
THE CHRISTIAN PROSPECT

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A Word to Our Readers

We would like to thank all of you for the encouragement we have received, as well as your patience as we continue to press onward. It has not proven easy to keep up the same scale of content every month, especially since the demands of each month have not been made equal. At times, this month included, we have needed to sacrifice both punctuality and quantity to preserve the quality of our content. Our values remain the same, and we will continue to make the same decision, if need be.

Nonetheless, our publication has noticeably drifted from the beginning of the month toward the end, with this issue being the latest to date. We have made two determinations to prevent ourselves from missing an entire month in our publication schedule. First, we now intend to publish on the 15th of every month, not the 1st. This is partly to prevent us from burning out while trying to produce a full issue in one week, and partly to avoid planned holidays and major events that disrupt our normal workflow, since several annual events take place at the beginning or end of the month. Second, it is our goal to publish next month's issue *no later than* April 15th. I expect to travel throughout the summer, so it is essential that we get the spring off to a good start. I currently have the freedom in my schedule to complete an issue in less than a month, but I cannot guarantee that I will be able to do it again later in the year.

We have also begun several studies and conversations that need more attention than we have been able to give them over the last few months. Specifically, I would like to pick up where I left off with my studies in the Grace of God and the concept of Good Teaching and unity among God's people. We would also like to continue the discussion about higher

education that began in the last issue. We hope to pick up these threads of thought again, starting in April.

In the meantime, we hope that our foundation of expository study has proven beneficial for you! My commitment to produce content for this paper has helped me grow tremendously as a Bible student in the course of the last 8 months, and I hope that our studies have been similarly helpful for you.

God bless

- M. S.

Bible Interpretation, No. 8

Now that we have considered the importance of the *content*, *context*, and *purpose* of the Scriptures, we want to round out our study by understanding their *implications*. We need to learn how to apply the content of Scripture to our present-day situation. The gaps of space and time that exist between us and the world of the Bible can pose their own interpretive challenges at this stage, because we may need to sort through unfamiliar cultural features to understand how to embody Christian character in the world today. Likewise, we need to have a good handle on each passage's audience and intention so that we can discern whether the commands and examples apply to us *directly* or *indirectly*. For this reason, we will use much of the information we have gathered in the earlier stages of our study.

Direct and Indirect Commands

The first step in application is to identify any commands that apply to us directly. Commands and instructions are easy to pick out in most cases, though they may take many different forms:

"You shall have no other gods before Me." (Exodus 20:3, NKJV)

"How long till you put an end to words? Gain understanding, and afterward we will speak." (Job 18:2, NKJV)

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16, NKJV)

"Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you." (Romans 16:16, NKJV)

"And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Galatians 5:24, NKJV)

"Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work." (1 Timothy 5:9-10, NKJV)

These six passages each contain commands or instructions of one sort or another, but not all of them apply to us directly. How can we know? Here, we should use the kind of information we gathered earlier regarding the author, speaker, and audience of each passage:

Exodus 20:3 is one of the ten commandments, the first laws that God gave the nation of Israel when He made a covenant with them on Mount Sinai, which set the tone for the whole law that came afterward. We may not apply this command to ourselves *directly*, because it was meant for a group (the nation of Israel) to which we do not belong, even if we are Christians. It is important to remember that this does not mean that this passage has no *implications* for us today, since we serve the same God who occupies the same place over the universe as He did in the days of Israel, only that the command does not apply to us directly.

Job 18:2 records the words of Bildad the Shuhite, one of Job's friends who wanted to help Job come to terms with the tragedy that had torn his life apart. Bildad believed that Job was not looking at his situation the right way, so he rebuked him and told him to fix his perspective before responding to what Bildad had to say. If we read the book of Job as a whole, we will see that Bildad was not an inspired man. Consequently, this command was neither directed at us, nor does it carry any independent authority. This

passage is important to understand what the book of Job has to teach us, but this command does not carry any authority today.

Matthew 5:16 was part of a lengthy sermon that Jesus preached to his disciples on a mountain (Matthew 5:1-2). This sermon explained the purpose of God's commands and the effect they should have on those who follow Him. Throughout this passage, Jesus explains how God's expectations extended deeper than the superficial level that the Law of Moses was able to judge – for example, the Law of Moses was only able to judge someone who actually committed murder or an act of violence, while God would judge those whose minds dwelled on violence and hatred (Matthew 5:21-26). Since the discourse was directed to those who willingly followed Jesus, and the theme had to do with growing beyond the Law, it is reasonable to conclude that the commandment in Matthew 5:16 applies directly to Christians today.

Romans 16:16 contains a friendly greeting between Paul, along with the congregations he could speak for, and his audience. Paul had not yet visited Rome when he wrote this letter (Romans 1:9-12), but he knew many Christians who lived there personally. Most of chapter 16 is made up of Paul's various greetings to specific individuals. Verse 16 marks the end of this section, when Paul asks all of the churches in Rome to greet one another cordially – using an affectionate kiss, according to their culture at the time. Thus, we can say that Paul is not speaking authoritatively here (although he had authority as an apostle), and that this passage was meant specifically for the churches in Rome in Paul's day. It does not apply directly to Christians today any more than it is necessary for us to “Greet Philologus and Julia” (Romans 16:15). However, the passage may hold indirect *implications* for us by providing an example of Christian love.

Galatians 5:24 contains a grammatically indirect command. This verse is not phrased like a direct command, but it makes a positive assertion about everyone who truly belongs to Christ. Thus, if we aspire to be true Christians, this verse applies to us directly. We should fit the description of Christ's true servants.

