
THE CHRISTIAN PROSPECT

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Studying the Revelation

Introduction

A few years ago the church here at Pleasant Grove in Brazil, Indiana conducted a study of the book of Revelation. It was a very valuable experience. The Revelation is a difficult book, and is too often ignored. Although it is the word of God, and is meant to be studied and understood, we often leave it out of our studies. I want to encourage everyone to read and study the Revelation so that we all can grow in our knowledge of God's word.

One of the chief difficulties when studying Revelation is the abundance of varied, and often wildly imaginative, interpretations in existence. It's impossible that we haven't been influenced by these. The apocalyptic language used in Revelation is found in popular culture. Movies and music use references to various scenes from Revelation as their inspiration. We find ourselves having to unlearn ideas and concepts that have no foundation in truth. Our challenge is to read the Scriptures and allow them to guide us without outside interference. Even among honest, well-meaning commentators we will often find disagreements and contradictions. Every familiarity we have with their work will entice us to spend our time trying to decide who to agree with and less time studying the material for ourselves.

And so, readers, it is my intention to study through the book again, and I want you to study along. I welcome your input, questions, comments, and disagreements.

The Purpose of Revelation

What is the purpose of the Revelation? As the name suggests, it is to reveal the will of God. John tells us it is to “show His servants what must happen very soon” (Revelation 1:1, NET). Furthermore, the Lord told him to, “write what you saw, what is, and what will be after these things” (Revelation 1:19, NET). We will find in our study an assessment of the state of the church in that time, and much more about events that would take place beyond the time of John’s writing. It is a prophetic letter, a blessing to those who read it, hear it, and obey (Revelation 1:3).

Christians of every generation have found themselves persecuted, discouraged, and wondering if the Christian life is worth living. The Revelation reminds us that God and the Devil are at war, that a battle rages over the souls of man, but in the end, God wins. Sorry about the spoiler. The word “overcome” appears several times in the book as our path to eternal reward in Heaven. No punches are pulled with respect to the persecution God’s people will face, but He wants His people to understand that He knows our plight and is with us until the end.

Its Relationship with the Rest of Scripture

Revelation is not primarily a doctrinal book. When we read it we need to do so with the understanding that the fundamental doctrines of Christianity were well established by the time it was written. With this in mind, our study will be improved. Deciphering the symbolic language in Revelation is made easier if we know that our conclusions must be consistent with the rest of the Bible.

Visualization

Revelation is a book to be visualized. In the NKJV the word ‘saw’ appears 47 times. In the second verse of the book we are told that John testified to everything he saw. In verse 11 he is told, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia.” Throughout the book John writes about what he saw.

As we read it we need to visualize the things John saw. These visual images contain the signs and symbols we need to decode the message. In many ways the visions of Revelation are like the parables of the gospels, but not quite. Parables are stories about common, everyday things that have a spiritual meaning. But whereas a parable is about farming, paying debts, or dealing with neighbors, the visions of Revelation are about dragons, bottomless pits, or locusts with faces like men, hair like women, teeth like a lion, and tails like a scorpion (Revelation 9). In this way Revelation is more abstract like political cartoons that use much more figurative medium. The visions John saw used Bible based symbols to reveal God's message of encouragement to us.

For example, in Revelation 5 John saw a Lamb that appears to have been slain. Heavenly beings bow to the Lamb and sing a song. This is a pretty easy symbol to figure out. What John saw in this vision was Jesus, whom he refers to symbolically as a Lamb. If we develop a good mental image, we will be able to see what John saw through his eyes and identify the truth we are meant to learn.

Symbolic Language

Revelation is written in symbolic language. This is the most challenging aspect of the book. When you begin to read the book you soon discover that things like numbers and colors have a purpose. One of our tasks will be to determine the meaning behind the symbols.

For symbols to be useful they must be understandable. We use them all the time. If the evening sky is red we know tomorrow will have good weather, but if it's red in the morning it will not be so nice. Jesus pointed out the same to the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:1-3). Familiarity is the key, which can be our problem. In our study we will often find ourselves digging through passages in the Old Testament looking for answers. To understand Revelation, we'll need to expand our range of familiar symbols.

What is the purpose of symbolic language? Coded language is used to conceal information from an enemy. Governments use it to hide their secrets from hostile nations. Why would God want to hide His revelation? The answer is in the first verse of the book. “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to show His servants” (1:1, NKJV). The revelation of Jesus Christ is meant to be understood by those who serve Him. It is not meant for the enemies of Christianity; it was to be hidden from them. This tells us what we need to know to figure out what the signs and symbols mean. Every type of code has a key used to decipher messages. In this case that key is the rest of scripture. That might seem counter intuitive, why wouldn’t the enemies of Christianity simply read the Bible and figure it out? Why put the key in plain sight? Consider that anyone who put in the time and effort to read that much of the Bible might end up not being an enemy of Christianity anymore.

We should not get carried away with symbols. This has been a significant problem. Symbols have a meaning, we must decide what that meaning is, and then remain consistent with it. As we noted above, Revelation is a book to be visualized. But when we think about how political cartoons work, not everything in the cartoon is significant. If you saw a cartoon of two men sitting on a park bench talking, you would probably first read whatever dialog is there. Based on the dialogue you might notice that their age or how they were dressed bore some relationship to it. If they’re discussing poverty and wearing tattered clothes, that might mean something. But much of a cartoon is simply scenery to set a tone or mood. A sunny sky and green grass are cheerful, where clouds and rain are not. Counting the clouds in the sky or cracks in the sidewalk are probably more distraction than informative.

It is important to keep our reasoning simple and Humble. Let the Scriptures provide their instruction. Many of the symbols in the book are used repeatedly, indicating their importance. If the common symbols reveal what appears to be a complete spiritual message, then our work there is probably done.

As we study, keep a list of the symbols we find. When we encounter a symbol I will endeavor to research, analyze, and conclude what it means.

The Method of Study

Tell a Bible student you're studying Revelation and one of the first questions they'll probably ask you is which approach, view, or interpretation you're using. By this they mean, which preconceived notion about the book have you decided to follow: a historical view, futurist view, etc. I will not go into detail about these. Pick up most any commentary on the book and it will have a discussion of these near the beginning. The problem with this, as I hinted earlier, is that you are asked to take a position on a book you haven't studied yet. If an author subscribes to one of these views it is best for them to acknowledge it up front and explain why, but isn't it better to wait until you've read and studied the book before you decide what it means? We don't do this with other books in the Bible, why begin studying Revelation with prejudiced thinking?

We prefer to allow the Bible to speak for itself. Our study will be expository in nature, considering the words and phrases of the text, examining the context, and drawing appropriate conclusions. From this we will apply whatever lessons we learn from it.

Be Reasonable with Our Understanding

It is acceptable to study a passage and not understand every element of it. As students of the Bible, we pride ourselves on knowing what it teaches, and trusting that we have a good understanding of it. This can make the Revelation frustrating. As a book written using symbolic language it is more difficult to understand. You might also find yourself trying to make more of a passage than need be done. Pick up 5 reliable commentaries and you will find yourself, in places, with 5 somewhat different explanations about what certain passages mean, or no explanation at all. In some cases, commentators will simply ignore part of a passage. In those cases, perhaps the silence of the commentator is the correct analysis. The point is, don't get caught up on every word or phrase in the book. Study what you can,

learn what you can, and when it becomes frustrating, move on. As you continue to study the Bible and grow, you'll have opportunities to look at the passage another time. It is ok to say, "I don't know."

Closing Thoughts

The devil would like for us to believe that Revelation is too difficult to understand, but I don't believe that. It is God's word, and with a bit of effort we can learn from it. We will not unravel every mystery, answer every question, or discover when time will end, but we will learn valuable lessons. My overall hope is that we will learn what God has revealed to us and find ways to make that information useful for Christians today. It is of little use to figure out the meaning of every symbol in the book if we fail to use that information to help people be eternally saved. So please join me and help study this fascinating book.

- **Lance Stallcop**

An Important Query – Answered

The following article is quoted verbatim from the April 1833 edition of Alexander Campbell's paper, *The Millennial Harbinger*. The author, Aaylet Raines, was a preacher in the Restoration Movement that was associated with Campbell. He wrote to answer a sincere question that can affect any Christian congregation – why do we often experience periods of rapid growth that are followed immediately by a period of stagnation? Raines, writing from his own experience, suggested that the fault may not lie in the external circumstances that surround us, but that we should take these opportunities to look at ourselves introspectively and ensure that we are acting as good ambassadors for our God. It can be tempting to press an attack when it is going well, but, if we are not careful, we may accidentally make ourselves reprehensible to our audience.

Raines' language is somewhat antiquated, as he wrote almost 200 years ago, and so a few of his expressions may come across a little more harshly than

he intended them. However, I commend his words to you as a warning with lasting relevance.

- M. S.

Brother Campbell,

In the 3d volume, on the 143d page of the *Millennial Harbinger*, there is a very important *Query*, which has not, I believe, been yet answered. It reads as follows:

"How is it that when the ancient gospel has been fairly presented to a people, and the work of conversion progresses most joyfully for a time; after it arrives at a certain point it ceases; and afterwards in that place for some time conversions are rather rare?"

In relation to this query, you say, "An answer to this question is requested from some of our correspondents who have been engaged in proclaiming the word. We will reserve our remarks until we hear from some who have been more in the field than we."

This request of yours, as well as the importance of the query, were, I thought, well calculated to elicit an answer; and hence I have been expecting one from the time of the publication of the query. The query certainly merits an answer: because it relates to a lamentable fact, the future existence and influence of which might be prevented by the instituting of a consistent course of conduct on the part of the reformers. This belief, as well as a desire to hear your sentiments in relation to the evil concerning which complaint is made in the query, I offer as an apology for presenting you at the present time with this paper.

