**More Than Semantics:**

**Reverend, Pastor, Minister, Preacher, Or Evangelist?**

Before time began, God had a plan in mind. His wisdom provided for mankind before he ever rebelled. God provided a system of redemption. He provided open access to all those who responded to His grace. A necessary part of that plan was that His only begotten Son would build a body of believers and that body of believers would be able to exercise their God-given abilities in God-granted roles in that church (Eph. 4:11-16).

In God’s church, He has enabled all of us to serve. Yet, some serve in a more formal role as elders, deacons, and preachers. These have traditionally been viewed as “higher and nobler” as “professions of the clergy”, a distinction utterly foreign to the Scriptures. However, they do reference functions that have notoriously been the source of much disagreement regarding proper terms of reference. Five terms are well known and used, but quite misunderstood: reverend, pastor, minister, preacher, and evangelist. This lesson will clarify the differences between these terms and how they are truly used in God’s Word. While we examine these terms, we must specifically focus on which are appropriate or inappropriate biblically and also remember that these terms are not titles, but rather descriptions of particular God-given roles. To use ANY of these as titles is to misuse them (Matt. 23:5-12). Having said this, let us begin!

**I. “Reverend”**

A. Definition & Current Usage

1. Hebrew: יָרֵא (pronounced ya-ray with rolled r)

a. *Outline Of Biblical Usage – to cause to fear, honor, respect; incite awe; inspire godly fear*

2. English/Current Usage (*Webster’s*):

a. *“Worthy of reverence”*

i. Definition for reverence: “*profound, adoring, awed respect”*

ii. Synonyms for reverence: *adore, deify, glorify, revere, worship, venerate*

b. *“Of or relating to the clergy; being a member of the clergy”*

i. Definition for clergy: *“a group ordained to perform pastoral or sacerdotal functions in a Christian church”* and also *“the group of religious officials (as priests, ministers, and rabbis) specially prepared and authorized to lead religious services*

ii. Synonyms for clergy: *“church, cloth, first estate, ministry, spirituality, spiritualty”*

c. *“As a title Reverend is used for members of the clergy; the traditionally correct form of address is the Reverend James Smith or the Reverend J. Smith, rather than Reverend Smith or simply Reverend. Other words are prefixed in titles of more senior clergy: bishops are Right Reverend, archbishops are Most Reverend, and deans are Very Reverend”* (*OED*)

B. Biblical Usage – *“He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and* ***reverend*** *is his name.”* (Ps. 111:9) (KJV 1x!)

C. Conclusions:

1. First, “reverend” holds the connotation of veneration, worship, & deification. It therefore should not be used for a preacher. God alone is worthy of glorification, worship (Is. 42:8; 43:11; 46:9; Mk. 12:30).

2. Since the term “reverend” is only used of God in the Scriptures, and that only in older translations, it should be reserved for referring to God, not projected on the minister at a congregation, no matter his education or credentials. God is “reverend”, man is not!

3. If a person refers to another as reverend, they are taking the glory that belongs exclusively to God and giving it to a man. If that person refers to himself or herself as reverend, then they are blaspheming, taking the authority & glory that belongs to God & holding it for themselves.

**II. “Pastor”**

A. Definition & Current Usage

1. Hebrew: רָעָה (pronounced ra-ah with rolled r)

a. *to shepherd, rule, teach, feed, graze*

b. *to associate with, be a special friend of*

2. Greek: poimhvn

a. *Vine’s – "a shepherd, one who tends herds or flocks" (not merely one who feeds them), is used metaphorically of Christian "pastors," Eph 4:11. "Pastors" guide as well as feed the flock; cp. Act 20:28, which, with ver. 17, indicates that this was the service committed to elders (overseers or bishops); so also in 1Pe 5:1, 2, "tend the flock... exercising the oversight," RV; this involves tender care and vigilant superintendence.*

b. *The Outline Of Biblical Usage – “A shepherd in the Near East was responsible for watching out for enemies trying to attack the sheep, defending the sheep from attackers, healing the wounded and sick sheep, finding and saving lost or trapped sheep, loving them, and sharing their lives and to earn their trust.*

3. English/Current Usage (*Webster’s*):

a. *“a spiritual overseer; especially : a clergyman serving a local church or parish”*

b. *“a minister or priest in charge of a church”*

B. Actual Biblical Usage:

1. OT Usage: 8x in Jeremiah for leadership of Israel (poor leadership 7x – 2:8; 3:15; 10:21; 12:10; 17:16; 22:22; 23:1, 2; God’s leadership 1x – 3:15)

2. NT Usage: *“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some* ***pastors*** *and teachers...”* (Eph. 4:11) (NT 1x!)

C. Conclusions:

1. The Bible uses the terms pastor, elder, overseer, bishop, and shepherd synonymously (Acts 20:17, 28; 1Pet. 5:2; 1Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Phil. 1:1). They are used of the position in the church as well as for Christ Himself (1Pet. 2:25; 5:4).

2. “Pastor” refers to the shepherds that oversee a local flock and are to be distinguished from a preacher(s) at a local congregation. Pastors meet exact requirements in the Bible that are not all required of preachers.

