

Call No Man Father, Castor and Pollux, Contraception

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[0 : 00] Welcome back. Today I'm answering three questions that have been sent to me by one of my supporters. As a benefit of the higher levels of support on Patreon, the questions of those supporters are prioritised for videos.

And if I can't answer them on videos, I'll try my best to answer them by email or some other means within reason. These three questions I thought I'd tackle within one video, even though they're unrelated.

They're very interesting questions and I'm sure that they will be of interest to more people than the person who sent them. The three questions are as follows. The first one, how can Paul call Timothy his true child in the faith?

1 Timothy 1 verse 2, 1 Corinthians 4.17 and 2 Timothy 1 verse 2. When Jesus forbids calling anyone father besides God in Matthew 23.

I'm assuming Jesus meant call no man a spiritual father. But that seems to not clear up the issue since it seems like Paul is referring to himself as Timothy's spiritual father. Maybe in a nuanced sense.

[1 : 04] Is this situation analogous to how in the next verse Jesus tells us to call no man instructor except for the Christ. But we obviously have instructors in the church. The verses in question are in Matthew 23 when Jesus challenges the scribes and the Pharisees who like to sit in Moses seat and be given high status and privilege among the people.

He says to his disciples, but you do not be called rabbi for one is your teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father for one is your father. He who is in heaven and do not be called teacher for anyone.

Do not be called teachers for one is your teacher, the Christ, but he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. Now this would seem to be at odds with a number of the things that we see Paul speaking in relationship to Timothy.

Timothy is described as his true son in the faith in various places, which would seem to be at odds with this. Elsewhere in scripture, we have the language of sonship associated with the relationship, for instance, between Elijah and Elisha.

Elijah and Elisha. Elisha is the son and he refers to Elijah as his father and my father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel. And he asked for the double portion of Elijah's blessing of spit of his spirit.

[2 : 27] It's the double portion being the firstborn portion. And so he sees himself as a son figure. But within Pauline theology, there is this language of sonship applied in his relationship to the people he is begotten.

In the gospel. So, for instance, and one of the passages that are mentioned was mentioned is first Corinthians 4:17. For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord.

But then just a few verses earlier we read in relationship to the Corinthians. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers.

For in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you imitate me. Now, that's a striking statement. And Paul's referring to himself as a father in relationship to the Corinthians.

But the logic of it is significant. That the logic is that he has begotten them in Jesus Christ through the gospel. And so the logic here is not of Paul as a privileged father in his own right.

[3 : 35] Rather, he is a father in the gospel. A father through the gospel in Jesus Christ. And so ultimately, the teacher, the father, the authority is God.

And that's something that goes back to Paul's wallings earlier on in the book, where he writes about the sectarianism within the Corinthian context. Now, I say this that each of you say, I am a Paul or I am a Paul or I am a Paul or I am a Cephias or I am a Christ.

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius.

And then he goes on. And later on, he deals with the question of sectarianism. Therefore, let no one glory in men for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephias or the world or life or death or things present or things to come.

All are yours. And you are Christ's and Christ is God's. And this is related to what he says early on in that chapter as well. Who then is Paul and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed as the Lord gave to each one.

[4 : 47] I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. So the language of fatherhood is used.

But the language of fatherhood is tempered by this sort of spiritual democratization that the spirit has been given to all. That ultimately fatherhood flows from God.

There is no ultimate father except God alone. And every single one of these leaders within the church, if they're jockeying for position, they're undermining the true nature of the fatherhood that they are properly to exercise.

So there is a spiritual fatherhood. But it's a spiritual fatherhood that does not displace the fatherhood of God. And it's not a competitive sort of thing where you have one person standing against another.

Ultimately, Christ is undivided. And these things flow back to Christ, who is our one true teacher and God, who is our one true father. And therefore, when we talk about concepts of fatherhood within the church, it's appropriate to use them.

[5 : 53] But they need to be used in a way that does not usurp Christ's primacy, that does not engage in competitive jockeying for status within the life of the church.

But in a way that is self-effacing, in a way that recognizes the importance of the calling that is given to certain people who are spiritual fathers within the church. But appreciating that the fatherhood that they're exercising ultimately is rooted in God's soul fatherhood.

And that's what I think Christ is talking about here. He's talking to challenge the rabbis who are jockeying for position, who in the situation of in the situation that's described in Corinth, for instance, they would be wanting to form their own sect around them, their own sort of cult with them at the center, them as the gurus and the leaders.

Whereas for Paul, there's always this sense that he may be a spiritual father, but there's a self-effacing character to his ministry. All the time, he needs to draw attention away from himself and towards Christ because they are begotten.

