

# *The Recognition of Religious Titles*

**By David Lee Burris**



- HIS EXCELLENCY
- PRESIDENT FOR LIFE FIELD MARSHAL AL HADJ DOCTOR  
IDI AMIN DADA
- VC
- DSO
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- LORD OF ALL THE BEASTS OF THE EARTH AND FISHES OF THE SEA
- CONQUEROR OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN AFRICA IN GENERAL  
AND UGANDA IN PARTICULAR

# As Our Ears Hear The Previous God's Ears Hear the Following:

## Papacy: Tracing Through Titles

- ✓ Bishop Of Rome
- ✓ Roman Province Metropolitan
- ✓ Primate Of Italy
- ✓ Patriarch of the West
- ✓ Successor of Prince of the Apostles
- ✓ Sovereign Pontiff Universal Church
- ✓ Vicar Of Christ

We Can Only Imagine  
God's Anger At Those  
That Greet Their Fellow  
Creature As "Reverend"

## Should I Call My Preacher "Reverend"?

Mike Willis  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

Here are the reasons why I reject the wearing of religious titles:

### **1. There is no New Testament authority for the practice.**

Though there were many gospel preachers in the first century, not one of them accepted and wore a religious title. I cannot read where Paul was ever called "Reverend Paul," Peter was ever called "Archbishop Peter," James was ever called "Pope James," Timothy was ever called "Pastor Timothy," or John was ever referred to as "The Right Reverend, Dr. John." The wearing of religious titles is a practice that arose centuries later. They were never worn with the approval of God by those in the Lord's church. Consequently, I refuse to go beyond the things which God has revealed that we should do in our worship of Him (2 Jn. 9-11; 1 Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 4:11; Rev. 22:18-19).

### **2. Wearing religious titles is expressly condemned.**

The Lord Jesus forbade the practice when He said,

*But be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ (Matt. 23:8-10).*

The wearing of religious titles to elevate one brother above another was soundly condemned by Jesus. The practice is contrary to the spirit of Christianity that "all ye are brethren."

Long ago Job said, "Let me not, I pray you, accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man. For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away" (Job 32:21-22).

### **3. Wearing religious titles exalts man too highly.**

Paul warned us "not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another" (1 Cor. 4:6). Man should not be an object of worship. Peter would not allow Cornelius to bow to him (Acts 10:26); an angel would not allow John to worship him (Rev. 22:9). Man steps outside his proper bounds of his habitation when he allows himself to be worshiped.

When man exalts himself through flattering titles such as "reverend," "right reverend," "worshipful master, most worshipful," he encourages others to offer praise to him, rather than giving praise to God. In this practice, man sins.

### **4. Wearing religious titles exalts brother above brother.**

Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees saying that they "love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (Matt. 23:6-8). By "all ye are brethren," Jesus forbade exalting one brother above another (also see Gal. 3:27-28; Jas. 2:14).

## **5. Wearing religious titles contributes to an unscriptural clergy-laity distinction.**

The first century church did not have a clergy separate from the members. In *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, McClintock and Strong wrote,

*In the apostolical Church no abstract distinction of clergy & laity, as to privilege or sanctity, was known; all believers were called to the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices in Christ (1 Pet. v. 3). The Jewish antithesis of clergy and laity was at first unknown among Christians; and it was 'only as men fell back from the evangelical to the Jewish point of view' that the idea of the general Christian priesthood of all believers gave place, more or less completely, to that of the special priesthood or clergy (McClintock and Strong, Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, Vol. II, p. 386).*

In the years since the New Testament was written, a clergy has developed. The clergy is composed of those ordained for performance of Christian worship & teaching. The ordained clergy has these jobs to perform; (1) interpret the Bible for the people, (2) administer the sacraments (usually defined as the Lord's supper, baptism, marriage), and (3) administer excommunication.

Only those who meet certain qualifications can become part of the clergy. In the Presbyterian denomination, a man must have a diploma from college, a diploma from an approved seminary, and be willing to submit to the teachings of their accepted creeds in order to become a member of their clergy. The Wesleyan Methodists encourage their men to attend a 4-year ministerial school operated by their denomination, hold membership in the Wesleyan Church and pass an exam from their denominational hierarchy.

Neither Jesus nor one of His apostles could've been part of modern clergy of the denominations of men.

