
THE CHRISTIAN PROSPECT

VOL. I, NO. 2 – SEPTEMBER 1, 2021

The Kingdom of God, No. 1

In this series of articles, I wish to explore the meaning of the phrase “the kingdom of God” in Scripture and its function in Biblical theology.

In the New Testament, the word kingdom is translated from the Greek *basileia*. This word has four shades of meaning: rank, rule, realm, and reign.

Sometimes *basileia* refers to the rank of a person, that is the power, dignity, majesty, privilege, right, and authority to exercise force over others. In Luke 19:11-27, Jesus told a parable about, “A certain nobleman [who] went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.” This was in reference to a practice under the Roman Imperial system, in which a local ruler would journey to receive certification of his “right to govern” or his rank from the Caesar so that he could exercise ruling authority over a given territory.

The other three uses of the term *basileia* relate to this one. Sometimes it refers to a rule – the exercise of authority or exertion of dominion over subjugated peoples (Luke 1:33). In this case, those who have been subjugated are said to be “under the feet” of the one who is ruling.

Additionally, *basileia* may refer to a *realm*. Under the heading of realm two ideas are present. First, there is the region, domain, or country governed by a king. In Esther 5:6, the king offered Esther “up to half” of his kingdom – that is the territories over which he ruled. In Matthew 4:8, Satan took Jesus up on a high mountain, and in an instant “showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.” That is, the Devil showed Jesus the vast territories of human rulers with their riches and resources.

Second, there are the people who inhabit that realm that submit themselves to the king's authority. When God told Israel that they would be "to Him a kingdom" (Exodus 19:6) this was the meaning: they would be His people in the world.

Finally, the word may refer to a *reign*, that is the duration or period of time when a particular sovereign is in power. Thus, we speak of the reign of King George I which commenced with his coronation and concluded with his death.

Unfortunately, most modern English versions uniformly translate *basileia* as "kingdom" causing most English readers to think only of a territory or place where God rules. That is not the only meaning and, in some cases, it is not the primary meaning.

For example, when John the Immerser and the Lord Jesus announced that "the kingdom of heaven was at hand" or "drawing near" – they did not mean that a *place* or *territory* was getting close (which would be rather nonsensical), but rather they meant that the time when heaven would rule over the earth was about to commence.

We should emphasize that even when one of these shades of meaning is in view, the other aspects are present because these are all co-dependent. One cannot be a ruler unless he has the rank and a realm, and unless the official and recognized time for his reign has begun and not yet ended.

My plan is to submit a series of essays discussing the teaching of Scripture on the senses of the term "kingdom" in relation to Jesus Christ. How does Jesus rule? How did He acquire the authority to rule? Who are His subjects and what is the territory of His sovereignty, how will it increase, and how far will it ultimately reach? When did His rule begin, and how long will it last? I look forward to receiving critical feedback from other readers of this journal.

– Clinton De France

Comments on Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2

In our last issue, we printed a question that arose from our first article on the grace of God – namely, do we know that Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2 assign authority over God’s creation to humanity as a whole, or to Christ specifically as a representative for humanity? It seems best to explain each in sequence, starting with Psalm 8:1-4:

*“O Lord, our Lord,
 How excellent is Your name in all the earth,
 Who have set Your glory above the heavens!
² Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
 You have ordained strength,
 Because of Your enemies,
 That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.
³ When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
 The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
⁴ What is man that You are mindful of him,
 And the son of man that You visit him?” (Psalm 8:1-4, NKJV)*

David opens the psalm by recounting the line of thought that led him to consider God’s care for humanity. First, this is a psalm of praise. David pronounces the glory of God as visible in “all the earth” and “above the heavens.” We can find signs of God’s creative work, power, and glory in every part of the world around us. The intricacies of the natural systems we see in the earth as well as the movements of the heavens above us all display the magnificence of our ingenious and powerful God. Every one of these things is a testimony to His wisdom and His ability to create an orderly world out of nothing.

God possesses irresistible strength Himself, and He has created many mighty and immovable things in the universe around us. However, He has chosen what is weak – babies and infants – to prove His power and His dominion over those who would oppose Him. When we think of God’s

enemies, we can think specifically of the devil, and generally of those who follow him into rebellion against God. Satan is a more powerful being than any living human, but God has specifically chosen to empower those who are weak and helpless to put to shame those who are strong (see our comments on 1 Corinthians 1). Those who are helpless cannot be overcome if God is their defender, and those who are weak cannot be bested if God is their strength.

It is a self-evident truth that humanity is not the strongest force in creation. David considered the heavens – the moon and the stars – which God put in place. These are mighty, massive, and unreachable. We know more of these things now than David did then – at least as far as physical, experiential knowledge is concerned. Human beings have walked on the moon, but we are no closer to mastering it or any other part of the heavens. We cannot even reach the stars, let alone make any kind of modification to their paths across the sky. When we think of the power, the mastery, and the *control* that it would require to move one star from its place in the sky above us, we can see why David started to question his own position in the universe. As king, his position in Israel was lofty, but when he looked at the skies above, he realized just how little power he actually possessed.

So he asked that immortal question – what is man that God is mindful of us? Why has God worked through generation after generation to rescue us from our sins and guide us toward a better end than we could achieve ourselves? Why has He chosen to help us – the weak elements of His creation – to put to shame those who would oppose Him? David answers his own question by pointing back to God's original purpose in creating man:

*“For You have made him a little lower than the angels,
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.*

⁶ You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;

You have put all things under his feet,

⁷ All sheep and oxen—

*Even the beasts of the field,
⁸ The birds of the air,
 And the fish of the sea
 That pass through the paths of the seas.
⁹ O Lord, our Lord,*

How excellent is Your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:5-9, NKJV)

Notice that in all things, God is the active agent. All that man has he has because God has given it to him. We do not have some intrinsic strength or character by which we have fought our way into a position of authority and power. Instead, what we have has been given to us. God chose to place us a little lower than the angels. He chose to show His glory and honor through us. He chose to place all things under the feet of humanity.

The language that David uses in verses 6-8 reflects on Genesis 1, when God created everything that exists. God created the three great habitats of creation – the sea, the sky, and the land – and He populated them with creatures that correspond to each territory. Last of all, He created Adam and Eve, to whom He gave three simple commands: “be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth; and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). When He commissioned man to subdue these things, He assigned strength, glory, and honor to those who were weak and helpless. Adam and Eve could not have created and ruled over the heavens and the earth and all of their inhabitants on their own. They only had the ability to do so because God gave it to them. He had created these things to be ruled, now He had created and appointed His chosen ruler.

So Psalm 8 teaches us that God cares for humanity as a whole. There is nothing intrinsic in humanity that makes us better or stronger than the other elements of creation. Instead, God has chosen us – because of our weakness – to rule over what His hands have made. He cares for us because He wishes to see us fulfill His purpose – to glorify Him by taking the place He made for us in His design. This desire on the part of God is the theme

that drives the second chapter of Hebrews, which echoes the lessons of Psalm 8:

“For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels.

⁶ But one testified in a certain place, saying:

“What is man that You are mindful of him,

Or the son of man that You take care of him?

⁷ You have made him a little lower than the angels;

You have crowned him with glory and honor,

And set him over the works of Your hands.

⁸ You have put all things in subjection under his feet.”

For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.” (Hebrews 2:5-8, NKJV)

The author of Hebrews opens this discussion by introducing the “world to come.” When the Bible speaks of the world to come, it means the final state of things after Christ’s final judgment has restored order and purity to all that God has created and the fires of vengeance have consumed all that is corrupt and sinful. Peter tells us that, when the world around us is melted with an intense heat, we look forward to God’s promise of a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). I do not pretend to know exactly what this world to come will look like, but I know that this is the world in view here. The Bible makes it clear that we humans – as far as we are sanctified by Christ – have a place and a role in the coming order.

