

Pastor, Elder, Overseer: Same Office?

What Scripture Actually Says About Shepherds and Saints

Acts 20:17–31 • Titus 1:5–9 • 1 Timothy 5:17–18 • Ephesians 4:11–16

Key Thoughts

- 1. One office, three terms:** The New Testament uses elder, overseer, and shepherd/pastor to describe the same office from different angles—character, responsibility, and care.
- 2. Misconceptions distort the church:** When business culture, personal preference, or tradition defines pastoral ministry, pastors get crushed, and the church stays immature.
- 3. Shepherding is Word-centered care:** Feeding and guarding the flock (doctrine + protection) is biblical care—even when it includes the corrective “rod and staff” that modern culture resists.
- 4. Ephesians 4 is the blueprint:** Pastors equip; the saints do the ministry; the body grows when every part does its share.
- 5. Maturity can’t be delegated:** Pastors teach, but believers must receive and obey Christ personally—no one can obey Jesus for you.

Discussion Questions

- 1.** In Acts 20:17 and 20:28, what three descriptions/functions are applied to the same group of leaders? Why does that matter for how we understand pastoral ministry?

- 2.** Read Titus 1:5–9. What qualifications and responsibilities stand out most, and how do they protect both the church and its leaders?

- 3.** Which misconception is most common in your experience: primary minister, CEO/vision driver, exists to make me feel cared for, or responsible for my growth? Why does it persist?

- 4.** Ephesians 4:11–16 says leaders equip the saints for the work of ministry. What does it look like practically for “every part to do its share” in a local church?

5. Acts 6:1–5 shows leaders protecting prayer and the Word while empowering others to serve needs. How does that model help a church care well without overloading one leader?

6. Personal: Where are you tempted to approach church as a consumer rather than a body-member? What is one concrete step you can take this week to step in and serve?

Applications

1. **Reset expectations:** Pray for your pastors/elders and thank God for what Scripture actually assigns them—teaching, guarding, equipping, modeling, and shepherding.
2. **Step into ministry:** Identify one specific way to carry the load of the body (encourage, meet a need, disciple, serve, pray with someone) and do it within seven days.
3. **Commit to community:** Join a Life Group, or move from attendance to contribution—share, pray, follow up, and help someone obey the Word.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for purchasing the church with the blood of Your Son. Forgive us for importing expectations You did not give and for treating the church like a service to consume. Give our pastors and elders strength to teach Your Word faithfully, courage to guard the flock, humility to shepherd, and wisdom to equip the saints. And move us as Your people to do our share—serving, discipling, praying, and obeying Jesus. Build Your church in love for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.