

**Acts 20:17, 28–31, Ephesians 4:11–13,  
1 Timothy 3:1–7, Titus 1:5–9, 1 Peter 5:1–4,  
and Pastors & Their Congregants**

## Prayer

## Introductory Questions

- What are different terms for those who lead a church? Why so many terms?
- What are the main responsibilities of a pastor?

## Introduction

This lesson addresses four topics with respect to pastors: (a) the terminology of pastoral leaders, (b) the qualifications for pastoral leaders, (c) the responsibilities of pastoral leaders, and (d) the relationship between pastors and their congregants.

### 1. Defining Terms

- a. **Shepherd** (Greek: *poimen*; English term derived from the Latin: *pastor*)  
Shepherds (the literal ones) lead, feed, and protect their sheep, and the term is a rich metaphor in the Bible. Jesus gave the church “shepherds” (Eph. 4:11). The English term “pastor” is derived from a Latin word for “shepherd.” Over time, the term “pastor” came to be used in churches, but many people who use the term miss the metaphor.
- b. **Elder** (Greek: *presbuteros*; English term derived from the Greek: *presbyter*)  
This term can refer to an old person (John 8:9) or, in a comparative sense, someone who is older than someone else (Luke 15:25). It can refer to officials in Judaism (Acts 4:5) and the church (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1)—individuals who ideally have maturity and wisdom that correspond to their age.
- c. **Overseer** (Greek: *episkopos*; English term derived from the Greek: *bishop*)  
This term refers to someone in an office of leadership with an emphasis, as the English translation reflects, on a person who oversees and manages people and tasks (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1–2; Titus 1:7; Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons*, 62–65).

### 2. One Office

These terms refer to *one office* in the New Testament. In 1 Peter, the apostle exhorts “the elders” (5:1; cf. v. 5): “*shepherd* [a verb] God’s *flock*” (5:2), “not *overseeing* [a participle] out of compulsion” (5:2), “but being examples to the *flock*” (5:3) (cf. Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7).

On the following two pages, we address these topics: (1) The Qualifications for Pastoral Leaders (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) and (2) The Responsibilities of Pastoral Leaders (1 Pet. 5:1–4; Eph. 4:11–13; Acts 20:28–31). We conclude by explaining how pastors and their congregants function together in a local church.

## 1. The Qualifications for Pastoral Leaders

- “1 This saying is trustworthy: “If anyone aspires to be an *overseer*, he desires a noble work.” 2 An *overseer*, therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not an excessive drinker, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy. 4 He must manage his own household competently and have his children under control with all dignity. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God’s church?) 6 He must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and incur the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Furthermore, he must have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he does not fall into disgrace and the devil’s trap.” (1 Tim. 3:1–7)
- “5 The reason I left you in Crete was to set right what was left undone and, as I directed you, to appoint *elders* in every town. 6 An *elder* must be blameless, the husband of one wife, with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. 7 As an *overseer* of God’s household, he must be blameless, not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, 9 holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.” (Titus 1:5–9)

Merkle groups the qualifications for elders/overseers into three categories: (1) *situational qualifications* (such as the ability to teach and not a recent convert), (2) *family qualifications* (such as the husband of one wife and the ability to manage his household well), and (3) *moral qualifications* (such as being above reproach, self-controlled, and hospitable) (109–123). This final category (moral qualifications) receives the most attention in these passages.

A man must have a desire to serve as an overseer (1 Tim. 3:1), which Paul assumes he will have before agreeing to serve in that role. There are three requirements for that office that not all Christians can or are required to meet. A shepherd/elder/overseer must be: (1) a man (1 Tim. 3:2, 4–5; Titus 1:6; cf. 1 Tim. 2:12–14, where Paul appeals to the creation order and the fall of humanity), (2) “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9; cf. Eph. 4:11), and (3) “not be a new convert” (1 Tim. 3:6). Other than those requirements, God calls *all Christians* to develop the character qualities that Paul outlines. All Christians benefit from studying, praying over, and discussing these lists, not only for their own character development but also so they (along with others in a church) can help to identify, appoint, and hold accountable pastoral leaders.

Merkle concludes his discussion: “Biblically qualified elders are not superspiritual people but are those who are mature in their faith and live consistent, humble lives...He is not perfect, but his life is characterized by integrity” (122).

- What questions or comments do you have about the qualifications for elders?
- What are some of the negative consequences when elders lack these characteristics?

