

Call Bible Things by Bible Names

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Acts 11:25-26 (NASB)

²⁵ And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Introduction:

We who belong to the Restoration Movement have a great heritage passed down to us. We are a people of the Book. We look to the Bible for our doctrine and our practice. Unlike many other groups, we have not permitted the opinions of men and the pressures of society to determine what we believe and practice – at least not until more recent times. We believe that we are Christians only but not the only Christians, and that the Bible only makes Christians only. The early days of the movement were full of debates that centered on the Scriptures and what they taught.

Every group of believers must accept the Bible as the ultimate authority or there is no basis for unity. Those who accept other books, other authorities, modern revelations and such, will never be able to find a common ground for agreement. It is the Bible and the Bible alone that must be turned to if we are to find the answers that will bring us together, and at the same time please the Lord.

Names are important to God. God changed the name of Abram to Abraham and Jacob to Israel. This had significance. Jesus called Cephas “Peter” and Saul of Tarsus became known as Paul the apostle. If these names were important, then the names that we use for the Lord’s church, those who lead within the church, and the things we do in the church are important too. As a people of the book we should want to call Bible things by Bible names.

Alexander Campbell did a series of essays in “The Christian Baptist” in 1825

called “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things.” Among other things he argues this very point: “Now as all correct ideas of God and things invisible are supernatural ideas, no other terms can so suitably express them, as the terms adopted by the Holy Spirit, in adapting those supernatural truths to our apprehension. He that taught man to speak would, doubtless, adopt the most suitable terms in his language to reveal himself to his understanding. To disparage those terms, by adopting others in preference, is presumptuous, and insolent on the part of man. . . . In order then to a full restoration of the ancient order of things there must be a ‘pure speech’ restored.” (The Christian Baptist – Vol. II, No. IV, pg. 81):

The Basis for Calling Bible Things by Bible Names

Most every Christian group recognizes the authority that was given to the apostles. This authority was given to them by the Lord Himself. He promised them knowledge (John. 14:26; 16:13) and He gave them authority (Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23). They expressed recognition of that authority in themselves (1 Corinthians 14:37; 1 Peter 3:15, 16). The apostles expected that the customs and practices that they introduced to the early church would be carried on as they had given them. Their example became the standard for conduct in the church.

1 Corinthians 4:16, 17 “Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.”

1 Corinthians 11:2 “Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.”

Philippians 3:17 “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”

Philippians 4:9 “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

1 Thessalonians 1:6 “You also became imitators of us and of the Lord”

2 Thessalonians 2:15 “so then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.”

2 Thessalonians 3:6 “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.”

I realize that in many of these passages one could understand them to be referring to doctrine but that is not the case in every passage. There is clearly more than just doctrine intended. There were examples and patterns that the apostles gave that were expected to be followed but were never clearly “commanded” in Scripture. These are also a part of the “tradition” that was expected to be observed. It should be no less true today than it was in the first century.

Those things that the apostles taught the church to practice but were not specifically commanded in Scripture were handed down through apostolic precedent (that which is not specifically commanded but was universally observed by the early church under the direction of the apostles). We have two clear examples of this in the Bible: First, the day on which the church gathered – It would be expected that the first Christians (Jews) would meet on the Sabbath. This is what was commanded under the Old Covenant and would be natural to continue. There are several groups today that would argue that this is what God expects, but under the leadership of the apostles the early church came together on the first day of the week instead. There was never any command to change the day but they did so because this is when the Lord was resurrected and this is when the church began (Pentecost). This day of meeting was never questioned and it is clear that they did so both by the testimony of Scripture (Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2) and secular history. The second illustration is the observance of the Lord’s Supper. When Jesus instituted this observance He gave no indication as to when or how often the church was to do this. But again from secular history and Scripture (Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16,2) it is clear that the first Christians observed it each first day of the week. We come together to “break

bread” on the first day of each week because of apostolic example (precedent). Those who do so monthly, quarterly, or at other times, do so without any precedent. The example of the apostles gives us a reason for meeting each first day of the week. If there were no Biblical example for when we should observe the Lord’s Supper, I think that we would have to meet once a year at Passover, for this is when it was instituted.

