

Under the Word: Biblical Church Government (Part 1)

Let's start with what we are familiar with: the term "pastor"

- 1) ^{NASB} **Ephesians 4:11** And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* **pastors** and teachers . . .
 - a) Typically, this word (ποιμήν *poimen*) normally refers to literal shepherds of sheep:
 - i) ^{NASB} **Luke 2:8** In the same region there were *some* **shepherds** staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.
 - ii) ^{NASB} **Mark 6:34** When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a **shepherd**; and He began to teach them many things.
 - iii) ^{NASB} **John 10:11** [Jesus said,] "I am the good **shepherd**; the good **shepherd** lays down His life for the sheep."
 - iv) ^{NASB} **Hebrews 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,
 - b) Here's the verbal form of the same root word:
 - i) ^{NASB} **John 21:16** [Jesus] said to [Peter] 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."
 - ii) ^{NASB} **Acts 20:28** 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.

Next, two more terms that the Bible uses for the same office: "elder" and "overseer."

<i>Translation</i>	<i>Base Greek Words</i>
<u>Pastor</u> (or <u>Shepherd</u>)	ποιμήν (<i>poimen</i>)
<u>Overseer</u> (or <u>Bishop</u>)	ἐπίσκοπος (<i>episkopos</i>)
<u>Elder</u>	πρεσβύτερος (<i>presbuteros</i>)

Notice, *they are used interchangeably in the New Testament.*

- 1) ^{NASB} **Acts 20:17, 28** From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church . . . ²⁸ "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."
- 2) ^{NASB} **1 Peter 5:1-2** 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, ² 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.
- 3) ^{NASB} **Titus 1:5-7** 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, ⁶ *namely*, if any man is above reproach, the

husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.⁷
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,

- 4) ^{NASB} **1 Peter 2:25** For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the **Shepherd** and **Guardian** of your souls.

Terms used in Baptist history

- 1) *The 1689 Second London Confession* (historically, one of the most important of all Baptist Confessions):
 - a) Chapter 26, Paragraph 8: “A particular church, gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members; and the officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church (so called and gathered), for the peculiar administration of ordinances, and execution of power or duty, which he intrusts (*sic*) them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the world, are **bishops or elders**, and deacons.”¹
- 2) *The Abstract of Principles, 1859* of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Section XIV, “The Church”):
 - a) “The Lord Jesus is the head of the Church, which is composed of all His true disciples, and in Him is invested supremely all power for its government. According to His commandment, Christians are to associate themselves into particular societies or churches; and to each of these churches He hath given needful authority for administering that order, discipline and worship which He hath appointed. The regular officers of a Church are **Bishops or Elders**, and Deacons.”
- 3) *1925 Baptist Faith and Message* (Section 12, “A Gospel Church”):
 - a) “A church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ, governed by his laws, and exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by his word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Its Scriptural officers are **bishops or elders** and deacons.”
 - i) In 1963, this section was changed to:
 - (1) “A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.

“This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation, members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are **pastors and deacons**.

“The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages.”²

¹ William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1978), 287.

² <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp>.