The evil alluded to is an effect produced not by merely one, but many causes: and these causes are to be found partly among the enemies, and partly among the friends of reformation. I shall, therefore, proceed to speak of these causes, or rather some of them, as they have come under my

observation at various times. The first cause of this evil which I shall mention, is —

1. *The prejudice of our opponents.* — This prejudice does not unusually bring forth its bitter fruits at any place until some time after the commencement of the preaching of the gospel at that place! Consequently, the gospel obtains a considerable weight of influence in many minds, enough to urge them into obedience, before our opponents can bring their artillery to bear against it. No sooner, however, do they perceive sinners in multitudes obeying the gospel, than they are aroused to action. Then follows almost every species of vituperation and misrepresentation. The doctrine which we preach is called by hard names; scraps of Scripture, wrested from their connexion, are brought into requisition, by which to show the fallacies of our teaching; the antiquity and popularity of sectarian establishments are appealed to as divine establishments, while the ancient gospel is held up as a thing of yesterday; the aberrations of the members of our congregations are magnified and trumpeted, slander, with her thousand tongues, vilifies the public proclaimers; all these means are resorted to and used by one or another of our opponents, and not without effect! Many of the multitude are misled by them; others, although in despite of all the fiery darts of the wicked one, they continue to believe that we preach the true gospel, yet are not without a sufficiency of a certain kind of dubiety, and, in some instances, love of popularity, to prevent their submission to the gospel. Powerful, however, as are these means, they would fail of neutralizing the gospel, did they not find auxiliaries within the ranks of the reformation. Some of the auxiliary neutralizing causes found among us, are as follows:

2. *Many of our public proclaimers have been too sarcastic and severe.* The writer of this article acknowledges himself to be implicated by this charge; but he has been endeavoring for some time to reform in this respect; not, he thinks, without success. Public proclaimers should be as conciliatory as the nature of the truth will permit. Love to all men should be in them a prominent characteristic. But if, instead of this, we indulge in the constant use of biting sarcasms against sectarians and sectarianism, we shall inevitably increase the quantum of the prejudice of our opponents instead of lessening it; and we

shall meet thousands beyond the reach of our voices, and consequently beyond our influence, who, had we pursued a conciliatory course, would have heard us gladly, and would ultimately, under our ministry, have become the happy subjects of gospel conversion. We therefore say, that the severity and sarcasms of many of our preachers have constituted a part of the means by which the evil complained of in the query has been produced.

3. *The severity and sarcasms of many reformers who are not public proclaimers.* A preacher, if he is an influential one, is very apt to inspire his readers with his own spirit, especially if it be a bad spirit! At any rate, we do know that there have been too much severity and sarcasm used by reformers, in conversation and controverted points. While the gospel has been bringing many into obedience, the people, as a matter of course, would take sides — some for, and some against the gospel as we preach it. Well, in many cases controversy between the contending parties waxed exceedingly warm, and many things were said on both sides calculated to hurt feelings, and to engender incurable prejudices; and the reformers, it may be, played their part in this war of words as warmly as did their opponents. What but mischievous prejudice and bitterness of spirit could be expected to result from this awful deviation from the genius of the Christian institution? If seriousness and love on the part of the reformers, such as Christianity demands, had always been used by them in their addresses to their opponents, the truth would have rolled onward like a mighty torrent; nor would all the vituperative and argumentative energies of anti-reformers been able to retard, much less to stop it. I say, *seriousness*; because when we converse with friend or foe on a subject so serious as is the subject of the Christian religion, solemn seriousness becomes us; nor can all our *witticisms* concerning *long-facedness*, alter, much less destroy the nature of this obligation.

4. *The reformers have frequently contributed to the production of the evil complained of in the query, by an unskillful use of the sword of the Spirit.* Nothing is more common than for young disciples, in private at least, to attempt the propagation of their sentiments before they themselves understand the Christian religion; and, in scores of instances I have known them advance

the most extravagant errors; which errors were immediately caught up and trumpeted by the opposition as fixed articles of our creed. Now, when young disciples, who are not well informed, permit themselves to circulate their fancies in this way, and to do so too in some cases with considerable asperity, what can they expect but to injure the cause of truth? The most of us are probably rather prone to give ourselves credit for more knowledge than we really possess; and hence liable to become inflated with a kind of spiritual pride. Young disciples should most assiduously court humility – not pride; – they should never suffer themselves to be puffed with a belief that they possess much spiritual knowledge, when indeed they have not advanced beyond the *Christian Alphabet*! Much injury has also been done in some congregations, by speakers who have not been careful to confine their discourses within the sphere of their knowledge; and who have consequently given to the people their own speculations and fancies instead of the word of the Lord. I am willing that all the brethren should teach in the congregations, who can teach so as to edify; but I do insist that no man should attempt to teach that which he does not himself understand. Teaching should by all be considered a matter of fact work. But if, when a speaker tells his congregation that he *goes* for facts, and blames in terms of awful severity the whole religious world for its speculations, it should be ascertained that he himself is as speculative as those whom he blames, what will the shrewd hearer say of him? Will he not say that the reformers are in this respect as others – only they have a class of speculations peculiar to themselves? I do indeed think that if the brethren of our congregations would confine themselves on their First Day meetings to the breaking of bread, singing, prayer, exhorting one another to a holy life, and would have less to do with *chapter-commenting*, it would be infinitely better for us and for the world! We have done much harm by the unskillful use of the sword of the Spirit. But the mammoth evil, that which contributes more than all others to the obstructing of truth in its progress, is –

5. *That reformers do not, in their every day deportment, conform, with sufficient strictness, to the Christian religion.* We have by profession taken an elevated stand. We call ourselves Christians, New Testament Christians, Reformers, &c. We

proclaim these things abroad every where. The world is consequently on *tiptoe* to see what holy livers, what paragons of Christian purity these reformers are going to be! Now, suppose that after they shall have looked on us for some time, and with good intention too, they should be puzzled to tell in what kind of holy living we excel our neighbors; think you it would not have a tendency to keep them at a distance from us? The more so, as we have made so much ado about practical reformation. Tens of thousands of non-professors are now sick of the immoralities and impurities of sectarian churches, and are looking towards us with intense solicitude, hoping to behold in us what they have long desired to see – a congregation of faithful men and women, holy, harmless, undefiled – walking in the truth! O! Shall we not drive them into infidelity if we do not permit them now to behold in us *the peaceable fruits of righteousness*? We do know that the shortcomings of reformers have had, in many places, an immense, and a deleterious influence upon the people of the world. We will not say that in such instances no injustice has been done to our cause by the people of the world. In converting sinners, and constituting churches, we are dependent upon the world for materials; and really many of these materials have been so spoiled in and by the world, before ever the gospel found them, that we can make nothing of them that will redound to the credit of the Christian religion! For this reason I do not think that the people of the world do either themselves or us justice, when they blame either the Christian religion or the church for the aberrations of those dishonest and depraved beings whose moral maladies are beyond the reach of the gospel *materia medica*! Many of the people of the world seem to excuse their own disobedience by pleading the disobedience of professors – just as if *two wrongs*, one in themselves and one in a professor, would make *one right*!! But so it is; and it ought to make us all more circumspect.

I have merely hinted at what I consider the chief causes of the evil lamented in the query. It will remain for the public to judge whether my answer is true or false. If it shall be of no further benefit, it may attract attention to the point to which the query relates, and eventuate not only in eliciting information from other men more competent than the writer of this article,

but in the removal, to some extent, of those evils upon which I have animadverted. But this paper ought not to be closed, without saying that however great may be the evils which we deplore, the reformation carries with it much sterling virtue – much pure and undefiled religion – much native talent and high intellectual endowments; and as its advocates have put themselves under a *divine church discipline*, one made for them by Jesus Christ – the New Testament, we may expect that the evils of which we complain will be perpetually, though perhaps imperceptibly diminished; and that ultimately the truth, either by its own efficacy, or by collateral supernatural aid, will obtain a complete and never-to-be-forgotten triumph. May the Lord grant it!

Yours,

- Aaylet Raines

Bible Interpretation, No. 7

Introduction

As we move into our third set of study questions – questions of intention – we enter into a somewhat less tangible, though no less important field of study than we have considered before. We have worked hard to investigate *what* the author literally said in a given passage, as well as how that passage *connects or contributes* to the flow of thought surrounding it. Now, we want to ask *why* the author wrote what he did, where he did. Similarly, we might ask why he did *not* mention other details we can find elsewhere in Scripture, or details that we wish we could know. By examining which details were important to the author, we can draw reasonable conclusions about the purpose of any passage.

Study and Speculation

When we begin to ask *why* questions, we need to be careful that we keep our study focused and do not allow ourselves to fall into a rabbit hole of speculation. If, for example, we want to study a passage where a New

Testament author quotes a verse from the Old Testament, it would be appropriate for us to ask, “why did he choose this passage to prove his point?” It would even make sense if we asked, “why did he prefer this passage to another that teaches the same thing?” However, it would not be reasonable to ask why he did not use any of the other 23,144 verses in the Old Testament.

This kind of speculation would distract us from what the passage *does* say and why the author *did* use the language and content that he chose to use. We need to allow the author to guide us, even when trying to understand his purpose. It is not our place to assert what the biblical authors *could* have said, and it is certainly beyond our ability to declare what they *should* have said. Rather, we hope to discover what they wanted us to understand when they wrote.

An Example from the Gospels

We will leave our usual example in 1 Peter for a moment because the four gospels serve as an excellent proving ground for this kind of study. In most passages in the gospels, we can examine three or four perspectives of the same event in Jesus’ life. Each of the gospels agrees on what happened, but each gospel writer mentions and emphasizes different details to serve a slightly different purpose. Each of them did intend to report the events and significance of Jesus’ life to their readers, but each of them drew different, though complementary, lessons out of His life for their readers. Below, we will consider the testimony of Mark, Matthew, and Luke regarding the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness:

Mark

Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. ¹³ And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him. (Mark 1:12-13, NKJV)

Mark’s account of Jesus’ temptation is, by far, the shortest of the three gospels that deal with it. Mark brings out five significant details:

1. The sequence of events – this took place after Jesus was baptized by John (Mark 1:9-11) and before He began to preach (Mark 1:14-15).
2. The place – Jesus was in the wilderness with the wild beasts, isolated from civilization.
3. The duration – He was there for forty days.
4. The presence of Satan, who tempted Him.
5. The presence of angels, who cared for Him.

What can we discern about Mark's purpose from the way he presents this event? He certainly does say something about Jesus' qualification for His work, and the reason He can have sympathy for human weaknesses, because He Himself has suffered from isolation and severe temptations (see Hebrews 2:17-18). This is also the first time that either Satan, the angels, and their respective works are mentioned in Mark's gospel. If Mark or anyone else used this writing to introduce the gospel to someone who had never heard it before, these verses would be enough to show, generally speaking, who Satan is and how he tempts us, and who the angels are, and what they do for God's children.

Matthew

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

² *And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.*

³ *Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."*

⁴ *But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"*

⁵ *Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written:*

'He shall give His angels charge over you,'

and,

*'In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"*

⁷ Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

*¹¹ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.
(Matthew 4:1-11, NKJV)*

Matthew's account mentions all of the same points that Mark brought out, and then some. The additional details offered by Matthew divides easily into two categories:

1. Satan used three tools or opportunities to tempt Jesus – 1) physical discomfort, specifically hunger; 2) misapplied Scripture, in that he tried to convince Jesus to throw Himself from the temple in an ill-conceived show of faith; and 3) earthly authority and power, which he offered as a replacement for Jesus' heavenly inheritance.
2. Correct and incorrect uses of Scripture – Satan's second temptation showed how Scripture can be misused when taken out of context, while Jesus' response to all three temptations demonstrated a thoughtful understanding of each passage and a sincere commitment to the principles taught in each place.