The establishment of a clergy undermines the New Testament concept that all believers are priests (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), having the right to approach God directly in worship without the intervention of a human intermediary. Jesus is the only High Priest we need through whom to approach God (Heb. 2:17-3:1). Every man can read and understand the Bible; he has no need for an official interpretation by a church official.

The only biblical passages which could be used to authorize a separate priesthood must be found in the Old Testament. To appeal to those passages for authority for a separate priesthood is to revert to Judaism with its animal sacrifices, rather than accepting the all-sufficiency of the blood of Christ as revealed in the New Testament.

### **Noted Religious Titles Worn Today**

Here are some of the religious titles which men wear today. All of them are unauthorized by the New Testament.

*Pope Father*

*Reverend Right Reverend*

*Bishop Archbishop*

*Cardinal Pastor*

Masonry has always shown a propensity for flattering titles. The master of a symbolic lodge is addressed as "Worshipful Master." The prevailing title of a Grand Master is "Most Worshipful." A thirty-second degree Mason is "Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret."

The New Testament teaching on wearing religious titles condemns the practices of most denominations and the Masons.

### **New Testament Terms Show What A Man Does**

A man is a "doctor" because he doctors the sick; a man is a plumber because he plumbs; a man is a builder because he builds. These terms explain what a man does and are not titles. In the same way, the New Testament uses terms to describe what men do. A preacher (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11) preaches (2 Tim. 4:2). An evangelist (Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5) evangelizes. (There is no difference in a preacher and an evangelist in the New Testament.) Overseers (Acts 20:28, sometimes translated "bishops") oversee local congregations. "Pastors" (Eph. 4:11) tend or shepherd a flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). These are not religious titles to exalt one brother over another; they are descriptive terms which tell what a man does.

A preacher does not oversee the affairs of a local church and is never called "The Pastor" in the New Testament. Bishops, overseers, pastors and elders are different terms for the same work - the work of guiding and directing the affairs of a local church. This office or work is limited to the local church & is not to be confused with the evangelistic labors of a preacher.

**A preacher has no right or authority from God to pastor or oversee a church; therefore, he is not properly called "The Pastor." God ordained that each local church has a plurality of elders, bishops, or pastors - men chosen from within the local membership - to oversee the local congregation. Preachers are not to usurp that office for themselves. Like all other members in a local church, the preacher serves under bishops, elders, or pastors. If we properly understand the work of a preacher and the work of a pastor, we will not confuse the two terms.**

## **Conclusion**

**A generation which does not learn the thoughts and language of New Testament Christianity will soon imbibe the thoughts and language of modern denominationalism. Like Israelites in Nehemiah's day who began speaking the speech of Ashdod (Nehemiah 13:24), untaught Christians will begin speaking the language of denominationalism. We will do well to be reminded of the danger of wearing religious titles, even in incipient form, among us. Sometimes men who have academic degrees are advertised as gospel preachers with these titles: "Dr." The term "brother," used in the Bible to refer to a relationship sustained by all Christians, is sometimes reserved only for the preacher. Others are introduced by their names but the preacher is introduced as "Brother ."**

**We must never forget that "all ye are brethren" (Matt. 23:8).**



**The wearing of religious titles is a practice specific condemned of God. Let us avoid every form of evil (1 Thess. 5:21). Let us resolve to call no man father who is not our fleshly parent, who is not married neither has children, and who does not teach the gospel which enables children to be begotten of God (1 Cor. 4:15); to call no man reverend who does not revere what God spoke about wearing religious titles (Matt. 23:9); to call no man pastor who does not meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 but usurps to himself the rule over a local congregation; to call no man bishop who oversees a collectivity of churches unknown to God's word; to call no man cardinal who exalts himself as if he held a chief office in the church; and to call no man pope for God alone is our Father.**

**Let God alone be exalted among those who profess to serve Him. - *Guardian of Truth***

# Are Preachers To Be Called “Reverend”?

By **Wayne Jackson**

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**Q: “Do you have information as to when various denominations began to apply the term ‘reverend’ to preachers?”**

The title “Reverend” has been adopted in many English-speaking denominations as a courtesy designation for clergymen. Higher orders are designated as “Very Reverend,” “Right Reverend,” or “Most Reverend.”