He is a spiritual father to them, but they are begotten in Jesus Christ through the gospel. And so the way that Paul relates to this as a father, in some ways, the role of father is more like a certain type of handmaid than a father that's an ultimate father, a father who stands above them and is the one that is an absolute father, an authority figure to them.

[7 : 28] No, he's not that. And so the relationship between Paul and Timothy is a specific sort of relationship, too. It's not just the same as the relationship between the believers in Corinth more generally, as Paul relates as a father to them.

In his relationship to Timothy, Timothy is his representative. He's the one who acts on Paul's behalf. And so that's a closer sonship relationship that's at play there.

It's a similar sort of thing that we see with Elijah and Elisha, that Elijah is given a mission. He appoints Elijah, Elisha as his successor and Elisha is his son.

And in that sense, he continues on his mission in the same way with Moses and Joshua, that Joshua and Moses relate very much as son to father.

And in Christ, Paul exercises a sort of fatherly role, but it's a participation in the fatherhood, a deeper fatherhood rather than a fatherhood that is ultimate.

[8 : 30] And so I think putting this together, this does not contradict Christ's teaching, but it helps to explain when we consider the context of Jesus' teaching, what he's challenging, why Paul acts in the way that he does, why he speaks about spiritual fatherhood.

But he's always challenging those who will jockey for position and those who will seek to get prominence above others and those who will divide Christ by setting up their own camps and parties around themselves.

Paul is constantly downplaying the status of the ministers who are elevated above others. He's constantly putting them in their right perspective, giving them a proper status, which is an honoured status, but one that is not exalted in the way that the Corinthians and any group with a party spirit and any person who has a yearning for authority and power and prominence and influence over others.

In a way that would put others down and form their own party around themselves. He challenges that at every point. There is a fatherhood that's involved, but it's always one that does not displace, but is put in its proper position by the ministry of Christ.

Second question. What is the significance of Luke mentioning in Acts 28 11 that the boat Paul was sailing on had the twin guards, Castor and Pollux, I think, as figureheads?

[10 : 04] This might be a historical detail, but I was curious. So the detail comes from Acts 28 and the final chapter of Acts. After three months, we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the twin brothers, which had wintered at the isle.

And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. So it's an interesting detail. I mean, why would we be given the detail of these particular guards being either painted on the prow of the ship or carved into it?

We don't know. I'm uncertain of what to make of this. It's an unusual detail. I don't really have much. I actually have a bit of some clues, but suggestive hints.

But I'll throw out some of the things that are leads that we could explore. First of all, some have suggested that they are associated with the validation of witness and vindication of testimony and that sort of thing.

And that could be associated with Paul's witness. Far more likely is the fact that they are associated with safety at sea. Paul has just undergone a shipwreck and been on Malta and had a struggle with and been bitten by a snake there and thrown it off.

[11 : 27] But what we have here, I think, is another reference to safety at sea with other guards being implicated. So maybe it's associated with that.

That's a possibility. Another possibility is that Castor and Pollux or the Dioscuri, the twin brothers, they are Gemini.

They are the sign of the zodiac. They're associated with a particular sign. And Luke perhaps engages in some details of the zodiac.

So what we see, for instance, in Luke's Gospel, just before the celebration of the Passover, they are given the sign of a man carrying a water pitcher, which is an unusual thing to see.

It would usually be a woman. And the man carrying a water pitcher that will lead them to the upper room is possibly, a number of people have suggested, an association with Aquarius. Here we have another significant juncture in the narrative as they leave Malta after the victory of the shipwreck and after being bitten by the snake and after overcoming the fever.

[12 : 44] And now they have this situation where there's another sign that comes into play, Gemini. I don't know. Maybe there's something there. Within the scripture, more generally, there are a number of allusions to the signs of the zodiac.

This doesn't mean that there's an approval of horoscopes and things like that and the superstitions associated with astrology. But there is a sense of meaning in the heavens.

There is a sense that the constellations have meaning. And so we see, for instance, the four faces of the cherubim are associated with four directions of the zodiac.

And that's an important detail to recognize. There are also ways in which they're explored within the book of Revelation.

The ordering of the camp of Israel, the ordering of the tribes is associated with the zodiac, even within the Old Testament in numbers. And this is something that we see in the Second Temple Judaism.

[13:47] There is reflection upon the relationship between the zodiac and Israel. Twelve signs. Twelve signs in the heavens. Twelve tribes on the earth.

And Israel was compared to the stars. And so Israel has some relationship to the zodiac. The twelve, the eleven stars bowing down to Joseph. Are those eleven signs in the stars?

These are the sorts of questions that I think will reward attention. There are a lot of things going on there. Others have suggested in the beginning list in Acts 2, the list of the nations at the day of Pentecost, that that follows an order of the zodiac.

The order that we see in someone like Paul of Alexandria, where each of the nations are assigned to a particular star sign. Now, again, that's an outside possibility.

