

## **Why do Catholics call priests "Father" when Jesus told us not to call anyone "Father"?**

"Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice. They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted'" (Matthew 23:1-12).

Jesus' instruction when viewed in the context of the entire passage shows that what he was forbidding was giving honor and recognition reserved for God alone to men. If taken literally, we would all be sinning by referring to our biological fathers as "father." This was not the intention of the Lord, rather it was to remind us that God is the One Father, Teacher, and Master of us all.

Jesus himself referred to Abraham as a "father" in one of his parables:

"But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead'" (Luke 16:29-31).

Even St. Paul referred to others as "fathers" in his letters, often referring to Abraham as the father of believers and even calling himself a "father in Christ Jesus" to those whom he wrote:

"I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning" (1 John 2:13-14)

"The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but also follow the example of the faith which our father Abraham had before he was circumcised" (Romans 4:11-12).

"That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants - not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations' - in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Romans 4:16-17).

"I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:14-15).

Shortly before his martyrdom, St. Stephen also spoke to the "fathers":

"And the high priest said, 'Is this so?' And Stephen said: 'Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran...'" (Acts 7:1-2).

This question highlights one of the most common errors people make when quoting the Bible to refute Catholic theology - taking a single sentence out of context and applying it as an absolute truth. The Bible can only be understood in its totality. We would not read one page of American history and attempt to deduce the entire course of our country's past, so why would we try to do that with the word of God?

Catholics call priests "father" in recognition of their role in our lives - to act as our fathers in Christ Jesus just as St. Paul did. But we never forget that God is still the One Father, Teacher, and Master of us all.

(Matthew 23:9; Luke 16:29-31; 1 John 2:13-14; Acts 7:1-2; Romans 4:11-12; Romans 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 4:14-15)[22]

Catholicism Frequently Asked Questions from the Transporter Information Services.

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