

The Problem Is  
**The Pastor**

And the Better the Pastor, the Bigger the Problem  
By David A. DeWitt

## **A Definition**

First of all, let me define the word we will be talking about. The word *pastors* only occurs once in the English translation of the New Testament (Ephesians 4:11). But the Ephesians reference does not define what we call a pastor. What we, in the Christian community, mean when we use the word pastor is,

**The individual considered *first among them* who speaks, or is expected to speak, most of the time, during the main assemblies of the church.**

[The phrase *first among them* (KJV *have the preeminence among them*) comes from 3 John 9, where John condemns *Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them.*]

The problem with having a pastor is not just in the title “pastor.” To simply re-name the pastor a “teaching elder” or a “pastor-teacher” does not change anything. The problems arise when there is one identifiable person who represents the church and is designated as the one usually speaking, most of the time, when the church assembles. And the better he is at his job, the more he comes to be *first among them* and have *preeminence among them*. Therefore, the better he is, the bigger the problem.

Usually, pastoring includes visiting the sick, administering church functions, heading up the church board, and being the church CEO. But that’s only most of the pastors, most of the time. It is not necessarily true of all pastors. Some have an agreement with their board to delegate these duties to others, although that usually doesn’t work well, and it hardly ever works in smaller churches. When Aunt Sophie is sick in the hospital, she wants to see the pastor, not some designated visiting elder or associate. When someone has a disagreement with a program of the church or the way it’s being handled, they want to talk to the pastor, not a church administrator. Baptisms, weddings, and funerals are ceremonies to be conducted by pastors.

Nonetheless, some pastors are capable of delegating some traditionally pastoral functions to others. What they will **not** do, or not be able to do, is avoid being *first among them*. And, although no pastor speaks all the time, because associate pastors, visiting pastors, or missionaries speak some of the time, the pastor is the one usually expected to speak regularly on Sunday morning.

In this study, I will be using the word “pastor” as we define it in in our global church culture.

## **My Experience**

You need to understand that I have generally had a very good experience with pastors. My first memories of being in church as a small child include a pastor named Burnson. I was too young to know much about him, except he seemed like a distinguished man and my father liked him. Actually, I remember my father saying we went to the Evangelical Free Church because Pastor Burnson was such a good Bible teacher. When I was a bit older, we had a pastor named Buckert. Again, a real good man, who was respected personally and in the pulpit. The one I remember most is Pastor Westland, the man who pastored our church when I was a teenager. He was a big man, a bit overweight with a big friendly smile. Along with a small group of other teens, Pastor Westland taught me

to memorize Scripture, and understand biblical prophecy, for which I will be forever grateful. I really liked that guy.

When I went to Michigan State University, I attended East Lansing Trinity Church and sat under the teaching of a pastor named Williams. Pastor Williams taught the Bible with verse-by-verse exegetical preaching. I was amazed at this and tried to be there whenever he was teaching. Pastor Williams was responsible for my going to Dallas Theological Seminary, and he performed the wedding for my wife Ellen and me.

Clearly, many good men have become pastors. Through the years, I have had good relationships with pastors. I also was a pastor, the first pastor of a beginning church in the north Dallas area, and an interim pastor in the Evangelical Free Church in Bay City, Michigan.

My problem with the office of a pastor is not that I have had bad experiences with pastors. My problem is that I cannot find them in the Bible. And when we do not follow the church design given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles, then we will not have the church they designed. Of course, we are all sinners, and the way we do church won't solve that. Nonetheless, there were no pastors in the New Testament church, and what Christ and the apostles taught makes the whole idea of a pastor a problem.

There is no reason those men who helped me during my younger years had to be pastors. Actually, they were helpful in spite of the fact that they were pastors. Good men can get a job done even if they have to pull around a ball and chain to do it. But, what if this job we call a pastor is not just a ball and chain but a hindrance to ministry? What if it's actually biblically wrong? If we are doing something wrong, say, lying, stealing, cheating, or lusting, then the better we are at it, the more we do it and the more successful we are at doing it, the bigger the problem. So if the job we have created and called a "pastor" is wrong, then **the better the pastor, the bigger the problem.**

## **The Evolution of Pastors**

Fact is, the whole idea of a pastor comes from our traditions, not Scripture. We will look at the Scripture in detail, but for now, let's think about how we got here. In the first century, the apostles set up a plurality of leaders. The church established by the apostles consisted of all the believers of a city (or larger geographic region such as Judea, Samaria, and Galilee – Acts 9:31). They called the leaders *elders*, a term commonly used for city leaders in the Old Testament and the gospels. As the church developed, different words were used to describe its leaders. Paul added the terms *overseers* (KJV, *bishops*) and established *deacons*. The author of the book of Hebrews used the common word for *leaders*, although Peter, Paul, and John continued to call them *elders*. But whatever they were called, they were always: (1) a plurality of spiritually qualified men who (2) had responsibility, not authority, (3) within a city or larger region.

The only gatherings of believers were in homes.

Acts 2:46, ...*breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness*

Acts 5:42, ...*from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ*

Acts 20:20, ...*teaching you publicly and from house to house*

Romans 16:5, ...*greet the church that is in their house*

1 Corinthians 16:19, *Aquila and Prisca greet you...with the church that is in their house*

Colossians 4:15, *Greet...the church that is in her house*

Philemon 2, ...*to the church in your house*

The homes were small, and the apostles never set up a pastor, or any prominent person or speaker, over the house church assembly. Elders, bishops, deacons, and leaders were for cities, not house assemblies. And, although early on the two were the same, soon the larger cities had several house churches. But the responsibility of church leaders was still throughout the whole city.

As soon as the apostles passed off the scene, the church in the second century developed the idea of one bishop over each church assembly, and one bishop over each city. Then larger metropolitan city bishops became more prominent—some acquiring the title of “Metropolitan.” Apparently, all bishops were equal, but some bishops were more equal than other bishops.

