
THE CHRISTIAN PROSPECT

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A Word to Our Readers

First, we apologize for the lateness of this month's issue. This has been a hectic time of year, and my time has been occupied with preparations for an evangelistic trip. I do not yet know whether this trip will affect my ability to write for the November issue, but I am hopeful that everything will proceed on schedule.

We launched our website, www.christianprospect.com, last month in conjunction with the September issue. Right now, the website is serving primarily as an archive for past issues. We hope this will be helpful, since most of our articles in this issue are a part of ongoing series.

We solicit your prayers for this work, and hope that it can be a blessing and encouragement for you this month!

- M. S.

Call on the Name of the Lord, Part 1

What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? Romans 10:13 says, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Ask your religious friends, or look on the internet, and you'll find a variety of opinions about this passage. This phrase is common in scripture, dating back nearly to the creation. In this essay we will examine its history and usage so that we might understand it better.

In both Hebrew and Greek the word 'call' means what we expect it might mean: to call (as in give a name to), to call on, call out to, proclaim, cry out to, invoke, appeal to, to worship, etc. A casual reading of the Bible would show nearly all these used in relation to God. When men pray, when they're

in distress, when they praise Him, they will often use His name in one of the described ways. But the phrase ‘call on the name of the Lord’ implies something more specific than casual or spontaneous use.

Our study begins in Genesis 4 with the story of Cain and Abel. Each offers a sacrifice to God, Abel’s was acceptable to God, Cain’s was rejected (Genesis 4:4-5). Cain became very angry, but God encouraged him saying, “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” (Genesis 4:7). It is clear that God desired Cain’s obedience, and the opportunity stood to offer a proper sacrifice and be accepted by God. But Cain refused. Instead he confronted his brother and murdered him. For this act Cain was cursed by God.

We must emphasize how completely Cain rejected God. His disbelief was deliberate. At that time God’s relationship with man was direct. He spoke and interacted directly with Adam and Eve. Here God spoke and interacted directly with Cain. There was no question who God was. His parents were created by God’s hand. If Cain had any doubt or question about his actions he could have asked, but he did not. Cain knew God’s will, knew what he was doing, knew his offering was not acceptable, but he offered it anyway.

In his epistle, John uses Cain and Abel as an example:

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 12 not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.” (1 John 3:11-12, NKJV)

John wrote a great deal about the need to love one another. In this passage he got to the foundation of love and hate among people, and it is obedience. Cain murdered Abel because of the difference in their relationship with God.

Earlier in his letter, John wrote:

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have

fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” (1 John 1:5-6, NKJV)

The difference between light and darkness, good and evil, is the practice of truth. John continued to emphasize the need for obedience throughout his letter. Concerning man’s relationship with Jesus he said:

“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.” (1 John 2:3-5, NKJV)

The only way to know Jesus Christ and have fellowship with Him is to keep His commandments. Later John referred to righteousness as something that must be practiced (1 John 3:7). Sin is also something that is practiced. He wrote, “The one who does what is sinful is of the devil (1 John 3:8 – NIV). The difference between the practice of righteousness and sin is obedience. John said that sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4). If we wish to be righteous then we must be keepers of the law.

Jesus said of Himself, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). Throughout His life He repeated the need for obedience (Matthew 12:49-50, Matthew 21:30-32, Luke 22:42, John 5:30). In this He established the criteria for acceptance by God. If the divine Son of God made flesh must reject His own will in favor of the Father’s, how much more His lowly creation?

Jesus told the Apostles to go and make disciples, to baptize them, and to teach them to “observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus expected that all His followers would be keepers of His commandments.

Now back to our story. The criteria for acceptance by God have always included obedience to His will. Cain could not have fellowship with God because he did not practice the truth. He made a pretense of worship, but

his works were evil, he walked in darkness. In contrast, Abel was a man of faith. The Hebrew writer tells us:

“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.” (Hebrews 11:4, NKJV)

Abel’s sacrifice was offered because he had faith, established by the word of God (Romans 10:17). He had fellowship with God because he practiced the truth and kept God’s will. Abel was righteous because he practiced righteousness. Because he was obedient, because he practiced righteousness, Abel found acceptance. The difference between Cain and Abel was obedience. Abel offered a sacrifice in keeping with God’s commandments.

The last thing we read about Cain’s relationship with God says he “went out from the presence of the Lord” (Genesis 4:16). Cain’s rebellion was complete. This was the end of any relationship he or his family had with God. Cain’s family was described as accomplishing many things (Genesis 4:17-22), but none of those accomplishments included following God. His family continued to drift further away from God.

Against this backdrop, we are told Adam and Eve had another son and named him Seth. God appointed “another seed” to replace Abel. This was the lineage through which Christ was born. It seems clear that in spite of their sin in the garden, Adam and Eve continued their relationship with God. Both Cain and Abel had been instructed to worship, and this pattern continued with Seth. Moses writes:

“And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the Lord.” (Genesis 4:26, NKJV)

In contrast to Cain, Seth and his family drew nearer to God. The events surrounding Cain and Abel surely had an impact. God showed Himself to be merciful by giving Cain a second chance at obedient worship. But Cain’s

rebellion revealed God's severity. His grace is abundant to the faithful but is withdrawn from those who are disobedient.

Moses wrote that Seth's family "began to call on the name of the Lord." Some translations use the term 'worship' to describe their actions, which is consistent with the context of Genesis 4. Keil & Delitzsch write in their commentary:

*"We have here an account of the commencement of that worship of God which consists in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, or in the acknowledgment and celebration of the mercy and help of Jehovah. While the family of Cainites, by the erection of a city, and the invention and development of worldly arts and business, were laying the foundation for the kingdom of this world; the family of the Sethites began, by united invocation of the name of God of grace, to found and to erect the kingdom of God".*¹

Through Seth, the formal worship of God commenced. Cain and Abel's example made known the necessity of proper worship, in accordance with God's will. In this way they identified themselves with God. They could invoke His name as the authority by which they lived and worshipped. They could call on Him in prayer to give thanks or seek His help. Like Abel before them, they practiced righteousness. Calling on the name of the Lord was not an arbitrary action. It was a proclamation that they were His people.

