



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

June 2018

SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT RELIGIOUS TITLES

Among those who profess to believe in Jesus, it is quite common to see the use of religious titles for those who serve in some special capacity, perhaps as a preacher or some other leader. Jesus had some things to say about such a practice.

In one instance during the last week of His life, the Christ “spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples” (Matthew 23:1). Consider this analysis of the first portion of His message to that audience:

- Do not act like the scribes and Pharisees (23:1-4).
- The scribes and Pharisees love to be seen and honored by other humans (23:5-7).
- Condemnation of religious titles (23:8-10)
- The need to be humble servants (23:11,12)

Whatever one’s personal opinions might be about religious titles, we need to acknowledge the authority of Jesus and be willing to submit to His will in this and all other matters. You agree with that, correct? Here is what the Master said in this regard: “*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 . . .*” (Matthew 23:8-11).

Q: Jesus said to call no one “father.” Does that mean it is wrong in every case to refer to a human as one’s “father?” No. The Bible speaks about “human fathers” who discipline their children (Hebrews 12:9) and have the duty of raising their kids in the way of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Paul described himself as a father to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:15). Why? Because he had taught them the gospel. He was not, however, elevating himself and calling himself “Father Paul” as a religious title.

Q: Jesus said not to be called “teachers” because He is our teacher. Does this mean that it would be wrong in each instance to call a person “a teacher” on the earth? No. In the church at Antioch, there were teachers (Acts 13:1). They were so designated by divine authority, because it was the Christ who gave the role of teachers in the church (Ephesians 4:11).

Q: What was it, then, that Jesus was condemning

with those words that are recorded in Matthew 23:8-10? The word “Rabbi” means teacher (23:7), and some of the scribes and Pharisees loved to be greeted in such a fashion. Among the Jews, the word “Rabbi” had come to be more than a designation for the role that one played. They used it as *a title of honor*. In reality, Jesus is our Rabbi/Teacher. What Jesus was condemning was *the use of religious titles* by which some were elevated above others. The widespread use of religious titles today among the professed followers of Jesus has no biblical precedent or authority. Despite its popularity, it is a man-made practice, and humanly-devised doctrines and actions do not have the Lord’s approval (Matthew 15:9,13).

Q: In the New Testament, what is one called who gives himself to the preaching of the gospel? He is referred to as a (gospel) “preacher” (1 Timothy 2:7) or “evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). Note, however, that the words “preacher” and “evangelist” are not titles, but rather describe the work that a brother is doing.

Q: What about the title “Reverend,” is that scriptural? No. There is not one bit of evidence in the Bible that a preacher of God’s gospel should be identified as “Reverend.” We are obligated to speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11); calling a preacher “Reverend” fails to do that because such a title is unauthorized and unfindable in the Bible. Those who call themselves or other preachers in their religious group “Reverend” are violating Jesus instruction not to use religious titles (Matthew 23:8-10).

Q: What other religious titles are used among those who claim to be Christian groups? “Pope” (goes beyond the doctrine and authority of the Christ, 2 John 9); “Father” (violates Matthew 23:9); “Cardinal” (not found in the Bible); “Sister,” that is, nuns who are not allowed to marry – while the Bible speaks of sisters in the Lord (James 2:15), you will never find anything in the Scriptures which indicates that anyone should use “Sister” as a religious title.

Let us learn to be humble servants (Matthew 23:11,12). As we do that, we will have no desire to “crown” ourselves with religious titles, nor will we in any fashion condone the use of religious titles, period.

-- Roger D. Campbell

GOD'S SABBATH INSTRUCTIONS TO ISRAEL

When godly Levites in the days of Nehemiah exalted Jehovah in prayer, they spoke about what He had done with the Sabbath. They prayed, *"You came down also on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments. You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, and commanded them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses Your servant"* (Nehemiah 9:13,14).