The author appeals to Psalm 8 to show that authority in this coming world has been given to men and not angels. God appointed mankind to an office – an authoritative role in His creation. He has placed all things in subjection under humanity, and the Hebrew author encourages us to take this at face

value. God has appointed us over *all* the works of His hands – this excludes nothing! But it is self-evident when we consider our present state in the world that we do not currently exercise this kind of authority. As David looked to the heavens and realized just how small and insignificant he was in relation to the powerful, immoveable things of the universe, we can look at the great powers of the universe – including the angels – and be amazed that God has appointed us to a position higher than them in the world to come, despite our humble state in the world today.

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone

¹⁰ For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹² saying:

*‘I will declare Your name to My brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.’*

¹³ And again:

‘I will put My trust in Him.’

And again:

‘Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.’

¹⁴ Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. ¹⁶ For indeed He does not give

aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.” (Hebrews 2:9-16, NKJV)

Verses 5-8 proved both the office God has appointed to humanity, as well as humanity’s inability to fulfill that office under our own power. Just as David showed in Psalm 8, so the author of Hebrews points out in this place: what we have we have only with God’s help. Thus, when we look at natural humanity, we only see weakness and inability, but when we look at Jesus, we see strength and authority. Jesus has accomplished all that we have failed to do, and He now enjoys the mastery and authority over God’s creation on our behalf.

But the great hope of the gospel is that Jesus did not become human and did not qualify Himself for our office and our authority so that He could *replace* us. No, He did all of this so that He could *give aid* to us. He became a man and endured the sufferings of flesh and blood so that He could bring many sons to glory. He has made Himself our brother so that He can show us the way to overcome our weaknesses and, through His atoning work, to qualify us for the work God has prepared.

The author of Hebrews appeals to death as a clear example of what Christ has done to aid us. We are bound by death – not one of us has the strength to defeat its power over us. Thus, as long as we still die, we have not attained and cannot have the kind of authority and dominion God has appointed to us. However, by coming to earth as a human, dying on the cross, and rising again the third day, Jesus changed our enemy’s greatest weapon into a medium of strength and perfection. Our weakness is revealed in death, but God’s strength through the resurrection has made it our greatest victory. This is the hope we have in Christ.

“Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.” (Hebrews 2:17-18, NKJV)

Therefore – because God has a purpose for humanity, because He has appointed us to glory, honor, and authority far above our natural position in creation, because we are weak and unable to attain to this position on our own, because God wants to see His creation fulfil its original design – for all these reasons, Christ had to come. He had to become a man, and He had to fulfil His work in a way that helps us overcome our every weakness. All of this is because God made a plan in the beginning, and He will move heaven and earth to accomplish it. If we will commit ourselves to Him and His purpose, there is no help that we need that God will withhold. This is why God cares for us.

We submit this interpretation of each chapter to our readers. Our pages are open for any further criticism or inquiry into these things!

– M. S.

The Grace of God, Part 2

In the last issue and in the foregoing essay, we have established that God does have a purpose for humanity, and that the mission of Christ to the earth was meant to give us the aid we need to accomplish that purpose. We now turn our attention to the nature of sin in relation to our divinely ordained purpose. What is sin, and how does it affect our position in God's creation?

We will pick up the thread in the book of Genesis. In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, He created only two human beings, Adam and Eve. He commissioned these two to accomplish three things: “be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth; and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). To prepare them for this work, and to give them the support they needed, He planted the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-17). The garden was meant to be a tool to equip Adam and Eve for their work.

However, just like any other tool the garden could be used two ways. It was good and sufficient for its own purpose, but it could be misapplied and misused to accomplish something contrary to its design. Thus, although it

was intended to enrich humanity and enable us to multiply, fill the earth, and have dominion over it *within* God's plan, it could also be misapplied in an attempt to aggrandize humanity *apart* from God's design.

These two purposes are represented by the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9). I hold these to be literal trees, but they each played a role either in the success of humanity in God's design, or their commitment to some other purpose foreign to God.

The tree of life enabled Adam and Eve to live forever (Genesis 3:22). This would enable them to build a family large enough to fill the earth, and to keep learning and working for eternity, ever reaching closer to the goal that God had set.

To eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil indicated a lack of faith in God – an opportunity to second-guess God's design, wisdom, and purpose. This was expressly forbidden (Genesis 2:17).

Why did God create the garden so that it could be misused? I cannot say more than the Bible does, but it seems that God placed both trees within the reach of humanity so that we – creatures of free will – could learn to trust Him. We may either follow His design in faith and enjoy an eternity of happiness and fulfilment, or, if we do not trust Him, we may try our own hand at ruling the universe. We can take it upon ourselves to determine what is good and evil, and we can do our very best to create a system of authority and control that is better than the one God designed for us.

In other words, God took a policy of openness toward Adam and Eve. Not that He made every secret of the universe available to them, but He made the opportunity available to examine His work with a critical eye. However, He warned them plainly that if they chose to do so – if they made themselves judges over God – their weakness would be revealed, and they would die (Genesis 2:17).

We know that this is the significance that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil carried because this is exactly why Eve chose to eat from the tree.

The serpent, Satan, prompted her to question God's wisdom or sincerity in the design of the garden and the commands He had given. He implied that God had been dishonest when he discouraged Adam and Eve from eating from that tree, and that God was afraid that humanity could become His equal or His better, if only they had the knowledge contained in the tree – "The serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" (Genesis 3:3, NKJV).

So when Adam and Eve ate from the tree, it was a result of their mistrust toward God. They no longer believed that He was better qualified to lead their lives or dictate their place in creation than they themselves were. They took it upon themselves to know good and evil, and as the rest of the chapter indicates, they immediately saw how weak they were in comparison to Him. They could no more solve the problem of their own physical nakedness than dictate order on a universal level.

Thus, the sin of Adam and Eve represented a departure from God's original design. With the tree of life, God had given them all that they needed to reign over creation *under* Him, and *with* Him. If they had continued to grow into the position that God had prepared for them, then they would have glorified Him and been glorified by Him when the whole creation worked together flawlessly, by His great design. However, when they decided to elevate themselves beyond their position in His design, the system no longer worked the way it was meant to. There could only be one supreme judge of what is good and what is not – and humanity was not qualified for that work. God removed the grace that He had given – the tree of life – so that it would not be misused to create a race of immortal, corrupt humans who spent their endless days warring against God (Genesis 3:22-24).

Thus, sin entered the world; not through some horrifying, gruesome crime that could easily be decried under any system of human morality, but rather by simply questioning God's wisdom and design. Through sin, we, as humanity, have disqualified ourselves to fill even the role of authority that God assigned to us in the beginning – much less a role equal to God's. God,

however, has not given up on His design. His work in human history since that first sin has been dedicated to our *restoration* to the position we were originally designed to fill. Through the resurrection, the same death that was made necessary by the first humans' rebellion has become a tool of restoration and hope for as many of us as believe in Jesus Christ and commit ourselves to His purpose (Hebrews 2:14-16). God submitted us, His creation, to futility out of hope that we will once again reign with Him in His restored purpose (Romans 8:18-21).

Since all humanity has been made subject to sin (Romans 3:23), we are all subject to God's hope of restoration. In essence, time itself is a grace from God. We have already deviated from His purpose, but He has not wiped us from existence because He hopes that we can be restored.

