

Matthew 23:8-10

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Jesus forbids His disciples from challenging God's position as Rabbi and Leader. And He forbids them to follow anyone other than God the Father. He does these things while alluding to the Trinity.

There are no apparent parallel accounts for this teaching in the Gospels.

Jesus just explained three aspects about the Bad Religion and fake righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. They crush men beneath their mountain of moral rules in order to elevate themselves, and do not budge a finger to advance any principles that actually help people. They do all their works to be noticed by men (Matthew 23:5). And they love the place of honor at banquets, the chief seats in the synagogues, being greeted with respect in the market places, and being *called Rabbi* by men (Matthew 23:6-7). They are self-seeking, and do not serve the best interests of those whom they are supposed to serve.

Jesus then briefly stopped talking about the actions and motives of the religious hypocrites and instructed His followers of how they can avoid being like them or following their Bad Religion. Interestingly this instructive interlude also may be seen as an allusion to God's Three-in-One nature. This commentary will focus on the meaning of Jesus's instructions and then look at how these remarks possibly allude to the Trinity.

The Meaning of Jesus Instructions

Jesus told them three things they should *not do*. These commands are likely all hyperbole in order to make a point.

The three things Jesus forbids in this scripture were:

1. *Do not be called Rabbi.*
2. *Do not call anyone on earth your father.*
3. *Do not be called leaders.*

Jesus said *but do not be called Rabbi*. *Rabbi* means *Teacher*. A *Rabbi* was a *Teacher* of God's law. Rabbis had followers who personally learned under their authority. Disciples of Rabbis were devoted to their Masters. They had a moral duty to do whatever their *Rabbi* commanded.

The relationship that Jesus had with His disciples was that of a *Rabbi* and apprentice. His disciples entered that relationship when they positively answered His call to "Follow Me" (Matthew 4:19-22; 9:9).

The reason Jesus forbade His disciples to seek being called Rabbis was because He Himself was The Rabbi. As *Christ* put it, *for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers*. Only Jesus was

the *One* worthy to be called *Rabbi*. Every disciple, however knowledgeable or righteous he may be would still be *brothers* among *all* other believers. This included great Apostles such as Peter, James, John, and Paul. This means they were not to assume a position over others in order to esteem themselves, like the Pharisees did. This compliments Jesus's teaching that the greatest of all should become the servant of all (Matthew 23:11).

The disciples were to be *brothers* in relationship to Jesus, their *One Teacher* and *Rabbi*. No one compares to *Christ*. This principle applies to New Testament believers as well. We are to make disciples and followers of Jesus, not disciples and followers of ourselves (Matthew 28:20). We are not to recruit followers for ourselves as a first century *Rabbi* might do. Bad Religion follows men and seeks followers. Good Religion seeks and follows Jesus and invites others to join in this pursuit.

Just as the command to *not call anyone on earth our father* does not negate the biblical command to respect our parents, this command of *do not be called Rabbi* does not mean that we are not to mentor, disciple, or teach others. The Great Commission is a command to do just this—“teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). The key is that we are to teach others what Jesus has commanded, not what we command. The command *do not be called Rabbi* is a command to not seek affirmation from men through the means of gaining religious authority. We are forbidden to usurp His role as the *One Teacher* who is the authority we are all to follow. When we teach others, we are to teach them to follow Jesus, who is our *One Teacher* and *Rabbi*.

Jesus also commands *Do not call anyone on earth your father*. A *father* was someone who provided for his children's needs. He trained them and taught them how to live. Fathers take responsibility for their children and love them. Fathers are powerful authority figures. In a first century family, the *father* was the authority of every child within that family. The fifth of the Ten Commandments tells children to obey their parents (Exodus 20:12). The first four of the Ten Commandments make clear that God is the ultimate authority, not man. Arguably the fifth commandment appoints parents to stand in God's position of authority for children who are too young to understand submitting to God by faith.

When Jesus told His disciples *not to call anyone on earth your father*, He meant that they should *not* give anyone but God a child-to-father allegiance. *For One is your Father, He who is in heaven*. The LORD alone is our Shepherd (Psalm 23:1, John 10:11). He is *the One* who provides for our needs (Psalm 23:2). He is *the only One* we should listen to and follow (John 10:14, 10:27). This command forbids the disciples from following anyone as a supreme authority other than Jesus. The disciples were not to seek the *Rabbi* position of religious authority over one another because they were *brothers*, and they were not to submit to any *father* authority other than God. Jesus appears to be commanding His followers to adopt a perspective that we are all children in one family, under the authority of the same *Father* God.

