
THE CHRISTIAN PROSPECT

VOL. I, NO. 9 – APRIL 15, 2022

Announcement

As of today, we have launched a new page on the website for real-time discussions regarding matters of common interest to all Christians. Each conversation will take place in the comment section under a blog post introducing the subject. The discussion will be fully moderated to prevent aggressive or unhelpful comments, so every contribution will be reviewed by me before it can be seen publicly.

It is my hope that this format will allow us to better accomplish a free and productive conversation in a way that everyone can participate in, whether you have a comment, a question, or a lengthy contribution to make. Likewise, if you have any questions or topics that you would like to discuss this way, please contact me at editor@christianprospect.com. I will gladly post your contributions on our website.

Beginning as soon as next month, I will publish any robust discussions that come out of this new format as a transcript in the *Prospect* directly, so that our efforts to understand and apply God's word will be recorded more permanently and made more easily accessible in the future. I hope and pray that this development will be helpful for you!

The discussion can be found at <https://christianprospect.com/discussion/>

- M.S.

Bible Interpretation – A Summary

We have come to the end of the materials I have put together regarding Bible interpretation. This certainly does not mean that we have exhausted all that can be said about the subject, only that I have traversed the ground

I set out to cover. To conclude this series, I would like to look back at the concepts we have explored over the last nine months with a better-rounded perspective. Why does it matter how we study the Bible?

Meeting the Scriptures on Their Own Terms

This entire series of articles was built on the concept of expository study, not topical study¹. This means that these methods are best applied when studying entire books of the Bible from beginning to end, or at least entire passages in full context. This certainly is not to say that topical study has no place in the life of a Christian or a congregation, only that topical studies should be built on an already well-developed understanding of each passage involved. We have a responsibility to learn what every verse and every passage means on their own terms first, *before* we apply their messages in another context.

There are several advantages to this kind of study, perhaps the most important of which is its ability to overcome our limited perspective on the world and faith. If we rely on our own judgment to decide which topics deserve careful study and which ones can be set aside, we will imprison ourselves in our own circumstances, and we will rarely be challenged to grow. Our studies will center on the sermons and disputes that we have heard or participated in during our spiritually formative years. We will approach the scriptures with an externally motivated list of questions, which will determine whether we find any given passage useful or not. It is easy to come to this kind of Bible study with a sincere desire to do what is right – our lives are characterized by our relationships, and when someone we care about challenges something about our beliefs or our practices, it is natural to want to defend what is right. It is possible, with a background in expository study, to use this kind of study effectively. However, if we rely

¹ My approach has been particularly informed by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021); and Richard Alan Fuhr Jr. and Andreas Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

on conflict to guide our personal and congregational growth, we will begin to lose the value of doctrines that are not controversial, and our knowledge and culture will begin to stagnate if, as so often happens, our relationships are characterized by the same types of conflicts, repeated time and time again.

By contrast, expository study will allow the scriptures themselves (and through them, the Holy Spirit) to tell us what we ought to learn. Instead of relying on my own judgment to decide whether I have developed a complete understanding of my role as a Christian or not, I can allow the apostles Paul, Peter, and John, among others, to walk me through the important considerations. In order to truly hear what the Spirit has to say to us as God's people, we must allow Him to speak for Himself in the context He chose. Even if I wrote an essay or delivered a sermon that consisted only of quotes taken directly from the scriptures, my human judgment would still be the primary creative force behind its structure for the simple reason that *I* would decide which quotes to use in what order, and *I* would decide which quotes were irrelevant to the point I wanted to make. In this scenario, the words might have belonged originally to inspiration, but I have made them mine by imposing my structure onto them². This is not, again, to say that there is no constructive role for essays and sermons to play – the scriptures themselves testify to the importance of these things. Rather, it means that, if I want to truly learn from the Holy Spirit, I need to study the words He inspired in the same structure and context that He inspired. No essay or sermon can bring us closer to the mind of God than His own words (1 Corinthians 2:10-16).

Therefore, we must commit to a method of study that recognizes the importance of every word and phrase in its proper place. We must determine to study the Bible without providing our own guidance, but rather to allow the scriptures to challenge us with their own message. We

² See, for example, how Satan applied his own meaning to the words of scripture in Matthew 4:5-6, even though his words were directly quoted from the 91st psalm.

should not approach the Bible with the intention to draw something specific out of it, but rather to see what each book has to offer. We can only do this responsibly when we read and study the Bible according to its native structure. Isaiah expects you to understand chapter 1 before you read chapter 2, and Paul lays the groundwork of Christian unity in his epistles before addressing disagreements that took place in the early church. If we do not follow the program that these inspired authors prepared for us, we face the real danger of missing important pieces of the puzzle and, consequently, misusing and abusing the authors' statements later in their writings.