In the next issue, we will examine a case when God lost that hope – in the days of the flood. Then, when there was no longer any reasonable expectation that humanity, save eight souls, could be restored to Him, He withheld the grace that He extends to us today.

– M. S.

A Plea for Restoration¹, No. 1

“For a great and effectual door is opened to me, yet there are many opposers.” (1
Corinthians 16:9)²

In the text set before us, the great apostle to the gentiles describes, in metaphorical language, the ways in which the gospel spreads and is opposed in this world. The term “door,” in its figurative sense, most often signifies an opportunity. When a college student says, “a door was opened for me

¹ This essay has, in large part, been inspired by and adapted from an article written by Isaac Errett, “Opportunity and Opposition,” in *New Testament Christianity* ed. Z. T. Sweeney (Columbus: Z. T. Sweeney, 1923), 60-85.

² All scripture quotations are taken from Alexander Campbell's *Living Oracles* translation of the New Testament unless otherwise noted.

to travel and study abroad,” he means that he was afforded an opportunity to travel and study. Similarly, when a preacher says, “a door was opened to me to preach the gospel of peace to a lost soul in this city,” he, too, means that he was given the opportunity or the occasion to spread the gospel in a certain place.

Upon returning from their missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas told the church in Antioch “what God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the gentiles” (Acts 14:27). We are wise to note that this language does not necessitate nor imply a direct act of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of the gentiles as some have supposed. Instead, we ought to take this language just as defined above—that an opportunity was afforded the apostles to preach to the people in various places in the gentile world. The one to open these doors was none other than Jesus Himself. To the church in Philadelphia, He says, “I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it” (Revelation 3:8) This supports the assertion made previously, viz. that God is the One who opens doors of opportunity to those who seek to do His divine will. Errett says:

“This suggests to us a truth of the greatest possible [importance]. The success of the gospel is not simply a question of ways and means of our creation or at our disposal. The gospel may have in it, as it has, all the saving power necessary for its object; we may have all the means necessary for its promulgation, eloquent preachers, learned advocates, powerful writers, men and money, numbers, social position, and all else that wise policy or worldly prudence could suggest, and yet, if the door is not opened, if God open not the way of access to the hearts of men, vain are the wealth and learning and skill and system, and social influence, and vain, too, is the gospel truth and grace.”³

Thus we ought to pray every day for the providential hand of God to reach down into this world, to open doors of faith, and to lead us to those who desperately seek and grope for the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Paul, it seems, did not consider his success in preaching to be attributed to his own

³ Errett, “Opportunity.”

oratorical training or eloquence of speech (for he had very little of this; see 2 Corinthians 11:6), his own intellect (he had much of this), nor his influential position as Jew or a Roman citizen. On the contrary, he attributes his success to the increase given *by God* after he had preached the word which had been given to him *by God*, and after he had walked through the door opened to him *by God*. In all this we see clearly, though perhaps retrospectively, that no man can call himself a great worker, preacher, teacher, or evangelist. We must give God the just title of “the great evangelist”⁴ and “the true worker.” We are but His slaves, chained to this old world and charged with acting as His hands and feet shod with the gospel of peace.

To Corinth, however, Paul says in our text that not only was a *great* and *effectual* door opened to him, but there were also many who *opposed* his work and preaching. This appears to set a precedent and model by which the rest of time and space would inevitably abide, viz. that as long as there are supporters of truth and citizens of God’s kingdom, there will also be those who oppose them and obstruct their progress. As great opportunity begins to build, opposition will rise to meet it. And this should not be a surprise to those who understand the spiritual warfare in which we, as Christian soldiers, are embroiled. The parable given by Jesus of the wheat and the corresponding tares, is sure evidence of this principle. “The same soil that produces a [great] yield of corn produces also a corresponding abundance of weeds and noxious plants.... If the press gives us Bibles, it gives us also infidel books as readily. If free speech [such as we have in the United States] enables us to preach the gospel without restraint, it equally removes restraint from the enemy of the gospel⁵.” If modern transportation speeds the movement of the knowledge and glory of the Lord through the world, it also quickens the feet of those already swift to do evil. If the internet and social media allows men to communicate and reach a broader audience than could squeeze into any stadium or arena in the world, it also retains

⁴ This language was first suggested to me by Clinton De France.

⁵ Errett, “Opportunity.”

pornographic images and fulfills lusts of the flesh of those who would otherwise be kept pure and chaste. Because of sin and the ruler of it, this is the world in which we live and work.

Any honest person must admit that both of these propositions are evidently true. The God of the universe will certainly move heaven and earth in order to open doors and bring the world under His rule. Concurrent with this, however, men and authorities, powers and kingdoms will rise up in opposition to the humble labors of Christians everywhere. To Isaac Errett, this seemed to be an inevitable and persistent theme throughout history, and we would agree, but the scriptural hope and promise to the believer is that of victory and not defeat; advantage and not disadvantage; dominance, not weakness; superiority, not subjugation. The earth will, one day, be filled with His knowledge and glory as the waters that cover the seas; this is the promise of the Old Testament prophets (see Isaiah 11:9) and it is the promise of the apostle Paul, viz. that He, that is Jesus, must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. Therefore, we must not be ignorant or blinded by our optimism so that we exclude the possibility of opposition in our work. Such an attitude would be unwise at best and more likely destructive. Rather, we must rise to meet the opposition. We must learn to use the advancements of our times to the glory of God and to the spread of His word. We must be diligent to fight and war against the spiritual powers so dominant in this sphere.

In this series of essays, it will be our purpose to 1) examine the doors that have been opened to us by our technological and societal advancements, 2) give attention to the antagonists who have risen to prominence in our day, and 3) propose a solution and method by which we may continue our plea to restore apostolic Christianity.

— **Kaleb Leonard**

Bible Interpretation, No. 2

In our last study, we concluded that the Bible is a message from God that is meant to apply to our lives today. Thus, the Bible is meant to be understood. It is our responsibility as Christians to equip ourselves to discern its meaning. Now that we know something about the background of the Bible, we need to think about the reasonable expectations that we should have when we prepare to interpret a passage.

The following list explains seven logical presuppositions that can help us interpret the Bible⁶:

1 – The Bible Means What It Says

While there are some passages in the Bible that are written using symbolic language, the vast majority of its text communicates its meaning plainly. The people and events described in the Scriptures should, in most cases, be understood as real people and real events. We should not expect to find a hidden code waiting to be uncovered. Likewise, when one of the biblical authors writes about something spiritual, we should not try to add anything to what they themselves have said.

2 – Every Passage Has a Context

No passage in the Bible is meant to be read in isolation. Just like any other book, we should not expect to find all the meaning of the Bible condensed into a single verse. Instead, we need to make an effort to understand how each passage fits in with those surrounding it. For example, many passages in the epistles of the New Testament rely on conclusions that have already been reached earlier in the same book. We need to read the first four chapters of Romans to understand what is taught in chapter five.

⁶ The following list is adapted from chapter 2, “Inductive Bible Study,” in Richard Alan Fuhr and Andreas Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), pp.20-44.

3 – Every Passage Means Only One Thing

Generally, when we read a piece of written material, we acknowledge that the text does or should mean what the author intended it to say. We might disagree at times about the author's intention, but we agree that a text must mean one thing or another. It makes logical sense for us to read the Bible the same way. We should not expect to find a passage whose meaning changes depending on how or when we read it. We may find multiple ways to *apply* what one passage teaches, but that does not mean that the passage itself has more than one meaning.