The prominence of Scripture in Matthew's account makes sense, considering how meticulous he is to show the relationship between Jesus' ministry and the Old Testament. This narrative, which demonstrates how Scripture can be appropriately used and how it can be misapplied and abused, serves Matthew well in his pursuit of that purpose.

Luke

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

³ And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

⁴ But Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.' "

⁵ Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶ And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. ⁷ Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."

⁸ And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "

⁹ Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For it is written:

*'He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you,'*

¹¹ and,

*'In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"*

¹² And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

¹³ Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13, NKJV)

Interestingly, the primary differences between Matthew's account and Luke's account focus on Satan:

1. Satan has been given authority over the kingdoms of the earth.
2. He used every tool he had to corrupt Jesus ("when the devil had ended every temptation...").
3. He did not intend to tempt Jesus only one time. When he saw that his temptations had failed, he decided to wait for "an opportune time."

Luke's explanation of Satan's tools and his relentless pursuit of those he desires to have will help to clarify statements we find later in his gospel, such as his description of how Satan entered Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:3), or how he wanted to wreak havoc among the apostles (Luke 22:31-32). Thus, Luke's account may be intended as more of a warning.

We can see that each of the gospel writers had a different, though complementary purpose in mind when he described Jesus' temptation. Mark wanted to introduce Satan and the angels, as well as their roles in relationship to God's servants. Matthew showed how the Scriptures could be properly and improperly used, and Luke demonstrated how Satan used the tools (including the Scriptures) and opportunities available to him. We can know this with a reasonable amount of certainty because of the details that each author does and does not bring out.

Studying Intention throughout the Scriptures

It is comparatively easy to conduct this kind of study in the gospels because we can find different accounts of the same events, each of which brings out

different details of what happened and what was said. We cannot find a direct parallel for most passages in the Bible – although we may be able to find indirect parallels that address the same topic from a different angle. Thus, it is necessary for us to study the author’s intention directly. Consider 1 Peter 3:21 (NKJV):

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.

The process will be very similar to the one we followed above with the gospels. First, we’ll list the individual details that Peter draws our attention to. We’ve already dealt with each of these in previous lessons:

1. Baptism corresponds to the flood (1 Peter 3:20), in that people were saved through water in both cases.
2. Baptism saves us.
3. The power of baptism is not in the physical action of washing our bodies, but rather goes deeper.
4. The power of baptism is based in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When we consider the context of our passage – that Peter is helping his readers develop a commitment to suffer in this body out of hope for life in the spirit – we can see something of his purpose in mentioning baptism. In essence, baptism does not improve our lives in a physical way – just like the flood did not bring material blessings to Noah and his family. Its power is spiritual, and the hope that it gives us is spiritual. If we have been baptized, we are not anchored here, but rather we are anchored beyond this life. The Christian life is a life characterized by hope and purpose directed toward the future. Therefore, what happens here and now is of relatively little significance.

Conclusion

Why is it important to discover the intention that lies behind a passage? This study is very close to what we have discussed regarding content and context, but it deals with something a little less tangible. What do we hope to gain by speculating on the author's purpose for bringing out every detail that he does?

Simply put, we need to protect ourselves from misusing a passage. We might understand precisely what a verse means, and we may be able to explain flawlessly how the author's train of thought flows through the verse and throughout the rest of the book. However, if we do not consider the *reason* that stands behind every detail, we may overextend the passage in application. This is not to say that the content of a verse will not have any impact on how we think about other passages – we will deal with this at length in our next study – but it does mean that we should not expect more from a passage than it is designed to give us. The verse we have taken as an example, 1 Peter 3:21, is not designed to explain the role that baptism plays in our salvation. There are much more directed passages that do deal with that question (see, for example, Romans 6:1-14). 1 Peter 3:21 does interact with some of the features of baptism that Paul draws on in Romans 6, so there is some conceptual overlap, but Peter uses those facts to serve a different purpose. Thus, it would be inappropriate to use 1 Peter 3:21 to explain *why* baptism saves us, since Peter takes it as a presupposition that it does.

- M. S.

Before the Movement

After the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, the European nations quickly became the world's religious leaders with France and England being chief among them. What is more, theologians began to use French as their language of choice. However, the unification of language in their writings did not immunize churches against the disease of

interreligious strife. In 1562, a prolonged period of war and unrest began in France between the new Reformers and Catholics which would later be known as the French Wars of Religion. This conflict soon spread when protestants fled from the Catholic-controlled country to the center of the continuing reformation movement in England. This, we may take notice, was also one of the early indications in the modern period of the enduring discord between the French and the English nations.

One of the reasons for the conflict between the two leading religious systems was the choice of translation of the Bible. The Latin Vulgate had been trusted and used for centuries by Catholics, but there were some protestants who realized and resented the intense theological bias present in that rendering and the clergy's interpretation thereof.

Previous to and simultaneous with the wars was the rise of renaissance humanism which, unlike its modern counterpart, suggested that Greek and Hebrew studies, philosophy, history, classical grammar, and rhetoric would allow scholars to produce a historical-critical exegesis of the scriptures and also a new and improved translation, thus allowing for a purification and renewal of biblical Christianity. This, coupled with the amelioratory movement, gave rise to a new age of church scholarship.

Over the next century, new translations seemed to be produced almost yearly. The Geneva Bible, which was the first English version to include numbered verses, was printed in 1560. Seemingly in rebuttal, the Catholic church completed the Douay-Rheims Bible in 1609. Then, in 1611 the King James Version, including the Apocrypha, was printed and quickly became the translation of choice of many protestants.

For the next two centuries political and religious unrest did not cease. The seventeenth century saw the rise of Calvinism, Lutheranism, and Atheism with all three claiming to be a restoration of the original order of the world. The eighteenth century saw the rise of political and religious differences between the British mainland and the American colonies. In particular there were three events during this time period which, in this author's opinion,

acted, perhaps in the providence of God, as stepping stones to the launch of the American Restoration movement, viz. the rise of Renaissance Humanism, the Enlightenment, and the American Revolution.

The rise of Renaissance Humanism. As previously mentioned, Renaissance Humanism was a movement which began in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that called for a revival of classical studies of antiquity. Many of the first members of the movement were Catholic theologians or scholars including Pope Sixtus IV, Leo X, and Pius II, but in some sense their ties to humanism disagreed with their religious beliefs. While they believed and practiced the traditions of the church, at the same time these men were calling for a reinterpretation and restoration of the early Greek and Roman documents and scrolls. Consequently, many Reformers took hold of the movement's ideals and ran with them. No matter the religious background of the proponents, they all encouraged their peers to learn the ancient languages (e.g. Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic, Sanskrit, etc.), revive the study of archaeology and history, and practice a protohistorical-critical method of interpretation.

We may now notice the particular impact that this school of thought had on the men who called for restoration in America in the nineteenth century. When the restorers began their search for the Ancient Order, they practiced many of the same principles as the Humanists of the fifteenth century, but they took them to their fullest extent. Alexander Campbell, for example, refused to prepare or deliver a sermon to the church until well into his twenties because he did not yet have a grasp on the biblical languages.

Furthermore, JW McGarvey wrote, concerning the grounds on which we receive the Bible, "Believers may be divided, in reference to their grounds of belief, into three classes; first, the uneducated who have never made a study of the evidences of Christianity; second, the more intelligent class, who have paid more or less attention to the subject, but have never studied it systematically; and third, those who have investigated the subject exhaustively" (Garrison, 24). Those in this third class, McGarvey says, have devoted much time to the study of the ancient languages and have

“ransacked the ancient libraries of Europe, Africa, and western Asia, in search of manuscript copies of the New Testament.” These restorers had become textual critics (we may even recognize them as Renaissance Humanists) with the highest degree of respect for the authority and inspiration of the scriptures.

The Enlightenment. Spanning nearly two centuries (c.1637-1789) and eventually circling the globe, the Age of Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, emerged out of the Renaissance Humanist movement and expanded upon its precepts. Thinkers in this movement brought new ideas about liberty, technology, human progress, epistemology, and knowledge to the forefront of scholarly investigation. It is difficult to give a single reason or mission statement to this crusade due to its myriad members, but in its most general terms we may say that its purpose was to ask a single question: “Why?”

Following the European religious conflicts of the previous century, philosophers of the Enlightenment developed into two schools of thought concerning religious philosophy, each of which proposed a solution to the issues regarding the union or separation of church and state. The first group, sometimes called the moderate variety or the “middle ground,” suggested a compromise or accommodation between reform and traditional religion and faith. Essentially, these proponents held to a belief in God, His work in history, His mission for the world, and the need for the Church, but they, like many other reformers (including the Renaissance Humanists) realized, although somewhat vaguely at first, the need for a restoration of primitive Christian practices. The second group, often termed “liberal” or “radical,” was characterized by its suggestions concerning liberated self-expression and a total eradication of religion over the moral aspects of man. Proponents of this second group thought that man’s moral properties and faculties ought not to be governed by any god or religion, but rather that ethics could be relative.

John Locke (1632-1704), often characterized as perhaps the most prominent, and probably the most recognized Enlightenment thinker, was

a member of the former group. Following in the footsteps of René Descartes, Locke spent his life in the pursuit of knowledge and while on that journey came to believe in the God of the Bible, or at least some form thereof. Some scholars have classed him a Calvinist, some a Socinian, some an Arian, some a deist, and still others a Pelagian. No matter how he is termed, there is no doubt about his beliefs regarding the authority of the Bible. He held firmly to a belief in verbal inspiration and that the miracles of Jesus, viz. the resurrection, and the apostles served as a proof for its authority. He would spend much of his life writing about the Christian evidences and their absolute compatibility with reason. He retained the conviction that Christianity was the sole religion which reason could confirm.

It is widely documented that many preachers during the restoration movement would carry with them on horseback a copy of the Bible, often Alexander Campbell's translation, the *Living Oracles*, and John Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity* and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Not only this, but his philosophies and works influenced the founding fathers of America as well and ultimately influenced the religious ideologies found within the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. We may say that Locke's signature can be just as clearly seen on the Declaration of Independence as that of John Hancock.

The American Revolution. Prior to the signing of the Declaration and the subsequent birth of the United States, the American colonies were under the rule of King George III of England. By this time, the English were known for their traditionalist views of nearly everything (Middlekauff). They, like the Epicureans of old, wanted no change or uproars in society but were perfectly content to remain unmoved in their government, trade, economy, and religion. The rich stayed rich, the poor became poorer, and the middle class didn't have enough influence to make a difference.

