The Ministry of Pastors
by
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Introduction:

Pastoral ministry has become one of the most confused issues in the church. In some cases, pastors are the professional *ministers* who are the only ones caring for people. In such a scenario, the church is relegated to passive observation. In other cases, pastors are *C.E.O.'s* who never spend time praying, training, and studying God's Word, but instead spend all of their time in committee meetings. So, after acknowledging such extremes, what is the biblical role of pastoral ministry?

Relevant Biblical Terms:

The biblical title appears to be *elder* (πρεσβυτερος) which harkens back to the elders of the twelve tribes of Israel, who are discussed in the O.T. They were the official leaders of the twelve tribes because they were wise and spiritually qualified to lead the people.

New Testament elders are also described as *overseers* (or *bishops* – επισκοπος). This word was used to describe governors who had been placed over cities by the emperor of the Greco-Roman empire. Elders are also described as *stewards,* which would be a synonym of the word *overseer*. When the master of a household left to go on a journey he would appoint one of his slaves as the *steward* over all of his household. The steward was to ensure that everything functioned as his master desired. This is the function of an *overseer,* to watch over Christ's church, ensuring that it functions as Jesus desires, according to God's Word.

New Testament elders are also described as *pastors (*or *shepherds* – ποιμενος). Shepherds are to lead their flock to cool water, provide food for them, and protect them from predators. Pastor/Shepherds lead Christ's sheep, provide spiritual food for them, and protect them from false teachers by exhorting them through teaching the Word of God and refuting false teachers through teaching the Word of God. A pastor shepherds God's people through a biblical life-example and through biblical teaching. This shepherding occurs in all facets of life, not just from the pulpit.

Here are some implications →
Elders are to:

(a) shepherd/pastor
  i. lead the church
  ii. feed the church
  iii. care for the church
  iv. protect the church
(b) oversee
  i. watch over Christ's church as a steward. The stewards as a household slave manages his master's household, making sure that things function according to the will of the master.

Note: All of these biblical functions of shepherding occur through the pure biblical teaching and pure biblical life-example of the pastor/elder/overseer. The biblically qualified man *shepherds* Christ's church in whatever location Jesus places him.

Relevant Biblical Passages:

In the O.T., God referred to those whom He had appointed to lead His people as *shepherds*. Moses and Joshua *shepherded* the nation of Israel (Num. 27:15-23). David was called to *shepherd* Israel as her king (2 Sam. 5:2; 7:7; 1 Chr. 11:2; Ps. 78:71; Ezek. 37:24)). Israel's judges were referred to as her *shepherds* (1 Chr. 17:6). He also referred to Israel's priests and prophets as *shepherds* (Ezek. 34:5, 8, 12, 23; . They were called to *shepherd* God's people Israel. Even God is referred to as *shepherd* by His people (Gen. 48:15; Ps. 23:1; 28:9; 80:1).

In the N.T., Jesus refers to Himself as the *Shepherd* of the sheep (Jn. 10:2, 11, 14, 16). Elsewhere, Jesus is referred to as the *Shepherd* of God's sheep (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4; Rev. 7:17). The apostles *shepherded*

the church after Christ ascended to the Father (Jn. 21:16; Acts 2:42; 6:1-6; Eph. 2:19-22). Elder/pastor/overseers were called to *shepherd* the church in the place of apostles (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Pet. 5:2).

Passages in the Book of Acts

Acts 6:1-6 → The shepherds of the church at this time were the *apostles*. They could not care for the entire church which would cause them to neglect other essential shepherding responsibilities. They had to be praying and studying/teaching the Word of God.

Acts 15:6-11, 22-23 → The shepherds of the church at this time (*apostles* and *elders*) made decisions about interpretation of doctrinal issues.

Acts 20:17-35 → Paul as an apostle had shepherded the church in Ephesus. Now there were elders who were shepherding the church in Ephesus. The elders are reminded that God called them to *oversee* the church and that they are to *shepherd* the church. *Overseeing* and *shepherding* are accomplished through a consistent biblical life-example and pure biblical teaching of believers, along with protecting the church from false teachers.

