

The Culture of the Kingdom Spiritual Families

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Sam Soleyn
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If the body of Christ is not institutional but organic, how does it actually function then? We've been so used to institutional functioning that it's difficult to conceive of any other form of functionality. The box of our thinking - with respect to where the church operates - is that it's institutional; men derive their authority from the institution. This is the model that the Romans introduced in the 4th century AD when Constantine gave the church power and instituted the church of a state. Then it didn't matter what the relationship was between the leaders and the people because the people were compelled by the state to observe certain norms. And in fact when you have a church that is the church of the peoples culture, then you're automatically in it just by being born into it and so the institutions supplant the organic nature of the church and the result is: people feel no connection to the leadership but they're members.

And a strange and interesting culture develops as a result of that disconnect. People will speak of, on one hand, of their being members of a particular church, on the other hand, they'll speak disparagingly about the leaders of that church. We have that in full cry in this particular election season in America where the big question people have for one of the candidates is, "Since your pastor was so obviously a reprobate, why did you stay in the church?" And the answer that comes right back from that particular constituency is, "Look at what the priests do in the Roman church or what the bishops do in the Episcopal church, why are you still a member, why do you not quit?" And it highlights the point, that in an institutional church there is no assumed relationship between the leadership and the people; the people have a relationship to the organization, to the institution, and the institution determines who the leaders are by the particular polity that delivers that answer. And so the people have little connection to the leadership. And even where that's not so obviously the case, I've had any number of people say to me over the years, "Well my pastor is too busy to talk to me because he has all these duties associated with the church." And my question is, "What do you mean 'Duties associated with the church'? Is the church something other than the people?" And of course the truth is that the church is something other than the people, it's the positioning of an institution in the consciousness of a particular local constituency. Biblically, the model of the patriarch was the model of a father, in fact it is one of the meanings of the word 'father'.

We ended the last broadcast with explaining, in brief, why on one hand Jesus said, "Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father who is in heaven," and on the other hand Paul said to the Corinthians in I Corinthians 4, "I became your father by this gospel." I explained that there were nine different meanings to the word 'father' in the Scriptures. The most intrusive meaning is the word 'progenitor', it means "the one from whom your origin is derived." But there are other meanings such as (and I'll just illustrate a particular meaning) such as one saying, "So and so is the father of this business," or "he's the father of modern science." Well the two things that are being spoken of, the father and the thing he fathered, are conceptually very different beings or very different entities; one is a human being, the other is an idea or a concept. So Paul was not the actual biological father of the Corinthians, he was not their progenitor in that sense. So when Jesus said, "Call no man on the earth your progenitor," what He's saying is there's no one on the earth with whom you have a relationship that takes precedent over your relationship to God the Father because the gospel is how God created, created, we had our very being from Him; we live in Him, we move in Him, and we have our very being in Him, the Scriptures say.

So there can be no other relationship more intrusive into our beings than the relationship that we may have with God as our Father. Paul is saying, when he said, "I became your father," is not that, for obvious reasons; he didn't give birth to them in any way like that; he's not their creator, as in the case of God, doesn't give birth to them. But what he did do is he was the father of the faith to which they had come, they now believed in Jesus Christ through his gospel, as he himself would say it. He not only preached the gospel to them, he modeled what the gospel meant to them. So everything that they would become visa vie the gospel - namely they would become sons of God, they would become believers in Jesus Christ and they'd grow from infancy to maturity - Paul would be the indispensable party to that entire process, his stamp on them was undeniable. Therefore he had a right to correct them because part of his fathering them in the gospel was to model the gospel, another part was to teach them what they were watching him do and yet another was to encourage them to follow. Even yet another facet of this same concept was to correct them or rebuke them when they would go astray or would miss the mark. All these things are among the things that a father would do, even if you didn't give birth to their being.

So God appoints spiritual fathers in the lives of His children to bring them to maturity, to model the gospel, to instruct them in righteousness, to correct them, to approve of them, to encourage them; all these things. These things are done by human instrumentalities, not from the remote regions of heaven; they're actually done 'hands on' by those whom God appoints. So Paul said, "I became your father by the gospel." This is a far cry from the way people pastor today. Today pastoring is a remote undertaking. But in Scripture, pastoring is descriptive of one of the functions of a father; it's one of the things a father

does. So Paul then is the father of the Corinthians and he has therefore a spiritual family over which he has the right to rule and to exert influence that they might become mature. And the sign of their maturity would become their ability to function alongside other believers under the headship of Jesus Christ.

