TWO HUNDRED

NEW TESTAMENT WORD STUDIES

THAT COULD CHANGE YOUR LIFE

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The Problem with Words

I mentioned in other essays that in my translation work, I have studiously avoided what I referred to as “Christian passwords.” These are words so frequently quoted that it is assumed that “everybody knows” what they mean: usually a standardized, sanitized definition that rattles no doctrinal cages. This is not helpful in finding out what the writer wrote, or what the reader understood, in the beginning.

Words are funny things. Essential for communication, they can nevertheless confuse as much as they clarify. Words encompass far more than their “lexical meanings” (a term used by linguists to refer to dictionary definitions). Connotations, implications, shades of meaning vary widely, depending upon the perspectives of a speaker/writer and the hearer/reader, which may — or may not — be similar.

Our understanding of words is heavily dependent on context. If I use the word “drive,” for example, how do you know whether I am referring to: operating a car — collecting funds — playing golf or baseball — a very hard rain — intense ambition — basic physical needs — a gadget on my computer — or a host of other things? (English is particularly bad at this.) Only the context can give you a clue.

When one moves between languages, the situation becomes even more complicated. There is seldom a one-to-one correspondence between two words, in any two languages. If one tries to translate “literally,” how is he to choose among all these “meanings?”

Cultural convention, likewise, affects the “flavor” of what is understood by certain words. This varies over time. (In the 1950’s, for example, the heyday of the McCarthy persecutions, “red” was no longer simply a color! It was a dangerous accusation!)

Also, any currently spoken language is constantly changing. Consider as an example that is not theologically “loaded”, that in Elizabethan (KJV, Shakespeare) English, “quick” meant “alive,” not “fast, sudden, or rapid”. “The quick and the dead” meant “the living and the dead,” not, as some would have it, the two categories of pedestrians in city traffic!

All of these considerations and others come into play when one turns to the study of Scripture. Over the years, many “definitions” or understandings have become codified into “doctrines,” which in turn have become weapons in the battle for “orthodoxy.” Subsequent “translation” works, and assorted Bible dictionaries and chain references, have then incorporated these standardized understandings, without reference to the freight carried in the words chosen by the original writers. (Please see the essay, “The Task of a Translator,” posted previously). Many “proofs” are derived entirely from English texts, without regard for departures from the source documents. Accurate understanding depends upon trying to hear what was communicated to the first readers.

“So must we all learn Greek?” Ideally, yes. It is a fascinating, enlightening study that can enormously enhance one’s appreciation for the graciousness of the Lord’s invitation to us, to become a part of his Kingdom! But even without direct access to the Greek language, a student of Scripture can uncover a vast quantity of treasure by careful use of the tools of Word Study.

The basic principle behind this study method is simple linguistics: one learns best to understand the meaning of a word by observing the context in which it is used. That’s how you learned to talk! When your toddler is learning to talk, you don’t hand him a dictionary! You point, and demonstrate — “show and tell!” This is also the best way to learn another language.

So give it a try! I can almost guarantee surprises — and delight. And who knows — you just might get “hooked”? There are worse addictions!
Helps for Word Study

The discipline of Word Study is based upon the linguistic principle of context. Responsibly used, the New Testament is itself its own best commentary, as the usage of a word provides the most accurate clues to its intent. It is also helpful if you can explore the historical and contemporary uses of the vocabulary, but that can wait. For responsible word study, the tools you need are few:

1. at least 2 or 3 different New Testament translations — the more the better. NOT paraphrases. A paraphrase is not a helpful study tool, as it invariably departs from a literal rendering of the text. One of these should be the KJV, to facilitate the use of the concordance.
2. Young’s Analytical Concordance. First compiled in the 19th century, Young’s work has resources not available elsewhere. Entries are sorted by the original word used in the text, and in the back, a separate section identifies alternate translations for most words.
3. A notebook
4. A few brothers/sisters to compare notes with. This is IMPORTANT, as you will discover things that you will find it hard to accept unless they are confirmed by the study of others whose faithfulness you trust.
5. Leave your other commentaries, dictionaries, etc. on the shelf, until AFTER you have completed your own study.

LESSON 1.
There are many places where one English word represents the same Greek word throughout the text. These are the easiest. Even here, looking at the context is very constructive. Write down what you understand the word to mean before you begin, and compare with your conclusions. Consider the audience being addressed; the subject under discussion; whether the focus is past, present, or future. Ask questions!

It is important to look up every reference. Use multiple translations. Often the greatest insight comes from the references that don’t seem to “fit.” Read the surrounding material. What does the word seem to mean here?

You are right now looking at New Testament references only, for language reasons. If you want to include OT uses, you will need a copy of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT, and a concordance to that work, since the correspondence between Greek and Hebrew words is outside the scope of this study.

After you have looked up every reference to your target word, try to formulate a definition that would “fit” in every instance. Can you think of a synonym, or a phrase, that describes it?

If your target word appears with more than one Greek word in the listing, you need to proceed to Lesson 2.

LESSON 2
There are many places where the same English word has been used to translate two or more Greek words. This results in the confusion of separate concepts as if they were one. The Greek language, for the most part, is much more precise than English. If a different word is used, A DIFFERENT CONCEPT IS INTENDED!!! Accurate understanding requires that these differences be identified and communicated. The approach of Young’s Concordance is very helpful here. References are separated according to the original word, which enables the student to distinguish which passages are truly talking about the same idea, and which are not connected, even if the same English word has been used.

For example, the English word “gift” is used to translate no less than NINE different Greek words! It is NOT a single concept! The different words have implications including such ideas as:
– the identity and relationship of the giver and receiver
– the nature and purpose of the gift
– the intentions of the parties involved,
and other considerations. The carefully chosen vocabulary of the writers must be honored, by any responsible translator or teacher!

Ask yourself, what is the difference between these terms? Why was one chosen over another? What errors result from assuming that all are alike?

LESSON 3
Yet another complication occurs when a single Greek word has been translated by multiple English words. This usually happens when the translator’s theological presuppositions are challenged by the text. “Righteousness” and “justice”, for example, are translations of the SAME WORD! Dikaiosune and its related verbal and adjectival forms, are LEGAL, not
philosophical or religious words. However, it appears that translators/theologians preferred a “theological” flavor — which of course can be kept pretty theoretical rather than practical! — to the more overtly obvious concept of “justice.” Sadly, it is not rare for folks to prefer theoretical speculation to practical instructions! That was one of the big problems the “establishment” had with Jesus!

To discover these situations, “the answers are in the back of the book,” in the section titled “Index-Lexicon to the NT.” You need to copy down the original word (Young has helpfully transliterated them for you in both sections), and look it up in the back, where he has listed all the other ways that the KJV translators rendered it. Then return to the main concordance listings, and track down each of the alternates.

Realize that THESE ARE ALL THE SAME WORD — consequently, the same concept! Your conclusion must include ALL the references. You need to come up with a single word, phrase, or concept that would fit in ANY of those contexts! Be careful that you confine your search to groups of references that appear under the SAME ORIGINAL WORD.

For example, look at the word, *AGGELOS*. The transliterated form, “angel”, has been used when the powers-that-be thought that the reference was to a supernatural being. Where they assumed the creature to be human, they wrote “messenger.” But THE WORD IS THE SAME! This indicates that the focus is not upon who or what is carrying a message, but simply upon the FUNCTION being performed. Yet a huge mythology has grown up around speculation about many sorts of “angelic” creatures — when the very same word is used of quite ordinary humans. God can use natural or supernatural “messengers”, as he pleases! Even you and me!

This is also true of many other words referring to functions served by many individuals in the NT church. They were not “titles” or “offices” at all (Jesus had forbidden that!) but simply assignments to do a needed task. “Titles” were assigned much later, as a hierarchy developed.

Well, folks, this is just to get you started. In the next weeks, I hope to post a few specific studies to whet your appetite. I will augment them with some further linguistic research. One of my favorite resources is the Oxford Greek Lexicon (Liddell/Scott) which lists literary word usage through many centuries, and provides fascinating insight. But basically, with these few simple tools, you can find a huge amount of wonderful stuff.

These methods, along with reference to several Greek lexicons and grammars, listed in the appendix to the Translation Notes, were used in the preparation of the following Word Studies.
Word Study #1 — Faith/faithfulness

As we begin this series of word-studies, let me remind you of the perspective from which all this work is undertaken. My serious study of the New Testament was motivated by having been invited to “come and see” a supremely attractive way of life, introduced, advocated, and empowered by the Lord Jesus Christ. The invitation to participate in the Kingdom that he described and demonstrated was irresistible — and the more I learned, the more I wanted to be a part of it. My search has been two-fold: (1) for instructions in experiencing that Life, and (2) for folks with whom to share it. Consequently, I have resonated with the intensely practical tone of the New Testament. I see the Lord Jesus and his followers outlining and modeling the way people were originally created (and are presently being re-created) to relate and interact. Neither they nor I place any value on high-flown speculation or complicated theories. The “demonstration project” in which (Ephesians 3:10) whatever “rulers and powers” may exist in heaven or on earth, are enabled to see the wisdom and love of God, is not an intricately argued philosophical or theological system, but the manifestation among us of his gracious gift of Resurrection Life!

Therefore, a good place to start seems to be with the concept of “faith”/faithfulness, since one’s understanding of “pistis” and its related words will color his perspective on virtually everything else. Understanding the meaning of this concept must include the noun, verb, and adjectival forms: pistis, pisteuo, pistos.

First, look up “faith” in Young’s concordance. Scan quickly down the column of references, and notice that not one makes any reference to an “intellectual assent to a list of statements or propositions” about the nature, history, or purposes of God. Historically and linguistically, pistis has nothing theoretical about it at all. The classical writers used it to describe trust or trustworthiness, loyalty, confidence and honesty. It was also a term used in politics, of a treaty, an exchange of assurances, of political protection or safety granted in exchange for submission. In economics, it referred to good credit, a guarantee, pledge, or security deposit!

This fits well with the definition provided in Hebrews 11:1, which speaks of “substance” and “evidence”, both courtroom terms. If a case lacks “substance” it is thrown out of court. “Evidence” is confined to information actually seen or experienced by a witness, or it is not accepted.

The writer then turns to a list of individuals, in each case citing the demonstration of their faithfulness to the call of God. Abraham, for example, did not deliver a sermon about the nature of God — he simply followed instructions. God said “Go” and he went, without having the slightest idea of where he was going (Heb.11:8). Proceeding down the list, notice that the pattern of following instructions is common to all. **Not a word is said about what they “thought” or “believed”** about what was going on. **They simply followed orders.** Careful note is taken that it did not “all turn out ok” for everyone. Commendable faithfulness does not guarantee one’s safety or prosperity!

Another interesting cluster of references centers around the many healings that took place during Jesus’ ministry. Notice that it was often not the patient, but the person who brought someone to Jesus whose “pistis” is commended: the friends who lowered a paralyzed man through the roof, Jairus who sought help for his daughter, the centurion who advocated for his servant/child, among others. And when the disciples failed to heal the boy while Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, it was their “pistis”, not the child’s or his father’s, that was critiqued. In John’s account of the man at the pool (chapter 5), the healed man did not even know who had restored him, nor did the blind beggar at the temple gate (chapter 9). And in no case was anyone urged to “believe” that a healing had taken place in the absence of empirical evidence. On the occasions when Jesus did make the usually quoted statement “Your faithfulness) has saved/rescued you,” it is after some action by the person that demonstrated his/her commitment to/trust in Jesus.

The verb form, pisteuo, usually translated “believe”, historically was used in the sense of trusting or relying on someone. Where an object of that trust is expressed, it is usually the person of Jesus, or something he had done. Out of 233 occurrences, the reference is to a future event only 4 times, and to some fact about 5-10 times (depending on how you classify them.) Those facts include (1)Jesus’ resurrection, (2) his “I AM” statements, (3)something he had said. In no case is there a detailed list.

Clearly, there had already been efforts to reduce faithfulness to such a list by the time James wrote his letter. It is still just as true, as he notes in 2:19, that if one wants a “list” (a “creed”), the devil himself could acknowledge everything on anyone’s list as “true.” It is one’s commitment to the person of Jesus that sets his people apart — and strangely, that appears on no “lists.”

