

## 1. Introduction

This paper is offered as a partial corrective to the programmatic approach to Christian training and education.

Lots of people ask for the “MTS syllabus”. One of the reasons I have difficulty producing this animal is that such an approach distorts what Christian training is about. Ticking off the 30 Topics to be covered doesn't achieve much except for giving a sense of achievement. As parents we don't train our children by completing a syllabus, although we wish it could be so simple and trouble free. But how boring!

So this is a contribution to communicating the ethos, values, atmosphere, ministry philosophy and 'feel' for MTS (or any ministry).

## 2. Our Problems

We are generally uneasy with the concept of spiritual children and with good reason. Jesus Himself taught not to call anyone on earth 'father', for we have one Father, and He is in heaven. For that matter we are not to call anyone master or teacher. He was dealing with the pride of the Jewish teachers. (Mt 23: 8-12)

Through the gospel and the operation of the Spirit, we are adopted sons, children of God and co-heirs with Christ. As believers in the promise, we are children of Abraham, God's covenant children. We are not the children of any minister or preacher. God has no grandchildren.

So we are rightly in reaction to the various strands in Christendom which elevate the role of the minister to some kind of fatherhood. For example, the priests in the Catholic traditions, who are called 'father' and have mediatorial roles. Or some strands of the discipleship movement which cultivate authoritarian leadership with exclusive spiritual direction of their converts. Of course the cults are the extreme expressions of this problem. Yet the apostles use the language of their children.

## 3. Children in the faith.

The NT writers regularly address their converts and fellow workers as their children. By far the most frequent word is *τεκνον* or the diminutive, *τεκνιον*. *υιοσ* only seems to be used in this sense once in where Peter addresses Mark as his son (1 Peter 5:13)

**See Appendix A**

## 4. Paul and his children

We will limit this discussion to Paul and his children, since he fills out his parenting role more fully. What are the attitudes, activities, hopes and fears of Paul the parent? These are in no particular order. We are considering the 12 passages where Paul addresses his children using *τεκνον*, *τεκνια*. 1 Cor 4:14-17; 2 Cor 6:11-13; 12:14-17; Gal 4:19-20; Phil 2:22 1 Thess 2:6b-12; 1 Tim 1:2; 1:18; 2 Tim 1:2; 2:1; Tit 1:4; Phm 10.

## Giving birth

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From 1 Cor 4:15 Paul's unique fatherhood was established through his preaching of the gospel and their resultant faith in Christ Jesus<sup>1</sup>. The apostles from 1 Thess 2:8-9, establish relationship with their children by imparting<sup>2</sup> and preaching (κηρυσσω) the gospel. This is the character of parenthood, to give, and the apostolic gift by God's decree is the gospel. In the context Paul is reminding them that he is a 'giver' not a 'taker'.

Paul became the father of Onesimus, while in prison, referring to his conversion through hearing the gospel (Phm 10).

## Deep Affection

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In several ways Paul betrays his emotional and permanent commitment to his children and deep concern for their welfare. He writes to them as beloved (αγαπητοσ) children (1 Cor 4:14). On occasions of solemn warning he refers to them by name (2 Cor 6:11; cf. Gal 3:1; Phil 4:14)

From 2 Cor 6:11-13, Paul and his colleagues have spoken freely and opened wide their hearts.<sup>3</sup> The two perfect tenses convey his ongoing love for them. The suffering of vv. 3-10 demonstrate their love. They owe their spiritual life to these true apostles. All this is proof that Paul is not withholding his affection from them.<sup>4</sup>

In Gal 4: 19, the use of τεκνιον (voc. plural, τεκνια), the diminutive of τεκνον is a term of particular endearment, denoting warmth of affection. This is the only occasion where Paul uses this particular form of address. It is used by Jesus in familiar, loving address to his disciples and by John of his spiritual children. The term is striking given the tone of admonition throughout, including 'you foolish Galatians.' (3:1)

In 1 Thess 2:8, the phrase 'we loved you so much' translates the verb ὁμειρόμαι, found only here in the NT and expressing a deep yearning (Luke 3:11, Rom 12:8, Eph 4:28) and two to 'spiritual' need (Rom 1:11, 1 Thess 2:8) and depth of desire<sup>5</sup>. Such love drove them to impart not only the gospel, but their lives as well, their very souls (αλλά καὶ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ψυχάς). In their preaching 'they gave themselves without stint<sup>6</sup>. Their love for their children meant tireless self-giving, including in this context their manual labour. 'It is not a desire to possess but a desire to give,

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<sup>1</sup> 1 BAG, 155: γενναω, to beget, become the father of, is used figuratively 'of the influence exerted by one person on another' including those who are born of God. (John 1:13; 3:3-8; 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 5:18)

<sup>2</sup> Louw & Nida, 57.96 μεταδίδωμι: to share with someone else what one has — 'to share, to give.' Of the 5 occurrences in the NT, three relate to temporal needs

<sup>3</sup> Louw and Nida 25.53: an idiom, literally 'to broaden the heart'; to make evident that one has affection for someone — 'to show affection for, to open one's heart to'.