During the period of colonial revolution, many of the British soldiers were opposed to religion altogether and subsequently influenced some of their

American counterparts. Also, because of the long periods of war, there were men and women who found themselves pulled away from Sunday worship, and some deserted the ministry of the Church completely.

Voltaire, another thinker during the Enlightenment, was very influential to the unbelievers of this time period. He was a member of the second “radical” group mentioned above, and his writings primarily focused attention on the corruption of religion and of priests in particular. According to James Murch, Voltaire’s ideologies convinced the early Americans that religion was fraud and trickery “imposed on the ignorant multitude by the priestcraft.” The absolute infidelity and heathenism that was produced by this school of thought ran rampant in the streets of America after the revolution.

To fully conceive of the extent of skepticism and unbelief in the late 18th century we may notice several sources all quoted by Murch.

“We are fast becoming a nation of drunkards. We could ascertain that there are 300,000 drunkards’ graves” (Parker).

“Youths, particularly those who have been liberally educated, and who, with strong passions and feeble principles, were votaries of sensuality and ambition, delighted in the prospect of unrestrained gratification, and, panting to be enrolled with men of passion and splendor, became enamored of the new [infidel] doctrines” (Timothy Dwight).

“Murderers, horse thieves, highway robbers, and counterfeiters fled ... until they combined and actually formed a majority” (Peter Cartwright).

Certainly no man can deny the absolute depravity of that generation; the generation that would be inherited by the restorers. As a result, those men who still cleaved to religion, viz. Christianity, saw the need not only to reform the Church and destroy its denominations but also to convert the growing population of lost souls. This, combined with the previous two events, provided more than enough motivation, reason, and ideology for

men like the Campbells, Barton Stone, and James O'Kelley to call for a restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth.

Perhaps much more could be said concerning the historical prelude to the restoration symphony in America, but these three events and ideologies will serve as a foundation for understanding and interpreting the historical and religious contexts of the movement which would change the lives of millions both in this life and the next.

- Kaleb Leonard

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A Plea for Restoration, No. 2

Continued from Vol. I, No. 2

"For a great and effectual door is opened to me, yet there are many opposers."

We apologize to readers and to the editors for the gap of time between the first article in this series and this second one. Many great victories have been won for the cause of Christ in the local work and it has distracted from the composition of this article.

In our previous essay, we introduced the concept that God is a providential worker in the lives of human beings and, more particularly, in the spread of

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from Alexander Campbell's *Living Oracles* translation of the New Testament unless otherwise noted.

the gospel. Paul retrospectively noticed on several occasions that God opened doors, i.e. gave him opportunities to do the things He would have him to do and teach others the same. However, upon walking through those doors, so to speak, Paul found antagonists and opponents waiting to criticize and diminish his work at every turn and thus impede the reign of Christ.

In this second essay, we will examine a few of the doors that have been opened to modern Christians and how we can use them for the glory of God.²

Internet. First, a door or an opportunity has been opened by God, in most places, through the development of the Internet and social media. It is no secret that we live in an age of technology. As we look back through the pages of history, we find there were several landmark inventions that drove entire civilizations to great heights and achievements. When household electricity and electrically powered machinery was invented just about a century ago, the world entered a new era of high-speed transportation, communication, and widespread information distribution. Arguably the most impactful result of the age of technology has been the Internet. The world wide web allows any person with access to it to learn about any topic they desire. The benefits of this are quite obvious to the Christian, and thus the point will not be belabored.

Social media, a natural outgrowth of the Internet and the latest communication methods, has also become a vital part of most moderns' lives. As Christians, our first question should be "how can we use this for

² The doors of opportunity that will be discussed here are only those which have been opened to us in the past 25 years. Some of these may have existed prior to those dates but have recently experienced an increase in usage or abuse and therefore are deemed necessary to discuss. Other doors listed here may have been opened or shut in the past but have recently been reopened and therefore are also deemed necessary to discuss.

the glory of God?" This is the goal of our lives and it must be the ultimate goal of all of our interactions. With social media this question may be difficult to answer. Many sites have been built around enticing the carnal desires of men and women. These sites, of course, must be avoided. However, inasmuch as the website itself can be used for good, it is this author's opinion that they ought to be used toward that end. Therefore, using social media for creating advertisements (flyers or otherwise) seems to be an excellent way to more effectively and quickly spread the good news about Jesus. Using social media to share and display gospel sermons can be efficacious if used correctly. (It ought to be noted that some will abuse the material shared through social media by claiming that their support of or participation in such platforms exempts them from certain commands of God, such as regular Sunday worship. This is absolutely unacceptable and must be addressed.) These are just a few methods for using this outlet for the spread of the Gospel. It is not the purpose of this essay to exhaust the possibilities afforded by social media or the internet but simply to impress upon the reader the necessity of taking the things we have at our disposal and using them for the Kingdom.

Higher Education. A second door is found in the realm of higher education. This section, we anticipate, may stir up the most discussion among its readers.

Many moderns have embraced an ideology known as anti-intellectualism. This term, however, has two accepted definitions, and thus we must clarify which we mean. Among the philosophical community, this term is defined as "a philosophic doctrine that assigns reason or intellect a subordinate place in the scheme of things and questions or denies the ability of the intellect to comprehend the true nature of things."³ A second accepted definition is as follows: "The generalized distrust of experts and

³ C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, fourth edition (Indianapolis: ITT Bobbs-Merrill, 1985). p. 27.

intellectuals.”⁴ In this essay, we will exclusively use the latter. Anti-intellectualism has ravaged the American culture for several decades, and this movement has, unfortunately, crept into the Churches of Christ as well. Believers have been discouraged from pursuing higher education (or any intellectual achievement for that matter) because of the notion that others may look down on them if they did. This, of course, makes for an uneducated generation of Christians who may or may not be able to defend biblical truth but, regardless, are largely unprepared for the higher critiques and attacks of intelligent unbelievers. This essay is not designed to teach that all Christians should attend university or pursue doctoral-level degrees. Instead, we suggest that those who are able and willing be encouraged to do so. This will make for a generation of evangelists, elders, deacons, and teachers who are able to withstand the wiles of the devil on the academic front more ably than any of their forefathers. Neither is this essay intended to convey that there are no educated believers. On the contrary, many Christians have climbed to the top of the academic ladder (and most of those would agree with the sentiment being conveyed here). We are simply arguing against the position of anti-intellectualism among the Churches of Christ on the premise that it hurts, rather than helps, the spread of the gospel.

Paul was, for all intents and purposes, an intellectual himself. He sat at the feet of some of the greatest teachers and philosophers of his time. For a time he was even instructed in the Scriptures and Jewish tradition by Gamaliel—a renowned teacher of the law. It was because of this talent and education that he was able to rebuke, convince, and exhort even the academics on Mars Hill and others. We suppose that Paul even encouraged others who accompanied him to pursue similar education (e.g. Timothy, Titus, Luke, etc.), albeit in different manners and places.

⁴ Eric Merkely and Peter John Loewen, “Anti-Intellectualism and the Mass Public’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Nature News*, April 28, 2021. www.nature.com/articles/s41562-021-01112-w.

It is this author's opinion that an educated body of believers is an absolute necessity to the success of the gospel in the world of academia. As previously stated, this path may not be for everyone, nor should it be. For centuries, sinners with little to no education have taken their place in the body of Christ and have done their work nobly with great success. We believe it is time for the people of the world who claim to be 'too smart for God' to take their place alongside the rest as slaves of Christ.

Relative Peace. The third and final opportunity is perhaps the one that caused many of the aforementioned doors to open subsequent to it. From time immemorial, the nations of this earth have been at war with one another. Beginning with the wars in Genesis 14 and continuing to the wars in Afghanistan most recently, men and brothers have fought in carnal warfare for power and control of land and people. However, it seems that as time has progressed, and in God's good providence, the wars which at one time tore this globe apart, have become less common. This is a phenomenon that has been discussed at length in Tom Holland's recent bestseller *Dominion*⁵. Holland attributes the decline in the frequency of large-scale conflict to the increase of the Christian religion, but at the present time we are not convinced this is the case (although we are open to the idea). Whatever the case may be, we are currently living at a time when there are few wars which would result in barricaded national borders, or stoppage of international travel. In the past, when evangelists sought to preach to foreign peoples, they were forced to first wait for the current conflict to subside and for the borders to open once again. Today, we live in relative peace, especially in America, and we are able therefore to travel to nearly every country in the world and preach with little to no restraint. Thank God that He has given us peace which was not afforded to many of our ancestors.

⁵ Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*, (New York: Basic Books, 2021).

We have submitted a second essay to the editors concerning the historical background of the American restoration movement led by Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone. It is this author's opinion that the current world circumstances are now similar to those which birthed a rekindling of restoration of primitive Christianity. We ask that readers examine this first essay along with the second and contemplate the providential circumstances that God has afforded us, His people, and use them for His glory.

- **Kaleb Leonard**

A Query Concerning Higher Education

Brother Leonard,

Since you have brought up the topic of higher education in your article, I think this would be a good opportunity to start a dialogue to reason through both the benefits that higher education can offer for Christian congregations as well as the legitimate dangers that cause many to shy away from education at a university. You've taken a very positive view of higher education as a general concept, but I believe that that kind of optimism may be difficult or dangerous to apply in a real-world scenario. To illustrate what I mean, I'd like to quote at some length from Thomas S. Kuhn's book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*⁶:

"Observation and experience can and must drastically restrict the range of admissible scientific belief, else there would be no science. But they cannot alone determine a particular body of such belief. An apparently arbitrary element, compounded of personal and historical accident, is always a formative ingredient of the beliefs espoused by a given scientific community at a given time.

"That element of arbitrariness does not, however, indicate that any scientific group could practice its trade without some set of received beliefs. Nor does it make less consequential the particular constellation to which the group, at a given time, is in

⁶ (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 4-5.

fact committed. Effective research scarcely begins before a scientific community thinks it has acquired firm answers to questions like the following: What are the fundamental entities of which the universe is composed? How do these interact with each other and with the senses? What questions may legitimately be asked about such entities and what techniques employed in seeking solutions? At least in the mature sciences, answers (or full substitutes for answers) to questions like these are firmly embedded in the educational initiation that prepares and licenses the student for professional practice. Because that education is both rigorous and rigid, these answers come to exert a deep hold on the scientific mind. That they do so does much to account both for the peculiar efficiency of the normal research activity and for the direction in which it proceeds at any given time."

