

The Vanity and Abuse of Ministry Titles: A Lesson Confirmed to Me by the Late Lester Sumrall

I was preaching in a church in the Minneapolis area several years ago for the first time. In the pastor's office, as we exchanged greetings and discussed the order of the service, he stumbled over my name and was unsure what to call me. You see, he wanted to know or call me by a title. He came from a church culture that called all ministers by their title. He asked me, "Are you an evangelist, a reverend or what?" I responded, "You can just call me and introduce me as Brother Bert Farias."

With all due respect to those who function according to the fruit of their titles or who have earned degrees and titles such as "Dr." or "Bishop" and so forth could use a lesson or two on humility. One of my fathers in the faith whom I followed closely in my ministry was Lester Sumrall, who had the following wisdom to share about titles. Before I ever heard him say this, I had the same conviction.

Here's what he said:

Sumrall: "We're living in a strange period where people are going around calling themselves prophets and apostles who don't even know the meaning of the word. Those people are proud. Anybody you see who is sticking "bishop" and "prophet" in front of his name is full of what Lucifer got thrown out of heaven for, and that's pride. We don't need titles. We need experience, and we need action and we need blessing, and we need anointing, but we don't need titles. That's Pharisee-ism in the New Testament. The Pharisees were very eager to get a high name for themselves.

“Also, Ananias and Sapphira fell dead in that first church in Jerusalem because they wanted to be a Barnabas. They wanted to be a son of consolation. They wanted to be something more than what they were, and they had to die for it. They lied to the Holy Spirit in church.

“People who come around and say, ‘Look on me ... I’m this or that or the other,’ disregard them completely because it’s vanity that’s in their heart.

“If you’re a prophet or apostle or a pastor, there will be fruit, and you don’t need a title. Titles are not what the world needs today. The world needs ministry. The world today needs us to bear fruit of what we are.”

Farias: “What do you want people to call you?”

Sumrall: “I want people to call me “brother.” I don’t know that I’m a pastor or an apostle, but I’m sure that I’m a brother. Don’t follow the vanity of men and try to have a title stuck over you.”

“And the word ‘Reverend.’ I see it quite often, and they will try and stick it on my name when I’m not around and don’t know about it. The only time it’s used in the Bible it’s used about God. Why should you grab His title? Reverend is His name, not yours. If you keep it very simple and very humble ... if you say ‘brother’ or ‘sister,’ that means all of us are equal together. But what we would like to have is to know that all of us are important, and we’re all part of the body of Christ.”

Brother Sumrall was a true missionary statesman—a man of great spiritual stature, a mighty apostle who changed nations. And yet he was a very humble man. Let us be imitators of such worthy men who follow our Master closely in meekness and humility.

What I have found is that many of our fathers in the faith and

men of old made little of themselves and much of God, and possessed great power with God and accomplished great things for God. Today we make much of ourselves and make great boasts of our ministries and churches, and wear our titles like some badge of honor, but in reality, we have no power with God and accomplish so little for eternity.

I believe humility is the greatest qualification of receiving more of God's grace. The Scriptures bear witness to this truth.

"But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' ... Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (James 4:6, 10).

Let us humble ourselves before the Lord so He can be magnified, and His power can be released in greater measure on the earth in these last days. {eoa}

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