
THE CHRISTIAN PROSPECT

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Notice

Because of the flurry of activity surrounding our new year and unavoidable delays due to illness, several articles have been delayed to February. This includes two articles we have recently received from Kaleb Leonard, as well as our continued studies on the grace of God and unity among brethren. May God bless you all in the coming year!

- M. S.

Our Editorial Process

Before we published the first volume of the Christian Prospect neither of us had any experience in editing or publishing a religious journal. The past five months have been a learning process, and now is as good a time as any to reflect on the decisions we have made so far and see if our course into the future needs to be corrected. This is especially relevant because one prospective writer has asked us to clarify our editorial process so that he can know what to expect as a contributor. We would like to do this openly so that all of our readers and prospective writers can understand the tone and purpose of this publication.

The Tone of our Discourse

In our first issue, we expressed our hopes that this journal could become an open forum where every serious-minded reader could confidently express and discuss their thoughts on the Scriptures and Christian living. Toward this end, it is necessary that we preserve a *positive* and *constructive* tone in all of our articles. If we want to have a conversation that anyone can participate in, we, as editors, must be able to protect our writers from

written abuse, even if we do not agree with a given writer's beliefs. This does not mean that any beliefs expressed in the journal cannot be challenged – only that a writer may not be ridiculed for holding any given belief.

To encourage this kind of tone, we ask that any articles or challenges submitted to the Prospect be *constructive* in nature, not *destructive*. What we mean by this is that this is not the place to try to prove someone else wrong, especially if they have not expressed themselves in our pages. We are not so much interested in articles that disprove a doctrine believed by one group or another, we are rather interested in articles that make a positive case for what the Bible *does* say. Our faith should be in our trust for God and His word, not in our ability to find fault with others.

Our tone is also affected by our audience. This journal is not addressed to any particular group, nor is it intended to be an academic publication (although we encourage responsible scholarship among all of God's servants!). It is instead meant to encourage every reader and writer and serve as an instrument for our common spiritual growth. Not all of our subscribers share a common background in the Restoration Movement or any other historical and doctrinal ties. We are bound together only by our interest in the Bible as the word of God, and we hope that this common bond will help us all grow together into the fullness of Christ. To this end, I (Matthew) have chosen to focus on the following three questions in my writings:

1. What do I believe?
2. Why do I believe it?
3. How do I reason through a passage in the Scriptures or a question that has been posed?

This, I believe, is all that any of us can offer. When we expose our convictions this way, it makes our thoughts plain and relatable, and it makes it easy for us to identify when and where we disagree. To this end, we invite

you as our readers to express your beliefs and to point out if and where your thoughts differ from ours.

What to Expect When You Submit an Article

When we receive an article or a question for publication, the following will be our normal editorial process:

1. I (Matthew) will first read through the article and make minor edits for grammar, clarity, and tone. I will adjust the formatting to meet the standard style we use in the journal (e.g., verse number formats, Bible translation information, footnotes and references, etc.). The only edits I will make to the content or structure of the article will be to remove or blunt any language I am concerned will come across as demeaning or discouraging to others.
2. Lance will read through it second and check my work, making his own comments along the way if he thinks there is anything that needs further attention.
3. Within one or two weeks (barring extraordinary circumstances), I will send a copy with all of our edits and comments clearly marked for the writer's final approval. This copy (with markings removed) will be considered ready for publication unless the writer objects to any change we have made.

If we reject an article for publication, we will return it to its writer with a full and detailed explanation of why we cannot include it in its present state. If the writer wishes to rework the article in a way that will fit the tone and purpose of the Prospect, we will gladly offer any help as we are able.

If any writer would like to have the help of a more involved editor while writing an article, I would be happy to fill that role as well as I am able. I would like to do what I can to help everyone learn to boldly express their faith in God and discuss His word confidently.

- M. S.

Call on the Name of the Lord, Part 4

Calling on the name of the Lord began with those who wanted to worship and serve God. It was the beginning of a relationship with God. Seth's family began to publicly worship God and identify as His people. Abraham entered into a covenant relationship with God that included the promise of a son, through whom salvation would come into the world. He and his family continued to call on the name of the Lord. God instituted a much more expansive law and covenant with the Hebrew people, who were allowed to be called by His name. Anyone who was faithful to God's commandments could call on and be identified with His name.

Those who were not faithful only had access to God through repentance. As we saw in Part 3, unfaithfulness could sever a good relationship with God. Isaiah 1 and Joel 1 report that, because of their unfaithfulness, the Hebrews were separated from God and were called to repent. This was also the case with the Ninevites who had no relationship with God. Jonah was sent to tell them to repent. In such a situation, God's grace is only available for those who will seek His forgiveness.

Joel said that "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Joel 2:32, NKJV). In Acts 2 Peter quoted this passage and said it was being fulfilled at that moment. The Spirit had been poured out on the disciples. The Church Isaiah had predicted, and which Jesus said He would build (Matthew 16:18), had been established (Acts 2:47). The word of the Lord was taught in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3). As Zechariah and Jeremiah had promised, people were being cleansed of their sins (Acts 2:38).

Like their forefathers, first century Hebrews found themselves separated from God. They had rejected their Messiah's teaching, denied His divinity, and crucified Him on a cross. Peter spelled out the case against them and called on them to repent. In this way Peter's sermon mirrored that of the old prophets' calls for repentance. How was salvation accomplished?

Peter's sermon consisted of four parts: 1) A reminder of God's promises through the prophets, 2) proof that Jesus was the Messiah, 3) the charge of

murder against the audience, 4) a path to salvation. The sound of the wind, the gifts of the Spirit, and the speaking in tongues all confirmed that these events were those foretold in scripture. Like Joel, Peter pointed out their sin and separation from God. They had murdered God's Son and were in need of redemption. How could redemption be found? They cried out to Peter and the others, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37, NKJV). Their question was the same as asking, "how can we call on the name of the Lord?" Peter commanded them to "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38, NKJV). The people's appeal for salvation was answered with instruction from God. Because of their obedience God added them to the church (Acts 2:47). It is notable that when convicted in their hearts the people did not attempt on their own to cry out for God's mercy. They needed instruction. They needed to call on the name of the Lord obediently and according to His will. They knew the law of Moses, but it was not enough. Their own knowledge and wisdom had led them to crucify the Son of God. Isaiah had prophesied that the word of the Lord would go out from Jerusalem. Peter, in Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, preached the word of God to sinners who heard and obeyed.