This pattern of observance was handed down through Seth's family from generation to generation. We find Abram observing this same tradition.

Genesis 12:8 And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

¹ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 1: The Pentateuch*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 75.

Abram was chosen to be the father of a great nation, blessed by God, and a blessing to the whole world. God promised that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed. Abram was commanded to pack his family and move to a land he would be shown, so he moved. He followed every commandment God gave him. When he arrived in this new land, he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord.

Abram continued this pattern of behavior throughout his life. We find him again in Genesis 13 and Genesis 21 worshipping at an altar, calling on the name of the Lord. Abraham's relationship with God was well known. In Genesis 14 Melchizedek goes out after Abraham's war victory and blessed him. In that same place Abraham invokes the Lord's name in a vow to the king of Sodom. His fellowship with God was not in question.

After Abraham's death Isaac kept the traditions of his father. God reiterated His earlier promise to Abraham, that a great nation would arise through Isaac, and through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 26:3-4). God also confirmed why Abraham had been blessed, "because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Genesis 26:5).

It is clear Abraham enjoyed God's blessings because he was faithful to obey God's commands. Isaac was likewise blessed with flocks and herds, prospering beyond his neighbors. The Lord appeared to him saying,

"I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake." 25 So he built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well." (Genesis 26:24-25,

NKJV)

Like his father, Isaac was obedient and worshiped God. The pattern of public worship which began with Seth's family became the established practice of righteous men. From the time of creation God was worshipped.

Those who were faithful worshipped according to God's will and were found pleasing in His sight.

The law of Moses expanded on public worship with a more formal, documented process. As a part of their covenant with God, all the requirements of worship and sacrifice were codified into a law, which was itself ratified with a blood sacrifice.

In Exodus 20 we read how God gave the 10 commandments to Moses. At the conclusion of the chapter, He instructed the people to make an altar of earth to offer their sacrifices on. Then He said, "In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you" (v.24). God associated His name with their public worship. This designation for places of worship is found in other passages (see Deuteronomy 12:20-22, 1 Kings 8:16-18, 1 Chronicles 22:18-19, Jeremiah 3:17). Wherever men worship God according to His commandments, by His authority, He is there with them, and His name is remembered.

While God was giving His law to Moses, He interjected His promise of blessing to the obedient. In Leviticus 26 God reminds them not to worship idols. He alone is to be worshiped. "If you walk in my statutes and are sure to obey my commandments," He says, there will be abundance: rain for the crops, grain from the land and fruit from the trees, all the bread the needed, peace in the land, freedom from harmful animals, victory over every enemy, and maintenance of His covenant (Leviticus 26:3-10). God concluded His promise of blessing and said,

"I will put my tabernacle in your midst and I will not abhor you. 12 I will walk among you, and I will be your God and you will be my people. 13 I am the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from being their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and caused you to walk upright." (Leviticus 26:11-13, NKJV)

Here the relationship between God and His people is firmly established. His grace overflows to the obedient, and they are acceptable to Him. Those

who kept His will could call on His name, and He would be with them in their midst. Why? Because He was their God, and they were His people.

Hundreds of years later we find Elijah standing beside a water-soaked altar, mocking the prophets of Baal. They had cried out to Baal all day with no answer. But when the time of offering came, he built his altar, prepared the offering, and called on the name of the Lord:

“Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. 37 Hear me, O Lord, bear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.” (1 Kings 18:36-37, NKJV)

Fire rained down and consumed the offering. Everything was as it had been since the beginning. A faithful man of God offered his sacrifice in accordance with God’s commandments, called out to the Lord, and the Lord was with him.

God desires a relationship with mankind, but since He is righteous, man must be righteous to have fellowship with Him. As we have seen, righteousness is only possible when man is faithful to keep the Lord’s will. The examples of Cain and Abel illustrate for us the difference between acceptance and rejection. Both knew God’s will but only Abel was obedient. After Abel’s murder and Cain’s departure, men began to call on the name of the Lord, identifying themselves with God in public worship as His servants. This action continued throughout the time of the patriarchs, until it was more formally adopted into the law of Moses, where God reiterated His commitment to bless those who do His will.

The Grace of God, Part 3

In our last studies, we have noticed that God has a plan for humanity, and that His grace and providence toward us has always been designed to help us accomplish that plan. We saw that the first sin in the garden of Eden represented a change of course for humanity, one that will lead us away from the end that God has planned for us. God does not want to see us pursue this path, so He has withheld the grace of eternal life until we can be restored to our proper place in His creation.

But God did not put an end to human life altogether when we first sinned. Even though we have all defied Him in some way or another since that day in the garden, He has allowed us to live and learn without immediately facing the punishment that our sins deserve. This is, in itself, a grace, but it is a grace that expresses God's hope, not His indifference. It does matter to God where we are going, and the blessings that He gives us are given out of hope that we will turn to Him. We know this, because the Bible tells us of a time when God lost His hope in humanity.

'Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, ² that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.

³ And the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.' ⁴ There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.

⁵ Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. ⁷ So the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for

I am sorry that I have made them.’⁸ But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

⁹ This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. ¹⁰ And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹ The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.

¹² So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.” (Genesis 6:1-12, NKJV)

These verses tell us not only why God determined to wipe humanity from the face of the earth in the days of the flood, but also why Noah and his family were allowed to survive. There are several academic difficulties in this passage, but the central meaning is clear: God could no longer expect any righteousness from human society in Noah’s day, so He withheld His grace and allowed them all to be swallowed up in the chaos of the flood.

What happened to corrupt society to this point? Genesis 4 describes the foundation of a faithless tribe of humans who descended from Cain. These were ingenious and powerful men, but men who chose to defy God and develop a mastery of violence and tyranny. They, like their father, were not interested in being what God wanted them to be.