Passages in the Pauline Letters

Romans 12:3-8 → Every *believer* has received at least one spiritual gift and each one is to use his gifting for the good of the church. A couple of the gifts mentioned are – teaching, exhortation, and leadership. This is not speaking exclusively of pastor/elder/overseers. It is speaking of all *believers* who are called to serve the Lord and one another.

1 Corinthians 12 → Each *believer* receives at least one spiritual gift from God at salvation. Those gifts were given by God so that as the believers serve one another through their gift, the church will be *strengthened* and *cared* for by its own members. There are gifts/offices mentioned at the end of the chapter – apostles, prophets, teachers, etc... Pastor-teachers are mentioned third in the list.

Ephesians 4:11-16 → Pastor-teachers are given to train/equip the church to *minister/serve* (or *care for*) the church. As each believer is *trained/equipped* by pastor-teachers and then serves the church, Christ uses the believers caring for the church to build up (strengthen) the church spiritually. Pastor/elder/overseers accomplish this through a consistent biblical life-example and through pure biblical teaching.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 → The church is Thessalonica is called to *know/appreciate/acknowledge* those who *diligently labor among them* and *have charge over them in the Lord* and *give them instruction*. The church is to acknowledge/appreciate their shepherds – pastor/elder/overseers. The church is to *esteem them very highly in love because of their work*. As a result of what shepherds are called to do the church is supposed to acknowledge and respect them.

Passages in the Pastoral Letters

1 Timothy 3:1-7 → The *office of overseer* (επισκοπος) is mentioned here. Such men are to *manage their own household well* because they manage (*steward*) the church. They are also to be able to teach.

1 Timothy 5:17-22 → *Elders* who *rule/lead* well, those who *work hard at teaching and preaching*. Those who *labored hard at teaching and preaching* would be leading *well,* therefore they were *worthy of double honor* from the church they were shepherding.

Titus 1:5-9 → This is a parallel passage to 1 Timothy 3:1-7. In Paul's letter to Titus, he refers to *elders* who are *overseers*. In Paul's letter to Timothy, he simply calls them *overseers*. Elder/overseers are God's stewards (household managers while the master is away). Such men are to hold to the Word of God as it is written. They are to exhort the believers with pure biblical teaching and to protect the believers by refuting false teachers.

Passage in the General Letters

Hebrews 13:7 → The church was to remember those who had *led* them. This would refer to elder/pastor/overseers because it is mentioned that these men *spoke the word of God to them*. The church is

called to imitate the faith (or *life example*) of those men – elder/pastor/overseers.

Hebrews 13:17 → The church is called to *obey* their leaders (this is the same Greek word that was used in verse 7, which means that it is referring to pastor/elder/overseers as *leaders*) and to submit to them (as these men shepherd the church through biblical life-example and biblical teaching). These men *keep watch over the souls* of the church (lit. *they stay awake to watch over* as a shepherd would watch over his sheep). These men (pastor/elder/overseers) will give an account someday to Christ for how they have *kept watch over the souls* of those entrusted to them by Christ, who is the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). The church is to *obey* and *submit* to their shepherds (pastor/elder/overseers) so that they can watch over the church with joy and not with grief. If the church refuses to obey and submit to their shepherds (as they shepherd the church through pure biblical life-example and pure biblical teaching) the pastors will be caused to grieve. It will be unprofitable for a church if its shepherds are being caused to grieve because of the church refusing to obey and submit to its shepherds.

James 5:13-16 → The church is instructed that if one is sick (a continuing sickness) that person should call for the elders of the church (pastor/elder/overseers) who are to come and pray over the sick person.

