

Introduction

In my first semester of college, I was enrolled in an honors calculus class. We started with about thirty students in the class. After the first test, there were about thirteen students. The instructor was very difficult to follow, and he was not a good communicator. Most of us prepared for the first exam by understanding how to solve the problems with the formulae that we had been given. The first test blindsided the whole class. Instead of working the problems, the entire test was about proving the theorems that were given, and nobody was prepared to do that. The majority of the class flunked the first test, including me. I had won the math award in high school, and was excellent in math, and had never made anything but A's in math. I stuck with the class, but was not able to bring my grade up to what I wanted. I later took another calculus class and made an A in that one. Nobody likes to be blindsided about things.

Because I do not want you to be blindsided about what we are doing, I will be taking the next couple of weeks to look at the Office of Overseers. Many people are not familiar with that term, but in 1 Timothy 3, Paul wrote, "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do." Throughout much of church history there has been a lot of confusion and erroneous teaching about the office of overseers. Most churches, church leaders, and congregations do not have a good grasp of it, and this has led to many problems in churches. So, if you are not real clear about it, you are not alone. I hope after the next couple of weeks you will have an excellent understanding of overseers.

(1 Ti 3:1) "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*."

We know from this verse that the office of overseer is an office or position in the church, but what exactly is an overseer? We are going to take a look at this office of overseer so that everyone has a good understanding of this word and office. In Part 1, we will look at the need for overseers, the office of overseer, the calling of overseers. Then, in Part 2, we will look the qualifications of an overseer, and the ordination of overseers.

Why are we taking a break in our current series and looking at the office of overseers? On April 8, Joe Warner will be coming to our church, and we will be ordaining Tom Swenson to the office of overseer. It is important for our body to understand what we are doing, so I wanted to bring some understanding about it before Joe comes. I am trying to prepare everyone for this special ordination service, so that nobody is blindsided or confused about what we are doing. I wanted our ordination to be about Tom, and not a long message about the office of overseer. I also wanted to honor Joe, and allow him to minister to our congregation while he is here, and so I want to do as much as I can on my part before he gets here.

Office of Overseer – Part 1

1. Need for Overseers
2. Office of Overseer
3. Calling of Overseer

Office of Overseer – Part 2

4. Qualifications for an Overseer
5. Ordination of Overseer

1. Need for Overseers

There are a number of different reasons for having overseers in the church. One of the first reasons for having overseers is to set churches in order. God is orderly and He desires His church to be in order. In Paul's letter to Titus he told him to set in order what remains in the island of Crete, and appoint elders in every city as he had directed him. A big part of setting the church in order is to ordain elders in a church to get the government of the local church properly established. The overseers are God's government representatives in the church and they are tasked by God to manage the affairs of the church, which is the household of God.

(Tit 1:5) "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you."

The elders are to properly manage the affairs of the church, which would include the meetings, the administration, the finances. They are not to do all the work, but they are tasked with overseeing it. God wants every joint to supply and for each member to be properly working, and the overseers are to oversee this.

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, there was a lot of confusion in their meetings. Things were not being done in an orderly manner. He wrote that God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. He wanted things in their services to be done properly and in an orderly manner, so he gave some instructions for how to run their meetings. The overseers needed to take God's instructions and implement them in their services.

(1 Co 14:33) "for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

(1 Co 14:40) "But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner."

When Paul wrote Titus, there was some false teaching going on, and a number of families had been greatly upset. When Paul said to set in order what remains, it gives us the impression that a hurricane had gone through and devastated it, and Titus was being asked to set in order what remained. He needed to deal with those problems to get things in order. Titus was to appoint elders in every city, and these elders were to make sure that sound doctrine was being preached.

(1 Tim 3:5) "(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),"

A second reason for overseers is to care for the flock. God's people need to be cared for. In Mark 6, Jesus saw a large crowd and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and He began to teach them. Sheep need shepherds. Sheep need to be led to green pastures so that they can eat. Sheep also need to be protected from wolves, coyotes, and other predators. Sheep need to be cared for, and when Jesus saw the crowd, He saw a lot of people whose souls were not being cared for. He saw a lot of people who were hungry for truth, and were not being fed. Jesus saw this and felt compassion for them. Our churches need overseers to care for the souls of those in the church. Our churches need shepherds who will feed the sheep. Our churches need shepherds who will pray and watch over the flock.