1 Timothy 5:9-10 is addressed directly to Timothy, Paul's protégé. However, the subject matter touches on the proper management of a Christian congregation. If Timothy, as an example of a faithful leader among God's people, had a responsibility to fulfil, it follows logically that every faithful leader among God's people faces the same responsibility. The commandment applies to us directly insofar as we have adopted the same position that Timothy occupied.

Ultimately, the question of whether or not a command applies to us is a question of where we stand in relation to the passage. Are we in the same shoes as the original audience of this passage? Can we learn an important lesson from someone who – although not exactly in our position relative to God – had a similar responsibility to fulfil? Was this commandment meant for someone whose situation had nothing to do with ours at all? We can learn from every command in Scriptures, but we need to be responsible in how we apply them.

Examples

The Scriptures do not always teach us through commands and direct instructions. Many passages point to the fact that God is not interested only in teaching us to follow a list of commandments, but that He wants His word to have an impact on our character and the way we make decisions that are not explicitly outlined in the Bible. See, for example, Galatians 5:22-23 (NKJV):

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

This fruit of the Spirit would be difficult to understand and apply if each component were phrased as a command. Some would make more sense: “Love your neighbor as yourself,” “Be gentle with others;” but others cannot simply be obeyed: “Be joyful!” “Have peace within yourself.” We need to learn how to find and express joy in our lives in an often-painful world. Likewise, we must learn how to find peace when our own thoughts may be at war with each other, even as the whole world around us is

characterized by conflict. Neither of these things is something we can simply *do*. Instead, we need to learn through experience and example.

This is where biblical examples come in, both positive and negative. The Bible describes numerous righteous individuals whose choices and experiences can help *show* us how to live a life characterized by God's word. It also shows us individuals who failed, whose experiences serve as a warning not to follow in their footsteps. Consider some of the examples we can find in Scripture:

How did Moses come to terms with a task that he thought was outside his abilities (Exodus 4:10-17)?

How did the Israelites fail to trust God in the wilderness (Numbers 14:1-4)?

How did Hannah overcome her sadness and frustrations with her situation in life (1 Samuel 1:1-18)?

How did Judas Iscariot react to his own guilt (Matthew 27:3-10)? What positive lessons can we draw from his negative example?

How did Jesus find strength in the most difficult moments of His life on earth (Mark 14:32-42)?

How did Paul make peace with the terrible sins he had committed before he became a Christian (Philippians 3:1-14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17)?

We can also find several examples in the New Testament that illustrate how to fulfil commands and responsibilities that have been placed on us as Christians. For example, Hebrews 10:24-25, among other passages, places the responsibility on Christians to consider ourselves as productive members of a family of Christians, not as isolated, self-sufficient individuals. In particular, these verses indicate that we cannot encourage and motivate one another if we do not spend time together. Thus, we have the responsibility and command to come together regularly. Other passages (Acts 20:7-12; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4) show us by example that the earliest

Christians, being aware of that responsibility, set aside time on the first day of every week to be together.

Likewise, we can look at examples of sermons and studies that took place in both the Gospels and the book of Acts to learn how to proclaim the word of God with the right tone and emphasis. We can look at Paul's example in his various letters to learn how to be firm about God's commands and yet gentle at the same time. We can learn from Christ's example what true love looks like. The examples of Scripture give life to the principles and instructions that we find in its pages. It is safe to say that every example we can find in the Scriptures has a purpose, just as every other word and phrase serves the purpose of the author.

To properly handle any examples we find in a passage we are studying, we simply need to ask the following questions:

- Is this a positive or a negative example?
- What command or characteristic of a righteous spirit does this example interact with?
- How can I embody/avoid the character or decisions displayed in this example?

Cultural Differences

As we mentioned earlier, the direct application of the commands and examples we see in Scripture can be occasionally complicated by the presence of culturally specific terms and practices. When we come across this kind of cultural reference, we need to decide how to apply the principles of the passage in our present cultural context. We will consider three examples from earlier in this chapter:

"You shall have no other gods before Me." (Exodus 20:3, NKJV)

"Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you." (Romans 16:16, NKJV)

“Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.” (1 Timothy 5:9-10, NKJV)

Exodus 20:3 was written in a culture surrounded by idol-worship and polytheistic nations. In fact, it was common for the devotees of one god to pay honor and tribute to other gods when they interacted with their worshippers or passed through the territory that was associated with them. This way, everyone tried to avoid inciting the wrath of other gods in case they might have power to cause harm. This meant that God’s command to the Israelites was a direct challenge to the culture that surrounded them. There were common phrases, actions, and attitudes that the Israelites needed to avoid in order to show their devotion to God alone.

However, in the present-day western world, we are less likely to come across anyone who worships another god than we do. Even if we do, we will experience less cultural pressure to pay honor to another religion than the Israelites did in their day. However, we can think of this example (remembering that this command serves us better as an example than as a direct command, as it was specifically directed to the Israelites) more introspectively. What other influences demand my devotion in the world today? What about sports? School? Hobbies? Work? Do I show honor and respect to anyone or anything more than to God? What really guides my decisions?

Romans 16:16 reflects a different culture than ours. It is not normal for even close friends to greet one another with a kiss and doing so might cause more offense and trouble than it would show Christian affection. Considering our earlier discussion – that this is an example of Christian affection, not a spiritual command – we may find it best to express our affection in a way that lines up better with our culture and is less likely to offend or mortify our fellow Christians.

1 Timothy 5:9-10 explains that a widow who will be supported by a congregation needs to have exhibited a lifetime of good works. Most of what Paul mentions applies just as easily in the modern day as it did in the ancient world, with one exception: he says that a widow must have “washed the saints’ feet.” When we apply this passage in a modern-day scenario, we need to decide if this is a cultural example for a more general principle – something like “if she has cared for travelers’ needs,” since a host would normally wash his or her guests’ feet after a journey to clean the dirt and grime of the road off – or if there is a special significance in the act of foot-washing itself.

