

Christ Warned Against Titles

William MacDonald:

“...you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ.” (Matt. 23:8-10 RSV)

The Lord Jesus warned His disciples against high-sounding titles that cater to the ego and put self in the place of the Trinity. God is our Father, Christ is our Master, the Holy Spirit is our Teacher. We should not arrogate these titles to ourselves in the assembly. In the world, of course, we have an earthly father, in our work we have a master or employer, and in school we have teachers. But in the spiritual realm, the members of the Godhead fill these roles and should be honored exclusively as such.

God is our Father in the sense that He is the Giver of life. Christ is our Master because we belong to Him and are subject to His direction. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher because He is the Author and Interpreter of Scripture; all our teaching must be guided by Him.

How strange, then, that churches perpetuate honorific titles just as if Christ had never warned against them. Priests and ministers are still called Father and Padre and are sometimes referred to as Dominie, meaning Lord. Clergymen regularly use the title “Reverend,” a word that is used in the Bible only of God (see Psa. 111:9, “...reverend and holy is his name.”) The title “Doctor” comes from the Latin *docere*, to teach. So doctor means teacher. The degree, whether earned or honorary, may come from an institution that is a pesthouse of infidelity rather than a bulwark of the Christian faith. Yet when a man is introduced as “Doctor” in the assembly, the implication is that his words have added authority because of his degree. This, of course, is completely unfounded. A hunchbacked garbage collector, filled with the Holy Spirit, may speak more truly as an oracle of God.

There is a place for titles in the so-called secular world. The principle that applies in that sphere is “Render therefore to all their dues: ...honour to whom honour” (Rom. 13:7). But the principle that applies in the assembly is laid down by the Lord in the words, “...you are all brethren” (Matt. 23:8 RSV).