

#142 “The Lord Is My Shepherd”

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If you have grown up in the church, you are probably familiar with the terms clergy and laity. Clergy is generally considered to be anyone who is ordained or doing the work of the ministry, usually full-time in nature. The laity is made up of the "lay people" who are not formally trained in the ministry and who typically do not serve full time. Now why does this matter and why bring it up? Man-made terminology that is not in the Bible can lead to dangerous distortions of the Bible. The terms clergy and laity strike me as having a condescending tone to those who are not seen as members of the clergy. Furthermore, it can create a perception among the ordinary folks like the rest of us that we could never understand the Bible to the same extent that an ordained person could. These misimpressions could allow pride to seep in to the "powers that be" and for complacency and blind submission to take over among the non-clergy.

The New Testament is clear that all believers are part of the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). We are all brothers and sisters in Christ on the same level (Romans 8:17). The Bible doesn't use the terms clergy and laity at all; rather, it views the entirety of the church as one body with our head being Christ (Ephesians 4:15). Thus, we need to be careful how we view our leaders, and they need to be careful how they view themselves. If each has a proper understanding of the role they play and Who is the real Head of Operations, then the church can be at peace and avoid abuses of power or other maladies and destructive forms of church government. God has given pastors and elders to lead His church because they meet the Biblical qualifications for ministry, being able to teach the Bible and possessing impeccable character (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1). These deserve honor and respect (1 Timothy 5:17), but they are not to exploit the influence that comes from being in a position of leadership.

Matthew 23:1-12 is a rebuke from Christ to the religious leaders of the day. Let us reflect upon it and draw some conclusions for how leaders should operate and how followers should follow. Scripture says, "Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: 'The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.'" Jesus plainly and directly rebuked the Pharisees for not living out what they taught and for desiring to be seen for what they supposedly did religiously. They looked the part, played the part, and even had the titles and power to be

the part, but they weren't what they ought to have been. They had influence and power, and they misused it and abused it. They longed to be called Rabbi because they loved hearing the title before their names and because they loved the authority it implied over the people. They loved being called father whereas they ought only to have considered themselves as brothers. They were leaders and in so doing they did not sin; however, *their sin was that they loved being called leaders*. Those in positions of authority, pastors, elders, etc., must not love being called whatever title they love being called. Leading, shepherding, and teaching the church is not about a power trip or feeling above the other sheep. Even pastors are sheep themselves, brothers and joint heirs with the rest of the children of God. It is easy for there to become an abuse of power when church leaders love their titles and their power and positions. Jesus is the head of the church, not they (Colossians 1:18). They are merely called of our Master Servant to be lead servants, so to speak. The true leader is the one who understands that his call is to serve others. This humility leads to true exaltation from the only One Who can rightly give it.

In the church, we are all members of the same body, some having more prominent positions and callings than others. But none is superior, none is inferior, and none is to be neglected (1 Corinthians 12). This theology when properly understood and applied makes church government a lot less threatening, complex, and dysfunctional. After all, it is the Word of God that stands in judgment over all (1 Peter 1:25).

The question for those in leadership is this: Do you delight in being called Reverend, Doctor, Teacher, Bishop, Pastor, Elder, etc.? Is there a love for the title? There ought not to be. God is not impressed with titles earned, bestowed, or granted by men. True "ordination" is a blessing only God can give (Genesis 39:21). The rest of the sheep need to remember to keep studying the Word to make sure that the lead sheep is headed in the proper direction. The only way to know that for sure is if he is following the Shepherd. Whether we are the lead sheep or the caboose, when we can say with David, a mighty leader of old, "The Lord is my Shepherd," we will be in a good place.