

Twisted Scriptures

My Son, My Son

TWISTED SCRIPTURES – 1 TIM. 1:2

Neil Girard

Paul calls Timothy, “my true son in the faith.” (1 Tim. 1:2), “my son,” (1 Tim. 1:18, 2 Tim. 2:1) and “my dear son.” (2 Tim. 1:2) Paul also calls Titus “my true son in our common faith” (Tit. 1:4) and refers to Onesimus as his “son” stating that he “became my son while I was in chains.” (Phlm. 10) And Peter refers to Mark as “my son.” (1 Pet. 5:13)

From these references alone - *two men referring to four individuals* - some misguided teachers have concocted a teaching that says that *all* men must have a “spiritual father” and any one who does not have one is an orphan who is destitute of any real place in the order and family of God. This false teaching fails on many counts, not the least of which is the poor Bible scholarship on which this teaching rests. To make up for this lack, teachers of this deception are quick to point out that one needs “special revelation” to be able to understand and walk in the precepts of “spiritual fathering.” Any group that requires “special revelation” in order to grasp their peculiar idiosyncrasies is a group one is wise to avoid! Any precept not available to *all* comes from some other source than the faith delivered “once for all.” (Jude 3)

But let us return to the Scriptures for a better insight into what the Bible really says about this matter. In the same books of the New Testament referenced above we find also mentioned:

- Onesiphorus who searched for Paul in Rome and helped him in Ephesus as one who “often refreshed” Paul and “was not ashamed of [Paul’s] chains” (2 Tim. 1:16-18);
- Demas a fellow worker (Phlm. 24) who deserted Paul and went to Thessalonians (2 Tim. 4:10);
- Crescens who went to Galatia (2 Tim. 4:10);
- Titus who went to Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4:10);
- Luke a fellow worker (Phlm. 24) who was still with Paul (2 Tim. 4:11);
- Mark a fellow worker (Phlm. 24) who was helpful to Paul in his work (2 Tim. 4:11);
- Tychicus whom Paul sent to Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:12) and whom he might send to Titus (Tit. 3:12, also see Col. 4:7);
- Carpus at Troas with whom Paul left a cloak (2 Tim. 4:13);
- Erastus who stayed in Corinth (2 Tim. 4:20);

- Trophimus whom Paul left sick in Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20);
- Eubulus a brother who greeted Timothy, also Pudens, Linus and Claudius (2 Tim. 4:21);
- Artemis a fellow worker Paul might send to Titus (Tit. 3:12);
- Zenas a lawyer travelling to spread the gospel (Tit. 3:13);
- Apollos a travelling teacher (Tit. 3:13, also see Acts 18:24-28);
- Philemon a dear friend and fellow worker (Phlm. 1);
- Appia a dear sister (Phlm. 2);
- Archippus a fellow soldier (Phlm. 2);
- Epaphras Paul's "fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus" (Phlm. 24, also see Col. 4:12-13);
- Aristarchus a fellow worker (Phlm. 24) whom Paul elsewhere calls his "fellow prisoner" (Col. 4:10);
- Silas who helped Peter write the letter who is regarded by Peter as "a faithful brother" (1 Pet. 5:12); and
- an unnamed sister "who is in Babylon" (1 Pet. 5:13)

Of these *twenty four* individuals who are named (many who were very near to Paul or Peter in their work) only *two* – Titus and Mark – are elsewhere called sons. *None* of the other *twenty two* people listed here are said to be *anyone else's* spiritual "sons" – neither in these books nor anywhere else in the New Testament. If the teaching that *all* must have a spiritual father were true, then we must conclude that the others in this list were mere orphans, living life outside their proper place in the order and family of God. The truth is that there is no such requirement on the people of Christ and God – foisting a "spiritual father" upon a believer is merely another scheme of the spirit of antichrist who lures anyone he can to place any person or thing in any place that rightfully belongs to God, Christ or the Holy Spirit. The truth is that the Scriptures do not speak clearly at all about fathers and son because there are no such *places* or *distinctions* in the body of Christ. The routine making of fathers and sons is merely a perpetuation of the ancient clergy and laity divisions, a fact clearly demonstrated by the "spiritual fathering" teachers' appropriation of all the language and interpretations of the old "personal pastor" distortion and error, especially the terms and concepts related to "the set man" deceptions.

We find the real reason Paul calls Timothy his son in his recommendation of Timothy to the Philippians:

“But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.” (Phlp. 2:22)

Timothy, whose father was a Greek (Acts 16:1), was raised by his Jewish grandmother Lois and mother Eunice in whom lived a sincere faith (2 Tim. 1:5) and came into contact with Paul when Paul travelled through Lystra. Timothy already had a good reputation with the brothers at Lystra and Iconium and Paul wanted to bring him along on his journeys. Timothy even submitted to the painful process of circumcision for the sake of preaching the gospel with Paul. (Acts 16:1-3)

Mark, also known as John Mark, as a boy lived in the house of his mother Mary – it was to Mary’s house that Peter went after the angel released him from prison. (Acts 12:11-12) John Mark went with Barnabas (his cousin – Col. 4:10) and Paul on their first apostolic journey (Acts 13:5) but left them after their strange encounter with Elymas the sorcerer at Paphos in Cyprus. (Acts 13:13) Later Barnabas and Paul would split over the question of whether John Mark was able to do the work. (Acts 15:37-39) By the time Paul writes his second letter to Timothy (some 15 years after the split with Barnabas), he acknowledges Mark’s usefulness (2 Tim. 4:11) and Peter (at about the same time) calls Mark his son. (1 Pet. 5:13) Mark may or may not have already written his gospel as it is just as likely that it was written shortly after Paul and Peter’s executions in Rome (c. 64 A.D.)