Professor Burton S. Easton, of the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church, has briefly discussed this matter. He notes that only in recent times has the Catholic Church begun to employ “Most Reverend” for its Bishops and Archbishops, while certain priests (of the “Monsignor” rank) are addressed as “Right Reverend.” The Professor contends that the Catholic practice began in Ireland and subsequently spread to America. He believes the usage commenced among Protestants in England in about 1865, and has grown since then (Ferm, 661).

Those who seek to follow the apostolic pattern will reject the use of special name-associated, religious “titles” for two reasons.

## **No New Testament Authority**

First, there is no New Testament authority for the use of such nomenclature. This argument will carry no weight with those who are unconcerned with operating within the bounds of the Lord’s authority; yet, apostolic teaching is clear that one must not venture into the domain of presumptuous religious activity (1 Cor. 4:6 ASV; Col. 3:17; 2 Jn. 9). Christians are warned against religious conduct that is grounded in their personal “will” (cf. “will-worship” — Col. 2:23).

## Clerical Titles Condemned by Christ

Second, *in principle*, the use of “Reverend,” as a clerical title, is condemned by the Lord. In a scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus spoke these words:

“But all their works they do to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called of men, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even the Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Mt. 23:5-12).

Clearly the Savior has condemned the use of pompous titles by which Christian men exalt themselves above their fellows.

R. C. H. Lenski, a Lutheran scholar, noted: “Any title that is contrary to [the] equality of brethren in Christ Jesus, even the desire for such a title and honor, is wicked usurpation as far as our one real Teacher is concerned.”

Albert Barnes, the noted Presbyterian commentator, expressed a similar sentiment, suggesting that titles like “Doctor of Divinity” fall into the same category.

Nor is it appropriate to refer to the apostles as “Saint Peter” or “Saint Paul”—as some writers and speakers are accustomed to doing. I once heard a flamboyant preacher saturate his sermon with allusions to “Saint Paul” and “Saint Peter.” He slipped up along the way, however, and quoted a passage from “Saint Galatians”!

More than a century ago, A. Lukyn Williams, who authored the scholarly work on Matthew in *The Pulpit Commentary* series, commented that the wearing of such titles partakes of...

“that sectarian spirit which began in the primitive Church, when one [person] said, ‘I am of Paul; another, I of Apollos,’ etc. (1 Cor. 1:12), and [this disposition] has continued to this day in the divisions of the one body into innumerable sects and parties, ranged under various leaders, and generally bearing their founder’s name” (397).

The use of a descriptive phrase, e.g. in this sentence, “John Doe, an elder, lives in Chicago?,” is not wrong. But to utilize special titles, “Elder John Doe,” “Rabbi Samuel Goldstein,” or “The Reverend Bob Smith,” cross the line, thus demonstrating the very attitude that Christ rebuked.

One might add, as an aside, that distinctive attire falls under the same sort of condemnation (e.g., the use of robes, clerical collars, special rings, etc.).

In commenting upon the context of Matthew 23, A. T. Robertson, a Baptist writer, observed that some religious leaders are afflicted with “an itch for notice.” He specifically takes note of both “pope” and “priest” who covet the religious recognition of “father” (180).

## **No Biblical Example**

Third, New Testament precedent is against the august titles that the “clergy” so relish. If there was any teacher of the primitive church who might deserve a special appellation, should such have been permissible, surely it would have been Paul, whose scholastic achievements eclipsed those of his Jewish kinsmen (cf. Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:4ff). Yet, when Peter had occasion to refer to his fellow apostle, he did not allude to “Rabbi Saul” or “Doctor Paul,” but simply as — “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Pet. 3:15).

## **A Popular Flawed Argument Against Clerical Titles**

As a concluding point, we must not fail to notice that while there is ample evidence against men using the title “Reverend” to set themselves apart from others, a common argument against the use of this expression is exegetically flawed.

It is not unusual to hear this statement.

“Psalm 111:9 says, ‘Holy and reverend is his [God’s] name.’ It is therefore wrong to apply to man that which belongs exclusively to the Lord.”

Though the motive behind the admonition is noble, namely, to reserve appropriate honor to the Creator, the argument is specious.

The Hebrew form rendered “reverend” is yare, from the root yr’. The term signifies “terror, to be afraid of, to be awed by, to honor, worship,” etc. The stem form is used 485 times in the Old Testament. Most of the time it refers to God (about 80%), though it is used of human beings as well (see: *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 2.527ff).