1 Peter 4:7-11 → The church is to praying, loving each other, and being hospitable and gracious to each other. Each believer is to *serve* using the spiritual gift which God has given them. They are to be good stewards/managers (household slave who is in charge of what the master has entrusted to him) of the varied grace of God. The church is to serve according to the gifts which God has given to each individual believer, so that God the Father will be glorified.

1 Peter 2:25 → Jesus Himself is referred to as the *Shepherd* (ποιμενος)and *Guardian* (επισκοπος) of our souls. Christ is our *shepherd/pastor* and our *overseer/bishop*.

1 Peter 5:1-5 → As a fellow elder, Peter encourages *elders* (πρεσβυτερος) to *shepherd* (ποιμενος) the flock among them (the local church which God has entrusted to them), *overseeing* (επισκοπος) the flock. The pastor/elder/overseers are to be examples to the flock, they are not to *lord it over* the church (shepherds are not to act as masters of the flock, only Jesus is *master* of the flock). Christ is the Chief *Shepherd/Pastor* (αρχιποιμενος). This means that pastor/elder/overseers are *under shepherds*. The *younger men* (or *new ones*) are to *submit* themselves to the *elders* (πρεσβυτερος) of the church (pastor/elder/overseers). Everyone is to be *humble* toward one another (elders and people are to be humble toward God and each other).

The Priesthood of Believers

Introduction:

This biblical teaching has become lost from the practice of too many evangelical churches. Baptist churches affirm the doctrine but have not applied it in practice. The priesthood of the believer should be applied to every believer being involved in ministry to the church and not simply voting in business meetings and being on committees. Believers in the church should be doing ministry. Somewhere in church history people began erroneously referring to pastor/elder/overseers exclusively as *ministers* or *servants*. The idea was the elders were the *professional ministers/servants*. The implication is that elders are the ones who do the ministry. The thought is that if you want ministry done, ask the elders because that is what they are paid to do.

As a result of this false equation of elders as *professional ministers* there are elders who are functioning as *deacons* and deacons functioning as *elders*. There are churches full of believers who are not being equipped/trained and released to do the ministry/service because the elder/pastor/overseers are too busy doing the ministry themselves that they have no time to train the church to do it. It is like having a huge army which is untrained and sitting on the sidelines while a small group of leaders fight the war. It makes no sense and it is ineffective. Elder/pastor/overseers are called by God to teach, train, oversee and shepherd the church. The church is to be equipped by pastor/elder/overseers for ministry and then the church is released to do it. Christ uses the church to strengthen and care for itself as the believers minister/serve one another. He does not use the elders alone to strengthen and care for the church.

These un-biblical distinctions of *clergy* and *laity* have crippled the church. Pastors aren't *professional ministers*. The church, the believers are all ministers. Elder/pastor/overseers have a special role to carry out in the church, shepherding the church through – providing a consistent biblical example and providing pure biblical teaching. Elders are to equip the church to minister, so the whole church serves one another through their spiritual gifts and the church is cared for and strengthened.

Therefore, it is absolutely essential for the health of the church and the glory of God, to regain the biblical teaching about the priesthood of the believer.

Relevant Biblical Passages:

In the Old Testament priests had to meet rigorous physical, spiritual, and genealogical requirements. Only men who were descendants of Aaron were priests (Ex. 29:9; 40:15). They had to be Jewish and from the tribe of Levi (Num. 3:10; 16:40; 18:7). They could not have physical abnormalities (Lev. 21:16-23). Priests could not marry a divorced woman (Lev. 21:7).

The Old Testament Levitical priesthood was one of exclusivity, not everyone could do it. The priests were those who *served* God all the time. They were the ones in charge of presenting offerings to God. The nation tithed to financially support the priesthood. It was as though there was a *priestly class* that was set apart from the *rest of the people*. There were things that *only* priests could do. If someone else tried to do such things God would judge them for doing something only a priest was to do. They represented the people before God. They interceded between the people and God. They were to know the Word of God so that they could teach the people (Deut. 17:8-13; 33:10; Mal. 2:7).