An additional clue to the active nature of both the noun and verb forms is found in the grammatical structure. Frequently, translations render the object of “faith” or “believing” as “in Christ.” This phrase is one of Paul’s favorites, but he uses it to
describe the context, the very atmosphere, in which our resurrection life exists. The choice to use, or not to use, a preposition is of the utmost importance in understanding. “In” can be expressed by two different prepositions: *en* and *eis*. *En* may only be used with the dative case, which implies a static situation: the location or environment in which something takes place. This is used when speaking of the condition of those who have been called out of their former life into a new one. *Eis*, on the other hand, is used only with the accusative case, which is much more active, more dynamic. And it is *eis* that is used with *pisteuo* — it implies motion, direction, or purpose. I have usually rendered it “become faithful toward”, or something similar, to convey the active sense of the case.

There is yet another construction that has been erroneously translated “in Christ”, which uses no preposition at all. That is where the text employs a genitive case — most commonly indicating possession, but also frequently the source of its object. Here, adherence to the text requires “of” and not “in” for accuracy. Thus, Gal.2:20, Eph.3:12, and others are pointing to our dependence on his faithfulness (Jesus’), not our own.

The adjectival form, *pistos*, has suffered less abuse, being frequently translated “faithful.” Other historical uses included such ideas as “genuine, loyal, credible.”

It is for these reasons that I have usually chosen to render *pistis* as “faithfulness” or “loyalty”, and *pisteuo* as “to be or to become faithful” or “to trust.”

It should be noted also that with the more active understanding of the words, as in James 1, the age-old Reformation argument about “faith” vs. “works” simply disappears. As James points out very well, behavior is the only way that “faith” can be demonstrated. These are two sides of the same coin, not conflicting principles.

May we all constantly increase in faithfulness, by means of the perfect faithfulness of the Lord Jesus!

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**Word Study #2 – Doubt vs. Unfaithfulness**

The usual way to communicate the opposite of a word, in the Greek language, is to add an “*a*” as a negative prefix: hence, “*pistos*”, faithful (see last week’s post), becomes “*apistos*”, unfaithful. Unfortunately, when people begin to “label” each other and each other’s ideas, it is not that simple. Due to changes in the English language over the course of time, the concept of “doubt” has crept in to confuse the situation, and grossly distorted the picture. Many people assume that “doubt” indicates a perverse, deliberate refusal to “believe,” (read, “accept the required dogma”), making it essentially synonymous with “unbelief.” **This has no basis in the original language.**

If you will look for “doubt” in Young’s concordance, you will see that the term has been used to translate four different Greek words, which are themselves quite distinct from one another. Interestingly, not one of these describes a situation where a person has taken a deliberate stand against faithfulness. Mostly, the individuals are puzzled, and trying to make sense out of a confusing event. **Uncertainty**, for which no one is scolded, is much more in evidence than the outright rejection of a message. We must be just as careful not to confuse these ideas.

The first of the terms that has been translated “doubt” is *aporeomai*. Historically, it conveyed a sense of utter bewilderment, of being at a loss to understand something. In the New Testament, it appears only four times: in John 13, when the disciples were trying to figure out who the betrayer would be; in Acts 25:20, when Festus confesses to Herod that he has no clue what charge to write, upon remanding Paul to Rome; in Galatians 4:20 of Paul’s uncertainty as to the continued faithfulness of those brethren; and II Corinthians 4:8 when he speaks of his own confusion. “Baffled” might convey the thought in more modern language.

*Diakrino*, by far the most common of the four, referred historically to discussion or debate, to discernment or evaluation. Here again, there is no negative connotation. It is used of Peter trying to figure out his vision, prior to visiting Cornelius (Acts 10:20 and 11:12); of the discernment required in dealing with the issue of meat offered to idols (Romans 14:23); and the restriction of discussions requiring discernment to mature believers (Romans 14:1). Jesus uses it in the statements about moving mountains (Matt.21 and Mark 11), indicating that these are not “playthings” for discussion. Perhaps one of the most significant is James 1:6 — where the request for wisdom is plainly intended to be used for instructions for action, and not just “ammunition” for debate or argument. The flavor, consistently, is **discernment**, in an effort to be faithful.

*Diaporeo* is more similar to *aporeomai*, but is considerably stronger. It refers to a matter for agitated discussion. It describes the confusion of the crowd at Pentecost, (Acts 2), trying to understand what is happening; and also the confusion among the
temple authorities when (Acts 5) the apostles were not found in prison where they had been locked up so carefully. It refers to Herod’s confusion, when he finally decided that Jesus must be a resurrected or reincarnated John the Baptist, and the bewildered reaction of the women at the empty tomb (Lk.24:4). It is used together with *aporeomai* in II Corinthians 4:8, as the more severe of the two terms.

*Distazo* is used only twice in the New Testament. Jesus uses it to Peter in Matt.14:31, when the latter floundered in his attempt to walk on the water. This has frequently been read as a rebuke, but rightly understood in the historical context of the word, “hesitation, uncertainty”, it sounds more like a critique than a criticism: “You almost made it!” Uncertainty definitely fits the other use, the resurrection scene where some were “uncertain.”

The important point is that none of these indicates a refusal of faithfulness.

Distazo is used only twice in the New Testament. Jesus uses it to Peter in Matt.14:31, when the latter floundered in his attempt to walk on the water. This has frequently been read as a rebuke, but rightly understood in the historical context of the word, “hesitation, uncertainty”, it sounds more like a critique than a criticism: “You almost made it!” Uncertainty definitely fits the other use, the resurrection scene where some were “uncertain.”

The verb form appears in the New Testament seven times, the noun twelve, and the adjective ten. It refers to outright rejection of Jesus and his message (the home-folks at Nazareth, or the present state of Jewish opponents); the ancient Hebrews who did not enter the Promised Land; Paul’s description of his own days as a persecutor. Sometimes it is related to ignorance: as in Paul’s former case, or that of an unbelieving spouse (I Corinthians 7). Jesus connected it to outright disobedience in the case of the slave- overseer who abused his subordinates. Paul frequently uses the two terms in close association.

In almost every instance, it constitutes a deliberate rejection of God’s ways, by the deliberate choice of disobedience.

The remedy is in a joint effort among the brotherhood (Hebrews 3:12-14.) It requires mutual support and daily “coaching” to hang on and to avoid the deception which would lead to unfaithfulness.

So what of poor Thomas, who has been made a scapegoat through many generations as “the doubter”? Which of these words do you think applied to him? And in what way? Was Jesus scolding him for not being gullible, and immediately accepting the word of what seemed to him to be delusional reports? I don’t believe he was. To get the whole story, we need to look back at the account of Thomas at the time of Lazarus’ death. I submit that Thomas was the most faithful of them all, on this occasion. Everyone had tried to dissuade Jesus from returning to Judea, knowing that it was suicide to do so. But he was adamant, so Thomas spoke up –“Let’s all go along —we might as well die with him.” That’s faithfulness! and Jesus had not forgotten that scene. After the resurrection, he knew what Thomas needed in order to believe — and provided it. Jesus’ admonition was in the present tense: “Don’t become unfaithful, but faithful!”

Perhaps only together can we rightly discern between necessary caution and unfaithful refusal. Maybe that’s yet another reason why our gracious Lord has given us to each other!

Word Study #3 – Justice and Righteousness – the same word!

This one is a challenge, and one that requires the use of historical lexicons, rather than just the concordance. Most people who use only English translations assume that these are two very different ideas. However, they are actually translations of the same word! The choice by the translators is completely arbitrary, and has created serious misunderstandings among people who are sincerely concerned with faithfulness. Listing of classical uses of *dikaios*, (the adjective form), begins with Homer, who is thought to have composed his famous epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey around the tenth century BC. The first appearance of *dikaios* refers to well-ordered, civilized behavior; being observant of one’s duty to both gods and men. Later, it referred to equality, fairness, and impartiality; to legal precision; to doing or receiving what is right and just. (This was the original English meaning of “righteous”, as well.) It referred to the mutual obligations in contracts.

The noun form, *dikaiosune*, was also a legal term: the business of a judge in a courtroom. It referred to legally claimed rights or demands; to the vindication of the innocent and the sentence passed upon the guilty.

The verb form, *dikaioo*, could refer either to the demanding or maintaining of one’s rights, or to being “set right”, to be caused to act properly, or to be treated justly. Therefore, whether vindication or punishment was in view, would depend upon the perspective — or the behavior — of the individual concerned. And the resultant behavior would depend upon the “justice” of the situation — and the judge!
None of these ideas is foreign to the Old Testament prophets, who frequently called for justice among God’s people. Neither is it foreign to the New Testament writers. How the simple concept of “justice” morphed into the much more elusive, theological construct of “righteousness” is unclear. I’m inclined to guess that it happened contemporaneously with the transformation of the Law, (which was designed to promote/create a just and fair society,) into an increasingly complex system of ceremonial and ecclesiastical minutiae that required constant professional analysis, refinement and interpretation!

When people in positions of leadership begin to acquire power over their fellows — be that power physical, political, or theological — justice among the general populace is one of the early casualties. The stern requirement of “righteousness”, defined (and therefore understood) exclusively by those in power, then became a useful tool in retaining and increasing their dominion.

Turning to the concordance, (the back of the book this time — see the introduction to Word Study), it is interesting that the adjective dikaios is translated “just” 33 times, “right” 5 times, and “righteous” 41 times. The context will provide you with some clues to the reasons why different words were chosen. But remember, the original word did not change. The changes were an artifact of the ideas of the translators, not the writers.

The verb form was rendered “justify” almost exclusively — a word which today is understood far more theoretically than the more accurate “to make just” or “to do justice” would allow. For the noun form, most translators do not touch the idea of “justice” at all, moving exclusively to the term “righteousness.” This can only have been a theological decision, as there is no linguistic reason for the departure. Read an assortment of these references, substituting “justice” for “righteousness,” remembering that it is the same original word in each instance. How would that affect your understanding of any of these passages?

I suggest that the biggest difference would be the substitution of the concept of transformation for the sleight-of-hand idea to which many of us have become accustomed. You know the drill — the statement that “God doesn’t see” us as we are, but “sees” instead the moral perfection of Jesus. Could the originators and the perpetrators of that line really think that the Creator of the universe is so easily deceived? Or would choose to be? If one understands the active nature of the verb dikaioo, it becomes clear that there is no deception or pretense involved. Dikaioo implies a transformation of the lives of those who come to Christ — a new creation — that endows people with the true justice that the Lord Jesus embodies.

A proper linguistic understanding of dikaios, dikaioo, and dikaiosune eliminates another “favorite debate” of folks who enjoy focusing on theoretical theology rather than the practical principles of faithful living: the endless argument over whether “righteousness” is “imparted” (instantly created) or “imputed” (attributed or assumed) — both without regard to any empirical evidence — to an individual who makes a profession of “faith” (see Word Study #1 for this one). Neither of these words appears in the New Testament — nor do most of the terms that refer to theoretical speculation. More to the point of the transformation of life described by all the New Testament writers, would be the recognition that the justice of God, created and exemplified by the Lord Jesus, is carefully implanted in those who are his. It is all a gracious gift, to be sure: but one that, like everything else about such a wonderful new life, needs to be watered, nurtured, and cultivated, in order to grow to reflect with integrity the perfect justice of our Lord, the Giver of Life.

Word Study #4 – “Jesus is Lord” – Our Pledge of Allegiance

Acknowledging Jesus Christ as “our Lord and Savior”, for first century followers, was a far cry from the creedal recitation that it has become in subsequent generations. It was a powerful declaration of allegiance to Jesus’ new Kingdom — one that could, and frequently did, cost the life of the person involved! These were titles that the Roman emperors, drunk with power, had reserved for themselves, as symbols of their self-proclaimed deity! The two words in combination appear less than a dozen times in the New Testament, but used individually, they carry the same freight.

Kurios — Lord — in first century usage, could be as non-threatening as the polite form of address, “sir” or “mister”. It could refer to the master of a household, the head of a family, or any person with authority over another. It was common in both masculine and feminine forms, as the respectful way to address any person of social standing, beyond their mid-teens. It could also, of course, refer to the master of slaves or servants, over whom he had absolute power — even that of life or death. He offered protection and care, but at the price of absolute and unquestioning obedience.

