

THE SECRET OF HIS PURPOSE THE PLAN FOR THE FULLNESS OF THE TIMES
TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN THE KING,
EVERYTHING IN THE HEAVENS AND ON THE EARTH,
IN JESUS....

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#12

**Do Not Be Called...
You Are All Called Brothers**

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“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 [bold italic added])

I recall a story of a brother in Christ who called a titled *pastor* “brother.” The pastor responded: ***I am not a brother; I am a pastor.*** The Lord Jesus would say to such a one: ***But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your teacher, and you are all brothers.*** Simply, identify pastor with Rabbi and you touch the heart of the Lord on the matter.

Those who have known me for years know that I see a great danger in the many official titles held by so many today. The danger is not so much about the titles themselves as it is about the carnal spirit of partiality and exaltation behind the use of these titles. Those who hold these titles are generally referred to as leaders of the Lord’s people, which makes the exaltation of men (and women) and their titles all the more dangerous.

Some might think that I am obsessed with the matter and have something against leadership in general. Perhaps there is some truth in this, for some of my experiences with leadership in the world, as well as in the ecclesia, have given me some indelible memories, some of which are not very pleasant. I too have been a leader in the world and have made many mistakes and probably hurt some along the way. I can look back on these times and learn from them. The Lord does not lead us through trials without a purpose, so these experiences were necessary to reveal His heart on leadership. To be clear, spiritual leadership has nothing to do with the title one holds. It has everything to do with the heart of the matter, which is spiritual.

This leads to some questions: 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 new covenant scripture, we discover that the spirit of the Lord 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. However, 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."

According to scripture; 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 *having been with 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!

To be clear, I am not taking a stand against the various *terms* used in the Bible. Apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher, elder, and deacon are all scriptural. But the question is: Why does the ecclesia today place so much emphasis on something the new testament does not emphasize? Why do so many make these terms into great titles that men parade before the Lord's people? Today, men are not satisfied with even these biblical terms, so they have added extra titles like "Reverend" or "the Most Reverend." This may not be enough of a title, so they add on their educational degree as well — "Reverend Doctor So-and-So." Others take on the title of "Pastor and Founder of Such-and-Such Church." Why is there such an emphasis on these various titles? Could it be that there is a need for legitimacy? Somehow, they think that if they have a lofty title, people will look at them as a spiritual leader and give them respect. It is no different than the religious Pharisees that the Lord condemned and to whom He spoke woes.

Leadership is not a title. Men can take on the loftiest titles in the world and be highly recognized in religious circles, but this is not leadership. Men can stand in pulpits with puffed-up chests and great oration, but this is not leadership. Men can even write highly successful books that sell millions of copies that puts them on the Christian speaking circuit, but this does not make them spiritual leaders. Leadership is based on inner character and not on outward appearance or even performance. It is a spiritual matter. The issue is about spiritual leadership, not titles that exalt the man and that mirror leadership found in the world system (*kosmos*). The Lord's servants are not to demand respect; they earn it through lives laid down.

In Matthew 23, we discover that the Lord Jesus began to speak to the multitudes and to His disciples. He began by referring to the Pharisees who had seated themselves in the chair of Moses. In other words, they assumed a position of honor amongst the people. They wanted to tell the people what to do, but they themselves would not do the things they demanded of others. When they acted, they did things to be noticed by men. This was the heart of the religious leaders — to be noticed. I might add that this is the trademark of many leaders in the world as well. There is not much difference between the two.

How were they noticed? By their deeds; by their dress, garments, or appearance; by taking the place of honor and the chief seats; by receiving respectful greetings; and finally, by being called Rabbi by men! In other words, the Pharisees were interested in being lifted up and exalted amongst the people. They were full of pride, and that pride demanded they be recognized. What was one of the ways they desired recognition? By taking on an official title, Rabbi! They strode amongst the people and took great pride in being called a teacher. Why? Because it meant that they knew more than the people. It gave them respect and a sense of power over the people.

