

Scott's Thoughts

Attempts at explaining various
subjects of Scripture

from the small mind of Scott Sheridan

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The Pastor

In the current urge to “repent and be Baptist,” it is common to find congregations that have adopted the second-century model of church polity: the monarchical bishop. Preachers are declaring themselves the Pastor of the Church, as if the biblical doctrine of leadership has somehow become irrelevant. It harmonizes with culture to give ecclesiastical authority to a winning and competent personality, but it defies the authority of Scripture, and it ignores the lessons of history.

Roger Chambers said that at the 1985 Florida Christian/National Missionary Convention¹. I’m not sure if even he knew the full stampede of preachers that was later to claim that title. I’m not wanting to make more of this than it is, but if we are to be true to the Word of God, calling Bible things by Bible names, then we need to examine why it is that so many preachers choose to use the title “the Pastor” over the Scriptural designation of evangelist.

The Greek word that gets translated as “Pastor” is ποιμήν (poimen) and is only translated as “Pastor” one time, i.e., Ephesians 4:11. I’m not going to take the time at this junction to show that the “pastors and teachers” mentioned in the verse are part of the same office. But they are. In this text Jesus gives four gifts to the Church: “and He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers...” All four offices deal with the Word of God. The first two offices, Apostles and prophets, were givers of God’s Word, and the last two offices are teachers of that Word. This is the only place in the entirety of the New Testament that the English word “pastor” is used. And in this one and only case, it does not refer to the preacher.

Let’s look at another passage of Scripture. Acts 20:17-28:

17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, 19 serving the Lord

with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

22 “And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

24 “But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

25 “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

While Paul was still in Miletus he called for the elders from Ephesus to meet with him. As he is saying his goodbye he calls them elders (v. 17, πρεσβύτερος – presbuteros) and also tells them God has made them “overseers” (v. 28, ἐπίσκοπος – episkopos) in order to “shepherd” the Church. This word “shepherd” is the word used in Eph. 4:11 translated as “pastor”.

The reason, I’m convinced, it gets translated as “pastor” in that one and only verse of Scripture is because if they translated it accurately, i.e., as “shepherd”, a lot of preachers could not find themselves in the Bible. When Jesus gave the four gifts to the Church He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and he gave elders. And there is always a plurality of elders when discussed in the Scriptures. There is nothing wrong with the word “pastor” when it is used correctly, meaning one of the plurality of elders. But too many preachers, for various reasons, prefer to usurp the title. Pride, pragmatism, sloppy theology, as well as other things are all possible reasons for the name-grab. But adherence to the Word of God is not one of them.

I’ve been told that there is so much overlap between the elder and evangelist that to call yourself the Pastor is

¹ You can read the entire presentation here:
www.crownhillchurch.com/Trends_In_The_Restoration_Movement2.pdf

Scripturally ok. You know, there was a lot of overlap in responsibilities with my mom and my dad but I never would have called dad “mom,” nor my mom “dad”. Neither one of them would have appreciated it. And anyone else listening to me would have thought that I was an imbecile. Usually people had other reasons for thinking I was, but not because I didn’t know the difference between my parents.

Some say it is a matter of pragmatics. “Everybody calls the Preacher ‘Pastor’ nowadays.” I know from experience that many people do call the preacher “the pastor.” They do so out of ignorance. When I am called “Pastor” I do not chastise them, nor bite their head off. I do find a time in which I can teach them more accurately in a manner that will not embarrass them. I have been thanked many times for my concern over their Scriptural understanding. To my knowledge, I have never offended anyone. The only people I know of that get offended are those that call themselves “the Pastor” when I tell them what I do.

It is convenient and hip (I’m showing my age by using words like “hip”) to call yourself what so many other preachers are calling themselves. It appears that many preachers are more concerned about fitting in with others around them than they are about following God’s plan for the government of His Church. A lot of people think that praying Jesus into your heart is the plan of salvation. Are we to let that ignorance slide as well because “everybody” seems to think that way? I should hope not. I know some people that actually seem to gloat in the fact that they are abusing a Biblical term. The reference may not completely apply here, but Nadab and Abihu come to mind.