As Joel prophesied, those who called on the name of the Lord were saved. God's people then continued "daily with one accord" worshipping God as Zephaniah said would happen (Acts 2:46, NKJV). God's people were known for their meekness and humility.

How exactly do the lost call on the name of the Lord? Throughout His ministry, Jesus taught that everyone who believes in Him needs to devote themselves to lead better lives, proclaim their allegiance to Him in faith, and commit themselves to His covenant through baptism. The apostles continued to preach the same gospel throughout the book of Acts. In Acts 2 we find a number of people who realized that Jesus was their Messiah, they were believers. Their appeal for salvation can be seen as an implicit confession of their faith. Beyond this realization, they did not know what to do. Peter's answer filled in the blanks with the same teaching Jesus gave.

When Paul recounted his own conversion, Ananias told him to “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). The forgiveness of Paul’s sin involved baptism and calling on the name of the Lord. Paul’s case is not unique. Peter said that in all cases it is baptism that saves.

“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.” (1 Peter 3:21, NKJV)

Peter explained that baptism saves and called baptism the ‘answer of a good conscience toward God’. As our brother has pointed out in his series on Bible Interpretation¹, the word ‘answer’ is translated in a variety of other ways:

“the pledge of a clear conscience toward God” - NIV

“an appeal to God for a good conscience” – ESV, NASB 1995

“the pledge of a good conscience to God” - NET

“an appeal to God for a good conscience” – Lexham English Bible

“an appeal to God for a clear conscience” - RSV

“a response to God from a clean conscience” – NLT, MEV

It was no coincidence that Ananias associated the act of baptism with the act of calling on the name of the Lord. If baptism is an appeal, a pledge, a response, is it not itself the means by which we call on the name of the Lord for our salvation? Peter quoted Joel, that all those who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved, then in his own epistle said that baptism saves. When the convicted heart submits in obedient faith to baptism, is it not an appeal to God’s promise of salvation?

¹ See “Bible Interpretation, No. 3” in issue no. 3 of this volume, 12-17.

Consider the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10). Luke describes him as devout, God fearing, charitable, but also a Gentile (v. 45). Cornelius was a man of prayer. We don't know exactly what he prayed for, but at a minimum, he expressed his desire to be one of God's people. This Gentile man was calling on the name of the Lord but doing so in ignorance. Thankfully, God heard him and sent instructions through an angel to summon Peter who would tell him what he must do (v. 6). Peter's account of the episode is even more vivid, "words by which you and all your household will be saved" (Acts 11:14, NKJV). As Jesus had so often done, Peter taught them to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, telling them, "Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43, NKJV). The devotion Cornelius had previously shown could now be practiced by faith; God had "granted to the Gentiles repentance to life" (Acts 11:18, NKJV). Once they were taught the word of God Cornelius and his family were baptized, because the Holy Spirit had confirmed that God would accept the Gentiles.

What then is the result of a genuine appeal to God? Paul explains this to the Colossians.

"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses." (Colossians 2:11-13, NKJV)

God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision to set him and his family apart from the rest of the world. Over time the word circumcision was used more broadly to describe a separation from sin and fleshly lust, which Paul described to the Romans as a circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:29). Here, he made it clear that this circumcision cannot be accomplished by any human hand, but by Christ. How is this circumcision accomplished? It is the work God performs when we are baptized. Just as Jesus was resurrected after His crucifixion, God makes us alive when we are baptized,

forgiving our trespasses. Similarly, Paul told the Romans “We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” – (Romans 6:4, NKJV). This is the result of the appeal to God – to be made alive, to be raised from spiritual death and given a new life, separated from our sins. This is accomplished through the act of baptism.

When Paul wrote in Romans 10:13 (NKJV) that, “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” he was presenting a consistent message. The context of the passage is the salvation of Israel, the Jews (v. 1). They had rejected God’s teaching and replaced it with their own (Matthew 15:9, Matthew 22:29). Thus, having a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, they rejected the righteousness of God (v. 3), and rejected His Messiah, who was the end, the purpose of the law, that in Him, righteousness might be found (v. 4). God’s righteousness here means His commandments, in distinction to ‘their own righteousness.’ His commandments are righteousness (Psalm 119:172). Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous because they kept the Lord’s commandments (Luke 1:6). The Jews always sought a sign: ‘come down from Heaven’ or ‘come up from the grave’ in order to establish their faith, and expected a Messiah who would end Roman rule, but His kingdom is not of this world, it is spiritual, and entrance to it is by the word of God. This ‘word of faith’ (v8) teaches all that is necessary to know to establish our faith, and faith must be confessed. What is the conclusion? That salvation is available to both Jew and Gentile. All who will accept the word of God and do His commandments can be saved. All who call on Him shall be saved, Jew or Gentile.

Paul then asked a series of questions beginning in Romans 10:14. His purpose was to demonstrate that calling on the name of the Lord could not be done outside the knowledge of God’s will. You cannot call on a God you do not believe in. You cannot believe in a God you know nothing about. You cannot know about God unless you have been taught by someone. “Faith,” he concludes, “comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (v. 17, NKJV). Thus, Romans 10:13 cannot be considered

a license to call on the name of the Lord in whatever way we choose. It must be done in obedience with God's word.

Jesus made this point in His sermon on the mount. In it He drew a comparison between those who serve Him lawfully and those who do not.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

24 "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." (Matthew 7:21-27, NKJV)

He began by dismantling the idea that we may worship or serve God on any terms but His. Not everyone who proclaims His name, cries out to Him in prayer, or appeals to Him for salvation will be saved, only those who do the Father's will. This is consistent with the pattern we have seen all the way back to Cain's unlawful sacrifice.

Many will be astonished at the judgment, having listed their many acts of service on His behalf, yet being told to depart from Him. He had previously warned the multitude against false prophets (v15-19), and now describes the final state of those who teach and practice false things. We must note that these acts of service are not evil acts in themselves, but they were done outside the teaching of scripture, making them lawless deeds. Those who live outside God's covenant are not entitled to act in His name, as we noticed in our study of the third commandment.

Next Jesus described the assurance found in following the Lord's commands. The obedient steward is described as a wise builder who builds his house on a firm foundation. When the doubts and cares of life enter this person's mind they are easily dispelled with the simple assurance of scripture. We know our deeds are acceptable because we find them in the word of God.

