those church elders? “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [episkopos], to shepherd [poimaino] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts. 20:28).”

Notice the interchangeable use of the three Greek words. They are not three different offices. Paul told the elders that they were overseers who were to act like shepherds.

Peter wrote in his first epistle –“Therefore, I exhort the elders [presbuteros] among you, as your fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd [poimaino] the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:1-4)”.

Peter told the elders to shepherd their flocks. The verb that is here translated shepherd is translated (in its noun form) as pastor in Ephesians 4:11: “And He [Jesus] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.

This also leads us to believe that elders and pastors are the same.

Paul also used the words elder (presbuteros) and overseer (episkopos) interchangeably in Titus 1:5-7: For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you....For the overseer must be above reproach (emphasis added).^[3] Thus it cannot be reasonably debated that the office of pastor, elder, and overseer are all the same office. Anything written about overseers and elders in the New Testament epistles is therefore applicable to pastors.

Bibliography

[1] “Ephesians 4 Expositor’s Greek Testament.” <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/egt/ephesians/4.htm> (accessed Oct. 02, 2021).

[2]. A. Burk, “Fathers in the Church by Arthur Burk – Agape Revolution.” <https://agape-revolution.com/2012/12/03/fathers-in-the-church-by-arthur-burk/> (accessed Oct. 02, 2021).

[3] “The Office of Pastor,” *David Servant*. https://www.davidservant.com/books/dmm/dmm_18/10-the-office-of-pastor/ (accessed Oct. 07, 2021).