However, Genesis 5 describes a tribe of faithful humans descended from Seth who valued their knowledge of and relationship with God. They held to God so closely that one of them, Enoch, was even spared the pain of death (Genesis 5:23). As long as this spirit of faith and righteousness was maintained, God had hope that at least some of humanity could be restored to their rightful place. Humanity was working with God, and God was eager to work with them.

But something happened to bring an end to the faithful tribe. By the time we reach Genesis 6:11-12, we see that all that was good in humanity had been replaced with violence and corruption. No one cared who God was

anymore, nor did they care for each other. Each was only concerned about his own aggrandizement. Seth may have had physical descendants at this time, but they had forgotten his righteous influence. All had gone the way that Cain and his family had gone.

The first four verses of Genesis 6 tell us how this happened. Many have speculated about who the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men” were, but it seems fairly straightforward when we consider the larger structure of the narrative. Through marriage, Seth’s righteous family began to mix with Cain’s violent family. When these cultures clashed, it was not the righteousness of Seth’s line that won out, but the violence of Cain’s. Soon, all families on the earth were embroiled in a struggle with each other. All the earth was filled with violence (v. 11).

These families produced what are described in the NKJV as “giants,” though most other translations leave the Hebrew word, נְפִילִים (nephilim), untranslated². This word means, literally, “the fallen ones,” and may simply have referred to those who fell in battle³. This would have been the first generation whose members lived their lives in battle, hoping that they would die a heroic death. Instead of being a horrifying, repulsive thing, violence became a way of life.

Therefore, God determined to destroy that society. They had forgotten God so thoroughly that no one who was born or raised among them had any hope of even hearing God’s name. They had reached a point where there was no hope for restoration. That is, all except for one.

It seems that Noah had not allowed his family to be caught up in the violence and evil that surrounded him, and so he “found grace” in the eyes of the Lord. He had determined to remember his Creator, and he taught

² See, for example, the NASB, the NIV, the ESV, and the NRSV.

³ This etymology, probable meaning, and the various interpretations including “giants,” are all described in Brian Neil Peterson, “Nephilim,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry, (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016). Logos.

his sons to imitate him in his respect for God. All the world had decided to fight against God, but these eight people, Noah, his wife, and their sons with their wives all chose to work with God. Therefore, God did not withhold His grace from them.

God took away every grace that He had given to the rest of humanity. They all perished in a single day when the floodwaters came upon the earth, but He cared for Noah and his family in the ark. He washed away the influences that had corrupted humanity and turned them so far away from their original design that they could not be recovered, then He presented the world to Noah as a blank slate. There was once again hope for every one of Noah's descendants.

Noah's family was human, however, and sin had not been eliminated entirely. All of us are descended from him, and we still sin, but we enjoy grace according to God's hope. Thanks to the gospel of Christ, we are not beyond hope. We can still be recovered, and God extends His grace to us in the hope that we will be recovered to our original place in His creation.

In our next study, we will examine how the grace of God was expressed under the Law of Moses. The flood was not the last time that God influenced human history to encourage us in the right direction, and the Old Testament plays an important role in setting up the great grace God has offered to us in His Son.

- M. S.

Bible Interpretation, No. 3

How to Use Bible Translations

Unless we have learned to read Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, we must access the word of God through Bible translations. There are several trustworthy, high-quality English translations available to us today, but we need to be aware that they are just translations. Each one represents the work of human scholars who, despite their sincerity, are not infallible in

their work. For this reason, there are differences between translations. Even if we do not know the original languages of the Bible, comparing multiple English translations when we study can help us to understand and appreciate the decisions that the translators made. Further, knowing the possible range of meaning in the original language through the different interpretations used by English translations can help us to produce a more robust interpretation of our own.

Why Do Translations Differ?

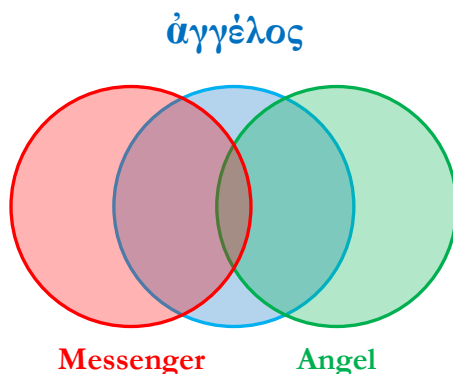
There are several reasons why one translation may differ from another. Some differences are a matter of style; for example, certain translations prefer to use simpler language to appeal to a younger audience. However, most differences that might affect the meaning of the passage stem from the differences between the original languages and the English language. Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek all have different grammar and vocabulary from English. It is difficult, if not impossible to find a perfect one-for-one equivalent that will always work across any two languages.

Every word has a range of possible meanings that must be refined based on the context. The appropriate English translation of a Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic word will often depend on where in this range the particular use of that word in a given passage falls. Take the word *ἄγγελος* (angelō) in Revelation 2:1 as an example:

“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write...” (Revelation 2:1, NKJV)

ἄγγελος is a grammatical form of the word *ἄγγελος* (angelos), which is usually translated as either “angel” or “messenger” in the NKJV. In most passages, it is clear that the word either refers to a heavenly angel (e.g. Matthew 24:36) or to a human messenger (e.g. Matthew 11:10). Broadly speaking, then, there are two suitable English words that can accurately translate different parts of the range of meaning enjoyed by the word *ἄγγελος*. In some passages, *ἄγγελος* may be translated by either word (i.e. God’s *angels* may be sent by Him as *messengers*), but, in general, the translator must select one or

the other to accurately convey the meaning of the original word in each passage. The overlap in meaning – as well as the distinctions between each word – may be illustrated by the graph below.