Throughout history, it also referred to government officials, guardians or trustees, or to those who held sovereign power over a city or state. By the first century BC, it also referred to the deified rulers of nations or empires. “Caesar is Lord” was
the commonly required oath of allegiance in the Roman Empire.

This casts a glaring light on Paul’s statement in I Corinthians 12:3, that “No one can say, “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.” A person on trial for his life could only escape the death sentence by replacing that confession with “Caesar is Lord; Jesus is cursed,” and burning incense at the imperial temple. A choice had to be made, which kingdom one would serve.

*Soter,* “savior”, likewise started out as a relatively low-key term. (Its related words will be considered in another posting.) “Savior,” “deliverer,” or “rescuer” might designate anyone who protected another from disease, death, or other disaster. It, too, however, as early as the writings of Homer, began to be applied, first to Zeus, and then to other gods, who were honored with temple sacrifices after a military victory or perilous sea journey, by those who had returned safely. Nearly every harbor town had a shrine available for such a purpose.

In both the LXX and the New Testament, God is called “savior”, in acknowledging the deliverance of his people. Consequently, it was not a stretch for the emperors to adopt that title as well. Jesus hinted at that practice when he noted that “The kings of the nations … who flaunt their authority, are called benefactors…” (Luke 25:22). Eventually, only the emperor dared lay claim to that title.

It is interesting that the later New Testament epistles — Timothy, Titus, and II Peter — are the setting for most of the uses of the combined terms “Lord and Savior.” These were written at a time when persecution had become extremely intense, and lives were on the line daily: the ultimate test of loyalty to the King of Kings lay in that statement.

When will folks who weekly repeat declarations that Jesus is “Lord and Savior” — while displaying in their places of “worship” the symbols of “Caesar” (their earthly nation)! — dare to consider the far-reaching implications of making a faithful –and fate-ful –choice? Who is your King?

**Word Study #5 – “Salvation:” past? present? future?**

The time was many years ago, when we were still sufficiently inexperienced at the discipline of Word Study that we expected it to be able to answer most, if not all, of our questions. (It can’t.)

We were leading a group in the study of Philippians, and stopped short at Philippians 1:19, where Paul comments, (KJV) “For I know that this will turn out for my salvation…”

“Whoa! Wait a minute!” one student exclaimed. “Wasn’t Paul already ’saved’?” Well, we all thought so, having at that time subscribed to the definition that equated the term with one’s initial “commitment to Christ.” But then, what was Paul saying? The curious among us needed to find out.

Out came the concordances, grammars, and lexicons. Out did NOT come total clarity with which to clobber any and all dissent. “What does the text SAY?”

Let’s start with the historical uses of the words. The compilers of the Oxford lexicon list for the verb form, *sozo*:

–to save from death, keep alive, preserve
–to escape destruction
–to be healed, to recover from sickness
–to save or recover an opportunity
–to observe or maintain laws or customs
–to keep in mind, to remember
–to bring one safely to a place
–to rescue from captivity or danger

and for the noun form, *soteria (or soterion)*:

–deliverance or preservation
–a way or means of safety
–safe return, or keeping safe
–security, or a guarantee of safety
–bodily health, well-being
–an offering in thanks for deliverance
–a physician’s fee!

Both are frustratingly broad, very like the widely trumpeted teachings about the Hebrew “shalom”. All, strangely, have the flavor of practical, **tangible experience**: there is historically no hint of any reference to one’s “eternal destiny,” although
that may be deduced from a few (by no means all) of the New Testament references.

This appears to be one of the cases where the New Testament writers took a commonly used and understood word, and poured into it additional meaning that did not originally exist. Please note that they did not abrogate the original intent; it still referred to physical healings, rescue from storms and shipwrecks, deliverance from enemies and persecutors. But a new dimension was added, when any of these included or resulted from one’s relatedness to Jesus.

The tenses of verbs used add considerable light to the subject. The vast majority of active voice references occur in purpose constructions, and are cast in the aorist tense, whether subjunctive, imperative, or infinitive forms are used. (Please see the appendix to the Translation Notes for further explanation.) They speak of the Lord’s intentions, his purpose, in coming to rescue his people from their wanderings, or, as he put it, “to save men’s lives, not to destroy them” (Lk.9:56 and parallels). Jesus himself uses it in reference to many of his healings.

Nearly an equal number of uses are in the passive voice, focusing on the receiver, rather than the doer, of the action. Among these, the predominant tenses are present (continuous action) and future. People “will be” or “are in the process of being” saved or rescued, except for a few purpose constructions that retain the aorist (implying, I think, the completion of the process.)

When attention shifts to the noun form, soteria, the accompanying verbs shift markedly to the present and future, except for two very interesting exceptions: Jesus’ comment (Lk.19:9) upon Zacchaeus’ announcement of his change of purpose and intention, that “Soteria has happened” on that day, and the song of praise in Rev.12:10, that it “has arrived” when the Accuser has finally been “cast down.” All the rest refer clearly to a work in progress, especially when Paul urges the Philippian brethren (2:12) to “keep on working” at it, or reminds those in Rome (13:11) that it is now “nearer” than at the beginning of their/our faithfulness.

With the linguistic prevalence of references to rescue or deliverance, it is also interesting to compare what folks are urged to be “saved from” with common “understandings.” Very seldom are the NT writers specific about that (except in the case of healings), unlike their modern counterparts, who would not even consider it to be a question. (Everyone needs to be saved from hell, right? “Just sign up for this guaranteed fire-insurance policy!”) As a matter of fact, that warning does not appear even once in the New Testament! Neither does “Where will you be if you die tonight?” New Testament “salvation” is about living, not dying! In fact, the word only occurs one single time paired with aionion, the word usually translated “eternal” (which needs its own study.) This would lead one to believe that at least it is not the primary emphasis.

In Zachariah’s prophecy when John the Baptist was born, he spoke of “deliverance from our enemies, and from all who hate us,” (Lk.1:71), and in 74-75 “the privilege to worship him (God) in purity and justice without fear!” Only secondarily does he refer to the “taking away of their hamartia” which has mistakenly been associated with paraptoma (deliberate transgressions) under the label of “sins.” This also requires its own study, but hamartia basically refers to failure to attain a goal or standard. Zachariah focuses wholly on the gracious mercy of God.

In Peter’s evangelistic sermon at Pentecost, he urged his listeners to (Ac.2:40) “be rescued (saved) from this crooked generation!” He also notes the result: (41) those who responded were “added” to the brotherhood (see also Ac.2:42-47.) Paul does mention in Rom.5:9 being “saved from wrath,” but he does not specify whether that “wrath” is God’s, or simply the constant state of those who ignore him. James refers to “saving from death” the life (psuche is another good study) of a person who is headed in the wrong direction.

SO — back to the question that started all of this: Wasn’t Paul already “saved?” Are we? Is anyone? What does the text SAY?

Jesus has already protected and rescued us many times, from many perils (some of our own making, some not.) He has healed and restored many of us, both physically and in terms of broken relationships. He has already (Col.1:13) “delivered us from the power of darkness, and transported us into his Kingdom” (the word used here is not sozo, but a much stronger errusato).

Still, there is much that is yet to be realized, if we consider all those future tenses, as well as the present progressives, and the beautiful goals he has outlined for the life of his people. There had to be a beginning, of course: but, in the vernacular of centuries later, “We ain’t seen nothin’ yet!”

So, “Brother, are you saved?”

Well, WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY???
Word Study #6 – “Repent” Does Not Mean “Grovel”!

Nearly thirty years had passed since all the wonderful events recorded in the introductions to Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts of the ministry of Jesus. After so long, did even the participants begin to wonder if it had all been just a beautiful dream? That can happen so easily, when hope is long deferred. Did anyone remember the prophecies, the promises, the wonder of those days?

Then, suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, a strange figure appeared at the edge of the Judaean desert, reminiscent of the prophets many centuries before, both in his rather scruffy appearance, his odd behavior, and his compelling, unequivocating message.

“Metanoeite!” he thundered. “The promised Kingdom has arrived!” English expositors have rendered that command, “Repent!”, and subsequently distorted it into a demand for repetitive, coerced assent to the sentence of guilt that they have concocted against their target audience. Oddly, neither Jesus, nor John, nor any of the later messengers, associated that call, either with violations of any list of forbidden thought or behavior, or with any convoluted connection to Adam and Eve in the garden. The word they chose was much more vital than either. Interestingly, it appears only 34 times in the entire New Testament, but the idea is pervasive.

Metanoeite, a present imperative form, never carried any implication of “I’m so sorry I was naughty — I must be a terrible person!” or “oops! I was caught!”. Metanoeite indicates a total and radical change of one’s mind / orientation / behavior / purpose — and results in a complete transformation of life. It represents a shift of focus from one’s former, self-centered concerns to a singular focus on the ways and goals of the Kingdom. Such a transformation takes a while — thus the use of the present tenses. Remember that the present tense, especially in the imperative mood, indicates a sustained, not punctiliar action. But that the results are expected to be seen in one’s behavior was well understood. This is obvious in the question posed by John’s listeners: “What shall we do?” Look at the description of his interviews in Luke 3:10-14.

–People in the crowd are expected to share food and clothing with those who lack either.
–Tax collectors are to quit cheating!
–Soldiers are forbidden to do violence to anyone!

Not a word is said about what they were supposed to “believe”!

And although the word appears very rarely in Paul’s writings, (as a verb only once, and as a noun four times), the understanding and expectation clearly persisted in the early church, as evidenced by the exhortations to the churches of Revelation. The folks at Ephesus are urged (Rv.2:5) to return to the loving behavior they had exhibited at the beginning; those at Pergamon (2:16) and Thyatira (2:22) to turn from the idol-worship they had come to tolerate; those in Sardis (3:3) to return to the way of life they had adopted at their conversion; and in Laodicea (3:19) to quit bragging about their financial prosperity and return to their dependence on the Lord’s provision. These expectations echo Jesus’ own statements, when he compared the responses of various groups to his message, with comparable historical situations — see Matthew 11:20-21 and 12:41, and parallels in Luke 10 and 11, and also Lk.13:3-5. It is behavior — “lifestyle” if you prefer — that is addressed in every situation: and metanoeite requires an all-encompassing change.

The noun form, metanoia, occurs only 24 times, and presents similar expectations. Both John (Mt.3:8 and Lk.3:8) and Jesus (Mt.9:13, Mk.2:17, Lk.5:22) insisted upon observable evidence of one’s having made a change, as do Peter and Paul in sermons and epistles. Consistently, metanoia refers either to a person’s initial ceding of his life to the Lord’s control, or to a major course-correction by a person or group that had (either deliberately or inadvertently) turned away. In either case, again, a drastic change of direction is in view.

A new Kingdom was being inaugurated — one with markedly different norms of behavior and citizenship from the prevailing culture — of the first, and every subsequent century! I have dealt with some of these counter-cultural issues in greater detail in an earlier volume, Citizens of the Kingdom, 1993.

The call, “metanoeite” constituted, in essence, an invitation to citizenship in Jesus’ Kingdom, which he was creating for the purpose of demonstrating the original intentions, and the transforming power, of God. The whole of the New Testament is intended as a “user’s manual” for Kingdom living!

Perhaps the most significant reference, in light of present day teaching and practice, is found in Hebrews 6:1. Metanoia — traditionally translated “repentance” — (I have chosen to use “a changed life”) — heads the list of “foundational” things that, the writer urges, once established, need to be “laid aside” in order to move on to maturity! Not abrogated; not denied; definitely assumed, but nevertheless laid aside, no longer the primary focus. Why then are committed followers of the Lord Jesus constantly berated — and in liturgical circles, continually expected to repeat profuse apologies and pleas for
“forgiveness” (another needed study)— about an assortment of supposed deliberate offenses against God — none of which could possibly be a part of a life that had truly changed direction? The same writer does have some very sobering things to say about turning one’s back on the gracious gift of life (Heb.6:4-7), but quickly adds (v:9) that such behavior is not assumed among the faithful!

