

Searching His Word
Titles from the Bible
By Russell Earl

The Bible uses several different names for God's servants. Each comes with important responsibilities. Some names are: Evangelists, pastors, elders, deacons, overseers, shepherds, bishops, and ministers. It is important to keep in mind we do not see the term "Reverend" in the Bible. Besides these, we know some names are given to people because of a specific occupation such as John the Baptist. John is called such because he was baptizing people. Thus he is more accurately called John the baptizer.

We see some of the same titles used today in the Bible, but are they used as they are described in the Bible? Lets look at a few titles most commonly used today for a preacher or evangelist. The first term is "pastor." In the Bible the term "pastor" is found in Jeremiah 17:16 (KJV) and can be translated as "shepherd." Pastors or shepherds are to guide and feed (spiritually) the flock (believers). The office of a pastor or shepherd is also referred to as elder, overseer, or bishop (Acts 20:28, Phil. 1:1). Since the term "pastor" refers to a Biblical office, we need to see how its used in the Bible. In the Bible the term for the office of an elder or pastor is never used in the singular state. It is always used in the plural (Titus 1:5, 1Tim. 5:17, Acts 14:23, 20:17, Phil. 1:1, 1Peter 5:2). This being the case the Bible tells us it is incorrect to have a "Pastor" but we ought to have "Pastors" (plural). The preacher, according to the Bible, is not a Pastor unless he meets the requirements (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9) and there are other pastors or elders in the church serving with him. It is unscriptural to have only one pastor or any other term used for the same office. Some congregations have a "Bishop." This too is incorrect if it is used in the singular form. These terms also refer to positions that are to be held only by men, as this is what the Bible teaches. There are no Bible examples of female pastors, bishops, etc (Titus 2:3-5, 1Tim. 2:12, Rev. 2:20).

The second title we want to look at that is often used today is "Reverend." No where in the Bible is the term "reverend" used. The only reference to someone being revered (the idea of being respected or shown godly fear) is God Himself (Ps. 89:7). In Titus 2:7 the women are to be reverent not reverends. When someone refers to themselves or allows others to refer to them as a "Reverend" they are placing themselves on the same level of respect as God. This is something that ought not be done.

A preacher is not a reverend. Preachers may be a pastor or bishop but only if that man meets the scriptural requirements and other qualified men serve with him. Christians are to be humble individuals. When we use Bible titles improperly in reference to a position they give us authority and recognition which we do not have and have not earned. Would anyone want a medical student operating on them because others refer to him as a doctor?

Scripturally speaking, preachers are men who are to teach and preach the gospel message. Thus, the term preacher describes the occupation or job of that person, just like John, the baptizer. Preachers can also be referred to as evangelists. Evangelists are those who evangelize (those who strive to teach the unbelieving about God), or a Preacher can also be referred to simply as a minister. In reality all obedient Christians are ministers so this term would not be incorrect to use in reference to a preacher.

Should not one of our aims be to call Bible things by Bible names and to do Bible things in Bible ways? Lets strive to recognize men by their proper Biblical titles. In doing this, we cannot be wrong.