However we apply these passages, we need to be conscious of the cultural differences, but thoughtful in how we deal with them. We should not dismiss the literal meaning of a passage and generalize its message simply because we do not want to do what it says. Our question should not be “is this an item on a checklist,” but rather “how does this passage explain righteousness, and how can I embody that same righteousness in my life today?” To do this, we will need to have a good grasp of the author’s intention before we apply what he had to say.

Conclusion

The Bible teaches us in various ways, and it is our responsibility to keep our minds open and ready to learn. Every passage has the power to help us grow closer to God and to better exemplify His character in our own lives. We simply need to learn how to handle His commands and learn from the examples He has prepared for us.

- M. S.

Jesus Christ Revealed

A Study of Revelation 1:1-3

Revelation 1:1-3 (ESV) *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his*

angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

The book of Revelation begins by telling us that its purpose is to reveal Jesus Christ to His servants, that the revelation comes from God, and that it was given to John by an angel. John was to be a witness of everything he saw in the visions he would be given, and that the words he wrote down would be a blessing to those who read and understand. In this essay we will consider these questions:

- What does it mean that Jesus Christ is revealed?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What does it mean that these “things must soon take place”?
- How was the Revelation delivered to John?
- Why should we study Revelation?

Jesus Christ Revealed

The letter begins by identifying itself as “The revelation of Jesus Christ.” There are two possibilities here: 1) that Jesus is being revealed to us, and 2) that the revelation came from Jesus. These can both be true at the same time if Jesus is revealing information about Himself. Sometimes this is the case. Later in this chapter Jesus addresses John directly, showing characteristics about Himself (1:17-20), then dictates messages to the seven churches of Asia. What we do know for certain is that this is the word of God, sometimes given by Jesus Himself, sometimes by one of His messengers. Sometimes it will reveal information to us about Jesus, sometimes about His kingdom, other times about judgment to come.

This is not the one and only revelation by or about Jesus Christ. I have a copy of “The Open Bible” which begins every book of the Bible with a helpful introduction. One of the sections is “The Christ of (insert book name)” and offers examples of how Jesus Christ is revealed in that book. In other words, every book tells us something about Jesus, some more than others. Here are some ways in which Jesus had already been revealed:

- Genesis 1:26 says that man was created in the image of God. The scriptures don’t reveal much to us about how man’s physical appearance is connected to the image of God, so we won’t speculate about that here. However, we clearly share many characteristics in personality though: we love, we hate, we can be angry and jealous, we can show kindness and mercy. In many ways man is the walking embodiment of revelation.
- Creation itself is a revelation. Paul wrote, “*For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made*” (Romans 1:20 ESV). We learn about the power and nature of God from what was created.
- The covenants God made with people, from Eve to Noah to Abraham and so on, revealed the love and compassion He had for His creation. With the benefit of hindsight, we see the plan unfold by which the Savior gave Himself to redeem us from sin.
- Paul said the law of Moses was “our tutor to bring us to Christ” – Galatians 3:24-25 (NJKV).
- The prophets revealed a great number of truths concerning the Messiah and His kingdom.
- John the Baptist was sent to baptize with water so that the Messiah could be revealed to Israel (John 1:31).
- Jesus revealed Himself to the world as a human being.

- Jesus appointed Paul to be a minister of “things which I will yet reveal to you” (Acts 26:16 NKJV).

John 1 explains that Jesus is the Word, which means that every time God spoke to man, He was revealing something about Jesus. There are key differences, however, that make the book of Revelation different. It explicitly says it is a revelation and that it will reveal events yet to happen. The book closes with a warning:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. – Revelation 22:18-19 (ESV)

As far as prophetic writing is concerned, this is it. There will be no more, there will be no less. The book of Revelation is the conclusion of God's revelatory work.

John's Audience

As we noticed in our introductory essay, the revelation was written to the servants of Jesus Christ. Part of the letter is written specifically to the seven churches of Asia, while the overall message is generally addressed to “he who reads and those who hear” (1:3 NKJV). Seven is one of the special numbers in Revelation, a symbol of spiritual completeness, making these seven churches a representation of the whole body of Christ. We will study the symbolic numbers in a latter essay. Every Christian should read and study the Revelation, there are blessings to be found in it.

Things Which Must Shortly Take Place

The troublesome part of the first verse is this middle bit: what does it mean that things must shortly take place, or happen very soon, or must soon take place, or shortly be, depending on whether you're reading the NKJV, NET, ESV, or The Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists of Jesus Christ? This short phrase has caused a great deal of debate about the book

as it indicates to us the timing (soon) and duration (take place) of what is revealed. It may seem strange to refer to duration with respect to something taking place, but that is where part of the question lies.

The Greek word for soon, *tachos*, means what we would expect: soon, very soon, speed, quickness, swiftness, etc. Sometimes it expresses great urgency (“Get up *quickly*” – Acts 22:18 ESV), other times it is more vague (“I hope to come to you *soon*” – 1 Timothy 3:14 ESV). In all cases though, the hope or expectation is that the time will be short.

In contrast, things that happen or take place in life come in great variety. Ask a friend what they did yesterday and the answer might be as mundane as “went to the store” or as consequential as “brought my first child home from the hospital.” Some of life’s events take place and are over, like a football game or birthday party. Others, like having a child, lead to years or even a lifetime of work.

This is the question we are presented with here: is God revealing events that will happen soon and be over, or the beginning of events that will unfold over a long period and continue on? Is it some combination of both? Hence the question of duration. The Greek word *ginomai*, translated take place or happen, can imply continuity, the beginning of something enduring. Some of its definitions include:

*to come into being through process of birth or natural production, be born, be produced, to come into existence, be made, be created, be manufactured, be performed.*¹

When Jesus was born the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass (*ginomai*), which the Lord has made known to us” (Luke 2:15 NKJV). What had come to pass was

¹ 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. 197. Logos.

one of the most consequential events in history, the beginning of the life of Jesus. The consequences of His life would change the world for the rest of its existence.

