

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)

Volume 6, Issue 2

February 2008

Who's Your Daddy?

Art Nelson

The correct *spiritual* answer to the title question is “my heavenly Father”. However, there seems to be a number of people who are constructing relationships based on people as spiritual fathers. Recently, I have had comments or questions about this from several different directions so it would seem that this is becoming widespread among a certain segment of believers.

On the surface this seems like a simple question with a simple answer. After all, Jesus said: “**Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.**” (Matthew 23:9 NKJV) In light of these words of Jesus, why is this issue a problem to anyone? Because someone is perverting the plain teaching of the Scriptures just as Paul told the Galatians, “. . . but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. (Galatians 1:7 NKJV)

As I understand the teaching, God is raising up “spiritual fathers” to raise up His sons so that they mature. Accordingly, everyone should have a “spiritual father” to train them, discipline them and give direction. A person must learn to be a “son” before he can become a “father”. This relationship, once established, is permanent like a “family covenant”. Your “father” is always your “father”. Of course, that raises another problem when your “spiritual” father dies. What do you do then?

One of the teachers of this said in one of his recordings that a man's wife also needs to have a “spiritual father” and that her “spiritual father” could be different from her husband's “spiritual father”. Ideally, he said, it should be her husband; but, her husband may not be mature enough to function in this manner so she could choose someone else as her “spiritual father”. Does this idea find any justification in the Scriptures?

Before Going Further

Before I get into this any deeper, let me say that there are three maturity levels recognized in the Scriptures: little children, young men, and fathers. John addressed them in his first epistle. They have more to do with attitude and perspective than with function. We are to grow up spiritually and put away childish things. God develops in us the heart of the Father so that we can have His view, His perspective, on history and the purposes of God. However, there is no indication anywhere in the Scriptures that He expects any of us to take over or assume any of His responsibilities as “Father”. Based on what Jesus said about calling no person “father”, this

seems to be clear.

What about what Paul said to the Corinthians then? Didn't he say that he was their father?

1 Corinthians 4:15 NKJV (15) 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.

Yes, but not the way the term is being used in the “spiritual father teaching”. It takes a pro-creative act to be a father. We are born of incorruptible seed that comes from God through the Holy Spirit, which makes God the Father of our spirits. Paul planted the 'seed' of the gospel, which resulted in the new birth. Paul, himself, though, was more like a mid-wife bringing them to birth. Then, he acted more like a nanny, or a nursing mother, feeding them milk so that they would grow.

Since this is the only Scripture of this nature, it seems risky to build a full teaching around it. Of course, the fact that Paul called Timothy his son is added to this as part of the foundation of the “spiritual father teaching”; however, it would appear to me that Paul meant Timothy was his son in the same way that he meant that he was a father to the Corinthians—he birthed him in the gospel.

These Scriptures fall far short of the application made by the “spiritual father teachers”. We are now in subjection to our heavenly Father not our earthly fathers, not even the “spiritual” ones.

Hebrews 12:9 NKJV Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

The Roots of a Deception

Just like the Shepherding Movement of the past, the “spiritual father teaching” relies on several concepts that appear to have a scriptural basis but are twisted by human understanding and application. These would include a hierarchical form of “spiritual authority”, “covering”, the “set man” concept and similar things. The appeal of the flesh in these areas is that one gets to “be over” others in a position of respect and power. People come into these relationships because of the promise of maturing spiritually quickly and entering into ministry. The appeal is to deep ambition, that is, religious ambition, and to promotion into positions of ministry and authority.

The people most susceptible to this type of teaching are those who have an identity problem. They don't know who they are neither in the natural nor in the Lord. They need validation, which, according to the “spiritual father teaching”, they didn't receive from their earthly fathers so they need to come into a relationship with a spiritual father in order to be validated and affirmed as a son. The identity issue creates an atmosphere that produces dependency on the part of the 'son' and control on the part of the 'spiritual father'.