When it comes to a passage like Revelation 2:1, every translator must decide how the original author intended this word to be understood. The word *ἄγγελος* here may either describe an angel of heaven who is somehow assigned to watch over and communicate with each of the seven churches of Asia, or it may refer to a human messenger from each congregation. If the translator believes that John wrote about a heavenly angel, then “angel” is the best choice. However, “angel” is an unsuitable translation if John meant to address a human messenger. Almost all major English translations prefer the translation “angel,” but the footnotes in many of these translations indicate that “messenger” is a possible interpretation⁴.

All translations of the New and Old Testaments are filled with interpretive decisions like this, since that is the nature of language. In the majority of cases, like the references to human messengers and heavenly beings mentioned above, the intended meaning of the original text is clear. In other cases, like Revelation 2:1, the intended meaning may be a little bit more

⁴ See, for example, the footnote in this place in the NKJV and NIV, as well as the note in the NET Bible on the same word in Revelation 1:20.

ambiguous, which means that the meaning expressed in the English translation has been left up to the judgment of each committee or individual translator.

How Can Comparing Translations Help Our Study?

Since each translation must make interpretive decisions about the meaning of certain passages in order to transfer that meaning into English, we can identify which words and phrases we need to study more closely by noting the places where translations differ. Simply observing the differences between translations will not necessarily tell us which one is correct – remember that the original language has priority over any English translation – but this observation can inform us about the interpretive decisions *we* need to make when we read each passage.

We'll take 1 Peter 3:21 as an example, since we have already noticed one major difference between the NKJV and the ESV in the previous lesson. Below is the verse in six major translations:

*There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, **but the answer of a good conscience toward God**), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (NKJV)*

*Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body **but as an appeal to God for a good conscience**, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (ESV)*

*Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, **but an appeal to God for a good conscience**—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (NASB 1995)*

*and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body **but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God**. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (NIV)*

*And this prefigured baptism, which now saves you—not the washing off of physical dirt **but the pledge of a good conscience to God**—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (NET Bible)*

*And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, **but as a response to God from a clean conscience**. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (NLT)*

All of these translations interpret the verse the same way except for one word (underlined in each translation), the interpretation of which may alter the meaning of the passage. All of them agree completely that 1) the presence of water in baptism corresponds to Noah's flood (see verse 20); 2) the effectivity of baptism doesn't come from its ability to remove dirt from the physical body; and 3) it is the resurrection of Christ that gives baptism its power. However, these six translations fall into three interpretive groups when it comes to the relationship between baptism and a Christian's good conscience:

1. The NKJV and NLT both present baptism as an *answer* or *response* toward God after a good conscience has been obtained. This interpretation can be read two ways – either freedom from sin is obtained sometime before baptism, or a “good conscience” denotes repentance, which must precede baptism, not salvation.
2. The ESV and NASB 1995 both place the arrival of a good conscience after baptism, so that baptism is presented as an *appeal* to God to give a Christian a good conscience.

3. The NIV and the NET Bible offer a little more ambiguity by presenting baptism as a *pledge* to God related to a clean conscience. This may be read either as pledge coming from a conscience that has already been made clean, or a pledge to keep a clean conscience in the future.

What this observation has revealed to us is the fact that each one of these translations has made an interpretive decision about the meaning of this passage and its bearing on the meaning of baptism. The differences in their interpretations center around the translation of a single word, ἐπερώτημα (eperōtēma), variously translated as “answer,” “appeal,” “pledge,” and “response.” We will discuss word studies and the tools available to help with them in a later study, but our comparison of six translations has helped us to identify which parts of this verse require more careful study, and which are unambiguous both in the original and in their English translations.

— M. S.

A New Translation of 1 Corinthians 3

“And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as if to spiritual men, but rather as to fleshly men, as infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able. Even now you are not able, for you are still fleshly. For where there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and do you not behave according to your humanity? For whenever someone says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ and another, ‘I belong to Apollos,’ are you not human?

Therefore, what is Apollos? What is Paul? We are servants through whom you believed, and each has what the Lord gave him. I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth; thus, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but rather God, who causes growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are one thing, and each one will receive his own reward according to

his own work. For we are workers of God, and you are God's field, and God's building.

According to the grace of God that was given to me, I laid the foundation like a wise master builder, but another is building on it. Let each one who builds be careful how he builds, for no one is able to lay any other foundation than the one that has already been laid, which is Jesus Christ. And if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, and straw, then each one's work will be made visible, for the day will make it clear, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire will test what kind of work belongs to each one. If anyone's work, which he has built, remains, he will receive a word. If anyone's work is consumed by the fire, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone corrupts the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

Let no one deceive himself – if anyone among you seems to be wise in this present age, let him become a fool so that he can become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written:

'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'

And again:

'The Lord knows the thoughts of those who are wise – that they are empty.'

So that no one should boast in men, for all things belong to you – whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things that are, or things yet to come – all things belong to you. But you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."

I have no special notes to make about the translation of this chapter. All of the translations I have compared agree in the meaningful substance of this chapter and only differ in matters of style.

– M. S.

Let Him Become a Fool

Comments on 1 Corinthians 3

Introduction

In the first two chapters, Paul laid out the principles of Christian unity, then demonstrated the nature of the wisdom and strength that sustain us in the gospel. God has chosen to save us through something counter-intuitive – a crucified Christ – something that seems foolish and weak to us, so we can see that God is operating from a different kind of logic than we understand. We are not in a position to judge or critique God's logic, but we can learn from it. God's Spirit has, through revelation, taught us how to think as God thinks – something that we could not know without His help. According to our natural, human state, we cannot discern what God has accomplished in His Son. If we learn what the Spirit will teach us, we will be able to discern as if we have the mind of Christ.

Now that he has established these things in principle, Paul turns his attention to the practical application. It is one thing to prove that we *should* abandon human wisdom and follow God's Spirit alone, but it is another thing entirely to accomplish it. How can we set aside our preconceived notions about what is logical and what is not? In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul begins to answer this question – using the divisions in Corinth as an example.