Jesus uses this same language to warn of the destruction of Jerusalem. “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet” (Matthew 24:6 ESV). This took forty years to unfold, but once accomplished, it was completed. There were consequences that followed but the event itself ended.

Ginomai sometimes indicates a state of being, with the expectation it will go on forever, as in Luke 6:36, “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (NKJV). Showing mercy is something Christians must do every day they live, there is no end to this command.

As we see, there are a range of possibilities with regard to timing. These are not random events. Heaven is responding to circumstances on earth, most often a form of judgment against the unrighteous. Judgment may happen very quickly and be over, or God in His mercy could begin to warn the wicked and give them time to repent, as He did with the Ninevites. Another possibility is that God set in motion a series of events that would continue through the end of time. As we continue our study we will attempt to determine which is the case.

John the Witness

Our passage tells us that the Revelation was made known to John by an angel sent from God. Many angels appear in the book, this does not mean a singular angel delivered the whole message, only that the messengers were all from God. Jesus Himself dictates the letters to the seven churches. On at least one occasion John is instructed by one of the twenty-four elders around God’s throne (Revelation 5:5). The whole message originates from God, no matter how it was delivered.

Whatever John saw he wrote down. As we noted in the introductory essay, Revelation is a visual book, and we must take care to try and form visual representations of what we read in an effort to see what John saw.

John was a witness; he is identified as a witness to the word of God and to Jesus Christ. John was an eyewitness to the life and death of Jesus. Now he was to be a faithful witness of all that was shown to him by God's messengers.

Blessed

Every time God's word is revealed to man it is a blessing, and this revelation is no different. Some translations stress that the reading should be done aloud, as in a public assembly. No doubt when it was sent out to the seven churches and other destinations it was read to the whole assembly. There was no printed bible, so this was a good opportunity for everyone to hear what was written. Public reading makes sense and should be expected.

Perhaps Christians today should spend more time reading Revelation aloud. It is oft neglected, yet we have the promise that we will be blessed if we hear the words of the prophecy and keep it. How can we keep what we do not know?

Conclusion

These three verses begin to teach us the purpose of the Revelation. It is meant to reveal more about Jesus Christ to His servants, and things that will happen to His people and the world around them. If we will read and understand it, God will bless us.

- **Lance Stallcop**

A New Translation of 1 Corinthians 8

“Next, regarding food offered to idols – we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes us proud, but love strengthens us. If anyone thinks that he

knows something, he does not understand it as well as he ought to; but if anyone loves God, he has been recognized by Him.

Therefore, regarding the matter of eating food offered to idols, we know that an idol amounts to nothing in the world and that none are truly God except for one. For even if there are those who are called gods on heaven or on earth – there are indeed many such “gods” and many such “lords” –

*yet for us there is one God, the Father
from whom all things exist and into whom we have been adopted;
and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ,
through whom all things were made, and we were made through Him.*

But not all share that knowledge; Some – who even now think of idols as they used to – eat under the assumption that the food holds religious significance, and so their weak consciences are defiled. Now, food will not bring us closer to God; and we are not weakened if we do not eat, nor are we improved if we do.

But take care that this freedom of yours does not become something that injures the weak. For if someone sees you – the one who has such knowledge – participating in an idol’s feast, will that not encourage his weak conscience to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? The one who is weak is being destroyed by your knowledge – your brother, for whom Christ died! Thus, by sinning against your brethren and wounding their weak consciences, you are sinning against Christ Himself! For this reason, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never again eat meat, only so that I will not cause my brother to sin.”

Notes:

2: *“If anyone thinks that he knows something, he does not understand it as well as he ought to.”* – The same Greek word, γινώσκω (ginosko), appears three times in this phrase. The NASB 2020 translates it literally: *“If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.”* Since Paul is apparently describing someone who “knows” something without “knowing” it, it is

clear that he is playing off the different meanings of the same word, which can mean anything from knowing that a fact is true to comprehending its significance and connection to other ideas². Considering Paul's statement about pride in verse 1, it seems most likely that he means that, if we have the kind of knowledge that makes us proud, we probably don't really understand the subject anyway.

6: “*Yet for us...*” – I have stylized this verse as poetry because that seems to be what it is in Greek. There is a clear parallel structure between the first and third lines, as well as between the second and fourth lines. Further, this verse is cast in poetic language, leaving some of its significance open to interpretation, which explains the variation between translations. Consider the word-for-word translation below:

ἀλλ'	ἡμῖν	εἷς	θεὸς	ὁ πατὴρ	
but	for us	one	God	the Father	
ἐξ	οὗ	τὰ πάντα καὶ	ἡμεῖς	εἰς	αὐτόν
out (of)	whom	all things and	we	into	Him
καὶ	εἷς	κύριος	Ἰησοῦς	Χριστὸς	
and	one	Lord	Jesus	Christ	
δι'	οὗ	τὰ πάντα καὶ	ἡμεῖς	δι'	αὐτοῦ
through	whom	all things and	we	through	Him

What stands out immediately about this verse is the complete absence of any verbs. This means that we do not have a temporal frame of reference. Based on the context (“*there are many such ‘gods’ and many such ‘lords’*”) and the way that Paul contrasts this poem to that statement, it seems likely that we should supply the present tense of the verb “to be” everywhere that we

² On this word's range of meaning, see 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), pp. 199-201. Logos.

would expect a verb. That would give us, as a very literal translation, the following:

*But for us is one God the Father
out of whom are all things and we are into Him
and (there) is one Lord Jesus Christ
through whom are all things and we are through Him*

This gets us much closer to making sense of the poem, but there are still some points that remain confusing in English. Specifically, the prepositions “out of,” “into,” and “through” imply motion, while the verb “to be” implies a stable state. Therefore, setting aside modern colloquial language, it does not make sense for us to say that we are or exist *into* something. This means that we need to provide a layer of interpretation to make sense of the contradiction in English grammar.