Things will not end so well for the other group. A life built on anything other than a firm commitment to God's word is unsure. We do not know what motivated Cain to offer an unacceptable sacrifice, but he did. Perhaps he knew what God expected but decided a different offering would be fine. Or perhaps he wasn't attentive in the first place. In either case, Cain's house was built on the sand. He had no assurance from God's commandments. We must allow the word of God to guide every aspect of our lives.

The New Testament often references calling on the name of the Lord in the context of believers. In 1 Corinthians 1:2 (NKJV) Paul writes "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." Paul is addressing Christians in Corinth, refers to them as the Church, the sanctified, saints. He extends the use of his epistle to the church in every place and every time, "all who in every place." These are Christians, worshippers of God, calling on the name of the Lord like those in time past who were faithful and kept His commandments.

Timothy is instructed to, "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22, NKJV). Peter tells those who "call on the Father" (1 Peter 1:17, NKJV) to conduct themselves with fear. It was assumed that the saved would continue to call on the name of the Lord as His people.

Calling on the name of the Lord is the means by which a person aligns himself with God. It begins when a lost sinner learns and obeys the gospel,

is baptized to have their sins washed away, and is raised to live a new life. As Christians we are able to call on Him in worship, to call on Him in prayer, to call on Him in times of need. “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12, NKJV).

- Lance Stallcop

Bible Interpretation, No. 6

Introduction

Our first set of interpretive questions grew out of one, central question: what does the text say? Word and phrase studies give us the tools we need to understand what a given verse can mean, and what it cannot. We have already seen the importance of context when we determine the meaning of a word, now we will extend our view of the context even farther. Here, we will deal with the central question of *structure* or *relationship*, which underlies our second set of interpretive questions. How is the book and chapter of the Bible put together, and what role does our verse play to move the thought, argument, or narrative forward?

When we study a passage this way, we will deal with most of the surrounding text in a more superficial way than our chosen verses. This is fine if we keep ourselves humble. Every passage deserves our full attention, but it is not practical to study a whole book in-depth every time we deal with a single passage. Thus, we can work with our best understanding in the moment if we recognize that our thoughts on a verse we deal with in passing may change or develop when we examine it in more detail.

The Book as a Whole

The first step when dealing with a passage's context is to identify the purpose of the book as a whole. If we know what the book was designed to accomplish, we can take it for granted that every verse serves to support that goal. This will give the broad context that we need to orient our study.

The genre of literature to which a given book belongs will often determine what kind of purpose it serves. By nature, a collection of poetry, like the book of Psalms, will not contain a single line of thought from the first psalm to the end of the book. Instead, its purpose has more to do with inspiring the people of God toward praise and appreciation of God's work in our lives. Likewise, a book of history may be more descriptive, while a letter may have a central thesis that its author seeks to prove. The purpose of each book can generally be summarized in a short statement. Consider the following examples, according to my understanding:

- **1 Samuel** tells the history of Israel from the birth of the prophet Samuel to the death of king Saul.
- The book of **Psalms** contains the thoughts of God's people expressed in poetry to inspire the praise and devotion of His followers.
- The book of **Haggai** was written to convince the people of Israel to continue rebuilding the temple of God in Jerusalem despite the threats of their enemies.
- The book of **Acts** tells the history of Christianity from Jesus' ascension to Paul's imprisonment in Rome.
- The book of **1 Corinthians** was written to foster unity in a congregation that was torn apart by factions and doctrinal arguments.
- **1 Peter** is a general reminder of the things Peter had taught throughout his life and an encouragement to all Christians to keep the faith, whatever we may suffer in this life.

If you do not know what the purpose of a book is, try reading the first and the last chapters. Often, though not always, the author of the book will explain what he hopes to accomplish in that writing (e.g., 1 Corinthians 1:10-11), or he may summarize and apply what he has said throughout the

book (e.g., 1 Peter 5:8-11). If you cannot identify a clear statement from the author himself, you might consult the introductions of a few commentaries on that book. The authors of commentaries generally explain what they think the central purpose or theme of the biblical book is, along with their reasons for reaching that conclusion.

The Chapter/Section in the Book

Once we have determined the direction in which the whole book is oriented, we can start to think about the large blocks of content that make it up and how they move the book forward to its goal. There are **at least** two ways that we can divide the book up: we can assess the book chapter-by-chapter, or we can use the section headings provided in most modern translations. There is an advantage to the second approach, since it breaks down the progress of each book into smaller steps. Chapters, as they are divided in modern Bibles, often deal with several subjects that, although they are related, are more difficult to summarize into a short statement. However, it is worth noting that the section headings vary from translation to translation. As you study the book, you may find that you disagree somewhat with the section headings used by your preferred translation, and your interpretation of the book will reflect that.

We should note that it is not always helpful to study the whole book. Some books do not necessarily have a continuity of thought from chapter to chapter, like the book of Psalms – although some psalms may have been grouped by a common theme. Additionally, it may not be necessary to study every part of a historical book like 1 Samuel, any of the gospels, and Acts to understand the context of a particular passage. In these cases, it may be better to study a distinct section of the book, like Saul's efforts to kill David (1 Samuel 18-31), rather than to start from chapter 1.

The following is a basic outline of 1 Peter using the section headings in the NKJV:

- **Greeting and address** (1:1-2)

- **A heavenly inheritance** (1:3-12) – We have received an eternal and incorruptible inheritance through the resurrection of Christ, which was predicted and proven beforehand by the prophets of old.
- **Living before God our Father** (1:13-21) – Because our inheritance is purer than things of the world, we must replace worldliness in ourselves with holiness.
- **The enduring Word** (1:22-2:3) – The Word of God – the expression of His holiness and incorruptibility – is the tool that God uses to train us in holiness.
- **The chosen Stone and His chosen people** (2:4-9) – Through the influence of the Word, God is building us into a spiritual house that shares the nature of Christ, our prototype, who was rejected by the world.
- **Living before the world** (2:11-12) – Therefore, as Christ, we must live a life separated from the world.
- **Submission to government** (2:13-17) – Yet we should not war against the world, but be submissive to its authorities, so that we will win through peace and good works, not aggression and violence.
- **Submission to Masters** (2:18-25) – This principle is true, no matter how cruel and aggressive this world's authorities are towards us. If we want to win like Christ, we must fight like Christ – through submission and humility, knowing that God will judge evildoers in the last day.
- **Submission to husbands** (3:1-6) – The same principle applies to authority in marriage. Wives who find themselves married to a man who does not believe in Christ cannot win him over through rebellion, but rather through peace and good works.

