**Reverend Who??**

**By Charles Strong of** [**Bible One**](http://www.bibleone.net/)

It is common practice today, as it has been for many years, for members of the clergy within the various branches of Christendom to be referred to with the title “Reverend” – a title intended to convey a state of spiritual elevation and position over that of communal believers. This title 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.”

Yet, to many within Christendom, the use of such recognition would only be a means of conveying respect for those who minister the Word of God for and to others and not a means of establishing a spiritual hierarchy recognized or originated by God.

Nevertheless, for those who utilize and who wear such a title, it would be prudent to consider the following:

**1)** There is no New Testament authority for the use of such titles. This practice was initiated by man in both Ireland and England during the eighteen hundreds. Scripture is clear that Christians must not venture into the domain of presumptuous religious activity ([1 Corinthians 4:6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+4.6&t=NKJV); [Colossians 3:17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Colossians+3.17&t=NKJV); [2 John 1:9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2John+1.9&t=NKJV)). They are warned against religious conduct that is grounded in their personal “will” (*cf.* “will-worship” — [Colossians 2:23 KJV](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Colossians+2.23&t=KJV)).

**2)**  Jesus Christ condemned the use of titles by which men of faith exalt themselves above their fellows, which was a common practice among the Jewish religious order at the time of His earthly ministry. This was made clear when He “*spoke to the multitudes and to His disciple*s” about the “*scribes and the Pharisees*” ([Matthew 23:1-2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+23.1-2&t=NKJV)).

(During the time that Christ walked the earth, *scribes* were those who were trained in writing skills and who interpreted the law of Moses, while *Pharisees* were religious controllers of the synagogues who were separated from the local populace to the study and interpretation of the law of Moses and who were the developers of the oral traditions and teachers of the two-fold law: written and oral.)

The following is what Christ stated pertaining to man-made religious titles:

*But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries* [a portion of their attire] *broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, “Rabbi, Rabbi* [a Hebrew official title of honor].*” But you, do not be called “Rabbi”; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.* ([Matthew 23:5-12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+23.5-12&t=NKJV))

**3)** The only New Testament list of descriptive positions [not “titles”] designated by Jesus Christ for the Church (*i.e*., the entire body of believers in Christ) is found in [Ephesians 4:11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+4.11&t=NKJV) for the purpose or purposes described in [Ephesians 4:12-16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+4.12-16&t=NKJV).

*And He* [Christ] *Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers* [Gk. literally “pastor-teachers”], (12) *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,* (13) *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;* (14) *that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,* (15) *but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ –* (16) *from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.* ([Ephesians 4:11-16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+4.11-16&t=NKJV))

It is important to understand that the designations listed – *apostles, prophets, evangelists*, and *pastor-teachers* – were never meant to be strictly “titles” by which these individuals were to be addressed, although they could and have been utilized as such, but more importantly they are terms that specifically describe the duties and activities to be performed by those who were to minister to the “*body of Christ*” [the Church]. The following are descriptions of the duties of each designated position:

**Apostle** (Gk. *apostolos*) – a delegate, ambassador, special messenger.

**Prophet** (Gk. *prophetes*) – an inspired foreteller of coming events.

**Evangelist** (Gk. *euaggelistes*) – a preacher of the gospel (good news).

Note how Paul conducted his ministry along these lines (*cf.* [Acts 20:20-32](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+20.20-32&t=NKJV); [Colossians 1:1-29](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Colossians+1.1-29&t=NKJV)). And note Paul’s command in his second epistle to Timothy, along these same lines:

*But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.* ([2 Timothy 4:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Timothy+4.5&t=NKJV))

The word “evangelist” (Greek: *euaggelistes*) means, *a proclaimer of good news*. The word is not used in Scripture in the narrow sense in which it is often used in Christendom today — one proclaiming only the good news of the grace of God as it pertains to eternal verities. Scripture uses this word in a much broader sense.

Timothy, being told to “*do the work of an evangelist*,” was simply being told *to proclaim the good news*. What good news was he to proclaim? The context itself has to do with the good news of the coming glory of Christ (*cf.* [2 Timothy 3:15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Timothy+3.15&t=NKJV); [4:1](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Timothy+4.1&t=NKJV), [7-8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Timothy+4.7-8&t=NKJV)). Thus, contextually, this facet of the good news would be foremost in view.

But there is another facet to the good news — a preceding facet — the good news of the grace of God. And the command to Timothy could not preclude this facet of the good news, though the context deals with the other. In other words, if Timothy was dealing with the unsaved, he was to proclaim the good news of the grace of God. He couldn’t proclaim anything else to them, for they were still “*dead in trespasses and sins.*” They were incapable of spiritual discernment ([1 Corinthians 2:14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+2.14&t=NKJV)).

But, once they had “*passed from death to life*,” he was no longer to proclaim the good news of the grace of God to them. Such would be meaningless, for they had already heard and responded to this message. He was then to proclaim the good news of the coming glory of Christ, for now they could understand spiritual truth ([1 Corinthians 2:9-13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+2.9-13&t=NKJV)).

