

Call No Man Rabbi And Other So Called Forbidden Titles

By Rabbi Moshe Yoseph Koniuchowsky

In the short space that I have, I will present for your consideration one common anti-Jewish teaching, that has been taught in most churches, while many innocent congregants often do not pick up on what is really being taught. You see my friend, the House of Israel (most non-Jewish believers) are often just as blind, as all those supposedly blind Jews! In Matthew 23:8, Yahshua supposedly commands His disciples that no one must be called or referred to by the title of "Rabbi". Yahshua supposedly claims to be our only Rabbi, therefore apparently forbidding His followers from using the term. Is this really true?

The rest of scripture totally contradicts this anti Jewish interpretation. Rabbi simply means teacher. Nothing more, nothing less. In Ephesians: 4:11, Yahshua tells Rav Shaul (Paul) that teachers or rabbis are Yahweh's personal gift to His body in order to teach, build up and encourage people to walk in truth. Why would Yahshua supposedly first forbid teachers or rabbis, and then boldly state that they are one of His fivefold office gifts to His people! Have you ever asked yourself that, or perhaps wondered about that? The Hebrew word for teacher is Rav or Rabbi in Ephesians 4.

In Matthew 23:9, Yahshua also supposedly forbids calling anyone on earth "father". Then John the beloved, one of the original 12 disciples, in First John 2:13-14 refers to mature spirit filled believers as "fathers" in and of the faith. Wasn't John paying attention to Yahshua's teachings? Was John sleeping instead of taking notes? Why would John who lived daily with Yahshua for three and a half years, suddenly turn around and disobey Yahshua, by referring to mature born again believers as "fathers" of the faith? Weren't you and I supposedly taught that both these titles are forbidden titles?

In Matthew 23:10, Yahshua also tells us to avoid using the title of leader. He supposedly claims that since He is our one true leader, that we should not have other leaders. Could this possibly be right? Wouldn't lack of leadership result in chaos within divine government? Messiah would then be ruling over an anarchistic body. Yahweh's word tells us that Yahweh is not the author of confusion in the *kehelo!* As a matter of fact, in Second Thessalonians 3:7 -9 and several other places, Rav Shaul (Paul) asks through apostolic authority to be followed. He asks and even demands to be followed as He walked with Yahweh (1 Cor.11: 1). He is asking others to accept his role as a leader. Rav Shaul further instructs Timothy and Titus to lead and appoint other leaders in other local assemblies.

Due to these seemingly irreconcilable contradictions, we must reread Matthew 23:8-10, asking Yahweh to shed pure gospel light on these verses. We must never make the mistake that so many make by taking a verse out of context in order to develop a pretext. Does Yahshua pick on three titles above all other titles and forbid their usage among his followers? No, he does not! The anti-Semites in the church would like you to think just that! The heart of Yahshua's discourse regarding the titles of rabbis, fathers and leaders, is that men must always resist the tendency to label themselves with man-made titles and with self awarded designations. Any title that we assign to ourselves, in order to be noticed and to lift our fragile egos with pride, is sinfully corrupt and wrong. Yahshua was not attacking Jews or rabbis. He Himself was a rabbi as was Rav Shaul (Paul). He is exposing the religious mental gymnastics that men play with each other, by granting, withholding, interchanging and exchanging meaningless self imposed titles, designed to feed the fleshly desire for acknowledgment!

When and if Yahweh calls you a rabbi, you are a rabbi! When Yahweh calls you a congregational father, you become a congregational father. When Yahweh calls you a leader of

His people you are a leader. If on the other hand, you or I grab any title (not limited to these three), that has not been divinely imparted by Almighty Yahweh Himself, then we are being hypocritical, vain and self-seeking. Yahshua does not merely single out three titles for prohibition in a world having a plethora of man made titles and declaring only these three to be inherently evil! He prefers rather to single out the sinful tendency in man to promote himself through public recognition, without divine sanction.

