

## **Accurate Use of Religious Terms**

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We continue to hear folks misuse religious terminology. This happens frequently in regards to the various titles that define the roles of individuals. Here's a simple grouping of some terms that are synonyms:

**Christitan; disciple; servant of the Lord; child of God; saint** Note that the term saint applies to all baptized believers (Phil. 1:1), not to a special select few who have had special honors conferred upon them.

**Elders; pastors; bishops; overseers; shepherds** Note that these are always mentioned in the plural. The term "pastor" has been misapplied by many people and is wrongly used as a synonym for "preacher." The term "bishop" has been perverted through the centuries to mean someone high up in a universal church organization. No such organizational structure or office is authorized in the Bible. There are to be "elders in every church" (Acts 14:23).

**Preacher; evangelist** Observe that the preacher may be an elder (1 Peter 5:1) and thus might be a "pastor," but in most instances this is not true, and the terms are absolutely not synonyms. The preacher is often referred to as a "minister." This is not really inaccurate, for all Christians are to be ministers (literally meaning one who acts as the agent or instrument of another), but to use the term "minister" exclusively for the preacher leaves a potential for misunderstanding. We should stress that the New Testament teaches no "clergy/laity" distinction. It is very important to point out that the term "reverend" is found only once in the Bible (Ps. 111:9) and is applied only to God, not to any man.

Let's be careful to use Bible terms in Bible ways. Accurate use of these Bible words shows that we are "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).