Each church selected one bishop for their church, then bishops from other cities would come and lay hands on him, anointing him as the new single bishop over that church. Sometimes a meeting of those bishops was called the church. This developed a need for a single church leader, and in the 400s, Leo I, bishop of Rome, declared himself the head of the whole church and traced his authority back to Peter, as the bishop of Rome. The Roman Catholic Church saw itself as a replacement for Israel, therefore, its clergy was a replacement for the Levitical priesthood, and individual priests were assigned to individual church establishments. But the priests all answered to the chain of command that ended in the Roman pope. A similar thing happened in the Eastern Orthodox Church, except they had national patriarchs instead of one catholic (universal) pope.

Dan Wallace summarizes well the problem of following church history into a single leader paradigm:

In Ignatius (an early Christian writer who died in c. AD 117), at the beginning of the second century, already a monarchical episcopate exists. It is interesting that Roman Catholics especially appeal to this as a model for their practices (since they rely on the tradition found in patristic writers like Ignatius far more than on divine revelation). Those who deny the Pauline authorship of the pastoral epistles (i.e., 1-2 Timothy and Titus) also see the pastorals as reflecting a one-elder situation (monarchical episcopate) because they regard the pastorals as having been written during the time of Ignatius. But evangelicals should not consider arguments from either camp as weighty. In particular, if we equate either what the early church fathers practiced or believed as totally in line with the New Testament, then we have some significant retooling to do in our churches today. Some examples:

*Didache* (c. AD 100-150)--gives several regulations about baptism and fasting, much of which is pure legalism. (For example, in one place he says, ‘Let us not fast as the Jews do, who fast on Mondays and Thursdays. Instead, let us fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.’ In his discussions of baptism, he argues that cold water is better than warm, etc.--all arguments that have nothing whatever to do with the biblical revelation).

Most early church fathers (i.e., 2nd-3rd century AD) didn't have a clue about grace, eternal security, the gospel. The church very quickly degenerated into basic legalism. It was not until Augustine that the church recovered some of this. But then it fell into the dark ages, waiting for a young monk from Germany to nail his protests on the door of the Wittenberg Church. Dr. Ted Deibler (former chairman of Church History at Dallas Seminary) used to say, ‘the one thing we can be certain of learning from church history is that we learn nothing from church history.’ He meant by this that we are on very dangerous ground if we assume uniformly correct theology from the church fathers.

Allegorical interpretation and eschatology: Origen and his school in particular promoted a view of Scripture which was quite fanciful.

In sum, the argument for a single leader of each church is especially persuasive to Roman Catholics because it did occur throughout church history. Yet, such traditions can never replace the Word of God.

At the Reformation, Luther, and later Calvin, understood the clergy did not have the capacity to forgive sin. But the idea of one person being the prominent leader of a congregation, with authority to preach, marry, baptize, and bury, was preserved. The idea also had practical advantages because Protestants wanted to hear from their leaders on Sundays, since they were teaching the Bible rather than administering a ritual mass. Plus, it was much easier to hire a pastor to run things, so they could “let George do it.”

For the last, oh, say, 150 years, the American church planters have spread this pastor concept all over the world. For the last century or so, American Protestant Christianity has dominated Protestant missions, simply because American missionaries have been more capable of raising money and traveling to other countries. But this was not like the travel of the Great Awakening of the 1700s, or that of the evangelists of the 1800s, where missionaries were presenting the Gospel. American missionaries of the last century have primarily been church planters.

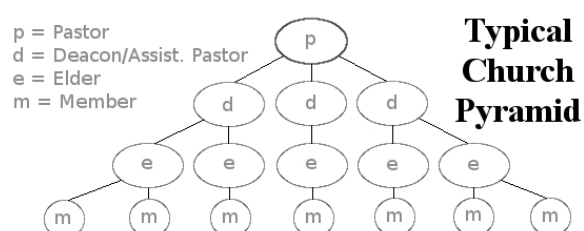
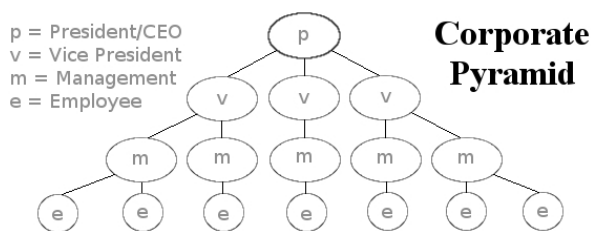
And the churches they planted followed the American model of independent (or denominational) local churches run by, taught by, and overseen by, a single person, usually called a pastor. Even those doing evangelism and social work tended to do it through the local church pastors. Missionaries report that they are working through local churches. But what that really means is they are doing it with, and only with, the blessing of some local church pastor. The rest of people, in a local church visited by missionaries, will find it difficult to be involved, if the pastor does not sanction the missionaries (as in 3 John 9-11).

It’s what the world does with all its institutions. Businesses, clubs, schools governments, and armies all need a single official leader in charge to operate efficiently, grow numerically, and preserve their traditions. That always makes sense when man is organizing things without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Responsibility alone won’t cut it in a manmade organization, so responsibility must be coupled with authority. Therefore, most Protestants never abandoned the idea of one leader over a congregation.

When they developed denominations and the denominations developed seminaries, the purpose of the seminary was to supply clergy for their denominational churches. The tradition of the pastor was solidified. We reduced the church to an assembly, evolved a traditional office of pastor over that assembly, then created schools to supply people for that office. But the Apostle Paul warned us about that.

*See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ (Colossians 2:8).*

Our western culture has forced the church into that of a typical western, corporate structure. The modern day pastor has become the CEO of an organization, with the elders or deacons acting as the board of directors and lieutenants. We have reduced true shepherding to that of hiring a paid professional to represent our church and stand up to make a speech once a week.



Many modern authors on church growth promote the need for a strong one-man pastorate. Such sentiments as those expressed by C. Peter Wagner are fairly common within churches today:

The local church is like a company with one company commander, the pastor, who gets his orders from the Commander-in-Chief [Jesus]. The company commander has lieutenants and sergeants under him for consultation and implementation, but the final responsibility of his decisions is that of the company commander, and he must answer to the Commander-in-Chief...the pastor has the power in a growing church [C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Ventura, CA: Royal), 1984, p. 65].