Of course, this does not mean that we cannot have exemplars or mentors whose advice and pattern we imitate. Rather we are not to place our devotion or allegiance to anyone on the same level as God. As Paul told the Corinthian believers, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of

Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). In other words those we follow should also be following God themselves. Our *Father in heaven is the One who oversees heaven and earth.*

Jesus also commanded His disciples *Do not be called leaders*. He did this for the similar reason He forbade them to *be called Rabbi*. This was because *One is your Leader, that is, Christ*. This appears to be a third way Jesus used to express the same basic idea, which is to be on guard against putting any human in God’s seat of authority, or seeking to sit one’s self in God’s seat of authority. Jesus Christ is the one who properly sits in the seat of authority. It is a seat that He was granted because of His faithful obedience to His *Father* (Revelation 3:21; Philippians 2:5-10).

Christ means “Anointed One” or “Messiah”. The Messiah is the only King. Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16). The Messiah was God’s promised rescuer of the Jewish people who would restore Israel to her promised glory.

The Christ was to be a:

- Prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19);
- King like David (2 Samuel 7:12-13; Isaiah 9:7);
- Priest like Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4; Zechariah 6:13).

Jesus is *the One Christ* (Matthew 1:1; 16:16).

Only Jesus is the true Prophet (John 6:14; Hebrews 1:12).

Only Jesus is the King of Heaven (1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 19:16).

Only Jesus is the perfect High Priest (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25-28).

Only Jesus is God.

Only Jesus, the God-man, was granted all authority that is in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18).

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”
(Jude 1:24-25)

As Jesus’s disciples, no matter how great our wisdom may grow, we should never seek to usurp through earthly means influence that rivals His. We should do well to follow John the Baptist’s example: “He [Jesus] must increase, but I [John the Baptist] must decrease” (John 3:30). Jesus is the Bridegroom. We are His friends (John 3:28). It would be reprehensible for us to try and seduce His bride—the Church—and lead it astray. Doing so is Bad Religion.

Jesus *Christ* alone *is* our Leader.

However, paradoxically, when we lay down our lives in service to Christ, and overcome worldly temptation as He overcame, Jesus promises the great reward of sharing the authority of His throne with us (Revelation 3:21). It seems that Jesus is seeking those who are willing to serve in faithful obedience and it is to them He will give the reward of inheriting the rule over His domain (Philippians 2:5-10; Revelation 3:21; Matthew 19:28-30).

These Remarks as a likely Allusion to the Trinity

The statements *One is your Teacher*; *One is your Father*; *One is your Leader* are a fascinating combination. They are an explicit reference to the opening statement of the Jewish prayer known as “The Shema” which says, “Hear O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is One!” (Deuteronomy 6:4). In Hebrew, “shema” is the first word of this verse translated as “Hear.” The Shema is a part of daily worship for a Jew. It is a prayer composed of selected phrases from Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; and Numbers 15:37-41. This prayer was to be offered every day, regardless of where the Jewish people were and what they were doing. The Shema is an essential declaration of the Jewish faith.

Jesus’s trio of statements: *One is your Teacher*; *One is your Father*; *One is your Leader* are also a likely allusion to the Trinity. *The One-ness* speaks to the unity and simplicity of God. The declaration of these three phrases speaks to Gods’ Triune nature. Each of these three phrases is a likely reference to a respective Member of the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit is our *One Teacher*, and you are all brothers:

“You gave Your good Spirit to **instruct** them...”
(Nehemiah 9:20a)

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, **He will teach** you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”
(John 14:26)

“For **the Holy Spirit will teach you** in that very hour what you ought to say.”
(Luke 12:12)

The phrase, *and you are all brothers* can allude to how God’s Spirit unites us in the bond of peace,

“being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
(Ephesians 4:3)

God the *Father our One Father*, *He who is in heaven*.

“Just as a father has compassion on his children,
So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.”
(Psalm 103:13)

“But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”
(Matthew 6:6)

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God...”
(1 John 3:1a)

God the Son is our *One Leader, that is, Christ.*

“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”
(Matthew 16:16)

“And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, ‘KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.’”
(Revelation 19:16)

As the *Christ*, Jesus is the King. The King is our *Leader*.

Biblical Text

⁸ But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. ¹⁰ Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.