Well how exactly does this spiritual fathering work? Well, Paul refers to Timothy as his son in the gospel. Jesus commissioned us to go and make disciples of the nations. Discipling people begins with receiving those whom God gives you. Jesus himself being the model - the pattern Son who models discipleship for us - took on no one that the Father didn't give to Him. And He would give an account to the Father at the end of His ministry for those quote, "Whom the Father gave Me." So He would say, "Father, all those whom You have given to Me I have kept." So the first element of spiritual fatherhood - the first element, the step that you cannot overlook and you cannot ignore, if you do this you're off on the wrong track - is God assigning who the father is and who the sons are. That's the first, basic truth that forms the alternative to religious institutions.

In a religious institution, you throw out a net - and that net is a net of ideas, intellectual constructs - and whoever is caught by that net, you draw into the institution. So they become yours by mental agreement. Now here's the problem with that: when they come to mental disagreement, they will become as readily the sons of the new persons whose ideas they've adopted. That would certainly explain why the church moves from one shoal to another; from one congregation to another. You take growth today - in cities, in churches - there's no actual growth in numbers. In fact, in the majority of cases there is an overall decline in cities and we know that overall in nations - even in nations such as the United States - there are dramatic declines in the numbers of people going to church overall, even though individual congregations may experience spikes in membership. If the overall trend is downward, from where do those come who spike the membership of a particular group? Well they come from the groups that they used to belong to and often so many move when there are troubles in these groups that the groups disband and the reconfiguration occurs in bigger and bigger groups but smaller and smaller numbers of these groups.

This isn't about spiritual fathering because... and in fact the church today in America, generally speaking, cannot endure the intrusiveness of Paul. For he would say to the Corinthians, I Corinthians 4, "Shall I come to you with gentleness or shall I come to you with a whip?" The preacher who says that today, "Shall I come to you with a whip?" why, the congregation is likely to be non-existent when he does come with a whip. That's because the reality is - the realities in spite of all the fluff, in spite of all the noise to the contrary - the reality is, the current church system produces and maintains orphans, fatherless people. And you cannot discipline an orphan because an orphan is someone who already knows the rejection of a father; that's why they're orphans, that's how they

became orphans.

If you cannot discipline a person, you can never bring them to maturity. They may have positions that signify authority but if you put any weight on them, they'll go and find another position where they're more comfortable. Which means coddled in their insecurities rather than corrected and brought to maturity. Any relationship that cannot sustain correction, is a relationship in which the persons will remain immature. Now the problem with being immature is that God will not entrust the responsibilities of the kingdom to any immature person.

So fathering is not some how suddenly the loss of your freedom; fathering is your right - your God given right - to be fathered that you may come to maturity. In fact, I would warrant you this: anyone who remains an orphan, anyone who is unfathered, can never have an appropriate vision of who God the Father is. Because I promise you, God the Father will correct you. As any true father, God the Father will correct you and believe me, you don't want for God the Father to correct you directly, you want Him to correct you through an earthly father because when He chooses to correct you Himself it is because your problems are fully grown and there are no alternatives except to arrest your behavior by confrontation. That is not good news. You want God the Father to whisper correction to you through, by the face, of someone who has a fathers heart for you.

Anyone who remains undisciplined in the house of God remains an orphan and his attitude and his character remain distant from the expression of the attitude and the character of God himself. Why? Because an orphan hoards. An orphans supply, an orphans understanding of his supply, is that he is the only basis of his own well being. Whereas a son understands - a son with a father who has a household that is at his disposal - understands that all of the assets of that household are available to that son in the pursuit of the sons maturity.

So the son who is fathered understands that he's to grown up to become a ruler, to have authority, to administrate for the good of those under his rule. One who is unfathered - meaning no one raises him - knows only the constant companion of loneliness and the gnawing fears of insecurity and insufficiency. So even when he has more than he needs, he will still hoard because he has no ability to depend upon anyone but himself. God cannot entrust the kingdom and it's resources to a hoarder because he'll view it all as a gift to him personally and not a gift for distribution. So simply put, the unfathered believer will remain in infancy for the duration of his life and will only know God's supply of his daily bread, he will never know the joy of distributing the grace of God as a mature son would. Look around and tell me, in the church culture today are the people of God fathered or are they unfathered? Are they orphans in their thinking or are they princes in their thinking? Do they administrate the grace of God with freedom and liberality or do they parcel out resources always in the hope of keeping people obligated

to them?

