

Is Your Pastor Qualified According to the Bible?

Robert R. Roxas

Many people ask either ‘*are you a pastor*’ or ‘*who is your pastor?*’ This is both an easy and difficult question. It is easy to answer if the person knows what he is asking about. It is difficult to answer if he does not know what he is asking about. Why? It is because most people misunderstand the term. If you answer them correctly, i.e., based on the Bible, they tend to be confused and think that you are odd. But if you answer them according to their misconceptions, you are not answering them correctly. That is the dilemma.

In answering this question, we need ample time to discuss the term so that we can answer them correctly. We need to let them see how the term is used in the Bible, and what are some other terms that are equivalent to other terms. There are six English words that come from three Greek words. The word *pastor* or *shepherd* comes from the Greek word (ποιμήν) *poimen*. The word *elder* or *presbyter* comes from the Greek word (πρεσβύτερος) *presbuteros*. The word *bishop* or *overseer* comes from the Greek word (ἐπίσκοπος) *episkopos*. Are they equivalent?

Let us see how the early Christians used the different terms. In Acts 20:17, Paul gathered the *elders* (πρεσβυτέρους). After gathering them, he told them many things and came to the conclusion by saying, “*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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.*” (Acts 20:28). Take note of the presence of the word *overseers* (ἐπισκόπους), and the verb *shepherd* which is from the Greek word (ποιμαίνειν) *poimainein*, which is the **verb form** of the noun *pastor*. In this particular passage, we can clearly see the equivalence of the six English words. Remember that Paul gathered the *elders* and told them that the Holy Spirit had made them *overseers* in order to *shepherd* the church of God. Therefore, the *elders* are the *bishops* or *pastors*.

Let us see what Peter has to say about the term pastor. In 1 Peter 5:1-2, Peter mentions the three terms. He says, “*The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.*” (NKJV). Can you read the three terms used? Peter is exhorting the *elders* to *shepherd* the flock of God and to serve as *overseers*. This passage of Scriptures proves the equivalence of the terms.

By the way, the term pastor is used only once in the English translation of the Bible. It is found only in Ephesians 4:11. It is named among the different religious terms such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers. It is interesting to note that while some people criticize those who used the religious title *Father* attached to the name of some religious leaders, these people do not bother to criticize the use of the religious title *Pastor* attached to the name of their religious leader. Remember that Matthew 23:8-10 **prohibits** the use of religious title such as *Father*, *Teacher*, etc. If the religious title *Teacher* is **not allowed**, then religious title *Pastor* is **not allowed also**. Why? It is because both terms are mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. Besides, Jesus Christ was just giving some sample religious terms which were prohibited. Try studying the Bible if you can find the other terms mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 being attached as a religious title to the name of the early Christian leaders.

Now we know that the terms *pastor* or *shepherd*, *bishop* or *overseer*, and *elder* or *presbyter* refer to the **same** person. Let us now study the **qualifications** of a **pastor** and try to examine whether or not those who call themselves pastors are really qualified as pastors. The Bible gives us important pieces of information as to who qualifies the position. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 give us the detailed instructions as to who qualifies to become a pastor. In 1 Timothy, the word used is *bishop* or *overseer* (1 Timothy 3:1-2). But in Titus, the words used are *elder* (Titus 1:5) and *bishop* or *overseer* (Titus 1:7). It can not be denied that these qualifications are for the pastors because we have already shown that they are the same persons. So a ***pastor must be a husband of one wife, must be one that rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence*** (1 Tim. 3:2,4). ***His children must be faithful and not accused of dissipation or insubordination*** (Titus 1:6). His training ground as a pastor must be his own family. Why? Paul gives us the answer in 1 Timothy 3:5. Paul says, ***“For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?”*** Of course, there are other qualifications that I do not mention here. Just read them in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Try to examine now your pastor. Is he **married**? Does he **have believing children**? Does he know how to manage his own household well? Do you know of somebody who is **still single**, but he is called a **Pastor**? What about the term **Pastora**, can you find it in the Bible? Is it Biblical to call someone a **Pastora**? Do not forget what Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:12-15. He says, ***“And I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”*** Why? He continues, ***“For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.”***

Dear reader, the Lord does not want His word to be adulterated with the doctrines of men. It makes our worship useless (Matthew 15:9), and God is not with the man who accepts the teachings of men as teachings of God. Do not forget the statement of John in his second letter. He says, ***“Anyone who is so progressive as not to remain in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever remains in the teaching has the Father and the Son.”*** (2 John 9 NAB). It is very clear that we need to **remain in the teaching of Christ ONLY** in order to have both the **Father** and the **Son**. Paul reminds us **not to join** with those who teach doctrines that are **contrary** to the Biblical doctrines. He says, ***“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to doctrine which you learned and avoid them.”***(Romans 16:17).

For further inquiries, please send your e-mail to: robert.roxas@tisachurchofchrist.org