But what was the Lord's response to this pride? How did He instruct His disciples, the ones whom He was calling into leading His people? Jesus said, ***But do not be called Rabbi.*** Then He went on

to say, ***Do not call anyone on earth your father.*** And finally, He said, ***Do not be called leader*** (or master, director). Instead, He said that ***there is only one*** Teacher, one Father, and one Leader or Master. There is ***only one*** sums up the whole matter.

Is it possible that the Lord was putting His finger on an issue that has challenged His ecclesia down through the centuries? Pride! Self-exaltation! When men want to be recognized by titles, perhaps the root cause or, better yet, the heart's desire is the boastful pride of life, the spirit of the world.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (1 John 2:16 NASB)

The boastful spirit of pride stands in opposition to the coming kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. It is worldly and has no place in a leader called of God. A leader amongst the Lord's people would rather be called a brother than accept a title that puffs up self. The Lord told His disciples: ***You are all brothers.*** This is the proper designation, no matter how visible one's service is to the Lord. In fact, if one is highly visible in the work of the Lord, then it is even more essential that the person never assume a position of pride. Leaders are to set an example, particularly for younger believers. If they see puffed-up leaders, then they will try to follow that example. It will be to the leader's shame, and they will be held accountable before the Lord in that day.

“But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.” (Matthew 23:11-12 NASB)

Our Lord spoke these words to reveal the opposite of worldly, exalted leadership. Leadership in the ecclesia of God is based on being a servant of God and of the brethren. It is as if the Lord says: “If you want to be exalted today, go ahead and assume the lofty places. Your reward will be given to you in full in this age. You will receive exaltation from the multitudes and the world, but not from Me. In the day of My judgment, you will be humbled before Me as you see your loss. If you want to be rewarded in the day of My judgment, then be humbled today and you will be exalted in that day. You will hear, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’”

True leaders are ones who walk in humility. They would rather be called a brother and bond-servant of Jesus Christ than to be lifted up to a high place of exaltation. Paul, in his great letter to the ecclesia in Ephesus, entreated the saints ***to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*** (Ephesians 4:1-3). It is true that Paul then referred to apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers; but he began with a foundational principle that applies to all of God's children and that must be manifested in leadership — all must walk in humility.

To repeat, true spiritual leaders are ones who walk in humility and in spirit, not in the pride of title, position, or lofty places. One walking in humility would rather be called a brother than take on any title. After all, our Lord is humble and meek. He came to serve by laying down His life for others (the world), and all who are called to lead must follow His path as well.

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. Personally, I prefer the term ***Christ-abiders***.

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'll never forget the time we were entering a place where I was to speak and across the main road was a large banner with my name on it preceded by the title *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 is that I never questioned that the brother who rebuked me was 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. It is called the ***clergy-laity spirit*** – a diabolically bad spirit built on the foundation of **the sin of partiality**.

Without belaboring the point further, 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).
- A leader is led by the spirit. ***If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit*** (Galatians 5:25). 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).
- A leader is a Christ-abider, one who smells of the aroma of Christ because he has been with Jesus.
- A leader is driven by an **ever-expanding revelational vision of God's ultimate purpose and plan** achieved through His Son, our Lord Jesus, who is central, supreme, and preeminent in all that the Father does. Further, a spiritual leader sees the ecclesia that Jesus is building, not as an organization built by men, but as an ***organic reality*** built upon the ***one true Foundation*** – Jesus Himself. The flesh of man, no matter how good it is, has no part in this building that is ***God's dwelling in spirit.***
- Those who are the true spiritual leaders may be the ones without title, pulpit, or paid position!
- The day is fast approaching when the exaltation of titles will come to an end as the one true leader of the ecclesia that He is building appears in glory to His people. The religious façade of titles is going to crumble along with all the other structures of man, even the religious structures built by the flesh and not by the spirit. The topstone of God's building project is coming very soon!