1-4

There is spiritual wisdom, and it is taught by God's Spirit to those who will learn from Him, but that was not where the Corinthian Christians began. Paul told us before that he had determined not to use human wisdom when he taught the Corinthians, since he perceived that they needed to understand the fundamentals first – they needed to learn to trust in God's power, not to reason about esoteric subjects (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). There is much that can and should be built on this foundation, but the foundation must come first. Therefore, he could not speak to them as spiritual men –

people whose minds were prepared to reason through the spiritual truths of God's word – but he had to treat them as spiritual infants. They needed milk, sustenance that would help them develop on a foundational level until they were ready for solid food.

But they had not matured. They were not ready to keep growing. They had been born, spiritually, when they were baptized, but they had yet to grow out of infancy. Paul knew this because they were experiencing divisions based, in part, on human leaders and egos. God's spiritual wisdom will never tear His people apart through jealousy and strife, so the presence of these kinds of divisions made it clear that something less than divine was driving their decisions.

This means that their factions – however good and right their chosen “ringleader” or rallying point might be – were human in nature. Paul and Apollos were both worthy of respect as faithful leaders among God's people, but those who learned from them had a responsibility to recognize them as servants of God, not the originator of the gospel, their salvation, or their enlightenment. They were right to accept what Paul taught because of Christ, who stood behind the gospel of Paul. They would be wrong to follow Paul because of *Paul*. He was not right because he was Paul, he was right because he belonged to Christ.

5-9

Paul drives this point home by comparing himself and Apollos to farmers working in a field. If Paul planted a seed and Apollos watered it, could either of them claim that they made the seed grow? Certainly not. They would each have served a role that helped to create an ideal environment for the seed. Paul would have labored to find and till good soil that would allow the crop to grow without interference from roots, rocks, overly packed soil, or any other obstacle. Likewise, Apollos would have continued to care for the seed as it grew, making sure it had plenty of water to feed the process. However, neither of them could claim that they *made* the plant because neither had the power to *make* a seed, nor give it the innate ability to grow.

Only God has that power. All the planting and the water in the world would accomplish nothing if the seed did not exist in the first place.

Likewise, Paul and Apollos had labored in the Corinthian congregation to plant the seed of God's word and nourish its growth, but no one could give either of them the credit for the existence of a congregation in that place. They had to begin with a seed, something which neither of them had the power to create or cause to grow. Paul's preaching planted the seed when he first arrived in Corinth, and Apollos' work watered it as the congregation grew, but neither had the power to make Christians by their own will. They were only able to use what had been given to them. The real power lay in the word itself.

This does not mean that the work of Paul and Apollos was meaningless, it just means that their work was secondary to the work of the word itself. Each would receive a reward as a faithful worker for God, because they had helped to create and maintain an environment where the word could grow.

10-11

Paul switches metaphors here, changing from a farmer's field to a building. This metaphor allows him to describe the Corinthians' own role in light of the lessons he has brought out so far. God's work is like a building, which must be built to completion after the foundation has been laid. Paul has only started the work, and they are a part of the ongoing process.

Paul says that the foundation which he has laid is the only one that *can* be laid for this kind of work – Jesus Christ. This is the same concept that he discussed above with the idea of milk and of solid food; it is impossible to reason through the weightier questions of Christianity without first understanding the foundational truths and powers that stand behind the gospel. If we do not trust in God's power, or in the cross of Christ, we do not have the tools we need to carry on His work. The foundation must be laid first, and everything else must be built on top of it.

We need to be aware of that fact because the productive work that we do as Christians builds on that foundation – the things that we teach and develop in our own Christian character. It is important that we build in a way that matches the foundation. It does not make sense to build a shoddy, temporary structure on top of a firm foundation. If we do, our work will vanish when the first great test comes, while the foundation will remain – a memorial to a work left unfinished.

12-15

When we serve productively as God's workers and build on the foundation of His Son, there is a possibility that some of our work will be imperfect. The imperfections may arise from any one of several factors, whether from our inexperience, our naivety, or our ignorance of any part of God's word. This does not disqualify us from God's service, but it does force us to come face-to-face with our own shortcomings and our need for growth.

Everyone who builds on the foundation of Jesus Christ will either produce work of good quality or work of poor quality. At times, we may use gold, silver, and precious stones, but at other times, we may use wood, hay, or straw. All of these things will be tested by fire, and only those that share the same nature and substance as the foundation will survive. Those who built the parts that perish in the fire will not be cast out as worthless, but they will be forced to recognize the imperfections in their own work and grow beyond them. God will not cast us out because we have yet to grow, but the process of growth will be painful. We will suffer loss, especially when we realize that we have done or taught something wrong among God's people, but God can save us from our weakness.

I do not know what kind of work Paul has in mind in this chapter – whether he is referring to converts brought to God through a Christian's work, or if it is more general than that. In fact, I do not think it matters very much for the point that Paul is making. The emphasis in this passage is on those who work for God, not on the work that they do, and we need to be careful not to make the metaphor say any more than it is designed to. Paul wants to

show us what it means to be a faithful, productive worker for God, and sometimes that means being able to recognize the fact that we have failed even while trying to serve Him. Those who do well will receive their reward, but a faithful worker is also willing to face his mistakes and grow by them, no matter how difficult the process is. Serving God is not about immediate perfection, but rather a steady growth toward perfection.

16-17

The story is quite different for someone who intentionally or carelessly corrupts the people of God. Someone who is sincerely trying to be productive in God's work but makes a mistake – even several mistakes – can grow past those imperfections. However, if someone determines to cause harm to God's congregation, the temple where His Spirit dwells, God will destroy him without mercy. No one can fool God, and no one who wishes to harm the faith of God's children can disguise themselves as a sincere worker who simply needs to learn. There is a measurable difference between the two.

