

# *“Be on Guard . . . to Shepherd the Church of God”*

## Study Two – Biblical Eldership

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*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28)*

Read Acts 20:28

God has given the Local Church individuals who are to assist in administrating, servicing, and serving His body. Those who are so gifted are to occupy the office of leadership. Though many will receive the gift, not all will function in the office of “Pastor/Elder.”

Does a title alone qualify an individual to occupy the office? Are there certain qualifications found in the New Testament that would guide a Pastor in fulfilling His responsibilities in shepherding the people of God? By looking at several words used throughout the New Testament to identify the one who occupies the office, his responsibilities will become evident.

### ► BISHOP (Episkope, Episkopos, Episkopeo)

First is the word “Bishop (**Episkope, Episkopos, Episkopeo**).” This particular root word is used several times throughout the New Testament. The Greek word etymologically means to act as an overseer, or to take the oversight. This particular root word is used several times throughout the New Testament.

“For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.’” (Acts 1:20).

“It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to **the office of overseer**, it is a fine work he desires to do” (1 Tim. 3:1).

“An **overseer**, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).

“For the **overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain” (Titus 1:7).

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

“Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, **including the overseers and deacons**” (Phil. 1:1).

“For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and **Guardian** of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:25).

### Initial observations concerning “Bishop”

A Bishop is one who has oversight over a Local Church. The idea of “Oversight” means “to look diligently” and “to visit.” The one who is a Bishop looks over the flock of God. Such a word conveys intimacy, familiarity, closeness, understanding, relationship, and rapport.

## ► ELDER (Presbuteros)

The word can refer to one who is **old of age** (John 8:9 [only occurrence in John's Gospel], Acts 2:17, 1 Tim. 5:1, 2), one who is a **leader in the nation of Israel** (Matt. 15:2, 16:2, 26:3, 47, 57, 59, 27:1, 3, 12, 20, 41, 28:12 [Mark and Luke use it similar to Matthew]), and one who is appointed a **leader in the Local Church** (Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23, 16:4, etc).

"When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23).

"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17).

"And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present" (Acts 21:18).

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you" (Titus 1:5).

"Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14).

"Therefore, I exhort the elders 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" (1 Pet. 5:1)

"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses" (1 Tim. 5:19).

"Therefore, I exhort the elders 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" (1 Pet. 5:1).

### Initial observations concerning "Elder"

Acts clearly shows the leadership role Elders have in a Local Church context for settling doctrinal disputes and guiding the people of God by ruling and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17). Congregational rule does not appear to have any place in the governing of a Local Church fellowship. The responsibility to lead rests on those who occupy the office of Pastor/Elder. James suggests the pastoral side of being an Elder when he sees them praying over those who are sick (James 5:14).

Again, this activity of Leading/ruling is in other areas of the New Testament.

"or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; **he who leads, with diligence**; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:8).

<sup>12</sup> "But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and **have charge over you in the Lord** and give you instruction, <sup>13</sup> and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another" (1 Thess. 5:12, 13).

<sup>4</sup> "He must be **one who manages his own household well**, keeping his children under control with all dignity <sup>5</sup> (but if a man does not know **how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?**)" (1 Tim. 3:4, 5).

"Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and **good managers of their children and their own households**" (1 Tim. 3:12).

“The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17).

The ones who rule over the Church of God are called Elders. In light of this, we as a fellowship are “Presbyterian” in our church polity. We are not congregational. Elders are led by God to provide His people with the direction He would have them take. American ideology and self-centered sinfulness moves a people to expect a voice in every decision. The New Testament Church is not a democracy.

It is important to remember that in the absence of leadership, people will create their own. It is imperative for the health of the local body to have those in leadership positions to lead the flock of God.

## ► PASTOR (**Poimen, Poimaino**)

The term “Pastor” is perhaps the most graphic word to describe the leaders placed by God to guide His people.

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- Without the God appointed Shepherd, His people will go astray (Matt. 9:36, 26:31, 1 Pet. 2:25).

“Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36).

“For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:25).

- Shepherds are divinely appointed (Eph. 4:11).

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11).

- Jesus Christ is the great shepherd and those He appoints are under shepherds (Heb. 13:20).

“Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord” (Heb. 13:20).

The verb form taken from the same root word is consistently translated, “Feed.”

“He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Shepherd My sheep’” (John 21:16).

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

<sup>2</sup> “**shepherd** the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; <sup>3</sup> nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2, 3).

“for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their **shepherd**, and will **guide** them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 7:17).

### Initial observations concerning “Pastor”

The pastors of a fellowship are shepherds. They protect the flock of God through proper nourishment by feeding the people milk and solid food (Heb. 5:11-14). Through the teaching ministry, the people are equipped for the work of service and are no longer tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:12-16).

### Conclusion

There is no distinction in the New Testament between a “Bishop, Elder, or Pastor.” They are the same office. The different words describe the activity and nothing else, though nothing less.

This raises two important questions.

1. Should an individual without the gift be in the office?
2. Does giftedness constitute the call to fill the office of Pastor?

No one without the gift should occupy the office of Pastor though gifting alone does not qualify one for the office.

Three elements appear to be present when one is to occupy the office of Pastor.

► First, he must meet the qualifications.

First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 list the qualifications for the pastoral office. The issue is not flawless, but faithful.

► Second, God has led through personal desire.

No one should occupy the office simply because there is a vocational appeal to the office. Those who occupy the office are those on whom God has placed His hand for a unique and demanding role. The pastoral vocation is as sacred as any vocation. Though the weight of the office must be embraced as a God given burden.

► Third, there must be peer approval.

In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul speaks of a succession of faith. This is no less true with the pastoral office. The pastoral office is entered through the mentoring process. Each Pastor is both mentor and protégé.

Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.