Using Tools Responsibly

We are separated from the authors of the Bible by time, language, and culture. By the nature of our circumstances, we must rely on tools to bridge these gaps. Bible translations allow us to read the scriptures effortlessly, while a wide variety of commentaries, handbooks, and histories help us understand the world in which the Bible was written. However, we must recognize that none of these tools are infallible, and none of them can replace our intellectual, emotional, and spiritual engagement with the contents of God's word.

The religion of Christ is meant to engage and transform our entire being, encompassing our mind, our heart, our soul, and our strength (Mark 12:28-34). Bible study is not only an exercise in determining what is true and what is false (though truth is certainly integral to our faith), but it should affect the decisions that we make on a daily basis, *especially* where those decisions interact with our relationships (cf., Galatians 5:16-6:10; Colossians 3:8-17). If we distance ourselves from the difficult passages of the Bible and rely on a preacher or a commentary to think for us – as a replacement, not an aid – then we will not find the results of our study to be personally engaging. Our life cannot be transformed if we are only able to recite what a passage means. We need to understand it in our own hearts and minds so that we carry the image of God's Spirit with us even when we leave our books

behind (2 Corinthians 3:18-4:6). For this reason, it is essential that we treat the word of God as a living agent in our heart (1 Peter 1:22-2:3).

Conclusion

It is possible to live a life guided by the Spirit of the Lord through His written word – our faith depends on it – but we need to be careful how we read. We must study with the right intentions and take our intellectual and emotional responsibilities to the scriptures seriously, so that we do not get in our own way while trying to serve our God. I hope and pray that this series of articles has helped each of you develop a greater commitment to the word of God.

- M.S.

The Grace of God in the New Testament

Considering the length of time that has passed since the last installment of our series on the Grace of God, it seems pertinent that we remind ourselves of the ground we have covered so far. Once we have done so, we will explore how the New Covenant in Christ Jesus fits into the themes we have observed in the Old Testament scriptures:

1. God designed His creation to function together as a unit according to a unified plan. Mankind was intended to play an integral role as co-rulers with God. When man first sinned, God did not abandon this plan, but rather delayed it for a time until humanity could be restored to its proper place and function.
2. Humanity was equipped at the very beginning to live forever and to do the work God designed us for. However, once we began to misuse the tools that God gave to us, God took some of them, like eternal life, away. These blessings will return when mankind has been restored, but God has submitted us to futility for now out of hope that we will allow ourselves to be restored with the rest of His creation.

3. Through the narrative of the flood, we saw that all humanity is essentially living in a “grace period” in reference to our sins. God has been patient with us even though He could justifiably punish us right now for every sin we have committed. His hope for our future has led Him to allow us space to repent and to learn to do better. However, if He loses hope in us and He knows that we will never meet His aspirations for us, He will no longer have any reason to show us grace.
4. God has expressed His hope for humanity throughout history by means of covenants – binding agreements or contracts between God and His people. God does not simply hope that we will stumble on the right path through life. He has offered His personal guidance through His covenants. We all need to grow out of our imperfections and learn how to exercise wise and good judgment as potential future rulers over His creation. God has promised us good instruction and unlimited grace toward our failures if we uphold our end of the agreement. We need His forgiveness if we want to be anything more than we are now, on this earth, and He wants to see us meet our full designed potential. These are the grounds of every covenant God has made.

With this background, we can observe how the New Covenant in Christ not only aligns in design and purpose with the grace God has shown mankind from the beginning, but also pushes us toward complete restoration. Even now, God’s plan of redemption is not complete, but we know how it will end in Christ. Through Christ, we can each achieve our full potential in God’s creation, and He stands ready to help us overcome any obstacle that blocks our path. His purpose is eternal, and we have been invited to become a part of it by entering into a mutual agreement with our Creator. He is willing to give us room to grow as well as the instruction we need to effect sincere growth, if we will commit ourselves to Him and His plan in return.

- We have seen how the work of Christ is linked to our own creation and God's purpose in us through Psalm 8, especially as that psalm is reflected in Hebrews 2. God made us to be eternal, mature co-rulers with Him. Christ died so that that ideal could become a reality.
- Although God introduced death as a response to sin, so that we could not squander the gifts He gave to us, Christ's sacrifice and the promise we have of resurrection through Him will restore us to eternal life and give us the same blessings our ancestors enjoyed in the beginning. Our mortal bodies must die, but we will be given new bodies that will not have to suffer the consequences of sin (1 Corinthians 15:35-58).
- If we are remade in the image of Christ, we will fulfill God's hope for us. He is eager to give us space to grow and learn today, and He is equally eager to give us eternal life, so that we will not perish in eternity (1 John 1:5-2:2; 2 Peter 3:1-9). God is not indifferent to our fate; He does not want His work in creation to prove futile (Romans 8:18-30). Thus, He has extended His hand in grace to all humanity.
- In Christ, God has accomplished His purpose through a covenant, just as He used covenants in the past. He is willing to supply the time and strength necessary for us to learn and grow, but He requires commitment from us. He does not give out His grace indiscriminately but to those He can trust. For this reason, Jesus and the apostles asked those who were prepared to make that commitment to do so formally through baptism (e.g., Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:37-39, 10:44-48). Baptism is a marvelously simple ritual that contains a great deal of symbolism. When a believer is baptized, he proclaims his trust that he will be raised again after he has died (Romans 6:1-11), he commits

