

No Titles, Please

Joe Slater

One of the minor annoyances of being a preacher is that well-meaning people frequently put some sort of title before your name. It may be Reverend, Pastor, Father, or some other. They are trying to be respectful, which I appreciate even though I repudiate the titles. I tell them that my mom named me Joe, and that's what I go by!

As with other unusual aspects of the Lord's church, people wonder why we don't use titles. We owe them a courteous, Biblical answer. Jumping down someone's throat feet-first for using a religious title is counter-productive. Just smile as you explain; most people will listen and respect you, even if they disagree or don't understand.

Be certain your reasoning is Biblical. Shortly after I began learning the Scriptures, someone taught me that the title "Reverend" was wrong because it was used only once in the Bible and referred to the name of God: "*Holy and reverend is His name*" (Psalm 111:9). That sounded convincing; it even appeared to be Biblical as long as you were using the KJV. However, as it turns out, the apostles could not have made that argument. The Psalmist's word for "reverend" is used over 300 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. Most often, it is translated "fear" or "afraid." The idea is that God's name is awe-inspiring.

Reverend is not a "title" for God any more than holy is a title ("*holy and reverend is His name*"). Holiness is an attribute of God, which He commands us to imitate: "*Be holy, for I am holy*" (1 Peter 1:16). His name is also reverend (worthy of great respect). Joshua 4:14 speaks approvingly of the fact that Israel "*feared*" (revered, stood in awe of) Moses and Joshua. Who can

doubt that Christians should seek to be respectable people? Even the pagan Chaldeans are said to be reverend (fearful, terrible, awe-inspiring, Habakkuk 1:7). The problem with using "Reverend" as a religious title, then, is not that the word is somehow reserved for God alone.

Jesus showed that the root issue is the very nature of religious titles. Like special religious garments (robes, collars, etc.) they serve to divide God's people, setting certain ones above others and fostering a spirit of pride and competition. Rejecting the use of contemporary titles such as Rabbi, Father, and Teacher, Jesus told His disciples, "*you are all brethren*" (Matthew 23:8-10). It is not the words Rabbi, father, and teacher that are forbidden. The New Testament uses these words regularly. The point is, they are not to be turned into titles that would exalt certain people above others.

Our highest honor is that we are brothers and sisters in Christ, children of the same Heavenly Father. May we always be content with that!

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We often treat Jesus like Saul treated David: We want Him to slay giants and sing evil spirits away, but we don't want Him to be King!

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When the church decides that it must become like the world in order to win the world, the world has won it.

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Lance Champion made an observation that has really resonated with me and I hope it will you too. Lance said, "For those who are Christians, earth will be the closest they'll ever get to Hell; and for those who are not Christians, earth will be the closest they'll ever get to Heaven."

AN OLD HOTEL

"And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13).

The six-story historical hotel was decked with Christmas finery. Outside, the front of the building, the bushes and trees, and every light pole shined with lights of various colors. Life-size angels hung over its porch and steps. At night, the front and outside took your breath away. Inside, large decorated trees, lights, Santas, snowmen, and teddy bears filled the foyer and hallways. Decorated Christmas scenes and trees took center stage in every banquet room and convention center. Indeed, she was a grand old lady, beautiful to see.

However, we weren't there to ooh and ahh over the lights. We were there to assess her condition. We saw nearly all of her over 100 rooms. Most needed paint and new carpet. The curtains were old and showing wear. In the far recesses of her basement, where only a few people were allowed, were old, rusty boilers no longer in use. Broken furniture took up one corner, and outdated computers another. Pipes carrying water along the ceiling dripped and made puddles on the floor.

Sometimes we Christians are like old hotels. From the outside, we look great. Our lives are shining examples of what a follower of Jesus should be. But inside, where only God can see, hide the broken furniture and discarded boilers.

Let us remember that God can see our weaknesses. He knows our thoughts, good and bad. He is aware of the secret sins we hide from others. Our Father can tell when our faith grows weak. He understands that we have holes where we sometimes let Satan creep into our lives.

Lest we lose heart, let us also remember that God will fix us up if we repent and let Him into our hearts. Our Father will strengthen us and keep us going until we reach our heavenly home.

--Donna Richmond Wittlif (Denver, CO)