I quote Kuhn to illustrate the fact that educational institutions do not operate in a vacuum of belief. There are *theoretical* or *methodical* principles that can and should be applied universally – and in these principles, we would agree completely with almost every educational institution – but every institution works within a predetermined set of beliefs that have been learned or developed by the professors whose research sustains it. Many or most of these predetermined beliefs are neutral in relation to Christianity, but we do not have to look far to find disciplines and universities that have been founded on beliefs that are diametrically opposed to Christian ideals. It seems to me that we, for the sake of wisdom, need to consider the probability of conflict before we embark on a campaign (Luke 14:31-33).

With all of that said, I would like to hear your thoughts on the following questions in the next issue, if possible, and I'd also like to open the discussion up for any of our readers who have experience with higher education to weigh in:

- Is all higher education beneficial for Christians, or are there disciplines and institutions that should be avoided?
- How should a Christian decide whether to pursue a higher education or not? What skills, experiences, and opportunities can act as an indicator?

- How can a Christian who has a degree of higher education use that qualification to enhance his spiritual life?

I submit myself as your servant in Christ,

- **Matthew Shaffer**

A New Translation of 1 Corinthians 7

“Now, regarding the things you wrote, it would be good for a man not to touch a woman; however, due to the problem of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman should have her own husband. Each man should give his wife the affection that he owes her, and the wife should do likewise for her husband. A wife does not have authority regarding her own body, rather, her husband has this authority. Likewise, a husband does not have authority regarding his own body, but rather, his wife has this authority. Do not withhold this authority from one another, unless you have agreed to do so for a time so that you can give yourselves to prayer, but then come together again. This way, Satan cannot tempt you through a lack of self-control on your part. Now, I say this to give you permission for marriage, not to command you to be married. I wish that everyone could be as I am, but everyone has his own gift from God. One may have this gift, but another may have a different one.

This I say to those who are not married and to widows, it is good for them if they remain as I am; but if they do not have their desires under control, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn. To those who are married, I command — indeed, not I, but rather the Lord — a wife must not separate herself from her husband. If she does separate herself, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. A husband also must not divorce his wife.

I — not the Lord — say this to the rest: if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she agrees to continue living with him, he should not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is an unbeliever and he agrees to continue living with her, she should not divorce her husband. This is because the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through the brother, for your children would otherwise be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever separates himself, let him be separated; the brother or sister is not enslaved in a case like this. God has

called you in peace. For how do you know, wife, if you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, if you will save your wife?

But the Lord has given an assignment to everyone; as each was called by God, so each one should walk accordingly. These are the directions that I have given in every congregation. If someone who is circumcised was called, he should not try to undo his circumcision. If someone was called while he was uncircumcised, he should not become circumcised. There is no advantage to being circumcised or being uncircumcised, rather, the advantage is found in keeping the commandments of God. Each one should remain in the calling in which he was called. If you were called while a slave, do not be concerned about it — though if you are able to become free, you should certainly take the opportunity. For whoever was called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freeman, likewise, whoever was called while free is a slave of Christ. You were bought for a price; do not become slaves of men. Each one of you, brethren, should remain with God just as you were called.

Concerning virgins, I do not have any commandment from the Lord, but I offer you my judgment as one who is trustworthy, having received mercy from the Lord. Therefore, it seems to me, because of this present distress, that it is good for a person to be as he is. If you are bound to a wife, do not look to be freed from her; if you are not bound to a wife, do not look for one. If you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned, but such people will experience distress connected with the flesh, and I want to spare you.

I say this, brothers: the time is short. Afterward, those who have wives might live as though they do not, and those who weep might be like those who do not weep, and those who rejoice as those who do not, and those who buy possessions as those who have nothing, and those who have power in the world as those who have none; for the present state of the world will pass away.

I want you to be free from care. The one who is not married concerns himself with things connected to the Lord, how he might please the Lord; but the one who is married concerns himself with things connected to this world, how he might please his wife, so he has received his assignment. Both an unmarried woman and a virgin can also concern themselves with things connected to the Lord, so that they may be holy in both body and spirit, but the woman who is married is concerned for the things connected with the world, how she may

please her husband. I say this for your own good, not to impose a restriction on you, but to encourage nobility and constant service to the Lord without distraction.

If anyone thinks that he is treating his fiancée unfairly, if she is at the age for marriage and his desire controls him, let him do as he wishes, he is not sinning; they should be married. The one who stands firm in his heart and does not feel a need to marry, but rather has control over his own will and passes judgment in his own heart to postpone his engagement for a time, he will do well. Therefore, the one who marries his fiancée does well, and the one who does not marry will do better.

A wife is bound as long as her husband is alive, but if he dies, she is free to marry whomever she wishes — only it must be in the Lord. However, she will be happy if she remains as she is, according to my judgment, and it seems to me that the Spirit of God is with me.”

Notes:

6: “I say this to give you permission for marriage, not to command you to be married” — Literally, all the Greek here says is, as translated in the NKJV, “But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.” I have translated it the way I have to make the reference a little clearer. Paul makes it plain in the next verse that he is speaking of the decision on whether to be married. He wants the Corinthians to understand that everyone who is tempted to sexual immorality may and should seek marriage, but that God has not commanded us to be married.

9: “It is better to marry than to burn.” — Most translations (NASB 1995, NKJV, ESV, NIV, and NRSV) add the interpolation “burn with passion.” It is unclear to me whether Paul is speaking of passion (or lust) consuming someone like a fire, or if he is speaking of the final punishment that will affect a man who does not learn to control his sinful passions, which Jesus characterized as a fire that will never be quenched (cf. Mark 9:42-48). Since neither interpretation changes the meaning of the passage, I’ve only translated what is explicitly present in the Greek.

16: *"How do you know, wife, if you will save your husband?"* – The NRSV takes a slightly different and perhaps more hopeful interpretation of this verse: "Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife." I prefer the interpretation present in my translation, which reminds a brother or sister who is grieving an unfortunate divorce that they are not necessarily at fault for the way things have gone. However, the NRSV's perspective can serve as a reminder that we should always conduct ourselves well, no matter what cruelty or pain we suffer, because our conduct may inspire even the bitterest opponent to reconsider their path in life.

21: *"Though if you are able to become free, you should certainly take the opportunity."* – Once again, the NRSV contains a different interpretation of this verse: "Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever." In the majority interpretation, which I have adopted, Paul encourages slaves to take advantage of any opportunity to improve their condition, while the NRSV has him telling slaves to remain in their calling *no matter what*. This seems to be out of line with what Paul teaches in the rest of the passage, since he presents his instructions here more as a matter of wisdom than as a matter of absolute necessity – e.g., he tells the unmarried Corinthians to remain unmarried unless they have a good reason to be married. Likewise, slaves should not try to change their situation unless a good opportunity arises.

25: *"Concerning virgins..."* – The Greek word *παρθένης* (35arthenos) normally denotes a young woman of marriageable age who has remained sexually pure. The same word is also applied, at times, to young men with the same traits⁷. It seems likely that the same teachers who encouraged the Corinthian Christians to avoid marriage taught them that sexual purity was

⁷ 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), p. 777. Logos.

positively associated with holiness. This is the same kind of doctrine that stands behind the asceticism of monks and nuns throughout history. Paul's point here is to emphasize that it is not wrong or unholy for someone who possesses sexual purity to give it up in marriage if they experience sexual desires.

Since modern western society does not share the social and religious values that venerated sexual purity so highly, there is not an English word in common circulation that communicates what Paul is talking about here. For this reason, I have made use of the somewhat antiquated word "virgin," especially so that I can preserve the contrast between a woman who is simply unmarried (presumably because of the death of her husband or some other circumstance) and a virgin in verse 34. At the moment, I cannot think of a better way to preserve the meaning Paul seems to have intended.

34: *"He has received his assignment"* – There are two points where translations differ in this phrase. First, there was no punctuation in the original Greek texts, so it is occasionally unclear where one sentence ends and another begins. This is one of those cases. Some translators attach this phrase, *καὶ μεμερίσται* (kai memeristai) – literally "he/she is divided" – to the sentence in verse 33, such as the NASB 1995:

"But one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided."

Others attach the phrase to the sentence that follows in verse 34, such as the NKJV:

"There is a difference between a wife and a virgin."

To my eye, the first interpretation makes much better sense of the Greek text, and most translators (NASB 1995, ESV, NIV, NRSV) agree.

However, each of the above translations interprets this phrase to mean that a married man's "interests are divided," which differs from the interpretation I have taken, "he has received his assignment." The reason I

interpret this phrase this way is because Paul is using the same terminology that he used earlier in verse 17, “The Lord has given an assignment to everyone.” If we translated verse 17 very literally, we would translate the same word ἐμέρισεν (emerisen) – a different grammatical form of the word μεμερίσται (memeristai) mentioned above – as something like “as the Lord has divided for everyone.”

It seems likely to me that Paul is applying the same lesson to marriage that he applied earlier to circumcision, uncircumcision, servitude, and freedom. There is no intrinsic advantage to one condition in life as opposed to another, so it is better to recognize our different situations as different opportunities and assignments from God. Likewise, there is no intrinsic advantage before God to being either married or unmarried. Thus, the one who is married has a different focus than one who is unmarried, but this is his assignment from God. He is no less of a Christian because he is concerned for his wife, even if he cannot do all that an unmarried Christian can.

36-38: *“If anyone thinks that he is treating his fiancée unfairly...”* – These verses are quite difficult to translate, largely because so many conflicting interpretations exist that affect the way we read the passage in any language. Consider the following three examples, the first from the NKJV:

“But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin.”

This translation simply presents the word παρθένον (parthenon) in its most literal sense: “virgin.” The translators made no attempt to clarify the relationship between the man spoken of here and his virgin.

Next, the NASB 1995:

“But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter.”

This translation explains the relationship as one between a father and a daughter. Presumably, the translators considered that, in the Greek culture of the day, a father would likely need to give his permission and blessing to

a suitor before he could marry his daughter. Perhaps the Christians in Corinth who believed that they would be holier if they did not marry were forbidding their own children from getting married to preserve their holiness. According to this interpretation, these verses act as a warning or permission to fathers to allow their children to marry to prevent sexual temptations and sins.

Finally, the ESV:

“If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed.”

This translation views the relationship as one between a young man and a young woman who are romantically involved, but not yet married. They feel a sexual desire for each other that they cannot fulfil appropriately until they are married, yet Paul has just encouraged them to remain unmarried if they are not married. In this interpretation, Paul tells this couple that his advice depends on whether or not they can control their desires for a time. If they can control themselves, it is better not to marry until the present distress has passed. If they cannot, then it is better for them to marry so that they cannot be tempted to sin.

