

## Pastors, Elders and Bishops – I Peter 5:1-4

### I. Introduction:

- A. Back in **chapter 1**, Peter introduced himself to his readers using the word “*apostle*.”
1. He was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ; one of those to whom Christ gave that special title in **Luke 6**.
    - a. *“And it came to pass in those days that (Jesus) went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*
    - b. *And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples, and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.”*
  2. One of the things to keep in mind in that scripture is that out of a larger group of disciples, Christ chose only twelve to be His special apostles.
  3. Not all Christians, and not all evangelists are also “*apostles*.”
  4. I believe there is scriptural ground to say that the original office of “*apostles*” no longer exists.
  5. However, the word “*apostolos*” does refer to someone sent; someone sent on a specific task.
  6. And **Hebrews 3:1** appropriately calls Christ the Father’s “*apostle*.” *“Wherefore holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the **Apostle and High Priest** of our profession, Christ Jesus.”*
    - a. The Lord Jesus had a special commission with a message to share with sinful humanity.
    - b. Ultimately that message was delivered at Golgotha.
- B. In **I Peter 5** the Apostle Peter begins to share some ecclesiastical instructions – some church direction.
1. He says, *“The **elders** which are among you, I exhort... feed the flock of God which is among you.”*
  2. To highlight his words, Peter adds that not only is he is an “*apostle*,” but he is also an “*elder*.”
- C. Before we get into the specifics of those instructions, I feel it necessary to deal with that term “*elder*.”
1. As an elder myself, it is important that I feed you a little information about that office.
  2. One reason for this is I fear that one of the practices of Catholicism and Protestantism is creeping into Baptist churches.
  3. More and more churches are implementing something called “*elder rule*,” and some are even using the Presbyterian idea of distinguish between “*ruling elders*” as well as “*teaching elders*.”
- D. Let me be clear, I have no argument against a “*plurality of elders*,” because it is clear that some churches in the Bible had more than one elder.
1. But the problem arises in the definition and responsibility of those elders.
  2. Elders in many Protestant churches, govern the church.
  3. They are a religious oligarchy wherein a select few run the church, leaving the congregation behind.
  4. “*Elder rule*,” as advocated even by some Baptists, robs the church of its congregational government.
  5. This is an attack on one of the foundational principles that Baptists have died to promote and protect.
  6. I wouldn’t mind a bit if our church became so large that we needed a dozen deacons and six elders.
  7. But the moment those elders begin to rule the church, this would cease to be a Baptist ecclesia.

### II. When it comes to the Lord’s churches, there are only two Biblical offices – Pastors and Deacons.

- A. Initially, deacons were chosen by the church in Jerusalem to assist the spiritual leaders by ministering in secular things – such as distributing assistance to the widows and orphans of the congregation.
1. Their ministry allowed the Apostles, & perhaps others, to focus on the prayer & the ministry of the Word.
  2. Sadly, in some Baptist churches deacons make all the decisions, and **they** rule over the congregation.
    - a. In some churches they determine who will be the pastor and who will preach the annual “*revival*.”
    - b. In some churches they even tell the pastor what to preach.
  3. This, of course, is as unscriptural as “*elder rule*.”
- B. As I said, there are two ecclesiastical offices in the Lord’s churches – pastors and deacons.
1. But things get confused when reading the Bible, because other terms often come up.
  2. And the fact is: “*pastors*” are mentioned only one time, and that reference doesn’t yield much information.