- **A word to husbands** (3:7) – But as many Christians as have authority in this world, such as through marriage, are bound to use it wisely, with compassion for and cooperation with those entrusted to them.
- **Called to blessing** (3:8-12) – Therefore, Christians are to do good and to bless others in every situation, for they must bless to inherit the blessing.
- **Suffering for right and wrong** (3:13-17) – No one in this world can truly harm us, for our eternal, incorruptible blessing from God is greater than all the suffering this life can threaten.
- **Christ's suffering and ours** (3:18-4:6) – This is because the death of the flesh, even if it comes by violence, brings about an end to sin and gives the Spirit of God opportunity to make us alive in our spirits, just as Christ's death was necessary before He could be raised again.
- **Serving for God's glory** (4:7-11) – Therefore, while we still have time in this life, it is our duty to use the gifts God has given us to glorify Him.
- **Suffering for God's glory** (4:12-19) – We should also view suffering as a gift, an opportunity to glorify God. If we live like Christ, we will share His reward.
- **Shepherd the flock** (5:1-4) – A closing word to elders, who have the responsibility to use their authority wisely and sincerely for the good of those under them.
- **Submit to God, resist the Devil** (5:5-11) – Those who are younger have the responsibility to submit to the elders among them, and to one another as brethren. If we resist the temptations of the devil and humble ourselves to God, we will be glorified in the end.

- Farewell and peace (5:12-13)

Our verse, 1 Peter 3:21, falls in the section titled “Christ’s suffering and ours” (3:18-4:6). We can see that this section is not thematically isolated from the sections surrounding it – before we get to this section, we can see several examples of how our duty as Christians is to submit to worldly authorities and to commit ourselves to good works, no matter how cruel the authorities are. Peter uses the specific examples of cruel masters and unrighteous husbands to illustrate this point. It follows logically that we may suffer in this life. Therefore, under the heading “Suffering for right and wrong” (3:13-17), Peter demonstrates that this worldly suffering cannot harm us in an eternal way. The next section, where our verse can be found, explains that worldly suffering and even death cannot nullify our salvation in Christ – in fact, death is what gives our salvation its power! The next two sections go on to show that, on these principles, our suffering in this life actually glorifies God, since it is both the result and means of our victory over sin.

To summarize our findings on this level, the comments on baptism in 1 Peter 3:21 appear as part of a larger case that we should accept suffering in this life because we can identify ourselves with Christ’s suffering and His resurrection. How does Peter’s reference to baptism help support this case? To answer, we will need to look a little closer at the immediate context surrounding that verse.

The Verses in the Immediate Context

It will be helpful to take a similar approach to interpreting the flow of verses in the immediate context. How does each verse help us move from the point proven by the previous section to the thesis proposed by the one we are studying? We will consider each verse individually with careful consideration to how it adds to the unified message of the passage:

- **3:18** – Worldly suffering should not trouble us (from the previous section), because when Christ suffered and died on our behalf, he died in the flesh but He was made alive by the Holy Spirit.

- **3:19** – This is the same Spirit who has preached to men in the past (we will set aside the precise identity of the “spirits in prison” for this study, though it is a question that deserves much more attention).
- **3:20** – The Spirit preached in the days of Noah, when salvation through water was first declared, then accomplished – albeit in the case of only eight people.
- **3:21** – There is a corresponding message of salvation through water in the present day – baptism – whose ability to save is centered in the inward man, and whose power comes from the suffering and resurrection of Christ.
- **3:22** – This Christ, who died, has nevertheless been glorified with a position of authority in heaven.
- **4:1** – Since Christ has suffered to accomplish His glorification and His victory over sin, we should be prepared to experience the same.
- **4:2** – Once we have armed ourselves with a mind prepared to suffer, we have broken the bonds that temptation in our bodies has over us. We can live for the will of God because we are willing to forego the comforts of the flesh.
- **4:3** – This lets us leave behind the excesses that may have defined our earlier lives.
- **4:4** – Those who are still bound by the comforts of the flesh cannot understand why we have forsaken these things, nor why we are prepared to suffer. Thus, they speak evil about us.
- **4:5** – They will be accountable for themselves.

- **4:6** – Thus, we see that what is important to worldly men and what is important to God are opposed to each other. What is judged negatively by men – suffering, broadly speaking – counts favorably toward eternal life in the spirit with God.

There are some difficult details in this whole section that require more attention, but we can find a clear progression of thought: Christ had to suffer to be glorified. This is the same pattern that has saved since the days of Noah and, through the imagery of baptism and its connection to the death and resurrection of Christ, it is the same pattern that we have submitted ourselves to. Therefore, we should expect to be perfected through suffering and even physical death.

This gives us a view of our verse in its context. Baptism is an important part of the greater point that Peter is making because it is the moment when a Christian convert identifies himself with Jesus' suffering and death. It provides a link to show how God's Spirit has worked to overcome suffering and death from the earliest stages of history until Christ, and even now, as long as there are Christians.

Conclusion

When we examine the structure of a biblical passage, it is usually easiest to work from the outside in. We must 1) determine the overarching message of the book, 2) identify and examine the component sections that make up the book, to understand the author's flow of thought on a large scale, and 3) examine the verses immediately surrounding our passage of interest to see how it helps to push the author's discussion forward. If we can understand the passage's connection to the book on these three levels, we should be able to answer the questions of relationship we developed earlier in our course of studies.

- **M. S.**

A New Translation of 1 Corinthians 6

"If any one of you has something against another, does he dare to let the matter be judged by unrighteous men rather than those who are holy? Or do you not know that those who are holy will judge the world? And if the world is being judged in you, are you not worthy to judge the most insignificant disputes? Do you not know that we will judge angels, not to mention things associated with this life? Therefore, if you have disputes associated with this life, would you select those who do not have any power in your assembly to serve as judges? I say this to your shame. Is there no one wise among you who will be able to pass judgment between his brothers? Will brother take brother to court, even before those who do not believe?