Either way though he would be doing the work of *an evangelist*. That is, he would be proclaiming good news, whether relative to salvation by grace or the coming glory of Christ.

[Above taken from [Bible One - Mysteries of the Kingdom, Ch. 8, by Arlen Chitwood](http://bibleone.net/MK08.htm).]

**Pastor-teacher** (Gk. the copulative “*de*” unites “*poimen*” [pastor] and “*didaskalos*” [teacher] into one meaning. *Poimen* literally means “shepherd,” one who feeds and cares for the sheep [Christ being the Chief Shepherd ([John 10:11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+10.11&t=NKJV); [Hebrews 13:20](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+13.20&t=NKJV); [1 Peter 2:25](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+2.25&t=NKJV); [5:4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+5.4&t=NKJV))] – one who feeds (instructs) the members of the “*body of Christ*” with the Word of God.

**4)** As to a local church (assembly of believers), the two identifiable positions recognized by the New Testament with duties and/or responsibilities are “bishop” (also referred to as “elder”) and “deacon.” Within the New Testament both the eldership and diaconate in the local churches were referred to in the plural, *i.e.*, there is no recorded instance in Scripture of only one elder or only one deacon in a local church. The use of the singular in [1 Timothy 3:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Timothy+3.2&t=NKJV) and [Titus 1:7](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Titus+1.7&t=NKJV) refers to the “bishop as a type” rather than a set number. The selecting of such officers by some form of a “group [possibly ‘democratic’] process” by a local congregation is found in [Acts 6:1-6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+6.1-6&t=NKJV).

The following are descriptions of the duties of each designated position, as outlined by Arlen L. Chitwood:

**Deacon**

The verb form of the Greek word (*diakoneo*) for “deacon,” which is *diakonein* means “to serve.” It connotes a very personal service closely related to a service of love, exemplified in Christ’s second commandment: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” ([Mark 12:31](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Mark+12.31&t=NKJV)).

In [Acts 6:1-6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+6.1-6&t=NKJV), which most scholars agree is the first recorded appearance of the diaconate in the early Church, and where the Greek terms *diakonia* (“ministry” or “service”) and *diakonein* (“to wait on or serve tables”) are used, they are used in a non-technical sense, *i.e.*, they refer to workers and not to office bearers. And as to gender, this rests upon ones interpretation of the use of the Greek word *diaknos* (which may be either masculine or feminine; in this case “deaconess”) as it refers to Phebe in [Romans 16:1](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+16.1&t=NKJV).

With reference to one who holds a specific office in the local church, the word *diakonos* (“deacon”) occurs in only four passages in the New Testament ([Philippians 1:1](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Philippians+1.1&t=NKJV) and [1 Timothy 3:8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Timothy+3.8&t=NKJV), [10](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Timothy+3.10&t=NKJV), [12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Timothy+3.12&t=NKJV)). In the first reference is simply a greeting to them, where their qualifications are given in the second.

Nowhere in the New Testament are deacons seen as persons of authority in the conduct of church affairs, as is the case in so many local churches today. Rather, they were individuals who served the needs of others in order that the bishop/elders could devote themselves strictly to prayer and the teaching of the Word ([Acts 6:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+6.2&t=NKJV), [4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+6.4&t=NKJV); [1 Timothy 3:10](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Timothy+3.10&t=NKJV)).

Sadly, deacons do little true service (“to wait on or serve tables”) in today’s churches but are usually now considered part of the “church’s hierarchy” and are given priority in the making of decisions regarding most if not all matters concerning it. Such participation in church-related decision is a right that this author believes should be provided equally to all members of the congregation and not just to a “few.” The only priority that is allotted to a deacon is the “*right to serve others*,” a most notable activity if properly and faithfully performed that will be accorded great honor at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

**Bishop/Elder**

The Greek word for “bishop/overseer” (*episkopos*) in the New Testament occurs five times: once of Christ ([1 Peter 2:25](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+2.25&t=NKJV)) and in four other places, indicating a “superintendent” of a local church ([Acts 20:28](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+20.28&t=NKJV); [Philippians 1:1](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Philippians+1.1&t=NKJV); [1 Timothy 3:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Timothy+3.2&t=NKJV); [Titus 1:7](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Titus+1.7&t=NKJV)). The secular meaning for the Greek term *episkopos* indicated an “office,” and when used of a person indicated “protective care” as a function of the one so classified.

It is clear that a “bishop” and an “elder” (Gk: *presbuteros*) were terms representing the same office/person in the local church. The apostle Paul summoned the “elders” (*presuteros*) of Ephesus to Miletus in [Acts 20:17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+20.17&t=NKJV) and then addressed them as “bishops/overseers” (*episkopos*) in [Acts 20:28](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+20.28&t=NKJV). He also used both terms (*presbuteros* and *episkopos*) to refer to the same office in [Titus 1:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Titus+1.5&t=NKJV), [7](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Titus+1.7&t=NKJV). And the apostle Peter in [1 Peter 5:1-2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+5.1-2&t=NKJV) appealed to the “elders” (*presbuteros*) to fulfill the office of “bishops/overseers” (*episkopos*).