I submit that continually groveling in one’s supposed “sinfulness” constitutes a denial of the life-changing grace of God! True, at the point of initial commitment, we have not instantly reached maturity. We have been born into a new life, which needs to grow and develop. We may even stumble, or fall flat on our faces, like children learning to walk. But we are expected to be headed in the direction our Lord has indicated, urging and helping one another along the way (Heb.3:12-14.)

“Repentance” and “forgiveness” are NOT the sum total of the gospel message, as is implied when an “accredited official” needs to pronounce the audience “forgiven” at every meeting, and to state that this “news” represents the “gospel” that they are to “believe.” That is only the beginning of the message. Jesus’ invitation is to participation in the work of his Kingdom — to live the way he created it to be lived — in company with all the others he has called.

Metanoiete! Continually engage in the process of changing life to conform to his pattern! With the Spirit of the Lord enabling the Body of Christ, it can be done!

Metanoiete!! Reject the Accuser, recognizing that it is he who insists that you are “not worthy”. Turn to the Redeemer, instead, who has said that you ARE (Col.1:12)!

Metanoiete!! Stop groveling at the gate! Stand up on your feet, and with thanksgiving, join the triumphal procession of the King!

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**Word Study #7: “ Forgiveness of sins”: Welcome, or weapon?**

John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judaea, announcing, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the 'sin' (failures, faults, shortcomings, offenses) of the world!” From that time, Jesus proceeded to welcome all who chose to follow him, as members of his family, citizens of his Kingdom, participants in a community of folks who were in the process of being redeemed, transformed, re-created as members of the Body of Christ!

Ironically, high on the list of topics co-opted by the creators of creed and dogma as weapons or ammunition for laying heavy and unwarranted guilt-trips on those people is the concept of “forgiveness of sins.” Their signal success at distorting the message of Jesus in this regard (whether deliberately or inadvertently is not mine to judge) is due to a serious misunderstanding of both words. Each represents an instance of multiple Greek words (and therefore very different ideas) having been lumped together and expressed by one single word in most English translations.

There are three different words which have been rendered “forgive” by most translators: *apoluuo* (translated “forgive” only twice, out of 69 appearances in the New Testament), which most frequently signifies simple departure from a place, or sending away; *charizomai* (translated “forgive” in 11 of 23 occurrences), more often used of the gracious gifts of God for the needs and service of his people; and *aphiem* (47 out of 144 occurrences), for which the most common translation is simply “leave.” It is interesting to note that none of these includes any implication of “forget”, with which it is so frequently paired in modern rhetoric. Although the gracious generosity inherent in *charizomai* is an important component of a correct understanding of forgiveness, and noted in Eph.4:32 and Col.3:13 as the model for our treatment of one another, I choose here to focus on the more usual term, *aphiem*, because it has been so grossly misunderstood.

Etymologically, *aphiem* is made up of a prefix, *apo*, “away from”, and the verb, *hiemi*, “to send away, to discharge, to set free, to release, to dismiss, to acquit of a charge, to put away or divorce, to get rid of, to leave, to cancel.” Adding a prefix to such a word tends to strengthen it in the direction of the prefix (“away from”), indicating a sense of removal. Notice, “ignore” is NOT on that list of definitions. Nobody is saying, “Oh, that’s ok, it doesn’t matter.” It DOES matter: it matters so much that the situation in question needs to be removed — taken away — disposed-of. (please see posting #6.)

*Aphiemi* does not describe a clever lawyer getting his client off the hook without penalty for his crimes. It is the error that is removed. But what is that “error” that is being removed? The misunderstanding is even greater when it comes to the concept of “sin.” This English word also is used for three different Greek words: *hamartia* (175 times), *hamartema* (only 4 times), and *paraptoma* (23 times). To complicate the situation, theology and dogma have added the baggage contained in three more words, none of which are ever translated that way!
Hamartia, by far the most common, very seldom carries the indication of a deliberate offense. The lexicons include: “to miss a target, to fail of one’s purpose, to be deprived of something needful, to fail or neglect an assigned task, to err or to do wrong, to be mistaken.” These are primarily the errors of immaturity or ignorance. This is the word that appears most frequently with αφιεμί. (Interestingly, the second most common is not an offense at all, but debt.) Hamartia is also the word associated with Jesus’ dispute with the Pharisees over his authority to “forgive” (remember, that word means to remove, dismiss, or get rid of) “sins”. (Matthew 9:6, Mk.2:7,10, and Lk.5:21-24.) Note two things: (1) Jesus is speaking in the present tense — he HAS authority; and (2) Jesus does not dispute the statement that “only God” can do that. It is precisely because he is God Incarnate that he has that authority! Jesus makes no mention of his death as being associated with his right to forgive.

Stephen (Ac.7:60) prays that his executioner be “forgiven” for their hamartia — acknowledging, as did Jesus on the cross, Peter in Ac.3:17, and Paul on several occasions, that they were acting in ignorance. Peter’s question regarding forgiving his brother uses hamartia (Mt:18:21), but Jesus’ parable in reply shifts the focus to one of debt. This incident has often been viewed as parallel to the teaching in Luke 17:3-4, which was initiated by Jesus, but makes no mention of Peter. The Luke account is dealing with a very different scenario, although it also uses hamartia. Here, Jesus is referring to “straightening out” a brother who has taken a wrong turn, and the command to forgive is prefaced by a conditional clause indicated by the use of the particle εαν with a subjunctive verb. “IF he repents (see Word Study #6) — changes his direction” — he is to be forgiven. Acknowledging that this may take several tries does not remove the condition: it is embedded in the structure of the sentence. It describes a situation similar to the restoration (II Cor.2:7-10) of the person who was disciplined in I Cor.5.

Paraptoma, on the other hand, carries more of the freight of a deliberate offense. Alternate translations include “fall (2x), fault(2x), offense(7x), sin(3x), and trespass(9x).” Lexicons add “a false step, a blunder, defeat, transgression, trespass.” The references are about evenly divided between offenses against people and against God, but are generally deliberate in both cases. It appears frequently in Romans 4, 5, and 11 regarding Israel’s refusal of Jesus; and in Ephesians and Colossians regarding the excesses of pagan life before conversion. In Eph.2:1, Paul refers to both of the words together, making clear that they comprise two different classes of offenses.

Entirely missing from any of these concepts are situations where one has deliberately chosen to do — or to yield to the control of — what is overtly evil. Kakia (11 times): “evil, malice, maliciousness, wickedness”; kakos (35 times) “ugly, base, craven, worthless, evil, pernicious, abusive, foul”; and poneros (23 times): “evil, harm, wicked, wickedness, the Evil One”; occur far less frequently. They have in no case been translated “sin”, and with a single exception, never appear in connection with αφιεμί or any of the other forgiveness terms. The exception is found in Ac.8:22, the interview between Peter and Simon the magician in Samaria who tried to “buy” the ability to confer the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter does not sound really confident that “forgiveness” will be extended in this situation. His analysis is stern; Simon has showed himself to be quite alien to the spirit of true discipleship. Please note that this indictment is completely unique to this one situation. There is no parallel anywhere in the New Testament, unless it be the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac.5), where (Interestingly, the second most common is not an offense at all, but debt. ) there is not even any suggestion of the possibility of redemption. An accusation of having deliberately chosen evil is the most serious of charges. Reducing it to a routine recitation is irresponsible in the extreme.

Loyal disciples of Jesus find themselves at many different levels of maturity, understanding, and conformity to the Lord’s ways. John, in his first letter, assumes that as we mature, we will continue to discover things that need to be “taken away” from our experience, assuring his readers that the Lord is ready and willing to take care of that if they will cooperate. However, requiring committed disciples repeatedly to “confess” guilt for offenses that they have neither committed nor even considered, in order to be pronounced “forgiven” by someone in a hierarchical structure (which the Lord Jesus categorically forbade — see Mt.23:1-12), is a gross distortion — even a denial — of his gracious provision for the people he has redeemed for himself and called to populate his Kingdom!

“Behold the Lamb of God who TAKES AWAY the failures, faults, shortcomings, stumblings, and offenses of the world!” This is part of his program to re-create his people in his own image, and directly connected to the call to “Repent/change direction.” His authority and power to accomplish this monumental task reside in his very BEING – the King of Kings and Lord of Lords — “because in him, all the fullness of deity has its bodily, permanent residence (Col.2:9)!”

Glory to him forever!
Word Study #8 – Fellowship

My friend’s invitation to an event at her church was kind and gracious. “It’s just a fellowship meeting,” she explained, “Coffee, some board-games, conversation ….” Now, I like coffee. Conversation is pleasant. I can even occasionally enjoy a board-game with the grandkids. But is this “fellowship”? “JUST a fellowship meeting?” Has the contemporary church forgotten, or has it deliberately rejected, the “length and breadth and height and depth” of that beautiful word, reducing it to softball games and hot dogs?

“Fellowship” is the most common translation (12 times) of koinonia, which in other contexts has been rendered “communication (2 x), communion (4 x), contribution (1 x), and distribution (1 x).” Historically, it was quite a versatile word, used of joint business ventures, charitable contributions, the routine associations of human society, and even marriage! The verb form could refer to almost any sort of a co-operative effort — even crime! — while the adjective refers to things held in common by corporations, willingness to share among members of a group, and partaking of either the suffering or the good fortune of one’s fellows.

In the New Testament, the usage is also varied: these related words can refer to something as mundane as James and John’s partnership in their father’s fishing business (Lk.5:10), or as amazingly ultimate as Peter’s description of believers actually participating in the glory of the Lord Jesus at his coming (I Peter 5:1)! The word only appears twice in the Gospels — the previously mentioned passage in Luke, and Mt.23:30, where Jesus warns his opponents of “sharing” (koinonon) in the deeds of those who had stoned the prophets.

Interestingly, the word seems to have acquired broader and deeper meaning in the church after Pentecost. Might a new slant on koinonia be connected to the power Jesus promised when he instructed the baffled disciples to “wait around” for the coming of the Holy Spirit? The New Testament usage certainly changes after that momentous occasion. Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35 provide detailed descriptions of the “fellowship” (koinonia) of the early believers. They couldn’t get enough of being together! (But I don’t think they were playing board-games.) They eagerly soaked-up the apostles’ teaching, shared their meals and possessions, and prayed together. Incidentally, please note that there is no hint, in that description, of coerced communalism: the new brethren were just looking out for each other’s welfare, as they shared their whole lives. That concern spilled out beyond their immediate associates, as well, in many practical ways:

–When they learned of the famine in Judea, the scattered congregations spontaneously started a relief-effort for the brethren who were affected (Rom.15:26, II Cor.8:4, 9:13)
–They shared willingly in each other’s sufferings for their faithfulness, as well as in the suffering of the Lord Jesus for them (Phil.3:10, Heb.10:33, II Cor.1:7, I Pet.4:13)
–Various individuals and groups contributed support, not only to Paul’s efforts (the whole epistle to Philippi is a “thank-you note”), but to those of other teachers (Gal.6:6), and also to the needs of the wider brotherhood (Rom.12:13).

Paul speaks of “fellowship” (koinonia) as related to the approval other apostles gave to his work (Gal.2:9), the sharing of the “mystery” of the inclusion of Gentiles in the plan of God (Eph.3:9), and also to individual people who had shared his labors in various places. He refers to sharing (koinonia), personally and as a group, in the very sufferings of Jesus Christ (Phil.3:10), as does Peter in his first letter (4:13). John’s first letter is the most extensive direct treatment of “fellowship”.

Koinonia is also used –only once, in I Cor.10:16 — of the celebration that has come to be labeled “communion.” I have treated this subject in greater detail in Citizens of the Kingdom, chapter 12. This is the same word that has been used of all the sharing of life, teaching, resources, joys, and sufferings already detailed. Paul’s choice of the word koinonia makes abundantly clear that the purpose of the observation is the celebration of the depth of the mutual participation of the members of the Body — NOT some privatistic, esoteric appropriation of an undefined “spiritual” benefit. Luke records in Acts 2 (previously cited) that they “broke bread from house to house” with JOY. Nothing is said about a solemn ceremony officiated by a representative of a hierarchy (which, as noted before, Jesus had flatly forbidden.) As in every other reference to koinonia, the mutuality of the entire brotherhood is paramount.