Titus accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem for the council there regarding the question of circumcision. (Gal. 2:1, Acts 15:2-3) In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he calls Titus “my partner and fellow worker among you” (2 Cor. 8:23) and cites the similar love that he and Titus had for the Corinthians. (2 Cor. 8:6, 16, 12:18)

Onesimus, as has already been noted, became a follower of Christ while Paul was a prisoner, perhaps in Rome. (Phlm. 10) Paul, now an old man (Phlm. 9), sent Onesimus back to his previous master Philemon accompanied by Tychicus who also carried the letter to the Colossians. (Col. 4:7, 9) Paul says to the Colossians that Onesimus is a “faithful and dear brother” (Col. 4:9) and to Philemon he says Onesimus “is my very heart.” (Phlm. 12)

There is a noticeable pattern here. These four younger men, whose relations with their own fathers is less than clear, had *earned* (so to speak) the right to be viewed as sons. Each of them had *proven* themselves in the faith and displayed characteristics consistent with those of Paul and Peter. Through *personal experience in the work of the gospel* a special fondness and “pride” (so to speak) grew between the older man and the younger man. The closest relationship that this resembled was that of a father and a beloved son and so Paul and Peter used those terms of endearment. These special circumstances involving a tiny number of individuals does not make a doctrine or pattern for *all* to have to follow – the source of this error becomes especially apparent when often those who refuse to come under a “spiritual father” are shamed, intimidated, ostracized and shunned for not entering into this spiritual foolishness. The New Testament’s terms of endearment are never to be used as instruments of enslavement!

We must note also that neither Timothy, Titus, Onesimus or Mark – in keeping with Christ’s commands to “call no man on earth ‘father’ because you have one Father in heaven” (Mt. 23:9 - an instruction given, not to the Pharisees as some “spiritual fathering” teachers claim, but “to the crowds and to His disciples.” See Mt. 23:1) – at any time are ever recorded anywhere in the New Testament as referring in any way to Paul or Peter as “father.”

“Spiritual fathering” teachers (betraying more of their connections to the “personal pastor” errors – indeed “spiritual fathering” is nothing but a regurgitation of the “personal

pastor” errors with only the names of the titles and positions being changed) rely heavily on the notions of “mentor” and “mentee” and teach that when Paul called Timothy his son, they were still in a “mentor”/“mentee” relationship. There are at least two significant flaws in this notion:

- Neither “mentor” nor “mentee” are found anywhere in the New Testament and they contain an over/under connotation that is not supposed to be part of any brotherly relationship in Christ. (Mt. 20:25-26, 23:10, etc.) Thus the entire mentor/mentee concept is an addition to God’s word. Why? Because it is only a *mental* model that encompasses only knowledge. Yes, knowledge has a place in the genuine Christian life but it is a place much lower than modern churchianity gives it. Paul wrote, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.” And Paul immediately follows this with “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (2 Tim. 3:10-12) Only one of these is truly transferable under the mentor/mentee model. The disciple-teacher model that is found in the New Testament encompasses so much more than transferring mental, intellectual knowledge. It is a *spiritual* thing that involves experiences. Doctrine (teachings) can be transmitted mentally and yet never be grasped spiritually. One’s manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love and perseverance are spiritual traits that bloom forth from the depths of one’s interactions with Christ. Persecutions and afflictions cannot be taught – they must be experienced or witnessed. The Christian disciple-teacher model also differs from other philosophies because the younger disciple of Christ is taught to find for himself the *Christ* (a *Person* and not just independent knowledge one can wield as one wishes) by a more experienced “finder” of Christ. The mentor-mentee model is insufficient to encompass all this as it says simply that the mentor is inherently more qualified to teach the mentee some sort of knowledge. And these *positions* that implicitly speak of “greater” and “lessers” come from the realm of worldly, pagan philosophy. (see Col. 2:8) Jesus said that a man shall live “by every word that comes from the mouth of *God*.” (Mt. 4:4 - emphasis added) The true gospel of Christ most often begins for an individual by hearing the Word of God as re-spoken through the mouths of men. (Rom. 10:14, etc.) But the crux of the true gospel of Christ is to train the new convert to hear Christ and God for himself (Jn. 10:27, 1 Jn. 2:27, Heb. 12:25, etc.) and that as quickly as possible. Then we are, in the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3), to bring what we have learned from Him to one another and find confirmation and clarification from those others who also hear Christ and God. When there is conflicting ideas, we must all seek the Lord so as to discover how and where and which one (if not all) has not heard fully or correctly. Only by this manner shall we attain to the unity of the faith. (Eph. 4:13) It is Satan, particularly the spirit of antichrist (“in the place of *and* opposed to Christ”) who wants some man to stand between us and God and thus distort the words, meanings and intentions of God to whatever degree possible. (2 Cor. 11:3-4, etc.) Since the mentor/mentee model is not found in the Bible and carries with it some fairly serious liabilities, it is simply wisest not to use it at all.