The Spirit of adoption, which we have received, cries “Abba, Father” but only to our Heavenly Father. Since Jesus said to call no man 'father' then certainly the Holy Spirit would not call a man 'father' either. Therefore, calling a man 'father' is not done by the Holy Spirit but by some other spirit.

The nature of this deception has been around for a long time. The Shepherding Movement called the ones in authority 'shepherds' or 'pastors' and they fulfilled the function of hearing from God on

your behalf and giving you guidance and direction. They also provided an obligatory opportunity to learn to 'serve' by serving your shepherd. After the Shepherding Movement fell apart, the Apostolic Movement picked up the concept by saying that the 'apostles' are actually in charge. They are the 'set men' (after all, according to them, God has set the apostles first in the church). As a result, God has made them responsible for you and you are to honor them as if they are the Lord, Himself, because to reject them or their words is to reject the Lord. The blessings you receive from God are based on how you treat or how you relate to the 'set man' that God has put in your life.

Now the “spiritual fathers movement” comes along and picks up the concept and tries to apply it in a less dictatorial manner. The 'set man' is not the apostle but is your 'spiritual father' and therefore cares for you like a father. He is not going to be heavy handed with you but will discipline you like a father, with the love of a father. While the words are softer the application is the same as the Shepherding or Apostolic groups. But, is any of this Scriptural?

Spiritual Covering

Let's begin by looking at some of the major components of this type of false teaching. One of the major themes is the idea of “spiritual covering”. It seems that we live in a big, bad spiritual environment and need to be protected from evil spiritual things by being under a “spiritual covering” which protects us from evil.

This idea comes from I Corinthians where Paul is speaking about 'head covering'. He begins by establishing a flow of “headship”.

1 Corinthians 11:3 NKJV (3) But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God.

The headship flow is straightforward: God is the head of Christ, who is the head of man, who is the head of woman.

Paul then begins to discuss 'covering' and its meaning. Because Eve was deceived and because the man is her head, she is to be 'covered'. This 'covering' is a symbol of her being in proper relationship with her husband, who is her head.

1 Corinthians 11:10 NKJV (10) For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on *her* head, because of the angels.

In this verse, “a symbol of” was added by the translators and is not in the original text. So, literally, “the woman ought to have authority on head, because of the angels”. So, the authority of her husband as her head protects the woman from the angels (the fallen ones, of course).

However, the “authority teachers” apply this same concept to the man and say that he needs to be under the “spiritual covering” of his pastor, his shepherd, his spiritual father, his apostle, his whatever—the set man. This is in direct contradiction to what Paul said in Corinthians.

For the man to be 'covered', that is, to have authority over him that is not Christ is to dishonor his head, who is Christ. There is no one who stands between the man and Christ. Christ is the head of the man and provides all that is needed just as the husband provides for the wife.

For anyone to place himself 'over' the man as a 'spiritual covering' is to dishonor Jesus, to slap Him in His face. And anyone who accepts a man as a 'spiritual covering' over him is dishonoring his head and placing himself in a place independent of Jesus.

The Set Man

This idea is based on the fact that when God does something in the earth He moves through men. These are ones who have been called by God and put into position to accomplish His purpose. They have been 'set' in place. This is a truth that is most evident in the Old Testament and less evident in the New. Why would there be a change?

Hebrews 1:1-2 NKJV God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, (2) has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

God now speaks to us by Jesus and Jesus has received of the Father the promise of the Spirit and has poured forth the Holy Spirit into us in the earth. Jesus now speaks to us and directs us by the Spirit. That is how He functions as the head of the man—there is a direct connection or relationship through the Spirit. Yes, He still speaks and directs through men; but, it is not just one person but many that the Lord might use to speak to us by the Spirit.

The primary Scripture that is used to justify the 'set man' concept is from chapter twelve of Corinthians, "*And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, . . .* (1 Corinthians 12:28 NKJV) The 'authority teachers' see in this a hierarchy of authority of those appointed or 'set' (KJV) in the church with the apostles as the top dog.