Not all Protestants went along with the pastor idea. As noted, the church taught by Christ and the apostles in the first century had no pastors, before it evolved into the clergy of the second century. So when the church started over, at the beginning of the Reformation in the early 1500s, the emphasis was on going back to the Bible, especially for salvation. One group called the Anabaptists, in Zurich, Switzerland, went back to the Bible for everything, not just those things surrounding the doctrine of salvation. So they eliminated all Christian holidays except Sunday and the idea of a clergy, because they could not find them in the Bible. The Moravian Brethren and the later Brethren movements also developed the concept of a plurality of leaders without a pastor. Many in the house-church movements also recognized this and operated without a pastor. These were like the New Testament Bereans. Luke reports,

*Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).*

But even outside the Brethren and house-church movements, there are those who look at Scripture, find no pastors, and understand that it's a problem when we incorporate that idea into the church.

It seems to me that this model (either the philosophical single-elder model or the pragmatic single-leader model) misses the mark of the New Testament teaching on this topic. The early church had, I believe, multiple elders...If we can get back to this model, I think that churches will be stronger in many ways. They will be less idiosyncratic, less dependent on one person, more accountable [Dr. Dan Wallace, Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary].

May the church of Jesus Christ put leadership back where it belongs, in the hands of those mature Christians (plural)" [Steve Jones, True Grace Ministries (auburn.edu)].

The modern role and function of a pastor is found nowhere in Scripture. So, What Should A Pastor Do? Simple answer: Quit. In their hearts before the Lord and with the group they are with, the

“pastors” need to resign. They need to find work, and they need to become just brothers in the church [homechurchhelp.com].

It is difficult to get a man to understand something if his livelihood depends upon his not understanding it [Upton Sinclair].

We make bold to declare that we are unable to find anything in the New Testament which even approximates such a system. One-man ministry in the church is unknown in the Book which as Baptists we profess to recognize as “our only rule of faith and practice” [former Baptist pastor George Landis].

In all of this, one thing is clear. The idea of a local church pastor was never a development of, or an application of, any New Testament passage. Christ and the apostles never suggested such a thing.

## **Some Practical Issues**

### **Problems Caused By Having an Up-front Person**

I turned on Rush Limbaugh the other day, while he was taking about one of his favorite subjects, NFL football. He was saying that the reason we are so interested in it, is because we love entertainment. “Entertainment,” he said, “carries the idea that **the people in the audience cannot do what the people on stage can do**” (from my memory, not a direct quote). Whether it is watching a magician, a stand-up comedian, a philharmonic orchestra, or a football game, the concept of entertainment is that the audience cannot do what those “up front,” “on the stage” can do. And we are not only willing but eager to pay, to have them do it for us.

Having gone to church all my life, I thought of the structure of most local churches. We have a pastor up front and an audience listening. The assumption is that those in the audience cannot do what the pastor can do. If I go to listen to a concert put on by a philharmonic orchestra, I do not expect to participate (except in applause) or learn to play the violin. But the audience of a church contains believers gifted by the Holy Spirit. The apostles did not establish a pulpit with an audience. They expected a plurality of gifted believers to contribute to, and be involved in, discussing the content of the teaching (1 Corinthians 14:29-32).

But when the believers are an audience, it is inappropriate for them to be part of the program (except as an audience), simply because of the fact that they are an audience. Actually, their involvement is prohibited by the fact that they are down there, or out there, instead of up there. Involvement, the sharing of one’s spiritual gifts, enlightenment from the Holy Spirit, the understanding another believer may have on any passage or subject, a discussion about false teaching (or any discussion at all), is improper, out of place, ill advised, and out of order.

The better such a pastor is, for example, the more capable he is at teaching the Bible, giving application examples, or expressing the gospel message, the more he reinforces the auditorium-concept of the church assembly. This says that the church is a place where the audience cannot do what the pastor can do. The better he is, the more he neuters the church. The audience usually comes out of habit, or guilt, or tradition. And if the pastor is really good, the audience often becomes zombies, mimicking the views of the pastor. The potential contribution of any of the saints in the audience, those believers who are all regenerated, indwelt, baptized, sealed, filled, led, guided and gifted by the Holy Spirit, is out the window. Because it’s inappropriate.

Try this. Ask some Christian about his church. I'm willing to bet they will talk about their pastor. I've done this repeatedly. Most people will mention the pastor in the first sentence. Actually, most will not talk about anything else but the pastor, as if the church actually does not exist, only the pastor. If I prolong the conversation, they will say something else, like, "We have a great missions program," or "We feed the poor," or "We have midweek small groups," or "We have a great program for kids." But all of this is overshadowed by, and made possible by, the fact that they have a pastor who has grown the church to a point where they can do all this other good stuff. They don't need the other stuff, but they absolutely, positively, definitely, need their pastor.

The issue is stated well by a statement posted on [homechurchhelp.com](http://homechurchhelp.com):

What's the big deal and why is this an issue?

Our entire Christian culture has largely fit around this erroneous idea of this one man and his unscriptural role. Entire groups and churches are built around the pastor. People join churches based on who the pastor is. The entire direction, vision, and focus of a group is often based on the pastor. While the whole time, his role, function, and very existence are not even Biblical.

We've been taught:

'If you don't have a pastor, you are not under authority.'

'If you don't have a pastor, you don't have spiritual covering.'

'If you don't have a pastor, you aren't being fed.'

These are very common beliefs that stem from a basic error. *But you have today rejected your God, who delivers you from all your calamities and your distresses; yet you have said, 'No, but set a king over us' (1 Samuel 10:19).*

Just like the children of Israel cried out for a king, it is within the base, carnal nature of people to want a physical king. What does a king provide? A king provides security. A king provides a feeling that someone is taking care of things and that someone is making decisions that need to be made.