4 – The Text Determines Its Own Meaning

When we look for the meaning of any given passage, we should allow the passage itself to guide us. This means that we should try to understand it *before* we worry about applying it. If we start with the application and try to work our way backward to understanding the text, we run the risk of imposing our own thoughts over the inspired meaning of the Bible. Just because a particular passage is normally used to support a well-known doctrine or practice in our churches does not mean that it is right to assume that the passage teaches that doctrine or practice. If we decide ahead of time what we think the Bible *must* teach, then we will not be able to recognize what it *does* teach.

5 – No Translation Is Inspired

From time to time, disagreements over the meaning of a passage are reflected in and perhaps based on the different English translations that are available to us today. Consider, for example, 1 Peter 3:21. In the New King James Version (NKJV), this passage teaches that baptism is “the **answer** of a good conscience toward God,” while the English Standard Version (ESV) says that baptism is “an **appeal** to God for a good conscience.” The NKJV here implies that baptism is the product of a good conscience, while the ESV states clearly that a clean conscience can only come after baptism. This is a significant difference of meaning that could have a severe impact on the doctrines of many churches, but it cannot be solved simply by

picking a favorite Bible translation. It can only be solved by looking to the original language of the passage. No translation is perfect; we must be aware that we are reading an interpretation of an original document. The meaning rests with the original, not the interpretation.

6 – The Bible Has a Chronological Order

Many alleged contradictions in the Bible may be more easily understood when we recognize that the books of the Bible were written in the space of about 1,500 years. During this time, God's people lived under several covenants. None of these changes affect how we view God or the definitions of what is morally right or wrong, but many ceremonial laws and circumstances have changed over time. An example of this kind of progression would be the law of the Sabbath. Under the Old Covenant, the Law of Moses, the Israelites were commanded to rest on the seventh day of every week (Exodus 20:8-11), while the New Covenant, the Law of Christ, does not bind the same on Christians (Colossians 2:16-17). This is because God's plan of salvation has progressed through time. Knowing where each text stands in the story of that salvation will help us sort out how we should understand it.

7 – The Bible Agrees with Itself

When we recognize that every part of the Bible is a revelation from God regarding His plan for humanity, we should not expect to find contradictions within its pages. This means that our logical studies will consider the *harmony* of the Scriptures. If the meanings of two passages seem to disagree with each other outside of the context of the Bible's chronology, we have most likely mistaken the meaning of one or both passages. In this case, it would be best to study both passages again individually. If we try to force our interpretations of both passages to work together, we will most likely miss the point altogether. Harmonizations, just like interpretations, should come from the text, not from our own thoughts or preferences.

For the same reason, the Bible can help us to understand its own difficult texts. If we are having trouble drawing out the meaning of a particular passage, it can be helpful to study what the Bible has to say on the same subject in another place. Since we expect the Bible's teachings about sin, for example, to be consistent, we can find help all throughout its pages.

– M. S.

Teaching – The Story of the Bible

For a congregation of the Lord's church to survive and grow it must have capable teachers. Perhaps you are interested in becoming a teacher or wish to improve your teaching. You might have many questions, among them, how should I begin studying the Bible?

If you wanted to be a mechanic, you wouldn't begin by learning everything you could about speedometer repair. There isn't much demand for it, and a broken speedometer doesn't leave anyone stranded by the side of the road. Instead, you focus on the fundamentals: fuel, fire, and air. You learn what it takes to make a car run, keep air in the tires, make sure the brakes work, etc.

Learning to teach isn't much different. The church needs people skilled at teaching the gospel to the lost. The gospel starts at the beginning of Genesis and runs along a story that ends, then begins again at a cross. The Levitical priesthood is an interesting thing to study, but it isn't of great value to someone who wants to know what they need to do to have their sins forgiven.

How well versed are you in a gospel story that starts at Genesis and makes its way through the New Testament? If someone asked you what the Bible is about, what would you say? Can you describe in one sentence what the story of the Bible is?

Here's my one sentence:

“The Bible tells the story of man’s creation, his fall to sin, and God’s redemptive plan to save him through the blood of His Son.”

What if you had to turn your sentence into a longer summary of the Bible? Could you tell the story of the Bible to someone who asked? This is the kind of beginning knowledge that is necessary to teach the gospel to the lost.

Here’s my version of the story.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Over the course of five days God created light, the sun, moon, and stars, seas and dry land. He created grass and trees, fruits and vegetables, fish and birds. On the sixth day He created the animals that walk the earth, and finally, man. He called all of His creation “good” until He created man, when He called it “very good.” On the seventh day God rested.

Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden. It was a paradise with everything they needed to live. In the garden was the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve could have lived there forever. God instructed them that they could eat whatever they wanted except for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and if they did, they would die.

One day Satan went to Eve and deceived her, telling her they wouldn’t really die if they ate. Instead they would become like God, knowing good from evil. The fruit looked good to Eve, so she ate it and gave to Adam, who also ate. They immediately knew right from wrong, and realized they were naked. God went to them questioning what they had done. He pronounced His punishments on Adam, Eve, and Satan. They were forced out of the garden. From then on, they had to toil and sweat for everything. But included in Satan’s punishment was a promise to mankind, that through the Seed of Eve his head would be bruised.

Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Abel raised sheep and Cain raised crops. When the time came to offer sacrifice to God, Abel offered a sheep while Cain offered produce from his field. Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable to God. God offered Cain a second chance, but Cain was angry and would not repent. In his rage Cain went out and killed Abel. For this evil act he is cursed by God. Cain's family would continue to reject God and drift away from Him.

Eventually men became too evil to go on living. Noah and his family were the only believers left on earth. God instructed Noah to build an ark because God was going to flood the whole earth. This ark would save Noah, his family, and a remnant of the animals. Noah faithfully obeyed God's command. When the ark was complete, God caused it to rain and the waters of the deep to open up. The world was covered by water and mankind was wiped out except the eight people in the ark. When the waters receded and the ark came to rest, Noah and his family left the ark to repopulate the earth.

Some generations later a man named Abraham found favor before God. He was faithful in his service and pleased God with his manner of life. Abraham and Sarah were childless until late in life, but God promised them a child anyway. God promised to build a great nation through this child, and that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. When Abraham was 100 years old, Isaac was born. Isaac grew up, married, and had twins. Esau was the first born, but through deception, Jacob received the inheritance. Jacob grew up and married twice because he himself was deceived by his father-in-law. Jacob had twelve sons. Through the lineage of Isaac and Jacob God continued to reiterate His promise that a great nation would be built.

One of Jacob's sons was Joseph, and Joseph was the favorite. In a fit of jealousy his brothers conspired to get rid of him and sold him as a slave. Joseph ended up living in Egypt, a slave to a high official in the

government. In spite of great hardship, Joseph remained faithful to God, eventually becoming the most important official in the country, except for Pharaoh himself. Because of a terrible famine Joseph's family travelled to Egypt in search of food. There they found their long lost brother and were reconciled. The family eventually moved there as honored guests of the king. Jacob's family lived there for 400 years, growing very large. But the Egyptians began to fear them, and finally enslaved them.

God did not forget His people. He called a man named Moses, born to the Hebrews, raised as an Egyptian Prince, to lead His people out. He appointed Moses and his brother Aaron to be His representatives to Pharaoh, demanding the release of the Hebrews. Pharaoh refused, so God sent 10 plagues on the Egyptian people, the last plague being the death of every firstborn in the land. The Hebrews were instructed to sacrifice a lamb and place the blood around their doors. That night the Lord killed all the firstborn but passed over every home where the blood was applied.

Pharaoh had enough. He ordered the Hebrews to leave. Not long after he began to pursue them. God caused the Red Sea to part so they could cross on dry land. This wall of water collapsed on the pursuing Egyptians, wiping them out. Moses continued to lead the people toward the promised land. Along the way the people complained, but God provided for them.