However, this is a poor interpretation of this Scripture. According to the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance, the word translated "*appointed*" means "*to place, lay, set*" and is translated as "laid" more than anything else in the Scriptures. It is a building term as in "lay a foundation". This Scripture is not talking about an order of authority but, instead, an order of function. To build anything some things have to be done before other things. In building a 'church' the function of an apostle is first to lay the foundation, then the prophet to finish the foundation, and then the teacher to begin the construction and then the other things follow after that. There is not even a hint of the type of structure that the 'authority' teachers try to apply to this Scripture.

Spiritual Authority

The natural understanding of spiritual authority is the binding force that brings all of this together into a deceptive teaching. We take the idea of spiritual authority and apply the world's way of operating in authority and say the result is God given 'spiritual authority'. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus made it very clear that the way that 'authority' operates in the world is not the way that it operates in His Kingdom.

Luke 22:25-27 NKJV And He said to them, "*The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'* (26) *But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.* (27) *For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.*

From the world's viewpoint, those in authority consider themselves to be benefactors to those who are being governed. From the world's viewpoint, the one who sits at the table is greater (in power and position) than the one who is serving the table. However, Jesus said this is not the way it is among His people and in His Kingdom. From the viewpoint of the Kingdom of God,

the one who governs (has spiritual authority) is the one who is serving. From the viewpoint of the Kingdom of God, the one who is serving the table is greater than the one sitting at the table.

Any hierarchical authority structure taken from the world system and applied to the people of God does not operate in the authority of Jesus, even if “christianized” names are used to describe the structure and function. It doesn't matter whether the top position says pastor, shepherd, apostle or spiritual father—the organizational chart is not from God but from men's carnal thinking processes.

It is the fulfillment of the spirit of Antichrist, which from the Greek means “in the place of” as well as “against”. Its goal is to get us to replace Christ, the Father, the Holy Spirit with a substitute.

Whenever I teach on this subject, someone always says, “yeah, but somebody has to be in charge or it is just chaos.” Well, somebody is in charge and His name is Jesus. He administrates all that He intends to do through the Holy Spirit, who leads us according to the will of the Lord. Our problem is that we don't trust the Lord nor the Holy Spirit to be able to do that. We want a man to tell us what God wants instead of God Himself, just like the children of Israel at Mount Sinai.

Exodus 20:18-19 NKJV Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood afar off. (19) Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

Someone else always says, “but Jesus gave us authority”. Well, exactly what authority did Jesus give us? When you search the Scriptures you will find that the authority that Jesus gave us was authority over all of the power of the enemy, including authority over demons and sickness (Luke 9:1; Luke 10:19). Jesus, Himself, has received “...**authority over all flesh...**” (John 17:2 NKJV). This Scriptures give no indication that this authority over people has ever been delegated to anyone else. Jesus maintains His authority over people and reserves it for Himself. So, we have received authority over the enemy but not over people. That is why:

Ephesians 6:12 NKJV For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

This type of authority over people is the same type of authority that the Lawless One, the Antichrist, will exercise. He will create a hierarchical structure with himself at the top and will direct all who are under him to fulfill his purpose.

Why cannot we see that Jesus is perfectly capable of ruling His people Himself.? He doesn't need our help, He has the Holy Spirit. Why do we have to continue to interpret authority as position rather than function? Why do we need a person to be between us and the Lord? Why are we afraid of an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord? Until we can answer these questions scripturally, we need to stay far away from any form of the “set man” or “spiritual father” teaching.

For further study: [Spiritual Authority](#)

© 2003-2008 by Art Nelson and [Lifestream Teaching Ministries](http://www.LifestreamTeaching.com)
Previous issues of Present Truth are on the website: www.Lifestreamteaching.com
For comments or questions contact Art Nelson at this address:
artnelson@lifestreamteaching.com

You have permission to copy and distribute these materials provided:
1) no changes are made to the content, and, 2) they are not sold.

Removal instructions:

This is a free newsletter, without cost or obligation.
If you have received this newsletter in error or if you desire not to receive
"Present Truth" teaching letter please reply with "remove" in the subject area.