

Don't Call Me REVEREND!

by E. G. Cook

(Birmingham, Alabama)

If a person insists on being true to the Scriptures in our day he can expect opposition and persecution on every hand. Old Satan who is the god of this world has set his standards for even Baptist preachers to conform to. And they must conform to those standards or else be ready to suffer the consequences. Our dear Lord has set up His standards for just about everything that pertains to the Christian's life and action. But the old devil has his substitutes for every one of them. And many of his substitutes seem to be so reasonable they actually sound logical. He is even capable of lulling us into a state of spiritual stupor to the extent we may promote his substitutes and still think we are in the strait and narrow way.

But when we fail to walk in accordance with the standards set forth in the Scriptures we are in open rebellion against God. In I Samuel 15, God told Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites along with all their possession, but Saul and his men thought it would be better for them to keep the choicest sheep and oxen to sacrifice to the Lord. Certainly that sounds logical. So this they did, but in verse 23, God called it rebellion. Any time we do something in a way different from the way the Scriptures say do it we are rebelling against God. And Deuteronomy 31:24-27 tells us that God's Word is a witness against those who rebel against Him. Saul learned to his sorrow that doing a thing a different way from what God said do it is rebellion. That is true regardless of how convenient or how logical our way seems to be.

With that in mind let us see what title God's Word gives to His preachers. A God-called Baptist preacher should be an example for others to follow. His life and actions should be in accord with the Scripture. His title

should be one that is Scriptural. And anyone who desires to do so can easily find what title is Scriptural for a preacher to wear. In Acts 14:23 we read, "And when they had ordained them elders in every church," and in Titus 1:5 Paul tells Titus to ordain elders in every city in Crete. We can safely assume that churches had been organized in every city on the island of Crete. Now Paul tells Titus to ordain elders in each of these cities.

We find bishops in the New Testament churches, but I do not know of any instance where a bishop was ordained. It would appear that when an elder was called by a church as her pastor he was called a bishop in order to distinguish him from other elders who might be in that church. But the only examples that I can find in the Bible concerning the ordaining of Baptist preachers (that was the only kind of preachers in that day) is that of elders. I have heard the title of *elder* objected to because that title is worn by Hardshells. But I have never heard the title of *reverend* objected to because it is worn by Holy Rollers.

In Isaiah 14:13-14 we find Lucifer all puffed up with pride as he tells us of the wonderful things he was going to do. And the climax of them all was "I will be like the Most High." As a result of this he became just the opposite of the Most High. Still he has never stopped trying to be like the Most High in all outward appearances. Only one time in all the Bible do we find the title *reverend*. In Psalm 111:9 we find it applied to God Himself. Old Satan cannot wear God's title himself, but if he can get some of the Lord's own preachers to wear it, he feels he has been a success after all. I most certainly do not mean to say that Baptist preachers who wear the title of *reverend* are intentionally trying to "be like the Most High." But if I were to assume that title for myself, I fully believe that is the way God would consider it.

So far as I am able to learn, the title *reverend* was never used in connection with a mere man for at least fourteen hundred years after all those elders were ordained in New Testament times. The word *reverend* in

Psalm 111:9 comes from the Hebrew word *YARE*. This word is used more than 300 times in the Scriptures, but only one time is it translated *reverend*. Other meanings of this word *YARE* are "dreadful, feared, terrible." The title *terrible* would seem to fit some preachers I know better than *reverend*.

According to the *Oxford Universal Dictionary* the title of *reverend* was first applied to persons of age and character in 1449. In 1485 the deans in the Catholic Church were given the title of "Very Reverend" and the bishops were called "Right Reverend." God's title was "Reverend," so in order for the deans and the bishops to be more highly honored than God, they used "Very Reverend" for the deans and "Right Reverend" for the bishops. It would seem that by this time man would have been satisfied just to leave God that far behind. But it seems there is no limit to man's carnal desires, not only to be like the most High, but to go beyond Him.

So in 1642 the Arch-Bishops began to be called "Most Right Reverend." Just how much more reverend can you be than that? Three years later in 1645 just exactly two hundred years before the Southern Baptist Convention was born, the title of *reverend* was applied to the clergy as a whole. The Catholic Church had already taken over the matter of saving people. They just dash a little water on a person's head, and there you have it. That is so much more comfortable than hanging on a tree for six hours by means of nails driven through the hands and feet. Then they had already taken over the matter of forgiving sins. If you have the money, I understand you can have the sins you have already committed forgiven, and even the ones you plan to commit next weekend. Surely they have the most convenient religion in all the world. Now that they had taken over God's function in the matter of saving people and forgiving their sins, it was a little thing for them to take over His title. All this will culminate in the man of sin in II Thessalonians 2:34. But if you notice in Revelation 19:20 our Lord does not even go to the trouble of killing that old rascal. He just casts him into the lake of fire alive.

There are two undeniable and indisputable facts found in the New Testament concerning the title for a preacher. One is that the title of *elder* is Scriptural. The other is that somebody has substituted another title for the one God gave to His preachers. So it seems to me that if Baptist preachers would investigate the origin of their title, they would prefer the one given to them in God's Word rather than one given to them by the Catholic Church. If Baptists would discard all the junk the Catholic Church has sold them through the centuries, they would find they had a lot more room for Bible truth.