<sup>4</sup> Louw and Nida 25.54: στενοχωρέομαι εἰς τοὺς σπλάγχχνους: (an idiom, literally 'to be restricted in the bowels') to restrict one's affection for someone — 'to not respond with affection to someone, to close one's heart to.'

<sup>5</sup> Louw and Nida, 25.47 ὁμειρόμαι: to experience a yearning affection for someone — 'to have a great affection for, to have a yearning love for.' MM cite a sepulchral inscription (4th century AD) which speaks of the parents as greatly desiring their son.

<sup>6</sup> Morris, 80. cf. 2 Cor 12:15, Phil 2:17

a desire inspired by the nature of the God whom Christians worship<sup>7</sup>. All because they had become so dear to the apostles. The verse ends as it began with an expression of tender affection.

Paul is so involved with Onesimus, that in sending him to Philemon, he is sending his very heart or self (12).

### Self giving and suffering

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Such affection is costly. As their parent, Paul expends himself for them, not they for him (2 Cor 12:15).

The metaphor of child-birth and labour pain (Gal 4:19) serves to communicate the intensity of Paul's struggle for his little children. Although the Judaizers are zealous to win them over, Paul is even more so. They are his children, because he preached the gospel to them (13), so as their true father he is going through the pains of labour again, until Christ be formed in them. We feel the intensity of Paul's struggle, fearing for them (11), pleading with them (12).

### Appeal for loyalty

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Paul's struggle arises out of this threat of false fathers. So he lays claim to his unique fatherhood over against their many guardians

(παἰδαγωγος)<sup>8</sup> in Christ (1 Cor 4:15). Having many guardians is of itself not necessarily a danger but the Corinthian children were under severe pressure from 'false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ' (2 Cor 11:13). The Galatian children were confronted with people zealous to win them over and alienate them from the apostles (4:17). The Thessalonians had welcomed the message with joy, in spite of severe suffering (1 Thess 1:6) and were suffering from their own countrymen (2:14). He is jealous for them with a godly jealousy (2 Cor 11:2).

We feel the pathos in 2 Cor 6:11-13. 'There is no sense of restraint in Paul's feeling for the Corinthians: if there was any restraint or reserve between them, it was on their part not his.'<sup>9</sup> They close their hearts to their true father, yet open their hearts to the newcomers with their false Christ.<sup>10</sup> Paul appeals to fair play. 'If there is no restraint in my affection for you, let there be none in your affection for me.'<sup>11</sup> Similarly in 2 Cor 12:15, as their parent he appeals for his love to be reciprocated.

According to Gal 4:13-16, they had come to birth through the gospel Paul preached and were devoted to their father. They did not treat him with contempt, but welcomed him as if he were an angel of God, as if he were Christ Jesus himself. They would have torn out their eyes and given them

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<sup>7</sup> Morris, 80

<sup>8</sup> The only other NT usage is Gal 3:24-25, where the law is the teacher leading to Christ.

BAG: in classical times, a *παἰδαγωγος* was a man, usually a slave, whose task it was to conduct a boy to and from school and to supervise and direct his general conduct. He was not a teacher. When the young man came of age, the *παἰδαγωγος* was no longer needed.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce, 213

<sup>10</sup> Louw and Nida 25.54: 'it is not we who have closed our hearts to you, but it is you who have closed your hearts to us'.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce, 213, cf 7:2-4

to him. Now they have had a change of heart reflected in Paul's anguished interrogation. 'What has happened to all your joy? Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?' So he is perplexed (4:20)<sup>12</sup>

### Ultimate Purpose

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However, as we would expect, the apostle's ultimate desire is not personal loyalty, but that Christ be formed in them (Gal 4:19), that they live lives worthy of God (1 Thess 2:12). He can say 'what I want is not your possessions but you' (2 Cor 12:14) but is not speaking about the parent's personal agenda and gratification. Rather he wants them for Christ.

### Authoritative direction

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For this purpose, Paul warns, teaches, speaks, encourages, comforts and urges his children. He takes responsibility for their life in Christ, especially with the danger of false fathers. And the way he fulfills this responsibility is the ministry of the Word.

