

## ***Pastor vs. Preacher***

### ***Question:***

"I've always called our preacher the pastor of the church. Recently a friend told me this was wrong. Why?"

### ***Answer:***

The word "Pastor" occurs in Ephesians 4:11 of the New King James Version of the New Testament: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. . . ." Our first task is to determine the meaning of the word. If one does not properly define a word, then he is apt to use it wrong!

According to Young's Analytical Concordance the term literally means a "shepherd, feeder." Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words confirms this definition, stating that pastor means, "a shepherd, one who tends herds or flocks ... Pastors guide as well as feed the flock ... this was the service committed to elders (overseers or bishops) ... this involves tender care and vigilant superintendence."

So, the meaning of our study word is straightforward -- a pastor is a shepherd or overseer, and, as Vine's accurately points out, this role is given to the elders who tend the flock of a local congregation. Nowhere in the New Testament is a preacher laboring with a local congregation described as "THE pastor" of the church. Indeed, such a designation would be a corruption of the role and responsibility of the preacher. Man's tradition has come to use the word pastor as a synonym for preacher but such is a misuse of the term.

People often misunderstand the term because they are not familiar with what God's Word says about the organization and government of the local church. The New Testament describes each congregation as an autonomous body under the headship of Christ. Each congregation consists of elders (pastors, shepherds, bishops), deacons (servants), and saints (other Christians). This organization is perfectly described in Philippians 1:1, "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons..."

Elders must meet the qualifications set forth in I Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:3-9 (blameless, husband of one wife, gentle, not a novice, having faithful children, etc.). The qualifications for deacons are also stated in I Tim. 3 (not double-tongued, not given to wine, not greedy for money, etc.). It's important to notice that a plurality of elders is always mentioned in connection with local churches. For example, in Acts 20:17 the apostle Paul called for the "elders of the church." (See also Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5)

Of course, a preacher could serve as one of the elders, or pastors, of a congregation if he met the qualifications (just as Peter was an elder, I Pet. 5: 1). He could NOT, however, be THE pastor. The elders have the responsibility to shepherd or oversee the flock (I Pet. 5:2).

***- by James Evans***

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## ***Encouraging or Coddling***

It is not uncommon to hear someone say, "Brother Lukewarm and Sister Wayward need encouragement!" Is this the end-all solution to unfaithfulness? Someone throws a childish tantrum and quits the church. Another gets angry over something said in Bible class or a sermon and forsakes the Lord. Still another is not given the job he wanted thus he feels he is not needed, gets peeved and makes sure others suffer for treating him so badly. Is it just a matter of needing to be encouraged or is there something else needed?

Please don't misunderstand. I agree that discouragement is a problem for many individuals and congregations. I accept that Christians have both a privilege and responsibility to encourage one another. The Hebrew writer instructs us to assemble for the purpose of provoking one another unto love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). Paul tells Christians to restore those who have sinned and to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:1-2). We obviously have a responsibility to do all that is in our power to aid one another to make it to Heaven. However, the

question is, are we encouraging one another to a higher plane of spiritual service (Romans 12:1-2) or, are we coddling immature Christians and tolerating sin?

A sin that will condemn many souls to Hell is the sin of failing to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2 Peter 3:18). When Peter closed his second epistle, he gave this command. Notice, it is a command, not a suggestion. This makes our growing-up in grace and knowledge as necessary to our salvation as is baptism for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38).

The Hebrew writer rebuked some for failing to grow (Hebrews 5:12-13). Their failure to grow had caused them to remain babes. In this state, they could not teach others nor could they spiritually digest the 'meat' of God's word. There were things they needed to hear but because of their immaturity they were unable to spiritually digest it (Hebrews 5:11). It takes a mature Christian, one who has grown and exercised their senses in righteousness, to be able to discern good from evil (Hebrews 5:14).

We are alarmed when we hear of the failures within the public school system. We expect our children to be educated when we send them off to school. We set goals for their future, knowing that to reach those goals they must receive a good education. We would not think of coddling our children by allowing them to get their way when it comes to education. If we did, they would stay home and never learn. Why do we not have the same expectations for those who are Christians?

We all need to be encouraged from time to time. Let us be diligent to do so. But, we cannot coddle the immature and get them into Heaven. Only those who bear their cross (Matthew 16:24) will enter into the eternal rest promised to the faithful.

*- by Glen Young*

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## ***"Be No More Children"***

After seeing an exciting basketball game on TV, he decides he'd like to be a professional basketball player. A few days later, after hearing of a daring rescue from a burning building, he is convinced he wants to be a fireman. Not long after that he learns about men going into outer space, and he is sure that he really would love to become an astronaut.

What in the world is wrong with this guy? Why can't he decide on a career course and stick with it? Why is he always changing his mind about important things? The answer is simple: he's a child! It is inherent in children to frequently change their minds. They may be firmly convinced of something one day, and ready to do the opposite the next day. We understand that this is their nature. They will (hopefully) outgrow this tendency. And, when they do, we will say that they have "matured".

There are some that are spiritual "babes". In fact, everyone is in that category upon first obeying the gospel. Unfortunately, some never grow past that point (2 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:12-14). These folks are forever troubled by something new or different that they hear. It might be something about our worship, or about the work of the church, or about a matter of morality (like divorce and remarriage), or ... you get the idea. These people can never be settled as to what they think about the important truths contained in God's word.

Let us put it as simply and directly as we can - GROW UP! Ephesians 4:14 urges us "that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." You need to know what you believe, and you need to know why you believe it. If you hold a view, endorse a position, or would teach or recommend an "alternate view", you should have strong reasons for doing so. You should be ready to logically and rationally defend the position you espouse. If you can't do that, you're manifesting the fact that you are a spiritual child - immature - and you are likely to be "tossed to and fro" by whatever new thing comes along. GROW UP!

*- by Greg Gwin*