



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Papers | Reviews | Essays

## On Evangelists and Pastors

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In those days, as the disciples were increasing in number, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. The Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, "It would not be right for us to give up preaching the word of God to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6.1-4 CSB).

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, . . . (Eph 4.11-12 CSB).

The above are especially important passages for a study of ministry (see Acts 6.1, 4; Eph 4.12 for *diakonia*, and Acts 6.2; Eph 4.12 for *diakoneō*). I say this, in part, because of my American restoration heritage. For example, in *The Christian Baptist* (1823-1830), the paper he published prior to the more well known *Millennial Harbinger*, Alexander Campbell was often quite critical of what he saw as the unbiblical clergy system so prevalent in the denominations from which he was calling people to New Testament Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

In theory, at least, that attitude has characterized churches in the Stone-Campbell restoration tradition ever since. For example, a friend who was visiting with me prior to a funeral jokingly addressed me as "Rev," alluding to the way the funeral home had listed my name on the printed order of service. Not having had opportunity to discuss the matter with them in advance, I was not surprised by the designation. Even if I had been given the chance to say something, the use of "Reverend" is so common that I suspect the funeral home personnel would not have understood my point.

But it's the reaction of my friend, who has a lifelong affiliation with our fellowship, that I want to focus on. His comment illustrates how well the idea has been ingrained in many of us. We resist the common practice of referring to preachers as "Reverend" or "Pastor" (though, as noted in a previous article, we often use "Minister" in the same way). So, generally speaking, our terminology reflects an effort to call Bible preachers by Bible names.

But is our practice always consistent with our terminology? Even as we insist on never referring to our preacher as “Reverend” or “Pastor,” do we in fact have the same expectations of the man that those who use those titles do? Is one any more biblical than the other? Space permits only a few comments on the matter, which admittedly has more complexities than can be addressed here, but consider four things by way of introduction.

First, the New Testament authorizes a church to financially support those who devote themselves to full time service (see Paul’s argument in 1 Cor 9). Based on 1 Timothy 5.17, where the phrase “double honor” has a financial connotation, we know that a church is also authorized to financially support elders in situations where it is expedient. Also, based on the fact that “evangelists” are among those mentioned in Ephesians 4.11-12, we are convinced that, should a church choose to do so, those who work in other areas of service may also receive financial support for their work (something those who employ a church secretary implicitly acknowledge).

Second, from Acts 6, we conclude that there is a distinction between “the ministry of the word” and “serving tables” (v. 2 ESV), and that those who were devoted to the one were not expected to do the other. The question was not whether the apostles could serve tables, but whether the church would be better served if they delegated that task to others and focused their energies elsewhere.

Third, from Ephesians 4.11-12, it is evident that a primary function of “evangelists, pastors and teachers” was not to do the church’s work, but to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (*diakonia*) with the aim of “building up the body of Christ.”

Fourth, those who have been commissioned to focus on “the ministry of the word” may find themselves struggling to do their work because believers expect them to do so many other things, to act like “pastors” whether or not they address them with that title.

Think on these things.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See especially the series entitled, “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things,” but also other articles. All seven volumes of *The Christian Baptist* are available at [https://webfiles.acu.edu/departments/Library/HR/restmov\\_nov11/www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/acampbell/tcb/TCB00.HTM](https://webfiles.acu.edu/departments/Library/HR/restmov_nov11/www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/acampbell/tcb/TCB00.HTM), accessed September 8, 2020.