At Mt Sinai the 10 commandments and other laws were given. They continued their travels until they arrive at the edge of the promised land. Twelve spies were sent to scout the land. When the spies returned, 10 reported seeing terrible things and declared the effort futile. Only Caleb and Joshua were faithful, insisting they take the land immediately. This rebellion by the people was too much for God, who turned them away to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

When the 40 years had passed, Moses having died, Joshua led the people across the Jordan river to begin their conquest. When they were faithful to God, they defeated their enemies. When they were not, they lost. Thus, the Hebrews came to possess the land promised to Abraham so long before.

In time the Hebrews noticed all the nations around them had kings, and desired one of their own. This was yet another rejection of God. Saul was chosen to be their first king. He was not faithful to God and lost his throne to David. The Bible says David was a “man after God’s own heart.” He made many mistakes but never gave up serving God. He expanded the kingdom, bringing peace and prosperity along the way.

David was followed by Solomon, who was given great wisdom from God. Solomon made many mistakes, married too many wives, and had too many entanglements with the surrounding nations. Nevertheless, the kingdom grew and prospered. After Solomon’s death the kingdom split. The northern part never had a good king and drifted away from God. The southern part had some good, but mostly bad kings, and too, drifted away. God sent a number of prophets, warning them to repent of their sins and return to His law. These warnings fell on deaf ears, leading to the eventual conquest and captivity by other nations.

The prophets also spoke of a coming savior, their Messiah. They foretold many things concerning the Messiah: how He would be born, facts about His life, that He would be put to death, buried, then rise again from the dead on the third day.

For 400 years God was silent. No prophet spoke His words to the people. When the time was right God sent His messenger, John the Baptist, to declare that the kingdom was at hand. John preached repentance and baptism for the remission of sins. His job was to prepare the way for the Messiah, the Seed promised to Adam and Eve, then to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through the lineage of King David. John was very effective, making many disciples.

About 6 months after John's birth, Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem. He was impressive as a child, wise and capable well beyond His years. Even at the age of 12 He knew He had to be about God's business.

One day Jesus went to John to be baptized. John protested, insisting he needed to be baptized by Jesus. Jesus insisted that 'all righteousness' be fulfilled and was baptized. Then He began to preach. The common people of the day loved Him. He taught with authority, giving them practical instruction about God's will and how they could live better lives.

He also healed those who suffered. People from all around Judea, Samaria, and Galilee traveled to find Him and have their afflictions cured. He healed the lame, the blind, the leper. He even raised the dead. On other occasions He fed thousands from small amounts of food. These all served as proof He was the Son of God. As we might imagine, His fame and popularity grew.

Shortly after He began His ministry, He called 12 men to be His disciples. These accompanied Him everywhere He went, becoming witnesses of His many words and deeds. They watched as Jesus lived as the prophets said He would live, fulfilling all things written about Him. He gave them power of sickness and disease and sent them out to preach the gospel. Though they often failed to understand what He taught, they remained faithful, except for Judas Iscariot.

As Jesus' popularity grew, so did the envy of the Jewish leaders. They hated Jesus and wanted Him dead. After 3 ½ years of teaching, his time fulfilled, Jesus was arrested and tried. His death sentence was carried out under orders of the Roman government who ruled Israel at the time. Jesus died on a cross, was buried, and was resurrected on the third day.

For several weeks Jesus appeared to His disciples. Sometimes individuals, sometimes small groups, other times large. The number of witnesses was over 500. Having defeated death, He ascended to Heaven where He has been given all authority and is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

On the day of Pentecost after Jesus' death, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak in other languages. The Jews around them thought they were drunk, but Peter corrected them. Peter told them how they had taken and crucified the Son of God, that they were guilty of murdering their Messiah. Many of them believed, asking what they needed to do to be saved from this awful sin. Peter instructed them to repent and be baptized. About 3000 people were saved that day. Peter and the others continued to preach the word of God, baptizing all who believed.

One day a man named Saul was traveling to Damascus to persecute Christians. Along the way Jesus appeared to him in a bright light. He questioned why Saul was persecuting Him. Saul was instructed to continue to Damascus where a man would tell him what he must do to be saved. Saul, who became better known as Paul, followed those directions and was baptized. He then devoted his life to serving Jesus, whom he had persecuted. He traveled all around the Mediterranean Sea converting lost sinners, mostly among the Gentiles.

From the time Adam and Eve sinned in the garden God faithfully executed His plan to save men from their sins, ultimately giving His Son to die on a cross. Through His blood we can have our sins forgiven if we will believe and obey His gospel.

Consider the value of a study like this:

- 1) You familiarize yourself with the basic structure of the Bible.

- 2) You learn about the main characters, such as Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, His disciples.
- 3) You learn about the main events: The fall of man, the destruction of the earth by water, the call of Abraham to be a mighty nation, the organization of the Hebrews under a law, etc. In the New Testament you learn how all of these prepared the way for the Messiah and His kingdom.
- 4) God's faithfulness to His people and His promises is made clear.
- 5) The New Testament is filled with references to Abraham, Moses, the law, and the prophets. Matthew's gospel has a lot less value if you aren't familiar with the Old Testament.
- 6) The books of the Bible are not meant to be read in isolation. The thread of salvation runs through them all. Learn to follow it from start to finish.
- 7) It becomes clear that God had a plan from the very beginning and made sure it was executed exactly as designed.

Your version of the story will be a little different because it's yours. As you read you might find certain people more interesting or choose to emphasize other events. An advantage of this approach is that it encourages Bible reading. As a student of the Bible there are times to read, and times to study. If you're just getting started, Bible reading will be more valuable. You will gain a broad familiarity with the people, places, and events of the Bible. As you read, make note of passages you think deserve closer attention later.

If you're wondering where to begin your studies, think about creating your own summary of the Bible. Such a study will focus your mind on the basic elements of the gospel and provide a good foundation on which to build. Make a list of the characters listed above and go read about them. Go learn as much as possible about the gospel plan, and all the work that went into

making it possible, then go tell the story to lost sinners. May God bless you in your efforts to glorify His kingdom.

— **Lance Stallcop**

A New Translation of 1 Corinthians 2

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come preaching the mystery of God according to my superiority in speech or wisdom, for I did not deem it wise to know anything among you except for Jesus Christ — and Him as crucified. I became to you as one who was weak, in fear, and in much trembling, and my logic and my message did not consist of persuasive words of wisdom, but rather of proof regarding the Spirit and power, so that your faith may not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

But we do speak wisdom among those who have matured, though it is not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are being made void. Rather, we speak God’s hidden wisdom in a mystery, which God appointed before the ages began to accomplish our glory. Not one of the rulers of the age has understood this, for if they did understand, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. But rather, as it is written:

‘No eye has seen these things, nor has any ear heard them,

Nor have they sprung into the heart of man —

The things that God has prepared for those who love Him.’

But God has revealed them to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit examines everything, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of any man, except for the spirit of that man that is in him? Likewise, no one has understood the thoughts of God, save for the Spirit of God. Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but rather the Spirit which is from God, so that we may know the things which God has given to us by His grace. And we do not

express these thoughts with words taught by human wisdom, but with those taught by the Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things. A man devoid of spirituality does not accept the things taught by God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to understand, because they are discerned spiritually. The spiritual man, however, discerns all of what is taught, and he himself cannot be discerned by any other, for 'who understands the mind of the Lord, so that he will teach Him?' But we have the mind of Christ."

