

Elder, Pastor, Bishop, Overseer, and Deacon

There seems to be a lot of confusion regarding roles and offices in the Church. In order to make this a little more understandable, I have come up with the following compilation of information from the Scriptures.

The word pastor connotes shepherd and is used in only one verse (Eph. 4:11) [poiménas] as a designation of purpose for some believers. (The word is found in the KJV and the NASB — the word is not even present in the NIV, ASV, or NKJ.)

Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (KJV)

Pastor is not a universal “Christian” word for the leader of the congregation, even though some denominations have designated it as such.

Pastor

Strong says of pastor in Eph. 4:11

4166 poimen (poy-mane'); of uncertain affinity; a shepherd (literally or figuratively): KJV-- shepherd, pastor.

(Strong's Greek/Hebrew Dictionary)

Vine says of pastor in Eph. 4:11

PASTOR

poimen ^4166^, "a shepherd, one who tends herds or flocks" (not merely one who feeds them), is used metaphorically of Christian "pastors," <Eph. 4:11>. "Pastors" guide as well as feed the flock, cf. <Acts 20:28>, which with <v. 17>, indicates that this was the service committed to elders (overseers or bishops); so also in <1 Pet. 5:1,2>, "tend the flock... exercising the oversight," RV; this involves tender care and vigilant superintendence. See SHEPHERD.

(from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

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Bishop or Overseer (*Episcopos*)

The New Testament verses that list Bishop (in KJV and NKJ; the NIV calls the office *Overseer*) are:

1 Tim 3:1-2

1 This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a **bishop**, he desireth a good work.

2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; (KJV)

Titus 1:5-7

5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

Elder, Pastor, Bishop, Overseer, and Deacon

6 If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

7 For a **bishop** must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; (KJV)

According to **Strong**, bishop, as used in these two passages, is defined as:

1 Tim 3:1 #1984 episkope (ep-is-kop-ay');

from 1980; inspection (for relief); by implication, superintendence; specially, the Christian "episcopate":

KJV-- the office of a "bishop", bishoprick, visitation.

Titus 5:7 #1985 episkopos (ep-is'-kop-os);

from 1909 and 4649 (in the sense of 1983); a superintendent, i.e. Christian officer in genitive case charge of a (or the) church (literally or figuratively):

KJV-- bishop, overseer.

As you can see in the Titus passage, there is not to be *one* leader of the local congregation but several (bishops or overseers). Paul tells Titus to ordain elders (older men) as bishops (plural) in every city (Note: in those days, there was only one church in a city.) [Notice, they didn't "vote" on this position, they were appointed by an Evangelist. Our culture tends to want to vote on everything.] This is necessary to ensure that Satan does not enter one man and lead the entire congregation astray.

These "Episcopoi" are the leaders of the local congregation. Some groups call their leaders "elders" but a man can be an elder and not be a bishop. [Bob Allen is still an Elder, but he is not a Bishop/Overseer.] The men Paul mentioned should be ordained were already "elders" — a position the men had already achieved by the wisdom gained through their years of experience. An elder is a respected position that every man of God will achieve. Bishop (or episkopos), on the other hand, is the office of leadership in the Church.

Of **Elder**, Strong says:

NT:4245

presbuteros (pres-boo'-ter-os); comparative of presbus (elderly); older; as noun, a senior; specifically, an Israelite Sanhedrist (also figuratively, member of the celestial council) or Christian "presbyter":

KJV - elder (-est), old.

(Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

References for Elder are:

1 Tim 5:1 Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; (KJV)

1 Tim 5:19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. (KJV)

Elder, Pastor, Bishop, Overseer, and Deacon

1 Pet 5:1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: (KJV)

1 Pet 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. (KJV)

3 Jn 1:1 The elder unto the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. (KJV)

Note how they apply to anyone of age. Elder is not an “office.”

Now, Dale Schlafer, one of the writers for “*Seven Promises...(Promise Keepers)*” refers to Paul as “...an apostle and pastor...” Paul was an apostle, but he was *not* a pastor! That was not his role. Paul himself states that a pastor (elder, bishop) must be the husband of but one wife (1 Tim. 3:2), while in 1 Cor. 7:7 and 9:5 he clearly indicates that he is not married.

There are different roles in the church of our Lord:

Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (KJV)

There are distinct differences between their function. While it is possible to assume more than one role, it is not a given. Paul was an apostle.

(Notice, God didn't give the gift to be an elder, and the office of bishop is just that, an ordained office of leadership, not a gift from God.)

Ac.20:17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders of the church**. 18 When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia

Does this mean the office, or those with wisdom acquired through age? I believe this means those venerated men of experience gained through age.

Elder, Pastor, Bishop, Overseer, and Deacon

Deacons

The word "deacon," in the general context simply means servant, and can include women. However, it has a specific meaning in the Church, due to the fact that it was a position of leadership, and these are ascribed to men. One can't really be a leader if they are instructed to be silent in the churches, as were women. Also, it wasn't simply anyone who served, since it was an expected role that had requirements for qualification.

1 Timothy 3:8–13

8 Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. 9 They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

11 In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

12 A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. 13 Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

This indicates it was a standard role in the Church, and not just a general term for servants.