**[SUMMING CONCLUSION: WAYNE JACKSON IS SAYING THAT IN PSALM 111:9 REVEREND “YARE” IS USED AS AN ADJECTIVE. THEREFORE, IT CANNOT MEET THE STANDARD OF A PROOF-TEXT IN NOUN-TITLE APPLICATION. YET, UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES IS JACKSON SUGGESTING THERE IS NOT SUFFICIENT PROOF OF SCRIPTURE AGAINST THE TERM “REVEREND” BEING APPLIED AS A RELIGIOUS TITLE. MOREOVER, THERE IS NOT A SINGLE APPROVED EXAMPLE OF THE TERM “REVEREND” BEING USED NOUN SPECIFIC AS A RELIGIOUS TITLE OF OFFICE. DLB]**

## Even Jehovah's Witnesses Here Are Correct:

The Bible's Viewpoint

### Should Christians Use Religious Titles?

MUCH is said about a shortage of clergymen in Christendom today, but there is hardly a shortage of religious titles among them. Some titles are simple; others are pretentious. Here are a few examples:

- Clergyman: "Reverend."
- Anglican bishop: "Right Reverend the Lord Bishop."
- Roman Catholic bishop (in Italy): "His Excellency, the Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Monsignor."
- Cardinal: "His Eminence."
- The pope: "Most Holy Father."

The titles "reverend" and "bishop" have been in use for such a long time that they do not grate on the ear of most church members. But are such titles authorized by the Bible?

### "Reverend," "Bishop," and "Cardinal"

In the *King James Version*, the term "reverend" appears only once, at [Psalm 111:9](#), which says: "Holy and reverend is his name." Whose name? The next verse says: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." ([Psalm 111:10](#)) In one Catholic version, these two passages read: "Holy and awesome his name. The root of wisdom is the fear of Yahweh [Jehovah]." (*The New Jerusalem Bible*) Hence, according to God's Word, godly fear, or reverence, belongs exclusively to Jehovah, the Almighty. Is it correct then to give it to humans?

"If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work," wrote Paul to Timothy. ([1 Timothy 3:1](#), *KJ*) However, according to *The New Jerusalem Bible*, the verse reads: "To want to be a presiding elder is to desire a noble task." Early Christians with responsible duties were referred to as "elders" and "overseers." Were those terms used as titles?

No. Such men were never called “Bishop Peter” or “Elder James.” That is why mature Christian men among Jehovah’s Witnesses who serve the congregation as elders never use the term “elder” as a title. The terms “elder” and “overseer” (bishop) apply exclusively to those holding a position of authority and responsibility. The terms also describe the qualifications of the men appointed and the work that they do.

What about the title “cardinal”? Is it found in the Bible? No. It is not in any version. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church admits that this title is not Biblical. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* explains: “The word is derived from the Latin word *cardo* meaning ‘hinge,’ and in the words of Pope Eugene IV, ‘as the door of a house turns on its hinges, so on the cardinalate does the Apostolic See, the door of the whole Church, rest and find support.’” This reference work also informs us that “cardinals enjoy the privilege of being directly addressed as ‘Eminence.’” Their status also allows them to wear a red gown and a red cap. Did the apostles have those ‘privileges’? The Bible answers no.

## “Lord,” “Monsignor,” and “Father”

Should members of the clergy be called lords? Anglican bishops are addressed “lord.” Catholic prelates are often addressed “monsignor,” which means “my Lord.” In some countries, ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church are addressed *dominee*, a title derived from the Latin word *dominus*, meaning “lord.” But Jesus instructed his disciples: “You know that in the world, rulers lord it over their subjects, but it shall not be so with you.” ([Matt. 20:25, 26](#), *The New English Bible*) Also, the apostle Peter wrote: “Do not lord it over the group which is in your charge, but be an example for the flock.” ([1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:3](#), *NJB*) On the occasion when Jesus humbly washed the feet of his disciples, he said to them: “You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am.” ([John 13:13](#), *NJB*) Is it right for men to use a religious title that belongs to God and to his Son?

Is the religious title “father” correct? It is used widely by Roman Catholics and Anglicans. “Padre,” meaning “father,” is also widely used. But Jesus taught his disciples: “You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven.” Matthew 23: 9 *NJB*. Why do clergymen and their followers disobey this command from the Lord Jesus Christ?