Alexander Campbell considered the example of the apostles to be equal to a command of Scripture. He says,

“The Apostles were commanded by the Lord to teach the disciples to observe all things he commanded them. Now we believe them to have been faithful to their master; and, consequently, gave them to know his will — Whatever the disciples practiced in their meetings, with the approbation of the Apostles is equivalent to an Apostolic command to us to do the same — To suppose the contrary is to make the half of the New Testament of none effect. For it does not altogether consist of commands, but of approved precedents — Apostolic example is justly esteemed of equal authority with an Apostolic precept.” (The Christian Baptist, Vol. III, No. VII, pg. 10).

So the basis for calling Bible things by Bible names must be the same basis we have for when we come together and when we observe the Lord’s Supper — it is the authority, example, and precedent that were passed down to us from the apostles.

The Application of Calling Bible Things by Bible Names

The Name of the Church

There are many areas that this can be applied to, but we will begin with the name of the church. The Bible gives several names for the “church” (the ekklesia — “called out ones” — from the world and from the towns in which they lived to gather on the first day of the week at an appointed place; also called the “assembly” or the “congregation.”) The following is a listing of the names for the church:

Church/es – 92 times – the most common designation

Church/es at _____ - 21 times

Church/es of God – 10 times (see 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 1 Corinthians 11:16)

Churches of Christ (or Christian Church) (Romans 16:16)

Church of the Living God (1 Timothy 3:15)

Church of the First Born (Hebrews 12:23)

Churches of the Saints (1 Corinthians 14:33)

The names worn by the denominations of our day come from the leaders in their movements (Luther, Wesley) or from dominate characteristics within their churches (Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Baptist, etc.). It only seems fitting that those who claim to be the bride of Christ and the body of Christ should wear His name.

A few years ago there was a much-touted church plant in the Eastern part of our country. The thing that I remember most about that new church was this – the way they settled on a name for the church was by polling the community to see what the people of the area would like a church called! How about what God would like the church to be called?

The Name of Those within the Church

Those within the church were called “disciples,” “believers,” “brethren,” “saints,” and perhaps “those of the way.” The term “Christian” was the name bestowed by the apostles. Acts 11:26 says, “And it came about for an entire year they met with the church, and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.” This is clearly a divinely appointed name. The verse contains three identical infinitives (to be assembled, to teach, and to call the disciples Christians first at Antioch). “They” refers to Paul and Barnabas thus this was a name given through an

apostle. Isaiah 62:2 seems to prophesy a divinely given name: “And the nations will see your righteousness, And all kings your glory; And you will be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the Lord will designate.” The term “Christian” is also found in Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16 showing universal usage and acceptance within the Christian community and without. There were no other Biblical designations for the followers of Christ than these.

I remember a former director of the CRA, Jim Greenwood, telling of being at a conference at which many different denominations were represented. In speaking to another minister he introduced himself and asked, “And what group are you with?” The man replied, “I’m an Episcopalian. And what are you?” “I’m a Christian,” replied Jim. “Aren’t we all?” he asked. “Then why didn’t you say so?” said Jim.

Even the leaders of these churches themselves object to using these names as a designation for their followers: Henry Ward Beecher – “Let me speak in the language of heaven and call you Christians.” Albert Barnes – “These divisions should be merged into the holy name Christian.” Martin Luther – “I pray you leave my name alone. Do not call yourselves Lutherans, but Christians.” John Wesley – “I wish the name Methodist might never be mentioned again, but lost in eternal oblivion.” Charles Spurgeon – “I say of the Baptist name, let it perish, but let Christ’s name last forever. I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living.” (The source of these is uncertain but these have been quoted in a multitude of church papers for many years.)

The term “Restoration Movement” has increasingly now become “The Stone-Campbell Movement,” which would have been an abhorrence to those early leaders. In seeking to honor the men who started the quest to return to the Bible way we have dishonored the legacy they gave us.