The Catholics have their "fathers," the Protestants have their "pastors." People will always want someone else to take the responsibility off their shoulders. And we will gladly pay someone to do it. We want a specialist to take care of the role of leadership. Men are responsible for leading the church. Not a man.

The idea that we need pastors for churches, assumes that churches are for the masses. It assumes that the church is for everybody who will come—believers, seekers, unbelievers, the more the better. But the church of Christ and the apostles was for believers, not a gathering of the masses. The author of Hebrews said we should not be *forsaking our own assembling together (KJV assembling ourselves together)*. When the church assembles, it should be when believers, who have found fellowship with one another, gather **themselves** together. The church of the New Testament was for *devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer* (Acts 2:42), not assembling, gathering, or entertaining the masses. Evangelism is for the masses, assembling the church is for believers.

### **Problems Caused by Administrating Churches with Pastors**

Let me reemphasize, we are all sinners, and eliminating pastors will not cure our sin nature. We will sin under any organizational system. But that does not excuse the fact that the position of a pastor itself fans the flames of trouble. The problems caused by the existence of pastors over churches are

everywhere, many people are aware of them, and most never mention it. But once in a while someone tells it like it is. I would like you to read a paragraph from the letter of a missionary who worked in both Japan and Romania. His name is Ron Bates. Here's what he wrote:

Most of our time among these churches and believers was in full-time work as a "pastor." We also served as missionaries in Japan. In time, we saw that the pastoral office provoked much difficulty and division. From unofficial dictator to glorified errand boy, the democratically elected "pastor" often became the primary reason of blame for the condition of the church. He was chosen from a number of "candidates" for the pulpit and expected to direct the work of the Lord. If he had a good personality and was not too strict in applying the Word, and was quite a good motivator or promoter, then he was highly praised. If he did not fulfill the wishes of some in the congregation, he was then undermined, until he could be gotten rid of, with the thought, "We hired you, so we can fire you!"

On July 31, 1932, George Landis preached his resignation sermon before the congregation of the First Baptist Church of New Castle, Pennsylvania, after being their pastor for seven and one half years. Here are a few reasons he gave for leaving the pastorate of the church:

The popular idea of Church organization is a group of members known as the 'laity,' presided over by one man, known as a 'clergyman,' who serves as the 'pastor' of that particular congregation... That God in His grace has used this system and has wrought man spiritual victories through it need not be argued. That there are many consecrated and zealous men of God thus investing their lives in sacrificial and unselfish service, we freely admit. But we raise the question: 'Is it Scriptural?' We make bold to declare that we are unable to find anything in the New Testament which even approximates such a system. One-man ministry in the church is unknown in the Book which as Baptists we profess to recognize as 'our only rule of faith and practice.'... Clerisy is foreign to the New Testament, save to be condemned under the term of 'Nicolaitansim' (Rev. 2:6, 15), 'which thing,' says the glorified Christ, 'I hate.'

We believe that a one-man ministry is contrary to the mind of the Holy Ghost and retards the development of the body of Christ by preventing the exercise of many God-given gifts. It tends to the setting up of a hierarchy within the church, and virtually leads to a priesthood, whether recognized by that name or not. It makes the servant of God too often a servant of man and amendable to the will of man rather than God.

Dan Wallace adds these "Pragmatic Arguments":

Even if there were no decisive arguments for plurality of elders, the preponderance of evidence is decidedly on the side of this view. Further, in consultation with others (especially church historian, M. James Sawyer at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary), the following principle seems to be true: 'Churches that have a pastor as an authority above others (thus, in function, a monarchical episcopate) have a disproportionately high number of moral failures at the top level of leadership.' In other words, it is less likely for a pastor to fall into sin if he is *primus inter parus* ("first among equals" in the sense of his visibility and training, not spirituality) than if he is elevated above the rest of the church leadership. Thus, the case of multiple elders in the local church is solidly based on biblical, historical, and pragmatic reasons. By having several leaders, the church is more able to take on the personality of Christ rather than the idiosyncrasies of any one man."



## Undeniable Practical Problems

George Landis, Ron Bates, Dan Wallace and the folks at homechurchhelp.com have brought out some practical problem that are discussed regularly among missionaries and those serving the Lord in local churches all over the world. But rarely does anyone actually write about them. The situations these men have revealed are not in every church everywhere, but they are an undeniable tendency. It's not rare or infrequent. It's a common problem with churches organized around pastors. So I would like to list what they said:

1. The church tends to form a Roman-Catholic-like hierarchy, which becomes a clergy. So the church develops two kinds of Christians: the clergy and the laity. "It tends to the setting up of a hierarchy within the church, and virtually leads to a priesthood, whether recognized by that name or not."
2. The church tends to focus on the personality of the pastor, so it becomes crucial that he be liked. The pastor has to be careful to not do or say things most people in his congregation don't like. "If they like his personality, fine. If he did not fulfill the wishes of some in the congregation, he was then undermined until he could be gotten rid of..."
3. A "one-man ministry is contrary to the mind of the Holy Ghost and retards the development of the body of Christ, by preventing the exercise of many God-given gifts."
4. "It makes the servant of God too often a servant of man and amendable to the will of man rather than God."
5. "Churches that have a pastor as an authority above others (thus, in function, a monarchical episcopate) have a disproportionately high number of moral failures at the top level of leadership." Actually, the structure itself attracts some women to the pastor. Pastors are sometimes even unaware of this. But when such women come to him for counseling, it is a format for failure.

## The Teaching of Jesus

### Jesus Condemned Authority Structures and Authority Figures

Of course, Jesus did not talk about a pastor. Nobody in the Bible did, because there weren't any. We made them up as a product of the cultural evolution. But Jesus did talk about what most of our pastors are—authority figures over their congregations.

