

Respect for Bible Terms – No. 2

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A failure to observe and follow the meaning of words as they are used in Scripture is one of the major causes of religious confusion. To admit the claim of inspiration found in the Bible is to attribute its very words to the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13). To the earnest servant of God, the words of Scripture deserve and will receive the utmost respect.

Words relating to preachers are among the most abused. There are three basic words in the New Testament that refer to those who preach:

1. *Preacher*. A public proclaimer or herald (Rom. 14:2).
2. *Evangelist*. A bringer of good tidings (2 Tim. 4:5).
3. *Minister*. A servant (Eph. 3:7).

All these terms are used to some extent in present-day conversation in reference to preachers, but by far the most oft-used term is *pastor*. While *pastor* is a Scriptural term (Eph. 4:11, noun form; Acts 20:28, 1 Pet. 5:2, verb form), it is not used in the New Testament in reference to preachers, but in reference to elders or bishops. “What difference does it make?” Whether we see why the Holy Spirit distinguished between pastors and preachers or not is beside the point, although adequate reasons can be given for the distinction. That the Scriptures make such a distinction is reason enough for the dedicated Bible student.

As in all things that God does, He has a reason for making this distinction. *Pastor* means “shepherd” and carries with it the responsibility of feeding and providing for the church, but also the authority to keep the sheep closely following the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4). On the other hand, the preacher’s chief responsibility is to “preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:1–2) and he has no authority over the church except that exercised by the Word which he preaches. Thus, to make an unscriptural use of the Scriptural term, *pastor*, is to confuse the role of elder and preacher in the local church. It is possible for a preacher to be a pastor scripturally, **if** he is also appointed an elder (e.g., Peter - 1 Pet. 5:1). However, such a preacher is not a pastor because he is a **preacher**, but because he is an **elder**. The widespread “pastor system” followed by most of Christendom makes the preacher or priest in a church the singular authority figure, completely ignoring the Lord’s plan that this authority belongs to a Scripturally qualified plurality of men: *elders, bishops, or pastors*. If men would truly respect these Scriptural terms, the “pastor system” would vanish overnight.

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