

## APOSTLE PAUL OR PAUL, AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST

**Verse 1: 1 Cor. 1:1, “Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes...”**

**Paul:** Most Jews of Paul's day living outside of Palestine had two first names, one Jewish one Roman (cf. **Acts 13:9**). Paul's Jewish name was Saul. His Roman or Greek name, Paul, meant "little."<sup>1</sup> He, like the ancient King of Israel, was of the tribe of Benjamin (cf. Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5), grew up as a strong conservative Jew, a Pharisee, a persecutor of the church who was converted on his way to Damascus, finally becoming an apostle of Christ.

**Sosthenes:** His name appears only twice in the Bible. 1 Cor. 1:1 and Acts 18:12-17. This could be the synagogue ruler mentioned in Acts 18:17, who later got converted, or a different person, a good Christian known to the Corinthians, for Paul writes “our brother”.

- 1) **Paul affirms his calling as an apostle.** [Elsewhere "as called to be an apostle" only in Romans 1:1]
  - “Apostle”, in Grk. ἀπόστολος [apostolos], means “the one who is sent forth”.
  - Paul acknowledges his calling as an apostle, just like the other twelve apostles appointed by God and unlike the false apostles who were self-appointed.
  - Paul became an apostle, *not* by man’s will *or* by his own will *but* by God’s will who called him to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.
  - Paul doesn’t use the term “called” [κλητός] in an ordinary sense. This is an extraordinary “call”, just like God called prophets (Isa. 6:8-9; Jer. 1:4-5) and 12 apostles (Matt. 10:1-2ff), he called Paul [**Acts 26:12-18; 1 Cor. 15:3-9**]
  - So, in this unique sense of apostleship, nobody is an apostle today.

### 2) **Paul authenticates his ministry and writings as authoritative.**

- In acknowledging who he is as an apostle of Christ, Paul is not exhibiting himself as an authoritarian, but authenticates that his ministry and writings carry divine authority from God.
- Let’s approach Paul’s letters, knowing they are God’s inspired & authoritative word for us. [1Thess. 4:8]

**Note:** Paul did not use the term “apostle” as a title to his name, as some suppose. When necessary, he used it to identify his calling, mission and divine authority (**1 Cor. 9:2; cf. 1 Cor. 4:14-15**). By the way, does the Bible encourage honorific titles?

<sup>1</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/1-corinthians-1>

**What is a Title?: Cambridge Dictionary** defines it as “a word which is used before someone's name, stating their social rank, qualifications, position in an organization, sex, etc.” *[It could also be a description about a person's rank or office]*

**What is an Office? Cambridge Dictionary** defines it as “a position of authority and responsibility in a government or other organization.”

**Jonathan Went**, a Hebrew scholar, plainly wrote, "New Testament offices are not titles but ministries and functions."<sup>2</sup>

## WHY SHOULD WE NOT USE RELIGIOUS TITLES?

### 1) JESUS FORBADE HIS DISCIPLES TO USE RELIGIOUS TITLES.

**Scripture: Matthew 23: 6-12**

- The scribes and Pharisees of that time were called with religious, honorific titles, like rabbi, father, teacher. These were used in that day much as the title “doctor” today. They stressed so much on titles that they came with a maxim, "he who salutes his teacher, and does not call him Rabbi, provokes the divine Majesty to depart from Israel"
- The Lord Jesus forbade his disciples from following them. Instead, he said to the them, “you are all brothers.”

**Greg Ogden, a writer and church shepherd states:**

I mourn for the church because we seem to display so many of the characteristics that Jesus said, "Not so among you" (Mark 10:43). **Shameful arrogance and haughtiness have reached epidemic proportions among church leaders . . .** A direct implication of Jesus' servant stance was His obliteration of titles . . . We have refused to take Jesus' words at face value. Jesus' obvious intent was to remove any basis for "lording it over" others by dispensing with titles that give people an elevated place in the "pecking order." We all occupy the same level ground at the foot of the one Teacher, Jesus Christ. We are not "great ones" or "lords" . . . Finally, do not accept the designation "master" or "leader." No human can usurp the position of the head of the body, Christ. Our tendency seems always toward idolatry, to make someone larger than life. Never forget: Jesus alone is Lord.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/ls/ds/index.cgi?a=511>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gracegems.org/SERMONS2/reverends.htm>

## 2) THE APOSTLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT DID NOT USE RELIGIOUS TITLES TO THEIR NAMES.

1 **Cor. 1:1**, "Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus."

- Paul didn't say, "I am Apostle Paul", but Paul, "an apostle of Christ Jesus", which speaks about his responsible function, not an honorific title.
- Others didn't call him "Apostle Paul". Peter writes, "And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as **our beloved brother Paul** also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him" (2 Pet. 3:7).

