

# Religious Titles

It is commonplace for preachers to wear religious titles. They are called “Reverend,” “Father,” “Doctor,” “Cardinal,” “Bishop,” and many other such things. Even their wives are given titles like “First Lady.” Therefore, we need to search the scriptures to see if this practice is truly pleasing to God.

Jesus condemned the wearing of religious titles in Matthew 23. He said, “Don’t let anyone call you ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one teacher, and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters. And don’t address anyone here on earth as ‘Father,’ for only God in heaven is your Father. And don’t let anyone call you ‘Teacher,’ for you have only one teacher, the Messiah” (vv. 8-10). Notice that the Lord did not want His disciples to wear religious titles. They were simply to be called “brothers” and “sisters” (v. 8).



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No preacher in the early church wore a religious title. For instance, consider Paul and Timothy. They were two of the most influential preachers to ever live. Surely then they would be addressed with some glamorous and glowing title, right? Wrong. Peter simply addressed Paul as “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Peter 3:15), and the Hebrews writer addressed Timothy as “our brother Timothy” (Hebrews 13:23). They were never called “Reverend,” “Father,” or “Doctor.” In fact, two letters were written to Timothy and one to a preacher named Titus in the New Testament. None of the greetings included a religious title. They were just called “Timothy” and “Titus.” The same could be said about Philip, Apollos, Archippus, and every other evangelist of that time.

Preachers in the early church did not want to be exalted above their brothers and sisters in any way. Therefore, they did not wear special robes or special titles or sit in special seats during worship. Preachers today ought to follow their humble example.

The Psalmist declared of God, “He sent redemption unto his people; he hath commanded his covenant forever: holy and reverend is his name” (Psalm 111:9, KJV). Notice that “holy and reverend” is God’s name. He is the One to be revered. Why then do men want to assume that designation for themselves? Why do they insist that others call them “Reverend?” Holy and reverend is God’s name, not a denominational preacher’s name.

Consider this quote from a respected Baptist historian: “The term *Reverend*, now in such common use among our people and all other parties, was generally very offensive to Baptists of the old school, and was seldom employed by them in common conversation, in letter inscriptions, or in any other way. *Holy and reverend is his name*, as a designation of the Divine Being, was a passage often quoted by objectors to giving reverence to men. To the Deity alone, said they, reverence belongs” (*50 Years Among the Baptists*, David Benedict, p. 286). Amen.

All Christians should be people of humility (James 4:6). They should not think too highly of themselves (Romans 12:3) and seek to esteem others above themselves (Philippians 2:3). How can preachers exemplify that lowly spirit while insisting that men call them by special titles of exaltation such as “Reverend” or “Father?” Humility would refuse such exaltation, not accept it (Acts 10:25-26; 14:14-15). To God be the glory!