18-20

Thus, sincere workers will be patiently taught and allowed to grow despite their imperfections, while malicious malefactors will be judged and destroyed. We can see clearly in this system that no human wisdom or will can overcome God. We must either accept help from Him, or be opposed by Him. We can judge for ourselves which side we would rather be on. It is better to admit our own foolishness and submit ourselves to learn from God than to insist on our own ability to find a way in this life.

Thus, those who think they are wise are well counseled to become fools. If we think that our work is perfect and that we are uniquely capable of giving God's people what they need, our arrogance needs to be brought back down to earth. We need to humble ourselves. Only then can we learn true wisdom from God. We can only learn after we admit how much we do not know.

Paul quotes from Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11 to demonstrate this point. If we think we can fool God by our own craftiness, we will find ourselves caught up in a much cleverer trap of His design, wrought out of our own schemes. We need to learn from Him, not the other way around.

21-23

Paul concludes the chapter by reminding us what the point of this whole discussion has been – it will accomplish nothing if we identify ourselves as followers of a human being, even a very capable one. Paul and Apollos had no power to save apart from God, so there was nothing for the Corinthians to boast in by claiming to belong to one or the other. In fact, in God's plan, Paul and Apollos actually belonged to those whom they served. They were servants, not masters.

Likewise, the Corinthians were not their own masters. All things – Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life, death, things that are, and things that are yet to come – all of this had been given to them for their salvation and their glorification, but they belonged to Christ. They would have nothing if their Master had not given it to them. He, too, would not have His authority if He did not belong to God.

Let us, therefore, become fools so that we can become wise.

– M. S.

A New Translation of Mark 1:23-45

And immediately, there was a man with an unclean spirit in their synagogue, and he cried out, saying, "What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? We know who you are, holy one of God."

And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him." Then, after the unclean spirit had shaken him and cried out with a loud voice, it came out of him. And everyone was amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying,

“What is this? A new doctrine with authority, and He also commands unclean spirits, and they obey Him!” And the report about Him immediately spread everywhere, into all the region around Galilee.

And immediately, after they had come out of the synagogue, they went into Simon and Andrew’s house with James and John. Simon’s mother-in-law was lying down, sick with a fever, and they told Him about her. After He had approached her and taken her hand, He raised her up, and the fever left her. Then she served them.

When the evening had come and the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were ill, and all who were possessed by demons, and the whole city was gathered together at the door. And He healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons. And He would not allow the demons to speak, for they knew Him.

And early in the morning, having risen long before daylight, He went away into a deserted place and was praying there. And Simon and those with him searched for Him earnestly. When they found Him, they said to Him, “Everyone is looking for you.” And He said to them, “Let us go elsewhere, into the nearby towns, so that I may preach there, for this is why I have come.”

And He went, preaching in their synagogues throughout the region of Galilee and casting out demons. And a leper came to Him, begging Him and kneeling, saying to Him, “You are able to make me clean, if you want to.” And He took pity on him, reached out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “I want to, be clean.” Immediately, the leprosy went out of him, and he was clean. And He warned him sternly and sent him away, and said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest and offer that which Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” But he went out and began to declare everything and spread the word about, so that Jesus was no

longer able to enter a town publicly, but He was in deserted places, and people came to Him from all directions.

27: *“A new doctrine with authority...”* – This phrase, “with authority” can be read as attached either to the phrase preceding it, “a doctrine with authority” (as in the NASB, ESV, NIV, and NRSV), or as attached to the phrase following, “with authority He casts out demons” (as in the NKJV and the *Living Oracles*). It seems more likely to me that the people would remark about Jesus’ authority when teaching, since Mark has already made a point about this in verse 22.

- M. S.

The Character of Christ

Comments on Mark 1:23-45

In the first part of the chapter, Mark introduced us to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He told us who Jesus is and why we should trust Him, and he showed that Jesus had come to establish a legacy. Even before He began to preach Himself, he selected the first four of the twelve apostles, who would carry on His work after He died.

In the second half of the chapter, Mark looks more closely at Jesus’ character as He began to preach. How did He come across to those who heard Him? What kinds of things did He do while He was on the earth, and what motivated Him to do them? What were His living conditions like?

23-28

Jesus began to teach in the previous verses, and His style of teaching stood out to the crowd. He spoke as though He had authority Himself and did not need to rely on the great rabbis of Jewish history to guide Him. Most of the crowd was astonished and impressed by His teaching, but one man defied the crowd. Where others were curious and wanted to learn more, this man begged Jesus to leave them alone.

He did not do this under his own influence. He was the victim of an unclean spirit. This phrase, “unclean spirit,” refers to the same thing as a demon (see Luke’s account of this same incident, when he says that he was a man who had a “spirit of an unclean demon” (Luke 4:33, NKJV)). I do not know immediately what, exactly, demons are and where they come from, nor does Mark explain it in this place, but it is enough to know that they were agents of Satan (Mark 3:22-27). The unclean spirit who possessed the man in Mark 1 was exercising the devil’s influence in the world.

This would explain why he wanted Jesus simply to leave the people alone. He knew that Satan could not defeat God in any contest of power, so the only way to advance his master’s agenda was to convince Jesus they were better left alone. The devil could only win if he was left unopposed.

When he began to speak of Jesus’ true identity, Jesus silenced him. We will see several more incidents throughout the Gospel of Mark when Jesus tries to limit the open declaration of His identity as the Son of God. His true identity would only serve to enrage the religious leaders in Judea (see Mark 14:60-64), so He sought to delay that confrontation as long as possible. His true identity did need to be preached openly, but not until the foundation had been laid for His listeners to believe it.

Jesus then cast the demon out of the man who had been possessed. For the people in the synagogue, this was a vivid display of the authority that He had already claimed in how He taught. It did not necessarily surprise them that He commanded the unclean spirits – the Jews had a school of exorcists (Acts 19:13-15) – but it did astound them that the demons listened. Never before had they seen someone wield so much spiritual authority. They shared what they had seen with their friends and family, and His fame spread accordingly.