- Even if we trade out the words “mentor” and “mentee” for the Scriptural words of “teacher” and “disciple” (and dismiss or ignore all the over/under connotations that have come to be associated with even these words), we still find the writer of Hebrews (possibly Paul) reprimanding his readers by saying, “By this time you all ought to be teachers – instead you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again!” (Heb. 5:12) Paul’s letters to Timothy (and Titus), dubbed “the pastoral epistles” by many scholars and theologians, are not about “elementary truths.” And the “mentor”/“mentee” model differs from Paul’s own example whereby, after spending perhaps as little as *three weeks* (but certainly not more than one or at the most two years) with the Thessalonians (Acts 17:2), had left a sufficient seed of the gospel with them so that when he wrote his first letter to them a year or two later, they had already become “an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.” (1 Ths. 1:7) Paul, whose relationship with Timothy spanned at least *ten years*, would not still be in any kind of “teacher”/“disciple” relationship after such a long period – unless Timothy was somehow deficient in his faith, in which case Paul would hardly have entrusted him with the mission of making disciples and bringing order to the ekklesia! (1 Tim. 1:18-19, 2 Tim. 2:1-2, etc.)

What we find is not Paul and Timothy in any over/under, “mentor”/“mentee” relationship that prolongs Paul’s status as master and superior and Timothy’s as student and inferior. Rather, Paul was a true leader, someone who had simply gone further, had obediently submitted more of his life to the Lord and had received more extensive revelation, wisdom and maturity. Paul did not lord over Timothy but rather came alongside him and shared his deeper, more mature insights and wisdom and simply lived his life with Timothy as much as was possible. Timothy as we have already seen, in turn “proved himself” in “the work of the gospel” (Phlp. 2:22) and Paul, already filled with God’s love for Timothy, added a paternal affection toward the younger Timothy, painting as it were a picture of the depth and intimacy that can be found in our lives with the heavenly Father – they were not instituting a pattern to be routinely, religiously and lifelessly enforced upon all the warm bodies that come into our circle of “fellowship.” And the same can be said for Peter and John Mark. Rejecting the “mentor”/“mentee” notion as the impossibly false distortion that it is enables us to see more deeply into the question of what it means to be “fathers” and “sons” in the context of Christ’s true gospel.

Peter, in response to Jesus’ observation of the difficulty of the wealthy entering the kingdom of God (Mt. 19:23), blurted out, “We have left everything to follow You! What then will there be for us?” (Mt. 19:27) Jesus replied, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or *father* or mother or wife or *children* or fields for My sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.” (Mt. 19:29 - emphasis added)

Timothy, Titus and Onesimus were simply three fulfillments of this promise in Paul’s life (of whom there is no record that he had any children of his own) just as Paul was the fulfillment of it in the lives of Timothy, Titus and Onesimus (of whom, as was already noted, their relations with their natural fathers is less than clear.) Again, the same can be said of Peter and John Mark. And this promise *is* available today – but not to blind adherents to the false precepts of “spiritual fathering.” It is available only to those who abandon their own lives to the work of Christ’s true gospel. “Spiritual fathering,” which seeks to establish *all* under a false and permanent

“mentor”/“mentee” (yet another clergy/laity) relationship, which sometimes places even a widowed or unmarried woman as the “father” over other married men, and which talks about loving and nurturing the sons but in truth neglects or abandons them in their day of failure or trouble, is simply a different “gospel.”

“Spiritual fathering” teachers bring this farce to a full circle by excluding themselves from needing a “spiritual father.” Once one has reached a certain, unspecified level of “spiritual maturity” (as confirmed by his own sycophants and appointees, of course) he is to be regarded as a “patriarch” and no longer needs a “father” over him. If this “patriarch” digresses into error, some teach that a “council of apostles” (again, the “patriarch’s” yes-men and appointees) could be convened to bring “correction.” The fact that none of this will ever produce justice or righteousness and that none of this nonsense can be found anywhere in the New Testament bothers none of these “spiritual fathering” teachers. In fact, one can only rightly conclude that they simply make all this up as they go along – or else we must conclude that these are truly partaking of the teachings of demons as Paul prophesied that many would do in the end times. (1 Tim. 4:1)

Jesus still says, “Woe to you [who] travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.” (Mt. 23:15) Woe to those who travel the globe stealing children from God to make them their own “sons” – and pity the poor children who, being victimized in their ignorance and gullibility, are thus turned into illegitimate bastards and orphans! God still says that *He* is “the father to the fatherless.” (Psa. 68:5) Any one who chooses to allow a man to be his “spiritual father” forsakes their only true Father – God – and will reap the horrible consequences.

Let he who has ears hear.

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