

NOT MANY FATHERS

C. P. Schmitt

Shepherding and discipling are dynamic principles. When I first saw these twin truths, I sought diligently to implement them in the lives of the sheep we were responsible for. But some of the sheep balked. As they hesitated at the revelation, I pressed the issue of their submission even more rigorously, even to the fracturing of the Body. I later came to see that there is a higher way, there is a more productive way to shepherd and disciple lives.

If ever there was a man of spiritual authority it was Paul. He personally disciplined men (Acts 9:25, ASV), he built churches, he corrected whole bodies of believers. He *commanded* the Thessalonians (2 Thes. 3); he even threatened to come to Corinth "with a rod"! (1 Cor. 4:21). He built lives and ordered lives and structured lives and readjusted lives. Paul had immense practical spiritual authority in the lives of myriads of Christian believers.

We, in this generation, need to ask ourselves the pointed question: What exactly was the *key* to his spiritual authority? How was he able to command the lives of so many, yet without the disastrous side effects that we all too often have personally seen in the process of our own discipling and shepherding ministries?

The key to Paul's practical spiritual authority in the lives of men was simply that he was a *loving father*. He must have realized early in his ministry that he could not command true obedience nor wield true spiritual authority in lives where he had not first established a tender, personal, loving, and affectionate relationship. He was a father to many, though there were not many fathers even among the ministries of his time.

Paul was a father to Timothy and Titus. Timothy served with Paul in an apprentice capacity "like a child serving his father" (Phil. 2:22). Timothy was Paul's "much loved and

"for though ye have ten thousand instructors in Messiah, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Messiah Yeshua I have Begotten you through the gospel Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me" (1 Corinthians 4:15,16)

faithful son in the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:17). When Paul was absent from his beloved son Timothy, he longed for him and constantly remembered him before God (2 Tim. 1:3f). Paul had virtually poured his whole life into his young disciple Timothy. Titus likewise was "of one common being" with Paul (2 Cor. 8:23, literally). Little wonder that these disciple-teacher relationships worked! There is no mystery as to how Paul could have wielded such tremendous spiritual authority in the lives of young Titus and Timothy. His authority sprang from his fatherhood, not from a doctrine.

Paul was the father of the Corinthians. They had countless charismatic teachers, but they had only one father (1 Cor. 4:14-16). So great was the affection of Paul's father-heart towards them that he was willing "to spend and to be bankrupted" for their sakes (2 Cor. 12:15, literally). Could anyone question how Paul came to have such spiritual authority in these lives? He had won their hearts! He had conquered them in the love of God! He could command their obedience because he dearly loved them!

Discipleship is not a method; shepherding is not a new system of things; spiritual authority is not something we have because we read about it in a book. These all spring from

heart relationships. They work only in an atmosphere of love. Resistance can only be overcome, if at all, by love. If we try to hack it to pieces by our clever words and scriptural reasonings, it will only reappear doubly reinforced like the many heads of the mythical Greek Hydra.

Paul, who so authoritatively commanded and disciplined the Thessalonians in his second epistle to them, was first of all their pleading *father* and their nursing *mother* (1 Thes. 2:7, 11). He tenderly cared for them. He had "fond affection" for them, for they "had become so very dear" to him. They were his very "joy" and the "longing" of his heart" (1 Thes. 2:17-3:9). Paul had such a profound relationship of love with them - no wonder he could so readjust and command them.

Paul longed for the Philippians "with the affection of Christ Jesus" - literally, "with the bowels, the deep inner parts of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:8). No wonder he could so apostolically shepherd them and correct them.

Onesimus - the drop-out hippy slave-boy that Paul had found and won to the Lord Jesus - this Onesimus was Paul's "very heart" as he returned him to his owner, Philemon (Philemon 12). Little wonder that Paul could so order Onesimus' life. Who would not respond to such affection and love? Who could resist the impact of such profound personal relationship?

We live in an age of mechanization. Formulization has made its inroads even into this current move of God. Our heads are filled with lots of good biblical ideas on "how" to structure the Church of God. Brothers and sisters, may the love of God grip us in our innermost beings. May men arise who are truly *fathers* in Zion, and women who are truly *mothers* in Israel. These alone, like Paul, will effectively be able to disciple this new nation and shepherd the end-time flock of our God

Re. "Not Many Fathers" (C.P. Schmitt - GATES OF EDEN, May - June 2003)

With all due respects to the apostle Paul, including recognition of the tremendous value of his inspiration, devotion, instruction, zeal, and self-sacrifice, I would nevertheless suggest that we take vigorous principled exception to his claim to be the one father of the early Corinthian believers (I Corinthians 4:14-16). By his own admission. Paul was born "out of due time" (I Corinthians 15:8) into the true Messianic faith: had he been born "in due time" with the twelve disciples he would have been privileged to hear our Messiah categorically instruct His followers to "call NO man your father upon the earth: for ONE is your Father, which is in Heaven." and remind them that "ONE is your Master, even the Messiah, and ALL ye are brethren" (Matthew 23:8.9). The words NO, ONE, and ALL are not difficult to understand.

Not only do "father" and "author" sound the same.... but they also mean the same! Hence, to call a man your "father" is to acknowledge him as your "author" (your f-author). and thus simultaneously to acknowledge his AUTHOR-ity over you! Our Messiah's instruction is not intended to arbitrarily deprive us of a salutation of endearment for our spiritual elders, but rather is intended to protect us from those men who may represent themselves as our spiritual "fathers," gain from us acceptance of their claim through our use of the title "father" (f-author) with reference to themselves, and then claim a Heaven-granted right to exercise AUTHOR-ity over us! "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister: and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:25-27).

Ironically, if anyone could lay claim to greatness through a track record of ministry and service....it would be the apostle Paul. Were he here today, however, with the benefit of the gospel records which we possess. I suspect he would be busy editing and rewording - on the double! - a certain passage in I Corinthians 4, particularly as he became aware of the use made of his statement by the institution which embodies the mystery of iniquity/lawlessness, to construct the very foundation of its claim to have legitimate authority over all men to enforce its Torah-defying man-made doctrines on pain of loss of eternal life!

During Catholic World Youth Days here in Toronto last summer (2002) I was on the street distributing literature and had opportunity to discuss many issues with zealous supporters of the Catholic persuasion. I asked one gentleman to explain how his church could present its members with a man declared to be THE pre-eminent holy father (the pope, or papa), plus a complete hierarchy of other men also declared to be holy fathers.... when the Messiah whom they worship has emphatically instructed His followers to "call NO man your father upon the earth; for ONE is your Father, which is in Heaven" (Matthew 23:9). His answer - "We are well aware of the Messiah's instruction, but we notice Paul's claim to be the one 'father of the Corinthian believers, and thus we feel we have the right to use the title 'father' for our spiritual leaders."

May we all come to recognize that we are called to be followers of our Messiah, and followers of Paul only insofar as he was a follower of our Messiah.

Sincerely, your BROTHER under our ONE HEAVENLY FATHER,
Ron Buhler

"Salvation is of the Yahudim (Jews).... We know what we worship" (John 4:22)