

## Call No Man Your Father

In the course of instruction to his followers concerning the scribes and the Pharisees, who "say, and do not," Jesus gave the following prohibitions; "But be ye not called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Matthew 23:8-9).

What did Jesus mean by forbidding us to call any man "father"? What harm is there in it? Is this prohibition being violated by any today? These questions commonly come up in a study of this context, and they are important questions.

Jesus is not forbidding us to refer to our male earthly parent as our father. We are to honor our father and mother (Ephesians 6:2), and referring to him as "father" is one way to do just that. The Bible records many instances of such being done. It is not a violation of what Jesus said.

Jesus is forbidding reference to one as "father" in a religious sense as a religious title. This is commonly violated in society today. You hear it any time a Catholic priest is being addressed. It is often the case that an elderly person will be heard referring to one many

years their junior as "Father." This happens even when the persons are not acquainted. It is a religious title given for the purpose of honoring one for the office they hold, or the work they do. This is what the Lord was speaking of and forbidding.

Many seem to enjoy the pseudo-prestige that comes with being given a flattering title. Several years ago, while involved in a Bible study with a lady who was a member of the Baptist denomination, I arrived for a study shortly after her "pastor" had left. She informed me that he had left her home angry and upset. When I asked why, she told me that he insisted that she call him "Reverend," and she refused to do it. In Job 32:21-22 Elihu said, "Let me not, I pray thee, accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man. For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away." This needs to be the attitude of all of us because it is Biblical and, therefore, right. I will not refer to another person as "Reverend." Being a preacher, sometimes people will refer to me with such a title. I always correct them when it is possible. It is not right to use it nor to permit it being used to refer to us.

What is wrong with the religious titles? Well, first of all they are wrong because

Jesus forbid their use. He forbid the use of "Father" and "Master" specifically and, in principle, the use of other religious titles. This should be enough! What Jesus forbid we should leave alone simply on the grounds that he forbid it. Is he our Lord or not? Are we like little children that have to have a "WHY?" response to the voice of authority?

Religious titles separate people. The Bible does not teach a "Clergy/Laity" system such as is used in the denominational world. This system exists because men ignored what the Bible taught about church organization and government. The church does not have a priesthood, the church IS A PRIESTHOOD! The apostle Peter wrote; "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:5). In chapter 2:9, he referred to the church as a "royal priesthood." Christians serve as priests under our "high priest" who is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26). You never read of "Father Peter," or "Reverend Paul," or "Pastor James." Such titles are used to exalt people to positions in the religious realm that are not

authorized.

Religious titles show respect of persons. These titles are bestowed, or assumed, to exalt people in a certain work. It is respect of persons. Sometimes even a uniform, or certain style of dress, is worn to denote the men or women who have achieved this status. The Bible teaches us that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34, Colossians 3:25, Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9, 1 Peter 1:17) and that we, likewise, are not to be (James 2:1).

Some months back a student of ours from the Philippines asked about this very question (our course addresses the subject and she didn't agree, being Catholic). She argued that Timothy was Paul's "son" in a religious sense, therefore, Paul was Timothy's "father." This still doesn't prove that Timothy ever referred to Paul as "Father Paul." Furthermore, those who wear the title do not wear it only to their converts, they insist on it being used toward them by ALL people, even non-Catholics! She also referred to the term "Brother" being used as a title. It is sometimes so used, and it should not be. However, it is not always so used. Sometimes, perhaps most of the time, it is used simply to denote kinship in the faith. "Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty" (Hebrews 13:23).

Some will answer that great men have used and worn such titles. Our response to this is that "Great men are not always wise" (Job 32:8). Titles that exalt men and women in the religious realm are wrong and do a great amount of harm. Let us determine to never violate our Lord's prohibition in this matter. If men are offended, so be it. We would much rather offend men than to offend our Lord. ■

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