The qualifications of the bishop/elder are found in [1 Timothy 3:1-7](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Timothy+3.1-7&t=NKJV) and [Titus 1:5-9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Titus+1.5-9&t=NKJV). In addition to the personal moral and social qualifications requisite to the person appointed/ordained to fill this office, the *one primary ministry qualification* deemed absolutely indispensable in regards to his relationship to those he would oversee was the ability to labor in, understand, and teach sound Bible doctrine.

Considering the above, the only assessment one can come to is that there is no Scriptural basis for using the title “Reverend” to apply to man. And finally, as one considers the above, one should understand the purpose of the “local church.”

There is only one purpose unique to the position of bishop/elder relevant to the local church that is prominent in the Word of God. And it is the contention of this author that this is *the primary purpose* for saints to assemble together, *i.e.*, the establishment or existence of a “local church.” As previously stated, this *one primary ministry qualification* deemed absolutely indispensable in regards to the relationship of the bishop/elder (pastor) to those he would oversee was his ability to labor in, understand, and teach sound Bible doctrine.

*. . . we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. . . .then the Word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly . . .* .([Acts 6:4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+6.4&t=NKJV), [7a](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+6.7a&t=NKJV))

*For I have not shunned to declare to you the Whole Counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd* [“feed” KJV] *the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. . . . So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified*. ([Acts 20:27-28](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+20.27-28&t=NKJV), [32](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+20.32&t=NKJV))

*A bishop then must be . . . able to teach*. ([1 Timothy 3:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Timothy+3.2&t=NKJV))

*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the Word and doctrine.* ([1 Timothy 5:17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Timothy+5.17&t=NKJV))

*Holding fast the faithful Word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. . . . whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.* ([Titus 1:9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Titus+1.9&t=NKJV), [11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Titus+1.11&t=NKJV))

*Shepherd* [“feed” KJV] *the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.* ([1 Peter 5:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+5.2&t=NKJV))

In this sense, the elder or bishop served as one of “Christ’s gifts,” specifically “*pastor-teachers*” (not “pastors and teachers”— the copulative “and” unites the two into one meaning), to the local church in order “*for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine ..*”([Ephesians 4:11-14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+4.11-14&t=NKJV)).

Yet in Christendom today one must search long and far to find a pastor of a local church who fulfills the biblical role (the *only primary* role God would have him fill) *of pastor-teacher*. Instead one finds multitudes of pastors who believe their role is to deliver “sermons” designed to hearten the Christian community. Their multi-point messages are intended to promote a “feel-good” (emotional) response and to influence attendees to join their multi-activity assembly, often for the underlying purpose of self-aggrandizement.

The “milk” of God’s Word is standard fair in such churches; “meat” (and “strong meat”) is never served. Instead of encouraging the biblical formula for witnessing to the lost, such pastors take on this responsibility within the confines of the church by devoting much of the time to evangelical efforts from the pulpit and thereby essentially relieving their flock from conducting soul-winning efforts outside the church. Doctrinal instruction is relegated to “Sunday School” classes, which normally amounts to 30 to 40 minutes a week, and is generally structured around a denominational issuance of more “milk.” And then there are the sundry social activities that are legion in today’s local churches and which never end. All this has the net result of avoiding the in-depth teaching of Bible doctrine, which should profusely flow from both the pulpit and most other church-sponsored activities.

Due to this dearth in teaching Bible doctrine in most churches within Christendom today, most Christians never leave the “baby, milk-fed” state of spirituality and therefore they lead carnal lives, *i.e*., they walk according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit, which does not please God.

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food* [meat]; *for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?* ([1 Corinthians 3:1-3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+3.1-3&t=NKJV))

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food* [meat].  *For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the Word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food* [meat] *belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.* ([Hebrews 5:12-14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+5.12-14&t=NKJV))

*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. . . . that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* ([Romans 8:1](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.1&t=NKJV), [4-8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+8.4-8&t=NKJV))

It is unfortunate that to fill the spiritual-growth void that many sincere Christians experience as a result of their “milk-diet” since their spiritual birth, they resort to highly emotionally charged, supposedly “evangelical,” activities within and without local churches, which play on “experience,” “feelings,” and “miraculous signs” rather than the sound doctrine of God’s Word. Even though emotionalism and feelings may be experienced in such environs, they have no relation to spirituality. Spiritual growth is linked solely to faith in God’s Word as the newborn Christian goes beyond the “milk” to the “meat” of doctrine.

In short, local churches and pastors do believers a grave injustice by not adhering to their primary responsibility of fully teaching God’s Word (Bible doctrine). Spiritual maturity can only be achieved through continuous consumption of the “meat” of the Word. And although a truly biblical doctrine-based local church may not be as popular as the “emotion-fed” activities and “social-based” mega-churches of today, one may be assured that this is completely in-line with the Savior’s revelation regarding the Church during the “last days” of this dispensation.

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