According to the words of that prayer, whose Sabbath was it? It was God's. To whom did He make the Sabbath known? To the Israelites whom He had brought out of Egypt. And where did He make the Sabbath known to them? At Mount Sinai. By whom did He make it known? Via Moses. Thus, when the Israelites were encamped at Sinai, God made known/revealed His Sabbath to them. Let us take a look at several aspects of His Sabbath instructions for Israel.

The designated day – As part of the Ten Commandments, God's message was, *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy . . . the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God . . ."* (Exodus 20:8-10). So, God's designation was for the Sabbath to be the seventh day, that is, Saturday.

The designated restrictions – *"Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you"* (Deuteronomy 5:13,14). On the Sabbath, God's people were not allowed to work throughout the entire 24-hour cycle that constituted the seventh day. Not only was it a holy day, but it also was a time to allow their bodies to rest (5:14).

There is more. At Sinai, God through Moses also informed Israel that something else was "off limits": *"You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day"* (Exodus 35:3).

The designated keepers – Contrary to what many assume and several have propagated, God never intended for every person of every nation to keep the seventh day of the week as *"a holy day . . . a Sabbath of rest to the LORD"* (Exodus 35:2). To whom was that instruction given? The Bible says it was given to the children of Israel (35:1). The Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath, were given as part of a covenant that involved two parties. Those two parties were God and the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 5:1-3). God Himself made it super clear, saying,

"Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath . . . It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel . . ." (Exodus 31:16,17). The Sabbath was for Israel, my friend, not for every nation under the sun.

The designated significance – On the Sabbath, the children of Israel were to refrain from labor. They were to count it as a holy day and also as a day of "resting up." Beyond that, though, was another matter of great importance for God-fearing Israelites. When the Israelites were on the verge of entering the Promised Land, God by Moses pointed out to them, *"And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day"* (Deuteronomy 5:15). Let that thought sink in. According to that passage, why did the Lord command Israel to keep the Sabbath? So they would *remember* that He had rescued them from bondage. Thus, for the Israelites the Sabbath was to be a weekly *memorial* of what their gracious God had done for them.

The designated punishment – What if? What if an Israelite disregarded God's message about the Sabbath and worked on the seventh day? What God said about such a transgression was plain: *". . . the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death"* (Exodus 31:15). That was not symbolic language. It was not a hyperbole (an exaggeration to emphasize a point). At God's order, the Israelites stoned a man to death who violated the Sabbath by working (Numbers 15:32-36). God was not joking!

The designated duration – Per God's plan, Sabbath-keeping was to be a temporary action. "Wait a minute. I remember that God said the Israelites were to keep the Sabbath as a perpetual, that is, ongoing, never-ceasing covenant." He did call it "perpetual." That simply meant that Israel was to keep on keeping the Sabbath as long as that law/covenant was still in force. The Lord's arrangement was for the Law of Moses, including the Sabbath, to be in force for only a certain period of time. When the Christ died on the cross, He abolished the old law, including the command to keep the Sabbath (Ephesians 2:14-16). By no means is that a criticism of the Sabbath or its Giver. Rather, it is a recognition that the Sabbath and all the rest of the old law system were temporary. For those who are wondering, *no*, the Bible does *not* instruct Christians to keep the Sabbath, and, *no*, in the Bible, Sunday is *not* called "the Christian Sabbath."

-- Roger D. Campbell

THE ROLES THAT EVANGELISTS PLAY

One brother was described in the Bible as “*Philip the evangelist*” (Acts 21:8). Timothy also was recognized as an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5). Evangelists in the first century played a role in the church’s edification and evangelism activities (Ephesians 4:11,12). We still need evangelists today since, until the Christ returns, the church will continue to carry out the works of evangelism and edification.

Our word “evangelist” comes from a Greek word (“εὐαγγελιστής/euangelistes”) which means “a messenger of good . . . denotes a ‘preacher of the gospel’” [Vine, www.studylight.org/dictionaries/ved]. Thayer defines the word as “a bringer of good tidings” [word no. 2099 via e-Sword].