So yes, dear people! May all our meetings be “fellowship meetings”! May we live and breathe the koinonia described so vividly by the New Testament writers! Building each other up in love, may we continue to grow together into “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ!” (Eph.4:13). For “Our fellowship / sharing / participation / koinonia is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. We’re writing these things to you all in order that our mutual joy may be made complete!” (I John1:3-4).
Word Study #9 — “Judgment” — Commanded, or Forbidden?

(I am going to divide the consideration of *krino* into two postings, since the two major aspects of the word (excluding simple courtroom scenes) are both seriously misunderstood.)

“Do not pass judgment, so that you all will not be judged.” (Matthew 7:1)

“Don’t keep judging according to appearances, but judge just judgment (evaluate things fairly).” (John 7:24)

These apparently contradictory statements by Jesus use derivatives of the same word, in each instance: the very same word (*krino, krisis*) that also refers to God’s final sorting-out at the “end of the ages.” (This latter usage will be dealt with in the next post.) Translating *krino* is one of those places where a translator must work with extreme caution, and uncommon flexibility, because, frustrating as it is, the Greek words are no more precise than the English.

Historical records show the verb, *krino*, rendered as “to separate or distinguish, to divide, to pick out, to choose the best, to decide disputes or questions, to contend, to compete in games, to evaluate, to esteem, to decide in favor of, to bring to trial, to pass sentence.”

The noun, *krisis*, and occasionally *krima*, is rendered “decision, choice, selection, verdict, interpretation (as of dreams), a trial of skill or strength, a dispute, an event or issue to be decided, the turning point of a disease, a legal decision.”

**There is no necessary negative connotation in any of these.** Common, non-theological English uses the word “judge” in many of the same ways. Contests, legal decisions, debates or disputes, evaluation of persons or situations all require “judgment.” Please note, consequently, that in neither Greek nor English does the word “judge” automatically imply condemnation – or even disapproval. It may, in fact, indicate the direct opposite!

The concepts in question are clarified when a form of *krino* appears with a prefix:
- *ana* (again, or up) creates *anakrino*, “to examine closely, to interrogate, to inquire into
- *dia* (through, or toward) creates *diakrino*, “to distinguish, to separate, to decide, to argue”
- *epi* (upon, over) creates *epikrino*, “to pass sentence, to assent”
- *kata* (down, against) creates *katakrino*, “to condemn”
- *sun* (together) creates *sungkrino*, “to compare.”

Unfortunately, these compound forms are used comparatively rarely. Most of the time, we are left to figure out the sense of *krino* from its context.

Taken in their context, for example, the two quotations with which we began are not contradictory at all. Consult the rest of the paragraph in the Matthew 7 reference. The prohibition is directed at self-appointed “perfection police,” who enjoy nit-picking at others without regard to their own need for correction. This is unacceptable. However, the give and take of mutual admonition is essential for healthy growth. Witness Paul’s instructions in I Cor. 5 and 6, and notice that he is concerned (5:12) with the relationships of those within the brotherhood. This is reinforced in I Cor. 11:31-32: “If we would be evaluating ourselves, we would not be judged. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined, so that we will not be condemned (*katakrino*) with the world.” This kind of “judgment” is an act of compassion and protection, not condemnation!

Such an understanding highlights a significant difference between the New Testament and the contemporary church. The original idea, in the message of both Jesus himself and all the apostles, began with “*metanoeite*” (see Word Study #6), a call to change one’s entire orientation of life. Sadly, that no longer seems to be the standard assumption. We have correctly perceived that the invitation to the new community/kingdom of Jesus’ followers is open to all. But when the entry points, “repentance” (W.S.#6) and “forgiveness” (W.S.#7), are robbed of their true content, and it is no longer assumed that there will be either a radical change of life or the removal of offending behaviors, and that invitation is reduced to an insipid verbal assent to a prescribed list of “beliefs” or “doctrines,” the life-giving aspect of “judgment” disappears as well.

Look for a moment at a few of the places where “judgment” is advocated – even commanded – in the church! Notice that in the John 7 passage already quoted, the verbs are **plural** – not singular (individual). This is a job for the brotherhood as a whole, as are all the other such admonitions. That is an important safeguard, to assure that any “judgment” will be “just,” and not capricious. In I Cor.6, Paul goes into considerable detail about the need for disputes in the brotherhood to be settled internally – by Christian standards, and not by those of the outside world. In I Cor.14:9, the **whole congregation** is to “evaluate” carefully any messages delivered to the group. Jude (22) calls for “discerning” where mercy is called for. Even what appears to be an individual responsibility – assuring that one does not cause another to stumble or fall (Rom.14:13) – is addressed in the plural. And Peter calls for “judgment” to begin in the household of God. It is the task of the **group** to “clean up our act!” Discernment/judgment is essential, if a person or group is to act responsibly as representative of the Kingdom in an alien world. This is at least one of the reasons why “discernment” is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Body (1 Cor.12:10).
At the same time, clearly, “judgment” needs to be exercised with caution. In many of his epistles, Paul reminds his readers that the mandate for discernment/judgment is not a license to dictate all the minutiae of life, or to catalog and rank the “sins of the world.” Jesus intends to take those away! Discernment is needed in order to draw lines only where they matter. The Kingdom is not a new Law. Its citizens are urged to be considerate, rather than picky, about such things as food and drink, customs and celebrations (Col.2:16 f), and the details of people’s former lives (Rom.2). James warns against economic discrimination (2:1-7), and obsessing about technicalities of law (ch.4). Romans 14 is a beautiful treatise on helping one brother another to find ways of faithfulness. Don’t forget that a changed life is assumed! But in that context, compassion, not coercion, is the hallmark of faithful “judgment,” remembering that (14:8) “The person who is a slave to Christ — is pleasing to God”!

Rightly understood, judgment/discernment serves as an extremely useful tool, as aspiring followers of Jesus seek to learn his ways. It is exercised, by common consent, within the brotherhood, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in a mutual effort toward faithfulness. We have not been called to “reform” the world. It is our joyful privilege to demonstrate an alternative to its ways, and to invite all who will, to transfer their allegiance from the world to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus!

Word Study #10 — “THE Judgment”

Please remember that a “word study” must confine itself to passages where the actual word is used. There are other references that may—or may not—bear upon the subject under consideration. It is important to distinguish, for example, between simple cause and effect, and “the judgment of God.” Actions do have consequences: it may be simply a result of the way the world works – do not confuse consequences with overt judgments.

Only in threatening theological rhetoric is talk about the “final judgment” used in an attempt to bludgeon members of an audience into accepting a list of statements about the nature and purposes of God. There is not a single example in the New Testament record of anything similar being primary—or even present!—in the “evangelistic” message. While classical uses of krino do include the sense of a legal, judicial verdict, there is no sense of divine retribution, and certainly none of “eternal” duration. Although that idea does occur—rarely—in the New Testament, implicit references to judgment are found only in 7 of the 68 uses of aionion (“eternal” or “everlasting”), while all the rest refer to “life” and all sorts of “blessedness.” A related word, krimatos, is only found with one of those seven—Heb.6:2, where it appears on the list of foundational things that need to be “laid aside” in order to move on to maturity (see W.S. #6).

In point of fact, the vast majority of references to the judgment of God are addressed to the faithful, for their encouragement and comfort! Romans 2:16, Gal.5:10, I Pet.2:23 and 4:5, and Rev.6:10, 11:18, 16:5-6, 17:1, 18:8, and 19:2 all speak of the eventual vindication of the faithful and the destruction of their persecutors. Another large group of references, Rom.2:16, I Pet.1:17, II Pet.2:1, and Rev. 16:7 and 19:11, emphasize that the judgment of God is consummately fair, and therefore greatly to be desired by folks who have suffered unjust treatment. Heb.4:13 does not use the word, but characterizes a situation where the faithful have nothing to fear: “There’s no created thing concealed from him: everything is naked and exposed to his eyes, with respect to whom the Word (evaluates) us.” John 5:22-30 and much of chapter 8 explains that Jesus himself will judge honestly. Here is a judge that cannot be “bought”! Of course, judgment that is absolutely just and fair can seem like a threat, to anyone who is trying to hide, or get away with something. But for all who have struggled to live faithfully, in a world that does not acknowledge its true King, it presents the joyful prospect of deliverance. I treasure our last conversation with a dear, elderly brother, who, after a lifetime of service to his church, was the victim of vicious false accusations, and had been repudiated by many. He had stood kindly by us, years earlier, when we had been the victims of false gossip. Brother John had been able to retain his radiant love and trust in the Lord’s mercy, and told us: “We can all hold on to this: the Lord knows the truth, and he is the one that is our final judge.” That was a joyful statement of trust—not of fear.

On the rare occasions when mention of judgment is directed to the uncommitted—Mt.12:41-42 and parallels, Lk.10:14, Acts 13:46, 17:31, and 24:25, notice that it is usually to people—often religious leaders—who have already deliberately placed themselves in opposition to Jesus—not to those who are unaware of his ways.

Attention should be given, of course, to the two unique occurrences of solemn warnings directed to people within the brotherhood. The letter to the Hebrews highlights the danger of deliberately ignoring or violating one’s commitment to faithfulness (10:24-31), while urging readers to keep after each other, encouraging one another to “hang in there” in faithfulness, lest any turn and become opponents. James also (2:12-13) echoes Jesus own warning (previously cited) in
Mt.7:2, that one will be “judged” with the same degree of mercy that he has extended to his brethren. Both admonitions are intended to motivate caution, not terror.

Finally, it may be instructive to revisit a few of the passages that are frequently (mistakenly) used in an effort to frighten listeners into submission with lurid descriptions of torment.

Look at the “sheep and goats” judgment scene in Matthew 25. Notice the charge brought against the “unfaithful”. Jesus says nothing about what either group “believed,” or to what creed or doctrine they subscribed (or failed to subscribe). He passes judgment on their behavior – their neglect of the needs around them.

The same charge appears in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Actually, that gentleman probably “believed” all the “right things.” He probably even ascribed his wealth to the “blessing of God!” It is his treatment of the beggar that is the focus of his condemnation.

And among those who love to quote the Revelation to strike terror to the hearts of their audience, I have not heard anyone refer Rev.18, the account of the fall of Babylon, to the present economic distress (v.11-19). I’m afraid more who claim the label “Christian” are weeping with the merchants “who got rich off of her luxurious excesses” (v.15) – note that there are few real necessities listed in the account of the collapse – than are heeding the voice from heaven (v.20), “Celebrate over her, heaven, and God’s people, and apostles and prophets! God has passed judgment on her for you!”

There is a way in which it still all boils down to a case of discernment (see W.S.#9) – of choosing sides. Paul’s testimony in I Cor.4:3-5 is a classic example of the confidence that a committed disciple can rightfully derive from the prospect of God’s judgment. “It matters little to me,” he observes, “that I should be examined (judged) by you all, or by any human tribunal. I don’t even keep examining myself! For I am not aware of anything (that is a problem) for myself; but that’s not how I have been made just: the one who examines (judges) us is the Lord. So don’t pass judgment on anything before the time – until the Lord comes. He will illuminate the things hidden by darkness and reveal the plans of (people’s) hearts. And then praise will be given to each one, from God.”

If we are not “hiding anything in darkness,” then there is no cause for panic!

I Jn.3:19-20 seems to anticipate the problem of people being (wrongly) made to feel “guilty”, reminding us that “even if our hearts scold us, God is greater than our hearts” and eminently able to override any criticism.

Our confidence is in the mercy of God, which we have received in Jesus Christ!

Give thanks to the only One we can count on to be consistently merciful and fair!

As in so many other situations, there is only one necessary question: Whose side are we on? To whom do we belong?

Word Study #11 – “Testing / Trial / Temptation” -- Don't Blame God!

How many times have you heard – or said -- “God is/was testing me/you,” “God won't give you more than you can handle!”, or “God has put me/you through a heavy trial!”, or something similar? The culturally expected response is usually respectful sympathy, and a few “piety points” to the credit of the speaker. Why does it so seldom occur to anyone to reply, as the apostle James did (1:13-14), “But God doesn't DO that!”?

