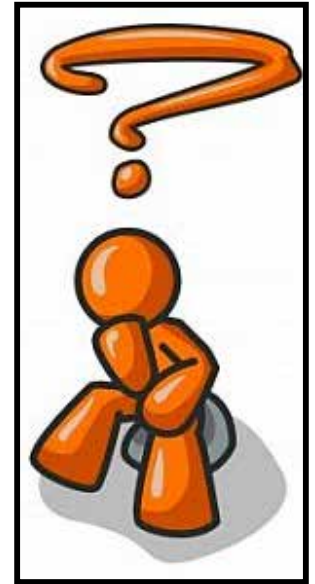


# What About ... “Do Not Call Anyone on Earth Your Father”?

BY DARAN ARMSTRONG

*But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted (Matthew 23:8-12).*

The verses above were spoken by Jesus Christ, our God and Savior. He was telling crowds of people and His disciples, if they wanted to lead, then they should serve others (unlike the glory-seeking scribes and Pharisees). This was spoken in the context of spiritual leadership. This seems pretty simple and straightforward when taken at face value, the author’s intended meaning. When Jesus said, “*Do not...*,” it sounds like He is telling His listeners not to do something. One might ask, “What part of *do not*, do you not understand?” When one of the members of the Godhead tells us not to do something (*Do not murder; do not commit adultery, do not bear false witness, do not steal* – Exodus 20), we should not do those things. Right?



This is not about using the word “father” or “teacher.” This has nothing to do with calling your biological father “father,” or your French teacher at the local high school “teacher.” There are many areas in the Bible where the term “father” is used in a non-spiritual leadership context. *When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth (Genesis 5:3).*

People have been calling priests “Father,” since at least the Reformation [taylor\_marshall.com/2008/11]. The Roman Catholic response is to cite Paul calling Timothy *my son* and John using *my little children*, as examples of Father/son spiritual relationships in the New Testament.

“By referring to these people as their spiritual sons and spiritual children, Peter, Paul, and John **imply** their own roles as spiritual fathers” [catholic.com].

This is the classic error of transporting the meaning of a word from one context to another. Notice how they conveniently leave out the fact that no one in the New Testament ever referred to any apostle as “Father.” Peter, Paul, and John are saying they brought the gospel to these people, they are not suggesting the people use “Father” as a title for spiritual leaders.

In the Bible, God, not man, chooses His leaders. God chose the patriarchs, the judges, and the prophets. It was the disobedient Northern Kingdom that chose its own leaders. When Korah decided Moses should share the leadership, Moses essentially said, “Well, let’s ask God about that.” God opened up the ground, Korah and his people fell in, God shut the earth up over them and essentially said, “Will there be any other questions today?” (Numbers 16). The scribes and pharisees were all about self-appointed leadership titles. Again, the point is God, not man, chooses His leaders.

Did God really mean it when he said, *Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy (Romans 13:13)*? Did Jesus really mean it when He said, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me (John 14:6, see also Acts 4:12 and 1 Timothy 2:5)*? Did Jesus really mean it when he said, *Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.*

Therefore, if **one** is your **teacher, Father, and leader**, and Jesus said not to give anyone on earth titles like that in a spiritual leadership context, I would have to say – **JESUS MEANT IT!**