

Scriptural Designations for New Testament Elders

In consideration of practices among local New Testament churches, for the most part, we often limit our vocabulary to one particular term as relates to those who have scriptural oversight regarding the local church. We usually limit our terminology to the term elder. Indeed this is a scriptural designation, however as one studies the New Testament one will find a plurality of terms used.

By the words of plenary verbal inspiration there are three significant terms that describe the work of elders. These words have been translated into six terms in the English translations of the New Testament: ***Bishop, Overseer, Presbyter, Elder, Shepherd, Pastor.***

While all of these specific descriptive words correctly set forth the concepts regarding the nature, tasks, and authority of the responsibilities of elders we at various times have failed to note the merit of giving adequate study to properly deduce the meaning and correct application of these various terms. In order to enable us to better understand how God has designed scriptural oversight of local New Testament churches, let us give consideration to the basic definition and application of these terms.

Elder (Πρεσβυτερος). While this is the **most** commonly used of all New Testament terms regarding that of elders, such as an adjective describes and depicts the men serving in such a capacity rather than the work itself. We especially take note of this regarding the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

The term elder is used regarding comparative degree such as one being the older of the others (Luke 15:25; Acts 2:16-17; 1 Timothy 5:1-2). This term is also used regarding the rank or responsibility of persons (Matthew 16:21). As the church was established and the New Testament of Christ revealed to inspired men, the term came to be used of a plurality of men, who presided over local churches of Christ.

Inherent within the word is always the concept of age. In some instances the concept of age may be relative in which one may deduce that one is not older in the sense of being a senior citizen, but rather older than the one to whom compared. During the first century of the church the term elder was used regarding men who had reached the time of their years as being over forty years of age, and no longer subject to be conscripted to serve in the Roman Army. This term is used regarding men who are appointed to oversee local New Testament churches (Acts 20:28).

Bishop/Overseer (Επισκοπος). While this term is translated bishop in most English translations of the New Testament it is more literally translated as overseer. This word carries with it the idea of supervision or superintendence. It is inclusive of taking charge and oversight of affairs including the authority of management and that of giving proper direction.

Among the Greeks during the first century this title was given by the Roman government to magistrates, who were sent out to tributary cities in order to organize and properly govern them. The New Testament writers used this term concerning those who had been qualified and appointed to oversee the affairs of a local church. These overseers were to accomplish what needed to be done by the right individuals, at the correct time, and in the right way (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1).

The apostles of Christ were not legislators, but rather, were instruments through whom God gave revelation of His pattern. Overseers are not legislators, but rather supervisors and as executors to carry out the New Testament pattern. Because of the fact that elders are bishops and/or overseers, they thus have delegated authority from Christ to oversee local churches to which they have been appointed.

Pastor/Shepherd (Ποιμνη). The term pastor is derived from the Latin term pasco which literally means to feed. It corresponds to the Koine Greek term as found in the New Testament ποιμνη which means shepherd. This is the concept discussed in Psalm 23 and is metaphorically used of Christ (John 10; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 5:1-4).

Protestant Denominationalism has confused the proper usage of the terms pastor and shepherd applying it to preachers whereas the New Testament uses such terminology regarding elders. **The only time a preacher should be considered a pastor is when he is appointed to serve with other men in the local church as one of the elders.** Peter, the apostle of Christ, served in this type of capacity.

According to 1 Peter 5:1-4 elders are to oversee the local church in such a way that they direct it to accomplish those things desired by Christ and in the best interest for all concerned.

Elders, pastors, shepherds thus have the delegated authority to lead, watch, and protect the local church from harm. The work of elders is limited to the local church over which they have been appointed to shepherd.

- by **Kent Bailey**

He "Disrespected" Me

It's common to hear the young folks speak of someone "dissing" another person. That is a shortened slang word for "disrespecting", which means to treat with contempt or rudeness. Sadly, this happens far too often. In fact, it happened to me just the other day. The offender was a man in a position of governmental authority. I was a simple law-abiding citizen. In a verbal exchange, he was rude and mean-spirited. He "dissed" me!

Later, I was thinking about this episode, and considering what I could have said or done. I imagined quick and cutting replies I could have made. This man needed to be taught a thing or two. "Put him in his place," I thought. Or, perhaps I should have gotten his name and notified his superiors concerning his inappropriate behavior. Let his bosses deal with this arrogant fella. After all, if he is to be out in the public, he needs to know how to relate to others in the right way. I was angry -- downright mad -- and there was surely some way to "get even" with this haughty, obnoxious individual.

But then, it occurred to me that it didn't really matter. So what if he was rude? It didn't harm me in any significant way. The only damage was to my pride, and that isn't important at all. In fact, the only thing my pride does is get me in trouble. He "dissed" me, but I'm no worse for the episode.

Our Lord taught us that when our pride is assaulted we ought to "turn the other cheek" and "go the extra mile" (Matthew 5:38-42). The only reason this is hard is because we are tempted to "think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think" (Romans 12:3).

We are not implying that such "disrespect" is OK, or that it is excusable. Neither are we saying that God won't hold men accountable for such things. But, the lesson for us is that we learn to live with it in a way that will not harm our relationship with the Father or our influence on others. In the final analysis, that's really all that matters.

- by **Greg Gwin**