*But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28).*

Jesus condemned leadership as defined by the world. The word for *Gentiles* here is ἔθνος (*ethnos*). It's the word the Jews used for Gentiles, but it is also used generally as a word for the unbelieving world (*nations* in Matthew 28:19). So the way the world describes leaders will be those who (1) *lord it over* others and those who (2) *exercise authority over them*. And Jesus distanced Himself from any connection to this world. He said,

*"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:36).*

Of course, every pastor will claim he doesn't do that, and people who like their pastor will claim the same. But then, why do they have a *lord it over them, authority over them* structure with a CEO, a

board of directors (called elders or deacons) with lieutenants who carry out tasks? Why does their leadership structure look like the world's pyramid of authority?

Some say, "It's an inverted pyramid with the pastor at the bottom." But all that amounts to is an excuse to keep the world's model. If you have a pyramid, then the one at the pinnacle is the authority figure, no matter what way you tip it. And if the idea is to use the world's model with the right attitude, then why didn't Christ or the apostles do that? Why didn't Jesus set up some familiar model of leadership, and then use it in a good way?

Probably because the model itself promotes the perversion, since that's what it's designed to do. If we establish a large or growing organization, we will likely set up a leadership model everyone is familiar with (a CEO with a board, a pyramid with a leader and middle management, a coach over a team, an officer in the military, a president, prime minister, or general security over a country).

When it's a church, we call the authority figure a pastor, and everyone expects the pastor we put at the top of that model to act like everyone in the world does in that position. And the pastor himself will feel comfortable assuming that *lord it over them, authority over them* role. As he does, he will be claiming, and probably convince himself, that he is using the role to serve, bringing a new meaning to the position or the idea of an inverted pyramid. But the reality is, when we create the position, we create the problem. Jesus not only did not form a *lord it over them, authority over them* model of any kind, He resisted being placed in that role by the people.

*So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone (John 6:14-15).*

### **Jesus Condemned Authority Titles**

Jesus told His disciples,

*But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted (Matthew 23:8-12).*

So we can also be confident that the early church did not follow the synagogue format. The synagogues had no pastors, but they were dominated by the authority figures of the Pharisees and their rabbis. Although Jesus condemned the use of all titles, He illustrated that with the three of them:

1. *Rabbi*, a term which parallels our title "pastor" in the sense that the rabbis were the clergy of the synagogues.
2. *Father*, a term designating one specific leader. This title is specifically violated by the Roman Catholic Church and condemned because God is *Our Father which art in heaven*.
3. *Leader* [καθηγητής (*kathegetes*)], which can be a leader or a teacher, condemned because only *One is your Leader, that is, Christ*.

It's not that other titles were all right, okay, or permissible. These are only examples. No title of leadership is appropriate for the church. Therefore, we can conclude that when the apostles used the words *elder*, *overseer* (KJV *bishop*), *deacon*, and *leader*, they were describing service responsibilities, not designating a title to distinguish some people from other people. Such titles would be disobeying Jesus.

## **Jesus Is the Only Pastor**

The word “pastor” is an English word [or however it’s rendered in other languages] for the word *shepherd* ποιμήν (*poimen*). Jesus said that He was the Good Shepherd, and He was building *one flock with one shepherd*. There are simply no such things as “under-shepherds.”

*I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become **one flock with one shepherd*** (John 10:14-16).

As Peter wrote,

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

## **Jesus Described a Believing Leader as a Slave, Not an Up-Front Figure**

When the mother of James and John asked that her sons *sit one on Your right and one on Your left*, Jesus made some comments about being great in the sense of being distinguished from others. He said,

*... whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:26-28).

This is not about some well-known authority figure who speaks on Sunday, claiming he is a servant. Jesus’ idea of a servant was somebody most people would not even know. He illustrated what He meant in the Upper Room at the Passover, during the Last Supper, when He took upon Himself the role of a household slave.

*[Jesus] got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded* (John 13:4-5).

## **The Teaching of the Apostles**

### **The Apostles Did Not Designate Specific Titles for Leaders**

Let’s look more closely at Paul’s unique use of the word ἐπίσκοπος (*episkopos*) *overseers* (KJV *bishops*).

*It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be...* (1 Timothy 3:1-2a).

It seems that he uses the words *overseer* and *elder* for the same people. That is to say, the two terms were synonymous. For example, in Titus 1:5 the phrase *appoint elders* is followed in verse 7 by the phrase, *for a bishop must be blameless*. It seems they are the same or Titus would have qualification for those whom he was not to appoint. In Acts 20:17, Paul calls together the *elders of the church* of Ephesus. But in verse 28, he addresses those same men as *overseers* (KJV *bishops*). So they are one and the same, meaning neither is a specific title but a functional description. The older mature Christian men were also the ones who oversee the less mature believers in their city, but no specific title was given to them (as in 1 Peter 5:1-3).

### **What About the Office of an Overseer?**

Many ministries, supporting the idea of having titles, say this is not disobeying Jesus because of Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 3:1, *office of and overseer* (KJV *bishop*). The problem is **the words**

**office of** are not in the Greek text. It's just the way the translators translated the word ἐπισκοπή (*episcopo*) for *overseer*. But the Louw & Nida Lexicon has an informative comment on this word:

Though in some contexts ἐπισκοπή has been regarded traditionally as a position of authority, in reality the focus is upon the responsibility for caring for others, and in the context of Ac 1:20 the reference is clearly to the responsibility for caring for the church.

Besides, there actually is another different Greek word for *office*, and it is only used in the New Testament with reference to the Old Testament priests. For example, the author of Hebrews writes, *And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office* [ἱερατεία (*hierateia*), from which English gets the word hierarchy] *have commandment in the Law* (Hebrews 7:5). So Paul is talking about overseers (which we will discuss later), **not** the **office** of an overseer.

### **When They Discussed Elders, the Apostles Always Designated a Plurality of Elders**

Acts 11:30—*elders* at the church of Antioch  
Acts 14:23—Paul and Barnabas appoint *elders in every church*  
Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4—*elders* at the church in Jerusalem  
Acts 20:17, 28—*elders/overseers* at the church in Ephesus  
Acts 21:18—*elders* at the church in Jerusalem  
Philippians 1:1—*overseers and deacons* at the church in Philippi  
1 Timothy 5:17—*elders* at the church in Ephesus  
Titus 1:5—Titus is to appoint *elders* in every city on Crete  
James 5:14—*the elders of the church*  
1 Peter 5:1-2—*the elders among you*

### **The Apostles Used Elders As a General Designation Of the Mature Believers In a City**

Titus 1:9 includes in the qualification for an elder that he be  
...*holding fast the faithful Word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.*  
Teaching, exhorting and refuting assumes a good deal of knowledge and maturity.

