

A word for the Grand Poobah

People often ask me if I have a title. My normal reply is: “You can call me Lee. Or if you want to sound formal, you can say, ‘Brother Grady.’” But my reply doesn’t always satisfy everyone.

All kinds of labels have been pinned on me: Reverend, pastor, prophet, apostle ... even bishop. Once I was introduced to a church as “Dr. Grady” and I almost crawled under my seat. I only have a college degree. There are no letters after my name.

Today it seems we’ve developed a title fetish. For a while everyone in charismatic circles was becoming a bishop (and some were installed into this office with rings, robes and strange hats). Then the same guys with the pointy hats started calling themselves apostles. Then the prophets got jealous and started calling themselves apostles too. And I knew one lady who required people to call her “Exalted Prophetess.”

The latest fad is requiring church folks to address certain people as apostles. (As in, “When Apostle Holy Moly arrives, please only address him as, ‘Apostle,’ and then make sure he is seated in a private room while his two adjutants guard his door.”) They’ve even invented an elaborate theology to go along with this ridiculous rule. It suggests that you can’t receive the true anointing from a man of God if you don’t honor him with the right title.

This sounds so very *ooo-oooh* spiritual to the naive. But it’s garbage.

Jesus didn’t play this religious game, especially when he was around the Grand Poobahs of His day—the long-robed scribes and Pharisees. After accusing them of loving the best seats in the synagogues, He pointed out that they loved to be called “Rabbi” by men (see Matt. 23:7).

Then He warned them: “But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. ... The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (vv. 8-12, NASB).

People have quibbled over these words for centuries, insisting that ecclesiastical titles are not the problem; pride is what Jesus was rebuking. I would agree that Jesus was going to the root sin. But He was also asking these title-crazy guys if they'd be willing to ditch their labels and act like normal people.

A few years ago I met some amazing leaders in China who had planted thousands of congregations. They had spent a lot of time in jail for their faith, and they'd been beaten with iron rods for preaching the gospel. They were the bravest apostles I've ever met. But when I asked them if they used “apostle” as a title, one guy said: “We believe in those roles in the church. But we prefer to call each other ‘brother’ or ‘sister.’”

That settled it for me. If these giants of the faith—and true apostles—don't require to be addressed with titles, then Your Worshipful Grand Master Rev. Dr. Bishop Jones (who claims oversight of maybe four churches) shouldn't wear his ministry role around his neck like a tacky neon name badge.

If people can't see the anointing on your life through your character, then don't cheapen the gospel by wearing a title you don't deserve.

I'm not saying people shouldn't use reverend, minister or even bishop to identify their roles in the church. And I believe we need genuine apostolic ministry today. But requiring a title? Can we please dispense with the insecurity and the childish, “I'm more important than you” appellations, and get back to the simplicity of the gospel? Let's get over ourselves!

Jesus is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Son of David, the Prince of Peace and the apostle of our confession. Yet when He came into this world He laid aside His heavenly glory and took on the lowly name of Jesus.

He wore no fancy robes. He demanded no titles. He did not come to be ministered to, but to minister. If we want to serve Him honorably, we must forsake our need for fame and cast our crowns at His feet.

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