If the Preacher is the Pastor, what does that make the elders? If the Preacher is one of the elders, then at least it makes sense to call him “a” pastor. I do not believe that the preacher being one of the elders is the Scriptural plan, but it’s better than someone calling himself something he is not. And if he is one of the pastors, why is he called “The Pastor” unless he likes to have pre-eminence.

I cannot help but think of what Peter had to say: (1 Peter 4:11) “Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

George Faull wrote an article many years ago entitled, *Please Don’t Call Me “The Pastor”* which was published in the *Restoration Herald*. I have a copy of it which does not list the date. He gives nine reasons with explanations. Here are his nine reasons:

1. Because I am an evangelist and not one of the elders of the Church

2. Because it infers that I do not know my job or what my work is.

3. Because it infers that I am Biblically illiterate.

4. Because it infers that I am a “fad follower.”

5. Because it infers that I am “Pasadena oriented” instead of “Jerusalem oriented.”

6. Because it infers that I am doctrinally questionable.

7. It infers that I am denominationally inclined.

8. It infers that I am not “restoration indeed.”

9. It infers that I am a proud, preeminence lover who looks for the respected titles of men.²

George may be onto something. Pragmatism is the reason many preachers use this title. It seems to work. And most people don’t object. What works outvotes what is right, or true. And this kind of thinking will work in our postmodern generation because nothing is absolutely true, at least that is the societal understanding of our day. And I’m sure some of that culture has slipped into the Church. If someone’s truth is that they are the Pastor, who are you or I to question that? But I do not believe that is the attitude of most of those calling themselves “The Pastor.” At least not the ones I know.

It is said, “Look at all the really big Churches. Most of them are led by a man calling himself ‘Pastor’ and it works for them.” They must be doing something right or God would not bless them with large crowds. But when has size determined what is true, or right? Does that mean the Mormons are closer to the truth than we are? They are growing faster. Look at the growth God has given Islam in the last few years! Of course I am being sarcastic. Size only means a lot of people.

For many, it is a bad case of the “be-like-ums.” Wanting to be like the evangelicals they chase after them imitating whatever they do. An image comes to mind of a dog running down the street chasing after a car. What would the dog do if he caught it? What are some Preachers willing to do to be like the big evangelical Churches? I do not believe that someone calling themselves “The Pastor” will send anyone to Hell. However, it sure does indicate that there are other things amiss in that person’s doctrinal understanding.

We at Crown Hill have just opened up to a new Korean ministry. This is my second experience in bringing in a different culture into the Church in which I serve. These people, for the most part, do not know English very well. They usually end up calling the Preacher “the Pastor” because that’s what they hear Americans calling their preacher. Yes, I try to teach them the proper English words.

I truly do not want to make more of this switching of titles than it deserves. But if we are to be a people of the

² You can read the entire article here: www.crownhillchurch.com/Please_Dont_Call_Me_the_Pastor.pdf

Book, then let's teach things as they are in the Book. Jesus gave four gifts to the Church:

Apostles: these were Jesus' ambassadorial representatives to give us His Word and establish His Church

Prophets: These were those who spoke the very words of God at a time before the Word of God had been written down.

Evangelists: These were to go into the Church and set things in order, ordain elders, and preach and teach the Word.

Pastors and Teachers: these were to lead, shepherd, teach, and oversee God's people. They were to be older in the faith and a little older in life.

Why would someone wish to try and improve upon the gifts Jesus gave His bride? Beats me.

I am constantly amazed however, that these old issues keep coming up. This whole issue was dealt with pretty well over 150 ago. J.W. McGarvey dealt with the fact that the pastor is an elder in his book *The Eldership*. I have articles by Moses E. Lard and others, all demonstrating the fact that the pastor is an elder, not the evangelist. Men who want to Restore the New Testament ways will do so in the little ways as well as the big ways. I pray we will get back to being a people of the book. And when I say "the Book", I mean the Bible, not the current Church growth theory.

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I received no responses to the last edition.