There are four different words that have been translated “trial” -- each only once in the entire New Testament. Dokime (also rendered “experience, experiment, or proof”), is classically defined “to test or assay, to approve or sanction, to examine and admit to a class”, in Paul's second letter to Corinth (8:2); dokimion (the means by which a test is made) in I Peter 1:7; peirazo (trial, attempt, experience) in Heb.11:36; and purossis (burning, cooking, or destruction by fire) in I Peter 4:12 and Rev.18. None of these are represented to be caused or “sent” by God, although several times he is said to have used them, or turned them to the benefit of the affected individual. Sometimes, with other translations, those same words merely refer to human investigations.

The more common word, peirazo (v.), peirasmos (n), is classically defined as “attempt, test the quality (as the assay of metal or ore), to be experienced, to examine, and to seek to seduce or tempt.” Remember, this is the same word: the only distinction is the context.

In the New Testament, the import leans heavily toward the latter meaning, though not by any means exclusively. It may refer simply to people trying to do something (Ac.16:17, and 9:26); to a person's credentials for a task (Rev.2:2 and elsewhere); to self-examination (II Cor.13:5); and to people's attempts to put God to a test (Ac.5:9, 15:10, Heb.3:9). Only
once does it refer to a physical malady – Gal.4:1-4 – to which Paul applies the label “a messenger of Satan” -- hardly a justification for the common practice of referring to every illness, inconvenience, or incapacity as a “trial from God”!

The vast majority of New Testament references, however, are to Jesus vs. Satan himself, or the Pharisees and/or Sadducees who opposed him. Another large segment refers to the persecutions endured by the faithful because of their fidelity to Jesus and his Kingdom. The relationship to persecution is not accidental. Refer to W.S.#4, where I have noted that persecution could frequently be avoided by a statement that repudiated one’s loyalty to Jesus, and acknowledged “Caesar is Lord” instead. The “temptation” was NOT to “indulge” in some activity on a list of “no-no’s”, but to desert or betray one’s Kingdom citizenship. In both cases, whether the translation is “temptation,” “trial,” or “test,” the perpetrators are either Satan himself (12 x), or people/institutions that have deliberately set themselves in opposition to Jesus (about 15 x) -- certainly not God!

There is one reference (Jn.6:6) where in the crowd-feeding incident, Jesus essentially gives the disciples a “pop quiz”: “He said this, testing him (Philip), for he knew what he was about to do,” and several where the source of the test/trial is not specified (James 1:12, I Peter 1:6-8).

The use of peirazō in the Lord’s Prayer, interpreted by some as a request for God to refrain from what they see as his practice of “testing” people, when seen in the context of the other half of that request, phrased in classic parallelism, “but rescue us from the Evil One,” reveals exactly the opposite (and more accurate) understanding: that it is the Evil One who causes problems with “temptation.”

Peirazo appears in admonitions to “test” the qualifications of people who claim to speak with authority (Rv.2:2), although a form of dokimazo (dealt with in the discussion of discernment, W.S.#9) is more common in those contexts.

Do you notice anything apparently “missing” here? In all of these references, we have encountered none attributing them to “God's will” or any deliberate infliction of these “trials” or “temptations” by him upon his people! Search the Scriptures, folks. It's not there. In no instance is there any hint of any of these situations having been instigated by God! In fact, James clearly declares that allegation to be a fallacy: (1:13-14)

“No one must say, when he's being tested, ‘I'm being tested by God.’ For God is not tested by evil, and he tests no one. But each one is tested by his own desires, drawn out and enticed.” Remember, the choice of whether to use the word “tested” or “tempted” is entirely that of the translator. The word is the same. It is, as James makes clear in the next sentence, a very serious matter, and one intimately connected to a person’s own “desires”, and having a very serious effect on his life.

Epithumias- “longings, yearnings” -- (from thumoo, with an intensifying prefix) -- is a very strong word. These intense desires are the artifacts of one's chosen life-direction, which is expected to have been altered by metanoia (w.s.#6) -- a process which, as we have seen, is not necessarily instantly completed. James places the responsibility exactly where it belongs: on the focus of our attention and ambition. In a similar warning, Paul advised Timothy (I Tim.6:9) of the danger of being distracted by competing loyalties -- in that case, riches. The remedy is equally clear. Jesus himself has “been there, done that.” Heb.2:18 tells us, “In that he himself has suffered temptation/testing, he can help those who are being tempted/tested.” Or, as a later writer has put it, “He made himself like us, so that he could make us like himself!” By having experienced severe temptation/testing and triumphed over it, Jesus was enabled to extend his own success to his people!

Paul's reassurance in I Cor.10:13 is essentially the same. Notice carefully that this passage also attributes to God not the source of the testing, but rather the “way out!” These two passages need to be held together, like the two lenses of a binocular, to obtain a proper perspective. And as always, only the Lord Jesus can “hold everything together” as needed. He has had a lot of practice, as Peter reminds us (II Pet.2:4-9) -- and has also promised to rescue his people (Rv.3:10) from the greater testing on the horizon – to enable their/our endurance. “He has been tested in everything, just like us – but he didn't flunk!” (Heb.4:15)

So where do we come out? It is appropriate neither to apply the label “trial/testing/temptation” to every major or minor annoyance of life (although one's response to those certainly does “prove” -- demonstrate – where his loyalties lie!), nor to ascribe all our “troubles” to the “will of God” (another needed word study!) Only when tests/temptations are recognized in their true light – attempts to turn us aside from whole-hearted devotion to the Lord and his Kingdom – and their source is rightly identified – persons or institutions that have set themselves in opposition to that Kingdom, and that malevolent power whose cause they serve – can the battle lines be accurately drawn.

(I Peter 4:12-16) observes, “Don't be surprised/shocked” when trials/testings come” – that is to be expected, if one is faithful to the Kingdom of a King that the world does not acknowledge. Just make sure, he notes, that the “sufferings” imposed from the outside are not deserved.

And don't blame God!!! **He does not attack his own Kingdom or its citizens.** Jesus gave his life in their/our defense!

**THY KINGDOM COME!!!!!**
This subject, which has borne the weight of complex “theological” arguments for centuries, is far too broad and deep to be contained in a post of reasonable length. I do not intend to try to settle all the hypothetical questions in which self-styled “experts” delight. An honest encounter with the New Testament will almost always come up with more questions than answers, and this one is no exception.

One can delve into the various derivatives of thelo (classically ethelo)(v.), thelema (n), and boulomai (v.), boule (n), or boulema (n) – none of which make the classical distinctions in which theoreticians delight – i.e., “permissive will,” “eternal will,” “ultimate will,” ‘sovereign will,” and so on down the list of doctrinal hobbyhorses. Thelema and its related words are classically defined simply as: “to be willing, to consent, to delight in, to ordain or decree, to be naturally disposed toward a person, idea, or thing.”

Boulomai, the stronger word, is listed as “the wishes of the gods” (in Homer), “one's choice or preference, to want to do something, desire, prefer, purpose, intend that something be done.”

Please note that none of these carry any implication of direct causation. Both word groups legitimately contain sufficient latitude that people with “an axe to grind” can manipulate them with amazing dexterity. I choose not to join that fray, but rather to call your attention to the handful of places where the statement is plainly phrased: “This is the will of God ...” or, “The will of God is ....” Whatever direction people choose to push (or twist?) the more ambiguous statements, these few are unmistakably clear: and consequently, must inform / govern any conclusion that requires or permits interpretation. Any interpretation that directly contradicts what is plainly stated, must be recognized as being in error.

I am deliberately listing these with only minimal comment: they speak for themselves:

Mt.18:14 – Jesus speaking -- “It is NOT the will of my/your Father in heaven that one of these little ones be destroyed/lost.”

Jn.6:39 – Jesus speaking -- “This is the will of the one that sent me: that I may not lose anyone of all that he has given me, but that I may raise him up in the last day.”

Jn.6:40 – still Jesus – “This is the will of him that sent me, that every one who sees the Son and is faithful to him may have eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day.”

Jn.6:40 (and parallel, Mk.3:35) – Jesus speaking -- “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, this one is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Jn.4:34 – Jesus in Samaria -- “My food is that I continually may do the will of the one that sent me, and that I may complete his work.”

Jn.5:17 – Jesus again -- “I have come down from heaven, not to do what I want, but to do the will of the one that sent me.”

Eph.6:6 -- “as Christ's slaves, doing God's will with your whole self.”

Heb.10:7,9 – quoting Jesus, “I come to do your will.”

Heb.10:36 -- “You all have need of endurance, in order that when/since you have done God's will, you may obtain the promise.”

Heb.13:21 -- “He will establish you all, in everything good, for doing his will.”

I Jn.2:17 -- “The world is passing away, and so are its passions; but the person who keeps on doing God's will remains forever.”

I Peter 2:15 -- “This is God's will: that by doing good, you should silence the ignorance” of those who make spurious accusations.

Mt.8:3 – Jesus, again -- “I will” – his intention to heal the leper.

Mt.9:13 – Jesus, quoting Hosea 6:6 -- “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.”

I Tim.2:4 – (God), “who will have [wants] all people to be saved/rescued, and come to understanding of the truth.”

These are completely unequivocal.

Another block of references indicate that “God's will” is something that his people are expected to DO.

Mt.7:21 – Jesus speaking: “Not everyone who says to me “Lord, Lord!” will come into the kingdom of heaven, but he that keeps on doing the will of my Father in heaven.”

Mt. 12:50 (and parallel, Mk.3:35) – Jesus speaking -- “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, this one is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Jn.4:34 – Jesus in Samaria -- “My food is that I continually may do the will of the one that sent me, and that I may complete his work.”

Jn.6:38 – Jesus again -- “I have come down from heaven, not to do what I want, but to do the will of the one that sent me.”

Eph.6:6 -- “as Christ's slaves, doing God's will with your whole self.”

Heb.10:7,9 – quoting Jesus, “I come to do your will.”

Heb.10:36 -- “You all have need of endurance, in order that when/since you have done God's will, you may obtain the promise.”

Heb.13:21 -- “He will establish you all, in everything good, for doing his will.”

I Jn.2:17 -- “The world is passing away, and so are its passions; but the person who keeps on doing God's will remains forever.”

Of course, to “do God's will,” one must know what that “will” is. And this is the key. “God's will” is not a subject for debates, but a pattern for the life of his people! Actually, the whole New Testament is the “instruction manual” for that project: the demonstration – by the people he has called and assembled -- of God's mercy and gracious provision for his
creation. The instruction manual is provided for a very simple purpose: Jn.7:17 -- "If anyone wants to DO his will, he will know about the teaching, whether it is from God." Might it possibly be a corollary, that a person who does not purpose to "do his will" can not know? (There is a similar flavor in James' advice about asking for wisdom-- 1:5).

Paul described it to the Ephesian brethren (1:9-10), "God let us in on the mystery of his will -- he set it all out in him (Christ) -- his plan for the consummation of all time -- that absolutely everything be summed up under the headship of Christ -- things in heaven and things on earth!" and later reiterated, (5:17) "So don't be unwise, but keep working to understand what the will of the Lord is!"

He prayed for the Colossians (1:9-10), "asking that you all may be filled with the certain knowledge of his will .... so that you may behave in a manner worthy of the Lord, in order to please him fully!"

He gave the Roman readers a classic description of what should be integral to metanoia (W.S.#6) in 12:2 -- "Do not continue to pattern yourselves by this age, but be continuously, completely changed by the renewal of your mind, so that you all will recognize what God's will is -- what is good, and pleasing, and complete."

If that doesn't send us scurrying back to the textbook (the New Testament), I don't know what will.

To be sure, incidents of specific individual guidance are occasionally mentioned, as are callings to a particular task. These must not be ignored, but tested and confirmed in the Body. We are called to enable one another's assignments. Please note also that the designation "God's will" is never applied, in any New Testament text, to any form of disaster, disease, or disobedience! Such things will happen in the world we live in -- and will affect the lives of the faithful as well as the unfaithful. But in no instance are they represented as caused by "the will of God!" God's will is that we respond/react to whatever life brings, in faithfulness.

In I Pet.4:19, for example, "according to God's will", grammatically, could link either to "suffering" or to "entrust themselves." Contextually, (see vv.12-16), the latter choice seems more consistent with the rest of the passage. This is one of many reasons why one should be extremely wary of quoted "verses" removed from their original context. Isolated "verses" are so easily twisted to win an argument or "prove" a point!