3. **Ephesians 4:11** says that Christ *“gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers;*
    - a. *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ;*
    - b. *till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man...”*
  4. It is important to note that the word *“pastors”* is *“poimen (poy-mane),”* & it literally speaks of a *“shepherd.”*
  5. To that, I’ll come back later.
  6. It is also important to notice there in **Ephesians 4** there is no mention of *“elders”* or *“bishops.”*
  7. Didn’t God give churches *“elders”* and *“bishops?”* Yes, He did, but under a different title.
  8. I will come back to this in just a minute, as well.
- C. In **Roman Catholicism** there is a ministerial hierarchy starting with the Pope at the top, descending in power and authority to cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests and finally to deacons.
1. In **Episcopalism** pastors may lead congregations, but bishops have authority over those pastors, and over groups of churches, & over those bishops is the *“Presiding Bishop”* who is often called the *“Primate.”*
  2. **Presbyterianism** is somewhat similar, as is Lutheranism, Methodism & most of the rest of Protestantism.
  3. In contrast to those various denominational hierarchies, Baptists believe in the independency and autonomy of each local church without bishops ruling over groups of churches.
    - a. No single Baptist church, however large it might be, has any authority over any other Baptist church.
    - b. And no local pastor has any right to dictate anything to another pastor or church.
    - c. That is old-time Baptist doctrine.
  4. But going back to that word *“bishop.”* There are references to *“bishops”* in the Bible.
  5. Who are they, and what do they do?
- D. At this point, before proving it, I will just say that Biblical *“bishops”* were the pastors of local churches.
1. For example, when Paul was writing to the church in Philippi, he began his epistle with the words,
    - a. *“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons;*
    - b. *Grace be unto you and peace for God our Father, the from the Lord Jesus Christ.”*
  2. Why didn’t Paul address this letter to the *“pastor”* or *“pastors”* at Philippi?
  3. I believe he did, but under a different title.
- E. I am convinced that *“pastor,” “elder”* and *“bishop”* all speak about the same office or the same person, and I don’t see that as a problem.
1. Just as at some businesses I am known as *“David Oldfield,”* but in others *“Kenneth Oldfield,”* I am only one person, and the two names both apply to me.
  2. And some of you call me *“Brother Oldfield,”* while others address me as *“Pastor Oldfield.”*
  3. Again both titles all apply to me.
- F. A few minutes ago, I pointed out that the **Lord Jesus** is called an *“apostle”* in **Hebrews**.
1. In the last verse of **I Peter 2**, Christ is described as *“the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.”*
  2. **Hebrews** even calls Him our *“High Priest.”* Which is it, Shepherd, Bishop, High Priest or Apostle?
  3. This is before considering that He is the Son of God and our Saviour.
  4. Of course He is all of these things. Each of these titles points to a different aspect of His ministry.
- G. And in regard to *“shepherd,”* don’t forget the instruction Jesus gave about Himself as the *“Good Shepherd.”*
1. A few minutes ago I said that *“pastor”* is a translation of the Greek word *“poimen (poy-mane).”*
  2. Well, when Jesus called Himself the *“good Shepherd”* He used the same word.
  3. We could say that Jesus is the *“Good Pastor”* and we’d be Biblically correct.
  4. We could also say that the pastor of a local congregation is an *“undershepherd”* in relation to Christ.

H. And what is it that shepherd's do? **Psalm 23** tells us.

1. *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*
  - a. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*
  - b. *He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*
  - c. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*
  - d. *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."*
2. And what is Peter's instruction to the bishops in Asia? **"Feed the flock of God which is among you."**
3. Would you like to guess what Greek word is translated **"feed?"** It is the verb form of **"pastor"** & **"shepherd."**
4. Peter is instructing those men whom he calls **"elders,"** to pastor, or shepherd the flock of God.
5. **"Elder"** is another name for **"pastor."** They are synonymous.

I. When Paul was traveling back to Jerusalem carrying the offerings of the Greek saints, he stopped in Miletus.

1. **Acts 20:17** – *"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the **elders** of the church" to meet with him.*
2. Why didn't he call the **"pastors"** of the church to join him? I believe he did, but they were called **"elders."**
3. In **Acts 14** before moving to a new location, Paul and Barnabas *"ordained them **elders** in every church, and had prayed (with them) with fasting, (after which) they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" – **Acts 14:23.***
4. Why didn't they ordain **"pastors"** for those churches? I believe they did.
5. Five times in **Acts 15** there is mention of **"elders,"** along with the apostles, but not one **"pastor"** was mentioned because the words are synonymous.
6. In **Titus 1** Paul instructed his assistant to ordain elders in cities where churches had been established, but again there is no mention of ordaining **"pastors,"** because to be an elder was the same as to be a pastor.