himself fully and openly to God's purpose (Colossians 2:11-15³), and he proclaims his desire to be remade in the image of Christ (1 Peter 3:21-4:2; cf. Romans 8:28-30). The apostles viewed this as the moment when an individual entered into a covenant with God, with all the grace that God has promised. For this reason, even Jesus proclaimed His commitment to God through baptism (Matthew 3:13-17)⁴.

Every Christian can say with the apostle Paul that we are "saved by grace through faith." Our own strength is not enough to reach our true purpose and our full potential. Without God, we are helpless. When we become Christians, however, God's grace is there to allow us to learn and grow, and His grace will raise us up again after we have suffered the consequences of sin in our mortal bodies. All that God asks is that we commit ourselves to Him in faith, formally declare our covenant with Him through baptism, and allow Him to teach us and guide us as we grow into the image of His Son.

- M.S.

³ The force of Paul's argument in Colossians 2:11-15 seems to be that the Christians in Colossae did not need to be circumcised because baptism had already accomplished what circumcision was meant to do. Circumcision was a symbol of God's covenant with Abraham, and its presence or absence served as proof whether a male child had been dedicated to God or not (Genesis 17:9-14). Likewise, Paul appears to be saying that baptism is a symbol of our covenant in Christ, so that one who has been baptized has been placed in a better covenant with God. Paul views the two acts as redundant.

⁴ It is worth noting here that there is a difference between John's baptism and Christian baptism (cf. Acts 19:1-7). This is not the place to explore that distinction at length, but John made it clear that his baptism represented a commitment to a renewed life in allegiance to God (Matthew 3:7-12), which Paul confirmed in Acts 19:4. Therefore, although Jesus did not have any sins from which He needed to repent, His baptism did reflect His commitment to give His future life entirely to God.

A New Translation of 1 Corinthians 9

“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, certainly I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defense for those who are judging me. Do we not have the right to eat or to drink? Do we not have the right to bring a believing wife along with us, as the other apostles do, as well as the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Do only Barnabas and I have no right to not work in an ordinary profession? Who pays his own way to go to war? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Who shepherds a flock, but doesn’t drink from its milk?

Is this my own idea? Doesn’t the law also say the same thing? It is written in Moses’ law: “Do not put a muzzle on an ox while he is treading out the grain.” Is God concerned with oxen here, or does He rather say it for our benefit? He did write for our benefit, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the one who threshes should thresh in hope of his share.

If we have planted spiritual seeds in you, is it excessive if we reap physical things from you? If others have this right over you, how much more should we? But we have not used this right; rather, we endure all things, so that we are not a hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who work with sacred things eat a share from the temple, and that those who minister at the altar have a share in what is on the altar? Likewise, the Lord has commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should be able to live from the gospel.

But I have not made use of any of these things; I have not written these things so that they should be done for me; for it is much better if I die than that anyone should make my boast ineffective. For when I preach, there is no reason for me to boast; I preach by necessity. I will be accursed if I do not preach! For if I were to preach willingly, I would have my wages; if I am unwilling, I have been entrusted with a commission. What, then, are my wages? That when I preach, I should present it free of charge so that I will not use my authority in the gospel to my own advantage.

Even though I am free from everyone, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more. For the Jews, I conducted myself like a Jew so that I could win the Jews; For those under the law, I conducted myself as though I were under the law – even though I

myself am not under the law – so that I could win those who are under the law; For those who are lawless, I presented myself as though I were lawless – though I am not lawless toward God but am rather obedient to the law of Christ – so that I could win those who are lawless; For those who are weak, I became weak, so that I could win the weak. I have become all things to all men, so that I might save some at every opportunity. Everything I do, I do for the gospel, so that I might share in it.

Do you not know that while everyone in a contest runs, only one receives the prize? Likewise, run so that you can win. Everyone who competes in sports exercises total control over himself, although he competes to obtain a crown that will not last. We, on the other hand, compete to obtain a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run as if I am uncertain, and I do not fight as if I am punching the air. Instead, I subject my body to strict discipline and subjugate myself, so that, after I have preached to others, I do not myself become disqualified.”

Note on the Translation:

8: “*Is this my own idea?*” – Literally, as with the ESV, “*Do I say these things on human authority?*” I’ve adjusted the tone slightly to match Paul’s conversational tone in the original Greek, which is lost in the literal translation.

