



## Where have all the fathers gone?

I think the answer to this question will surprise, and perhaps upset you. I think too many of them have gone looking for sons to give them a sense of significance in their latter years. Ouch!

Listen to four passages:

1Corinthians 4:14 I write not these things to shame you, but as my **beloved sons** I warn you. 15 For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many **fathers**: for in Christ Jesus **I have begotten you** through the gospel.

1Timothy 1:18 This charge I commit unto thee, **son Timothy**, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;

Luke 1:17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children**, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Matthew 23:9 And **call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.**

How do we reconcile these passages with one another? Surely they must reconcile. Of course they do. Even though they look contradictory they really aren't.

Consider some application statements for each:

1 Corinthians 4:14,15 applied: It is one thing be an agent of the Spirit to bring the lost to salvation with the result of entering into a spiritual mentoring role and that of a father in the faith, but quite another to need significance through searching out insecure souls who want to be controlled, led about, manipulated, and used for the enhancement of some older brother who needs a greater sense of significance.

1 Timothy 1:18 applied: It is one thing to have God create a relationship with a younger believer in which significant ministry of love takes place bringing about a deep relationship of appreciation for wisdom and grace gathered over many years of faithful service to God, and quite another to need to be needed by sons in the kingdom who need to have fathers who can give them a sense of safety and stability in ways they never found with their own fathers and that God alone should be providing.

Luke 1:17 applied: It is one thing for the Spirit of God to turn the hearts of fathers to children of the faith, and quite another for older brothers to try to get young men to accept them as fathers because they've told themselves if they can end up their lives mentoring and controlling younger men they will be able to recover their lost sense of meaning through reproducing themselves through such relationships and live on through them and their exploits.

Matthew 23:9 applied: Better that we not seek fathers, and fathers not seek sons, and that

we older brothers seek to bless and encourage younger brothers, and then if younger men find older men to truly be “fathers in the faith,” they’ve found the real thing. The only hope for true fathering is where both sides of this equation are properly related to God the Father for security and significance.

Why am I writing this article you say? I’ll tell you why. Church history is more about control and significance development, than it is about Jesus. So often spiritual fathering becomes the avenue through which terribly unhealthy things take place, and have contributed to much of the Church’s woes. And, we are living in a day where scores of older men are leaving the formal ministry, disillusioned, burned out, used up, tired of being controlled and not appreciated, and yet still have a great felt need to end their lives with a sense of significance at having accomplished something lasting from their lives, and thus seeking to find younger, insecure men, who are struggling to figure out who they are and are correspondingly susceptible to being controlled by men.

And, we are living in a day where scores of young men are leaving Churches, in search of true fathers of the faith, who can guide them into true ministry, yet have themselves not sufficiently dealt with their need to be controlled and thus find themselves in unhealthy relationships of being controlled and manipulated.

This doesn’t always have to be older men with younger men. I’ve had younger men than myself attempt to get me to let them control my life, because they sensed certain vulnerabilities and insecurities in my life, and thought they could attach themselves to the insecurity in me and exploit it for their own purposes and needs, both to lead and to be provided for through my followership. In the end, it is a very sick thing, and something that we must avoid becoming trapped in.

Having just watched “The Last King of Scotland,” it reminded me of the men I’ve known in my life who needed to be seen as fathers, and needed to have sons who acknowledged them as such. These symbiotic and parasitic relationships ultimately become very hurtful, but in the most hurtful manifestation they draw their followers away from Jesus and to themselves.

Whether we’re talking about Idi Amin, Hugo Chavez, or the senior pastor you have been or are being controlled by, this tendency among men abounds, far more than is often acknowledged or admitted to.

It is just at this point that we must be the most careful. Why? **Because One is your Father, who is in heaven! Only one. No one else.** No one can take His place. Earthly spiritual fathers take the place of the heavenly Father when the earthly fathers need spiritual sons and the earthly sons need earthly spiritual fathers.

There is no need in the body of Christ for men to look for fathers to father them, and fathers to look for sons to be fathered. If fathers are truly needed then those best qualified to be such are those who completely resist the notion of being such to anyone, and those least likely to be led astray by fathers are those who aren’t looking for fathers but whom the Lord brings a father into their lives to father them.

I hope you are paying attention to what I’m sharing here, and not getting lost in the comparisons and explanations.