Therefore, you have already hurt yourselves grievously by having such disputes between your members. Why should you not rather suffer harm? Why should you not rather be defrauded? Instead, you cause harm and defraud — and all this to your own brethren! Or do you not know that those who are unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Make no mistake; no one who is sexually immoral, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor men who are effeminate, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor those who are ruled by greed, nor drunkards, nor those who behave abusively toward others, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. Now some of you once fit these descriptions, but you have been washed, you have been sanctified, and you have been pronounced righteous by the name of Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

I am permitted to do everything, but not everything is helpful; I am permitted to do everything, but I will not be controlled by anything. Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, and God will destroy both one and the other. The body also is not for sexual immorality, but it is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body; and God, who raised up the Lord, will also raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I take, then, the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Certainly not! Or do you not know that the one who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." Now, the one who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Flee from sexual immorality. Whatever sin that one does is outside the body, but the one who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit who is within in you, whom you have from God, and that

you do not belong to yourselves? You were bought with a price; now, indeed you ought to glorify God in your body.”

Notes on the Translation

1: “*Those who are holy*” – This phrase translates the Greek word *ἁγίων* (hagion), which literally means “the holy ones²”. This is often translated by the word “saints” (NASB 1995, NKJV, ESV, NRSV) or “the Lord’s people” (NIV). Here, I have opted for a translation that highlights the contrast Paul is making – those who are *unrighteous* as opposed to those who are *holy*.

4: “*Those who do not have any power in your assembly*” – We can find several interpretations of this phrase in the translations we have reviewed: “[those] who are of no account in the church” (NASB 1995), “those who are least esteemed by the church” (NKJV), “those who have no standing in the church” (ESV, NRSV), and “those whose way of life is scorned in the church” (NIV). Each of these communicates the meaning, but I have translated the word *ἐκκλησία* (ekklesia), usually translated as “church,” a little differently to highlight Paul’s argument.

The word *ἐκκλησία* (ekklesia) can refer to an assembly for almost any purpose, but it had a specific meaning that tied it to *governmental* assemblies – that is, assemblies that came together for the express purpose of conducting the business of a government. The New Testament appears to use the word with this signification in reference to the local assemblies of each congregation. This means that the congregation would come together for official reasons within God’s kingdom, and that only citizens had official power within these assemblies³.

² 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). 10-11. Logos

³ Ibid., 303-304.

This means that those who were unrighteous – those who were not citizens of God’s kingdom – had no rights or power when the congregation came together. Literally, they are “considered to be of no significance” or “beneath consideration” in the assembly⁴. Since these people were not permitted to influence the congregation’s spiritual direction in the assembly, why would the Christians in Corinth hand over control of their lives to them?

9: “*men who are effeminate... sodomites*” – These two words form a pair, in a sense. The Greek words *μαλακοί* (malakoi) *ἀρσενικοῖται* (arsenokoita) were used to refer to both men involved in a homosexual relationship, which usually manifested in a form called “pederasty”⁵. In this kind of a relationship, one man – usually the older of the two – took advantage of another for his own sexual pleasure. This meant that there was a dominant figure in the relationship as well as a passive one. The passive participant was viewed as effeminate in Greek society. It seems that Paul chose these words to bring three things to mind – the homosexual relationship on the whole, sexual domination, and sexual passivity. None of these things matched the character of God’s servants. Paul builds a positive case for Christian sexuality in chapter 7.

11: “*you have been pronounced righteous*” – This phrase is translated as “you were justified” in the NASB 1995, NKJV, ESV, NIV, and NRSV. The concept of justification is a legal one⁶, so that we can think of it in terms of a verdict. Justification is a verdict of “not guilty,” so that it can be contrasted to a verdict of “guilty.” In terms of sin and righteousness, we can think of this as a verdict passed in our favor with Christ’s help.

⁴ Ibid., *Lexicon*, 352.

⁵ Ibid., 135, 613; Karen R. Keen, “Sexuality, Critical Issues” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016). Logos.

⁶ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, & Danker, *Lexicon*, 249.

12-13: *“I am permitted to do everything... Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food”* – Both of these phrases are represented as quotes from the Corinthians in the ESV, NIV, and NRSV, which interpret these two verses as a back-and-forth between the Corinthians’ perspective and Paul’s concerns. See, for example, the ESV:

“All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything. ‘Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food’ – and God will destroy both one and the other.”

To my understanding, it does not change the meaning of the passage if Paul is quoting the Corinthians’ words or not. These verses introduce a theme that will be developed at length through the next several chapters in the book: how to use our freedoms in a conscientious, productive way. Paul will claim several freedoms himself to demonstrate his own through process in connection with rights and freedoms, especially in chapter 9. For this reason, it does not seem problematic to me that he would claim freedoms here, simply to show how good sense and care for one another limits the way he would use them.

- M. S.

All Thing Are Permitted

Comments on 1 Corinthians 6

Introduction

In the last chapter, Paul stressed that Christian leaders have the responsibility to act as faithful judges among the members of their congregations when it comes to moral matters. God has entrusted His people with the responsibility to safeguard a healthy spiritual culture in their assemblies, and the congregation at Corinth had been neglecting that duty. This neglect could and would lead to the breakdown of the congregation’s identity – which should be centered on purity and growth in Christ. If anyone had handed control of his life over to some other influence, it was

necessary for the congregation to act quickly and decisively so that the sinner's influence could not push or pull the whole group away from their common goal.

Their responsibility was clear when it came to moral concerns and Christians who were sinning openly, but what about petty disputes? What responsibilities do Christians have toward each other when we have disputes over worldly things – whether it be finances, possessions, or simple personality conflicts? These matters do not have the same gravity that moral concerns do, but they have just as much power to pull a congregation apart. It is important for every congregation to learn how to get along and solve its petty disputes themselves without appealing to an outside judge.

1-6

Paul opens this discussion with a challenge that emphasizes how absurd it was for the Corinthian Christians to turn to a civil judge to solve their disputes: “How dare you take the matter to an unrighteous judge?” Why would it make sense to choose somebody who does not understand or respect our way of life to decide who had mistreated whom? While Christians are certainly commanded to submit to civil government as far as their authority stretches (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17), it seems counterproductive to invite someone who does not share the same spiritual direction or legal values as the congregation – no matter how well-intentioned – to exercise more control over our lives.

Paul frames the discussion in terms of responsibility – every dispute is a responsibility. It falls to us to decide how to resolve a disagreement that takes place within our number. We can take on the effort that is required to solve the dispute in a way that satisfies everyone, we can ignore the problem, or we can try to pass the responsibility off to somebody else. It seems that the Corinthian Christians had pursued this last option. They did not want to solve the problem themselves, so they invited somebody else to solve it for them. To Paul, this indicated that they were not prepared to

take on the much greater responsibility that they had already committed themselves to when they were baptized – the judgment of the whole world.