There are good arguments for and there are good arguments against that. But there seems to be some similarity and it's suggestive at least. So Luke might be doing some things with symbols of the zodiac here, giving some sort of symbolic significance to this particular juncture in Paul's journey.

[15:03] We've already seen within the shipwreck that there are a number of things going on there. The way that the story is told in each stage of the itinerary, it reminds us of the exodus with the itinerary that you find in places like Deuteronomy.

It also reminds us of the exodus in other ways. So, for instance, being told to remain inside the ship for fear of your life. The fourteenth night.

And on the fourteenth night, breaking bread and giving thanks to God in the presence of them all. And when it's being broken, giving it to them to eat.

Now, these are Passover and Lord's Supper themes. And then deliverance happening at dawn when the day comes. So these are themes that are associated with the Passover, with the Red Sea crossing, with the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

These sorts of themes. And with death and resurrection. And so there's a parallel between death and resurrection and the story of the shipwreck. And this connects the book of Acts with the book of Luke.

[16:10] And we've seen a number of connections between those books more generally. These connections occur from the very beginning with the emphasis upon the temple, for instance, and praying in the temple.

It can be upon the emphasis upon new birth. These sorts of things. There's a lot of things going on there. And prophetic initiation and succession. But I won't get any further into that.

That's the direction I'd suggest exploring. There's probably some connection, first of all, with Castor and Pollux being associated with safety at sea. And Paul's having just undergone a shipwreck.

And going to this site of paganism in Rome. And God being the one that gives true safety at sea.

And then perhaps, as an outside possibility, some connection with deeper use of signs of the zodiac within the thought of the New Testament.

So we have a number of things like the ram, or the Passover lamb. We have the lion. We have the bull. We have the man carrying the water pitcher. We have the two fish.

[17:16] We have these themes of zodiacal themes, but they're also very prominent within the New Testament. And I don't think that's an accident. Because Christ is the Son who has come.

And the Son, relating to the different signs, I think is significant. But I do not have a clue what to make of that. It's something that one day I hope to explore in more depth.

But until then, I'll just throw out the possibility and see if anyone has suggestions. The third question, what should Christians think of contraceptives, specifically non-abortive contraceptives, like condoms and birth control?

Should Christians only use methods of family planning? Or are there any methods, artificial or natural, of preventing children from being conceived? Or are any methods, artificial or natural, of preventing children from being conceived immoral?

No, I don't think all such methods are immoral. I think the difference between Catholics and Protestants on this point is that Catholics focus significantly more upon acts, sexual acts, and seeing the ways that those sexual acts must be structured in order to be morally licit.

[18:30] Whereas for a Protestant approach, I think there's a lot more of an emphasis upon not the sexual acts, just in an abstract sense, but sexual practice within marriage, which is something that stretches across a number of different acts.

So sexual practice within marriage should be open to the bearing of children. It should be ordered towards the bearing of children. That does not mean that each and every act must be so ordered.

It does not mean that there are not periods of time when it is appropriate and indeed prudent to seek to avoid conception.

Now, that can be avoided through natural methods or through artificial methods. I think there are differences between these artificial and natural methods. I think, for instance, that there is something about the artificial attempt to avoid conception that is very much at risk of undermining the natural logic, the natural end, the natural telos of sexual relations.

And that's something we've seen more generally in our culture, that the more that contraception becomes the norm, bearing children becomes seen as an anomaly or sex towards the end of bearing children becomes more anomalous.

[19 : 54] So we talk about safe sex. That's sex that has no relationship with the bearing of children. Sex that is contraceptive and sterile in its form.

We talk about, for instance, being sexually active. And again, that's having sexual relations generally outside of marriage and not in relationship to procreation.

These are the ways that we use terminology nowadays. And so when we have a technology that's been developed, technology can present that which is natural as artificial. So increasingly, the bearing of children and the having of sex that is ordered towards procreation is seen as a choice, as something artificial.

It's not just natural. It's seen as something that must be chosen. And as a result, I think our notion of children has shifted. So we think about children far more in the terms of the concept of chosen.

That concept has a lot more weight in the context of childbearing, precisely because we have normalized contraception. And that normalization of contraception across society has caused significant problems.

[21 : 09] It's one of the key factors for the breakdown of marriage. And it's also something that is quite fundamental to our social order.

If it were not for contraception, if it were not for abortion, a lot of what is regarded as women's liberation within the current context would be impossible.

And it's important to reflect upon that and realize exactly what is at stake here. That we have ordered a society where the bearing of children is increasingly something that marginalizes you.

And our society is not ordered around the bearing of children, but the avoiding, for the most part, of children. And reducing people to interchangeable persons that can work within abstract organizations, detached from the life of the household.