As we endeavor to get the gospel to all people everywhere (Mark 16:15), we appreciate the work done by faithful gospel preachers. Indeed, “*How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*” (Romans 10:15). Let us, however, keep things in perspective. Evangelists are not the Savior, but His servants. They are not the King of kings, but point others to the King. They are not God’s gift to the world, but rather tell others of His gift of eternal life.

Paul by the Spirit charged Timothy to “*do the work of an evangelist*” (2 Timothy 4:5). What is that? Go back a few verses and you will find the answer: “*Preach the word*” (2 Timothy 4:2). Part of that preaching is done in a public manner. See the apostles preaching in the temple (Acts 5). See Stephen preaching to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7). See Philip preaching in Samaria (Acts 8). See Paul preaching in the synagogues (Acts 17). See Paul preaching in a first-day-of-the-week assembly of saints (Acts 20).

We err, though, if we conclude that an evangelist’s work is limited to the public preaching of God’s word. I personally have no interest in being identified as “the pulpit preacher” of a congregation. Such a label may cause some to conclude that public preaching is the fellow’s sole responsibility. It is not.

Every child of God is given the duty to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3). Paul said that he was set for the defense of the gospel (Philippians 1:7,17). Observe the gospel preachers in the early church and you will see them as defenders of the faith. Evangelists of every generation need to prepare themselves to defend God’s truth against those who seek to destroy, distort, or dilute it.

Another aspect of an evangelist’s work is to train others. Timothy was charged, “*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others*

also” (2 Timothy 2:2). Timothy had acquired both knowledge and “know-how” (via his work and teaching experiences). He was supposed to take what he had learned and commit it to other faithful saints, sharing with them matters which would benefit them and train them to be able to teach others. We need gospel preachers to make this a priority today!

Let us not lose sight of the need for gospel preachers to be personal evangelists as well. By that, I mean they need to do more than present God’s word inside a church building by teaching Bible classes and preaching sermons. They need to be men who relish, seek for, and take advantage of opportunities to teach the gospel in private one-on-one settings. See Philip teaching the eunuch from Africa (Acts 8). See Paul and Silas teaching a jailer and his family (Acts 16). A congregation which has a preacher who is not evangelistic-minded will struggle to have an evangelistic fervor, period. We need our evangelists, along with our elders, leading the way in personal evangelism. It will have a positive “trickle-down” effect on the rest of a local church.

Brethren, when it comes to gospel preachers connecting with people and teaching them one-on-one, we are not getting the job done. What is wrong with the following pictures?

(a.) A gospel preacher is so saddled with “other stuff” (meaning activities which mimic what is expected of a denominational pastor) that he feels like his time is all gone, plus he is so drained mentally and physically that he seldom, if ever, engages in private Bible studies with lost people. This is not right.

(b.) An evangelist is so occupied with “other duties” that he gives no thought to what he can do to help others be effective teachers of God’s word. He basically makes no effort to carry out the instructions of 2 Timothy 2:2. This is not as it should be.

(c.) Schools established to train brothers to be preachers and teachers have courses on how to prepare and present public sermons (“Homiletics”). Good. We need those. But, while emphasis is given to pulpit preaching, in some cases personal evangelism is treated as if it were a secondary or even optional matter; or, it may be that a training school does not have a single course on personal evangelism. That is a pitiful scenario, and we are reaping the consequences.

The church needs evangelists who diligently preach the gospel publicly, defend the faith, train others, and labor to teach the lost in a private, personal way. May the Lord of harvests raise up laborers for His bountiful harvest (Matthew 9:37,38).

— Roger D. Campbell

PICTURES OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

Throughout the epistle which we identify as “First Corinthians,” the Holy Spirit through Paul depicts/portrays/pictures the people of God in a variety of ways. It makes for an interesting study. Let us take a look at some of the ways that God’s people are described or pictured in this letter.