What Paul says here does not contradict what we find in other passages, which teach us that Jesus will judge the world (e.g., 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; 2 Corinthians 5:9-11). Rather, these verses indicate that Christians will be given authority in the process of the judgment, not that we will take the place of Christ. I do not know what that authority will look like. It may be that our lives that have been purified and redeemed by Christ will be used as a standard to show that Christ's judgment will not be unfair – the fact that some will be saved will demonstrate to the rest of the world that salvation was within their grasp, by the grace of God, but they allowed it to slip away. It could be that we will take a more active role. In either case, God has placed a great deal of responsibility in the judgment on our shoulders, and the process of spiritual growth that we experience is designed to prepare us for the task.

However, if we shirk our responsibilities in this life and pass them off onto others, this does not reflect well on our ability to keep what God has entrusted to us. If I cannot make peace with my brother, how can I help bring peace to God's creation? How could I exercise judgment on angels, whom I do not presently understand, if I cannot reach a resolution on a matter that I understand fully?

What Paul says of human judges simply illustrates their limited jurisdiction in the grand scheme of things. They have no authority in the assembly of God's people because they themselves have not learned to discern things spiritually. If they cannot have a say on the most mundane of matters that have to do with the kingdom of God, they did not have the perspective necessary to decide on disputes that would have an impact on the congregation's ability to work together. Instead, Paul proposed a much more productive model – look for wise and capable Christians within the congregation's own membership who could be trusted to guide and encourage both sides involved in the disagreement. Only someone who had a proper concern for the health of the assembly could give a proper

judgment in such a case. A civil judge is only concerned with deciding who is right and who is wrong. A Christian judge is concerned with reconciling both parties to one another. This is a much better way.

7-11

Disregarding the question of who should judge these kinds of disputes, the simple fact that the Corinthians had allowed their disagreements to escalate to legal disputes indicated that they had lost sight of the bond that they shared. When one Christian did something that harmed or cheated another in a petty or a worldly way, whether intentionally or accidentally, love and the desire for unity should lead the one who had been wronged to be patient and forgiving with his brother. This does not mean that the matter should not have been addressed and resolved in a reasonable way, but the brother who had been wronged had the responsibility to preserve his relationship with the one who wronged him. The health of the congregation, once again, dictated the correct response to this kind of situation.

But the Corinthians had taken the opposite approach. Instead of being patient with one another and working through their disagreements in a calm, reasonable way, each determined to hurt the other the same way that they had been hurt. They set out to exact revenge, not to reconcile. This meant that the disputes had been corrupted by ill intentions from the very beginning. The Corinthian Christians had failed before they had begun.

In this context, it seems that the list of sins Paul gives in verses 9-10 is designed to challenge the Corinthians to reconsider their motivations when interacting with one another. Their disputes betrayed that they were not considering one another with the love and purity that was appropriate for brethren. Paul did not speculate on what drove specific individuals in specific disputes; instead, he reminded them that impure motives have no place in the kingdom of God, and reminded them what those motives looked like:

1. *Sexual Immorality and Adultery*: The congregation of Christ was not an environment to look for a sexual partner outside the bonds of

marriage. While some of the Corinthians may have formerly conducted their social lives in a way that brought them into contact with potential partners, but it was inappropriate for them to look at their brothers and sisters in the same way.

2. *Idolatry*: Chapters 8-10 make it plain that some of the Christians at Corinth had continued to attend feasts and worship ceremonies at idols' temples in Corinth, and that they had either implicitly or explicitly encouraged others in their congregation to attend these feasts as well. This kind of influence worked against the unity and purpose of the congregation.
3. *Men who are effeminate and Sodomites*: These words describe both participants in a type of homosexual relationship called pederasty. This kind of sexual misconduct could be distinguished from adultery and general immorality by the fact that it was, first, a *homosexual* relationship and, second, a potentially *abusive* relationship. At the very least, one of the partners took a controlling role in the relationship, while the other was expected to submit passively. Everything about this kind of relationship worked against Christian character and the mutual respect that should be found in a healthy congregation.
4. *Thieves, Greed, and Extortion*: It was not right for any Christians to look at their brethren as a potential source of financial or material gain, especially when that gain involved theft and dishonesty. Our fellow Christians are not there to be used for our personal gain.
5. *Drunkenness*: When we hand control of our lives over to alcohol or other drugs – even for a limited time – we deny ourselves the opportunity to build productive and healthy relationships with others. Someone who is carelessly addicted to alcohol cannot contribute meaningfully to the work of God's people.

6. *Verbal Abuse*: Someone who is unkind and demeaning toward his brethren likewise cannot help them grow. We have to ensure that our intention is to build up our brethren, not tear them down.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that many of them viewed others through these lenses in their former lives, before they committed themselves to Christ. However, when they were washed and sanctified by His blood, they were meant to put these things behind them and treat one another with a newfound respect and dignity. The fact that they were falling into disputes that they themselves could not solve showed that they had rather relapsed in this area. Somebody was pursuing motives that were less than pure, and they could not come together as one body until they had set these things aside once again.

12-14

When Paul says that he is permitted to do everything, he does not mean that all things are morally neutral. It could be that he is responding to a doctrine in Corinth that overemphasizes the role that freedom plays in the Christian life. Chapter 8 reveals plainly that certain members at Corinth claimed that their knowledge of the existence and supremacy of God made it possible for them to treat idolatry as a morally neutral thing, something that would have no impact on their ability to serve God properly. It seems likely that Paul is already building a foundation here that will help with the later discussion, especially since he very nearly repeats this verse in that discussion (1 Corinthians 10:23). However, the primary context in chapter 6 has to do with motivations in congregational relationships. Paul is encouraging the Corinthian Christians to no longer ask themselves the question, “*Can I do this?*” and start asking, “*Should I do this?*”

This means that they needed to start thinking about their end goals. Yes, they could theoretically do many things, no one was going to stop them, but would these things be helpful for the growth of the congregation? They could do many things, but were they allowing their freedoms to enslave them? Were the things that they enjoyed taking control of their lives to their

own harm and the harm of their brethren in Christ? Every tool that God has given us has a proper purpose, and God has an intention for everything. Food serves to preserve our life in the present, but it has no intrinsic impact on eternity. Once this physical age is over, God will destroy our need for food – our stomachs – and the food that sustains us. They will simply no longer factor into our lives.

