

# Clergy, Reverend, Father?

## Introduction

It is hoped that all who take the time to read the following article will understand that it is written with sincerity and with love for the Lord and for souls. As I have set forth to write with an open Bible ready to reference, I humbly request that you read with the same. You may respond to this message after you have read and studied it (Acts 17:11) by clicking on the e-mail button at the end of this page.

### "Whoever Exalts Himself . . ."

The word "clergy" means, "the group or body of ordained persons in a religion, as distinguished from the laity." The word "laity" means, "the body of religious worshippers as distinguished from the clergy; the people outside of a particular profession, as distinguished from those belonging to it; those lacking professional knowledge of a particular subject." Very simply put, the clergy/laity distinction used by many denominations creates a presumptuous, artificial, unbiblical division between the so-called "professional" vessels of knowledge (clergy) and the common religious persons (laity) who are assumed, according to definition, to be ignorant. It has also contributed to the mistaken application of titles of distinction, such as "reverend", "right reverend," "vicar," "father," "pastor" and "priest" being accepted and worn by those who in apostolic times were known simply as preachers or evangelists. The problem with such an hierarchical arrangement in the church is multifaceted, and to say the least, entirely unscriptural..

### Jesus and Paul Were in Agreement

Although differing functions such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are mentioned as roles within the church (Ephesians 4:11), all fall under Christ's instruction, "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 (Mat 23:8-12)." The Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul are not in disagreement. While by inspiration Paul recognizes and legitimizes differing roles within the church, Jesus forcefully affirms that those descriptive terms were never to become official titles of distinction, and thus, division. It is clearly understood that when men accept, or demand to be addressed with, such titles, that they do so in order to set themselves apart from and above those not of their perceived lofty position.

As a case in point, as I walked through a neighborhood with my wife some time ago, I noticed a signboard before a church building that read, "The Reverend Doctor 'So and So,' Pastor." I wondered if he expected to be addressed as "the Reverend-Doctor-Pastor," or perhaps as any combination of the three. It did seem that he wanted all passers by to know that he enjoys an especially holy station, aloof and apart from "commoners."

### **Who is Reverend?**

"Reverend" is the adjective form of the verb "revere," which means, "to regard with respect tinged with awe, venerate," further, "to stand in awe of, fear, feel reverence." Biblically speaking, the application of such intense devotion to any being other than God is grave error! There is abundant evidence that God is to be respected, held in awe, venerated, feared and revered. Read I Peter 2:17; Psalm 4:4, 33:8, 89:7. Men and women may be honored (I Peter 2:17), but God is to be feared! How sad it is when the noble, exalted adjectives applied by the Holy Spirit to Jehovah are hijacked by men who are inclined to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think (Romans 12:3)! How is it that men, supposedly educated in the Word, allow and encourage people to direct toward them adoration that should be reserved for God? What adjectives remain to describe a God that is greater than any man?

In India, when I sometimes hear a brother preacher being addressed as "Reverend" I ask why he allows it to pass without correction. The invariable answer is that it brings respect, or that it is too hard to explain otherwise. I know a few brethren in the United States who feel the same way, and sometimes, for others of us who know better, it is easier just to hang our heads and let such things pass without a word of truth being uttered. Is it any wonder that God is given such little adoration, even it seems, by some in the church? Paul's instruction for servants of the Lord was, "...in humility correcting those who are in the opposition (2 Timothy 2:25)." As opportunities arise let us be quick to teach, preach, declare, make manifest the will of God, contend for the faith, give an answer to all who ask concerning the faith that is in us. The truth cannot thrive in silence. No error is too trivial.

### **Pastor, Elder, Overseer and Bishop are Synonyms**

Regarding the term pastor, a study of the New Testament usage of pastor, bishop, overseer and elder reveals that they all fulfill the same function. Consequently, we understand the terms to be synonyms that, with regard to serving a local church, always appear in plural number (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5). In apostolic times local churches were served by a plurality of elders, or pastors. The single pastor system is a distinctly later development and a clear departure from the New Testament pattern.

### **Other Titles Misused**

Regarding "Vicar," it means: "to stand in the place of." Christians learn from the Bible that Jesus Christ stood in their place on Golgotha (1 Peter 2:21-24), and that He now stands in their place before the Father as our Advocate (1 John 2:1). Jesus is the only Vicar in the Christian

religion. It is wrong for any human, Pope or otherwise, to assume, and thus presume, that he stands in the place of Jesus Christ.

Regarding "Priest," all Christians are "...a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5)." The distinction of priest from laity in this Christian age is a purely human contrivance which will be rooted up along with all other such ungodly traditions (Matthew 15:1-14). The singular High Priest of the Christian priesthood of believers is the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:17), who is also the singular Founder and Head of His church (Matthew 16:18 ; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18).

Regarding "Father," it is not possible to be more clear on the matter than Jesus was: "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven (Matthew 23:9)."

Jesus said, "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 14: 1 -1 1)." Within the perspective of biblical Christianity, religious titles that distinguish an elite from the rest, or from which are inferred a special class of holiness for a few, are to be avoided (Matthew 23:1-12). To us, Jesus said, "...you are all brethren (Matthew 23:8)."

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