

Fathering in the New Testament

Jesus referred to the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother" while at the same time telling us to call no man our father on earth. Both in the church and ultimately in the family, it is God who is our Father. He is the source, and the men He supplies to nourish and lead us are merely extensions of His Fatherhood.

This theme is carried out by Paul and John as the New Testament continues.

Paul speaks of many Old Testament saints as our *fathers*, even calling Abraham "the father of us all." Abraham's name in Hebrew has the word "father" embedded in it. Paul also refers to Moses' commandment to honor fathers while forever referring to God as His Father. He says that God sends His very Spirit into our hearts and has us cry out "Father" in that Spirit.

Though neither Paul or any New Testament writer is referred to as father by title, Paul makes it clear that *functioning* as a father is the norm for advanced Christian leadership. I Thessalonians 2:11, Paul dealt with the church of Thessalonica as a father deals with his children.

Elders were to be treated as fathers, I Timothy 5:1.

I Corinthians 4:15 says that not many in the church are truly fathers. But some are. This is not an ordained class, wearing clerical garb and special titles. These are men advanced in the faith. John wrote to them in his epistle, as well as to the "young men" in the faith, and the "little children." These three classes were obviously not the steps of a hierarchy, but descriptions of progress in the life of holiness.

As the fathers of the church are the most holy, it is their job to bring others along the pathway which they have come. Every true pastor should be a "father" but alas not too many are! Many pastors are administrators, speakers, aggressive promoters of the faith. But how many are "fathers"? Paul said, not many, in his day. Things do not seem to have changed.

Frightfully young men are set over congregations today. They may have a speaking gift, and it is assumed from that, that they know how to speak to individual hearts and nurture them along. Often this is not true. Men fresh out of Bible College are placed over elderships in local churches simply because of their charisma and good grades.

Charisma does not create character or the ability to father. The only thing that does that is many years walking hand in hand with Jesus. Not just *many years*, by the way. Old does not mean gold. But a man who has walked long and consistently with Jesus will know how to father others.

He will be such a holy man, that the temptation will be there to *call* him "father." At that point we have stepped over the line. We *call* no man father, but we recognize who the fathers are. They look like Jesus, because they have been with Him so long.

It is entertaining to meet a Mormon on the street and have him introduce himself to you as "Elder" so and so. 25 years old? Young enough to be my grandson. I can learn from anyone, but do I entrust my spiritual life to a man who has not had a chance to live that life yet?

Not that Mormonism is attractive on any front. Just sayin.'

More to the point is the honor we have given to the youth culture among us today. Why are we turning over leadership more and more to the young? Because they wrote and can lead a song? Because they are aggressive for Christ? That is good, but where are the fathers, the elders? Have they fallen away, gotten lazy, assumed it was time for them to sit down and let the youth take over? In many cases, it was not time!

And what will these mature men be doing now that they have "retired" from the leadership of the church? Do they not bear some of the responsibility for the fact that the church is looking more and more like the culture in which it finds itself, instead of leading that culture?

Where are the fathers? The real fathers. Where is the serious earnestness about bringing souls to Christ? Where are the level-headed decisions in board meetings? Where is the fatherly counsel that only a true father can impart?

Perhaps it is in every generation, not just my own, that the young tell the old to get out of the way, and the old do so. That "times are changing" and we need "fresh blood." Revolution. Twenty years later, many of them need to apologize, as the church takes its downward swing.

So many bad attitudes prevail toward those seniors who taught them the faith to begin with. Wrong assumptions are made. In some cases, wrong doctrines creep in. And the congregation has a feeling that somehow it has become a successful business, but not a loving family. Father is missing. His authority. His loving care.

No sense of submission is left in these situations. No accountability. People are free to do as they are "led", which means they do what is right in their own eyes, as the people of the times of the judges of Israel.

The church cannot be the church without the fathers. Bring them back. Not as advisers, but as leaders. Let the young stay in training. Their day will come. Let them assist, learn, work, get dirty. But give us the fathers in the lead.

We are an orphan planet. Fatherhood, whether human or Divine, is so sorely lacking. Missing dads. Alcoholic dads. Perverted dads. Unfaithful dads. Busy dads.

When Jesus shows up, He turns the hearts of all these fathers toward their children. When Jesus is manifested fully in your church, sir, the fathers will be leading it. They are the ones who have "known Him Who is from the beginning." They know how to lead people to the real Father.

The women, the youth. They will never be able to fill the need of a church for wise and loving fathering. An older male voice speaking into their hurts, a life that is ordained and given by God Himself to be God Himself in the life of the church, that is what they crave.

And when the world sees a church like that it will realize where they are lacking. As it is now, things in the church are looking more and more like the world. Fatherless. Pained. Hobbling along in weakness.

God, manifest yourself as Father to your people.