In summary, Old Testament priests were:

- Levites, sons of Aaron
- Without physical deformity (Lev. 21:17-23)
- To wear special clothing (Ex. 28:2-43; 39:1-29)
- Not allowed to marry a divorced woman, prostitute, proselyte, or a widow – unless she is the widow of a priest (Lev. 21:14; Ezek. 44:22)
- Those who served God in the Tabernacle and the Temple (maintaining those locations)
- Those who interceded on behalf of the people with God
- Those who studied and taught God's Word (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 33:10)
- Those who approach the altar to offer sacrifices (Lev. 1:4-17)
- Those who declared people *clean* or *unclean* ceremonially, and then provide the means of cleansing (Lev. 14)
- Those who pronounced God's blessing on others (Deut. 21:5)
- Those who judged legal issues (Deut. 17:9, 12; Num. 5:11-31)

- Those who were not allowed to function in the priestly role while under the influence of alcohol (Lev. 10:9)

New Testament Priesthood:

In the New Testament church, Christ has become our High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 5:1-6) and Christ has offered the final sacrifice for sin (Heb. 7:27-28; 9:23-26). Christ is the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Jesus as our High Priest offered Himself as the once for all sacrifice to cleanse our sins and reconcile us to God the Father (Heb. 9:11-14; 10:11-18). Christ intercedes on our behalf with God the Father (Heb. 7:23-28; Rom. 8:33-34).

Born again Christians are declared to be *priests of God* *in* Christ (1 Pet. 2:4-5, 9-10; Rev. 1:4-6; 20:4-6). As a result of *all believers* being declared to be priests there are some major differences between how N.T. believers function in comparison to O.T. believers. New Testament believers are able to do many things that O.T. Believers were not allowed to do. Here are some examples of what N.T. Christians (as priests of God in Christ) are able to do:

- The presentation of the *gospel* and *conversion* of sinners → Paul refers to himself as *ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that his offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 15:15-16).
- Living in a *holy* way → Paul refers to believers *offering their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which our reasonable service* (Rom. 12:1-2).
- *Serving* God → Believers living for God and serving Him are referred to as *offering up spiritual sacrifices* and *proclaiming the excellencies of God* (1 Pet. 2:4-5, 9-10).
- *Praising* God → Believers *giving thanks to God* is referred to as a *sacrifice of praise*, *the fruit of lips that give thanks to God* (Heb. 13:15). Sacrifices in the O.T. were referred to as fruit offered to God (Mal. 1:12).
- Doing *good* and *sharing* with others, especially with believers → God considers such godly living to be *sacrifices* offered to Him (Heb. 13:16).
- *Financial giving* to support church planters → Believers giving financially to support church planting efforts is described as *a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God* (Phil. 4:15-20).
- *Loving* other believers and Showing *hospitality* to strangers → These are things that God desires believers to do (Heb. 13:1-2).
- *Loving* other believers and being *hospitable* to other believers without complaint → (1 Pet. 4:8-9)
- Sharing the *gospel* → Every believer is called to share the gospel with the lost (Col. 4:5-6; 2 Cor. 5:16-20).
- Serving God by *Ministering* to one another through our *spiritual gifts* → (1 Tim. 6:17-19; Tit. 2:11-15; 3:1-8, 12-14; 1 Thess. 5:12-15; Eph. 2:8-10; 4:11-16; 5:17-21; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-13; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).
- *Praying* directly to God through *Christ* → (Heb. 4:14-16; Phil. 4:6-7; Col. 4:2-4; 1 Thess. 5:16-18; 1 Pet. 4:7; 5:6-7; 1 Jn. 5:13-15).
- *Hearing* from God through His *Word* and therefore able to know His *will* → Since each believer can read God's Word, each one can hear directly from God. Since each one can hear from God through reading His Word, each one is able to learn what God's will is for believers (1 Thess. 5:21-22; Eph. 5:6-17; Col. 1:9-13)