I believe that it is the "will of God" that his people quit wrangling over how that "will" applies to other people, and get about the business of incarnating the answer to Paul's prayer "asking that you all may be filled with the certain knowledge of his will ....in order to please him fully!"

Amen, Lord! THY WILL BE DONE!!!!

Word Study #13 – To be “Perfect”

The English word “perfect” carries many different ideas. To illustrate: When parents enfold a newborn child in their first "group hug", gingerly unwrap the precious bundle to marvel at the tiny fingers and toes, and exclaim "He/she's perfect!" -- nobody argues. When the school child proudly brings home a "perfect" paper he is praised. Later, with considerably less delight, they may refer to their teenager as a "perfect storm!" -- and later still, he may land the "perfect" job, for which he is "perfectly" qualified, and find the "perfect" match with whom to start the whole process all over again. In each case, a different idea is in view.

Ironically, it is the sense of the "perfect" (without error) schoolwork -- the only concept that is not represented among the Greek words used in the New Testament -- upon which people have become fixated when pontificating about the “Christian life”. Too often, it then becomes a weapon of theological warfare, ignoring the fact that none of the seven different words that traditional versions have rendered “perfect” carries any implication of being totally free of error!

Akribos (from akriboo) refers to “accurate information, careful investigation, thorough understanding.” Luke uses it to describe his own research (1:3), Priscilla and Aquila correcting the errors in the teaching of Apollos (Ac.18:26), and legal investigations (Ac.23:15, 23:20, and 24:22) by government officials.

Artios -- “suitable, a perfect example of its kind, full-grown, mature” -- is used only once in the New Testament (II Tim.3:17), of the maturity Paul sets before Timothy as a goal.

Epiteleo -- “to pay in full, to discharge one's duty, to complete, finish, or accomplish a task” -- is translated “perfect” only twice (II Cor.7:1, and Gal 3:3). In other contexts, the translations are more in accord with its definitions, especially those referring to the completing of a task (Rom.15:28, II Cor.8: 6 and 8, and Phil.1:6).

Katartizo -- “to adjust, put in order, restore, mend, furnish, equip, prepare,” involves the process of teaching -- an important component of maturity. It is even used classically of the setting of a broken or disjointed limb! Jesus uses it of a disciple becoming “like his teacher” (Lk.6:40); Paul includes it in his instructions for the growth of the Body in Corinth (I Cor.1:10, II Cor.13:11) and his intention to add to his teaching in Thessalonica (I Thess. 3:10). God himself is doing the teaching in
Heb.13:21 and 1 Pet.5:10: “on-the-job training” of the very best kind!

By far the most common among the references are two related words: teleios (adj.) -- “complete, entire, whole; fully constituted, valid; full-grown, married; accomplished, trained, qualified; absolute or final; serious or dangerous (of illness); and unblemished (as of an animal for sacrifice.)” and teleioo (v.) -- “to make perfect, complete, or accomplish; to execute or make valid a legal document; to be successful; to reach maturity (fruit, animals, or people); to be fulfilled or brought to consummation (a prophecy or promise).”

I have tentatively sorted the passages where these latter words appear into three groups on the strength of these definitions (definitely open to challenge!): those that refer to a task or purpose being finished or accomplished; those that refer to maturity; and those that indicate completeness, validity, or fulfillment.

Jesus, for example, referred to “finishing” the particular healing work in which he was involved, when he was warned to leave town because of Herod’s plotting (Lk.13:32). In Phil.3:12, Paul speaks of God’s work in him not being yet “finished”. James 1:4 refers to wisdom “finishing” its work in shaping God’s people, and Hebrews 9:11 to the “better tabernacle” than the elaborate tent in the desert. In most of these, the word “complete” would work equally well.

Frequently, “complete” is contrasted with “partial” or “in progress”, and refers to a goal that is still before us – James 2:22 refers to “faithfulness being made complete by action”; I Jn.4:17 to love being “made complete”, Heb.11:40 to the faithful folks of the past being “made complete” only together with the followers of Jesus. In his prayer (Jn.17:23) Jesus asks that his disciples be “made complete” in unity with each other, with himself, and with the Father. And of course there is the most familiar statement in I Cor.13:10, that when all is “complete”, the partial will be no longer needed.

The greater portion of the references refer to maturity. Paul frequently admonished his readers to “grow up” -- a constant, lifetime assignment for us all. Clearly that is the sense of Jesus’ statement in Mt.5:48, in the context of his teaching that the attitudes and behavior of his disciples are expected to be patterned after the Father, rather than the local culture, as a child learns to mimic his adult role models. Paul, in Eph.4:13, Phil.3:15, and Col.1:28 and 4:12, incorporates the same idea of working/growing toward maturity, and John (I Jn.4:18) highlights the results of that maturing process: fear being replaced by total confidence in the love of God.

Heb.2:10 and 5:9 suggest that maturity may have been a process even for Jesus himself, as our forerunner. This may also include the sense of establishing his qualifications for the work of conforming us to his own image. Please note, to think of Jesus “maturing” is not to suggest that he was ever less than the earthly manifestation of our holy God. But also remember, he did deign to be born and reared as a person. I refuse to enter the argument as to whether he ever had a normal childhood spat with his brothers. To insist that he could not, however, is to miss the meaning of teleios altogether, as well as to deny his total identification with our human condition. I do think this indicates that in our quest for the maturity to which we are called, we need not categorize immaturity as “sinful” or wrong or evil. It’s simply what a dear friend used to call “a No Parking zone.”

Note also that maturity is never represented as an instantaneous achievement. “Mature” looks different at age 10 – or 20 – or 50 – or 70, physically, socially, and spiritually. Jesus and the faithful of historic times are the only ones for whom it is spoken of as an accomplished fact.

For the rest of us, “Nobody’s perfect” must describe a goal, not an excuse: a motivation, not a lame apology. It is our privilege to declare with brother Paul:

“Not that I’ve already arrived, or already have been made complete (teleios) – but I’m striving intensely to take possession (of that for which) I was taken-possession-of by Christ Jesus” (Phil.3:12), and later (v.15) “Anyone who is mature, (teleios) must have this mind-set.”

Keep on keeping on!

Word Study #14 -- “Humility”

It’s certainly true that we/you’re not “perfect” -- but we/you’re not scum, either!

It must cause real distress for our gracious Lord, having chosen, called and redeemed “a people” to populate and demonstrate his Kingdom, when he sees those people, instead of rejoicing in that calling and buckling down to work at it, preferring to wallow in lamentations about their self-diagnosed “unworthiness,” and proclaim themselves to be “wretches” and “worms”, instead of Kingdom citizens personally selected by the King of Kings!

It's all over our hymnody: “such a worm as I,” “guilty, vile, and helpless we,” “false and full of sin I am,” “saved a wretch like me” … and so on and on.
But it's NOT in the New Testament! And as such, it is dishonoring to the Lord who has called us! Paul admonished the Colossian brethren (1:12) rather, to “Joyfully keep giving thanks to the Father, who **qualified** you all for a share in the inheritance of his people!” Do you really intend to call brother Paul a liar? Or when Jesus himself says of the faithful, (Rev.3:4) “They will walk with me in white, because **they are worthy**,” is he mistaken?

I don't think so.

Some call it “humility;” I “humbly” submit that a better word would be “falsehood”!

*Tapeinos (adj.), tapeinoo(v.), and tapeinophrosune(n.),* the words usually translated “humility” or “to humble”, are indeed commended as attitudes and behavior becoming for the people of God. But the actual meaning of the words is poles apart from their usual demeaning English connotations.

*Tapeinos* was originally a geographical word, used of “low-lying” land, or low water in a river or pond. Astronomically, it referred to stars near the horizon; and physically, to people of short stature. From there, its usage morphed into ideas of powerlessness, poverty, weakness, or a lack of prestige. In a moral sense, it could have either good or bad connotations – probably depending upon the perspective of the speaker.

*Tapeinoo*, the verb form, indicates a decrease in size or influence, fasting or abstinence of any kind, as well as humiliation or abasement.

*Tapeinophrosune* – with the addition of a suffix taken from the verb *phroneo* (to have understanding, to be wise or prudent, to be sane, to know by experience, to purpose or direct one's attention, to be in possession of one's senses) – directed the implication to a person's deliberate attitude of mind.

The New Testament frequently contrasts “humbled” with “exalted”. In Mary's song, for example (Lk.1:51-53) she refers to the “putting down” of the “mighty” with the exaltation of the “lowly.” Jesus uses a similar comparison (Mt.18:4 and 23:12, and parallels in Lk.18:14 and 14:11) of “humbling oneself” -- *tapeino* -- leading to “exaltation” -- *hupso*.

This appears to be what has led some folks to conclude that they are being asked to adopt a stance of groveling, self-deprecating worthlessness, and (proudly!) to label it “humility”! They fail to notice that *tapeinoo* is used of Jesus himself (Phil.2:8), and Jesus never pretended to think he was worthless! Paul’s point is that Jesus deliberately chose to forgo the privileged position that was rightfully his. He focused on Jesus' absolute obedience to the Father's will: simply the direct opposite of self-promotion.

A similar healthier tone is seen in the Isaiah prophecy quoted by John the Baptist (Lk.3:5). The scene is one of road construction, where hilltops are scraped off (*tapeinoo*) and valleys filled (*hupso*) to create a level super-highway for the arrival of the King! This was a common practice in antiquity. It is leveling that is called-for --- not degradation!

Although he did not use the word, a similar attitude is evident in Jesus' instructions to his disciples in Mt.20:25: “You all know that the rulers of the nations (Gentiles) dominate them, and their great ones wield oppressive power over them; but **it shall not be that way among you all!**” and in Mt.23:12, “You are not to be called Rabbi, for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And don't call any one on earth Father, for your one Father is in heaven. And do not be called Leaders, because your one Leader is Christ.” **Jesus himself is the only superior**, among his people: he has expressly forbidden human hierarchy! How sad, that these instructions are so universally ignored!

James, in his instructions about the rich and poor in the church (chapter 2) becomes quite specific in denouncing status and favoritism in the brotherhood. Paul went to great lengths in his letter to Colossae (chapter 2) to point out the “false humility” of various pagan practices, which had been touted as representing some sort of superior “spirituality” (does that sound contemporary?!). He makes the point that such exercises are only a form of showing-off, and have no value for Kingdom living.

In his farewell to the elders from Ephesus (Ac.20:13-35) Paul listed the characteristics of his service among them, which he described as “humility” -- his faithful teaching, his self-support, and his honesty before them all. “Lowness” (*tapeinophrosune*), an assumption of completely level standing, is listed along with gentleness, patience and forbearance, as needful for healthy relationships in the Body (Eph.4:2).

I like the motto I copied from a friend's desk:

> “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less!”

Deliberate focus upon Kingdom affairs and interests rather than our own self-interest – obedience modeled after the Lord Jesus -- the absence of posturing and pretentious behavior -- are worth a lot more in the service of our King, than abject servitude and songs about “wretches” and “worms”!
The observation may be coarse and ungrammatical, but it is nevertheless gloriously true:

“God don't make no junk!”

We are created and called to be servants – even children! -- of the King, citizens of the Kingdom in which there is only one superior – the King himself – and the citizens serve him, and one another, in the true “humility” of mutual respect, honor, and love.

Word Study #15 --“The Image of God”

The word *eikon*, “image,” is one where the Greek and English concepts are unusually parallel. Historically, it referred to “a likeness, picture, or statue; one’s reflection in a mirror; a personal description; a representation or imaginary form; a pattern, archetype, similitude or comparison.”

The whole idea of “the image of God”, of course, derives from the Genesis account of the creation. Interestingly, this event is never mentioned in the context of “image” in the New Testament, where Jesus is the only person to whom the term “image of God” is applied (II Cor.4:4 and Col.1:15), and his people are being re-created in his image (Rom.8:29, I Cor.15:49, II Cor.3:18, Col.3:10). Nevertheless, the creation account includes significant elements that deserve our attention.