In each phrase, there are a few ways that we could understand the meaning. This means that we need to reason through which one makes the most sense contextually and thematically. We will consider them on a case-by-case basis:

- “*Out of whom are all things*” – This is probably the easiest case in this poem. God the Father is described here as the original source of everything that exists, so that He has control over all things.
- “*We are into Him*” – Since the preposition introduces a sense of motion into this line, then it is best to read this statement as referring to our trajectory of life in some regard. We can think of this in future terms, that is, our lives are directed *toward* God, so that we will meet Him sometime in the future. Alternatively, we can think of this in past or perfect terms, our lives have brought us *to* God, which is where I draw the idea of adoption in my translation. Both ideas have thematic precedent in the New Testament (for adoption, see, e.g., Romans 8:12-17; for the idea that God is the endpoint of our lives, see, e.g., Philippians 3:12-

14). Both ideas have an impact on the present, which seems to be where Paul's emphasis lies.

- “*Through whom are all things*” – This seems to be a parallel statement to John 1:3, where “All things were made through Him [Christ]” (NKJV). If God the Father is the source of all things, everything was created by the agency of Jesus Christ.
- “*We are through Him*” – This could either be a statement that emphasizes Christ's role in our salvation – we live through Him – or on His control over even our lives – we also were made through His agency. The latter seems to be where Paul's interest lies, since it contrasts Jesus' place in creation with the place that idols fill.

7: “...eat under the assumption that the food holds religious significance.” – The Greek word used here is *εἰδολόθυτος* (eidulothutos), which simply refers to food sacrificed to an idol³. However, the question here is not whether the food was actually sacrificed in an idol's temple or not, since the Corinthians with “knowledge” were apparently making the case that they could eat such food without any negative consequences. The question was whether the idolatrous practice gave the food any religious significance. Thus, when the Greek literally says that those with a weak conscience “eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol” (NASB 2020), it means that they thought the sacrificial ritual had affected the food in a religiously significant way.

- M. S.

Food Will Not Bring Us Closer to God

Comments on 1 Corinthians 8

The next dilemma that was turning brother against brother in Corinth was centered around a question of freedom. Some Christians in that city believed correctly that idols had no power at all in the world – they could

³ Ibid., 280.

neither bless their worshippers nor curse those who opposed them. This knowledge, they believed, took away the meaning behind idolatrous worship and turned it into something neutral to be used or ignored according to their discretion. It did not matter to them from a religious perspective whether they attended a feast in an idol's temple or not, it was simply a social occasion to be enjoyed.

However, not all Christians in Corinth shared this point of view. Some were not yet fully convinced that idols had no power in the world, though they had devoted themselves wholly to God. These Christians were not comfortable attending idol's feasts because they saw them as an act of devotion to another god, which they could not do in good conscience because of the commitment they had made to Christ. Consequently, they did not know how to respond to their brethren who, as far as they could see, had proclaimed an allegiance to Christ alone yet devoted themselves to the Greek gods who were worshipped throughout the city.

This chapter, along with the next two, constitute a warning to those Christians who feel they are free where others feel bound. Christ has not made us free so that we can pursue our desires, but He has made us free so that we can use our efforts constructively in a way that is considerate of our brethren. If we cause one another harm in our pursuit of liberty, we have lost the heart of Christianity.

1-3

Paul begins this discussion by recognizing the fact that we all have knowledge of some kind. If we think back on what Paul has explained earlier in the book, we can recognize that we have all learned from God. Nothing we have of value has come from our own wisdom or our own strength, but it has been given to each of us by the same God. If we have been introduced into God's family, we have a certain degree of knowledge about what that means and how that fact should change the way that we view the world. However, we need to be careful about how we use the knowledge we have been given.

If we spend our Christian lives focused on the fact that we know more than those outside, or that we know more than those Christians who are less educated or newer to the faith than ourselves, we will become self-centered. Our value as Christians cannot be determined by comparing our knowledge with anyone else, no matter how impressive we may be or how weak they may seem. Our goal is to create a culture of growth and education that produces mature Christians throughout our congregations, not a culture that belittles and shames those who are behind us in any way.

Therefore, love is much more valuable for the health of a Christian congregation. Knowledge is important, certainly, but knowledge without love will tend toward strife and division because of pride. It is love that gives the older and wiser members of a congregation the motivation they need to patiently educate and encourage those who still need time and space to grow. A congregation without love will feel an insurmountable generational gap, in a sense, between those who understand certain doctrines and those who have yet to learn them.

Paul also warns those who think they have finished learning. When he says that one who thinks he knows something does not understand it yet, he certainly does not mean that it is impossible to truly learn. Rather, he probably has someone in mind who is self-confident in his own knowledge. Most of us have probably experienced the feeling when an answer to a question only reveals how little we actually know. There is more to knowledge than knowing facts or having the right answer to a list of questions; we need to be able to apply our knowledge practically before we can say that we really understand the matter. If we think we have solved a problem through a quick, witty reaction, we probably do not realize just how deep our ignorance goes. We must stay humble, and we must keep learning. The moment we stop and proclaim that we have reached the pinnacle of knowledge, we have opened ourselves to sin and pride.

Instead, Paul appeals to the fundamental core of Christianity. Christians are not defined by their knowledge, but by their love of God. If someone loves God, God knows, and God recognizes His servants. Detached love is not

enough, because God wants us to learn from Him, but knowledge without love will get us no further.

