

Bible Question!
“Why does the church not use the title ‘Father’ for its leaders?”
DJ Curry

I was asked, “Why does the church not use the title ‘Father’ for its leaders? This is my response to this question.

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11 NKJV)

It is the desire for Christians to adhere as closely as possible to the words of the Father, as did Jesus (John 12:50). When we align ourselves with the Scripture; we avoid moving away from the doctrine of Christ and substituting it with our own. If we depart from the doctrine of Christ, then we do not have God (2 John 9). We have seen this even during the Restoration Movement, which celebrated the mindset of sticking to the Scriptures for all authority. You might remember this slogan: “Let us Do Bible Things in Bible Ways and Call Bible Things by Bible Names.” This slogan states a biblical truth that was not only followed by those during the Restoration but also in the early church, which we read of in our New Testaments.

Proper vocabulary is important in the Lord’s church. Corrupt vocabulary has been seen to lead to corrupt practices. Corrupt vocabulary grows thanks to an incomplete or flawed understanding of vocabulary in the Bible. So let the faithful study to show themselves approved to God. Corrupt vocabulary is worthless and can cause troublesome issues that give no edification, and we have been warned in the Scripture against corrupt communication (Eph 4:29).

As for using the title “Father,” there is nothing wrong in thinking of those men who have led you into the kingdom or shepherded you as being fathers through the gospel. This is the same sense that Paul puts it in. “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Cor 4:15). Christian leaders who lead well are as fathers who have begotten us through the gospel, like the apostle Paul. So, in a sense, they are father figures (1 Cor 4:14, 1 Tim 1:2, 2 Tim 1:2, Titus 1:4) but only by the authority “in Christ Jesus.” Paul is careful to say where the authority lies “in Christ Jesus” and “through the gospel,” as he, as a father, encourages the Corinthian brethren to repent.

What the Scripture teaches against is using “Father” as a religious title or one of authority, as seen in some denominations today. “Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven” (Matt 23:9). In this context, Jews were content with the authority or judgment of the rabbi, and Jesus is teaching not to use religious titles that give men undue authority. We see why Jesus warned us of this because we have seen this to be true in the history of denominations that have used “Father” titles of authority. In some religions, they were given the right to forgive sins, to contradict Scripture, etc. The correct usage of “Father” boils down to using the word in the correct sense. Corrupt vocabulary is seen to lead to corrupt practices. Let us abide in His word and not our own.