Likewise, God has a plan for our bodies. If we commit ourselves to God while we are *physically* alive, God will raise us up after we die to share in the glory of His Son, who will save us from our sins. He will restore life to our bodies and glorify them to be something much more than they are now (see 1 Corinthians 15). They have a purpose and a proper use in God's great plan for His creation.

However, as tools, both food and bodies can be misused. Paul does not elaborate on the misuse of food, but we can imagine gluttony and idol worship as two possible misuses. Likewise, our bodies can be used in a way that does not fit into God's plan for them. Paul is very plain on this point, sexual immorality abuses and defiles what God has given to us to use for good.

15-17

These verses introduce an idea for the first time that will see much greater development as the letter continues: Christians are members of Christ's body. We should not think of ourselves in isolation at all – no matter what circumstances or decisions we have in view. We have become appendages of Christ's presence in the world, and what we do reflects back on Him. That fact alone should cause us to reconsider what we do with ourselves. The case in point – can it be right or permissible in any way if we use Christ's body to commit sexual sins?

To add to the force of this argument, Paul explains how a sexually immoral Christian pits two covenants – two binding principles built into the fabric of our existence against each other. He quotes from Genesis 2:24 to illustrate how sexual activity is meant to illustrate and strengthen the bond

of marriage. From the very beginning, God intended for a man and a woman to commit themselves fully to one another in marriage, then demonstrate and strengthen that commitment through sexual union. Sexual immorality ignores the covenantal commitment that goes with sexuality, but it still displays a distorted view of what God intended in the beginning. Paul says that someone who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her – they aren't married, they aren't in a covenant with each other, but they are acting like they are. Paul makes his view of this practice unmistakable: this thing is shameful, and it is not right for a member of Christ to make a mockery of the marriage covenant. This can do nothing but bring shame on Christ.

By contrast, the one who has entered into a covenant with Christ through baptism has joined his spirit to the spirit of Christ. Just like a husband and a wife have committed to a shared life with a shared purpose, every Christian has committed to a shared life and purpose with Christ. It is dishonest to commit to this kind of a life, then commit to a distorted covenant that works against Christ. We must hold our covenant with Him in good faith, just as a good spouse remains faithful to his marriage.

18-20

If we have joined our spirits to Christ's, then, in a real sense, the Spirit of God lives in us. Our spirits are being renovated until they reflect the same image that the Spirit of God projects (2 Corinthians 3:16-18). This means that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, He dwells inside of us. For this reason, we need to treat our bodies with respect and use them in a way that reflects the price that Christ paid to redeem us and renovate our spirit. This is what Paul means when he says that sexual immorality is a sin against our own bodies. We have been sanctified for a holy use within a covenant, and sexual immorality violates that covenant and commits our body to a distorted, shameful purpose. We cannot be faithful to both partners – the Holy Spirit and a prostitute – at the same time. We must choose one or the other, and Paul urges us strongly to choose the Spirit.

A New Translation of Mark 2:23-3:6

“And it happened on the Sabbath that they were walking through the grainfields. As they went, His disciples began to pluck heads of grain. Then the Pharisees said to Him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not permitted on the Sabbath?’

And He said to them, ‘Have you never read what David and those who were with him did, when he was in need and hungry; how he went into the house of God in the time of Abiathar, the high priest, and ate the bread of God’s presence, which only the priests were permitted to eat? And he gave it to those who were with him also.’ And He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for the sake of man, man was not made for the sake of the Sabbath. Thus, the Son of Man is also the lord of the Sabbath.’

Then He came again into the synagogue, and there was a man there who had a withered hand. Then they were watching Him carefully to see whether He would heal him on the Sabbath. Then He said to the man who had the withered hand, ‘Stand in the middle.’ Then He said to them, ‘Is it permitted to do good on the Sabbath, or to do evil? To save a life, or to kill?’ But they were silent.

He looked around at them with anger, since He was grieved at the hardness of their hearts, then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ Then he stretched out his hand, and it was restored. And the Pharisees went out immediately and conspired with the Herodians about what they could do against Him to destroy Him.”

Notes on the Translation:

2:26: *“The bread of God’s presence...”* – This is literally the “bread of the presence” (ESV, NRSV), which is variously translated as the “showbread” (NKJV) and the “consecrated bread” (NASB 1995, NIV). I have chosen to translate it a little more in an explanatory way to make it plain why the bread was considered holy – especially if the reader is unfamiliar with the Law of Moses. To my understanding, the bread and the lamps in the tabernacle (and later temple) were designed to show God’s continual presence in His house. His house was never empty but was always filled with food and light (cf. Leviticus 24:1-9).

The fact that the bread was so closely tied to the real presence of God in His temple meant that the Israelites had to treat it as holy, as something that belonged to God. This is why it could only be eaten by priests – who were prepared and designated to work in God’s presence – and it had to be eaten in God’s presence, in a holy place (Leviticus 24:9).

- M. S.

The Sabbath Was Made for the Sake of Man

Comments on Mark 2:23-3:6

Introduction

When Jesus healed the man who was paralyzed, He proved that there was real power behind the gospel that He preached. His followers could trust that their sins really were forgiven because He had shown such complete control over the world around Him that no disease was beyond His power to heal. When He called Levi and ate with the most hated members of Jewish society, He showed that His gospel was meant for those who needed help, not those who wanted to aggrandize themselves and prove their superiority. When He explained why His disciples were not fasting, even though Jewish society encouraged everyone to fast often to show their righteousness, Jesus showed that His gospel was not meant to make people seem righteous outwardly, but rather taught them to react thoughtfully and reasonably to whatever situation they found themselves in.

All of these features of Jesus’ gospel – its power, its promise to sinners, and its sincerity – appealed to the people of Israel. However, they also led to increasing conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of the day. The power and influence possessed by the Pharisees and the Herodians stemmed from their ability to appear more righteous than those around them. The worldview that Jesus taught robbed them of that image. This conflict came to a head in the two incidents recorded in these verses, where these leaders disagreed with Jesus on how to respect the Sabbath day. As a

result of these conversations, the Pharisees and the Herodians committed to a course of action that would, ultimately, end Jesus' life.