- **M.S.**

I Have Made Myself a Slave to All

Comments on 1 Corinthians 9

Since laying the groundwork of Christian unity in the first four chapters of the letter, Paul has turned his attention to specific concerns in the Corinthian congregation; he has discussed congregational discipline in chapters 5 and 6, marriage in chapter 7, and now we find ourselves in the middle of a discussion regarding food offered to idols, which spans chapters 8-10. Throughout each of these discussions, Paul has used these themes to build up an awareness in his readers of their place within their local congregation, the body of Christ. The theme of discipline highlights

our need to view the body as a whole; we need to be aware of the congregation's health as a unit so that we can react properly when a member gives himself over to some kind of sin. The question of marriage shows us that anyone can serve God faithfully, no matter what his position in life may be. Our congregations should be filled with people from all walks of life so that we, as a body, are able to reach everyone. Now, through this discussion of food offered to idols, Paul brings the previous two points together. We know that we act as a body, and we know that we all bring different skills, experiences, and opportunities to the table. Now, we need to learn how to leverage our unique situation for the communal benefit of our brethren.

Paul brings this point out during a discussion of food offered to idols because it clarifies the dispute between the Corinthian brethren – they needed to learn how to make decisions with the welfare of their brethren in mind. It may have seemed like such a simple decision to make: to go to a party or not. Like the Corinthians, we need to think about the way our actions influence those closest to us in Christ. Are the things we do beneficial for our brethren, or do they detract from the health of our congregation? In this chapter, Paul uses himself as an example to demonstrate how someone can use their decisions to build up a congregation, rather than to bring it down. How do we use what God has given us?

1-2

Paul begins his exposition on stewardship by pointing out the advantages he possessed. He was an apostle, chosen by God to proclaim His gospel and to demonstrate His power through spiritual gifts. He was free, not bound by any other man's will or permission. He chose where he would go, and what he would do. He had seen Jesus Christ in His risen body, which gave him the advantage of having seen the proof of the Christian religion himself, as well as the responsibility to convince others of what he had seen. He had, through these means, convinced the majority of those in the Corinthian congregation to believe in Jesus Christ and reorient their lives

to serve His purpose. This gave him a level of influence and authority over them, because they were the fruit of God's work through him. All these traits gave him a claim to honor and support from the Christians at Corinth, and it is this claim that will occupy him throughout this chapter.

There are passages in Paul's letters that deal more directly with his apostleship. He found it necessary at times to defend himself and his call from the Lord against those who would have wished his influence in the early church to diminish. However, this is not the center of what he says. Here, he is not making a defense of his apostleship, but is, instead, emphasizing the way his apostleship could affect his relationship with the Corinthians. The Corinthians had believed in Christ specifically *because* God chose Paul as an apostle; the demonstrations of power and proofs of Christ's resurrection that had caused them to believe had been worked by his hand. If anyone should have cared for him and his work, it should have been the congregation at Corinth.

3-7

Paul makes his defense – apostles and preachers have human needs as well. They must eat and drink to live, and they have families that they need to support. It is not reasonable to expect human beings with such needs and responsibilities to forsake them for the benefit of *any* work. No one sets out to battle without any hope for reward, even if he believes strongly in what he is fighting for. He is not going to set out on a multi-month military campaign if he doesn't know that his own health and that of his family will be cared for. A man, out of either necessity or duty, would rather stay home and provide for his family than fight freely for a just cause.

Likewise, no one commits his time and energy to plant a vineyard or keep a flock of sheep if he does not expect to get something out of it. The basic human needs Paul appeals to in this passage occupy most of our daily attention, whether consciously or not. We don't commit our days to long hours or hard labor because we *want* to, just for the sake of the work itself. Rather, we do it because we believe that doing so will provide for ourselves

and for our families. Even if we believe in what we are doing, we can only commit ourselves to it if we can reasonably expect to get something back.

Paul's point in these verses is not to reclaim the rights of an apostle that have been denied to him – he will explain shortly that he would not use and did not want to use his right to demand financial support from the congregations he served – rather, he wants to show that preaching is no different from other professions in this regard. Those who preach reasonably expect to receive support for their work and to be able to care for their families. There were plenty of examples of those who used this right in Paul's day – the apostles, Cephas (or Peter), and Jesus' physical brothers, including James and Jude, who had committed themselves to working for the gospel. Paul and Barnabas were the two outliers, those who worked to support themselves while preaching. Paul's point is that he and Barnabas did not do this because they had any less right than the others, but because they chose not to exercise that right.

8-11

The point that Paul has just made is not just his opinion as a man, but it is something that God encoded into the law of Moses well over a thousand years before Paul lived. God spoke concerning oxen, so that the Israelites could see a principle played out in the lowest level of society. If it was necessary to care for oxen while they worked, and to make sure that they were allowed to benefit from their work on behalf of the farmer, how much more should the Israelites care for their own brethren and allow them to reap some appropriate reward for their labor? Thus, within God's system in the world, those who work should always do so in hope - for they will share at least a little of the product of their labor.

