

Church Leadership: Titles, Description, and Positions

Introduction:

Christ is our King, and we submit to Him by obeying all He has revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. To disobey the revelation of the Spirit is to take Jesus out of our church, or rather, how we become a church that no longer belongs to Him.

Church leadership is a great test of our loyalty to Him and His word. People claim to be faithful to Christ and His word, but when it comes to leadership in the church, very quickly people tend to depart from His revelation. Why?

- Ignorance of what He says?
- We think we have the right and ability to improve His plan by adding or changing.
- We are proud and want power for ourselves.

When we study the NT, we need to realize that Jesus plan for leadership in His church is very basic and very limited. There aren't many titles. There are very few positions of authority. There are no hierarchies of power. It's very limited in human leadership.

Is that on accident? Consider when the Israelites first moved into the land. How much leadership did they have? Virtually none. Why? God was their king; but they weren't satisfied with Him. They wanted a physical human leader over them. Was God happy with this? No. He declared it to be rejection. Now we are in the church. Who is our king? Jesus! There isn't going to be much other human leadership, because we don't need much more human leadership. This is the way Christ wants it.

People will continue to thrust themselves on the throne of Christ in their thirst for power. We will continually be tempted to push humans on the throne of Christ in our lack of faith. Let's remain Jesus church by making sure He is our king.

We will now look through scripture to see some things said about leadership in the church. We will discuss some titles, descriptions, and positions in the church.

Titles & Descriptions:

When we look at churches around us, it seems like there are many titles in the church:

- Pastor
- Minister
- Priest

- Reverend
- Youth Minister
- Founder
- Father

It seems people really want titles. They want to be called by these titles. You call them this title in common conversation. Hello Reverend Tim. If I have a doctorate, I want to be called the Reverend Doctor. In fact, you don't even have to call me by my name. Just call me Reverend, father, or pastor. Whichever title I've achieved after all my hard work in the church.

- Is this right to be called by a title?
- Are there titles in the church?
- How many titles are there?

What is a Title?

- A specific designation given to a specific person filling a specific position or job
- MEANT TO ELEVATE SOMEONE'S AUTHORITY OR WORTH OVER OTHERS

Two Titles in the Church:

- Christ: Title for the one God has chosen to accomplish His plans and OT promises
 - Of course Jesus is given this title, because He is the one picked by God to do this.
 - Is anyone else given the title Christ? Of course not.
- Apostle: Title for those chosen to be filled with the Holy Spirit to be especially authoritative ambassadors for Christ
 - Read many passages and see that that title has more authority over other prophets.
 - To be given the title "apostle", you need to be specifically chosen by Jesus or the Holy Spirit (Mat 10:1-4, Acts 1:20, 13:2, 14:4, 14:14).
 - [You could argue that it might be a more generic term used to describe more people than just the chosen apostles, but that's not what this study is about. That would mean there are even less titles]
 - No one can decide for themselves that they should be called apostle.
 - If you are claiming the Holy Spirit has specially chosen you to be an apostle, I would be very hesitant to believe you until you manifested a true miracle of an apostle (II Cor 12:12).
 - God prophesied for one apostle to be replaced (Judas), but no mention of replacing any of the other apostles.
 - This is not a title anyone in the church today should be called.

WHY DID THESE HAVE TITLE? TO ELEVATE THEIR AUTHORITY. OF COURSE JESUS DESERVES THE ELEVATION. WHAT ABOUT THE APOSTLES? MEN? NOT THE MEN BUT THE HOLY SPIRIT AUTHORITY THAT THEY HAVE.

That means there are no titles for any christians today. What about people called Minister, Youth Minister, Pastor, Head Pastor? Aren't those titles?

What Jesus Says About Titles:

It shouldn't surprise us that there aren't any titles in the church. Look at what Jesus said in Mat 23:6-10:

- 6-7: the Pharisees wanted glory from men, and therefore loved the honor of being called by these distinguished titles
- 8: Don't be called Rabbi (teacher)
 - Teacher isn't a position of authority.
 - You can be a teacher, but don't be designated by this title as if you have glory or authority over another individual.
 - We are all brothers = equal
- 9: Don't be called father
 - This again is a title of authority over someone else.
 - Paul said he was a father, but that referred to his relationship with the Corinthians, not his authority over them
 - So why do priests in the catholic church insist on being called father as if they have authority over others? As if they're a special kind of christian?
- 10: Don't be called leaders
 - A title of special authority
 - I'm the Foreign County Program Leader! I'm the authority of that.
 - That kind of language doesn't exist.

Christ and apostle are given titles, because they represent a special authority those people had. We need to be leaders. We need to be teachers. Those are words that should be used to describe who we are and what we do, but they aren't titles of authority or words that designate us as being special.

So what about the title reverend? Which essentially means "revered one" deserving deep respect on account of age, personal ability, great learning, etc. There is no reverend here. Or anywhere.

Descriptions:

So every other word in the NT to describe leaders or positions in the church are really just descriptions of what those people do.

- Eph 4:11
 - Prophets: those who prophesy
 - Evangelists: those who evangelize
 - Teachers: those who teach
- Deacons, Minister: same word, servant

Positions:

So there aren't any titles in the church, but are there actual positions? What is a position?

- Specific responsibility or job a specific person has been chosen to fulfill. Other people will then accept that this person is in that position, and responsible to fulfill the task.