(Mk 6:34) “When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.”

A third reason that we need overseers is to equip the saints for the work of service. Pastors are not supposed to do all the work; they are tasked with equipping the saints for the work of service. Pastoral surveys show that many pastors feel inadequate to do this, and for good reason. God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, and pastors to equip the saints for the work of service. God gave a team of ministry gifts to equip believers, not a single person. Most pastors are not equipped to equip the body in all the areas that they need to be equipped in. We need a plurality of elders and gift ministries in our churches so that the saints can be properly equipped. We do not find any examples of churches in the New Testament with a pastor overseeing everything by himself. When Barnabas and Paul planted churches, they ordained elders in every church. When Paul told Titus to set things in order, he was to ordain elders in every city. There was always a plurality of elders, and in Scripture this is called a presbytery.

(Eph 4:11–12) “And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, {12} for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

2. Office of Overseer

What exactly is an elder or overseer? Some believe that elders are a group of businessmen that oversee the finances of the church. Others believe that elders are a group of people that serve under the pastor of the church to administer the affairs. Some believe that an overseer is one over many churches and a pastor is over one church. Some believe the overseer is the leader in a church, and the elders are under the overseer. There is much confusion about this in the body of Christ, so I want to take a few minutes to Biblically define the office of overseer.

There are three Greek words that are used in the New Testament to refer to the office of overseer. The first word is episkopos (Strong’s G1985). Epi means over and skopos means to see. It literally means one who oversees or gives oversight. The NASB, ESV, and NIV all translate this as overseer. The KJV translates it as bishop. When you hear the term bishop, it is the office of overseer in a local church. It is not someone who is over churches in a region or district. Episkopos is used five times in the New Testament, and the first time is in Acts 20:28. Paul was at Miletus and he was meeting with the Ephesian elders. He was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem so that he could be there for Pentecost. Therefore, he elected not to go to Ephesus, but to simply meet with the elders. The Greek word for elders is presbyteros (Strong’s G4245), which means an older or elderly person. The NASB, ESV, NIV, and KJV all translate it as elder.

(Acts 20:16-17) "For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. {17} And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church."

In verse 28, he tells the elders to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers to shepherd the church of God. Paul is meeting with the elders and now he calls them overseers. It is clear that the elders and the overseers were one and the same. He tells these elders or overseers to shepherd the church of God.

(Acts 20:28) "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

The third word that we must look at is shepherd. The Greek word is *poimano*, which is the verb form of shepherd. (*Poimen* is the noun form, and it is used in Ephesians 4:11, where Paul mentions the five-fold ministry gifts to the church. *Poimen* is also used in a compound word in 1 Peter 5:4 where Jesus is referred to as the Chief Shepherd or *archipoimen*. Overseers and elders are to shepherd the flock. Our English word, pastor, comes from the Latin word *pastor*, which means a herdsman or shepherd. Overseers and elders are also shepherds or pastors and they are to be on guard from themselves and for all the flock, which is the church of God.

(Eph 4:11–12) "And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, {12} for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;"

(1 Pet 5:4) "And when the Chief Shepherd (*archipoimen*) appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Another passage that is good to look at is found in 1 Peter 5:1-4. Peter exhorts the elders (*presbuteros*) to shepherd (*poimano*) the flock, exercising oversight (*episkopeo*). The KJV translates this as feed the flock, which is one of the main duties of a shepherd or pastor. All three words are used in this passage. Again, it is very clear that the elder, overseer, and pastor are all the same office.

(1 Pet 5:1-2) "Therefore, I exhort the elders (*presbuteros*) 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, {2} shepherd (*poimano*) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight (*episkopeo*) not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;"

Looking at the three different words give us a fuller understanding about what pastoring is all about. The term elder refers to the spiritual maturity and character of the office. Some churches have made their own rules about the physical age of an elder, but in scripture, and elder is referring to the spiritual maturity and character of the man that qualifies him for the office.