The pope of Rome is usually addressed as “Holy Father.” But his Italian staff often address him as *Santissimo Padre*, which means “Most Holy Father.” “Holy Father” is a title that appears only once in the Bible. ([John 17:11](#)) It is the title of the Supreme Being. Is it right for creatures, who are earthly and imperfect, to be addressed by that title?

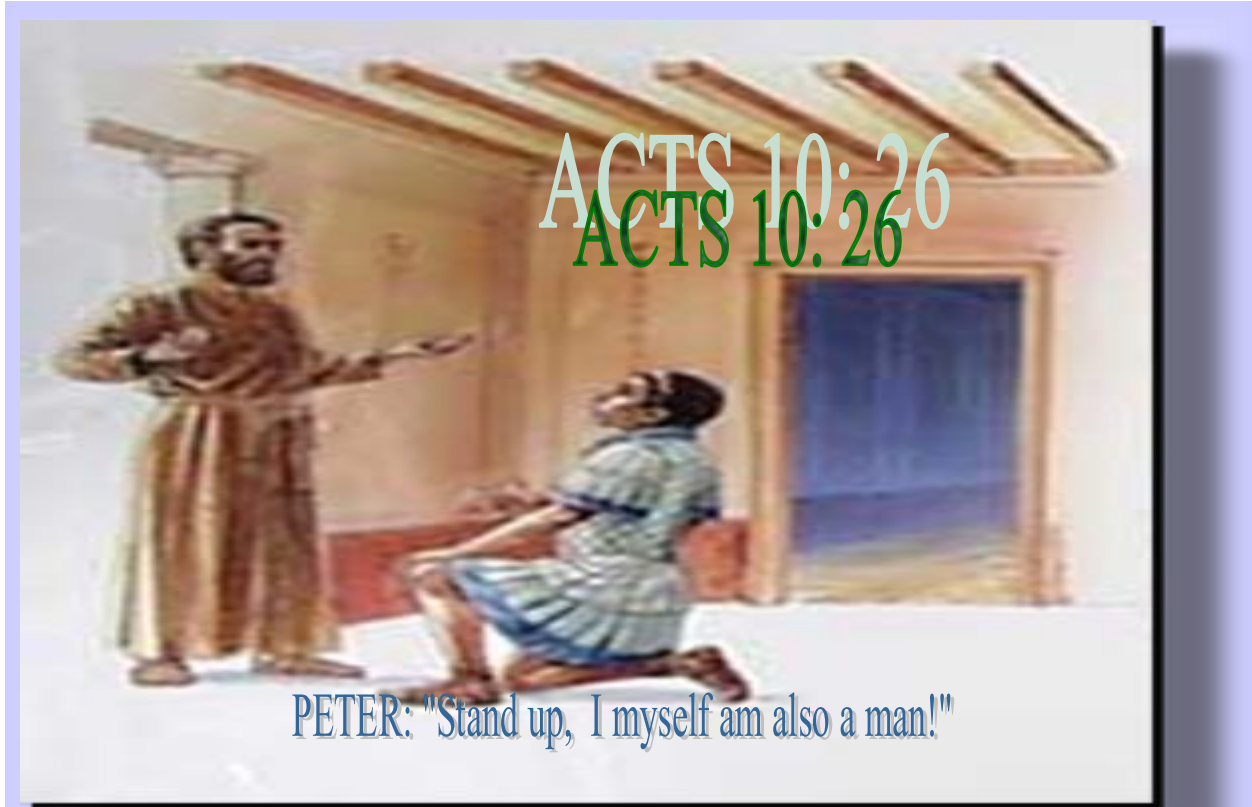
## Religious Trespassing

Please read and note the context of [Matthew 23:1-12](#). Jesus begins speaking about the Pharisees, who were a prominent sect of Judaism. They were legalists, sticklers for observance of every detail of the Mosaic Law. They liked to dress & act in such a way as to call attention to themselves. Their religion was one of ostentation — their style of clothing, their principal places at meals, their front seats in synagogues, and their titles of honor. They even claimed greater respect than that which was given parents. They wanted to be called father. However, Jesus shows that all his followers are equal as God’s children. Any title that suggests the opposite is a haughty usurpation of something that belongs to God. Thus, Jesus forbids the use of the word “father” as a title of honor in a religious sense. Jesus insists that his followers have only one Father in the faith, Jehovah.