In the examples Paul gives, the reward is a part - but only a small part of what the labor produces. In the case of the oxen who treads out the grain, he is allowed to eat what he wishes while processing the raw product. However, most of the processed grain will go to his master. Likewise, the material things that Paul says he *could* ask from the Corinthians would be

miniscule in comparison with the spiritual things that he had accomplished for them. If the salvation of their souls far outweighs any material blessing they could ever find, then it would be a small thing for them to share material things with the one who has done such a meaningful work for them.

12-14

Evidently the Corinthian Christians did support some preachers, but Paul and Barnabas had never asked for this kind of support from them. This is not because there was no command or no precedent. God has commanded that those who commit their lives to work faithfully for the gospel should be provided for, just as He provided for the physical needs of the priests under the Old Covenant. It is right and good that each congregation should take care of those who sustain it. However, Paul had never made use of that right in Corinth for fear that it would hinder his ability to influence the Christians there for good.

15-18

Paul states clearly that his purpose in explaining these things has not been to ask the Corinthians to support him financially - he had made his choice not to accept any support from them for the sake of the gospel, and he would rather die than see this purpose thwarted. He could prove conclusively using the word of God that he had a *right* to take support for the work he did, but he made the conscious decision not to accept it. Why?

The answer lies in what he has already established regarding boasting - remember the foundation he laid in chapters 1-4: no one can boast in the presence of the Lord because God chose a counterintuitive path to save humanity. No Christian can boast in their knowledge or their position in God's kingdom because these were given to us by God. We have no wisdom, except for that which He has revealed to us. We have no strength, save that which He has given us through His Son. This was as true for the apostles as it is for those of us who did not receive a special call or revelation from God. Paul did not want to put himself in a position where he could

develop too high of a view of himself. He would not allow himself to claim any authority or superiority over those he served as an evangelist. The gospel had caused him to abandon his own intellect and strength and rely entirely on Christ. In fact, as Paul reveals in other passages (e.g., Philippians 3:1-16), he was acutely aware that everything he had accomplished through his own strength and wisdom – all the prospects he had in Jewish society and government, as well as all his past accomplishments – all this had been lost when he accepted the gospel and began to preach Christ. His own efforts had been less than worthless, they had been spent persecuting God's cause.

What Paul says next reveals that he had this past in mind when he wrote these things: he preaches the gospel by necessity, not by choice. He did not commit himself to the cause, nor did he willingly become a preacher of the gospel (though he did become a sincere disciple of Christ after his experience in Damascus). Instead, the responsibilities of a witness to Jesus' resurrection and an apostle to the Gentiles were placed upon him by God Himself (see 1:1). He did not preach because he had determined to reap the reward of a preacher, but rather because to not preach would be a rebellion against God.

There are those who willingly commit themselves to preach the gospel, and these should receive their rightful reward. All that Paul has labored to prove in this chapter applies to them. However, Paul sees himself in a different light. He was chosen *against* his will, he has been issued a commission, so he was not a free-will laborer. His charge was to faithfully keep what was entrusted to him. He was not without a reward, but his reward was in his obedience to God, not in material goods to support himself and his family.

The final phrase in verse 18 tells us that Paul's argument here is not about what rights he did and did not have. He needed to prove that he really did have the right to demand financial support before he could explain why he refused to use it, but this is his central point: he wanted to prevent himself from abusing his authority. He was forced into humility by Christ on the road to Damascus, and he knew that he needed to keep himself in that state

of mind. He was accustomed to authority and affluence in his life before his apostleship, and he saw where that had led him. Perhaps he feared that if he began to accrue wealth and influence among Christians, he would rather abuse it as he had before. Therefore, he would keep *himself* from this temptation. He had a right, but because of what he feared he might do, he knew that exercising this right could do more harm to the church than good. Therefore, he refrained.

19-23

This decision was not an isolated moment in Paul's ministry. He had made this same decision over and over again for the sake of the gospel. Even though he had been made free in the gospel of Christ, and he had been elevated above most Christians in his apostleship, he would not use his liberties for his own benefit. He made every decision to benefit other people and to teach them about Christ. His liberty was not an excuse to do what he wanted – it was an opportunity to do what was right for his neighbors.

So Paul set out to subject himself to everyone. He was already familiar with the social morays of Jewish society, though he had left it behind when he became a Christian. Nonetheless, he would gladly submit himself to the same rules and regulations he had abandoned if that would give him an opportunity to speak with those who still belonged to Jewish society. Likewise, he could submit himself to the law of Moses again, even though he knew he had been made free from that law through Christ, if that would allow him to speak to those who were under the law. He could relate to those who were lawless, if only to give himself an opportunity to speak to them, and he learned to connect with those who were weak (perhaps in faith), because he wanted to make the most of every opportunity that was given to him. He could have been selfish and insisted that others make the effort to meet him where he was – in his freedom – but he chose to submit himself to their social conventions and make the sacrifice himself. His freedom gave him the opportunity to engage in conversation with anyone.