1: "Preaching the mystery of God..." – Most translations (NASB, NKJV, ESV, NIV) have here the "testimony" of God instead of His "mystery." This is based on a manuscript difference. According to the editors of the Greek text I am using – the 28th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*⁷ – "mystery" is the most likely early reading. There is a place to investigate the textual criticism of this passage, but I do not see that it has a significant impact on the meaning in this place. Therefore, I have translated it according to the Greek text before me.

3: "I became to you..." – Most translations have either "I was with you..." (NASB, NKJV, ESV) or "I came to you" (NIV, NRSV). The Greek word *γινωμαί* (*ginomai*) embraces all three meanings, to a greater or lesser degree⁸. Since Paul made a determination not to know any wisdom or strength among them, it would make sense that he "became" weak. He makes it clear in the next paragraph (v. 6) that he was capable of dealing in wisdom with those who were prepared to receive it, but this was not his starting point. He chose to be weak so that the gospel could be glorified.

⁷ Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28. *revidierte Auflage*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012). Logos.

⁸ Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000). 196-199. Logos.

4: “*My logic and my message...*” – See my comments on my translation of 1:18, “the logic of the cross,” in the first issue of this paper.

14: “*A man devoid of spirituality...*” – This is a difficult phrase to translate, partly because it sets up a theme that will appear again in 1 Corinthians 15:44-46. In this verse and the next, the Greek words *ψυχικός* (*psychikos*) is contrasted with the word *πνευματικός* (*pneumatikos*), often translated “natural” and “spiritual,” respectively (e.g., NASB, NKJV, ESV). The latter is the adjectival form of the noun *πνεῦμα* (*pneuma*), “spirit,” while the former holds the same relationship to the word *ψυχή* (*psyche*), “soul.” Thus, Paul appears to contrast a man who is led by his “soul” with one who is led by a “spirit” (whether his own or God’s).

Understandably, this is a difficult concept to work through, especially since we often use the words “soul” and “spirit” interchangeably in modern English. The concept of spirit can be understood easily in the context – Paul has appealed to the human spirit as the rational consciousness that dwells in a human body (“who knows the thoughts of any man, except for the spirit of that man that is in him?”), and he has spoken of the Spirit of God in the same way – as a rational consciousness who has full access to God’s deepest thoughts and communicates them to humanity. Thus, when Paul speaks of a spiritual man in verse 15, he is referring to someone who has been taught to discern things on a spiritual level – with words and concepts taught by God’s Spirit.

But what of the “soulish” or “soul-led” man? Regarding the soul, Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich are reluctant to “draw hard and fast lines in the use of this multivalent word⁹.” Sometimes it has reference simply to animal life, sometimes to something greater, perhaps even eternal life (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 5:23). However, the same authors are willing to limit the meaning of *ψυχικός* (*psychikos*) to the physical, animal world, in that it pertains “to the life of the natural world and whatever belongs to it, in

⁹ Ibid., 1098.

contrast to the realm of experience whose central characteristic is *πνεῦμα*¹⁰ (spirit). This would indicate that the man who cannot discern spiritual things is in this condition because of the absence of spirituality, not because something else has been introduced.

In other words, the spiritual man is not fundamentally different in his nature from the natural man. Rather, he has both physical, animal life *and* spiritual understanding. By contrast, the natural man only understands what happens in the physical world, for he neither believes nor understands the things that pertain to the spirit. As long as his reasoning and knowledge are based *solely* on the physical world, he will never understand what the Spirit of God has to say. This is the view expressed in the NRSV.

– M. S.

Spiritual Wisdom

Comments on 1 Corinthians 2

Introduction

In the first chapter, Paul established the only practical grounds for Christian unity. If we want to grow together into the same mind and purpose, we must abandon every influence that divides us – that elevates any group above another – and submit ourselves to God’s direction. For this reason, God chose to save us through the crucifixion of Christ, something so unexpected and irrational that no human philosopher or mighty warrior would claim it as a victory. To the contrary, the gospel demands that Christians give up their faith in human wisdom and human strength. These will accomplish nothing, only the foolishness of the cross can save.

But this does not mean that there is no wisdom or strength to be found in the gospel, only that they are of a different nature from the wisdom and strength that we perceive in the world around us. God’s Word does not

¹⁰ Ibid., 1100.

only appeal to our emotions – to tell us how to feel or react to Christ’s work – He also appeals to our rational minds. There is much that we can know and teach once we learn how to discern them spiritually. This is what Paul sets out to prove in 1 Corinthians 2.

1-5

In the first verses of the chapter, Paul explains the program he adopted when he first preached in Corinth and, more importantly, why he preached that way. He emphasizes that he did not preach the mystery of God according to his “superiority in speech or wisdom.” If anyone in the early church could appeal to his own learning and authority, it would have been Paul. He had a fortuitous upbringing, including an education under one of the most highly respected elders of Israel in his day, and his conduct under the Law of Moses was as blameless as anyone could be (Acts 22:1-5; Philippians 3:2-6). Surely he knew how to deliver an impressive speech that would evoke an emotional response from the audience, or how to form a forceful argument that an opponent could not easily resist. Nevertheless, he refused to do either of these things in Corinth. He denied himself the right to use his own natural advantages.

Instead, he presented himself to the Corinthians as one who was weak and fearful, who had only one message to preach – the crucifixion of Christ. The only evidence that he offered to support this message was proof that God’s Spirit was working with him – probably miraculous signs such as healing and speaking in foreign languages that he could not otherwise have known. All that these demonstrations would or could do is prove that Paul was supported by the strength of God. His message itself was not impressive, because the idea that Christ had conquered His enemies through a cross was foolish to the Greek world.

But Paul determined to use only this proof, and to preach only this message, so that the Corinthians who did believe would believe in the right thing. He needed to convince them to believe in God’s power and not to rely on Paul for anything. If someone in Corinth was converted only because of Paul’s

ability to argue for Christ or to disprove the power of idols, he would not begin his Christian walk with the right focus. In fact, he might rather look down on any other teachers who did not share Paul's eloquence. He would become a convert of Paul, not a convert of the Spirit of God. Paul wanted to minimize the possibility that his personality would be the driving force behind *anyone's* conversion. Therefore, he actively drew their attention away from himself and his strengths to focus on God and His strength.

6-9

The fact that Paul's initial message, which the Christians at Corinth had believed, was so simple did not mean that there was no depth to the gospel. Once a Christian has faith in the power of God, and once he has matured into the next stage of his life in Christ, then it is appropriate for him to focus on wisdom once again. But this is a different kind of wisdom than we will encounter in the world around us. God's wisdom appears foolish to the world, and likewise, it is not possible to use worldly wisdom, the "wisdom of this age," to accomplish the purpose of God's kingdom. Only God's wisdom can do this. Thus, we discuss His "hidden wisdom in a mystery."

This does not mean that God's wisdom is hidden from those of us who are in Christ – only that His wisdom is a mystery to those who are accustomed to relying on worldly strength or intelligence. The proof that Paul offers of this proposition is that the rulers of the world accomplished God's mission when they thought they were fighting against Him. The cross seemed so shameful to them, so foolish that the Son of God could not possibly use it to overcome the strength of the world. However, if they had understood God's plan, they would never have killed Him. They would never have allowed Him to defeat their greatest weapon – death (Hebrews 2:14-15).

But it was necessary that things happen this way so that God could fulfill His purpose in the church. God appointed the logic that would save us in Christ before time began in order to "accomplish our glory." He hid the things that He has prepared for those who love Him so that they could

neither be anticipated by those who would follow Him, nor denied by those who would oppose Him. Thus, he destroyed the wisdom of wise men, and refused the understanding of those who understand.