Is it not clear many clergymen are standing on ‘holy ground’ reserved for God and his Son, and that much reverence is diverted from them to imperfect men? True Christians today avoid using flattering religious titles, and they avoid the practice of setting men on ecclesiastical pedestals. Among Jehovah’s Witnesses the only form of address for ministers is “brother.” ([2 Peter 3:15](#)) That is in harmony with what Jesus said: “You are all brothers.”—[Matthew 23:8](#), *NJB*.

- *Watchtower Magazine*





# MISAPPROPRIATION OF “PASTOR”

**Question: Let’s talk about the word “pastor.” You don’t hear it much in Churches of Christ. We believe the word better describes elders than it does preachers. But we’re more likely to call elders “shepherds.” Your thoughts?**

“I use the word “pastor” in part because I think Paul’s theology has been abstracted and has made him a theologian rather than a missionary pastor.

I use the word for those who pastor people, so it applies to preaching ministers — who, in my opinion, should be preaching pastoral theology. And it applies to elders and deacons and other people in churches who are doing pastoral ministry.

So, I look at it as a functional term, a broader term. I know that some people in the Churches of Christ get really nervous about this term.

I’m not nervous about the term. I’m concerned that pastors in many churches today don’t even pastor at all. They’re leaders. They’re entrepreneurs. They’re visionaries. They preach. They teach. But they don’t know the people in their church. And that’s forfeiting the very task that they’re called to do.” – *Christian Chronicle*

## **“WHY DOESN’T THE CHURCH OF CHRIST HAVE PASTORS?”**

That is a fair question, and one to which all disciples of Jesus need to be ready to give an explanation (1 Peter 3:15). Let us turn to the Bible to find instructions which can help us answer according to the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11).

Fact: Though the querist wonders why we do not have pastors in the church, in fact, we do. Really? Yes, we sure do. Speaking of the ascended Christ, Paul wrote this to the saints in Ephesus: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). This is the only verse in the English New Testament in which the word “pastor” is used. That is interesting, is it not? Just a note of clarity: in this same verse in which we read about pastors, we also read of apostles and prophets. We still need pastors in the church today, and we still have brothers who can meet the God-required pastor characteristics. When it comes to prophets and apostles, though, we neither have a need for them nor is there anyone qualified to serve as one.

Fact: Pastors of the church shepherd, oversee, rule, and in general, take care of a local flock of Christians. The noun “pastor” is from the Greek word “ποιμ v/poim n,” which means shepherd/herdsman. Thus, by definition, a spiritual pastor is one who shepherds. In New Testament language, along with his co-pastors, he shepherds the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1,2). In that context of 1 Peter 5, the apostle Peter identifies those whose role it is to “Shepherd the flock of God” which is among them (5:2). Peter says those who shepherd the sheep are “elders” (5:1), and the local church is blessed to have these godly men “serving as overseers” (5:2). The wording of this text makes it plain that in God’s plan (and that is the only one that counts!), elders are the overseers who shepherd the flock. We recall, though, that by definition, a pastor is a shepherd, that is, he shepherds. Thus, when we connect Peter’s written statements with Paul’s oral statements to elders from Ephesus, it is clear that “pastors” is simply another designation for those who function as “the elders of the church” (Acts 20:17,18,28).

**Fact: The church has only one Head Pastor. Jesus alone is described as “the Chief Shepherd” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:4). Christ has preeminence in all things (Colossians 1:18), and the pastors/elders who serve under Him are equal to one another in value & importance. Among God’s people, we never should refer to a mere mortal as a/our “Head Pastor.”**

Fact: In God’s plan for the organization of His church, not every member of the body is allowed to serve as a shepherd/pastor. Every Christian can be saved, labor faithfully in the Lord’s Cause, and eventually go to heaven, but not all may be pastors. God has given specific traits that one must possess in order to be appointed as a pastor/elder (Titus 1:5- 9; 1 Timothy 3:1-7). We dare not disregard His setup.

Fact: In the Bible, the term “evangelist” and the word “pastor” do not refer to the same role. Again, biblically speaking, a pastor is a shepherd and/or overseer. An evangelist is one who bears the good news of salvation: he is a gospel preacher (2 Timothy 4:2,5).

“I do not want to argue, but I would think if you teach God’s word to His flock, then you are helping them grow spiritually. So, really, you are playing the role of a pastor.” Many brothers of all ages & levels of spiritual maturity might present lessons that contribute to the strengthening of God’s church, but only those who meet the heaven-given criteria are allowed to function as pastors (Titus 1; 1 Timothy 3).

