

Introduction:

1. It can come as a surprise when people go to the Bible and learn that a number of different terms are used in Scripture to describe those who lead the local church.
 - a. While the most common term we use to describe leaders is the term *elder*, other words such as *bishop*, *pastor* and *overseer* are also used to describe this same office. These words are not used to describe different offices, but to describe various aspects of one office.
 - b. This is just like the Bible's use of several different terms to describe one who follows Jesus. We commonly use the word *Christian*, but other words such as *disciple*, *child of God*, *brother in Christ*, and *saint* are used to describe the same person. These words are not used to describe different kinds of religious people, but to describe various aspects of individuals who follow Jesus.
2. It is important for us on this day of appointment that we understand some things about the various terms used to describe elders in a local church, and what those terms mean to us as a congregation and to the men who are about to take up the mantle of this office.

The Lesson:**I. Terms God uses to describe this office.**

- A. Our first word (*presbuteros*): The Greek word means "an older man."
 1. The word is translated "elders" in Acts 20:17. It carries the idea of those who through knowledge of the Scriptures and experience of years are regarded as wise.
 2. A form of the word is also found in 1 Timothy 4:14, where it is translated "eldership" or "presbytery." This refers to the group of older men who lead the church. In all cases in the New Testament, local churches are always led by a group of elders, never by one man.
- B. Our second word (*poimen*): The word means "a shepherd," one who tends or feeds a flock.
 1. It is found in Acts 20:28. Some translations use the phrase "to feed" instead of "shepherd." A form of the word is found in 1 Peter 5:2 where it is translated "shepherd."
 2. The word is translated "pastors" in Ephesians 4:11, where it is found alongside other teaching works. It carries the idea of those who are responsible for feeding the flock.
- C. Our third word (*episkope*): The word means "one who oversees or superintends."
 1. It is found in Act 20:28 where it is translated "overseers." These men have charge of—that is, they oversee—the local church and will give account to God for the souls under their charge, Hebrews 13:17.
 2. It is translated "bishop" in 1 Timothy 3:1. There, Paul gave the qualifications for the office.
- D. How do we know these words apply to one office? Because they are used interchangeably by Bible writers. Note that Paul called for the elders of the church in Acts 20:17. When they came to him he called them overseers and shepherds, Acts 20:28. The same office!

II. Why is this office significant?

- A. To ask the question in another way, “What role does this office play in God’s plan?”
1. Though this office makes decisions, the role is not really about decision making.
 2. It is not that this office has power and authority in the local church, though it has been given by God the responsibility to oversee, to be in charge of the local church.
 3. Though elders make some financial decisions, it is not about controlling the purse strings.
- B. More than anything else, this office, this work is about helping souls go to heaven.
1. Sometimes, in all the activities and works a local church may be involved in, it is easy to forget what the bottom line is. We can get so caught up in programs, planning and personalities that we lose sight of what is the most basic element of our faith.
 2. What is the most basic element of our faith? It is trust in the Lord Jesus that His death on the cross is the atonement for our sins, and that by His act of taking our sins away He has made it possible for us to go to heaven.
 3. The work of shepherds is appointed by our Lord Jesus to help souls make it to heaven. Forget about power, decisions and finances—and focus on this. This is the part this work plays in the plan of God. This is the ultimate role of elders. Note these passages:
 - a. Acts 20:28-31. It is about the flock and protecting it from those who would devour it. Why? Because the wolves would keep souls out of heaven.
 - b. Hebrews 13:7. Ultimately, it is about outcome. What do we seek as the outcome of our faith? Is it not heaven?
 - c. Hebrews 13:17. It is about watching out for souls. It is with dread and fear that this office must give account, not merely to the church, but to God.
 - d. 1 Peter 5:1-4. Shepherding the flock, being examples to the flock, leading those who are entrusted to their care by God and presenting them to the Chief Shepherd when He appears—that is what this work and responsibility is about.
 4. To summarize: It is about helping souls go to heaven. Though men may be feeble in their efforts to serve as elders, yet God has entrusted this sobering work to them.

Conclusion:

1. May our God bless these men who take up this mantle today!
2. A large number of names were submitted by the congregation to be considered for this office. You have done your work well. After talking with each of the men whose names you submitted, several asked that they not be considered at this time. We agreed together with some others that they would like more time to qualify themselves. We are committed to training those men, and others, in the near and distant future so that as many as possible can be appointed to this work. We want every man who becomes a shepherd in the future to be mentored by the current shepherds.
3. Heaven—it is about souls going to heaven. In all things that we do, may we never lose sight of that! Are you living your life in view of heaven? Do you want to go there? You can go, John 14:6.