The terms *overseers* (KJV *bishops*) and *deacons* are unique to Paul. In churches he did not start and develop, such as the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch and Rome, he did not recommend them or suggest they change something so they would have them. But the term *elders* is used by Peter, Paul, James and John. The word *elders* is used 196 times in the NAS Bible.

It was the common word for the mature city leaders of the Old Testament. For example, when Boaz wanted to marry Ruth and purchase Naomi's diseased husband's property, we read,  
*He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here."* (Ruth 4:2).  
Elders were a plurality of the older mature men of a city. The word is used that way throughout the Pentateuch, Psalms, Proverbs, and the prophetic books.

The authors of the gospels used the word *elders* the same as in the Old Testament, a word for city leaders. When the church began in Acts 2, the apostles used the word *elder* the same way, except it wasn't mature Jews but the mature believers in the city.

When Paul and Barnabas visited the cities of the Roman province of Galatia, they left behind a plurality of believers, called churches, in the cities Lystra, Iconium, Derbe and Antioch of Galatia. We read,

*When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:23).*

Notice they appointed (literally *chose*) elders. They did not appoint deacons. So apparently, from the earliest stages, the church of a city had a plurality of elders, but other leaders were optional. For example, if we compare Titus 1:5-9 with 1 Timothy 3:1-13, we can see a similar pattern of instruction. But Titus was not told to appoint deacons.

We can also **not** claim that young churches only had elders but more mature churches had both elders and deacons, because deacons are only mentioned for the churches in Ephesus (a large church) and Philippi (a small church). There is no mention of deacons, nor any instruction to appoint them, in the other churches, even the larger churches, such as in Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, or Rome. And no apostle except Paul mentions deacons.

So today's churches, the believers in a city or other geographic region, should have older men recognized in some way by a plurality of the believers (obviously they can't be appointed by apostles) as mature overseers. Other kinds of servants may also be indicated, but no other leaders are designated for all churches.

### **What About the "Pastors" of Ephesians 4:11?**

The only time the word ποιμήν (*poimen*) is translated *pastors* is in the English New Testament versions Ephesians 4:11.

*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.*

There are three possibilities for the duration of these five gifts:

1. They were all just for the beginning of the church during the first century.
2. Only apostles and prophets were for the beginning of the church.
3. All of these still exist today.

But whatever view you hold about how long they occurred, these are people who are gifts to the church given to the whole church by Jesus at the time of His ascension. These are not the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, given by the Holy Spirit, at the beginning of the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

**Nothing** in the book of Ephesians refers to what we call "local churches." Absolutely nothing. Nothing in Ephesians is about the subdivision of the believers in a city, such as into house church assemblies. There is nothing about the regulation of house churches, the nature of their assemblies or appointing their leadership. Ephesians is about there being

*... one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6).*

There is nothing local about it.

For example, in Ephesians 4:11,

- Were the *apostles* (like, say, Peter, Paul, and John) meant to be one for each local house church or the universal body of all believers? Answer: obviously, for all believers.
- Were the *prophets* (which included at least some of the apostles plus Matthew, Mark, Luke, the Lord's half brothers James, and Jude) meant to be one for each local church or were they prophets for the universal body of all believers? Answer: obviously, for all believers.

- Were the *evangelists* (such as James, Apollos, and Philip) meant to be one evangelist for each local church or those who evangelized throughout the universal body of all believers? Answer: obviously, for all believers. If these gifts are for the whole church age, we can see evangelists like D. L. Moody, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham, and Luis Palau. We do not observe one for each local church.
- Were the *teachers* (like Timothy, Titus, Pricilla, and Aquila) meant to be one for each local church or the universal body of all believers? Answer: obviously, for all believers. We can hear or read the work of teachers like C. S. Lewis, J. Vernon McGee, and Charles Ryrie. Not one teacher for each local church.

So why would we conclude that *pastors* are the only gift in Ephesians 4:11 designated to be one of them for each local church, when there is absolutely nothing else about a local church in the whole book or this passage? Answer: because we are reading our tradition back into Scripture, desperately looking for something to justify what we are doing.

Pastors [*ποιμήν (poimen)*] are shepherds. They take care of wayward sheep, keeping them out of trouble, and leading them out of chaos and into order. We can see the work of pastors like the New Testament Barnabas, and later the friars like Francis of Assisi, and still later, William Booth, Hudson Taylor, Brother Andrew, and Mother Teresa. None of this has anything to do with being *first among them* or regularly speaking to a group on Sunday morning.

But, some ask, weren't there some prophets and teachers in individual house churches? Yes, there were. These were people who received those gifts from the Holy Spirit (listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12) at the beginning of the church in Acts 2. But that's not these men in Ephesians 4. These men were given by Christ at His ascension, and were for the global body of all believers. And neither list of the gifts from the Holy Spirit (listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12) includes pastors. Only these men in Ephesians 4.

### **Are the Angels of Revelation 2 and 3 Pastors?**

*To the angel of the church in Ephesus write...* Those desperately seeking to justify the use of local church pastors, often go to Revelation 2 and 3 to call the seven angels of the seven churches, pastors. But everywhere else in the book of Revelation, the word *angel* refers to the race of angelic beings, not humans, and we are told the whole book is something Jesus *sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John*. So apparently, Jesus sent an angel to communicate to John what John was to write to those seven churches.

Since the word *angel* can mean a human messenger (Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52), this is taken to be the case here. But that hardly helps the case of making these into pastors. The word for angel is ἄγγελος (*aggelos*). The word translated pastor is ποιμήν (*poimen*). The two words are not in any way similar. If these seven angels are humans, then they are messengers who delivered John's letters to these cities, not pastors of local churches. ἄγγελος (*aggelos*) in no way describes someone who is *first among them* and gives regular sermons to local congregations.