4-6

Therefore, Paul says, we can have knowledge regarding idols. The brethren who proclaimed that idols had no power at all in the world were technically correct – there is no deity aside from God. It did not matter how many devotees believed that idols held the power of deity, there is nothing that can sway a mature Christian from his trust in God as the source of life and the assurance of the resurrection.

7-8

However, not all who lived as Christians in Corinth held the same conviction so unwaveringly. They were committed fully to God through Christ, but they kept their distance from idols and idol-worship because they believed that the feasts carried a real religious significance. For this reason, they would rather cut themselves off completely from social events that had any tinge of idolatry to ensure that they were showing no devotion whatsoever to any deity other than God. If they were to participate in an idol's feast, they would view that as a betrayal toward God, and so their consciences would be defiled.

Now, Paul is quick to point out that the dishes served at these feasts were not, themselves, religious artifacts. He maintains this point later, in chapter 10:23-33; meat that had been offered to an idol was not religiously defiled – that is, it was not a sin simply to eat meat that had been an offering. Food is not able to spiritually improve us or detract from our value to God. However, we do need to be careful about *how* we use the food that is available to us. What context do we eat it in? How does it affect those who are around us? The challenge facing the Corinthian church was not a challenge that could be solved by deciding who was technically right or wrong. It was a cultural problem, determined by how those who felt free to make a decision used that liberty – for the benefit of their brethren, or to their detriment.

9-11

Paul agreed that the food itself was not defiled, but he did not agree with the more knowledgeable Christians' decision to eat in idols' temples. If for no other reason (though he will provide another objection to this practice in chapter 10), those Christians who were more mature had a responsibility to model good behavior for those who had only just begun to learn. If a young Christian, who had not yet determined that the so-called gods that were worshipped in the temples really had no power or existence in the world, saw older, more experienced Christians joining in the celebrations in an idol's temple, he may falsely conclude that it was alright to worship both God and an idol, thus making God only one of many gods in his mind.

Paul's point isn't to say that that had already happened in Corinth, necessarily, since those he called "weak" brethren were still among them. Rather, he wanted the "strong" or "knowledgeable" brethren to begin thinking of their fellow Christians when they made their decisions. The way they used their freedoms had the power to affect those outside of themselves. Just because they believed they *could* do something did not mean that they *should* do it.

12-13

In the last two verses, Paul appeals to the idea that each congregation of Christians functions as Christ's body. The body should have a unified purpose, a sense of direction, and a meaningful sense of progress over time. In chapter 5, Paul made it clear that the Corinthian Christians had the responsibility to remove anyone who was actively working against that purpose, direction, and progress from their assemblies in order to avoid corruption and discouragement. In these verses, Paul warns those who believe they have freedoms that they can easily find themselves working against the body's progress if they mishandle their decisions. If they discourage or otherwise cause harm to their fellow Christians, they are causing harm to Christ's own body, and thus sinning against him directly.

Putting liberty into perspective this way can help us understand the role that we can play in our own congregations, even if it is only a passive role at times. When we face a decision that is morally neutral *on a personal level*, we have the responsibility to consider how that decision can and will affect our brethren in Christ. There are many such decisions – what we do professionally, where we go to school, what we do with our free time, who we spend our time with, etc. If we can use these opportunities to support and encourage growth among our brethren, our love for God and for our fellow Christians should motivate us to do so. If our decisions have caused harm to others, we need to change our course.

This certainly does not mean that it is wrong to do something simply because we *want* to do it. We have individual interests, and, insofar as there is nothing morally wrong with our interests, the Scriptures encourage us to enjoy the beauty and complexity of God's creation. However, even if our interests are morally acceptable, it is wrong to pursue them while *knowingly* causing harm and offense to our brethren. In such a case, it is the responsible course of action to give up what we want out of love for our brethren, even if that places a severe burden on us. It would not be easy for most to give up eating meat and follow a vegetarian diet for the rest of their lives, but that was a sacrifice Paul was fully prepared to make, simply because he loved his brethren.

- M. S.

A New Translation of Mark 4:1-34

“And again, He began to teach by the sea, and such a great crowd gathered around Him that He boarded a boat on the sea and sat down, and the whole crowd was on the land by the sea. And He taught them many things in parables, and while He was teaching, He said:

Listen, imagine a hired worker went out to plant seed. While he was scattering the seed, some fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some of the seed

fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil; this seed sprouted quickly, since it did not have deep soil, and, when the sun rose and the plant was scorched, it withered because it did not have any roots. Still other seed fell into a patch of thorns; the thorns grew up and crowded the good seed out, so that it bore no fruit. Yet some seed fell onto good ground and did bear fruit – growing and increasing – one produced thirty times what was planted, another sixty times, and another produced a hundred times.’ And He said, ‘Let everyone who has ears for hearing listen.’

And when He was alone, those who surrounded Him with the twelve asked Him about His parables. And He said to them, ‘The mystery of God’s kingdom has been given to you directly, but everything must be explained through parables for those who are outside, so that

*‘Although they look, they look without seeing
And although they listen, they listen without understanding
So that they will never turn and be forgiven.’*

And He said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand any parable? The worker is planting the word. The seed on the road represents those who hear the word wherever it is scattered, but then Satan comes quickly and takes the word that has been planted in them away. The seed that fell on rocky ground represents those who, when they have heard the word, accept it immediately with joy, but they have no root within themselves and only last for a short time. When these face difficult circumstances and persecution because of the word, they immediately give in to temptation. The seed that fell in the patch of thorns represents those who hear the word, but then the worries of life, the deceitfulness of riches, and their desires for other things enter them and crowd out the word, so that it becomes unfruitful. Finally, the seed that was scattered on good ground represents those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit – one thirty times as much as was planted, one sixty times, and one a hundred times.’

