

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 #3

“But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. 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 23.5-12 NASB)

This short series is about leadership in the ecclesia of God. Unfortunately, I believe that leadership amongst the Lord’s called-out ones has taken on an unhealthy emphasis that has some semblance to that of the world. In particular, titles have taken on a prominence that exalts the man and his credentials so that others will know that he is the leader. It is exaltation of the man, and if the man is not careful, he will begin to fall for the lie that he is something special. Real danger arises when a so-called leader sees himself as special and more important than others around him or, as he sees it, under him. Pride takes root, and authority finds its legitimacy in outward form and title.

However, leadership is not a title, a position, or forced authority; it is a responsibility given of the Lord to some, not many. Notice how Paul stated that the Lord gave some of the four types of gifts for the building up. Why are so many running around today proclaiming their gifting?

And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ.... (Ephesians 4.11-12 ASV)

I recall the story of a man who, years ago, traveled from city to city with a letter in hand stating that he was an apostle and that he was to be honored as one. The letter was signed by him; Apostle So-and-So. This is not much different from ones who have business cards with their name and title on it; however, this example is a little more brazen. In my opinion, if you have to tell someone that you are a particular gifting to the ecclesia of God and that others must honor you and listen to what you have to say, then I would seriously question whether you are actually one. Some might counter this opinion with the fact that when Paul wrote epistles to the ecclesia, he told them he was an apostle of Christ Jesus. Note how he never declared that he was the Apostle Paul. What he did declare was that he was an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and he had the revelation to back up his being sent not through the agency of man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father (Galatians 1.1). One who is gifted by God or, we could say, is a gifting to the ecclesia will be recognized not by his letters of commendation but a life of humility, love, and grace; a life laid down and walking in the spirit. Simply, he will be a living example of the life of Christ.

Consider the term *Christian*; the early believers did not call themselves Christians. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11.26). But who gave them this designation? It had to be those who were observing their life and their message. They became known as Christians because they stood for and preached the Lord Jesus Christ. They were identified with Christ because of their message, not because of who they were. We shouldn’t have to tell the world that we are Christians; they should know it by our life and by the message spoken through our lives.

Over the years, I have observed many examples of how the concept of leadership and authority has become so distorted in the ecclesia of God. To me, it has taken on a life that mirrors the world's concept of leadership.

In our travels, I have noticed that it is not uncommon for a man who stands in a pulpit to speak forth the word of God to automatically be called Reverend. I fought against this quite often in our travels. I would be introduced and greeted as the Reverend. Every time I heard the word, everything within me would scream: No! To the best of my ability, I would kindly tell others that I am a brother in Christ, not a reverend, which, by the way, is not found in Scripture. The last I knew, we were to revere our God, not men. Now, I realize that when I was called Reverend, it was a sign of respect; but to me, it often went beyond respect to exaltation. On many occasions, not only would I be called Reverend, but I would also be ushered to a stage to sit upon a kingly-looking chair that looked down upon all the brethren in the congregation. It was difficult for some to accept that I wanted to sit amongst the brethren until it was my time to speak. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. God shows no partiality, so why should we be partial with one another? Consider what James wrote about giving preference: **If you show partiality, you are committing sin** (James 2.1-9).

I recall attending a time of prayer in which many brethren gathered from across our city. During a time of sharing, a brother expressed his deep love for the return of the Lord and how his pastor could not relate to him, as if he had no desire to see the Lord. He longed to have fellowship with other brothers who shared his heart. My heart went out to this brother, so I encouraged him to seek out those who share such a heart. What happened next sort of shocked me. The one brother in the group that day that was called a pastor rebuked me. He warned me not to subvert leadership. In other words, forget the heart of this one brother who has a heart similar to Paul; one that loves His appearing (2 Timothy 4.8). What was more important to this pastor was the authority and position of pastor. The sad thing to me is that I never have questioned and still do not question that the brother who rebuked me has been given the gift of shepherding, but he, like so many in our day, has allowed authority to become a control over others and has lost the true nature of shepherding.

As a side note, the whole concept of clergy-laity is diabolical and only increases the sin of partiality. I have more to say on this but will reserve my comments for another issue.

To conclude this matter, I leave you with some thoughts on a true leader in the ecclesia of God.

- A leader is given by the Lord to the ecclesia as a gift for the building up of the body of Christ in love. We could say that a leader is a love gift.
- A leader is a brother, first and foremost. **Do not be called Teacher, for you are all brothers.**
- A leader walks in humility. **Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love** (Ephesians 4.1-2 NASB).
- A leader is led by the spirit. **If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit** (Galatians 5.25 NASB). Those gifted and given to the ecclesia by the Lord for the upbuilding of the saints are *spiritual* leaders, matured in Christ.
- A leader is a servant of all, one who lays down his life for the brethren. **But the greatest among you shall be your servant.**
- A leader is a loving example of the life of Christ. Those observing a leader must see an example of humility, love, and grace; an example of a life *in* spirit. Follow the example, not the person. **Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us** (Philippians 3.17 NASB).
- Those who are the true spiritual leaders may be the ones without title, pulpit, or paid position!