

WHAT SHALL WE CALL LEADERS IN THE CHURCH?

Many of the religious leaders in Jesus' day were very proud! They wore special clothing so they would look important in the eyes of men. They chose the best seats when they came to worship God. They wanted everyone to see them and praise them. They especially liked to be called by special titles such as "Rabbi," "Teacher," and "Father."

Jesus condemned these proud men. He commanded: ***"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 23:8-12).

Many preachers and other religious leaders today are just like the proud scribes and Pharisees who were condemned by Jesus. They like to wear "uniforms" or other special clothing so that they will stand out from other believers. They want people to see them. They think they are very important and deserve honor and praise from men. They especially like to wear religious titles such as "Reverend," "Pastor," "Doctor," and "Father" to set them apart from their fellow believers. These vain people are guilty of the same sin the scribes and Pharisees were guilty of! They are condemned by the same words the Lord used to condemn the proud religious leaders in His day!

The word "reverend" describes someone who is highly exalted and worthy of great praise. In the old King James Version (1611) of the Bible, it is used to describe God: ***"Holy and reverend is his name"*** (Psalm 111:9). The New King James Version translates this verse: ***"Holy and awesome is His name."*** Only a very foolish and arrogant person would claim to be worthy to be called "reverend" or "awesome" like God!

Many religious leaders today like to be called "Doctor." The word "doctor" originally meant "teacher." Today it is used to describe one who is a physician or medical healer. It is also the name of the highest degree one can attain in education. But it is not a title to be worn by leaders in the church, whether preachers, teachers, elders, etc. Jesus said: ***"Do not be called 'Teachers' (Doctor)!"***

"Father" is not meant to be used as a special title given to religious leaders. It is right for a child to call his male parent "father." But it is wrong to use it as a special title for religious teachers. Jesus said: ***"One is your Father, He who is in heaven."***

"Pastor" is one of the most misused words in the entire Bible! The word "pastor" means "shepherd." The Lord's church is often described in the Bible as ***"the flock of God"*** (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). According to the Bible, pastors (shepherds) are the elders or overseers of the church (See Acts 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:11; Philippians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:1-4). It is God's pattern for His church that each congregation will have overseers or shepherds who meet the special qualifications which He has given in His Word (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). There must be two or more pastors (elders, shepherds, overseers) for they are always plural when mentioned as leading a congregation (see Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; etc.).

Many people confuse the work of pastors with that of preachers or evangelists. Please note Paul's words to the church of Christ at Ephesus: "***And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors, and teachers***" (Ephesians 4:11). Evangelists are preachers of the Word of God. Their job is to "***Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching***" (2 Timothy 4:2). Elders (pastors) are only over the local congregation where they are members (1 Peter 5:1-4). But evangelists may serve just one congregation in preaching the gospel or they may be sent out to establish new congregations. Evangelists are not pastors (elders) and do not have the authority to rule the local congregation. Neither "evangelist" or "pastor" is meant to be a special religious title. They simply describe different workers in the church.

Jesus said of His disciples: "***You are all brethren.***" It is sinful for a Christian to exalt himself above his fellow Christians by wearing special clothing to set himself apart from them. It is also sinful for a Christian to insist he be called by some special title such as "Rabbi," "Father," "Reverend," "Doctor," or "Pastor!" It is wrong for workers in the church to insist that special seats be reserved for them or that they be given special greetings. God is our Father. All Christians are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Let us honor God as our heavenly Father and Jesus as our Teacher. Let us humbly serve them and take no pride in wearing man-made titles to exalt ourselves. Let us always remember Jesus' warning: "***Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted!***" (Matthew 23:12).