

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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DO NOT BE CALLED #1

But all their works they do to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called of men, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren [brothers]. And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters [leaders, directors]: for one is your master [leader, director], even the Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted. (Matthew 23.5-12 ASV [NASB, YLT])

During my 25 years of working in big business or what many call corporate America, I served under many leaders and served as a leader over others as well. So, from the world's perspective, I have observed the leadership of men and can testify that often it is, as the expression goes, not a pretty sight. All too often I saw leaders who were filled with pride and who were exalted in their positions, along with their titles and the power associated with the titles. I observed men so obsessed with power and the pursuit of wealth that many forms of evil were manifested. Very few, if any, of the leaders under whom I served exemplified a life laid down for others. Quite the contrary, most expected, if not demanded, that others lay down their lives for them. Consequently, in corporate America titles mean a lot to people. It establishes the pecking order of power and authority as handed down from the chief officers of a company.

For my last seven years of working in big business, I was given the title of director. I must state that this was the Lord's doing. I have an interesting testimony of how I got to that position and how He led me out; however, it is too long to recount here. The point that I want to bring out is that the title of director meant something to many people. I could walk into meetings and if I was the only director in the room and everyone else was lower in the pecking order, then I was looked upon as the one with the greatest authority in that room. I made many mistakes in leading others; but I trust that I learned much during those years as I began to learn the Lord's way of leading by serving.

This leads to the question: What does leadership in the ecclesia look like? Is it to be patterned after the world? How do we identify it? Is it based on titles? Do men have to wear a title on their sleeve or carry around a business card with their name and title to prove they are the leader?

When you hear the word *leader*, what comes to your mind? Do you immediately think of someone called a pastor? Do you think of some official title or office to which people are appointed? Do you think of some exalted position amongst the ecclesia, the called-out ones? Do you think of one man who is head over all the affairs of assembly life? It is probable that some reading this have answered yes to some of these questions. In one sense, our answers do not count; all that matters is what Scripture teaches us about leaders in the ecclesia. We should be asking ourselves: What is a true leader according to God's principles? Who are they? How do they become leaders? What are they called to do? What are the characteristics of a leader?

Studying the New Testament, we discover that the Holy Spirit was not as interested in titles as many today seem to be. There are references to men being just leaders and then some to men being

apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers, elders, and deacons. But take note that Scripture calls very few people by these names, as if official titles. There were apostles; there was Philip “an evangelist,” Manaen “a teacher,” and Agabus, Silas, and Judas “prophets.” Paul called himself “a teacher.” Curiously, no one was ever named “a pastor” or called pastor. *Pastor* as a title is widely used today, and yet the Bible does not use it.

Frankly, I am fascinated with the near obsession that many in the ecclesia of God have with the word *pastor*. I recall attending a local assembly one Sunday when they were honoring their pastor for the number of years he had been in that position. Actually, they held such a service every year. I do not question this congregation’s heart or their purpose. They genuinely desire to honor their pastor every year. To us, it seemed as if they were exalting the man above the Lord Himself, even though that was not the intent. But what caught my attention was that they referred to the man not as **the** pastor or **their** pastor or pastor So-in-So, but simply as pastor, as if it were the man’s proper name. Even the pastor’s son referred to his father as pastor. So that you understand how the word was being used, here are some examples: “I love pastor.” “I appreciate what pastor has done in my life.” “Pastor is a godly man.” “Pastor and his wife are loved very much.” “I don’t know what we would have done without pastor.” However, this does not seem to be an isolated phenomenon, for just recently on television there was a 50th anniversary for a well-known pastor-teacher, and the pastor’s son called his father “pastor” in the same way: “Pastor has been such a wonderful father.”

During one of our trips to Africa, I recall being told a story of how a brother in Christ approached a pastor (by title) and called him “brother.” The pastor responded with something like this: **“I am not a brother; I am a pastor.”** I know what the Lord Jesus would say to such a one: **But do not be called Rabbi: for One is your teacher, and you all are brothers.** All you need to do is substitute pastor for Rabbi to touch the heart of the Lord on the matter. If you still don’t see the problem with this man’s response, then you will have to wait until the next issue (part 2).

Back to Scripture; it seems that when reference was made to a gifting for the building up of the ecclesia, it was not so much an official position or title as it was a service for the person to perform. It is rather interesting that the apostles were never called “the apostle Paul” or “the apostle Peter.” Many books that I have read have adopted the world’s way of titles as they refer to the Apostles, such as the Apostle Paul; this is merely a reflection of what has taken root in the leadership of the ecclesia. Today, because of the world’s infiltration into the thinking of the ecclesia, many place a title before the name of a man. So they capitalize the word and say, “Apostle So-and-So,” or “Pastor So-and-So,” or “Evangelist So-and-So.” We see none of this in the heart of the early church. In fact, the emphasis was more on the fact that *they belonged to Jesus*.

If we search Scripture, specifically looking for how the apostles introduced themselves in their various letters, we discover that they first called themselves by their name followed by “an apostle,” “a bond-servant,” “the elder,” “a prisoner,” or “your brother.” It was Paul, an apostle of Christ; Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ; John, your brother. They all recognized themselves as bond-servants and that they belonged to Jesus Christ. If you study the lives of these men, you will see that they were not interested in the outward form or even the authority that titles bring. Their lives were a testimony of brokenness, humility, service, the cross worked out in their lives, and the power of the Life that lived within them. In short, their emphasis was not on themselves but on Christ. Even Paul, when he was in very difficult situations with various assemblies, did not want to exercise the authority of an apostle, even though he may have had a legitimate right. Paul did not see his authority in a title. He saw it as something given him by the Lord for building up and not for tearing down (2 Corinthians 13.10).

What a difference we see in these early church pioneers compared to many so-called leaders in our day!