

Getting to Know Your Bible

Who are pastors, elders, overseers, and bishops?

In the Bible, these people were appointed in each church (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5) to look after the welfare of the entire church on all levels, from personal care to the teachings/beliefs/direction of a church (1 Peter 5:1-4, Titus 1:9).

They are actually the same people:

“Pastor” (Grk. *poimen*), as used in the Bible, is used only once as a noun to describe a church leader (Ephesians 4:11). However, “pastor” as a verb is used to describe the activity of Elders (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2). Therefore, pastors and elders are the same as far as the Bible describes them.

“Elders” (Grk. *presbyteros*) and “Overseers/Bishops” (Grk. *episkopos*) are the same people (“bishop” is the older translation of the same word translated “overseer” in our Bibles today). Notice how the words are used interchangeably:

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.
18 When they arrived, he said to them... “28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” Acts 20:17,28

See also Titus 1:5-7

Each church had at least 2 elders:

Note Acts 14:23, Acts 20:17, Titus 1:5. This diversity allows for creativity and acts against the pitfalls of having one leader who “call all the shots.”

People could be elders only if they fit these qualifications:

1 Tim 3:2-7, Titus 1:6-9. This is key, especially because leadership is really based on character.

Why is it important that we know this?

God’s community is not run like a business with a CEO or like the government where the will of the people govern everything. It’s organized His way, with Jesus as our top leader (Ephesians 4:15). Learning about this helps us work together and fulfill His mission in a more powerful and effective way.

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