The Name of Those Who Lead in the Church

The Bible also gives designated names for those who lead within the church. Ephesians 4:11,12 “*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets and*

some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” There are four offices given here: two for revealing the truth of God (apostles and prophets) and two for teaching the truth of God (evangelists and pastoring teachers). The time of revealing the truth of God has passed, today we only have the last two offices for the teaching of God’s truth. There has never been any disagreement over what the first two offices should be called, but there has been quite a variety of opinion on what to call the last two.

In the religious world today we have those who preach and teach in the local body called: Reverend, Father, Pastor, Minister, Preacher, and Evangelist. In addition to these we have a number of variations that are commonly used such as “Senior Pastor,” “Youth Minister,” “Minister of Music,” etc. We have come to a point where we give titles to everyone who has a position in the church. I don’t think the Lord would approve of our titles (see Matthew 23:5-12). Why do we need special titles for doing His work? Are we not all His servants? When I came to Hessville I was asked if I would like to be referred to as the “Senior Minister.” My response was, “Just call me the “Prime Minister.” What is wrong with my name (Dan)? I had a lady in one church that used to call me “Preacher Dan.” I didn’t object to this but I was still somewhat uncomfortable with such a “title.” It was still a method of setting me apart from everyone else in the church. In the New Testament this office is referred to by several different terms:

Evangelist (Acts 2:8; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5)

Preacher (Literally “herald” – Romans 10:14; 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11; 4:2)

Servant or minister (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 1:7, 4:7; 1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:24)

Man of God (2 Timothy 3:17)

The Lord’s bond-servant (2 Timothy 2:2)

None of these were given as official titles to the office but simply as descriptions of the work of the office (as with all names for the offices of the church).

The designation “pastors and teachers” refers to a single office not two separate ones. It is the office of the elder, those who oversee the flock. It is clear that the terms for an elder (episkopos, poimenos, presbuteros) all refer to the same office (see Acts 20:17-28 where the three terms are used interchangeably with *poimenos* in the verb form). There is no basis for what has been done in the denominational world of making one term for this office of more importance than another (i.e. – “bishop” – a term employed by the KJV to justify an established hierarchy). The terms all speak of the work that these men (always a plural group) are called to do in the church for the Lord.

Why is it that the term “pastor” has become so commonly misused? This term was not applied to the office of evangelist until the time of Calvin and Zwingli. It was used in reaction to the Roman priesthood. The reformers sought to abolish the clerical system. They called the preacher a “pastor” in contrast to the priesthood (those who lorded over the flock). It is ironic that those who are “pastors” today have taken a role of superiority that the term was meant to extinguish when it was first employed.

It should be noted that the only time we find the term “pastor” in Scripture is in Ephesians 4:11 (speaking of the eldership), but today it is the most commonly used term for the one who preaches the word in the local church in the denominational world. What is more disturbing is that those of Restoration Heritage are embracing this term as well. I have a college classmate who many years ago wrote an article in his church paper called, “Don’t Call Me Pastor.” Today in his church paper he is Pastor _____ and he is not alone; a large number of men from our churches have adapted this title as well. They have several reasons for using this term. They argue that they do the same work as the pastors – and it is true that the work of the elders and the preacher overlap. The work of a mother and a father overlap as well but would that justify calling one the other? Some say that they are an elected elder in the church – but are they “the elder”? What becomes of the office of evangelist if all preachers are elders? Some would

argue that it is just the commonly used term today and we should accept its usage – perhaps we should also accept sprinkling as “baptism.”

