

"I'd Like You To Meet My Pastor. . ."

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Most people who use the above phrase are using the word "pastor" as synonymous with the words preacher, evangelist or minister. In other words, they intend to introduce you to the man who preaches in the pulpit where they go to church. Yet despite the word being overwhelmingly used in this way, the Bible teaches that a pastor and a typical preacher are not the same.

There are three principal words or concepts which the New Testament uses to describe the men called pastors and their work. Besides the word pastor (or shepherd), the words elder and bishop (or overseer) are also used. These terms refer respectively to the tending and feeding of the flock, the age and spiritual maturity of these men, and to the work of overseeing to which they are appointed. These concepts come together and show themselves to be referring to the same men in such scriptures as Acts 20:17,28 and Titus 1:5,7. Notice that in Acts 20:17, these men are called "elders of the church," and in verse 28 they are told to tend, shepherd, or be pastors of the church of God, the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers (or bishops). Likewise, in Titus 1:5, instructions about appointing elders begin, and in verse 7, a man doing the work is described as an "overseer." It is obvious that all of these descriptions are simply different slants on the same men or work.

But the differences between preachers and pastors are more than semantics or a nit-picking technicality. For one thing, the Scriptures always speak of a plurality of elders in every church. So if a church has only one pastor, it has at least one too few. Furthermore, specific qualifications and characteristics must be met before men can be appointed as pastors (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). At times, the work of preachers and pastors may overlap, but they are not the same. If we understand what we mean, we are on safe ground by calling Bible things by Bible names.