It is very unhealthy for anyone to look to anyone else for a place which the Father has

reserved for Himself alone. A true earthly spiritual father is one who is not seeking to be anyone's father, but is willing to be an extension of the father heart of God, if and only if it is clear that God is the one setting up that relationship. A true earthly spiritual son, is not an insecure young man, who so lacks sufficient faith in God that he is looking for some earthly father to tell him what he should be doing, in a place where he should be looking to God for this. A true earthly spiritual son is one who the Father brings an earthly spiritual father to, for a season of his life to speak to Him exclusively what the heavenly Father wants said.

Earthly fathers are only valid instruments when they are dead to themselves and their need to be needed, dead to their need to control, dead to their need for leaving a legacy, dead to their need to have followers follow them, and show them the respect they've always felt they deserved.

Earthly sons are only valid recipients of fathering when they are dead to themselves and their need to be coddled, dead to their need to be controlled, dead to their need for impressing a spiritual leader with how mighty that spiritual father is and what a great work they are doing, dead to their need to follow someone, and provide man a kind of respect that only God deserves.

If you don't think these concerns are valid, or you've never observed these kinds of parasitic relationships then you have either been living very close to God, very protected by God, or very blind to the reality of what goes on in so many religious environments. This stuff goes on all the time. Obviously it is the intent of these kinds of fathers to not leave the impression this is what they are about, and these kinds of followers don't know they are or they wouldn't be, but the reality is that both these kinds of leaders and these kinds of followers abound in the kingdom, and along with everything else God is reforming this is just another important area for the body of Christ to get delivered from.

Sometimes it is benign, and sometimes it is so sycophantish that the sickness of it is ugly beyond words. But, whether benign or malignant, it needs to be resisted and brought to an end, if Jesus' Church is to be Jesus' Church, and not the Church of man, by man, for man, and man's legacy.

God bless the older brothers who have no desire to be anyone's father. God bless the older brothers who could care less about controlling some insecure young man, in fact he would not allow such a thing to happen. God bless the older brothers whose hearts are just to be encouragers of younger brothers hearts, and leave the fathering to Father God. In the end, without their knowledge, they may have become an extension of the Father's fathering, but they could care less about such a position. They just desire to be a blessing.

God bless the younger brothers, who are wise enough to not seek out an earthly father to do for them what they should be looking to God alone for, and who, if it is God's will, find themselves receiving from the Father through an older and wiser brother.

Such relationships can be healthy and intensely valuable, when motives and needs are kept in check, and Jesus is truly the Head of His Church and the only Lord around. The story of Church history is that too many men have gone looking for spiritual fathers, because of their emaciated relationship with Father God, and have found themselves manipulated, controlled, religiousized, and brought into bondage by some older brother who had never dealt with his own desire to be worshiped.

Look, you're never going to find religious traditions gain a foothold if younger men refuse to be controlled by older father figures, who have usurped the Fatherhood of God. You're never going to find religious traditions get started where older brothers refuse to create anything or control anybody, but who seek only for relationship with Christ and entering into only those relationships He establishes for His purposes and His glory.

Church history is too much the story of control freaks. It's been the bane of Church life since the apostles all passed away. We who are young must learn to deal with our insecurities before God, and find in Him that which we need for strength, hope, and encouragement, and we who are older must learn to deal with our insecurities before God, and find in Him that which gives us significance apart from creating laws and rules to control the gullible and insecure for our own self glorifying reasons, otherwise Church history is doomed to repeat itself endlessly.

Jesus is the One we need, not earthly fathers or earthly sons. If Jesus hooks up older men with younger men, and younger men with older men, and the relationships are established "in Christ," and not in insecurities, then those relationships can be wonderful things. Paul was just this kind of father, and Timothy was just this kind of son. Paul didn't control, and Timothy was no sycophant. Both had divine functions in each others lives, and not at the expense of Jesus' Lordship. It was apparently a very healthy relationship, and one which God will at times establish when it becomes His will.

Older men don't need to be spiritual fathers to be significant, and younger men don't need spiritual fathers to be secure. Such roles are exceedingly unhealthy. But divine relationships, based in true spirituality can be great blessings.

May God lead us in our relationships, so the Church can move beyond the dysfunctions of unhealthy relationships that have spawned all kinds of sick and sad practices in Churches throughout history.