God Is Our True Teacher, Father and Instructor

Bill Sidney – 1 November 2026

In many cultures, a person's social standing is often considered very important. It determines whether the person receives honour, special treatment, or authority over others. Someone who is of high standing is often given special attention and high value. Those of low standing are often neglected, abused, or treated with indifference.

Rom 14:7; 1 Tim 5:17 Paul considered ministry leadership an honourable position to hold. Earlier, he told Timothy, "This is a trustworthy saying: 'If someone aspires to be a church leader, he desires an honourable position'" (**1 Tim 3:1** NLT). The leader who performs the duties of his position responsibly and diligently, according to Scripture, is worthy of double honour. "Double honour" refers not only to an abundance of respect and obedience from members of the church but also reasonable pay. The Greek word translated "double" in **1 Tim 5:17** means "two-fold." And the term for "honour" in the original language includes the notion of a price or compensation. In English, we also connect the word honour with the idea of recompense through the noun honorarium. Paul felt that dutiful and diligent shepherds of God's flock, the church, ought to be honoured in two ways: in proper esteem and fair compensation.

1 Tim 5:18 Someone who is of high standing is often given special attention and high value. This common thread was evident in the culture of Jesus' day too. Specifically, it permeated the religious culture of the ancient Jewish people. The religious elite studied and taught their Scriptures and they also enforced the Mosaic law as they held positions of power and authority in their community. These leaders may have had sincere devotion to God. But many of them pridefully enjoyed the status, authority, wealth, and power which came along with their position. Instead of pointing the people to God, they drew attention to themselves.

Matt 23:1-12 In our passage for this Sunday, Jesus turns their attention back to God and the importance of focussing on Him. These religious leaders took the Law of Moses very seriously. The Mosaic Law is the body of laws and commandments that God gave to Israel through Moses in the Old Testament. But over time, many additional teachings, called the oral tradition, were passed down alongside that written law. Oral tradition was passed from person to person by word of mouth. In Jesus' day, religious leaders had not only the written Law of Moses but also many teachings and interpretations that had been passed down orally for generations. This collection of practices was passed down by memory and instruction and were not in the Bible itself. For example, strict ritual washing was practiced. There were many rules about what could or could not be done on the seventh-day Sabbath. Tithing, or paying 10% of one's income, was broken down into detailed instructions about counting out herbs and spices. The problem was not tradition itself. The problem was that many of these added rules became a heavy burden. Instead

of helping people draw closer to God, they made faithful life feel exhausting, complicated, and nearly impossible to follow. Certainly not what God intended.

Jesus teaches a Better Way: Jesus told the crowd to obey what the Pharisees and scribes instructed them to do. He encouraged them to obey God's law of love. But the people were not to follow these leaders' example or traditions, because their actions were hypocritical. Jesus pointed out that these leaders had one main concern: to be publicly elevated and venerated.

And these leaders wanted to tell the people what to do, even though they did not do it themselves. They were showing off. They were hypocrites full of pride. Notice that Jesus did not tell the crowds to disobey God. He told them to follow what they were being instructed that was from the Scriptures. But the other, the teachings made by humans, to promote human values and positions — Jesus told them not to follow those examples. In other words, Jesus was telling them not to build their identity around public honour, special titles, or positions of authority. Instead of seeking recognition from others, they were to turn their attention back to the triune God. Then Jesus specifically addresses three titles commonly used by these leaders: rabbi, father, and instructor. In each case, he redirects the crowd away from human status and toward God. God is our true teacher, Father, and instructor.

Matt 23:8 God is Teacher. Jesus begins with the title of rabbi ("my great one," "master"). The word "rabbi" comes from the Hebrew meaning "my master," it was literally translating to "my master" or "my teacher."

Matt 23:9 ESV The title Father belonged uniquely to God. Jesus came to help people know God not as a distant ruler, but as a Father. In the Old Testament, God was sometimes called the Father of Israel as a nation, but people did not usually speak of him as their own Father in a personal way. Jesus, however, spoke of God as his Father. He shared a unique relationship with him and taught his followers to know God as Father as well. This was shocking to many of the religious leaders because Jesus was claiming a relationship with God that no one else had. By calling God his Father, Jesus was revealing who he truly was. He was not just a teacher or a prophet. He was the Son of God, equal with the Father and sent by him into the world. In everyday life, every human person has a father. And we often call our human fathers by the name "Father" or "Dad" or "Papa". There is no problem with that. Jesus wasn't saying we can't call our human fathers these names. What he was saying was for us not to seek to be elevated to a "father" status — a status that only our heavenly Father holds. Our supreme adoration and desire for approval should be to God alone. And God is our heavenly Father.

Matt 23:10 ESV Jesus reminds the crowd that they only have one instructor. He is the Christ or Messiah (the one sent by God to rescue his people). Jesus was instructing them about who God is and who they are in him. Jesus the Christ is the one perfectly faithful

instructor, not those who are just trying to gain the people's attention and adoration. Jesus holds the spiritual leaders of his day up against the lens of the triune God. God is our true teacher, Father, and instructor.

The Spirit unites all people as brothers and sisters. All are equal and all are taught by Jesus in the Spirit. The only leader-father they are to look to and hold in affection is their heavenly Father. And their only true instructor and leader is Jesus Christ, the One who would soon humbly lay down his life. Leadership Jesus' Way. Then Jesus hits the bottom line when it comes to positions of leadership or teaching: The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Matt 23:11-12 ESV Jesus shows them the divine reality of true leadership: greatness is expressed through humble service. A faithful leader does not seek applause, status, or control over others. The Son of God set aside for a time the privileges of divinity (God's being) in order to join us in our humanity. He lived a truly human life in faithful obedience to his heavenly Father. And he offered himself for all in humble sacrifice on the cross to free us from evil, sin, and death.

And Jesus rose from the grave, bringing all humanity home to his heavenly Father. And then he sent the Spirit so we could all by faith participate in his own relationship with his Father in the Spirit.

Our faith is in God — Father, Son, and Spirit — and God is faithful to finish what he has begun in us. Jesus has finished in humble service all that needs to be done for our salvation. And he reigns in glory now and forever. And he reigns in our hearts and lives by the Spirit as we trust in him. We are held in Jesus' arms, secure in the Father's love, and comforted by the Spirit's peace, now and into eternity.