### **Were There Anything Like Our Local Church Pastors in the New Testament?**

Yes, there are two places where the New Testament local assemblies, apparently, churches meeting in someone's home, did establish something similar to what we call local church pastors. And the apostle condemned the idea both times.

The **first** example was in Corinth. Paul wrote,

*For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:11-12).*

*I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:2-4).*

This is not exactly like a local church pastor, nothing in the New Testament is. But it has one big similarity. Some of the believers in Corinth had divided themselves up into groups, following certain personalities. These were not just local house church assemblies, but ones that had exclusively dedicated to following a certain leader who distinguished them from every other house church not following that leader. Notice, these were not false teachers or cult leaders. Apollos, Cephas (Peter), and Paul were godly men teaching the truth of the Word of God. Paul even objected to their saying they were following Christ, when it was done in such a way that it separated them from other believers.

The problem was not in the teaching of the leader. What Paul objected to was not the teaching of the person they were following, but the fact that they had focused in on following one person. Paul called it *...fleshly, ...walking like mere men*. That's what mere men, people of the world, do. They divide up into groups that follow earthly leaders. And the product of that is often *strife* between those groups.

Also, notice that Paul was not against local leadership. He began this thought by saying, *I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people*. Who is Chloe? Who are his people? And why does he have a people? We don't know, of course, possibly Chloe hosted a church group in his house. But it's interesting that Paul seems to have no objection to Chloe being prominent and there being some people identified as *Chloe's people*. It seems that local leaders are no problem if following them is not in exclusion or separation from other mature leaders or other groups in the city. Apparently, Chloe was not *first among them* and was not someone who spoke, or was expected to speak, to an assembly of believers every Sunday morning.

The **second** example is in the Apostle John's letter to his friend Gaius, which we call 3 John. The situation was that Gaius had been thrown out of his house church by a pastor figure named Diotrephes. Gaius had been supporting itinerant missionaries who *went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles* (verse 7). Since Diotrephes had not approved of these missionaries, he had apparently forbidden, or the church under Diotrephes leadership had forbidden, Gaius to support these people. Gaius supported them anyway, so Diotrephes had him thrown out of the church. John told Gaius,

*I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, **who loves to be first among them**, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good (3 John 9-11).*

We might call this guy REVEREND Diotrephes. He had a position, which allowed him *to be first among them*, which did not listen to what other believers from other city churches or house churches said, and dominated what happened in his house church.

So, yes, there are two sort of pastor-like examples in the New Testament. And both of them are condemned with strong words from two different apostles.

## **Epistles Written to Churches Never Mention a Pastor**

No book of the New Testament ever mentions what we call a pastor, not by title, not by name, not by a description, not by anything at all. There is simply no hint of a pastor anywhere. And how insulting is that? How insulting is it to address the believers of a city, the church of a city, the leaders of the church of a city and never mention the pastor? Unless of course...there was no such thing! And in the conclusions of Paul's letters, he often gave lists of the names of the people he greeted personally, but no pastors. Wouldn't the pastor feel slighted, ignored, insulted? Unless...there were none!

The New Testament letters to Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 2 John and 3 John were written to individuals, who were never called pastors. And by the way, the title "Pastoral Epistles" for the letters to Timothy and Titus is nothing short of absurd. These men were apostolic messengers sent to *set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city* (Titus 1:5), then return to the apostle (2 Timothy 4:13). In what sense is that a pastor? They were never told to shepherd the people, be *first among them*, speak at most of the assemblies, or even live there. Titus was to move about, visiting the cities where there were believers on the island of Crete, and Timothy was to visit Ephesus, carry out his apostolic assignment, and return. Local church pastors they were not.

Those desperately seeking to find a pastor in the New Testament assign the title to several other apostolic messengers, but the same is true of them. They delivered the letters from the apostles, greeted the people, and brought news from the apostle back to him. But pastors they were not.

And why weren't any of these people called pastors? If Ephesians 4:11 describes what we call local church pastors, then why weren't Timothy and Titus called pastors? Why wasn't anybody, anywhere, ever, called a pastor? The "Pastoral Epistles" never mention a name or describe anything like a pastor.

The rest of the epistles were written to believers collectively. One would expect some instruction to a pastor, about a pastor, how to treat your pastor, to be obedient to your pastor, to be in submission to your pastor, to listen and learn from your pastor (all those things pastors tell us to do), but...again, nothing, not one word!

Galatians was written to believers in several cities of the Roman province of Galatia, and Ephesians is most likely an encyclical letter meant to be circulated throughout the churches of Asia Minor. The epistles of Peter, James, Jude and 1 John were also encyclicals written to the church, in general. The rest of them were written to churches in a particular city, so all of them were written to the church. Yet none of them ever mention a pastor, not once. Let's have a look at the greetings given in the introductions and conclusions of Paul's letters to specific churches in specific cities.

Notice in Paul's letter to the **Romans**, he greeted all the saints and mentioned 26 people by name. But he never mentioned or described a pastor, or assigned a title to any of these people. Then he sent greetings from 8 people he mentioned by name, and again, no titles or positions are ever given.

- Romans 1:7—*to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints*
- Romans 16:3-18—*Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles;*
- *also greet the church that is in their house.*



- Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.
- Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.
- Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.
- Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.
- Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.
- Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.
- Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.
- Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.
- Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.
- Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.
- Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.
- Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.
- Romans 16:21-23—Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother.

In **1 & 2 Corinthians**, Paul wrote to the believers in the city of Corinth. He called them *the church of God which is at Corinth*. Near the end of 1 Corinthians, he sent greetings from *Aquila and Prisca ...with the church that is in their house*. So they were hosting a house church, yet neither they, nor anyone else, was labeled as a pastor, or with any title at all.