### III. In addition **"elder"** the pastor is also called **"bishop."**

A. Please turn to **Titus 1:5** – *"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:*

1. *If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.*
2. *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;*
3. *But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;*
4. *Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."*
5. Notice that Paul seamlessly goes from ordaining **"elders"** in **verse 5** to describing their qualifications in **verse 7**, but there he calls them **"bishops."**
6. And then in **verse 9** he says that the **primary ministry** of this **elder/bishop** is to **feed** the flock with sound doctrine and exhortation, which is the work of a shepherd or pastor.
7. Not only do **"pastor"** and **"elder"** refer to the same office, but so does the word **"bishop."**

B. Earlier I mentioned the Protestant denominations: Episcopalians and Presbyterians.

1. Honesty demands that I tell you that both those denominational titles come from the Bible, even though their offices and practices don't.
2. The word **"elder"** in Greek is **"presbuteros"** and **"bishop"** is **"episcopos."**
3. But both those words, when found in the Bible, describe local **"pastors."**

C. And furthermore, **"episcopos"** literally translates as **"overseer."**

1. A few minutes ago I took you to **Acts 20** when Paul called the elders of the church in Ephesus to meet him.
2. **Acts 20:28** says, *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you **overseers**, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."*

3. The word “overseers” in this verse is translated “bishop” in six other verses, including *I Peter 2:25* – “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”
  4. And we hear Paul telling these overseeing bishops to do the work of the pastor/shepherd feeding the church of God.
- D. What I am trying to show you is that the terms “pastor,” “elder” and “bishop” are interchangeable.
1. I am convinced that this is the teaching of the New Testament.
  2. Baptists today generally prefer to use the title “pastor.”
  3. “Bishop” may be more Biblically appropriate, but most Baptists shy away from that term because it has been abused by the Catholics and Protestants. What a shame.
  4. Also, “elder” is far more common in the Bible when speaking about the leadership of God’s churches, but it is considered to be somewhat old fashioned.
  5. “Elder” is still a very good word, and you’ll hear me use it from time to time, quoting statements from Baptist history.
  6. Two hundred years ago, Baptist churches were led by men who were most often called “elders.”
- E. Again, I don’t have a problem with a plurality of elders in a church when necessary, but I have serious problems with “elder rule,” because it places too much authority in the hands of the pastor.
1. I assure you, and you can verify this by your own search the scriptures, I do not find any Biblical reference to “ruling elders” versus “teaching elders,” nor do I find them in practice without using the terms.
  2. And even with the limited Biblical use of the word “pastor,” in my understanding of God’s Word, I don’t see churches with elders but not pastors.

#### IV. But what is the purpose of the three words? Why did the Holy Spirit implement three terms?

- A. Perhaps it was to highlight three different aspects and functions of the same office.
1. Just as the Lord Jesus is given many titles, because He wears many hats, so too does the earthly leader of God’s church.
  2. The word “pastor” relates to the **teaching duty** of the office.
    - a. As Peter tells the Asian churches, he is to feed the flock of God – *I Pet. 5:2* as I am trying to do tonight.
    - b. *Acts 20:28* – “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”
  3. The word “elder,” on the other hand, refers perhaps to **the dignity** of the office.
    - a. According to *I Timothy 3:6*, the bishop, or pastor, is not to be a novice in the ministry.
    - b. It isn’t his age or his white hair that is important; it is his experience – and hopefully his maturity.
  4. Then the word “bishop” speaks of **the leadership responsibility** of the office.
    - a. The pastor is to oversee the church in the things of the Spirit.
    - b. But as Peter says here: *not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.*”
- B. What about the title “reverend?”
1. That comes from Catholicism and a verse from “*Ecclesiasticus*,” one of the books of the Apocrypha.
  2. When someone who doesn’t know better calls me “Reverend Oldfield,” I usually respond.
  3. But if you use the term, I just might ignore you, unless I know you are just fooling around, as some of you are prone to do..
  4. There are other titles some preachers prefer, such as “Doctor” or “Chaplain so-and-so.”
  5. If a man has earned the right to such designations, and out of pride he insists you use it, go ahead.
  6. But it appears to me that the old, familiar Biblical terms are far better.
  7. I consider it a great honor when you call me “Pastor Oldfield.”