The church of God (1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9) – The term “*the church of God*” points to possession. The God of heaven planned the church, He purchased it, and He possesses it. It is His. Jesus said to the Father in prayer, “*And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine . . .*” (John 17:10). Numerous times in the New Testament, the two words “the church” are used to depict the followers of the Christ. They could be God’s assembly/called-out people in one locale (1 Corinthians 1:2), they could be His people in general (15:9), or “the church” can refer to a worship assembly (11:18; 14:19). The early church is even said to have been “in” people’s houses (16:19), meaning the brethren assembled in that place.

The saints of God (1:2; 16:1,15) – One who reads this epistle learns in a hurry that being a saint does not mean being a perfect person. Rather, it refers to them being holy ones – identified as sanctified in the Christ (1:2). Saints are those who are separated from the world and devoted to the Lord God (6:9-11).

The family of God – Those exact words are not used in this letter, but the concept is there. The saints in Corinth shared a common Father (1:3). What is expected of God’s children? Just as a biological child is expected to honor and obey his father (Malachi 1:6), so God’s children should do the same with their heavenly Father (1 Peter 1:14).

The idea of family also is seen in the word “brethren” (1:10,11), a word which is used in excess of twenty-five times in First Corinthians. Here are some of the appeals to family that we see in this letter:

- Be united, not divisive (1:10);
- Settle squabbles “in house” (6:1,4-8);
- Make sacrifices for the good of others (8:8-13);
- Eliminate malice (14:20);
- Care about one another (16:14).

God’s people comprise the greatest family in the world!

The field and building of God (3:9) – Our English word “field/husbandry” comes from a Greek word (“γεώργιον/geōrgion”) which means “a cultivated field, husbandry, tillage” [Thayer, word no. 1091 via e-Sword]. When we think about God’s people as a field, seed sown in the heart comes to mind (4:15). We think also of laborious effort/toil to make the field productive. From a field we would

expect fruit being brought forth, like in a vineyard (John 15:8). And, just as the Lord blessed literal fields with rain and sunshine, He blesses the field/vineyard which He planted – the church. .

In the expression “God’s building” (3:9), “building” comes from a Greek word (“οικοδομή/oikodomē”) which most often is translated as “edify/edification.” It can refer to a material structure (Mark 13:1,2), a symbolic house (heaven, 2 Corinthians 5:1), or the people of God. The building’s foundation is Jesus Himself (1 Corinthians 3:11).

The temple of God – “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are*” (3:16,17). In this setting, “*the temple of God*” is not the physical body of a person, but the people/church of the Lord. Under the Law of Moses, the Israelites looked to the temple as a place where sacred, holy activities were carried out. Today God expects His temple/people to be holy (3:17). In the temple built by Solomon, priests served. Under the new covenant, all Christians serve as priests in God’s temple (1 Peter 2:5,9). Under the old covenant, the temple was counted as God’s dwelling place; today He dwells in His people (2 Corinthians 6:16). It is a privilege for Christians to be counted as God’s temple. The demand: *act* like a holy people! We need to take this matter seriously. Yes, others are observing us.

The body of the Christ – “*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually*” (12:27). There is only one body (12:13,20). When we think of “body,” what comes to mind? First, it is under the Head’s guidance (Ephesians 5:23). Second, in the body, both physical and spiritual, we see many parts/members functioning together (12:14-21). Third, as in the physical body, so in the Lord’s spiritual body, we see members “stepping up,” so to speak, to look after and care for one another (12:25,26). In general terms, what does Jesus expect of His body? His will is for it to submit to Him in all things (Ephesians 5:24).

When we study the book of First Corinthians, let us not become so engrossed in analyzing their issues and weaknesses that we lose sight of these beautiful pictures of God’s people that we see throughout this letter. The Lord loves His people, and they love Him!

-- Roger D. Campbell

[Unless stated otherwise, all quotes in all articles of TRUTH come from the New King James Version; ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.]

TRUTH is published monthly by the Green’s Lake Road church of Christ in order to help educate, edify, encourage, and equip the saints of God.