This tells us something of Paul's evangelistic methods as well. Paul valued personal conversations above public spectacles (cf., 1 Corinthians 2:1-5). He did not want to rely on impressive demonstrations of rhetoric or public debates to convince others, but rather to persuade each individual sincerely and personally. For this reason, he needed to be able to adapt to the different tone and social expectations in every household. It would be difficult to make a sincere appeal to a man shortly after insulting him.

24-27

Paul was able to think this way and subject himself to limitations he did not want or enjoy because his mind was on his goal. He did not preach because preaching aligned with all of his interests – he preached because he sincerely wanted to help Christ win souls for the final redemption. He could submit himself to the social expectations of a Jew when he spoke to Jews because he set his goal firmly in his mind – a productive and helpful conversation that would help another reach one step closer to the ideal embodied by Jesus Christ. With his perspective set, he could see that any statement or action on his part that insulted his conversation partner or put up a social barrier between them would make it more difficult or impossible to make any progress toward Paul's end goal. The discomfort or restrictions that Paul placed upon himself were not so difficult when he knew that they helped him reach a worthwhile goal.

He compares this kind of thinking to athletics. Those who run in a race or compete in any sport want to win. With this goal in mind, athletes subject their bodies to exercises that build their strength and endurance but are not pleasant to experience. Likewise, an athlete cannot simply eat what they want or take a leisurely approach to life, but rather must maintain a strict regimen to keep their bodies in shape. They give up their personal freedom in order to accomplish a goal, which is precisely how Paul viewed the Christian life. He used himself and his work for the gospel as an example, but the principle extends well beyond evangelistic outreach. This same principle drove his decisions regarding financial support – he would not use his freedoms or his rights in a way that would harm the congregation in

Corinth or any others among their brethren in Christ. He would only use his rights in a way that was *helpful* to others.

This is the lesson he wants to get across to the Corinthians in relation to feasts in idols' temples. Even if the Corinthians could make a watertight, scriptural case that they had a right to eat food offered to idols, that does not mean that they should use it, or even that it would be *scriptural* to use it. They needed to recognize their position in the world – the rights and necessities that they had – as well as their duty toward the congregation as a body. Then, they needed to think introspectively to determine how best to use their rights for the benefit of the body, lest they should cause harm to their brethren in the process. Likewise, we should think about our own social positions in the world today. What opportunities do we have to help and encourage our brethren? What opportunities do we have to hurt them? Are we using our God-given rights for His people, or are we using them selfishly for our own pleasures?

- M.S.

A New Translation of Mark 4:35-5:20

“On the same day, when it had reached evening, He said to them, ‘Let us cross to the other side.’ When they had come away from the crowd, they departed in the boat with Him, without any time to prepare; and other boats went along with Him. Then a great windstorm came upon them, and the waves began to wash into the boat, so that the boat was immediately filling with water. Yet He was in the back of the boat, sleeping on a pillow. And they roused Him and said to Him, ‘Teacher, don’t you care that we are dying?’ And He woke up, reprimanded the wind and said to the sea, ‘Be silent, be still!’ The wind stopped, and everything was overcome by a great sense of calm. Then He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?’ And they were overcome with intense fear, and said among themselves, ‘Who is He, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?’

Then they came to the other side of the sea, into the region of the Gerasenes. As soon as He had stepped out of the boat, He was met by a man with an unclean spirit, who came

out from among the tombs. He lived in the tombs, and no one had been able to restrain him, even when he was bound with chains; he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and he had been able to pull apart the chains and break the shackles, and no one had been able to overcome his strength. He wandered through the tombs and the hills all day and night, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran to Him and bowed down, and he cried out with a loud voice and said, 'What do we have to do with each other, Jesus, Son of the most high God? I beg you by God, do not torture me!'

For Jesus had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'

And he said to Him, 'My name is Legion, for we are many.' And he begged Jesus not to send them out of the region. Now, there was a herd of pigs feeding there on the side of the hill, and so they begged Him, saying, 'Send us into the pigs, so that we may go into them.'

And He allowed them. Then the unclean spirits went out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd, about two thousand pigs, stampeded over the cliffs into the sea, and they drowned in the sea. And the men who were tending to the pigs fled and reported what they had seen in the city and in the fields, and those who were there came to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the one who had been possessed by Legion sitting down, wearing clothes, and speaking reasonably, and they were frightened. And those who had seen told them what had happened to the man who had been demon possessed, and about the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to leave the area.

While Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged Him to let him come along. He did not let him, but rather said to him, 'Go back to your house and to your family, and tell them what the Lord has done for you and how He has had mercy on you.' So the man left Jesus and began to proclaim what Jesus had done for him throughout the area of the Decapolis, and everybody was amazed."

Notes on the Translation:

4:36: “...without any time to prepare” – The Greek means, literally, “just as He was” (NASB 2020, NKJV, ESV, NIV, NRSV). I have applied a little interpretation to make the thought a little easier to follow in translation – Jesus had no opportunity to prepare Himself for the trip across the sea, which would explain why He was tired enough to sleep through a storm.

5:10: “*And he begged Jesus...*” – Literally, “And he begged Him,” but I included Jesus’ name for a clearer progression of thought in English.

- M.S.

“Tell Them What the Lord Has Done”

Comments on Mark 4:35-5:20

As time wore on, Jesus’ ministry came to be more and more defined by disputes initiated by the scribes and the Pharisees. We have seen how they traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee for the express purpose of turning the crowds against Jesus (Mark 3:22). It was never Jesus’ intention to engage in public disputes with the religious leaders in Israel, so He changed the way that He taught. He no longer proclaimed His gospel clearly and openly but rather taught using parables and metaphors. He explained the meaning to His trusted disciples in private, but He avoided conflict in public (Mark 4:33-34). Now, perhaps in search of relief from either the crowds or from the Pharisees’ attacks, Jesus led His disciples across the Sea of Galilee to a region that had few connections to Jewish society. The people there did not worship the God of Israel, nor did they expect any sort of appearance from a Jewish prophet or Messiah. Nonetheless, the short time that Jesus spent there certainly left an impression in their hearts and in their minds.

4:35-41

Mark tells us that Jesus’ decision to cross the Sea of Galilee came on the same day on which He began to use parables in His teaching. This was, it

would seem, a long, exhausting day. As before, the enthusiasm of the crowd had surely made it difficult for Jesus even to eat, and He certainly had not had time for quiet solitude, prayer, and rest. Probably all these factors contributed to His decision to leave immediately by boat; the other side of the sea was far enough that most of the crowd could not follow Him. Thus, His disciples ushered Him onto the boat without any time to rest, eat, or otherwise prepare for the journey. Some of the crowd did try to follow Him on little boats, but they took their leave from the majority at the shore. Jesus quickly fell asleep.

While He slept, a fierce windstorm began to assault the boat, which may have been a small fishing vessel that was not designed to operate far from shore. The Sea of Galilee is prone to severe windstorms, since it resides in a basin. The cliffs on the west side of the sea funnel winds down onto the water, where they ricochet off the basin walls, agitating the water⁵. It seems that the storm itself was not unusual, but the boat and its sailors were not equipped to sail in the middle of the sea.

When Jesus awoke to calm the sea by His power, it seems that what struck His disciples the most was His casual demeanor. He slept through the storm at first, until they roused Him, then He calmly spoke to the wind and the waves. Despite His calm, the sea responded instantly and obediently. To round out the disciples' sense of wonder, Jesus asked them why they had been so afraid! It is no wonder they did not know how to react, when He had faced near-certain death with quiet confidence and control. He knew what He was doing, and He had no doubt that God would preserve His life until His work was finished.

5:1-5

When we speak of the man possessed by “an unclean spirit” (or, as we will see in a few verses, numerous unclean spirits), I must reiterate my earlier uncertainty about the identity of these unclean spirits. We can confidently

⁵ Melton B. Winstead, “Sea of Galilee.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry. (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016). Logos.

say that “unclean spirits” and “demons” are different names for the same entities – Mark uses both terms in this passage. Likewise, we can say that demons possess a sense of both individual and collective identity, have independent thoughts, and support the spiritual influence of Satan in the world⁶.

Likewise, there is some uncertainty among scholars regarding the region where this encounter took place. Mark, according to the earliest manuscripts, places the location in the region of the “Gerasenes,” while later manuscripts place it in the country of the “Gadarenes”⁷. There is a similar manuscript difference in Luke 8:26, while Matthew 8:28 names it as either the country of the “Gadarenes” or the “Gergesenes”, varying again from manuscript to manuscript. This gives us a total of three very similar names: “Gerasenes”, “Gadarenes”, and “Gergesenes”, all three of which may be associated with three different locations near the east shore of the Sea of Galilee. Most likely, this confusion crept into the manuscript record

⁶ Further information can be found in David Seal, “Demon,” and J. A. McGuire-Moushon, “Demon, Critical Issues,” both in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Also helpful is the definition for the Greek word δαίμόνιον (daimonion) in 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). 210. Logos. Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker survey the history of the Greek term, which has referred to a variety of spiritual beings, both good and evil, who are more powerful than humans but less powerful than full deities. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, in *Wars of the Jews* 7.185, explicitly identified demons as the spirits of wicked men who have returned to earth after dying to torment and kill, if possible, those who are still alive. While Josephus provides a perspective that is culturally close to the New Testament, it is important to recognize that this passage deals with a root ? with alleged magical or mystical remedial powers, which seems to be based more on hearsay than personal research or experience. Nonetheless, his view is worth mentioning as a first-century Jewish perspective on the matter of demon-possession.