10-12

But these things have not remained hidden for eternity. God does want us to understand His wisdom and His purpose. But because this kind of wisdom belongs to God and not to humanity, He must teach it to us. We have to learn how to think like God. This is the mission of God's Spirit. The Spirit knows the deep thoughts of God, and He has carried them to us.

Paul explains why we must yield to God's Spirit by analogy. There are things completely hidden in the world around us to the point that no wisdom, science, or strength can uncover them. Specifically, there is no way for any human to know what another human is thinking or feeling. I cannot see your thoughts, nor can you see mine. The only one who has access to these things is the spirit, the rational consciousness, who dwells in each human individually. I can tell you what I think, because my spirit controls my thoughts, my speech, and my actions, but you can only know my thoughts if I *reveal* them to you. Likewise, God has thoughts and feelings, and these are shared with His Spirit. His Spirit is also responsible for revealing His wisdom to those who are outside, for if His Spirit did not tell us, we would never be able to discover what God thinks or feels.

Therefore, when Paul says that "we did not receive the spirit of the world, but rather the Spirit which is from God," he merely intends to demonstrate that the things revealed by the Spirit *are* God's thoughts. The Spirit did not come from the world, so He will not teach worldly wisdom. Thus, through Him, and only through Him, can we know "the things which God has given to us by His grace."

13-16

If God's Spirit has taught us things that cannot be discovered in the physical world, it follows that we will be unprepared to comprehend them or describe them the same way that we might describe a worldly subject. Thus, we use words or descriptions taught to us by the Spirit. It *is* possible to express these things in human language – Paul is clear that this is the medium the Spirit has used – but we have to learn a new method of reasoning before we can talk about them sensibly.

If someone is “devoid of spirituality,” one who has not learned to reason as the Spirit of God reasons, he will find that the things taught by God's Spirit are irrational and gibberish. He will favor the strength and wisdom of the present age because these things make sense to his way of thinking. A spiritual reward is not worth pursuing, because he cannot comprehend its significance.

However, those who are spiritual, who have learned how to reason like God's Spirit, are able to comprehend all of what has been revealed to us. They have learned to use God's wisdom, and Paul goes so far as to say that they are no more comprehensible to the world than God is: “he himself cannot be discerned by any other.” This argument, as well as the quote from Isaiah 40:13, are meant to show that, when we adopt the incomprehensible wisdom of God that is hidden from the world, our own wisdom and reasoning will cease to make sense to those around us. They will not be able to understand our hope nor our motivations, nor will they be in a position to critique or to guide us. Human wisdom is completely powerless when compared to the wisdom of God. Thus, insofar as we have learned the knowledge of Christ, and how to think like Him, we have been given His mind.

Conclusion

1 Corinthians 2 teaches us that there is wisdom behind God's actions, but it is a different kind of wisdom than we can find in the world. If we wish to grow together in unity, we must strip away any reliance we have on the wisdom of the world and submit ourselves as the students of God's Spirit,

who has revealed His Word to us. When we learn to reason like the Spirit, we will adopt the same understanding and the same purpose as God Himself shares. This is the one mind and one purpose that Paul appealed to in 1 Corinthians 1:10. When we learn to think like God, we will leave behind the wisdom of the world, and become as He is.

— M. S.

Question for the Prospect

Brother,

I enjoyed your translation and exposition of 1 Corinthians chapter 1. I believe you have identified both the cause and cure of sectarianism. There was a time when I thought that sectarianism, or denominationalism, was anything “out there” and different from “us.” The “denominations” or “sects” were like the gentiles - simply “non-Church of Christ people” or “non-Church of Christ ideas or practices.” Over time, though perhaps not soon enough, I learned that sectarianism is a sin that anyone can commit. It may be committed within the local church (as in Corinth), or a congregation may become a sect against all other believers, or a group of congregations may form a sectarian society. I believe you are exactly right that the root cause of this sin is hubris and conceit that creates an “us verses them” mentality. Of course some sects form as cults of personality, but they also form over propositional truths or practices and, as you noted, these may even be right - but our conceit regarding our own apprehension of them where others have failed to see what we see causes us to use these matters as instruments of destruction and sin. I first learned this from Alexander Campbell in the Christian System, but further study has brought me to an even stronger conviction that it is true.

I do have a question I would like for you to consider. If faithfulness to Christ and the path to unity among believers is found in the recognition that all the faithful are growing in the knowledge of the truth, then how are we to identify “sound doctrine” or “healthy teaching” from “false

doctrine”? How do we perceive whether or not our brother has turned his back on the pursuit of truth, or whether he is simply not where we are (either because he is behind us or because he is ahead of us)? Thank you for considering these matters. I look forward to more comments in future issues.

In Christ,

— **Clinton De France**

Re: Question for the Prospect

Brother,

Thank you for the support and the encouragement. Further, thank you for the question! This has been and remains an important question in the progress of biblical Christianity: how do we balance justice and integrity in our congregations with the humility our immaturity demands of us? How can we discern between a doctrinal disagreement that stems from immaturity (or higher maturity) and one that stems from rebellion?

I believe the answer is tied to the passages that deal with “sound doctrine,” especially 2 Timothy 4:3-4. If we can identify what sound doctrine is, and how it should be applied to matters of congregational discipline, we should be able to answer the questions above. If the Lord wills, I will put together an essay on sound doctrine for the October issue of the Prospect. Until (and after) then, we welcome our readers’ thoughts on these questions!

In Christ,

— **M. S.**

A New Translation of Mark 1:1-22

Since we have begun to publish comments on the book of Mark, it seems pertinent to approach it the same way that we have begun to address 1 Corinthians. I will produce a new translation of Mark with similar comments based on a comparison between my translation and several major translations. We will follow the same process, with the same translations outlined in the previous issue.

Mark 1:1-22

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Just as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

*‘Behold, I am sending my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way.’*

*‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight!’*

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance toward pardon from sins. And the whole district of Judea came to him, and all of Jerusalem, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan river, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

And he preached, saying, ‘One who is stronger than me is coming after me, and I am not qualified to bend down to loosen the straps of His sandals. I baptized you with water, but He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.’

And it happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, when he was stepping up out of the water, he saw the heavens split open and the spirit descending onto him

like a dove; and there was a voice from the heavens, 'You are my beloved Son, I delight in you.'

And immediately, the Spirit put Him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness for forty days and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels served Him.

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee and preached the gospel of God, and said, 'The time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near; repent and put your faith in the gospel!'

And as He passed by the sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting fishnets in the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you to be fishers of men.' They followed Him immediately, leaving their nets. And after He went a little further, He saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, and that they were in their boat preparing their nets. Immediately, He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers and followed after Him.

They traveled to Capernaum, and immediately, going to the synagogue on the Sabbath, He began to teach. The people were amazed at His teaching, for He taught them according to His authority, not like the scribes.

Notes on the Translation

Our comments on these verses will be quite brief, since it is presented as simple narrative. In fact, both of our comments relate to minor manuscript differences, neither of which affects our understanding of the passage:

2: "In Isaiah the prophet" – There is a manuscript difference in this verse. Some, specifically the *Textus Receptus* family that stands behind the KJV and NKJV, say "in the prophets," while the *Nestle-Aland* critical text, which is the basis of my translation, specifically names Isaiah.

4: “*John appeared, baptizing...*” – There is a minor textual variation here. Some manuscripts have ὁ βαπτίζων (*ho baptizon*), “the Baptist/baptizer,” while others simply have βαπτίζων (*baptizon*), “baptizing.” The translations I have reviewed are fairly evenly split on their interpretation, represented by the NASB – “John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness,” – and the ESV – “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness.” This has no impact on our interpretation of the passage.

– M. S.