And He said to them, ‘Surely a lamp should not be put under a basket or under a bed. Shouldn’t it be put on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, and there is nothing secret that will not be uncovered. Let everyone who has ears for hearing listen.’

And He said to them, ‘Pay attention to what you are hearing – the same standard you use will be applied to you – and even more will be given to you. For the one who has will be given more, and the one who has nothing will have what little he does have taken away.’

And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is like a man who scattered seed out on the ground, then he sleeps and wakes, and day and night pass. The seed sprouts and grows, but the man knows nothing of it. The ground bears fruit on its own, first the stem, then the head, then the head is filled with grain. But when the time has come for the earth to hand its fruit over, the man immediately sends the sickle, for the harvest has come.’

And He said, ‘How shall I portray the kingdom of God, or what parable can I use to explain it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when it has been scattered on the earth, is smaller than all the seeds that are on the earth; but when it is planted, it grows and becomes greater than all the herbs, and it grows great branches, so that the birds of the sky are able to nest in its shade.’

And He spoke the word to them using many parables such as this so that they were able to hear what He had to say; He would not speak to them without parables, but He explained everything to His own disciples in private.”

Notes:

3: “*imagine...*” – This word literally means “behold” (cf. NASB 2020). However, in the context of a parable, it seems that Jesus was asking His audience to picture the scene in their minds.

3: “*A hired worker went out to plant some seed*” – Literally, “the sower went out to sow” (NASB 2020). This terminology refers to a specific role in ancient farming practices, which employed a large team of sometimes specialized laborers for short periods of time. Modern farming, at least in the United States, is normally carried out by a single farmer with long-term hired workers, which can make the specialized language more difficult to understand. In this case, the language is easy to generalize without harming the meaning of the parable. I have specifically used the term “hired worker” to communicate the social relationship between a landowner and those he hired to work his land. This is an important relationship to understand, since Jesus’ parables portray God as a landowner who commissions Christians as laborers in His field, the earth.

- M. S.

He Taught Them Many Things in Parables

Comments on Mark 4:1-34

At the end of chapter 3, Jesus observed that there was a difference between His natural family and the family He found among His disciples. He trusted His disciples to support Him and encourage His religious efforts, while His physical family discouraged Him. Likewise, He found no support from the religious leaders in Israel, who felt threatened by His popularity and the sincerity He demonstrated every time they disputed with Him. They tried instead to undermine His work through deceit and turn His followers against Him. By necessity, these developments meant that Jesus would interact with His trusted disciples in a different way than He would interact with those outside His inner circle. With those He trusted, He could be open and speak directly about His intentions, while He had to use more tact with those who were outside. This is why He began to use parables, not to be dishonest, but to spur His audience to think without inciting a direct confrontation with His opponents.

1-2

Mark's introduction to this section shows that the slanderous accusations brought against Jesus in the last chapter did nothing to diminish His popularity. He was still forced to teach in the open plains by the Sea of Galilee because of the immense crowds that surrounded Him wherever He went. In order to manage the crowd, He boarded a boat so that He could sit across from them without being crushed by those who were trying to reach Him. This was not a new plan, it was the same approach He used in Mark 3:7-10, the only difference is that now He delivered a full discourse from the boat.

3-9

We will explore the meaning of this parable shortly, when Jesus Himself explained it. However, we can make a few observations about the nature of the parable itself. First, Jesus drew on imagery familiar to the common people in Israel at the time. One of Jesus' other parables (Matthew 20:1-16) indicates that it was common for people who were unemployed to stand in the marketplace looking for someone to hire them, and that it was likewise common for landowners to look for temporary workers there. These may have been hired only for a day or for a few days, so that landowners could employ many temporary workers to, say, plant a field at the beginning of the season, then hire another group at the end of the season to harvest the crops. Many of the people listening to this parable may have done exactly the job that Jesus was describing.

Second, Jesus' parables did not target a specific group by name. There were times when Jesus' religious opponents recognized that His parables contradicted their teachings and their attitudes (Mark 12:1-12), but He never identified Himself or His teachings by the groups that He opposed. In this case, the parable of the soils expressed some of the roadblocks that might prevent someone from recognizing the truth, but Jesus did not use His parable to commit a character assassination against any groups or individuals who had already rejected Him for one of the reasons mentioned

in the parable. Instead, He gave His audience the tools they needed to make such judgments themselves, if they learned how to use the tools He gave them.

Third, Jesus' parables were designed to help His audience visualize a concept. They were usually meant to illustrate a simple spiritual point or a series of thoughts that were naturally grouped together (as is the case with this parable). They were not designed to reveal anything mystical or hidden. The idea behind the parable could usually be expressed in a few words. The parables were meant to be understood, although they taught a lesson indirectly.

10-12

When His disciples asked, Jesus explained the philosophy behind His use of parables simply. Jesus was willing and eager to discuss God's kingdom directly with those who were ready to face those truths head-on, but He would not incite a confrontation with His opponents. Therefore, He would teach the crowds indirectly in public, so that it was harder for the Pharisees and Sadducees to contradict what He said.

His quote from Isaiah 6:9-10 recalls a point in Isaiah's ministry when the people of Israel did not want to hear what the prophet had to say. God's instruction to Isaiah was to keep preaching to them even though they did not want to listen. By doing this, Isaiah would "make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes," because this was the only reaction they could have without actually paying attention to what Isaiah had to say.

Likewise, Jesus was beginning to face harsh opposition from the Pharisees and Sadducees, who wanted to silence Him and His gospel. However, He would not let their opposition put an end to His ministry. Instead, He would adjust the way that He preached so that they could not easily oppose Him. In fact, if they wanted to, they could more or less just ignore Him. It would be their loss, considering the power and mercy Jesus' gospel

contained, but He would keep preaching whether they accepted Him or turned against Him.