Initially, I leaned toward the interpretation presented in the NASB 1995, but I have ultimately settled on an interpretation closest to the ESV. I reached this conclusion for a few reasons:

1. Verse 36 moves smoothly between “he,” “she,” and finally “they should be married.” It is most natural to read that the man and woman mentioned in the verse are the two who should be married;
2. Verse 37 says that the one who can control himself should, in most translations, “keep his virgin/betrothed.” This word, “keep,” carries the connotation of “keeping watch over, reserving for a definite purpose or a suitable time, etc.,”⁸ so it seems to

⁸ Ibid., 1002.

describe a delayed engagement, not a cancelled one. It makes sense for a suitor to delay his engagement for a better time because he has enough self-control to wait that long, but this verse does not make sense if a father is in view.

3. It is possible to read the phrase in verse 38, “the one who marries his fiancée does well,” as “he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage” (NASB 1995), but, considering the context of self-control, it again makes better sense to view it as “the one who marries,” rather than “the one who gives in marriage.”⁹

Consequently, it is easiest and makes the most sense for me to read this passage as a discussion of a couple who is romantically involved, not as a discussion of a father-daughter relationship.

As a final note on this passage, I have interpreted the beginning of verse 36 as “*If anyone thinks he is treating his fiancée unfairly.*” rather than the way other translations interpret the same word, e.g., “*If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed*” (ESV). The ESV’s interpretation suggests that the man is struggling against a strong sexual desire toward his fiancée. This may be the case, but it seems to me that it is just as likely that Paul is encouraging engaged young men to treat their fiancées fairly as well¹⁰. Both individuals in the relationship can experience sexual desires and temptations, and it would be unfair for a young man to indefinitely postpone his engagement to a young woman who urgently wants to be married. Since verse 37 seems to have a postponement of the engagement in mind, not a cancellation, this makes good sense to me. Paul nowhere encourages either party to break the engagement, only to postpone it if they have the necessary self-control. This phrase, then, encourages them to consider each other when they make this decision.

- M. S.

⁹ Ibid., 188.

¹⁰ This is well within the semantic range of this word, ἀσχημονεῖν (askhemonein), according to *ibid.*, p. 147.

“As Each Was Called by God”

Comments on 1 Corinthians 7

Now that Paul has established the more universal principles of Christianity – the grounds of Christian unity and the need for integrity and cohesiveness in each congregation – he turns his attention to the individual disputes that were fostering division in that congregation. Based on Paul’s comments later in the chapter (v. 26), it seems that there was a particular situation going on in Corinth that had caused many to feel that marriage was contrary to God’s will in their present situation – therefore, they taught the members of the church that they should not marry, and even taught those who were married to abstain from normal sexual relationships because they thought that it would somehow improve their spirituality. For this reason, Paul’s comments throughout this chapter are a response to the specific situation and teaching disputed in Corinth. He draws on general truths about the value of marriage, but this chapter is not designed to be an introductory text.

1-5

Paul begins by conceding that there is some merit to what the Corinthians were teaching. It is good for those who can to live a celibate life, which Paul will explain in detail later. However, it is also good for a man to have his wife and a woman to have her husband. Sexual temptation is a dangerous thing, and it is difficult to control. It is appropriate for a Christian to seek marriage because of sexual desire – although that should not be the only factor used to determine *whether* you will marry – because sexuality is a good and necessary part of God’s design for humanity. The danger of forbidding marriage is that those Christians who experience sexual desire have no proper way to express it. This leads to sexual sin. Therefore, forbidding Christians to marry is not the answer.

Likewise, it is inappropriate for those who are married to withhold themselves from each other. Just because someone is married and has experienced sexuality in its proper context does not mean that they are

immune to sexual temptation. The relationship between husband and wife is an ongoing relationship and an ongoing responsibility. If someone refuses to have normal relations with his wife because he wants to devote his time and energy elsewhere, he endangers her soul – and his own! Paul gives the concession that it is acceptable for spouses to make an agreement to devote themselves to holiness for a time, but that they must come together again in short order.

6-9

Paul clarifies that he does not mean to say that everyone should be married. Someone who is unmarried does have more time to give to learning, teaching, and evangelizing the word of God. Paul made great use of this freedom in his own life and work, though he defended the right of an evangelist and an apostle to have a wife (1 Corinthians 9:5). Nevertheless, he likely would not have been able to do as much work as he did if he had a family. Therefore, he could personally wish that there were more evangelists like him in the church – who were able to pick up their whole lives and go as soon as they heard the call, who had no need for a settled home, whose time and resources could be dedicated to the work of the church, not to raising children and cherishing a wife. It is clear what kinds of advantages the single life could offer for someone in Paul's position. However, he recognizes that the ability to remain single without temptation is a gift from God. Not all are capable. There are and will be people who can live this kind of an unattached life, but they are not intrinsically better than others. There are advantages to marriage as well.

Paul points to the problem of temptation again – it is better to marry than to burn. In fact, if Christians did not marry, there would be no children raised by Christians, and there would be no qualified elders. We need Christians who can remain unmarried, but we need those who are predisposed toward marriage just as much if we want a mature and capable congregation. Paul's point is only this – if we have an ability or an opportunity in our work for Christ that is not available to everyone, it is good for us to exercise it. However, if we do not have the ability or

opportunity, we are no less necessary for the kingdom of God. Each one has his own gift from God.

10-11

What Paul says here sets up his comment in verse 12, this is not a contrast between what God has revealed to him and what he thinks personally, but it is a contrast between what Jesus addressed during His life on earth and a new situation that Paul felt a need to address. In other words, he reminds the Corinthians that they had already learned that it was sinful to seek a divorce. Whether any of the gospels had already been written, or if they simply knew the teachings of Christ through the memory and teaching of the apostles, they knew what Jesus had taught in Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 19:3-9, and Mark 10:6-10 – that it is wrong for a Christian to divorce their spouse, unless one spouse has betrayed the other through sexual infidelity. If they do separate, it is sinful for them to marry any other – the only avenues available are reconciliation or remaining single.

Paul's reminder in these verses and the next section seem to serve as a response to anyone who would divorce his spouse in a misguided attempt to become holier or more devoted to the Lord. Not only would this decision be misguided – since married Christians are just as important and necessary as unmarried ones – but it would be sinful and unfair to the devotee's spouse. Jesus taught that marriage is a lifelong commitment that binds a man and a woman together in a covenant that causes them to function as a single unit in their work and relationships. This was not a connection that a serious-minded servant of God should haphazardly sever. This should only ever be done when the connection has already been severed.

12-14

Now Paul – no less inspired – adds to what Jesus had already taught. This commitment to the sanctity of marriage holds true even when one of the spouses does not recognize the identity and authority of Christ. Christ, during His lifetime, addressed those who had been raised among God's

people, the Jews. In the circumstances that He considered, both spouses recognized the authority behind the commandment. Thus, Christ's command bound each spouse equally.

But now, Paul is giving instructions for asymmetrical marriages – when one believes in Christ, but the other does not. Since Corinth was a new congregation, it seems that several members had been converted after they were already married, and their spouses were not believers. Thus, while the Christian in each marriage was bound by Christ's commandment, the other did not even recognize its authority or validity. In other words, some husbands and wives in the congregation needed to know how to apply the commandment to their own situations, since they knew that their spouses might make their decisions with no regard to the scriptures.

The first point that Paul makes is that the Christians' responsibility in the marriage is the same. They are married, and it would be wrong for them to seek a divorce from their spouse on the difference of faith alone. They are given no more freedom to initiate a divorce than if they were married to a believer.

What Paul says in verse 14 may most easily be understood as a response to a false opinion. It is probable that someone had told Christians in these kinds of marriages that their unbelieving spouse defiled the family. Perhaps they had even been told *to* divorce the unbelieving spouse because of this belief. Paul's statement here, then, is a reassurance that there is nothing wrong *intrinsically* with being in a marriage with an unbeliever. If the marriage were unlawful or unholy (i.e., if the unholiness of the unbeliever could "spread" into the rest of the family like a disease), then their children would have been illegitimate, just as if their parents were not married. However, I think that Paul's point here is that the sanctifying, holy influence of a true Christian in the marriage is stronger than the negative influence of the unbeliever. If anything will "spread" in the family, it is holiness, not unholiness, which would be the case if the Christian were not present. In other words, only good can come from the Christian's presence in the family, because if they were not there, there would be no influence toward

Christ for either the unbelieving spouse or the children. The Christian would do more harm if they left than if they stayed.

15-16

However, when the unbeliever is not taught nor held to the same standard as the Christian, it is possible that they will choose to leave their spouse for whatever reason. It will do no good to argue with them about the propriety of the divorce from the perspective of the law of Christ, because the unbeliever does not recognize that law in the first place. Instead, Paul encourages those who find themselves in this unhappy situation to be at peace. As long as the unbeliever is willing to maintain the marriage, the Christian is bound to the same love and devotion as they would be if married to a Christian. If the unbeliever chooses to divorce the Christian, the Christian is no longer bound to hold the marriage together.

Verse 16 makes it clear that the “sanctification” discussed earlier is not a saving influence by necessity, but only tends in that direction. It is not a mark against the sincerity and faith of a Christian husband or wife if their unbelieving spouse leaves them. They have done their duty, and they should not blame themselves or bear the blame of others for the way the situation turned out.

17-19

While Paul seems to deviate from the subject of marriage in these verses, he is really setting up a concept that he will use later, specifically in verses 26-28 – that each one should use his own circumstances to his advantage in service to God – whether he is single, to serve God one way, or if he is married, to serve God another way. Paul’s point is that there is no intrinsic difference that makes one state better than the other.

To establish that principle, he starts with the question of circumcision and uncircumcision. He says clearly in verse 19 that this does not matter toward God, since we have a new law and a new commandment that does not involve circumcision. However, there was a worldly difference between the

two. Those who were circumcised had doors opened to them in Jewish circles that were firmly closed to those who were uncircumcised. Likewise, those who belonged to uncircumcised Gentile society had advantages over Jews in their own spheres of influence. Each had an advantage and a disadvantage, but neither was *holier* than the other. Thus, it was wrong for anyone to teach that all Christians must be circumcised on the pretense that it was better or easier for a Jew to keep the commandments of God and preach to those around him. The same was true in reverse, it was wrong to teach that those who knew nothing of Jewish society had an advantage in the church. Instead, it was the responsibility of each to use his own situation to serve God.

20-24

Likewise, there was no intrinsic advantage to one occupation over another, nor to one's status as regards political or economic freedom. There is no disadvantage to Christ if one was a slave and had access only to the resources and opportunities available to a slave (though Paul tells slaves to certainly take advantage of an opportunity for freedom, if it arises). In fact, those who have experienced slavery have a rather unique perspective that they can use in serving God, because only they can really understand the full meaning of the freedom we find in Christ, while someone who is free in this life must instead learn how to be submissive. Again, in verse 23, Paul encourages Christians to avoid slavery, if at all possible, but there is nothing wrong or limiting from a spiritual perspective if one is a slave. Instead, it is best for each one to look at his own situation, his own gifts and opportunities, and to use them for God. There is no single way to live as a Christian in this world. What matters is our morality and our commitment to use what we do have in our service for Him.

