

Why So Many Titles?

Our focus must be on the development of character and skills—not on titles and status!

I was thinking the other morning about the many different hats I wear. I realized, to my dismay, that I have at least five different titles—Reverend, Doctor, Pastor, Senior Overseer, Bishop. Are all of these labels necessary? Are titles being misused in the church?

When I was growing up during the 1960s, my parents were extremely concerned about my respect for authority. I could not refer to the milkman as, simply, the milkman. If I didn't know his name, then he was Mr. Milkman. I was taught to reverence all schoolteachers, and had I addressed a police officer as anything other than Officer or, you guessed it, Mr. Policeman, my wise mother would have made sure I lived to regret it.

In today's world, this approach seems extreme, but my parents were smart enough to know that a young man who grows up ignorant of the boundaries separating him from those in authority could be headed for trouble. At the very least, remembering a person's station in life may prevent us from taking for granted those whom God has placed around us in positions of leadership.

Unfortunately, in the church today titles often are used to evoke status and position, while the leaders bearing these titles fail to inspire genuine respect. You may refer to your pastor using his or her title or first name, but the issue is whether or not you earnestly respect and honor the leader God has placed in your life.

Titles do not produce leaders. My friend John Maxwell teaches that people do not follow titles—they follow leaders. If this is true, then why do some leaders seem consumed with their

titles? I become amused when people introduce themselves to me as Dr. or Rev. So-and-So, and I wonder why these individuals feel the need to present titles as part of their identity.

Leaders are developed through God's process. No prefix on a person's name will transform him or her into the leader he or she is called to be. The body of Christ needs leaders now more than ever, but real leaders do not need titles to lead. Our focus must be on the development of character and skills—not on titles and status!

Titles alone do not produce respect. People inspire respect because of who they are, not what they are called. Growing up, I thought highly of my church leaders; they were people of integrity. I met many other titled Christians later in life who lacked the character and divine empowerment necessary to merit the same level of regard. If a leader is authentic, then he or she does not need to wield a title to demand respect—it will be given willingly by those whose hearts are open.

Titles should connect, not distance. Many of our church members have been with me since long before I became the overseer of other churches. I find it humorous when these members address me as "Pastor" and then apologize because they didn't call me "Bishop." The truth is, I just want to connect with the people I lead.

Some members love the term "Bishop" and bristle at my being called anything else. They see me as a pastor of pastors and connect with my heart to serve pastors around the world. If still others find comfort in calling me "Reverend," then so be it. What really matters is that the people I lead connect with the vision God has placed in my heart.

My title does not define me—it is a tool with which to link people to my call. My wife calls me "Sweetheart" because she expects me to love her. She is connecting with my call!

As a believer, you have a tremendous opportunity to encourage

those who lead you in the local church. Whether you call your pastor Bob, Pastor Bob, Bishop Bob or Dr. Bob, you can purpose in your heart to honor and respect your leader. Let your leader know that you appreciate his or her ministry.

Don't fall into the current trend of cynicism and criticism. Look beyond the title and see the man or woman who demonstrates the grace and skill to lead. When you find a leader of such caliber, respect and cherish that person—title or no title—for you have found a rare treasure.

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