- 1 Corinthians 1:2—*To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:*
- 1 Corinthians 16:19-20—*The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.*
- 2 Corinthians 1:1—*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia:*

Paul's greeting to the **Philippians** is particularly interesting. He sent greetings from he and Timothy, *To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons*. He greeted all the believers, but then he gave special mention to those serving as (a plurality of) *overseers and deacons*. But why not greet the pastor? Isn't that terribly rude and insulting of Paul to mention the other leaders and not mention the pastor? Unless of course...there was no such thing as a pastor!

- Philippians 1:1—*Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:*
- Philippians 4:21-22—*Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.*

Paul wrote **Colossians** to *the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae*. He sent greetings from four people and said a lot about some of them, but mentioned no titles or positions. One person Paul specifically mentioned is *Nympha and the church that is in her house*. Does it not seem odd that Paul would mention the name of a woman hosting a house church and not mention the

pastor of the church? Unless of course...there was no such thing as a pastor. Paul also mentioned a man named *Archippus* and gave him the instruction *Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it*. Here is a man in Colossae who has a ministry from the Lord, and he's not called a pastor. Why mention him and his ministry, and not call him a pastor? And if he is not the pastor, and someone else is, then wouldn't it be insulting to mention *Archippus* and not the pastor of his church? Unless of course...there was no such thing as a pastor.

- Colossians 1:2—*To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.*
- Colossians 4:12-17—*Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas. Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."*

When writing to the **Thessalonians**, Paul sent greetings from himself, *Silvanus*, and *Timothy*. He wrote *To the church of the Thessalonians*, and requested, as he often did, to *have this letter read to all the brethren*. But why ignore the pastor and send instruction to the whole *church of the Thessalonians*, the believers living among the people in the city of Thessalonica. Why ask that the letter be read to all the believers without asking the pastor to do it? Unless, of course,...there was no such thing as a pastor.

- 1 Thessalonians 1:1—*Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.*
- 1 Thessalonians 5:25-27—*Brethren, pray for us. Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.*
- 2 Thessalonians 1:1—*Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*

## **Peter Discussed Shepherding As a Ministry Mentality, Not an Up-Front Personality**

The Apostle Peter discussed the way leaders should lead in the church. Let's have a look.

*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, 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; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:1-4).*

I'd like to make a few observations:

1. Peter considered himself an elder, a *fellow elder*, even though he was an apostle. So clearly one is not only an apostle or only an elder, since Peter was both. Therefore, the term *elder* cannot be an official title, or it would conflict with his being an apostle. It would be like a general in the army telling a sergeant, "I exhort the sergeants as a fellow sergeant." That would be silly. But it would not be silly for a general to say, "I exhort the soldiers as a fellow soldier." That's not silly because soldiering is a job, not a rank or position. So is being an el-

- der. The church does not have positions of authority (beyond the first-century apostles), it just has more mature believers who serve the less mature believers.
2. Peter used the word *to pastor ποιμαίνω (poimaino)* as a verb (Greek, second person plural aorist, active, imperative). It's a timeless command to a plurality of elders. It isn't a person, it's an action (shepherding wayward or chaotic believers who have wandered off) to be taken by all elders.
  3. The action of shepherding/pastoring includes *exercising oversight*. These two words are a translation of the Greek word ἐπισκοπέω (*episkopeo*). This is a participle form of the same word Paul used for *overseer* (KJV *bishop*) – Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:7. So apparently, Peter also saw overseeing as a responsibility of all elders, not the title or an office or position.
  4. An elder is to serve believers *not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God*. The word translated *compulsion* (KJV *constraint*) is ἀναγκαστῶς (*anagkastos*), which means “pertaining to being obligatory on the basis of being imposed — ‘out of obligation, ought to’” (Louw & Nida Lexicon). So being an elder is not a job one is somehow pressured to do, or feels obligated to do. An elder is one who loves to serve other believers.
  5. *And not for sordid gain, but with eagerness*. *Sordid gain* means greediness or profit. It's Peter's word for money. It does not mean elders should refuse to receive money (1 Timothy 5:17), but they should not be motivated by it. It means an elder should be thankful for anything he receives, but not expect to be paid.
  6. Elders are not to be *lording it over* people. Once again, being an elder includes responsibility, but not authority.
  7. Elder responsibility is for those the Lord has *allotted to your charge*. In the context, the allotting people *to your charge* is not some distribution from an authority structure of a local church, but *Christ* who Peter proclaimed (verse 1) and looked to for his reward (verse 4). No local church structure is mentioned anywhere in the context. And *those allotted to your charge* may be a family, an extended family, a campus, military, prison, inner city, Bible study, missionary, or local church ministry.
  8. Whatever elders do, they will have an impact only when they are *proving to be examples to the flock*. In what sense is a pastor (who preaches from a pulpit, who's name is *first among them*, who is usually the authority figure and CEO of the church and thought of as clergy) an example to the flock? The pastor is basically an example of what the flock should not be.
  9. The elder should see his shepherding as a function under *the Chief Shepherd*, but not as an “under-shepherd,” the unbiblical term often attributed to local church pastors by those desperately trying to justify the position. If we understand shepherding as pastoring, then every elder is a pastor, and they are to be a plurality. But shepherding has been described by Peter as a function (a plural imperative verb), whereas *Chief Shepherd* [ἀρχιποίμην (*archipoimen*)] is a masculine singular noun. Shepherding is a way to serve, the *Chief Shepherd* is a Person. And Peter sees *the Chief Shepherd* as the only Shepherd over the church. Earlier he wrote, *For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls* (1 Peter 2:25). Here, once again, when the word Shepherd/pastor is a person (a masculine singular noun), it only refers to Jesus Christ. There are no under-shepherds.
  10. The elders do everything with the only reward being the time when they *will receive the unfading crown of glory*. And it comes only from the one and only *Shepherd and Guardian of your souls*.

## **Conclusion**

THE CHURCH IS A GLOBAL BAND OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST  
FROM THE DAY OF PENTECOST IN ACTS 2 UNTIL THE RAPTURE OF I THESSALONIANS 4  
WHERE THE MORE MATURE SERVE THE LESS MATURE.