25-28

So far, Paul's specific instructions have been directed toward those who are married. Paul uses the terminology that he does to emphasize the sexual purity of those who have never been married, probably so that he can

interact directly with the false doctrine in Corinth that had taught them to consider virginity as something that made an individual closer to God or holier in some respect. In this view, it would be a horrible thing for a young, unmarried Christian to give up their holiness by getting married. Paul's comments in this section are meant to clarify that it is not a bad thing for an unmarried Christian to marry and experience their sexual desire appropriately.

First, Paul states that he does not have any commandment from the Lord. This means that God has neither told him to preserve virgins in the churches *as virgins*, nor has He commanded them to be married. Either choice could be equally pleasing to God. In such a morally neutral situation, all that Paul could offer was his own wisdom based on the Corinthians' present situation, but he is clear that what he says is *advice*, not a commandment.

It is not clear to me precisely what "this present distress" is. Paul may be referring to some sort of persecution that was going on in Corinth, or he could be referring to the strife within the congregation itself – a situation that required spiritual focus and dedication from the members to resolve. Whatever the case may be, Paul believes that it would be good for an unmarried Christian in Corinth to remain unmarried *for the time being*. They would be better prepared to face the trials of the days to come if they did not need to care for a spouse or a family.

However, this does not mean that those who are married will be unable to endure the same difficulties. Those who are married already, or choose to be married, should show the proper respect and affection in their relationships. It seems to me that Paul's statement in verse 28, "If you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned," is meant to calm those who had been taught that they should not marry, as well as those who were teaching others that they should not marry. If you are the one getting married, you can rest assured that you have not sinned. If you see someone else getting married, you should not think any less of them for the fact that they have given up their "holier" lifestyle. The

decision to be married places no barriers between a Christian and God. Any advantage to remaining unmarried is purely related to fleshly things.

29-31

The reference that Paul makes in verse 29 is also somewhat obscure to me, but it seems that it is connected to Paul's concerns about the "present distress" in verse 26. This paragraph is meant to show why it will be more difficult for those who are married to endure the trials that will come. The present shape of the world, the world that the Corinthians knew, could be pulled out from under them. They would not be able to rely on their current social situation to guide them into the future. They could be forced to reassess how they interacted with their spouses, their emotions, their possessions, and those around them in the world. Particularly because Paul says that "those who weep might be like those who do not weep, and those who rejoice as those who do not," it does not seem that the changes will necessarily be targeted at Christians, nor that they will be consistently good or bad, only that they will be significant. Paul's encouragement seems to be that it will be harder to go through these kinds of changes while married, but that it certainly can be done.

32-35

However, everyone who is married has, in a sense, received his assignment from God. It is sinful to break up a marriage simply because it is difficult, so it is the responsibility for both husbands and wives to show affection for their spouses and see to it that the family is well cared for, no matter what is going on in the world around them. Someone who is unattached can easily shift and change directions without worrying about someone else in the process. Paul simply wants to encourage the Corinthians to practice their Christianity in such a way that they can persist. He does not want anyone to be lost or left behind because of worldly cares and distractions.

36-38

Last of his examples, Paul applies the lessons of this passage to a couple that was already expecting to be married before they hear his warnings. He does not encourage them to break their engagement, but to delay their marriage, probably until after the trials and distress he already mentioned. However, this situation ultimately comes down to self-control. If it would be a strain on the young couple, and there was a danger that they would give into temptation if they were forced to wait, it would be better for them to marry now, before the trials come, and face them together. If they had control of their passions, however, and they could wait for a time, Paul says that it would be better for them to begin their marriage in a more stable time.

39-40

Finally, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the permanence of marriage. When one commits to this kind of covenant, they are bound until it is broken by death. Afterward, the surviving spouse may remarry if they wish (Paul speaks of a widow, in this case, looking for a new husband), but that they must find a spouse who will support and encourage their spiritual growth and well-being. However, Paul thinks that it is better for such a one, if they have self-control, to remain single for all of the reasons discussed above. As with his advice regarding virgins, Paul presents this as his own judgment based on the present distress, not a divine commandment that all Christians must follow. However, it was the judgment of one inspired by the Spirit of God, and so a trustworthy one.

Conclusion

Paul speaks of marriage from several angles in this chapter, each of which can inform us today, even if we are not being taught the same things that the Corinthians were taught, or face the same trials that the Corinthians were anticipating. There is no intrinsic advantage to being married or remaining unmarried, but we should make our decisions wisely. If any of us struggles with self-control and sexual temptations, it is better to seek a spouse who will allow us to fulfill those desires while still giving us the

support and encouragement we need in our spiritual lives. If any of us has control over our passions to remain single, that should be viewed as an open door to a kind of life that simply is not available to one who is married. Neither is better than the other, but each serves God in a different way.

However, if we do marry, we must respect that relationship and fulfill our obligations to our spouses and to God. Marriage is not something that can be lightly dissolved or rescinded, but it will shape the course of the rest of our lives. God will not hold us guiltless if we neglect our duties to any covenant that we make.

- M. S.

A New Translation of Mark 3:7-35

“And Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples, and a great multitude from Galilee followed Him. Also, many came to Him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, from the other side of Jordan, and from the area surrounding Tyre and Sidon, since they heard that He was doing great things. And He told His disciples to set aside a small boat for Him because of the crowd, so that He would not be crushed, for He had healed many of them, so that as many as were suffering were pressing toward Him in hopes of touching Him. The unclean spirits were also falling down before Him whenever they saw him, and crying out, saying, ‘You are the Son of God!’ And He reprimanded them sharply, so that they should not make Him known.

And He climbed up onto a mountain and chose who He wanted to come to Him. He called these, and they came to Him. And He selected twelve, whom He named ‘apostles,’ so that they would be with Him and so that He might send them out to preach, and so that they should have the authority to cast out demons. These are the twelve that He selected: Simon – to whom He gave the name Peter – James, the son of Zebedee, with John, the brother of James – these He called ‘Boanerges,’ which means ‘sons of thunder’ – Andrew, and Phillip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Jesus.

Then He came into a house, and the crowd gathered again so that they could not even have something to eat. His own family also approached Him to restrain Him, after they heard what was going on, for they said that He was out of His mind. And the scribes who came from Jerusalem came as well, and said, 'He has Beelzebul,' and, 'He casts out demons by the authority of the demons' ruler.'

And He summoned them and spoke to them in parables: 'How can Satan banish Satan? And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a household is divided against itself, that household cannot stand. If Satan has also risen up against himself, and is divided against himself, he cannot stand; he has reached his end. Rather, it is not possible for anyone to enter a strong man's house and rob his things if he does not first bind the strong man, and then rob his house.'

'Truly, I tell you that the sons of men will be forgiven for every sin they commit and every blasphemy they utter, unless they blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. These will not have forgiveness for eternity, but are rather subject to an eternal sin.' He said this because they said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'

Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and they were standing outside, sending for Him and calling to Him. There was a crowd seated all around Him, and they said to Him, 'Look, your mother and your brothers are looking for you outside.' And He answered them, saying, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' Then He looked around at those surrounding Him and said, 'Look, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does what God wishes, he is my brother, my sister, and my mother.'"

Notes:

7-8: *"A great multitude from Galilee followed Him. Also, many came to Him..."* – This is a relatively minor point of interpretation, but some translations (NASB 1995, NKJV, ESV) translate this as a continuous list including Galilee, i.e., "A great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem, etc." (ESV). Others (NIV, NRSV) take the same approach that I have taken and break Galilee off from the rest of the list. To my understanding, this both makes the best sense of the Greek, but it also provides a narrative explanation for how and when Jesus' ministry extended beyond Galilee. Up until now, Jesus' fame had only spread throughout

Galilee (1:28), and it seems that Capernaum is the only city where He had preached, though He may have done some traveling throughout the region of Galilee (cf., 1:14). In any case, His ministry had so far been limited to Galilee, on the northern edge of Israel's territory.

This means that the narrative in verse 7 and 8 is significant to the development of Jesus' fame and ministry. So far, He was well known in Galilee, so those who already knew of Him continued to pursue Him wherever He went. Now, however, word had spread north, east, and even to the farthest southern reaches of the nation, including the capital city Jerusalem and Idumea – the territory that was formerly ruled by the Edomites, who were relatives and often rivals of the Israelites. Not only had word spread rapidly, but a good many people believed what they had heard, so they decided to travel to Galilee to hear Jesus and, perhaps, be healed by Him.

14: *“And He selected twelve, whom He named apostles...”* – The phrase, “whom He named apostles” is in some manuscripts but not in others, so each translation has chosen whether to include it (ESV, NRSV) or exclude it (NASB 1995, NKJV, NIV) for one reason or another. I have left it in because it is present in the Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek New Testament¹¹ that I use to translate, though this edition acknowledges the uncertainty. It does not change the meaning of the passage, so it only serves to clarify that these are the same twelve who are named “apostles” elsewhere in the New Testament.

15: *“And so that they should have the authority to cast out demons.”* – The NKJV includes an additional clause here: *“And to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.”* This additional clause also stems from manuscript differences. I do not have the expertise myself to explain all of the principles

¹¹ Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28. redivierte Auflage. (Münster/Westfalen: Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, 2016). Logos.

involved, but the NKJV was translated substantially from the same Greek text used for the KJV¹². Most recent translations take advantage of archaeology and research that has been done since the time when the KJV was first published. This includes the discovery of older manuscripts and the development of methods and theories that can reconcile the differences between the handwritten copies of the Scriptures that were produced before the printing press was invented. As far as actual meaning and content is concerned, there is very little difference between the manuscripts. However, we will occasionally encounter a few words here and there that are present in one translation but absent in another, and this is the concept that stands behind it. I am not prepared to launch into a study of textual criticism now, but we would like to explore it in the pages of the *Prospect* in the future¹³.

20: “*Then He came into a house...*” – This is a literal translation of what the Greek says. Some translations take this to be an idiom meaning that He came to *His* house (NASB 1995, ESV, NRSV) – “*And He came home*” (NASB 1995). The NASB has a footnote in this place pointing to Mark 2:1, 7:17, and 9:28 as possible indications that Jesus had a house in Capernaum that He considered His home. I see this as a reasonable possibility, considering His ministry did not begin until He was about thirty years old (Luke 3:23). We don’t know much about His life before that point, but it is reasonable to say that He lived somewhere. I have, however, left this phrase translated more generically, since I don’t see that it was necessarily *His* house, even though it is possible.