And so contraception is very much a central part of our culture's life. And so when we're talking about the morality of contraception, we need to think very clearly about the way that discrete acts are not necessarily the best way to get a handle upon what contraception involves more generally.

[22 : 26] Contraception is a technology that leads to ecological changes within our sexual culture. This is not just something that can be used in a few cases and makes no difference beyond that.

It's something that changes the whole game in many respects. And so when we're thinking about the morality of contraception, we need to take those questions into account too.

Are we a society that will use this technology in a wise and prudent way? Or is it something that will end up detaching sexual relations from their proper end?

I don't think that within a Christian marriage that is ordered towards procreation, that contraception is necessarily something that is ordered away from its proper end.

Indeed, it can be something that helps the couple to bear and raise children in a prudent manner.

And so I don't think there's anything wrong with this in principle. The Catholic position that focuses very much on acts rather than practices, I think ends up justifying in natural family planning sort of resistance to procreation at one level, at the level of practice often, whereas it would be very resistant to that sort of opposition in the case of the act, if that makes sense, that there's no artificial restrictions in the context of the act, contraception in the context of the act, but practices and processes that are designed to avoid conception within the context of the practice of marriage more generally.

[24 : 10] And so I think this is a fairly... There is some distinction here, but I think it's weaker, a lot weaker than Catholics want it to be. When we're thinking about the distinction there, we can think about the distinction in terms of, for instance, when a couple get married, to give their bodies to each other, to consummate that marriage, I think is to give their bodies in a procreative sense to each other, in a way that's open to procreation.

And so if it's just contraceptive relations, then I think that's not a true fulfilment or realisation of what marriage entails. I think there's a falling short of what marriage calls for.

And the idea of child-free marriage, I think, is a complete opposition to what Christians understand marriage to involve. And that is something that... Child-free is not the same as infertile.

Child-free is a marriage that is designed to resist the end of bearing children. And that is something that Christians' understanding of marriage has been traditionally, and I think should still be strongly opposed to.

More generally, I think then that there's nothing in principle wrong with the use of artificial contraception, provided it's non-abortive. I think that it should be used in a way that's consistent with the procreative end of the practice of sexual relations in marriage.

[25 : 38] And I think that it should also recognise some differences between relations that are... that occur with artificial conception, contraception, and those that don't.

So, for instance, relations that involve artificial contraception, I think, are resisting something about the gift of the body. And that gift of the body is seen in acts and also in the more general practice. And when contraception is involved, there is not a full gift of the body. I think that there's a restriction of that gift. And within the context of the practice of marriage, where the body is truly given in the end, towards the end of procreation, I don't think that's a problem in principle.

But in other cases, I think it can be a problem. The other thing worth thinking about is the way that contraception can lead to an avoidance of...

or a failure to need to learn the process... learn what it means to be sexually continent, to control our bodies, to master our vessels, as it were, in Pauline language, that it can be a way of avoiding restrictions upon sexual relations.

[26 : 58] It can be a way that detaches us from the natural ordering of our bodies and the hormones involved in some forms of hormonal contraception are concerning.

And they're not... It's not entirely something... I don't think it's something we should be positive about when it's normalized and seen as the natural state for women to be on hormonal contraception.

I don't think that's healthy. I think there are genuine concerns there. In the case of certain medicinal uses, it may be necessary. But it's a medicine. It's something that's designed to deal with dysfunction.

I don't think it should be seen as the normal state. And it leads to a breach between women and their bodies that I don't think is healthy. I think there are ways in which we can practice sexual continence.

I think that there are ways in which the use of contraception, artificial contraception within the context of that, can be appropriate. But these are questions that we need to consider. Because the failure to consider these questions and the ecological effect that they have upon a society at large, I think has led to massive change in our sexual culture.

[28 : 10] And those changes have occurred precisely because contraception does away with the same need to practice sexual continence, to have limits surrounding sex, to take sex very seriously and to see sex as ordered towards the natural end of procreation.

It also detaches women from their bodies in many contexts and creates contexts where sexual immorality and fornication are encouraged precisely because there are not the natural consequences.

So in all of these respects, I think I would give a cautious look both ways before you cross, as it were. If we're going to take the approach of using contraception in marriage, I don't think there's anything in principle wrong with that.

But it must be used in a way that recognises just how dangerous this has been across the cultural large and how much it has changed. And the potential within a particular marriage of that changing many things about the way that the couple view their sexual relations, view their bodies and view the gift of their bodies to each other and view their relationship to their children.

And for these reasons, I am very cautious about contraception. And our culture's approach to it, which has been fairly uncritical, is one that has been one with catastrophic effects.

[29 : 42] If you have any further questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you would like to support this and future videos, please do so using my Patreon account. And if you would like to have your questions prioritised, then you can do so at the higher levels of support.

Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow. Thank you very much for listening and hope you have a great day. God bless.