



Should I Call My Preacher “Pastor” Or “Reverend”?

DISCOVERING GOD’S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Q&A NUMBER: 7

www.GodSaidSo.com/QA7

Should I call my preacher “Pastor” or “Reverend”? Much of the religious world uses these titles for those who do the public teaching in the congregation or for the church leader(s). But, is this how the Bible uses these designations? Let’s investigate.

Speaking As The Oracles Of God

Both the terms “pastor” and “reverend” are Bible terms. We will look at passages that use them later in this study. However, we must not only be concerned about using Bible terms; but, we must also be concerned about using Bible terms *in Bible ways!*

Why does it matter whether the Bible uses these terms in the same ways we use them today? Why can’t we call our church leaders whatever we want to call them? Does God really care? Is it a big deal?

While some might suggest that it is “no big deal” if we use terms in ways that do not accurately reflect the ways in which God uses these terms in the Bible, I want you to consider why it actually *is* important to use the language of the Bible properly.

First, using Bible terms in Bible ways is important because that’s what God has told us to do! In 1 Peter 4:11, Peter wrote, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God....” To speak “as the oracles of God” is to speak according to the utterances of God (to speak in the same way that God speaks). So, whenever God uses words and terms in certain ways, we are not free to “adapt” those words to just *anything*.

Second, using Bible terms in Bible ways is important *if* we desire to do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus. Colossians 3:17 instructs, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” So, everything that we do – including the words that we use – must be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (by His

authority). If, then, we decide to use a Bible term to describe something that the Bible does not, we are failing to do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus.

So, as we proceed through this study, let's remember that we must use Bible terms in Bible ways if we want to speak according to the oracles of God and do all things by Christ's authority! Now, let's examine each of these two terms ("pastor" and "reverend") to see how the Bible uses them.

"Pastor"

It is common for folks to apply the term "pastor" today to the one who takes the leading role in the congregation's public teaching (probably the individual who is considered to be the leader of the congregation). It is often used in a singular sense, referring to a church's "Pastor" (although some churches have multiple "Pastors"). Additionally, the term is commonly used today to refer to either a man or a woman. Furthermore, the term is applied to individuals who are both old *and* young. These types of uses are commonplace in churches today. But, is it Biblical?

Let's begin to answer this question by defining the Greek word that is translated as "pastors" in some of our English translations of the Bible. The Greek word is the word "poimen" and is simply defined as either "pastor" or "shepherd." In fact, many of the modern translations of the Bible will translate the word as "shepherd" rather than the traditional "pastor."

The majority of times this word is used in the Bible, therefore, it is used in a general sense, referring to a shepherd or in reference to Jesus Christ as being our Shepherd. Here is an example of each.

1. Generally, referring to shepherds (i.e. the shepherds who heard the announcement of Jesus' birth): "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8).
2. Referring to Christ, as our Shepherd: "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own" (John 10:14).

The word is used in just one other way in the scriptures, regarding a specific function within a local church. This is the reference that will be most applicable to this study. Ephesians 4:11 lists some functions God had provided in His church. This reference is, clearly, not in reference to general shepherds over literal sheep – nor is the reference to Jesus Christ (notice that the term is plural). Instead, this is clearly a function in the local church (as other passages will help us to discover).

1. Ephesians 4:11: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers."

As you consider this function in the local church, other passages help us to discover that the term "pastors" is another way of designating the office of elders. First, before we consider

passages that help us to come to that conclusion, please notice the God-given organizational structure of the local church. It is summarized in Philippians 1:1 as being: Bishops, deacons, and saints. The “saints” are the members of the church (every Christian is a saint). The “deacons” are special servants of the church (their qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The “bishops” are the final classification in a local church. Of these three, “bishops” and “deacons” can be accurately classified as offices that are held within a local church. But, you must understand that these are the *only* two God-authorized offices within a local church today.

