

CONCERNING THE VERSE “CALL NO MAN FATHER”

It is true that Christ says, “Do not call anyone on earth your father” (Mt. 23:9), but this is not to be taken literally.

This is clearly evident from the following verses, where Christ Himself repeatedly uses the word “father” when referring to others:

- “Fill up, then, the measure of **your fathers’** guilt” (Mt. 23:32)
- “For in like manner **their fathers** did to the prophets” (Lk. 6:23)
- “For so did **their fathers** to the false prophets”(Lk. 26:26)
- “Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and **your fathers** killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers” (Lk. 11:47-48)
- “Then he cried and said, ‘**Father Abraham**, have mercy on me’ ... ‘I beg you therefore, **father**... ‘No, **father Abraham**...’” (Lk. 16: 24-30)
- “Moses therefore gave you circumcision, not that it is from Moses, but from **the fathers**” (Jn. 7:22)
- “**Your father Abraham** rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (Jn. 8:56)

If this verse (Mt. 23:9) voiced by Christ was meant to be taken literally, then certainly Christ’s Apostles would not have transgressed this commandment and would not have called anyone “father.” However, like Christ, they also used the word “father” numerous times throughout their epistles when addressing others.

And firstly, let us listen to the Apostle Peter:

- “the God of **our fathers**” (Acts 3:13)
- “For Moses truly said to **the fathers**” (Acts 3:22)
- “and of the covenant which God made with **our fathers**” (Acts 3:25)

- “The God of **our fathers**” (**Acts 5:30**)
- “which neither **our fathers** nor we were able to bear?” (**Acts 15:10**)

The Archdeacon Stephen addresses others thus:

- “Brethren **and fathers**, listen:” (**Acts 7:2**)
- “and **our fathers** found no sustenance” (**Acts 7:11**)

Saint Luke the Evangelist in the book of Acts uses the word “father”:

- “Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but **his father** was Greek” (**Acts 16:1**)
- “And it happened that **the father of Publius** lay sick with a fever” (**Acts 28:8**)

The Apostle Paul similarly addresses people with the word “father”:

- “The God of this people Israel chose **our fathers**” (**Acts 13:17**)
- “that promise which was made to **the fathers**” (**Acts 13:32**)
- “For David... was buried with **his fathers**” (**Acts 13:36**)
- “Brethren **and fathers**, hear my defense before you now” (**Acts 22:1**)
- “but also those who are of the faith of Abraham, **who is the father of us all**” (**Rom. 4:16**)
- “even by **our father** Isaac” (**Rom. 9:10**)
- “brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that **all our fathers** were under the cloud” (**1Cor. 10:1**)
- “And you, **fathers**, do not provoke your children to wrath” (**Eph. 6:4**)

- “**Fathers**, do not provoke your children” (**Col. 3:21**)
- “we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, **as a father** does his own children” (**1Th. 2:11**)
- “Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him **as a father**” (**1Tim. 5:1**)
- “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in the past **to the fathers**” (**Hb. 1:1**)
- “for what son is there whom **a father** does not chasten?” (**Hb. 12:7**)
- “furthermore, **we have had human fathers** who corrected us, and we paid them respect” (**Hb. 12:9**)

The Apostle Paul even calls himself a **spiritual father**: “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**” (**1Co. 4:15**). And elsewhere he says: “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, **who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord**” (**1Co. 4:17**)

Saint John the Evangelist addresses the faithful using the word “father”:

- “I write to **you fathers**, because you have known Him who is from the beginning” (**Jn. 2:13**)
- “I have written to **you fathers**, because you have known Him who is from the beginning” (**1Jn. 2:14**)

Saint James the brother of God:

- “Was not Abraham **our father** justified by works?” (**James 2:21**)

Therefore, it is clear that Christ is not forbidding us to use the word “father” itself; rather, He is teaching us to remain humble, not to have a high opinion of ourselves, not to seek distinction, and not to desire power and authority. He clarifies this in the immediately following verse: “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Mt. 23:11-12).