The second word, pastor or shepherd (*poimano*) refers again to the function of the elders. Pastors care for the sheep. Pastors or shepherds lead and feed the flock. Pastors teach the flock. The KJV uses the word feed the flock instead of shepherd the flock. The same Greek word *poimano* is used. They just translated it feed, because that is one of the primary functions of a pastor.

(1 Pet 5:2 KJV) "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;"

The third term, overseer (*episkopeo*), speaks more about the work that the elder does. Elders oversee the flock. It is extremely important to understand what the Lord wants elders to oversee in a congregation. Our first thought might be that it is the ministries of the church that we oversee. In 1 Peter 2:25 we find that Jesus is referred to as the Shepherd and Guardian of our

souls. The elders, need to oversee the souls of the sheep in the flock. All through the Psalms we find that the Lord is watching over and caring for our souls.

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

3. Calling of Overseer

There are a number of ways to look at the calling of an overseer. One way of looking at the calling is the use of fingers. There should be five fingers pointing to the calling of an elder.

A. The Finger of the Man

The first finger should be the finger of the one being considered. In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul wrote, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work to do." An overseer should aspire to the office. The Greek word of aspire is *oregimai*, and it means to stretch oneself, or to reach out after, or to desire. An overseer should have a desire or aspiration, and should be reaching out or working towards becoming an overseer. If a man does not have this desire and is not stretching or reaching out for this work, it is a very good indication that the calling is not there at this time in his life.

(1 Ti 3:1) "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*."

What does a man do if he is aspiring to be an overseer? What does it look like for a man to stretch out or reach for the work of shepherding? Here are a few ideas.

- i. An aspiring man will try and learn everything he can about pastoring and shepherding. He will read books. He will ask questions. He will seek to be discipled and mentored by shepherds.
- ii. An aspiring man will study Scripture. He will have a desire to teach and feed other people. This man will be reading, studying, and meditating on Scripture. The word of God will always be on his heart and in his words. He will study to show himself approved to God as a workman, who handles accurately the word of God.

(2 Tim 2:15) "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

- iii. An aspiring man will be working on his character. Paul has set a bar for those who aspire to the office of overseer. An aspiring man will be trying to nail these things down in his life. He will be asking the Lord to change and grow him in these areas. He will be open to correction and input from others.
- iv. An aspiring man will have a zeal for the household of God. Isaiah 9:6-7 tells us that those who have a governmental call will have a zeal to help accomplish the work. In John 2, when Jesus drives out the money changers, the disciples remembered that "zeal for thy house will consume me." There is a passion, zeal, and enthusiasm about the local church.

(Is 9:6-7) "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. {7} There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."

(John 2:17) "His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR THY HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.""

B. The Finger of the Apostle

The finger of the apostle should also point to the man who is called. This is particularly true in church plants where there are not any elders. An example of this can be found in the letter that Paul writes to Titus. He tells him to set in order what remains and ordain elders in every city as he directed. The apostle Paul was mentoring Titus. Titus was a young apostle and Paul is giving him instructions and qualifications for an elder so that he will have some practical guidelines to help him choose. In this case Titus is looking at the men and determining if they meet the qualifications. The qualifications are essentially the same as those given to Timothy to help set the bar for men aspiring to be pastors.

(Tit 1:5) "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,"

When Barnabas and Paul planted churches, they laid hands and ordained elders in all the churches. Barnabas and Paul were apostles and part of that calling is raising up and releasing leaders in churches.

(Acts 14:23) "And 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."

C. The Finger of the Presbytery

The third finger that should point to the call of a man is the presbytery. Presbytery is the plural of presbuteros, the Greek word for elder. The presbytery is the team, group, or board of elders. There were always a plurality of elders, not a single pastor. In ordaining a pastor, the team of elders should all be in agreement about the calling of the individual.

(1 Ti 4:14) "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."

