

## THE GREAT "CALL NO MAN RABBI" CONTROVERSY

### THE SCRIPTURE

The following is a translation which uses the core meaning of each key word. Please read it carefully.

(Mat 23:8-12) "You be not bided [kaleo] as My-One-Who-Has-Much [rhabbi], for you have one Guide [kathetes], even the Anointed One, and you are all brothers. You be not bided as Progenitor [pater] upon the earth, for you have one Progenitor [pater], who is in heaven. Neither you be bided as Guides [kathetes], for you have one Guide [kathetes], even the Anointed One. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be made low, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

(Ephesians 4:11) "And He gave some to be Sent-ones, and some to be Foretellers, and some to be Heralds, and some to be Shepherds and Instructors [didaskalos]."

### THE MISUNDERSTANDING

One of the most misunderstood sayings of Messiah Yeshua is the one above where he directs that no one be called "Rabbi" and "Father". One can easily see that this is a great contradiction, if taken at face value in the English. Scripture shows that it was permitted for the Patriarchs of Israel to be called father, and also Shaul (Apostle Paul) called himself father to the believers. Yochanan the Immerser was called rabbi by his disciples, also.

The violation of Messiah Yeshua's instruction here is placed on the one who is bided as rabbi or father, not the one who bids. So we might conclude by this that, if read in English, which has been so often mis-interpreted, Yochanon and Shaul violated the Torah of Yeshua. But that is not an acceptable conclusion, and neither is it true, as will be shown.

Another problem is that there is a seeming injunction against being called/bided as a teacher [kathetes], while conversely Shaul says that Messiah Yeshua gave us teachers [didaskalos]. The different Greek words here are synonyms and both also mean master! So this means that Messiah Yeshua in Matthew tells us not to call anyone master, while His servant Shaul declares the Messiah gives us masters. How can these seeming contradictions be resolved?

First, it should be clear that the teaching of Messiah Yeshua is not for the purpose of parsing syllables. In other words, it is not the sound of syllables themselves which we should avoid. The word rabbi originally meant "my one who has much" (rav is the root Hebrew word for many, multitudes, much). Rabbi is not used to mean that same thing in today's Hebrew at all. The understanding of rav or rabbi today is simply teacher. Yeshua certainly never says that the sound of a word is wrong. Common sense dictates that it is the meaning of the word which is wrong. So today, it would not be wrong to use the word rabbi as a descriptive title, unless we meant it in the

way it was originally intended in Hebrew, and that would be to use the title in recognition of thinking one to have much, or to be my source of supply, as it originally meant.

Second, the mention of father [pater] in the teaching, if taken a face value, would mean that no one could call their earthly father, father or dad, or pappa, etc. What would be the alternative? Once again, Messiah Yeshua is not speaking of parsing sounds of syllables. We must use common sense, and it is both the context and the intention of the teaching which must be taken into account.

## THE PRINCIPLE

Messiah Yeshua gave this teaching in the context of warning His disciples not to love to be called exalted names, which would seem to give them more importance than others. They were/are not to seek the praise of men. He wanted them and us to know that the greatest one among them or us is the one who serves (bows low) the most. So He did not want them to want or seek to be called or bided in a way which is glorifying to our selfish pride (ego). Messiah Yeshua was teaching a broad principle that applies to all titles of people which they perceive to be those of mastery. This would include, besides doctor, lawyer and Indian chief, the fivefold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors and teachers. The principle of Messiah Yeshua is this: "Do not accept anyone's attempt to make you their master, or their source of supply. There is only One who is your/their Master and Source of supply"

Shaul called himself an apostle. Was he building himself up? No, he was only stating what work he was assigned. He really was only saying, "I am one sent." So, if one says, "I am a rabbi" and considers that simply to mean "I am one who teaches," is that an error? Not at all! It would be error only if he believes in his heart that the title makes him a master over people, instead of a servant to people, and/or he encourages and allows others to view him as someone more important."

You might notice that some religious leaders think they are more accurate to scripture by being called pastor or elder. Yet, under the principle of Messiah these titles can be just as much used in an evil way. Pastor, scholars say, means shepherd, but who can be a shepherd but the Good Shepherd, Yeshua? Who is worthy to be called Shepherd except Him? Does not the title shepherd distinguish one from the sheep? So a pastor cannot be equal with the sheep, but rather the master of the sheep!. In addition, the word pastor is linked to the Greek word pater, which means father. And we should call no man father?

Elder means "older one", by inference, more knowledgeable, wiser. Such a distinction in the body can just as easily cause a person to be exalted in their heart.

Moses had a title, the Servant of Elohim. Though he was the meekest of men, yet he also fell because of pride and self-interest, and thereby was kept from the promise. Yet, his title was a humble one.

The point in all this is, it was not titles themselves that our Messiah was warning against, but rather the disciple's desire to be exalted.

## CHAIN OF COMMAND

In any army there is a chain of command. Winning battles depends on everyone's important contribution. The chain of command is used for communication and order. YHVH used a chain of command when He set Israel in order, using Moses, Samuel and David to define it. By Elohim's Word there was set judges, elders, priests, captains, prophets, and eventually kings and princes.

The army of Messiah Yeshua is no different. There must be a chain of command, and titles are used to define the chain. The purpose of the title is to set in order, not to puff up those who have them. The Most High has equalized his people, as He did with Israel of old, by declaring them all kings and priests in the realm of the Kingdom of heaven. But this does not negate the necessary chain of command and the appointment of certain ones to certain tasks.

The thing which our Messiah wants us to know is that the titles in the chain do not define our importance, but only our responsibility to Him. The title is not evil by itself; what we think of it, or how we want people to see us because of it, determines the good or evil of it.

## THE MESSIANIC RABBI

In the Messianic Jewish movement the title of rabbi is indicative of vocation ministry responsibility under Mashiach. It is NOT a title of exaltation, but given only for purpose of order in the body. In modern Hebrew it means simply teacher. Today a rabbi is a congregational leader/servant. He is an administrator of business and spiritual things in the congregation. He organizes and encourages the various gifts and callings in the congregation. He is responsible to teach the Torah, the Word of Elohim soberly with earnest study, but He is not the only one responsible. He is traditionally of Jewish origin, so the title helps him to identify with and to serve the Jewish people especially, but not exclusively. He is expected to be a Hebrew biblical language scholar of substantial ability, and most are also Greek biblical language scholars. The Messianic Rabbi is in his role because of Divine appointment, not because of personal worth or even skill. He will be judged more severely than most at the Judgment because of his responsibility. Rather than prideful in His work, the Messianic Rabbi mostly feels inadequate, unworthy, and trembling at the task. He realizes that nothing he does of himself actually accomplishes anything; that it is Adonai who does all that is good and eternal in quality. He knows and acts as knowing that he is no more important than the least, in fact, he is the least.

I, for one, do not want anyone to look to me as their source. So I warn everyone, to do so would put them at risk of severe poverty!

--- David M. Hargis