

Church of Christ

...Heart to Heart...

We have seen in the last two articles the term “*elder*” and what it means. “*Elders*” in the Lord’s church were older men, as described in I Tim. 3 and Titus 2, and they are given charge by God over His church.

The second important word to look at, referring to this same group of men in the church is *episkipos*. *Epi*, which means “over” and *skopeo* which means “to look or watch.” Putting them together, you get “one who looks and watches over others.” It is translated in our English as bishop or overseer (depending on the version used). The King James Version uses the word “*bishop*” while most others use the word “*overseer*”. They are men who watch over or “*oversee*” that things are done according to the Lord’s way.

We can look back into the Old Testament and see a form of this word used in the Hebrew language. In Numbers 3:38-39, the word “*numbered*” is the Hebrew root word for *overseer*. The “*numbered*” men were commanded at the bidding of the Lord. The word means to “appoint for supervision, to commission.” They were “*overseeing*,” they were guardians of God’s holy people and tabernacle. In Deut. 11:11-12, God says He “*cares*” for the land they were to possess. That word is another Hebrew word with the idea of “*overseeing*” His creation. In Gen. 39:19-23, Joseph was put in “*charge*” and was “*responsible*” to carry out or “*oversee*” things in his care. In Gen. 41:37-49, we see the idea of “*overseeing*” in greater detail, making sure things were done faithfully and right to preserve the people.

The New Testament word *episkopos* is not as common, but only used 5 times (Acts 20:28; Phil.1:1; I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7; I Pet. 2:25). In I Pet. 2:25 Jesus is described as “*the Shepherd and Guardian* (episkipos) *of your souls.*” Jesus’ work is the “*overseer*” of our souls. What does that teach us about Him? In Acts 20:28, the elders from Ephesus were called to Paul for last instructions. They are told to “*guard*” themselves and the flock because they, by the Holy Spirit, were made “*overseers*”(episkipos). If they were going to look out for, or watch over the Lord’s church, they had to be on guard themselves. Paul instructs Timothy and Titus what an “*overseer*” must be in his character. Paul writes the Philippians, addressing the “*overseers and deacons*”. (Phil. 1:1) He uses the word “*overseer*”, not “*elder*”.

Paul instructs the Thessalonians to “*appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.*” (I Thes. 5:12) The work of the “*elders*”/ “*overseers*” is described in the term “*have charge over you.*” They have the authority from the Lord! More next week. Think about it!!!