Considering these truths, we Messianic Nazarene Yisrael leaders are quite comfortable with our designation as rabbi's and teachers. Only a heart filled with incorrect doctrine and teaching through years of anti-Semitic indoctrination would fail to see and comprehend the above outlined truth from Yahweh's Word.

It is safe therefore to conclude that if Yahshua were addressing Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and other modern day groups, His message would remain unchanged. He would clearly condemn the usage of titles such as Reverend, Doctor, Pastor, Monsignor and others tossed around, unless the individual had been previously sealed separated and chosen by the *Ruach Hakodesh* (Holy Spirit), for a life of service. Yahshua obviously chose to make a point and simply used the title of rabbi, because He was addressing a Jewish audience, not because that title was inherently evil. He was not picking on three specific titles in a world full, of false titles. His own rabbinical discourse in no way teaches the intolerance of fellow rabbis (Matthew 23:1). He was condemning the practice of using titles, without His permission and His calling upon their lives.

Perhaps you and I will feel released from this religious legalism handed down to us through faulty church doctrine and unbiblical traditions. You and I are free in Yahshua to refer to the leaders of this great Messianic Nazarene Yisrael movement as rabbis without any hesitation, reluctance or guilt on our part. Perhaps if you have been referring to yourself as a Messianic Pastor, the time has arrived for you to realign your thinking with Yahweh's and become part of the new wine of biblical Messianic faith, the kind Yahshua died to establish. Since Yahshua was a Rabbi, it would stand to reason that any of His shepherds from both houses of Israel, would be honored to be called by the exact same title, that He Himself used freely.

I am Jewish and I am a Rabbi. When Yahshua "supposedly" prohibits men from using the title Rabbi, He is not picking on one or two titles out of a truckload of manmade titles and forbidding their usage. He is attacking an ungodly principle involving the mental gymnastics that religious people tend to play. Their giving, exchanging, purchasing, renting, or requesting of titles, from one another, is sinful behavior. Amongst those who represent Yahshua this practice is condemned, since that behavior is man's ordination practice and not the Father's. He states that we shouldn't call anyone Rabbi. Why? Because only He can anoint and issue a call for someone to be a Rabbi. If Yahshua were alive on the earth today, He would say to religious folks something like this: "Do not be called District Supervisor, do not be called District Superintendent of the Sunday school and do not be called Rev." Why? Because manmade titles and recognition puff up the flesh and are not necessarily a sign of Yahweh's calling. Remember, He was talking to Jews and therefore dealt with the title that they were most abusing. Were He to be talking to Baptists, He would say, "Do not be called Pastor." Why? Only He does the calling of Pastors. Not you or I! To think that Yahshua is picking on two or three titles, in a world full of manmade titles, is a highly anti-Semitic mind-set. It is unfortunately exactly what many churches would like you to believe and have in fact trained their people to believe.

To further prove my point, remember that Rabbi means teacher. Rav Shaul (Paul) lists the five fold office giftings in Ephesians 4 at the end of verse 11 and calls Rabbis a gift to Yahshua's body. Rabbi and teacher are synonymous terms. The risen Messiah gave Rabbis to the body. The church has a problem with the Hebrew word "Rabbi", not the concept of teacher. This is Judeo phobia at its ugliest.

Finally in First John 2:13-14, Yochanan calls mature believers in the faith, "fathers". Wasn't John paying attention to Yahshua? Didn't Yahshua warn us not to call any man father in Matt 23:9? Isn't John contradicting Yahshua? Or maybe John was in rebellion? No sir! We know that not to be the case. He correctly refers to mature believers as fathers of the faith, despite Yahshua's pronouncement. Therefore it is safe to say when you are a mature believer and are able to lead others as John said, you are a father of and in the faith. When you walk in the five-fold ministry of teaching, given by Yahshua to teach others, you are a Rabbi. Period! He isn't picking on two titles as evil over and above all the others! He merely is rebuking the principle of arrogance and pride in man's tendency to issue titles, without divine sanction and anointing!