⁷ See Mark 5:1 in the NKJV, as well as the footnote.

when scribes who were unfamiliar with the geography of the region mistakenly introduced or attempted to correct spelling mistakes in the name. Ultimately, the confusion does not hurt our understanding of the passage. All three possible locations were situated on the east coast of the Sea of Galilee, and all three were occupied by Gentiles⁸.

Despite any uncertainties that remain in our minds regarding demon possession or the precise geographical location of this event, the social and spiritual situation is abundantly clear. Jesus had stepped into a world that did not know God yet faced the same spiritual challenges as God's people. The difference was that these people had no hope of restoration. Jesus' arrival in Israelite society had inspired all who were sick and were suffering from demon-possession to seek Him out and be healed. We will continue to see the kind of hope that Jesus had instilled all throughout the country of Judea as more and more people sought Him out to heal themselves and their loved ones (Mark 3:7-12). Anyone who knew of Christ had hope that they could and would be healed of whatever ailed them. By contrast, the Gerasenes had utterly failed to help even one suffering man. They had tried to restrain him with chains, but the demon was able to pull the chains apart and break free every time someone attempted it – no doubt harming the poor man grievously every time his arms and legs were forced against metal until it gave way. Unable to resist his outbursts, the man's family and society had abandoned him alone in the hill country. He wandered about, howling and tearing at his body with stones – totally helpless and hopeless against the self-destructive powers of evil that controlled him.

5:6-12

These verses only add to the mystery of demon-possession. It is plain that the demons know more of the spiritual world than humans do, since they were able to recognize Jesus immediately as the Son of God. Likewise, we can see that the man was not the only one suffering – the demons could be

⁸ For more information, see S. M. Kraeger, "Gerasenes," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

tortured, and they were desperate not to go wherever they would go when they were cast out of the man. Whatever their normal state is, they considered possessing a physical body to be much more comfortable and desirable, to the point that they would rather possess pigs than be left on their own. It is interesting to note as well that they specifically asked to stay in the same region, the same word that appeared in verse 1 (“the region of the Gerasenes”), meaning that they had a specific preference for that area. I cannot say what significance this fact holds.

When we consider how astonished Jesus’ disciples were when the wind and the sea obeyed His voice, we can imagine how their wonder grew when they heard a demon-possessed Gentile confess that Jesus was the Son of God. The people of the region may not have been looking for a savior, but the forces of evil at work in their culture recognized Him immediately. The gospel was not only significant in Israel, Jesus’ ministry had implications all over the world.

5:13-17

It seems that the pigs proved to be even less fit for the demons’ possession than the man. The same self-destructive tendencies that seem to have been a hallmark of demon possession manifested themselves immediately and violently in the whole herd of pigs, so that they sent themselves tumbling off a cliff and into the sea below. We do not know what happened to the demons after their porcine victims perished, but we know that Jesus’ power and authority had freed the region of their influence.

Understandably, the sight of two-thousand pigs throwing themselves into the sea frightened their herdsman, who fled to the nearest city. When the people of the city heard what had happened, many of them rushed out to see it for themselves. The demon-possessed man probably came from this city, and in any case he would have been well known, since he could be heard in the tombs all through the day and night. It would have been unbelievable to hear that he had regained his right mind.

The testimony was proven true, however, when they saw him sitting down with Jesus, having a rational conversation. No doubt he still bore scars and even open wounds on his face and hands, but now he appeared and acted like a reasonable man. However, instead of responding with joy that such a good deed had been accomplished, it seems that the inhabitants of the region grew even more afraid of Jesus. They had seen the terrifying power of the demons – who knew what Jesus would be capable of if He could defeat them! They did not know how to react, but they knew they would be more comfortable if Jesus left and gave them space to come to terms with what had just happened.

5:18-20

Showing again that He did not want conflict to drive His ministry, Jesus agreed to leave, but His interaction with the man who had been demon-possessed allowed Him to leave a permanent mark on the people of that region. The object of their fear – Jesus Himself – would leave, so that He could not become a hindrance to His own gospel. Instead, one of their own took on a role as one of the first preachers. They had lost him to demons some time before, but now he had been restored to them by a power much greater than the one that had caused him so much pain and isolation. We don't know what this man knew about the gospel, aside from his own experience; we don't even know his name, or his history after this moment, but we can confidently say that he helped prepare the way for the apostles' work in the years following Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus came to the region of the Gerasenes because His own people were beginning to reject the blessings He had offered to them. He did not stay with the Gerasenes for long, but when He left, they had received something they did not have before – hope.

- **M.S.**

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