

**May 31, 2011**

## **Focusing On God Our Father**

***"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,  
that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"***  
(1 John 3:1a)

During our years of teaching at a retreat center we'd on occasion ask retreaters how often they'd heard a sermon *about the Father* and what it means to LOVE Him. In 10 years of asking that, only one person could recall that ever happening. Sadly, a sinister reason underlies why clergy seldom teach about our heavenly Father. Since many of you have been in the clergy-led religious system, we felt it worthwhile to talk about this since it may be negatively effecting your relationship with your heavenly Father.

If a pollster such as George Barna were to survey clergy today, he'd likely discover that the vast majority are shackled by *unresolved issues* with their own earthly fathers, especially *bitterness*. To become a clergy-person requires only knowledge acquisition at a seminary, not Christ-like character development. Young clergymen in particular can use their prowess behind the pulpit to make a name for themselves and experience a sense of an upper hand over their Dads. An unresolved issue with their own fathers forestalls sermon messages about the intimate relationship our heavenly Father wants with each follower of His Son Jesus.

Why is there such disparity between the mature biblical elder and today's career clergy person? So many "professional clergy" have little life experience in the world by which they could gain wisdom and compassion. Most were hired fresh out of seminary or shifted from congregation to congregation with little appreciation for the struggles those "in the world" encounter daily. Another factor relationally isolates most clergy: very few have experienced the rigors of military service. In fact, they avoid it like the plague! In the military someone has the right to *tell you what to do*. With unresolved bitterness toward their fathers, they avoid not only the military, but any situation where authority figures can confront them.

Instead, seminary training has placed clergy in a position of *spiritual superiority* in which they are recognized as sole authority, or chief among those on a "church council." We know from reports over the years that many "church board members" fear to correct or discipline their clergyman when he is in sin and unrepentant. They realize that the man's pious and caring personality comes across to most in the pew as dependable, good-natured, and easy to get along with — non-confrontational qualities which appeal especially to women, as well as to men who have issues with their own fathers. (And, few outside those on a board or council would be privy to the man's self-will or stubborn resistance to interference with his desires or plans for the congregation. Many of their wives do and divorce them. Clergy remain a leading occupation for divorce!)

Keep in mind that the Bible calls for **teaching and confronting** as our Father's means to convey His truths (see Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 2 Timothy 4:2). You've probably observed that confrontation and admonishment are missing in westernized Christendom today. "Loving one another" has been watered down to mean tolerance for anything EXCEPT biblical truth that's put into action. This liberal compromise with the world's ways is actually not surprising, since so many seminary professors who train and influence clergy have unresolved issues themselves with their own fathers. Since any form of corrective confrontation by *any* authority figure is regarded as something to avoid, seminaries teach clergy students to focus on **Greek rhetoric** as their primary means of ministry.

**Rhetoric is the art of eloquent speaking or writing. It relies on language that's designed to have a persuasive or impressive effect on an audience, but may also lack sincerity or life-changing content.**

A study a few years ago revealed that of every 10 adults in western Christendom, only 2 are men. In order for a man to grow in Christ's character and to put God's Word into practice, he needs a personal and meaningful relationship with another man who will both **role model** the way of the Lord and willingly **confront** him as necessary. These two relational responsibilities, role modeling and confrontation, are foundational to men becoming more like their Lord. Both Jesus and Paul used these in their pattern of discipling. How desperately are wise and mature servant-leaders who enact this way of life needed in faith families today!

If you're a wife who is struggling to respect your husband, know this: A man will seldom change unless he has in his life another man whom he respects and who is willing to confront him. Think about Paul's references to being a "soldier" for Christ. You know that a soldier is *sacrificing personal comfort and plans* for a cause larger than self, and that he is a person *under someone else's authority* (see Matthew 8:5-10). Neither of those features is popular in today's self-absorbed culture, whether "churched" or not!

While today's clergy depend on their Hellenist-revered rhetorical skill from the pulpit, Jesus relied on Hebraic **"direct experience"** in training His disciples: *He showed them what to do, then sent them out to do it.* And, in situations in which He couldn't use direct experience, our Lord exercised training through **"simulations,"** His use of pictorial images in His parables. We've used simulation for you through the characters of "Jack" and "Dee" in our *Kingdom Living Today* series to help you put into practice the biblical lessons these characters have learned as mature followers of Jesus. We also flesh out our writings with personal anecdotes to help you see some of the various ways our Lord has worked in our own journey in Him.

Recently we talked with several women here about the "Bible Study" held each week in our senior mobile home park. Their responses revealed a lifetime of complacent concession: "We make sure we always have a teacher who isn't 'controversial.' We don't want anything taught that will bring up our differences." "We sing only a few songs we've all agreed on so we don't have any hurt feelings." And when we asked, "What do

you *do* with what you've learned?", a blank expression said it all. We then asked these ladies about their *primary source* for Bible instruction. To a person each named one or another of the famous teachers on TV whose sermons overflow with polished rhetoric. When people are so enthralled with *how* the message is spoken, they lose sight of *putting it into action* (see James 1:22-25). Being *hearers* of the Word without doing what it says is a primary reason the *spiritual power* Jesus promises His own is so lacking throughout western Christendom (see Luke 24:49; John 14:12; 2Corinthians 10:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:5).

***"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power"***

(1 Corinthians 4:20)

In upcoming segments of our **Way of the Lord** video series we'll discuss how you can regain the spiritual power of the first followers of Jesus. Our Lord didn't end in the first century the power He promised His own through His Spirit in them. But so many today have chosen to disbelieve that He's still imbuing His family with power, or are living as though it doesn't exist. The foundation to living in His spiritual power begins with the quality of your relationship with your heavenly Father. Several more video segments will explore both this essential relationship as well as spiritual power in Christ.

Have you understood the difference between Hellenist rhetoric and the Hebraic representation of the King and His Kingdom? You are *not* here to persuade people through rhetoric to follow our Lord Jesus. He has called you to represent Him in *love and character* through *Word and deed* to the darkened world around you. Rather than reflecting the genuine love of Jesus, evangelism through rhetorical persuasion peddles salvation so those speaking can feel good about themselves—they've "done their duty." That sort of "self-righteous obligation" smacks of the tactics of both Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses, and leads no one into an authentic repentance and relationship with our Father.

This culture has become accustomed to Jesus being "marketed" through worldly "sales techniques." That makes it all the harder for you who are following Him to gain a hearing about your relationship with Him; people have become inoculated against the Gospel. But if we're to go on responding to the indwelling Spirit and His purpose for us in Christ, we *need* to speak up about how much we value our relationship with Him and our heavenly Father! Represent your values and goals as His servant and child with all the emotions you attach to them. It's *Who you value that you are representing*. As eager as you'd be to tell others about your spouse or family, be all the more willing to speak about your devotion to our Father and His Son, Jesus.

Eagerly pursue your *Abba* relationship that Father wants with you as His trusting and obedient child. It's a wonderful privilege given to you through the loving obedience of Jesus! *"And without trust it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to*

*Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who **earnestly seek Him**" (Hebrews 11:6). Out of your relationship with our Father flows the power that you need to do His will for His glory.*

**Mike & Sue**