As their father Paul writes to 'warn'<sup>13</sup> his dear children. But the warning is through instruction not emotional manipulation. He does not wish to influence them by shame. He warns through teaching and his teaching is standardised not localised. (1 Cor 4:14, 17)

For Paul, the opening of his heart to his children is by opening his mouth (τὸ στόμα ἡμῶν ἀνέωγεν). Love demands their instruction. (2 Cor 6:11-13)

In 1 Thess 2:11-12 Paul reminds them of the individual aspect (ὡς εἷς ἕκαστον ὑμῶν) of his fatherly ministry<sup>14</sup>. He gives attention to individuals who were converted through the public preaching. The three participles fill out this fatherly direction, encouraging, comforting and urging them.

### Imitation

Paul as their father calls upon his children to imitate him (1 Cor 4:16). In this context they are to imitate Paul's way of life and teaching. Such imitation is usually associated with sharing the suffering (4:9-13).

Paul is confident of his holy, righteous and blameless life in the church, invoking his children and God as witnesses (1 Thess 2:10). This is foundational for preachers who call others 'to live lives worthy of God' (2:12). Paul is establishing his trustworthiness (2:3-6).

### No financial burden

Paul is defending the accusations that he is foolish and weak (2 Cor 11:16-13:14). Apparently one attack has concerned his financial exploitation of the Corinthians (12:14-18). His defense is passionate. He will not be a burden, he wants them not their possessions, he will gladly expend his

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<sup>12</sup> Louw and Nida: 32.9 ἀπορέω: to be in perplexity, with the implication of serious anxiety — 'to be at a loss, to be uncertain, to be anxious, to be in doubt, consternation.'

<sup>13</sup> νουθετω: BAG, 544: 'admonish, warn, instruct.' Louw and Nida: The sense of warning is dominant - 'to advise someone concerning the dangerous consequences of some happening or action'.

<sup>14</sup> Morris, 84, note 34

very life (τῶν ψυχῶν), he did not exploit them through the men he sent. This last denial alludes to Paul's use of Titus and his companions in the collection for the Jerusalem Christians (8:16-24).

As apostles they have the right to financial dependency (1 Thess 2: 6b- 9).<sup>15</sup> Instead they acted gently<sup>16</sup> as nursing mothers<sup>17</sup>, providing for their children. The Thessalonians should remember their laborious toil, night and day, to avoid this burden (9). When did they find time to preach? This manual labour was one expression of 'sharing their souls as well' (8). Morris points out there were no paid teachers in Palestine.<sup>18</sup> This policy of self-funding was to ensure a blameless standing in the eyes of the community, by providing no grounds for questioning of the apostle's motives. (verse 10, 1 Cor 9:11). Interestingly, Paul received significant ongoing aid from the Philippians during his Thessalonian mission. (Phil 4:16)

## Co-workers as children

Timothy like the Corinthians is one of Paul's beloved children (1 Cor 4:17). See also 1 Tim 1:2, 18; 2 Tim 1:2, 2:1; Tit 1:4.

The distinctive of Timothy's sonship is his resemblance to his father. Like Paul, He is faithful in the Lord, in contrast with the Corinthians who are 'worldly-merely infants in Christ' (3:1). The contrast may also be with those creating divisions (1:10-12). Timothy will remind them of Paul's 'way of life in Christ Jesus'. By imitating the son, they will imitate the father. ὁδοσ is used here figuratively 'of the whole way of life from amoral and religious viewpoint.'<sup>19</sup> and is the sum of Paul's teaching. Note that teaching is not abstracted from life.

## Implications

### 1. Caution

We must not make too much from this language of children. The NT writers freely interchange terms for their converts and churches, such as brothers, fellow-workers, fellow-soldiers, friends, saints and so forth.

### 2. Parenting in Australia

A profound reflection on fatherhood in Australia was offered on Neighbours on August 8th. It just happened to be on as I walked past! A father, Dr Carl, refused to advise his son, Billy, about staying at school or getting a job on the grounds that he, the father had made some mistakes, particularly in family life. Billy yearns for his 'old' father who bossed him around. It's a long way from warning, teaching, encouraging, comforting, urging. Is it the old confusion between authority and

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<sup>15</sup> δυνάμενοι εἰς βάρει εἶναι: BAG takes a more figurative use of βάρει here and translates εἰς βάρει εἶναι as wield authority or insist on one's importance. However the contrast (ἀλλὰ) is with a nursing mother providing for her children, suggesting the burden Paul avoided was his dependency on them. Further, Paul uses cognates of βάρει to denote the in verse 9 and 2 Thess 3:8, 2 Cor 11:9; 12:16.