Head:

- Christ is head over the church (Eph 1:22-23)
 - That is a position only He is worthy and qualified to hold.
 - But just like the Israelites in I Sam 8, we want a physical king to rule us like the rest of the nations, and we turn to a man to be our leader.
 - The pope is a human being, put in the position as head of church. The Catholic church will say that Jesus is the head of their church, but their actions say otherwise. They look to this man as the inspired word of God, and accept what rules he makes, and worship him when he comes to our town.
 - They claim Peter was the first pope. Read the NT. Peter never elevated himself to this position as head, and he never accepted the worship that the pope does.

The Body of Christ: the church

Every christian is part of the body of Christ. We are one. Brothers. Equal. But in this body, Jesus has designated two positions of authority to lead the local congregations they are members of.

Elders:

- Acts 14:21-23, Tit 1:5: Certain men in each church are chosen to be in the position of elders. This is considered (by my definition) to be a position because certain people are chosen to fulfill this task, and only those picked men are in the position to accomplish that task

NOT A POSITION: Bible teacher. I am a Bible teacher here because I teach the Bible, but it's not a position. If it was, the Bible would say, appoint certain to be teachers in the church. Then only those appointed men could teach. Other christians wouldn't be in the position to teach. Now it makes sense for the church to pick men who are the most Biblically knowledgeable to teach most often, but it doesn't mean they are the only people allowed to teach. Bible teacher is not a position. Being an elder is.

- Is elder a title?
 - Acts 20:17, 28
 - Elders
 - Overseers (bishops)
 - To shepherd
 - I Pet 5:1-2

- Elders
- Practice oversight
- To shepherd
- Eph 4:11
 - Pastors (shepherds) same greek word as Acts and I Pet
- None of these words are NOT TITLES. They don't describe many different positions.
- They are all words that DESCRIBE ONE position.

Some Thoughts

- A church shouldn't have three elders and one shepherd. Or one Bishop and four pastors.
- A church shouldn't have one Head Pastor and two assistant pastors.
- All of those things are creating titles that don't exist, and creating positions that don't exist.
- Even when men are appointed as elders they don't need to walk around using that description as a title. Call me Elder Tim in casual conversation.
- My previous years, I've never been a Youth Minister. That title doesn't exist in the church. It isn't a position that exists in the church. I am a relatively young guy that saw the importance of teaching young people, so I decided to do that as much as I could among other things. But that's just because I saw it as my christian responsibility.

Pastor Vs. Elder?

Here's an interesting thought. The Bible uses four words to describe this position of eldership. Consider how many times the word is used:

- Pastor: once
- To shepherd (verb): twice
- Oversee/ oversight/ Bishop: four times
- Elders: eighteen times

The Bible uses the word elder most common. It only uses pastor once; however, in many churches around, they only know the word pastor and they use it all the time. They might not even know the word elder. It's not bad to use the word pastor instead of elder, but if when the world around us only uses that word, they're not really speaking Biblically, and it shows they might not really be familiar with the Bible texts about this subject. It shows that they've kind of just created positions and titles that make sense to them.

Responsibilities of Elders:

- Acts 20:28-30:
 - Guard the flock from false teachers

- I Pet 5:2-3:
 - Shepherd the flock; feed and guard with Bible teaching
 - Oversee: look over the church to see what dangers, problems, needs etc are there
 - Be an elder voluntarily, not by force
 - Don't be an elder for selfish gain
 - Don't be rulers over the flock
 - Lead by example

It's about taking care of the spiritual needs of the church you are a member in. It's about serving and helping. It's not about being a ruler, or having power over several churches, or receiving honor over the christians you are serving.

Qualifications of Elders (Tit 1:5-9):

- Blameless character: this is the most important. This is why the church puts them in this position of authority to lead the local church. Because they are going to do it well.
- Other criteria churches seem to ignore:
 - Old (elder)
 - Married to one wife
 - Have faithful kids
 - More than one qualified elder per church

People ask me if I'm a pastor. What they are asking is if I have a specific church where I alone am more or less in charge, like a team coach. I do basically all the teaching, and most of the churches activities go through me. Or they ask if I'm hoping to be a pastor. That means I'm teaching hoping that the church decides to put me in charge as the pastor over a church. They aren't concerned with the fact I'm young, single, and without kids. This idea of being a pastor is just unbiblical.

Deacons (Acts 6:1-6 Tim 2:8-13):

- This is the only other designated position in the church.
- It's qualified men who are chosen to be servants in the church responsible for various tasks.
- It doesn't even specify what tasks, so it amounts to whatever needs the church may have.

These Are NOT Positions in the Church:

- Minister:
 - Minister is not an appointed position in the church.
 - The word just means servant:
 - Acts 6:1 minister tables
 - Acts 6:4: minister the word

- Eph 3:7 is the same word
- If someone tells you they are a minister, tell them, “Congratulations. So am I”. If you are in fact serving the church that is.
- If they say they are a minister ordained by the church, tell them you didn’t wait to be chosen before you started serving
- Priest:
 - Jesus is our High Priest (Heb 9:11, 10:21)
 - He is our mediator between us and God
 - All saints are priests (Rev 1:6, 5:10)
 - No christian is ever elevated over another as a mediator to God.
 - Christ is the only mediator we need
 - If someone claims to be necessary mediator between you and God then as them how it feels to be Jesus.

Conclusion:

So what about our church? We are committed to obeying Jesus Christ as our King by following everything the Spirit has revealed in the Bible. Including church leadership. Church leadership is very minimal. There’s just not a lot going on. That’s because Christ is in charge.

Unfortunately here, were don’t have more than one man qualified to be in the position of elder. What’s the solution? We need to keep growing as individuals until we can fulfill these requirements. We are not going to change the rules and start making up different kinds of positions.