2:23-28

This series of events began in a seemingly innocent way. Jesus and His disciples were walking through a farmer's field when some of them became hungry. Since the grain in the fields offered an easy and attractive source of food, they simply reached out, took some, and ate it. There was nothing offensive about this in Israelite culture – the Law of Moses instructed farmers to leave part of their crops in their fields so that those who had nothing and those who were traveling could eat freely as they passed through (Deuteronomy 24: 19-22). The only point where they could be criticized was the fact that they collected food this way on the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath was one of the defining features of the covenant that God had made with the Israelites through Moses. It was one of the first ten commandments, which set the tone for all the law that would follow:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” (Exodus 20:8-11, NKJV)

God's instructions were simple: on the seventh day of the week, every citizen of Israel and visitor in their land must rest and do no normal work. Anyone who violated this command to do something as simple as lighting a fire (Exodus 35:2-3) or picking up sticks (Numbers 15:32-36) was found guilty of a capital offense. Nehemiah 13:15-22 applied the same strictness to winemaking and commercial activities.

It is important to note that the Old Testament does not provide a comprehensive list of activities that were and were not permitted on the

Sabbath day. The passages we've noted establish the principle ideas that stood behind the Sabbath and provide a few examples of behaviors that were not acceptable, but God allowed the Israelites to exercise their own judgment when it came to the minutiae of daily observance of His commandment. Every Israelite had the responsibility to judge what was proper to do on the Sabbath day, and each one would be held responsible for his own choices.

Therefore, the Pharisee's dispute with Jesus on this occasion can be boiled down to a difference in interpretation. The Law of Moses makes it plain that it was wrong for a farmer to harvest his field on the Sabbath day, but does this mean that a given action the farmer took when harvesting – namely, plucking a head of wheat off of its stalk – was always wrong for everyone on the Sabbath day? More specifically, did the prohibition against harvesting also act as a prohibition against a poor traveler eating what was left at the edge of the field for his benefit?

The Pharisees evidently believed that, yes, the action of harvesting a stalk of grain was always wrong on the Sabbath day, no matter what the circumstances were. Their approach to the law of God had little to do with understanding intention, personal responsibility, or maturity. In their view, it seems, the Sabbath did not necessarily have to accomplish *anything*. It was simply a law to be followed, and you were either righteous if you followed it (especially if you followed it better than everyone else) or unrighteous if you did not.

By contrast, Jesus' approach to interpretation allowed for different circumstances and intentions. His focus was not on the action itself – plucking the head off a stalk of grain – otherwise He may have reached the same conclusion as the Pharisees. Instead, He focused on *why* the head was plucked. If a farmer went out into his field on the Sabbath and plucked grain, he violated God's commandment because he would not rest from his normal work. His grain was available and ready for harvest both before and after the Sabbath, so it was irresponsible for him to devote himself to work on that day. However, for Jesus' disciples, who may not have had anything

else to eat that day, simply eating the meal that had been provided for them did not count as work, and it did not profane the Sabbath. God's intention in establishing the Sabbath was not to withhold a meal from people in this position, nor did those who saw to their regular needs dishonor God. Jesus never condemned his disciples' actions, whether before the Pharisees intervened or after.

In fact, Jesus appealed to an incident during the life of David, His own ancestor and the most famous king of Israel, to show that God has been merciful in all of His laws. Before David became king, he was a servant of his predecessor, a man named Saul. While David served Saul, his victories against the Philistines, including his confrontation against the giant Goliath, caused him to become more popular than Saul. Saul became so jealous of David that he intended to kill him. When David heard this, he and his closest supporters fled hurriedly from Saul's court. In the process, they evidently did not have time to pack food. For this reason, David led them to the tabernacle, where he lied to the priest on duty so that he would give them the bread of God's presence (1 Samuel 21:1-6 and preceding chapters).

Aside from the lies that David told on this occasion, this was wrong because only priests were allowed to eat the bread of God's presence. This bread was prepared every week to set the table in God's house, after which the priests would remove it to make room for fresh loaves. The bread that was removed was then meant to be eaten by a priest in the tabernacle itself (Leviticus 24:4-9). Under normal circumstances, David and his men would never have been allowed to even touch this bread. However, because of extreme need, both David and the priest on duty decided to violate the commandment.

Jesus applied this point to the Sabbath in His statement, "The Sabbath was made for the sake of man, man was not made for the sake of the Sabbath." God's commandment was meant to be interpreted and followed in line with its purpose. It was designed to improve the lives of God's servants while making them distinct from the nations around them, it was never meant to

bring them harm. If the Pharisees interpreted and applied the Sabbath in a way that prevented the poor and needy from seeing to their own basic needs, they were not doing God's work.

Jesus likely referred to Himself when He pronounced that "the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." This gave Him the authority to interpret it as a tool for His people. As a tool, it could be used properly or improperly. The proper use would elevate His people, but the improper use could tear them apart.

3:1-6

The second narrative is similar in tone to the one that came before it. After the confrontation about picking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus found Himself in the synagogue. Whether this was the same day or a later Sabbath, we do not know. There was a man there who had a withered hand, and, since Jesus had healed people with similar disabilities everywhere He had been up to that point, the people expected Him to heal this man as well. However, this encounter took place on the Sabbath, so there was some uncertainty about whether healing was considered work. Since it was a miraculous power, then the Israelites did not have any practical experience that could tell them whether it was proper to heal or not.

This time, instead of providing an answer Himself, Jesus asked those who were present to use their own judgment to solve the dilemma. If the Sabbath was meant for the good of mankind, was it acceptable to do something on the Sabbath that would accomplish some real good in another's life? Was it right to make a decision or withhold some help – thus accomplishing evil – simply because it could qualify as work and work was not permitted on the Sabbath?

No one present was willing to hazard an answer to the dilemma. Mark tells us that Jesus was angry and grieved because He could see that their hearts were hard. Considering the nature of the question, this probably means that they had no compassion for those who were suffering. They were willing to allow others to suffer and even to cause harm themselves in the name of

apparent righteousness. This aroused Jesus' anger because His people had taken something that was meant to bring life and had corrupted it so that it brought death.

Since the religious leaders in the synagogue would not answer Him, Jesus did what was right – He healed the man with the withered hand. No one could condemn Him, because no one could counter the powerful point He had made about the purpose of the Sabbath, but the Pharisees and the Herodians left the synagogue determined to put an end to Jesus' influence. He had exposed the superficiality of their religion, so that they could not defeat Him in a religious debate. Now, they would resort to more underhanded tactics.

- **M. S.**

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