I think there are other reasons why this has become so popular in the last several years among our leaders. One reason is position – they like the title that distinguishes them in eyes of the world. Several years ago I knew of a fellow minister in Michigan who took to wearing a clerical collar when he went to the hospital so he would be “recognized as a minister.” For others it is pragmatism – many successful churches have a “pastor” system so we should try it too. Then there is adaptation – they want to be like the other churches that have “pastors.” They become like Israel when they wanted a king like the nations around them (1 Samuel 8:5). Power is another reason – some just like the power that goes with being “the pastor” (CEO syndrome). If they really had a servant attitude, why wouldn’t they use the term “bond-servant”? And finally, ignorance is a factor. Some just don’t know any better and we must fault the teaching of our colleges with that. A few years ago, an area preacher who had just received his PhD from one of our schools wrote about Ephesians 4:11 in his church paper. His conclusion was that he was not an apostle or prophet or evangelist, so he must be a pastor. What was he taught? The real question is, just who do we want to honor, ourselves or the Lord?

The Ordinances of the Church

There are many other terms that should be looked at as well. For instance, what about the ordinances of the church? We should be careful to observe the Biblical designations for these.

The Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20) has several different designations. It is called most commonly “The Breaking of Bread” (Acts 2:42) but also “The Cup of Blessing” (1 Corinthians 10:16), “The Cup of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 10:21) and “The Table of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 10:21). The term “communion” (KJV) comes from the word *koinonia* (1 Corinthians 10:16 meaning fellowship or sharing) and even the term “eucharist” is taken from the Greek word “to give thanks” (eucharisteo – 1 Corinthians 11:24).

It is no secret that the word “baptism” was a contrived word from the translators of the KJV because of the common practice of sprinkling during their day. Even modern dictionaries define “baptize” as “to immerse in water or pour or sprinkle water on in Christian baptism” (Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary). Only a very few translations of the New Testament use the word “immerse” for baptize (most notably Alexander Campbell’s “Living Oracles”).

Worship and Salvation

What about worship? We understand that God wants worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth (John. 4: 23), but we commonly employ a number of terms in connection with worship that cannot be found in the Bible. Terms such as “worship service,” “worship hour,” “worship leader,” “house of worship,” and “private and public worship,” may be useful expressions but they are not biblical.

Then there are the terms of salvation. The Bible gives several different responses to “*What must I do to be saved?*” They include “*believe on the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 16:31), “*repent and be baptized*” (Acts 2:38), “*confess Jesus as Lord*” (Romans 10:9, 10), and even “*Call on the name of the Lord*” (Romans 10:13). But the religious world today has adapted expressions that cannot be found in the Bible: “Ask Jesus into your heart” and “Say the sinner’s prayer.” These have become so well-used that they are even becoming a part of the vocabulary of some of our people. If ever there was a need for “pure speech” it is in the area of salvation.

Others Terms

Alexander Campbell gives a long list of terms (more than 40) that he would include as just a beginning of the corrupted dialect that was commonly employed in his day. He goes on to say,

“These are but a mere sample, and all of one species. It will be said that men cannot speak of Bible truths without adopting other terms than those found in the written word. This will be granted, and yet there will be found no excuse for the above species of unauthorized

and Babylonish phraseology. It is one thing to speak of divine truths in our own language, and another to adopt a fixed style of expressing revealed truths to the exclusion of, or in preference to, that fixed by the Spirit, and sometimes, too, at variance with it. For instance, the terms Trinity, first and second person of—Eternal Son, and the eternal procession of the Spirit, are now the fixed style in speaking of God, his Son Jesus Christ, and of the Spirit in reference to their “personal character.” Now this is not the style of the oracles of God. It is all human, and may be as freely criticized as one of the numbers of the Spectator. Yet because of the sanctified character of these terms, having been baptized, or authorized by the orthodox and pious for centuries, it is at the risque of my reputation for orthodoxy, and at the expense of being charged with heresy, that I simply affirm that they are terms that the wisdom of this world teaches, and not the Spirit of God.” (The Christian Baptist Vol. II, Num. IV, pg. 81)

Conclusion:

We have only begun to touch on this important topic. Calling Bible things by Bible names is to use the language that God gave us through His Word. To use other terms is to employ the language of “Ashdod” as Campbell calls it. If we wish to please the Lord in all things then we will prefer the language of His Word. Let us conclude with the words of Peter (1 Peter 4:11):

“Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterance of God; whoever serves, let him do so as 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.”