<sup>16</sup> Morris, 77: either 'babes' or 'gentle'.

<sup>17</sup> Morris, 78 notes 25,26

<sup>18</sup> Morris, 80, note 30

<sup>19</sup> BAG, 554

authoritarianism.

### 3. The apostolic and our pastoral ministry

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What is unique about the apostle's ministry to their children? They had a unique place as the receptors and transmitters of the gospel and so in one sense we are all their children. However, they gave birth to their children through the gospel, as for any age. To think of our converts as our children is appropriate. But we would be unwise to call them our children, which could somehow detract from God as their Father and suggest our exclusive ministry to them.

### 4. Christian Ministry

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The shift from members of an institution (the church) to our children suggests lots of implications and questions. Members come and join us and we offer appropriate member 'services' like a club. Children are dependants for whom we take long term responsibility for their maturity. The implications are endless.

Are they our children if not our converts? Should we follow up our children long-term? Should we not move churches as much but stay long term with our children? When we do move on do we need to keep up with our kids? Of course Paul wrote and sent others but they were his burden. How many children can we deal with short and long term?

### 5. Church Economics

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Ministers and churches continue to burden adherents with financial needs, thus distorting the gospel and losing integrity. We keep handing around the plate to non-believers.

### 6. Training Ministers

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Thinking of our ministry trainees as our sons and daughters in the work of the gospel is the right starting point. They are not class members or students doing a course or completing a program. As our children they are to take on our likeness in doctrine, godliness, ministry and suffering. We are bonded emotionally as parent and child. By sending them elsewhere, we are going ourselves. You can see why I don't want MTS or Theological Colleges reduced to a program of study and skills.

### 7. Discipleship

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The language of discipleship doesn't appear in the epistles, but is reserved primarily for Jesus and his disciples. But some of the elements of discipleship, the teacher-learner relationship, are captured in the apostles' references to their children in the faith. This may be a more appropriate way of understanding 'discipleship' in the post-resurrection era when The Master no longer calls disciples to be 'with him' in the same way.

## Appendix A

The NT writers do not use *νηπιος*, or *παις*, in the sense of spiritual children.<sup>20</sup>

### ΤΕΚΝΟΝ

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Paul describes his 'converts' as his children, using the term *τεκνον* in 1 Cor 4:14, 17; 2 Cor 6:13; 12:14; 1 Thess 2:7,11 and Philemon 10. His co-workers Timothy and Titus as called his *τεκνον* in Phil 2:22; 1 Tim 1:2,18; 2 Tim 1:2; 2:1; Tit 1:4.

John employs *τεκνον* in the sense of his children in the faith or the church in 2 John 1,4,13 and 3 John 4.

In the gospels, *τεκνον* is on Jesus' lips as a form of address to the disciples in Mark 10:24 and to the paralytic in Mat 9:2, Mark 2:5.

In the LXX, Samuel is Levi's *τεκνον* (1 Sam 3:16).<sup>21</sup>

Louw and Nida include *τεκνον* in two semantic domains where 'child' has taken on a figurative sense for a close relationship other than kinship. A person who looks to another as being, so to speak, a father in the faith and thus becomes a disciple of that person — 'disciple.'<sup>22</sup> A person of any age for whom there is a special relationship of endearment and association — 'my child, my dear friend, my dear man, my dear one, my dear lad.'<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, BAG includes a usage of *τεκνον* for a spiritual child in relation to his master, apostle or teacher and notes that the sophist applied this term to his students. The adherents of false teachers are also called their *τεκνα* in Rev 2:23.

### ΤΕΚΝΙΟΝ

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Paul once employs the diminutive, *τεκνιον*, according to a variant (BAG, Guthrie) in Gal 4:19.<sup>24</sup>

John uses *τεκνιον*, to address his readers as his dear children. 1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21.<sup>25</sup> This diminutive form is also used by Jesus in familiar loving address to his disciples. (John 13:33).

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<sup>20</sup> TDNTT, Child

<sup>21</sup> TDNTT, Child

<sup>22</sup> Louw and Nida 36.40

<sup>23</sup> Louw and Nida 9.46

<sup>24</sup> In the NT *τεκνιον* only appears in vocative plural form, *τεκνια*.

<sup>25</sup> Louw and Nida 9.46

In 1 John it may be impossible to translate *τεκνια* literally as 'my children,' since this might suggest a kinship relationship between the author of and the people to whom he is addressing his letter. A more satisfactory equivalent in some languages is often 'my dear friends' or 'my dear ones.'