You see, when you don't know what you're missing, it's easy to think that you have all that there is. When you ask these questions of the church culture, you routinely get the answers, "This is all there is." The fact is, there is so much more and this is the time when God is revealing such things in the earth. And as God does this, those deceptions, those crafty deceptions of the enemy perpetrated through the agencies of familiar faces and through the familiar means of institutions, cannot hold in light of the truth that has come into the earth. Paul was the father of the Corinthians in the sense that he accepted the responsibility of disciplining them and raising them up in the things of God. He would say that to them in chapter 12 of the second letter. In chapter 2 of the first letter, he chastises them for remaining infants when he had invested so much of himself in bringing them to maturity.

Now how does this actually work then? If it's not institutional, if it's relational, how does it actually work? For example, what happens when you are not old enough to be a father in the Lord but you have responsibilities? How does that work? The example would be a young man who is married, has maybe one or two young children. Clearly, at that stage of his life he's not capable of being both the husband to his wife and the spiritual father to her as well; he cannot do both. Well we know for sure he is the husband and we know for sure he's the head, the head of the household. What if there is a disagreement between the husband and the wife and the disagreement cannot be resolved because they are at polar opposites and the issue is important, so it cannot just go away? How do they actually resolve the issue? The answer is that both of them – the husband and the wife – should have a spiritual father and ideally that spiritual father should be the same person. In that case, an appeal should be taken by (if the wife is the aggrieved party) the wife should take the appeal to her spiritual father who will convene a meeting in which he will examine the issue from both of their points of view. And even if the spiritual father is also the natural father of her husband (this is just an example, not an order to establish things this way) but even if that's the case...or vica versa, even if the spiritual father of both the husband and the wife is the wife's father, in that case the man should be – because he's the spiritual father of both of them, regardless of the fact that one of them may be also his natural child - when he hears the case, he will be hearing the case between two spiritual sons. So they come to him to judge the matter on the basis of spiritual equality, which is greater than natural family.

So if for example my son - who is my natural son and my spiritual son - has a dispute with his wife - who is part of my spiritual household - if she brings the dispute to me for judgment, the fact that he is my natural son does not interfere with the judgment that I will make between two spiritual sons. And if she happens to be right, then my judgment and my instruction will reflect both that she's right and how they should now go about to remedy the issue. Now what I'm teaching him in the process (that is, what I'm teaching

my natural son in the process) is how to become capable of being a spiritual father himself in the fullness of time. So in the norm he rules his household according to the tenants of Christ, if he misses the mark, if he sins, if his judgments are impaired for one reason or another, those under his authority may bring an appeal to his spiritual father. He is a natural father, he is a biological father, if you like to that family he is paternal. But to that same family I am patriarchal, a different kind of father; I am the father above the father, not in the sense of control but in the sense of authority. God establishes authority in the kingdom. You see, all authority in the kingdom goes back to Christ and the order of sent ones in the kingdom teaches all that authority that belongs to Christ may be delegated for the benefit of those who are subject to that authority.

So when a man has his own household, he may not at the same time be able to be patriarchal to that household but someone is patriarchal to him. So when they're multiple families, and if you like, when there are multiple generations under your spiritual authority, you have a spiritual household; you have a spiritual family. But that spiritual family is for the purpose of raising them to maturity. When and as they come to maturity, when that progression occurs, there comes to be no doubt in anyones mind that there is only one Body. And the patriarchs now should not divide the body of Christ among themselves, each one should be teaching those under his rule that there's only one Body and to reverence the body of Christ and all of it's members. Then we will have strength in the body of Christ, then we will be able to build multi-generationally and not have to start over in every generation as we do now because we're ruled over by orphans, by men who are in positions of authority who have no vision of the kingdom beyond their own sphere of influence; they're willing to divide the Body for their own benefit. This must come to a halt. "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you always," that fellowship is the way that the body of Christ is arranged by the Holy Spirit and we should endeavor to keep that fellowship, we should endeavor to remain assembled in this fashion against the day when the Body will be fully assembled.

I'm Sam Soleyn, God bless you. We'll continue our discussion of the culture of the kingdom. Until the next time, bye bye.