29-31

These verses serve as a straightforward introduction to Jesus’ ability to heal physical illnesses. This is the first time healing is mentioned in the Gospel of Mark, and it makes sense that it would take place in the house that

belonged to two of His disciples. Simon Peter's mother-in-law was sick, and His disciples wanted Him to know. This was not necessarily because they expected Him to heal her, only to explain why she was not with the rest of the family.

When He came to her and healed her, then, it would have been a surprise to the rest of those who were present. Perhaps someone would have gone out into the street to tell the rest of the town what happened. Jesus had revealed His power and authority in two spheres – the spiritual world and the physical world – and both astounded the people. This would explain why everyone in the town immediately brought their sick and their demon-possessed to Him. His ability to solve these problems was revolutionary to them, and they were eager to benefit from it.

32-34

Thus, these two features began to characterize His ministry and His interactions with the general populace of Galilee. The people knew that He could heal them, and so they brought to Him everyone who needed healing. The whole city came to Him to receive these blessings. We see that Jesus would not allow the demons to speak openly about Him, because He was not ready for the outrage that His true identity might cause, at least among the religious leaders of the people.

35-39

Here, we see another element of Jesus' ministry that will feature prominently throughout the Gospel – He was able to grow tired of the crowds. He was not a celebrity who thrived on the energy of the crowds, rather, He was a human being who could grow fatigued when the people would not leave Him alone. He helped the crowds out of compassion, but they often had little or no compassion for Him, so He sought solitary places to be alone and to pray for a while.

However, His need for solitude did not distract Him from His purpose. When His disciples found Him, He determined to continue preaching, and

to expand His circuit throughout the whole region of Galilee. As we will see shortly, this made it impossible for Him to travel anywhere without facing overwhelming crowds. He did this, knowing that it would exhaust Him, because He had come to help and to teach the people of Israel. The fame was something to be endured in order to accomplish His goal, it was not the goal in itself.

40-42

Many of the translations that we use today make the leper's request a little bit passive, "If you are willing, You can make me clean" (Mark 1:40, NKJV). This is still a tremendous declaration of faith, since the leper proclaims his trust that Jesus has the power to cleanse him of something outside of human control, but this translation shifts the emphasis away from the word *willing*. The leper is not asking about Jesus' ability, but about His *desires*. In essence, he is asking, "I know that You have the power to make me clean, but do you *want* to?"

Jesus' response, moved by compassion, is that He does want to heal the man. Jesus' healings were much more than a simple show of strength or impersonal proof of His divinity. Jesus healed people because He wanted to see them whole and healthy. He has the power, and He wants to use it. In the next chapter, Mark will apply this same lesson to Jesus' power to forgive sins. Jesus wants to see us live in righteousness and be justified before God. He wants to see an end to death and disease. He has the power to make it happen, and He is working in each of us because of His compassion. He wants to make us whole.

43-45

It is difficult to speculate on why Jesus told the leper to keep silent about his healing. The crowds knew that He had the ability to heal, so there is nothing unusual on the surface in this incident. However, this may have been the first time Jesus healed someone with leprosy. Leprosy was a severely regulated disease under the Law of Moses (see Leviticus 13 & 14), and it was necessary for a leper to live outside of the city or town where he

lived. He was excluded from society and from worship – in part, perhaps, because of the possibility that his disease was contagious, and in a large part because leprosy was considered “unclean,” it represented, as an obvious and persistent disease, those things which separate humankind from our Creator. When Jesus healed a leper, He did not just give him back his health, but he gave him back his family, his society, and his ability to worship God in the assembly of his people.

To the people of Israel, this would have marked a new height in Jesus’ ministry. He had already proven His ability to heal diseases and to cast out demons, and He had already shown that His teaching was unlike anything the people had heard before His time, but now He was actively restructuring society. He had taken someone who was rightfully an outcast, according to the Law of Moses, and had in a moment restored to him everything that the disease had cost him – his family, his friends, and his connection to God through worship. This, understandably, would cause quite a public stir.

But the impact that this news had on the people of the region made Jesus’ life and work very difficult. His fame increased until He could not actually enter a city because of the crowds that would immediately gather around Him. This tells us that He probably asked for the healed man’s silence to avoid such intense public pressure. Nonetheless, He was forced to continue His ministry in the deserted places around and between the cities of Galilee.

Conclusion

The second half of Mark 1 sets the tone for Jesus’ ministry. His power over demons and illness demonstrated His compassion on the sufferings of this world, and this power and compassion brought enormous crowds to Him. He used these opportunities to preach, and the character of His preaching astonished those who heard Him, because of the authority that He commanded. His popularity and the people’s desire to see Him forced Him into deserted places where crowds had to find Him. These circumstances

set the scene for most of the events that we will read throughout the Gospel.

- M. S.

Good Teaching

A Reply to “Question for the Prospect,” Vol. I, No.2

In the last issue, Clinton De France proposed a question that touches our studies in 1 Corinthians and a few other articles that have appeared thus far:

“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)?”

If I understand the question correctly, then we are dealing with a question of fellowship. How can we know whether someone really is a fellow disciple of Christ, and how can we identify a rebellious soul who does not want to submit to God’s guidance? The Scriptures demand that we make this distinction, but how? How can we patiently allow for growth and yet maintain discipline in the body of Christ?

To work our way through this question, we need to understand what “sound doctrine” is. More specifically, what must be “sound” in the process of teaching? Does it mean that we are responsible for curating a list of approved doctrines? Or does it mean that we have a responsibility to be sound and reasonable in *how* we teach? Both meanings fall within the phrase’s semantic range⁵, and I believe that the latter fits better in the

⁵ The Greek word *διδασκαλία* (*didaskalia*) may refer either to the act of teaching itself, or to the content that is taught. Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of*

contexts where it is used in Scripture. If we use sound reasoning when we teach, then the doctrines that we teach will be sound and reasonable. However, if we start from the finished doctrine without any concern for *how* it is taught, we cannot hope for much success, no matter how correct the doctrine is. To make these points clear, it may be helpful to think of “sound doctrine” as “good teaching.”