In established churches, where there are two or more elders already in office, the group of elders or presbytery should be in agreement about the call of the proposed candidate. We saw that in Acts 13, the team of five men prayed and fasted before laying hands on Barnabas and Paul. It was clear that they were all in agreement about this matter before laying hands on them.

(Acts 13:2-3) "And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." {3} Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

The lead pastor is part of the presbytery and should definitely be on board with the decision. In many churches the lead pastor tries to bring “yes men” into the team of elders. The lead pastor should not be looking for people that will give blind support. He needs to find men that are called to the office, and will be faithful to the Lord in that office.

There are some things outside the list of qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The elders are a team and they must be able to communicate and relate to one another. There should be a high level of trust and confidence in one another. The elders need to be on the same page doctrinally. They should share the same vision, and there should also be a common philosophy of ministry. If an aspiring elder is committed to seeker services and the rest of the elders are committed to being seeker friendly, but gearing the services towards equipping and encouraging the saints, the differences in vision and philosophy of ministry will cause di-vision in the church. The presbytery, and the lead elder all need to be in agreement about laying hands on a man and ordaining him as an elder.

Having the presbytery be in agreement, rather than just the lead elder, is both Biblical and prudent. Sometimes a man can be deceived, or act against his better judgment. A man may be looking at potential, rather than the current qualification of a man. By having several men seek the Lord about the matter, this mistake is less likely to occur.

D. The Finger of the Holy Spirit

We find the fourth finger in Acts 20:28 when Paul tells the Ephesian elders to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God. In this case we see the Holy Spirit is the one that makes overseers. In every case in the New Testament where leaders are being set into office, there was fasting and prayer accompanying the ordination. It is important to know that the Holy Spirit has called you to be a pastor. It is important to know for certain that you have been called to this office.

(Acts 20:28) "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

In Acts 13:1-3, the elders at Antioch are ministering to the Lord and the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Paul for the work He was calling them to do. The Holy Spirit was confirming the call to apostolic ministry. The Holy Spirit should confirm the call of pastors as well as those who are going to be doing apostolic ministry. There should be prophetic utterance given by the Holy Spirit. In the presbytery at Antioch they had both prophets and teachers. When getting prophetic confirmation, it is very beneficial to have prophetic men in the presbytery.

(Ac 13:1–3) “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. {2} While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” {3} Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

One reason that there may be so many people leaving the ministry is that many of them were not called to be pastors. They may have a desire, but they may be lacking confirmation from the

Holy Spirit, the apostles, and the prophets. Fasting and praying before laying hands on someone is important. We fast because we want to hear clearly from the Lord. We want to press in. Experts tell us that the sense that is dulled most by eating is our hearing. When we fast, we are pressing in to hear more clearly. When we fast, we are getting ourselves more sensitive to the things of the Spirit. We should use all the tools and methods available to hear from the Lord. We should pray. We should fast. We should wait on the Lord. We should seek prophetic ministry. We should look for the finger of the Holy Spirit pointing to a man before setting him in office.

E. The Finger of the Flock

The fifth finger that should point to the calling of an overseer is the finger of the congregation. Karen raised goats on our farm in Acworth. She spent time with the goats feeding them, trimming their hooves, and caring for them. When Karen went to the barn and pasture area, all she needed to do was call out, “Here girls!” The goats could be on the other side of the pasture, but they would stop what they were doing and run as fast as they could and come to her. There was no question about her being the shepherd of that flock. The goats knew her voice and followed her.

In the same way, the congregation should sense the call of God on the man. If the sheep won't follow a man, it is a pretty good indication he is not a shepherd to those sheep. Jesus, who is described as the Chief Shepherd, said My sheep hear my voice and follow Me. Those who were not His sheep do not recognize His voice and follow.