## 2. The Responsibilities of Pastoral Leaders

- **The Call to Shepherd:** “1 I exhort the *elders* among you as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory about to be revealed: 2 *Shepherd* God’s *flock* among you, not *overseeing* out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the *flock*. 4 And when *the chief Shepherd* appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (1 Pet. 5:1–4)
- **The Call to Equip:** “11 And [Jesus] himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some *shepherds* [pastors] and teachers [or shepherd-teachers], 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.” (Eph. 4:11–13)
- **The Call to Protect:** “17 [Paul] summoned the *elders* of the church. 28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the *flock* of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as *overseers*, to *shepherd* the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage *wolves* will come in among you, not sparing the *flock*. 30 Men will rise up even from your own number and distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I never stopped warning each one of you with tears.” (Acts 20:17, 28–31)

**In 1 Peter 5:1–4**, the apostle explained how elders should conduct themselves (v. 1), and he heavily uses the imagery of shepherding. The elders must shepherd God’s flock—which (other passages teach us) includes using God’s Word to lead, feed, and protect God’s people (v. 2; cf. Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9). Elders must oversee God’s people in certain ways (willingly, eagerly, being examples) and not in other ways (not out of compulsion, not out of greed, not lording it over those entrusted to them) (vv. 2–3). Peter promises the shepherds/elders/overseers that they will be rewarded with “glory” (either the state of being glorified or some other reward) at the return of the chief Shepherd, Jesus (v. 4; cf. Rom. 8:21).

**In Ephesians 4:11–13**, Paul taught that Jesus gave gifts to the church in the form of individuals who function in specific roles to edify the church: (first-century) apostles, prophets, shepherds (pastors), and teachers (or shepherds-teachers) (v. 11). Jesus uses them to equip the people of God for the work of ministry, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son—growing into maturity according Christ’s fullness (vv. 12–13).

**In Acts 20:17, 28–31**, Paul taught the elders (v. 17) how to shepherd the flock, over which those men served as overseers (v. 28). The overseers had to “be on guard” and “be on the alert,” for false teachers would infiltrate the community and distort the truth to lure disciples into following them (vv. 28–31). To this day, we must pay attention to Paul’s warning (v. 31).

- What does a literal shepherd do? How does a pastor fulfill those functions?
- How can shepherds/elders/overseers protect the flock from false teachers?

## Sound Doctrine: Pastors and Their Congregants

Below we outline ways that pastors and their congregants should relate to one another.

1. **While pastors serve in a unique office and make unique contributions in local churches, we must remember *the many ways they are not unique*.** *All humans* are made in God's image, have a sinful disposition and commit sins, and need God's saving grace through Jesus Christ (Gen. 1:26–28; Rom. 3:9–20; Gal. 3:25–29). *All Christians* must seek to grow in Christian community, to develop Christlike character, to serve and pray for one another, to make disciples of Jesus Christ, and, ultimately, to love and worship God above all (Matt. 22:37–40; 28:18–20; Acts 2:42–47; Col. 3:5–17; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). In these ways and many others, pastors are no different than their congregants. We should honor pastors, but we must never overvalue their presence and contribution (1 Cor. 12:4–6; 1 Tim. 5:17).
2. **Pastors must be willing to receive feedback, correction, and (if necessary) discipline, and their congregants must hold them accountable to the qualifications for pastors as outlined in Scripture:** “19 Don't accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses. 20 Publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will be afraid” (1 Tim. 5:19–20; cf. 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).
3. **Pastors must strive to be *godly examples* for their congregants, and their congregants should seek to imitate their character, words, and actions:** “Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7; cf. 1 Thess. 1:6; 3 John 11).
4. **Pastors must *teach* God's Word with faithfulness and *equip* God's people, and their congregants must both verify the truthfulness of their teaching AND humbly receive instruction:** “11 And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11–12; cf. Matt. 7:15; Acts 17:11).
5. **Pastors must *lead* their congregants with sensitivity to God's Spirit, wisdom, and assertiveness, and their congregants should follow their lead in a way that does not make their role unnecessarily difficult:** “Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17; cf. 1 Pet. 5:5). But we must never obey someone who asks us to disobey God (Acts 5:29).
6. **Pastors must *meet the needs* of their congregants, and their congregants must ask for and receive help:** “Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14). However, all Christians must be both open and honest about their needs.

- What comments and questions do you have about this lesson?
- What is one thing you can do in response to this lesson?

## Prayer