In the Bible, the terms “bishops,” “elders,” and “pastors” are all used interchangeably to refer to the men who occupy the same office (they are not three different offices). Consider Acts chapter 20 to see this. In this chapter, the apostle Paul was meeting with the elders from the church in Ephesus. Acts 20:17 says, “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.” Later, notice what he tells them in Acts 20:28: “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.” The term “overseer” is just another way of saying “bishop” (just as “shepherd” is another way of saying “pastor”). Notice that these elders (Acts 20:17) had been made bishops/overseers (Acts 20:28) to shepherd/pastor the church of God in Ephesus (Acts 20:28). So, pastors are elders and elders are pastors (also bishops). You can also see these terms used interchangeably in 1 Peter 5:1-4. Each of these three terms simply help us to understand a particular aspect of their God-given work.

Next, we must consider that the Bible *always* teaches that there are multiple elders (pastors) in one local congregation – *never* just one “Pastor.” Remember, Paul called for the “elders” of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17). Paul also went about appointing “elders in every church” (Acts 14:23) and instructed Titus to appoint “elders in every city” (Titus 1:5). So it goes throughout the New Testament. There is simply no Bible authority for just one man/woman to be appointed as the “Pastor” over a local church!

Then, you must also consider that God has given very specific qualifications for individuals to meet in order to be appointed as pastors/elders/bishops. Those qualifications are listed in two places in the Scriptures. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Therefore, an individual who does not meet these qualifications cannot rightfully be considered to be a pastor! Consider the use of the word “must” in 1 Timothy 3:2 – as an individual “must” possess these qualifications in order to be appointed as an elder/pastor. Titus 1:6 also says that elders can be appointed “if” they meet the qualifications that are given.

Some of the most noteworthy qualifications given in these two passages (as it relates to our question) is that these individuals are men (*never* women), older men (as demonstrated by the term “elders” and their need to have believing children), married men, and married men having Christian children. Yet, how many churches in today’s society have “pastors” who simply do not meet these qualifications?

“Reverend”

It is also common (in churches today) to hear the title “Reverend” being used in reference to a church leader (commonly the one who does the majority of the public preaching). However, we must again ask the question, “Is it Biblical?”

The word that is translated “reverend” is the Hebrew word “yare.” It is defined as to fear, to reverence, and to stand in awe of. In fact, the word is often translated as “fear” (148 times), “afraid” (78 times), “feared” (39 times), and “terrible” (30 times) in the King James Version – along with several other translations that are much less frequent. However, the only time that is translated “reverend” is found in Psalm 111:9. Yet, the New King James Version and many of the modern-day translations translate the word as “awesome” in that passage.

Again, the word “reverend” is only used one time in the Bible (and only by the King James Version and American Standard Version, among well-known translations). It occurs in Psalm 111:9: “He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.” This reference is clearly made regarding God Himself.

There are exactly zero references to this term being applied to church leaders (of any sort) in the pages of the Bible. God’s name is holy and reverend/awesome! But, this is not true of men. So, Christians are never referred to by this term. Deacons are never referred to by this term. Elders/pastors are never referred to by this term. Preachers are never referred to by this term. Using this term to apply to church leaders is simply an invention of man!

Conclusion

The terms “Pastor” and “Reverend” are widely misused in the religious world today. The designation of “Reverend” to refer to a church leader has absolutely *zero* authority in the Bible. The designation of “pastor” has a proper usage in a local church (in reference to men who fill the office of the eldership). If, then, your preacher is one of the men who have been appointed as elders in the local church, this designation would be proper. However, to refer to only one man as “Pastor” of a church, to refer to a woman as “Pastor” of a church, or to refer to anyone who does not meet the God-given qualifications as “Pastor” would not be according to the ways of God! I hope that you will desire to speak as the Bible speaks and do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus!

Discovering God’s Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: QA7

Written by Eric Krieg

Copyright: Copyright © 2018 GodSaidSo Press. Please use this material to God’s glory and honor. Feel free to copy and distribute this material in any way that will bring God glory and help souls to be saved. However, you may not take any of the material out of context or change the material in any way. Please provide the author with the proper credit for the material.

Scripture quotations: Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.