

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Call No Man Your Father

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F Jesus said, “*And call no man your Father on the earth: for one is your Father, even He who is in heaven*” (Matthew 23:9). Jesus gave this instruction to “*the multitudes and His disciples*” (Matthew 22:1). It is one of those distinctive characteristics of Jesus’ followers which should never be seen.

What is Jesus prohibiting? May a true disciple of Christ call his dad, “Father”? Is Jesus condemning the practice of the Catholic Church calling the Pope or their priests “Holy Father” or “Father”?

The Catholics in defense of their practice are quick to point out that the term “*father*” was connected with “*priest*” when Micah was inviting a Levite to dwell with him in his house (Judges 17:10, 18:19). Elisha surely called Elijah his “*father*” (2 Kings 2:12). So, such a practice is not inherently evil, is it? In the New Testament, Stephen and Paul addressed their fellow Jews as “*Brethren and fathers*” (Acts 7:1, 22:1). Paul was not shy in claiming that the Corinthians did not have “*many fathers; for in Christ*

Jesus I begat you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15). Is Jesus demanding the Christians in Corinth to forbear calling Paul their spiritual “father”, yet believe this as fact in their heart?

Jesus adds two more prohibitions, but they are what true disciples are not to be called, in contrast to what they are not to call others: “*But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren...Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even the Christ*” (Matthew 23:8, 10). The contrast between not calling one “father” or not being called “Rabbi” or “master” is God (father) and Jesus Christ (Rabbi, master). Jesus is directing our minds upward to correct a prevailing spirit seen among the scribes and Pharisees of his day.

Jesus is condemning a lack of humility for he says, “*And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted*” (Matthew 23:12). For example, the salutation of “*Rabbi*” fed this desire to be seen of men and be set apart among one’s people. The solution was to look up and see that Jesus the Christ is

your “teacher”, and then with humility view yourself among others as, “all ye are brethren.”

While the Catholic Church recognizes that all Christians are “priests” (1 Peter 2:5), they make distinctions between “common priests” and “ministerial priests”. The religious titles of “Father” and “Holy Father” reflect this distinction. Their human reasoning even distinguishes between “ministerial priests” and “the Pope”. This practice reflecting the exaltation of men above others is exactly what Jesus condemns

Jesus was not condemning calling your forbearers in the flesh “father” as Stephen and Paul did; nor was it wrong for Paul to illustrate the begetting function of what he did through the gospel with what a father does through the flesh; but Paul refused worship from men. The apostles are never called “father” by other Christians. They looked up to God as the only one worthy of worship (Acts 14:14-15). With humility they viewed themselves spiritually as “brethren.”