(John 10:27) "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;"

Even though it is the presbytery that raises up a man to be an elder, the congregation or the sheep should bring up any objections about a candidate to the elders. If the congregation has serious problems or issues with someone being considered for an elder, the presbytery needs to listen to them. A man must be above reproach, and if the congregation knows that the man is not above reproach, the man is clearly not qualified. When the apostles raised up deacons in Acts 6, they had the congregation select the men, and then they prayed and laid hands on them. While the congregation is never in Scripture asked to select a pastor, their approval is more important for this office than the office of deacon in Acts 6. The presbytery should give the congregation opportunities to ask questions and raise any concerns that they might have.

(Ac 6:3–6) “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. {4} “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” {5} The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. {6} And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.”

I want to know about the people that I am going to submit my life to. For young ladies, this is an important issue. You want to know all about the man that you are considering marrying, because you will need to submit to him as unto the Lord. Is this a godly man that I am going to submit to? Is this man submitted to the authorities over him? Is this man submitted to his parents? Does this man receive counsel? Does this man have an anger problem? Is this man a good listener? Is this a kind and gentle man? In the same way that a woman has a choice who she is submitted to, a

church has some say about who they will submit to. Therefore, if a person is being considered as an elder, and members of the congregation have an uneasy feeling about the man, the presbytery should listen to them. The man should not be set in as an elder.

(Eph 5:22-24) "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. {23} For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. {24} But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything."

(Heb 13:17) "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

Conclusion and Applications

God is a God of order, and He wants His household to be in order. He wants the services to be done in an orderly manner. He wants the affairs of His household to be managed properly and to be in proper order. The office of overseer is tasked with managing the church and to establish and maintain order in the church.

God cares about you and I. He tells us not to be anxious, but to cast our cares on Him (1 Pet 5:7). Jesus looked at the multitudes with compassion and said they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 8:2). God wants people to be cared for. He wants His flock to be fed and protected. Overseers are also called Shepherds or Pastors and they are tasked with feeding the flock and watching over them.

At the Last Supper, Jesus stripped down and girded Himself with a towel, and washed the feet of the disciples. Then, He told them that He gave them an example and they were to do as He did to them (John 13:15). God wants there to be examples in your life for you to follow. He tells elders not to Lord over the flock, but to be examples of the flock (1 Pet 5:3). Elders are spiritually mature and exhibit the character of God in their lives. God gives elders in every church to lead and be examples.

The world is in desperate need of godly examples to follow. The world is in desperate need of leaders who lead with integrity and by example. The world is in desperate need of leaders who will faithfully manage the affairs of their own houses and everything else under their care. People all over the world are in desperate need of leaders that will love and care for their souls. The office of overseer has been established by God to meet all these needs. It is an extremely important office and priority in the church.

God knew us before He formed us in the womb (Jer 1:5). God has a plan for each of our lives. He has called certain people to be overseers in His church (Acts 20:28). He has put a desire in their hearts for the office of overseer (1 Tim 3:1). He has gifted them to teach, manage, and lead. The increase of the government of God is never ceasing, and He continues to raise up overseers in the church.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for sending Jesus to be the Chief Shepherd. Thank You for caring for our souls. Thank You for Your plan for church leadership, and for raising up people to lead with integrity. We pray that the overseers in the Connection Church will be examples to the flock and to lead by example. We pray that the shepherds of the Connection Church will feed, protect, and care for this flock. Give us understanding of this office, so we can be an effective church in the things that You have called us to do. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Introduction (1 Tim 3:1)

1. Need for Overseers (Tit 1:5, 1 Cor 14:33, 14:40, 1 Tim 3:5, Mk 6:34, Eph 4:11–12)

2. Office of Overseer (Acts 20:16-17, 20:28, Eph 4:11–12, 1 Pet 5:4, 5:1-2, 2:25)

3. Calling of Overseer

A. The Finger of the Man (1 Tim 3:1, 2 Tim 2:15, Is 9:6-7, John 2:17)

B. The Finger of the Apostle (Tit 1:5, Acts 14:23)

C. The Finger of the Presbytery (Acts 13:2-3)

D. The Finger of the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28, 13:1-3)

E. The Finger of the Congregation (John 10:27, Ac 6:3–6, Eph 5:22-24, Heb 13:17)

Conclusion and Applications