The Beginning of the Gospel

Comments on Mark 1:1-22

1-3

The first three verses of the gospel serve as a rather abrupt and practical introduction to this book. First, Mark identifies what will occupy its pages: the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is the good news¹¹, a message of hope and of peace. This is Mark’s call to attention – you will want to hear what I have to say.

The good news regards the Son of God. This statement gives the news universal relevance. This is a strong statement of monotheism – the word could refer to any god believed in by any culture, except for the fact that He is not introduced as *a* God. It isn’t clear in our English translations, but Mark introduces Him as *the* God.

If we consider this in the light of Mark’s evangelistic purpose, this opening line communicates several points that would both challenge the polytheistic peoples of the Greek-speaking world and present a worldview that they

¹¹ Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000). 402-403. Logos.

would need to adopt to understand the good news – There *is* a God; He is *the* God over all things; and He has a Son.

Mark follows this introductory line with two quotes, one from Malachi 3:1, and one from Isaiah 40:3 in verse 3. These two quotes are linked together to show that the arrival of God's Son was expected by the prophets of old. Both Malachi and Isaiah spoke of a messenger who would precede the coming of the Lord, the Son of God, and would prepare the world for His arrival.

This is an unusual argument for Mark to make. He seldom refers to the Old Testament and generally expects his audience to be unfamiliar with Jewish history and culture. For example, he takes time to explain some customs of the Jews to his readers (Mark 7:1-4). Jesus does make some references to the Law and the Prophets in His sermons throughout the book, but Mark himself does not in his narrative comments.

Why, then, does he make an argument from the Old Testament at the beginning of the gospel? Mark was not trying to comprehensively explain every possible angle in Jesus' life and ministry, and he was likely writing for those who had never read the Old Testament, so this could simply be an indication that His coming was not unprecedented. There were prophets who looked forward to the arrival of the Son of God long before He came.

4-8

Similarly, Mark moves quickly through the ministry of John the Baptist. God had promised to send a messenger ahead of His Son to prepare the people for His arrival, and John filled all of the expectations set for that messenger. He appeared in the wilderness and pronounced the arrival of His successor.

John's ministry was characterized by his baptism. Mark says that all of the district of Judea and the city of Jerusalem came out to him to confess their sins and to be baptized. There are several theories as to how this prepared the people for Jesus' arrival. Most likely, it involved the following elements:

- 1) Those who were baptized were asked to analyze their own lives and recognize their sins and shortcomings.
- 2) It demonstrated to the people of Judea that every one of them needed to make themselves right with God individually – that they could not simply rely on the righteousness of their ancestors.
- 3) It prefigured the death and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6).
- 4) It gave John an opportunity to teach them about the One who would come after him.

John's arrival as a prophet is all the more significant when we realize that Israel had not seen a prophet for 400 years – not since Malachi predicted the pre-Messianic messenger. John's ability to prove his call from God could only mean one thing – the time has come; the Messiah is here.

9-11

When Jesus came to be baptized, He fulfilled all that John had taught the people to expect. This event acted as a sort of handoff between the two. John had come, he had reinitiated God's direct revelation to His people, and he had pointed to Jesus as the One who was greater than him, who would have the power to grant the Holy Spirit. God was, in essence, showing His work. The prophets of old predicted a messenger before the Christ, the messenger arrived, and then the messenger recognized Christ directly. Last of all, God sent His Spirit from heaven to mark Jesus, then spoke directly to those who saw the baptism. There could be no doubt, God had sent His Son.

12-13

Mark does not give nearly as much detail about Jesus' temptation in the desert as Matthew and Luke do. We don't see how Jesus used Scripture to defend Himself, nor do we see how Satan twisted Scripture to tempt Jesus to establish His kingdom without needing to sacrifice His life. Instead, Mark simply indicates that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for forty

days. Thus, when we limit ourselves to Mark's account, we only know that Jesus endured great discomfort and isolation. This fact alone sets up an important feature of Jesus' high priesthood, which is expressed plainly Hebrews 2:18 (NKJV): "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."

If we knew nothing of Jesus except for what Mark has told us so far, we might reasonably ask the question, "why should I trust Him?" This is Mark's answer: He knows how you suffer because He suffered just like you. He knows what it's like to face a difficult decision, and to be tempted to take the easy way out. He knows how difficult it is to do the right thing when the whole world is against you. He has made it through, and He is offering to help you make it to where He is.

Jesus may have been tempted more directly by Satan and helped more directly by angels than we are today, but the reality of His temptation and His comfort is precisely what we experience. The spiritual world is very real, and Satan does look for opportunities to attack us and to cause us to slip away from what we know to be right (1 Peter 5:8). God really sends His angels to minister to us and see to our spiritual needs (Hebrews 1:14).

14-15

These verses serve to move the narrative forward. We've met John, and Jesus was introduced through John's ministry. Now, John's ministry comes to an end through his arrest and Jesus' public ministry begins. John preached that the kingdom was coming soon, and Jesus preached that it was here. The time is now, return to God.

16-20

Jesus' first four disciples became some of His most loyal followers. We know that the conversation with Simon and Andrew included more than just the words that are included here (John 1:40-42), but Mark's brevity again aligns well with his purpose. John preached the arrival of the gospel and prepared for the teacher who would come after Him, Jesus taught that

the gospel had arrived, and He found men who could be prepared to keep preaching the gospel after He had died. From the beginning, Jesus began to prepare for the preservation of the gospel after He had died.

21-22

After He had called His first disciples, Jesus began His ministry. He started in Capernaum, a town which would mark the center of His work in Galilee. Here, Mark makes a note about the quality of Jesus' teaching, and what marked Him as unique in comparison to the scribes, the religious experts of the day. The scribes would not say anything on their own authority, but they would refer back to the rabbis of old to support their teachings. This attitude is true of much of the non-biblical Jewish literature from this time period. The words of the rabbis were written down and copied with almost as much care and reverence as the words of the Old Testament itself.

By contrast, Jesus spoke as one who had authority. Synagogue teaching began with a reading from one of the Old Testament scrolls, followed by an interpretive sermon commenting on that text¹². Likely, instead of deferring to the experts of older generations, Jesus interacted directly and definitively with the biblical text. Instead of giving possible interpretations, Jesus confidently declared what God had meant by every one of the Scriptures. We can see an example of this kind of teaching in Luke 4:21, where Jesus confidently declared that "this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Conclusion

Mark begins his gospel with the goal of evangelism in mind. In a very short, efficient narrative, he tells us how Jesus was foretold by the Old Testament, how John prepared the people to receive Him, how Jesus came and recognized John – and John recognized Him – so that John's ministry could end, and Jesus' could begin. We see that Jesus was tempted and suffered

¹² Matthew E. Gordley, "Synagogue," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016). Logos.

terribly for forty days in the wilderness, preparing Him to be compassionate toward sinners and to be able to speak to us from experience. We see how Jesus began His ministry with an authoritative declaration – the times that the prophets declared to you have come, the kingdom of God is here! Finally, we saw that Jesus began at the start of His ministry to select and train the men who would carry the gospel into the world after He had died.

– M. S.

To Our Readers

Thank you for the support all throughout the first month of publication! We are pleased to have received the questions and submissions that are found in this issue, and we look forward to what may come in future issues!

We are also happy to announce the launch of christianprospect.com. I do not yet know all that we may use the website for, but it is already serving as a convenient hub and archive for our issues as they are published. There is a contact form available on the website and, as before, you are welcome to contact me directly at editor@christianprospect.com.

We hope to publish the third issue on or near October 1st. Until then, may God bless you and keep you in His Son!

– M. S.