



The Good News

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“It’s the Reverend!”

By Michael McCleary

There have been times when I have been speaking to someone, either on the phone or in person, and they have called me “Reverend”. There are times when I say something about it and other times when I just let it go, as everyone uses the title as a form of respect. But I am often reminded how common it is to observe men (and sometimes women) with the title of “Reverend” in front of their names, to the point that it causes confusion when you ask to not be called “Reverend” even though you are a minister of the Gospel.

Consider these definitions found on Dictionary.com regarding “*Reverend*”: a) “used as a title of respect applied or prefixed to the name of a member of the clergy or a religious order”, b) “worthy to be revered; entitled to reverence”. Consider how the title is most commonly used to address a “*member of the clergy*” and then notice its meaning: “*worthy to be revered*”. We want to consider what the Bible says regarding not just the title “Reverend”, but the concept behind it.

The most common passage I have heard to condemn having the title of “Reverend” is found in **Psalm 111:9**, in which the psalmist says in the KJV “...*holy and reverend is His name*”. This passage is often used to say that the term “*reverend*” is the name of God, and therefore man should not use it. However, the psalmist is not using the term “*reverend*” as a title, or even a noun. If he were, then the accompanied term “*holy*” must also be God’s name, and that cannot be true because the New Testament writers often refer to the saints as “*holy*”. Consider the NKJV rendering of the aforementioned text: “...*Holy and awesome is His name*.” According to this rendering, and appropriately so, the term “*awesome*” is obviously not a noun, but an adjective, describing the name of God: Jehovah. The actual term in the Hebrew is “*yare*”, which means “*to be afraid, stand in awe, fear*”. To quote Vine’s on the term, he says “*This is not simple fear, but reverence, whereby an individual recognizes the power and position of the individual revered* (in this case God) *and renders him proper respect*.” This statement by Vine’s reminds me

of the passage in **Heb. 12:28**, “...*let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*.” The fear of God leads to having reverence toward Him, obeying His Word.

There might be some who see this definition rendered by Vine’s and say that it is perfectly fine for men (and women) to take the title “Reverend” as they should be respected for the “honorable position” of being a minister. My problem with this thought comes when Vine’s definition reads “...*whereby an individual recognizes the power and position of the individual revered*...” I challenge anyone to find a passage in the NT that says we are to “revere” any man other than Christ. The term “revere” means “to regard with respect tinged with awe; venerate”. In **1 Tim. 5:17**, Paul tells Timothy that elders who rule well are worthy of “*double honor*”, but that term in the Greek (“*time*”) means to “*value or regard*”, not to “*revere*” or “*venerate*”. The woman is to “*phobeo*” her husband in **Eph. 5:33**, which means to have fear and respect, but is not the same as revere and venerate. All of the passages, save one, in which the Greek term “*entrepo*” (which means “*to venerate, respect, revere*”) is used are in reference to Christ (Matt. 21:37; Mk. 12:6; Lk. 20:13). The one time it is ascribed to someone else is in **Heb. 12:9** in which the Hebrew writer says that the Jews under the OT had “*entrepo*” towards their human fathers and paid respect, but that attitude should now be turned to God.

The bottom line is, **Psalm 111:9** says that God’s name is worthy of reverence and we can observe that man cannot boast the same of his name. No man is worthy of veneration and reverence except for Jesus Christ our Lord, no matter what “power and position” that man possesses. Those men (and women) who use the term to exalt themselves should be careful of taking such titles to themselves, especially since these titles imply that they are worthy of special attention. The only One worthy of special attention and veneration is Christ.