There are four passages in the Bible that address this theme verbatim: 1 Timothy 1:10, 2 Timothy 4:3, Titus 1:9, and Titus 2:1. Let’s consider each of them in their immediate contexts:

“But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, ¹⁰ for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.” (1 Timothy 1:8-11, NKJV)

This passage shows that “sound doctrine” or “good teaching” must stem from a trustworthy source. Paul uses these verses to demonstrate the proper use of teaching, specifically when it functions as or in relation to *law*. Good teaching is designed to transform us from the sinners that we are and have been into the image of Christ. Therefore, good teaching must stem out of the “glorious gospel of the blessed God,” because this kind of transforming influence cannot be found in human wisdom. This concept of “reasonable teaching” is contrasted with the idle, purposeless teaching that was commonplace in Ephesus at the time (1 Timothy 1:3-7). Therefore, we can draw the following conclusions about sound doctrine from this passage:

the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000). 240. Logos. This is the word that appears in 1 Timothy 1:4, 2 Timothy 4:3, Titus 1:9, and Titus 2:1.

1. Good teaching must be based on God's revelation – we cannot rely on our own wisdom.
2. Good teaching must be purposeful – we do not teach God's people simply because we want to talk or because we want to have some sort of authority for ourselves, but because we want to spread the sanctifying influence of the gospel.

"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ² Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." (2 Timothy 4:1-4)

This passage introduces us to those who will not endure "good teaching." Paul gives Timothy the responsibility to teach the gospel firmly, but not aggressively. He was told to convince – to use reasonable arguments based on Scripture – to rebuke – to confront people directly when necessary – and to exhort – to urge or encourage people to grow in spiritual knowledge and maturity. He was to do this with all longsuffering – with all patience for those who do not learn or grow quite as quickly as Timothy would like. Timothy was to be a patient and gentle, yet firmly convicted teacher who would hold to the word of God.

However, Paul warns Timothy that there would be some who would not tolerate even this kind of teaching. There are some who simply do not want to know the truth – or at least they do not want to accept it, so they will resist the sincere teachers who are trying to help them learn and grow. They would turn away from the truth and from those who teach it in an appropriate way, and find teachers who would say what they wanted to hear. Their refusal to endure sound doctrine is not the fault of the teacher – it is his responsibility to teach it in a way that encourages growth – but their own, because they do not want to hear the truth.

Thus, we can draw the following conclusions from this passage:

3. Good teaching is not only good because of its content, but because of how that content is taught – we have the responsibility to be both firm and patient in how we teach.
4. Those who sincerely reject good teaching do so because of their own desires – the teacher should not do anything to drive them away, if he is using good teaching methods.

The next passage deals with good teaching as it relates to the work of a bishop, or elder⁶:

“For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, ⁹ holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” (Titus 1:7-9)

Many of the character qualities that are necessary in an elder qualify him as a good teacher as well. He must love what is good, be sober-minded, be just, holy, and self-controlled. All of these things allow him to use the faithful word that he has been taught to exhort – or urge – and convict those who contradict. An elder should not be an angry man, or one who will be impatient or unreasonable when someone contradicts the word of God. Instead, just as Paul instructed Timothy, an elder must be able to reason through what the word of God teaches and be patient with those who need time for their learning and growth. They must have a demeanor that will encourage troublemakers to grow, not one that will drive them away through aggression.

⁶ Paul uses the terms interchangeably in the greater context. He tells Titus to appoint elders in Titus 1:5, then, while describing the qualifications that a man must have to serve as an elder, he calls him a “bishop” in verse 7.

Therefore, we can add the following trait to our understanding of good teaching:

5. Good teaching is inviting – it should not be designed to drive imperfect individuals away, but should rather encourage their growth.

The last passage deals with good teaching as an established topic, something that is opposed to the negative influences that can corrupt the church:

“They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work. ^{2:1} But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine.” (Titus 1:16-2:1, NKJV)

This does not tell us more about what good teaching is, but it does emphasize the responsibility that is placed on God’s faithful servants. Regardless of how the members of our congregation or other congregations act and present themselves, we, like Titus, have the responsibility to limit ourselves to good teaching – both in content and methods.

We must be firm, but gentle and patient. We must use every opportunity to teach those whose actions deny the Savior they claim as their own, but we have to use those opportunities to invite and encourage growth, not to drive them away through needless confrontation and ultimatums. The biblical teachings regarding “sound doctrine” place this responsibility on teachers, not students. Teachers cannot hide behind bad methods simply because their content is true. If we are careless, we will answer for the damage we may cause to the church of God.

This is not to say that students have no responsibility. They have the same impetus to grow as any other Christian, and so they must be *teachable*. This is what Paul addressed when he spoke of those who will not “endure sound doctrine” in 2 Timothy 4. If we, as teachers, do our due diligence to ensure that our teaching is good, reasonable, and soundly based on the word of God, we should be able to tell when a student rejects us as teachers. If they do not have a respect for what the teaching is designed to do, and they do

not have any interest in growing, they will reject anyone who encourages them to learn. Instead, they will look for teachers who will compromise the truth and allow them to live as they wish.

Such a person cannot be identified in a moment. Since growth can only be measured over a period of time, a refusal to grow is bound by the same limitation. The long-suffering that good teaching demands (2 Timothy 4:2) means that we should not give up on someone and label them as an apostate simply because we disagreed one time – especially if we perceive that the disagreement is something that could be reasoned through. However, we should be careful when dealing with someone whose pattern of behavior is characterized by hostility and denial whenever they are challenged by something that contradicts their current worldview. Such a person is not open to learning and growth, no matter how good the teacher may be. However, we cannot know whether this is their attitude until we spend time trying to teach them patiently. Good teaching must first be present before it can be resisted.

I hope these thoughts have addressed the question, and we welcome any more input on this topic!

- **M. S.**

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