

Jesus and Fathering.

The subject of fathers and fathering is huge today. Some of the teachings are right on, some try to make the Scriptures say things that aren't there. What does Jesus say about it?

The Father-Son relationship is basic. Jesus modeled it for us as the perfect Son of the perfect Father, two Persons of the same Species, namely Divinity, God. Much can be learned about fathering when we see these interactions of Jesus and His Heavenly dad.

Perfect obedience. Perfect unity. Perfect submission. Perfect love. It's all there. But the question before us is, what did Jesus *say* about fathering on a purely human level? And what about His most drastic statement, "Call no man your father on earth, for one is your Father, Who is in Heaven." Matthew 23:9.

Let's look at that verse. Context demands one thing, consistent literal interpretation seems to point in a different direction.

Here He was warning his disciples about the ways of the Pharisees. They loved their titles, even as many church-men today. And women. How far we have strayed from His simplicity. Jesus said no titles. None. Of course we enter into offices clothed with His power, extending His very life. Shepherding, fathering, teaching, these are things that come from heaven when we are in proper relationship with the Father.

But the titles we must reject. All of them. No one is "reverend" but God. Give it up, pastor. And while you're at it, why not give up "pastor"? What?! Not the office, not the flow of God's presence into a needy people. But the demand to receive the title. Is anyone in the New Testament named with title first by someone else? If I am a teacher, must I be called "teacher Bob"? If I am a lowly servant of the church, must I be called "Deacon Sam" or "minister Suzy"? (Minister and deacon and servant are all the same in the Greek, by the way.)

Jesus desires that we be known by our service, not by our title. Give them up, men of God. We'll know who you are.

Which brings us easily to "father." Protestants have long derided the Roman Catholics for the use of this term by Roman clergy. They conveniently forget that in the same passage Jesus forbade *all* titles, not just "father."

*One* is your father. *One* is your teacher. *One* is your rabbi. *One* is your minister. Our Lord fills all these offices quite well, thank you. Give Him the glory by giving Him the title.

So, in context we agree that fathering here is talking about giving honor only to God as our source, our loving parent, the One who corrects and rewards and encourages and teaches us. Our Father is in heaven, and the church needs no other father. All fathering comes from Heaven by little bits and pieces through men of God on earth. (Makes more sense, doesn't it, to have males in charge at home and church?)

We have allowed this interpretation to filter down to the present age without contradiction. But could Jesus have been saying more than this? Could his directive refer to the family also?

Right away we are faced with the dilemma of "Honor your father and your mother." One of the ten commandments is at stake here. But then we recall some other commandments that needed dealing with: "You shall not kill" is internalized into, "Don't even hate..." "Adultery" translates into "lust", and so on. Let the giver of the commandments explain Himself.

All His disciples had left their fathers and mothers. They had laid down everything to follow Jesus. This was in fact His minimum requirement for discipleship, and still is. One who loves father or mother more than Jesus is not worthy of Jesus. His words. That puts the fourth commandment into proper perspective and even gives light to our original challenge: "Call no man your father on earth."

This is easy for some. In my case, there was no close bond at home in all my young years. It was easy to leave home, put it all behind me. I wanted to do that anyway. I have come to discover recently that that man was not my biological father to begin with. Oh so very easy to leave all.

But for many hearing these words, the strain is real. The conflict is obvious. Leave this man? Who gave me all? Who sacrificed so much for me? Leave him behind? Yes, if he is leaving Jesus behind, Dad must be history for you, disciple of Christ. Radical separation is the call. And the sooner the better.

For, if you look behind your dad's hands of giving and sacrifice, you will see the hands of God the Father in Heaven who was your real source. Call not this man your father. One is your Father. Whether you think in terms of a church or a family setting, one is your Father.

I was a small child in the 50's. Totally messed up home. At about age 8, someone, noticing my dejection, told me to try God. Didn't know what that meant, but I sure did miss my daddy at that time, and I figured if there was a God, He knew how to get my daddy back home. He had been gone for months. Hospitalized? Binge drinking? Not sure. But gone.

So I asked God that day, "God, if you're really there, I want to hear from my dad tonight!"

He's really there. I had never gotten a call from my Dad. He would just leave, then show up weeks or months later. But that night, that very special night, the phone rang (remember those old ringing phones?) and it was Dad. I still weep to picture the moment.

Dad. I cried then, too, and don't remember a thing He said, but I do remember thinking, "This was God. God did this. There is a God." It wasn't long after that, or was it the same night, that I figured out, my Real Dad is God. He's going to take care of me. Childish theology that left out the cross and rebirth, etc. But that was all taken care of later. And my Real Dad surely has taken care of me all these days

I don't have to call anyone Father on this earth.