

Jesus Condemned Authority Titles

By Dr. David DeWitt

Jesus told His disciples,

But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted (Matthew 23:8-12).

So we can also be confident that the early church did not follow the synagogue format. The synagogues had no pastors, but they were dominated by the authority figures of the Pharisees and their rabbis. Although Jesus condemned the use of all titles, He illustrated that with the three of them:

- **Rabbi**, a term which parallels our title “pastor” in the sense that the rabbis were the clergy of the synagogues.
- **Father**, a term designating one specific leader. This title is specifically violated by the Roman Catholic Church and condemned because God is *Our Father which art in heaven*.
- **Leader** (*kathegetes*), which can be a leader or a teacher, condemned because only *One is your Leader, that is, Christ*.

It's not that other titles were all right, okay, or permissible. These are only examples. **No title of leadership is appropriate for the church.** Therefore, we can conclude that when the apostles used the words *elder*, *overseer* (KJV *bishop*), *deacon*, and *leader*, **they were describing service responsibilities, not designating a title to distinguish some people from other people.** Such titles would be disobeying Jesus.

Jesus Is the Only Pastor

The word “pastor” is an English word [or however it's rendered in other languages] for the word *shepherd* (*poimen*). Jesus said that He was the Good Shepherd, and He was building *one flock with one shepherd*. There are simply no such things as “under-shepherds.” **“I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become **one flock with one shepherd**”** (John 10:14-16). As Peter wrote, *for you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the **Shepherd and Guardian of your souls*** (1 Peter 2:25).

Jesus Described a Believing Leader as a Slave, Not an Up-Front Figure

When the mother of James and John asked that her sons *sit one on Your right and one on Your left*, Jesus made some comments about being great in the sense of being distinguished from others. He said, ... *whoever wishes to become great among you **shall be your servant**, and whoever wishes to be first among you **shall be your slave**; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:26-28). This is not about some well-known authority figure who speaks on Sunday, claiming he is a servant. **Jesus' idea of a servant was somebody most people would not even know.** He illustrated what He meant in the Upper Room at the Passover, during the Last Supper, when He took upon Himself the role of a household slave.

[Jesus] *got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and **began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded*** (John 13:4-5).