13-20

Jesus expressed disappointment that His disciples had not understood what the parable was meant to illustrate, even though He had already taught them many things about the kingdom of God. They should have already understood the importance of preaching and the different kinds of reactions a sincere teacher of God's word may receive. This incident and the disciples' confusion illustrates that a student who is initially uncertain what the parables mean can learn to understand them when he understands the spiritual truths behind them.

The parable of the soils has a message for teachers and a message for students. For teachers, it provides assurance that they are not personally responsible for the way that every conversation they have turns out. If we share the hope of the gospel with our friends and family, and even if we devote our lives to creating opportunities to share our beliefs, we will not be able to convince everyone to become a Christian. This is not our fault – though we are certainly responsible for our own choices as to *how* we present the gospel to others. Instead, Jesus assures us that God understands the other influences and circumstances that affect the outcome.

Conversely, this parable teaches those who hear the word of God about the influences and circumstances that can ruin their spiritual growth. While it is not possible for a teacher to convince everyone who hears the gospel, it is possible for everyone who hears to trust and obey God, no matter what their circumstances are. This parable may be able to help struggling students recognize what might be stunting their growth.

Altogether, Jesus considered four possible scenarios:

1. Someone who is easily distracted from what he has heard. He may recognize the importance of the gospel, but it simply does not hold his interest long enough to make any difference in his life.

Jesus says that Satan has taken this opportunity to simply take the word away like it was never there.

2. Someone who enthusiastically commits to the gospel for a short period of time but does not allow it to penetrate deep into his heart or his mind. This may be the sort of person who jumps from activity to activity, becoming fully invested in one until something newer or better comes along, at which point their former obsession is completely forgotten. For this person, Christianity is little more than a fad or a phase in life.
3. Someone who sincerely believes in the gospel, but by merit of difficult circumstances or worldly responsibilities never gives their faith much attention. Jesus says that this kind of Christian will never bear fruit, even though the seed took root and the plant grew.
4. Someone who sincerely believes in the gospel and gives it space to grow in his life. Jesus recognizes in His comments that not all successful Christians share an identical experience – some produce thirty times as much as they started with, some sixty times, and some a hundred times – but all are productive. If we give the word room to grow in our hearts and minds, we will, likewise, be productive.

21-23

It seems that the rest of this chapter is designed to give examples of how Jesus taught using parables, so there is no specific theme that ties these parables together. We can draw general conclusions about Jesus' teaching, such as His preference for agricultural metaphors, and each parable, of course, has its own meaning. That said, Jesus' teaching at this stage in His ministry seems to have focused on the preaching and teaching process. This offered a benefit to His public audiences, because they could learn how to understand Him as a teacher and how to interact with the truths He taught them, and it offered a benefit to His chosen disciples, because they were

preparing to take on a role as teachers and they needed to know how to handle it responsibly.

This parable is simple in its meaning – the lamp, or light, of God’s word should not be hidden, but put on display to be seen. When God’s word transforms our hearts and minds into something much better than we were before, we should not try to hide its influence. Instead, we should allow the way we present ourselves to others to be changed and improved, and we should be open about what has caused the change. The gospel has been sent into the world to be a light, and we who have believed are its conduits.

Jesus introduces an element of futility into this parable which, in context, seems to be targeted toward those who are reluctant to present themselves as anything new or different from what they were before. If God’s word is making a change in our lives, it will be impossible to hide it. There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, and nothing secret that will not be uncovered. If you are a Christian, you might as well admit to that fact, because your behavior will betray you otherwise.

24-25

This parable is interesting for several reasons. First, it reveals that we are responsible for what we know. If we learn (and understand) something, we normally cannot help but use that information. If we learn how to view our lives and our potential from God’s perspective – if we really understand why He sent His Son to rescue us from the squalor of sin – we have the choice either to use that information in our future decisions or to try to ignore it and choose another standard to pursue in our lives. Nonetheless, if we understand God’s word, we will be judged according to that word. We cannot escape what we have once learned.

Second, if we listen attentively, God is eager to teach us more. Jesus has assured us that once we begin to learn, we will never need to find another teacher. There will always be more development, more wisdom, and more knowledge to discover in God’s word.

Finally, God will take vengeance on those who refuse to learn from Him. This may seem harsh at first glance, but it makes sense when we put it all in perspective. Jesus is expressing God's frustration with those who have learned enough to comprehend just how great of a gift He is offering through the gospel – eternal life with all knowledge and wisdom – but decide that they would rather not pursue it any further. Those who choose this path will be judged as if they had received nothing from God; what they have learned and rejected will be less than useless in the long run.

26-29

This parable seems to be a statement of encouragement to preachers and teachers – while also providing a guiding principle. The man is responsible for planting the seed of God's word, but he is not responsible for making it grow. We might think of Paul's similar statement in 1 Corinthians 3:5-8. Those who do work for God play an important role in His plan, but no human is held responsible for the success of God's kingdom. If we faithfully play our parts, God will see to it that our efforts to plant the seed, to nourish it, and to accomplish the harvest work together on a grander scale.

30-32

This parable once again emphasizes the power of God's word apart from the teacher. If a human preacher is diligent to plant a seed in good soil, the seed itself will provide its own strength. A small beginning can and, wherever God is involved, will lead to impressive conclusions.

33-34

All of these parables represented the way that Jesus taught the crowds so as to avoid conflict with the Pharisees. Nonetheless, He took care to teach His disciples in plain language so that they understood everything. For the rest, He planted a seed that should, if the hearer was receptive, generate a burgeoning curiosity that would lead them to learn ever more.

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