**Note:** Peter and Paul at times called themselves as an apostle (particularly in their introductory words to the church), but this was not a common title by which they were addressed.

**NOTE:** In **Acts 15:6-7**, Apostles and Elders met to consider the question but it doesn't say Apostle Peter stood up and spoke, but just Peter. **See REVELATION 1:9**

**A Christian writer, Alexander Strauch, has stated:**

All Christians are saints, but there was no "Saint John." All are priests, but there was no "Priest Philip." Some are elders, but there was no "Elder Paul." Some are overseers, but there was no "Overseer John." Some are pastors, but there was not "Pastor James." Some are deacons, but there was no "Deacon Peter." Some are apostles, but there was no "Apostle Andrew." Rather than gaining honor through titles and position, New Testament believers received honor primarily for their service and work (Acts 15:26; Romans 16:1,2,4,12; 1 Corinthians 16:15,16,18; 2 Corinthians 8:18; Philippians 2:29,30; Colossians 1:7; 4:12,13; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:1). The early Christians referred to each other by personal names (Timothy, Paul, Titus), the terms "brother" or "sister," or by describing an individual's spiritual character or work: "Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5); "Barnabas, a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11:24); "Philip the evangelist" (Acts 21:8); "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3); "Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you" (Romans 16:6).<sup>4</sup>

### 3) Religious titles create clergy-laity distinction in the body of Christ.

[clergy - special call for ministry, hence special people]

The Lord Jesus forbade his disciples from following the model of scribes and Pharisees. Instead, he said to them, "you are all brothers." **[Matt. 23:8]**

**Authors of Hard Sayings of the Bible point out,** "Jesus said to his disciples to refuse all courtesy titles: you have one teacher, and you are all members of one family. Members of a family do not address one another by formal titles, *even if some of them indicate high distinction.*"

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.gracegems.org/SERMONS2/reverends.htm>

- Believers and leaders are all equal in the church of God; the difference is only in the roles. We should not use our roles to create divisions in the equality of brotherhood in the body of Christ.
- **Note:** "brother(s)"/"sister(s)" is used 139 times in Paul's thirteen letters.

**Darryl M. Erkel rightly points out:**

The Christian world, it seems, is consumed with exalted and honorific titles for those in positions of leadership or influence. Some pastors, in fact, are rather offended when their congregational members address them by their first name or simply as "brother."<sup>5</sup>

**Regarding the disposition of the biblical ministers, Frank A. Viola has written:**

In keeping with our Lord's command, biblical elders did not permit themselves to be addressed by honorific titles such as "Pastor Bill," "Elder Tom," "Bishop Jake," or "Reverend Sam" (Matthew 23:7-12). Such titles naturally elevate church leaders to a plane above the other brethren in the assembly. Thus, congregations and clergy alike are responsible for creating the current "Christian guruism" that is rampant in the church today wherein religious leaders are recast into spiritual celebrities and lauded with fan club status. By contrast, New Testament leaders were viewed as ordinary brethren and were just as approachable and accessible to the saints as any other believer in the church. For this reason, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13 exhorts the saints to intimately know their leaders (a near impossible mandate to fulfill in most contemporary churches where the pastor is trained to keep his distance from the people lest he lose his authority). In this regard, the common image of church leaders as "sacred men of the cloth" is utterly foreign to the biblical concept.<sup>6</sup>

**Summary:**

- 1) Paul acknowledges his calling as an apostle.
- 2) Paul authenticates his writing as authoritative.

**Apostle is not a title to his name but a function/ministry to which Paul was called. We should not entertain religious titles like Pastor, Elder, Bishop, Reverend...etc. Why?**

- 1) Jesus forbade his disciples to use religious titles.
- 2) The apostles in the New Testament did not use religious titles to their names; rather, they generally addressed one another as "brother".
- 3) Religious titles create clergy-laity distinction in the body of Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.gracegems.org/SERMONS2/reverends.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.gracegems.org/SERMONS2/reverends.htm>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) What do you know about Paul? Birth of place/family background/Jewish upbringing/conversion.
  
- 2) Write the meaning of “Paul” \_\_\_\_\_ and “Apostle” \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 3) How did Paul become an apostle of Christ Jesus?
  
- 4) What are the two reasons for Paul to call himself as an apostle?
  - I.
  
  - II.
  
- 5) What is the difference between saying “Apostle Paul” and “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus”?
  
- 6) What are the three reasons for why we should not use religious titles? [Support with Scriptures]
  - I.
  
  - II.
  
  - III.
  
- 7) What are the New Testament offices—functions/ministries or titles?
  
- 8) How did this message speak to your heart?
  
  
- 9) Do you have any questions or doubts? Write below.

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