Fact: Some congregations currently do not have pastors. For a variety of reasons, local churches exist without a multiplicity of brothers who possess the scripturally-designated qualifications. However, each local church needs to be working diligently to train brothers so that some of them one day in the future will be qualified and prepared to serve as pastors.

— Roger D. Campbell

# Taylorsville church of Christ

## Religious Titles

One would be hard pressed to list all of the religious titles in existence. Reverend, Bishop, Archbishop, Father, Your Holiness, Your Eminence, Doctor, Pastor, and Elder are just some examples. There are even titles for the preacher's wife (like "First Lady"), and web pages that provide instruction on "clergy etiquette." Below are two excerpts.

*Greeting Clergy in Person.* When we address Deacons or Priests, we should use the title "Father." Bishops we should address as "Your Grace." Though all Bishops (including Patriarchs) are equal in the Orthodox Church, they do have different administrative duties and honors that accrue to their rank in this sense. Thus, "Your Eminence" is the proper title for Bishops with suffragans or assistant Bishops, Metropolitans, and most Archbishops (among the exceptions to this rule is the Archbishop of Athens, who is addressed as "Your Beatitude"). "Your Beatitude" is the proper title for Patriarchs (except for the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, who is addressed as "Your All--Holiness"). When we approach an Orthodox Presbyter or Bishop (but not a Deacon), we make a bow by reaching down and touching the floor with our right hand, place our right hand over the left (palms upward), and say: "Bless, Father" (or "Bless, Your Grace," or "Bless, Your Eminence," etc.). The Priest or Bishop then answers, "May the Lord bless you," blesses us with the Sign of the Cross, and places his right hand in our hands. We kiss then his hand.

*Addressing Clergy in a Letter.* When we write to a clergyman (and, by custom, monastics), we should open our letter with the greeting, "Bless, Father." At the end of the letter, it is customary to close with the following line: "Kissing your right hand..." It is not appropriate to invoke a blessing on a clergyman, as many do: "May God bless you." Not only does this show a certain spiritual arrogance before the image of the cleric, but laymen do not have the Grace of the Priesthood and the prerogative to bless in their stead.

**Though the wearing of religious titles is a prevalent practice, many are surprised to learn that such titles are not to be worn by Christians.** Below are some reasons why that is so.

(1) *They were specifically forbidden.* In Matthew 23, Jesus mentioned the special dress, special seats, and special titles of the scribes and Pharisees. Then He said, "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ" (vv. 8-10). Notice that Jesus did not want His disciples to wear titles like the religious leaders of the day.

(2) *They were not worn in the early church.* The first Christians did not use religious titles. Not even the most respected preachers wore them. For instance, Apollos (1 Corinthians 16:12), Timothy (Hebrews 13:23), and Paul (2 Peter 3:15) were simply called "brother."

(3) *They exalt some above others.* Disciples are not to elevate themselves above one another. Rather, they are to maintain a servant's spirit (Matthew 18:1-4; 20:25-28; 23:11-12). By their very nature, religious titles exalt some above others.

(4) *They reflect a clergy/laity distinction.* There is no such thing as a clergy/laity distinction in the New Testament. However, when men assume titles that elevate them above other members (or wear special clothing, sit in special seats, etc.), such a distinction can hardly be avoided.

The term “reverend” appears one time in the King James Version (KJV). Psalm 111:9 says, “He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant forever: holy and reverend is his name.” Notice that “reverend” is used in that passage of God. It is a bit presumptuous for men to take a term used only in reference to God and apply it to themselves.

*The term Reverend, now in such common use among our people and all other parties, was generally very offensive to Baptists of the old school, and was seldom employed by them in common conversation, in letter inscriptions, or in any other way. Holy and reverend is his name, as a designation of the Divine Being, was a passage often quoted by objectors to giving reverence to men. To the Deity alone, said they, reverence belongs. (50 Years Among the Baptists, David Benedict, p. 286).*

The fact that some of the titles worn by men are scriptural terms (like “elder” or “pastor”) does not justify the practice under discussion because they were never worn as titles in the early church. **They were used as designations.** For instance, Peter referred to himself as simply “a fellow elder” (1 Peter 5:1), not as “Elder Peter.”

Let us refrain from using religious titles. They were forbidden by the Lord and were foreign to the early church. They also exalt some above others and reflect a clergy/laity distinction.