¹² See the preface to *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (Thomas Nelson, 1982). Logos.

¹³ In the meantime, if you would like to become better acquainted with the problem of reconciling manuscripts and the way modern scholars think about that problem, I would recommend Daniel B. Wallace’s article, “Textual Criticism of the New Testament” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry, (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016). Logos.

It is also worth noting that the NKJV omits this phrase, though this is likely for similar reasons to the phrase in verse 15.

- M. S.

“If a Kingdom Is Divided”

Comments on Mark 3:7-35

The last several incidents in Mark’s account of Jesus’ early ministry ultimately became an embarrassment to the Pharisees and the other religious leaders among the Jews. Jesus proved repeatedly that He not only took the commandments of the Old Testament scriptures seriously and literally, but also that His devotion to the law went far deeper than the letter. It mattered to Him what the law of Moses said, but it mattered more *why* every word and phrase had been written. Every time the Pharisees challenged Him with a question regarding the surface level of interpretation, He responded with a question that challenged their character – often one that they could not answer. Their inability to compete with Him at this deeper level led to a rivalry, though it was not a rivalry that Jesus willingly fed. Their quarrels with Jesus would now aim toward discrediting Him to try to steal the hearts of the people back from the Teacher who had amazed them with His power and sincerity. This new kind of conflict sets the tone for the accusation brought against Jesus at the end of chapter 3, but first, Mark turns his attention to Jesus’ inner circle.

7-12

The way Jesus’ ministry is described, it is clear that He did not particularly want the fame that came to Him. However, every time He healed someone publicly or some other incident drew attention to His power, He was thronged by crowds trying to see Him and benefit from His ability to heal their diseases (Mark 1:21-28; 40-45; and the verses at hand are simply the incidents we have studied so far). Jesus withdrew to the sea to get away from the crowd, but the crowd followed Him. What is more, His activities had been reported everywhere else in the historical territory of Israel, so

that the crowd was constantly growing with pilgrims who arrived from faraway regions. With such a throng of people, it became necessary for Jesus' disciples to keep a small boat at hand so that He could escape the crowd if the physical pressure of all the people trying to reach Him and touch Him became too much.

In the middle of this chaos, many people who were possessed by unclean spirits began throwing themselves down near Jesus, confessing that He was the Son of God manifested as a human being. Mark does not tell us what these unclean spirits wanted from Christ, but it could be that they were begging for mercy out of fear, just like the man in Mark 1:23-24. In either case, Jesus did not want to feed the anger that the Pharisees and the other religious leaders already harbored against Him, so He ordered them to remain silent about His identity. It would not help anything at this stage in His ministry if the Pharisees received a report that the crowd was hailing Him as the Son of God.

13-19

In the midst of this chaotic crowd, Jesus was able to climb up onto a mountain and summon the individuals He wanted to work most closely with to join Him there. He may have chosen a mountain because it was physically difficult or impossible for the whole crowd to follow Him. This gave Him a level of privacy that He had not been able to find in the cities or on the seashore. Now, He could focus His attention on the disciples He had personally collected to help Him in His ministry.

He selected twelve to serve a special role among His closest disciples. These were the ones whom He could trust to preach as His ambassadors – which is a good translation for the Greek word ἀπόστολος (apostolos)¹⁴ – and give a limited form of His own powers to cast out demons. These twelve were

¹⁴ 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), p. 122. Logos.

meant to do a work very similar to the work that He Himself was already doing.

We have already encountered several of these apostles before. Jesus called Peter and Andrew along with the “Boanerges” in Mark 1:16-20, and Matthew’s decision to leave behind his professional life to follow Jesus is recorded in Mark 2:13-14 (Mark calls him “Levi” in chapter 2, though it is evident that he used both names, based on the parallel account in Matthew 9:9. It is unclear why Mark uses the name “Levi” in chapter 2 and “Matthew” in chapter 3). In addition to these five, Jesus chose Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, a second James (who may have been Matthew’s brother, both are described as sons of Alphaeus – cf. Mark 2:14), Thaddaeus, a second Simon, and Judas Iscariot.

The New Testament tells us relatively little about most of these men, which is itself a testament to their faithful service toward Jesus. They did not rely on their own personalities or accomplishments to spread Christianity in its early days, even though they are universally credited with the gospel’s success. All that we can know for sure about some of the apostles, such as Bartholomew or Thaddaeus, is the fact that they learned from Jesus and preached what they heard.

These verses do give us a few clues about a few of the apostles’ personal histories and personalities. Jesus called Simon “Peter” because this name implies that he was a dependable person¹⁵, while the “Boanerges” may have been brash or impulsive. Simon the Zealot (or Cananite (NKJV)) may have been associated with political resistance against Rome before he began to learn from Jesus¹⁶, and Judas Iscariot may have been from the town of

¹⁵ See the discussion in *Ibid.*, 809-810.

¹⁶ See Bradley T. Johnson and Jonathon Lookadoo, “Zealot” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry. (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016). Logos.

Kerioth¹⁷, which would make him the only apostle who was not from Galilee.

Mark additionally notes that Judas Iscariot is the one who would betray Jesus, but this does not necessarily mean that Judas plotted against Jesus from the beginning. In fact, it does not mean that he was any less interested in Jesus' teachings or any less dedicated to His leadership than any of the other apostles. All indications in the gospel accounts point to the idea that Judas fell prey to the temptation of greed when he betrayed Jesus, he had not been masterminding his actions since the beginning. Mark probably mentions his betrayal now simply for transparency's sake. Mark did not write his gospel to be filled with suspense or to contain twists and turns in the plot of Jesus' life. Instead, it is meant to be informative. Mark did not want to give his readers any false impressions about who Judas was or was not, so he simply reported the way that Judas' story ended.

20-22

After Jesus selected His apostles, the group evidently returned to one of the cities or towns, perhaps Capernaum. This did not give them any respite from the crowds, however, as it seems that they were followed into the house itself. There were so many people surrounding them constantly that they couldn't even sit down to have a meal.

While Jesus had captured the heart of the people, there were at least two groups who tried to undermine His popularity at this stage in His ministry. First, His own family wanted to restrain Him because they thought He was out of His mind. They had known Him His whole life, and it seems that He did not perform any miracles or show Himself to be anything more than a particularly promising young man until He was baptized by John. From that point of view, it would seem out of character to hear that He had been leading a massive crowd throughout Galilee and was healing sick people. It

¹⁷ See Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker on the name "Iscariot," in their *Greek-English Lexicon*, 480.

seems like that was what they had in mind when they set out to put a stop to His work.

At the same time, a group of scribes from Jerusalem tried to undermine Him in a more subversive way. They believed the miracles that Jesus worked, but they tried to convince the crowd that He was using some kind of dark power given to Him by Satan. The name they used to refer to Satan here, “Beelzebul,” was the name of a Philistine deity and literally meant something like “Lord of flies” or possibly “Lord of filth¹⁸.” I am not sure why they used this name in particular, though it may have been simply to paint a horrifying picture to go with Jesus’ seemingly (and actually) beneficial abilities. They wanted to assassinate His character by associating Him with all that the people feared and hated.

23-27

Jesus did not respond to the scribes on their own level. They were spreading rumors and slander among the people when Jesus was not present, but instead of responding to the people – and thereby starting a war of hearsay – He called the scribes to Himself so that He could speak to them directly. He wanted to give them an opportunity to defend themselves or to admit their own wrongdoing in front of the crowd that was affected by the rumors they had started.

Mark says that Jesus spoke to them in parables. This simply means that He used metaphors so that the people listening could hear the principles He was teaching in a context that they might understand more easily, then learn to apply them to the real-life situation at hand. The metaphors Jesus used here were somewhat simpler than some of the ones He used later in His ministry, but the principle is the same.

In this case, Jesus used parables to point out that the scribes’ accusation did not make any sense. If Satan was fighting against his own influence in the world, how could he hope to succeed? No earthly kingdom could work this

¹⁸ Ibid., 173.

way, neither could a household. If the members of either unit of society devoted their time to defeating one another, they would never be able to overcome a threat from outside.

He used another parable to explain what was actually going on. Jesus was, in a sense, an outside threat to Satan's kingdom. This being the case, it was necessary for Jesus to use force to protect Himself from Satan, the strong man, while He broke Satan's influence over the world through His ministry. Jesus' ability to cast out unclean spirits demonstrated His power to bind Satan and do what He wished while He was on the earth.

28-29

What Jesus says about the unforgiveable sin is part of His response to the scribes' accusation. They said that He had been empowered by an unclean spirit to do the things He was doing, when, in fact, He had been empowered by the Holy Spirit of God. These teachers had witnessed the power of God directly influencing the world before their eyes and refused to call it God's work. Instead, they insisted that it had to be the work of Satan. They had blasphemed the Holy Spirit by calling good evil.

These had no hope for salvation from their sins because they could not be saved without the power of God. If they rejected the power of God, they had no strength or wisdom that they could use to save themselves. Therefore, the unforgiveable sin was the sin that cut them off from the One who could heal them.

It seems to me that Jesus spoke in terms of eternal condemnation to contrast the scribes with God's faithful people. When His people were devoted to Him as children to a father, God could show a great deal of patience and mercy because He pities His children and understands our imperfections (Psalm 103:11-14). The picture is different, however, when we fight against Him, as the scribes did when they denied His Spirit's obvious hand in Jesus' work. God could not and would not forgive them unless they renounced their blasphemy and humbled themselves as His children.

31-35

What Jesus said in these verses did not indicate that He intended to disown His own biological family, or that He would not fulfil His duties toward them – in fact, He made certain that His mother would be cared for after His own death (John 19:25-27). Rather, Jesus used His family's attempt to restrain Him as an opportunity to reconsider His relationship with them in terms of their devotion to God and their trajectory in life. Here, Jesus' biological family sought to put an end to the work He was doing – they were working against His devotion to God. By contrast, those who were sitting around Him, especially those who were closest to Him, were supporting Him and encouraging His ministry – they were helping Him work closer to God. In this sense, they served as His closest family and confidants, which His biological family had failed to do at this point in His ministry.

Conclusion

This chapter has recorded an important series of events in Jesus' ministry. The religious leaders centered around the temple in Jerusalem had, in essence, declared war on Him when they declared that He was an agent of Satan, not of God. Nonetheless, His inner circle of disciples was solidified, and their devotion would only grow from here. The ones who should have supported Him – His family and the scribes who should have been respectable mentors within Jewish society – had betrayed Him, but He was not left alone.

- M. S.

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