3. These truths are biblically & fact-based and serve to correct the pervasive misuse and misappropriation of this terminology. Preachers ARE NOT pastors, unless they have also been appointed to serve in this role ***separate*** from their role as evangelists. They may serve in these two roles simultaneously, but be assured that they are ***two different roles***.

**III. “Minister”**

A. Definition & Current Usage

1. Hebrew: שָׁרַת (pronounced sha-rath with rolled r)

a. *Strong’s – to attend as a menial or worshipper; to contribute to, minister unto, do service, wait on*

2. Greek: diavkonoV or leitourgovV or uJphrevthV

a. *Vine’s – primarily denotes a "servant," whether as doing servile work, or as an attendant rendering free service, without particular reference to its character. The word is probably connected with the verb dioko, "to hasten after, pursue" (perhaps originally said of a runner). "It occurs in the NT of ... the servants of Christ in the work of preaching and teaching, 1Cr 3:5; 2Cr 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; Eph 3:7; Col 1:23, 25; 1Th 3:2; 1Ti 4:6...”*

b. *Vine’s – denoted among the Greeks, firstly, "one who discharges a public office at his own expense," then, in general, "a public servant, minister." In the NT it is used...* *of the Apostle Paul, in his evangelical ministry, fulfilling it as a serving-priest, Rom 15:16...*

c. *Vine’s – Attend, Attendance, Attendant: lit., "an under-rower;" hence, "a servant," is rendered "attendant" in Luk 4:20 and Act 13:5, RV. See MINISTER, OFFICER, SERVANT.*

3. English/Current Usage (*Webster’s*):

a. *“ one officiating in church worship”*

b. *“a clergyman or clergywoman especially of a Protestant communion”*

c. Antonyms: *layman, layperson, secular*

B. Biblical Usage: Acts 26:16; Rom. 15:16, 26f; **1Cor. 3:5**; Eph. 3:7; 6:21; Col. 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; 1Thess. 3:2; **1Tim. 4:6**; et al.

C. Conclusions:

1. Minister is not ***exclusively*** used in the Bible of the one who delivers a sermon, but it is used on numerous occasions in Scripture for that particular person in that particular role.

2. Caution should be retained in using this term as society has often used it after the fashion of a title and the distinction may be hard to establish.

**IV. “Preacher”**

A. Definition & Current Usage

1. Hebrew: קֹהֶלֶת (pronounced qoheleth)

a. *Outline Of Biblical Usage – collector (of sentences), preacher, public speaker, speaker in an assembly*

2. Greek: khruvssw – *Outline Of Biblical Usage*

a. *To be a herald, to officiate as a herald; to proclaim after the manner of a herald; always with the suggestion of formality, gravity and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed*

b. *To publish, proclaim openly: something which has been done*

3. English/Current Usage (*Webster’s*; preacher has no entry, only preach):

a. *“To delivers a sermon”*

b. *“to urge acceptance or abandonment of an idea or course of action”*

c. *“To advocate earnestly”*

B. Biblical Usage – 7x in Eccl.; NT – **Rom. 10:14**; **1Tim. 2:7**; **2Tim. 1:11**; 2Pet. 2:5

C. Conclusions:

1. I, personally, like this term a great deal. It has abundant Scriptural precedence in referring to the sermonizer and accurately conveys his role in a way that limits modern English connotations.

2. While this term was used often in secular settings, to create a distinction between the preacher and evangelist is biblically unfounded.

**V. “Evangelist”**

A. Definition & Current Usage

1. Greek: eujaggelisthvV

a. *Vine’s – lit., "a messenger of good" (eu, "well," angelos, "a messenger"), denotes a "preacher of the Gospel," Act 21:8; Eph 4:11, which makes clear the distinctiveness of the function in the churches*

2. English/Current Usage (*Webster’s*):

a. *“a person who evangelizes (proclaims good news); specifically, a Protestant minister or layman who preaches at special services”*

b. *“an enthusiastic advocate”*

c. *“A Christian preacher who tries to change or increase religious feelings”*

B. Biblical Usage: **Acts 21:8**; **Eph. 4:11**; **2Tim. 4:5**

C. Conclusions:

1. Evangelist is a word taken from biblical Koine Greek and therefore it precisely communicates the essence of what a lesson-giver and proclaimer of the gospel does in his service for the Lord.

2. The only possible issue arises in the fact that this is not a word with strict English origin. It is a transliteration rather than a translation. Oftentimes, it requires extra elaboration for those in the world. That being said, it’s not a real issue as it provides an opportunity to explain what the *euangelion* (i.e. good news) is!

Looking at these terms in a biblical context reveals that this discussion regarding terminology is not a mere issue of semantics; the issues that stem from the misuse of these terms results in a restructuring of the church and of God’s plan. No man should be called reverend, and pastors are elders, not preachers. Furthermore, preachers, evangelists, and ministers are all terms of reference for any proclaimer of the gospel in any context, not merely specific events or foreign countries alone.