When Scripture speaks of the creation of “Man”, the word used is *anthropos*, a generic term which refers to the species, not to gender. The term includes both *aner* (man) and *gune* (woman). It might better be translated “people” except that it occurs also in the singular. Sometimes “person” works, but not always. On Creation Morning, when the Creator spoke everything into existence, he is quoted (in the Septuagint – “LXX” -- the third century BC translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek) in Gen.1:26, “Let us make man according to our image...”. “Man” uses the singular form of *anthropos*, therefore referring to the species (the next phrases refer to “them”). The plurals “us” and “our” with which God refers to himself have often been considered the earliest hint of the concept of the Trinity, although some have treated it as the “royal ‘we’” referring to the English custom which is unlikely. That practice arose many centuries later.

It is not my intention here to get into a technical discussion of the Trinity. That is a game for folks who need complicated theories to enhance their egos! I simply call your attention to the fact that the initial intent was for Man (the species) to function with the unity and mutuality seen in interaction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: varied in function and activity, but perfectly one in purpose and devotion. This idea is developed in greater detail in Citizens of the Kingdom, chapter 2. Sadly, *anthropos*, the species, chose not to cooperate.

The point of what God has been trying to do throughout all the ages since Creation, is to reveal himself – to, in, and through his people. The same theme appears in Jesus' final recorded prayer for his disciples, in John 17: “that they may be one ... so that the world may know ...”

Please note that none of this is directed to or about individuals. No one person, however faithful, is capable of reflecting fully the image of the Triune God! We are not big enough, wise enough, nor yet sufficiently “conformed to his image.” Only by functioning as one, as our Sovereign prayed, can we begin to become what he intends, and “bear his image.”

Outside of Genesis, virtually all of the rest of the Old Testament occurrences of *eikon*, as well as those in Revelation, refer to idols and idolatry. Having totally missed – or rejected – the calling to reflect the image of their Creator, people created “images” of their own design, incorporating characteristics (power, ferocity, fecundity, etc.) which they hoped thereby to acquire. In Romans 1, Paul describes the tragic downward spiral that resulted. Jesus, too, described efforts to turn people back to their created purpose, having sent a long stream of messengers and prophets (see Mt.23:34 and parallels), until finally he came in person, to walk among men and create a demonstration project of his intentions.

The encounter between Jesus and his challengers (the only Synoptic use of *eikon*--Mt.22:20, Mk.12:16, Lk.20:24) over the payment of the Roman taxes (actually, tribute-money – the fee imposed by a conqueror upon vassal states, symbolic of their submission) is instructive. It combines several concepts of “image.” In ancient empires, as in modern times, coinage was designed bearing the “image” of a ruler – who (more overtly in those days) frequently insisted upon being worshiped as a divinity. It is partly for this reason that “money-changers” were required in the temple courts: money bearing an idolatrous image could not be used in a “holy” place. The religious potentates who accosted Jesus on that occasion should not have had such a thing as a Roman coin in their possession! It was “unclean”! Note that Jesus did not have one. This is further, seldom-noticed evidence of his opponents' duplicity.
The Lord's question is probing and perceptive: “Whose image is this?” The ensuing conversation reveals the cultural convention that the “image” is also a sign of ownership. It belongs to Caesar, and to his system. Let him have it. But don't stop there! Let God also be given what belongs to him – what bears his image – ourselves, and our very life. Is it too much of a stretch, then, to suggest that his people, the bearers of his image, are in fact the “coinage” of the Kingdom, intended to be used for the King's purposes?

“The image of God” refers not only to our provenance and ownership, but also to our destiny! Please notice: all of these assurances and admonitions are addressed in the plural. We will “arrive” together, or not at all.

Romans 8:29: Those whom the Lord has called, are intended (or, if you prefer, “destined”) to become “conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus – who is himself (II Cor.4:4) “the image of God.” Paul repeats this designation in the letter to Colossae (1:15) “he (Jesus) is the image of the unseen God!”

Earlier, he had explained to the folks at Corinth (I Cor.15:47-49), “The first person was from the dust of the earth; the second person was from heaven. “Dust people” are like the dust-person; and heavenly people are like the one from heaven. Just as we bore the image of the “man of dust”, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.”

This is the transformation that begins when people enlist in the Kingdom, and continues until its consummation. “The one who initiated a good work among you all, will keep working on it until it's complete at the Day of Christ Jesus.” (Phil.1:6). It requires our cooperation – Paul frequently speaks of “putting off” the old ways and “putting on” the new, as one changes one's clothing. Typical of the shifting responsibility is the passage in Col.3:10: “Put on the new person,” he directs – an aorist (single, snapshot action) middle (verb voice in which the subject both acts and is affected by the action) form -- “which is continually being renewed” -- a present (continuous) passive (the subject is acted upon by an external force or person) participle -- “in understanding, after the image of the one who created it.” The choice of direction is ours; the heavy lifting is in the capable hands of our Lord and King.

“And we all, with faces that have been uncovered, reflecting the Lord's radiance, are being transformed (another present passive) into his image.”

Amen, Lord! Let it be so!

Word Study #16 – “Fear not!”

Of all the imperatives in the New Testament, it may well be that this one stands in the sharpest contrast to the voices that constantly bombard our consciousness. Economic, political, medical, social, and yes, even “religious” spokesmen, of every persuasion, assail their already apprehensive audiences with the same message: “Be afraid; be very afraid!”

Jesus, in contrast, as well as virtually all of the supernatural participants in his recorded history, consistently greet worried or startled people with a reassuring, “Fear not!” “Don’t be afraid!”

How have these encouraging words become so universally ignored among those who claim to represent him? Indeed, the students in my husband’s class at a “Christian” high school, some years ago, overwhelmingly gave “fear of the consequences” as the primary reason for their commitment to the Lord! and a fellow teacher at the same school who called himself an “evangelist” questioned the validity of my own conversion when I said that I had never been “afraid of meeting God”! This is not only tragic – it is a shameful misrepresentation of the one who commissioned us to spread his “good news”!

Even “before the beginning” the heavenly messengers’ greetings to Zachariah, to Mary, and to Joseph, were the same: “Don’t be afraid!” Zachariah’s prophecy at the time of John’s birth referred to the joyous prospect of serving God “without fear”(Lk.1:70), safe from the harassment of enemies; and the announcement of Jesus’ birth to the frightened shepherds began with “Don’t be afraid! I am bringing you good news!”

Jesus’ ministry was frequently punctuated with the same phrase: admonishing his followers not to fear their persecutors (Mt.10:26,28, and Lk.12:4,7); reminding them of their great value in God’s sight (Mt.10:31, Lk.12:7); reassuring Jairus about his daughter (Mk.5:36, Lk.8:50); promising the gift of participation in his Kingdom (Lk.12:32); and in his final bequest to the disciples before his death, the legacy of his peace (Jn.14:27).

One outstanding event appears in Mt.14:25, Mk.6:48-50, and Jn.6:19-21. The scene is a ferocious storm on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples are terrified at the sight of Jesus walking toward them across the waves. His greeting combines two of his “trademark” statements: “Don’t be afraid – I AM!” (The next post will explore the latter part in greater detail. Here, I will simply remind you that “I AM” was God’s Burning Bush statement, a clear reminder of who Jesus is.) It is only after they recognized him and received him into the boat, that the storm was stilled.
Luke chose to highlight a different encounter on the lake (5:4-10), one that contemporary “evangelists” would do well to emulate. Overwhelmed by the huge catch of fish (quite an extravagant “thank you for the use of your boat!”), Peter reacted in the way many preachers expect (or demand) of their hearers: “Leave me, Lord! I’m a no-good sinner!” But far from pouncing on that “confession” and flogging him with it, (notice: that was Peter’s diagnosis, not the Lord’s!), Jesus replied in a way more in keeping with his character: “Don’t be afraid! (Don’t worry about it!) I have a job for you!” What a gracious welcome!

Matthew records the same phrase addressed to the frightened disciples on the occasion of the Transfiguration. Matthew (28:5) and Mark (16:6) quote the messengers’ address to the women at the tomb after the Resurrection, and Matthew also has Jesus himself repeating the same thing.

Twice in the Acts narrative, in Corinth (Ac.18:9-10) Jesus’ appearance to Paul, and just before the shipwreck (27:24) a “messenger of God” delivered the same message, “Don’t be afraid!” seems to have been almost like an authentication that a message was indeed from the Lord. That is how John seems to have recognized that his visitor in Rv.1:17 was Jesus himself. (It was combined with “I AM” there, as well.)

Even in contexts where fear is a very normal reaction to the perceived peril of a situation, (e.g., the storm at sea, etc.) Jesus consistently seeks to allay, not to induce, their fears. There is only one context in which he does not do so: the situations where the religious rulers, scribes and Pharisees, Herod, and even Pilate, are represented as fearing either Jesus himself, or the crowds who followed him, as they pursued their nefarious plans.

We cannot, of course, neglect the handful of passages that refer to the “fear” of God. Unfortunately, ever since Aeschylus (5th century BC), the same word, phobeomai, has also been used to refer to the reverence or respect due to a deity, a government official, or even the master of a slave. This sense of the word also appears in Philo (1st century) and Plutarch (2nd century AD), as well as the Septuagint. (cf. Bauer’s lexicon – see appendix.) The context usually makes clear the intent: some examples appear in Lk.1:50, 18:2-4, and 23:40; Acts 10 (referring to Cornelius); several sermons, and some of the epistles. “Those who fear [reverence] God” was a frequent reference to godly Gentiles. It is a gross distortion to represent these as advocating that one should be afraid of God!

The noun forms of “fear” deal primarily with either “respect” or the normal human reaction to peril, with a couple of major exceptions. In Romans 8:15, Paul reminds his readers, “You all didn’t receive a spirit of slavery, (that would take you) into fear, but you received a spirit of being made (adopted as) sons!”, and in the same vein, Hebrews 2:14-15 affirms that through his death, Jesus once and for all destroyed the one who had the power of death, and rescued those who by fear of death, had been held in slavery all their lives.

As an old man, John sums up the faithful followers’ point of view at the end of his beautiful treatise on the love of God (I John 4:18-19): “Fear doesn’t exist in love; but a mature love throws out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who is afraid has not been made mature in love. We keep on loving because he loved us first.” At whatever level of maturity we find ourselves, this is the goal.

Faithful representation of the Lord Jesus will always seek to alleviate, never to instill fear. This poor world has more than enough fear already. An accurate presentation of “the Gospel” is the same today as it was to the terrified shepherds on the hillside so long ago: “Don’t be afraid! I am bringing you Good News!”

It is a message our world desperately needs! Proclaim it faithfully!

Word Study # 17 – “I AM”

To understand the impact of Jesus’ use of “I AM” (ego eimi), you will need a bit of linguistics and a bit of history. Many languages, including Greek (but not English), “conjugate” all of their verbs: that is, the subject, “I, you, he, etc.” is inherent in the form of the verb, and does not require an expressed pronoun as a subject. In ordinary speech, “I am” is adequately expressed by the verb, eimi, standing alone. A pronominal subject would be used only for deliberate emphasis.

Historically, due to the account of Moses’ encounter with God at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3), “I AM” (with the pronoun) became traditionally recognized as the “name” of the Deity. Somewhere along the line – I recently heard the suggestion that it may have been in order to avoid breaking the third commandment – people were forbidden to pronounce
the “sacred” name at all. Consequently, the use of the first person singular pronoun was forbidden to “ordinary people”. The verb stands alone in the vast majority of Biblical references, even after the translation of the Old Testament into the Greek Septuagint, though it does appear, rarely, where strong emphasis is needed.

In light of the identification with God implied by the phrase, it is no surprise that the Gospel of John contains the greatest number of incidents where Jesus deliberately used that forbidden phrase. John’s entire prologue is a paean of praise clearly identifying the Lord Jesus with the eternal God.

The first occurrence of “I AM” (I have used capital letters where the pronoun is included), and probably the earliest chronologically, is in Jesus’ conversation with the woman at Jacob’s well in Samaria (Jn.4:26), where he matter-of-factly declares his identity as the promised Anointed One. She obviously got the message, as did the townspeople she recruited!

Four times, Jesus uses it in combination with his other “trademark”, “Don’t be afraid!” – in the storm at sea (Mt.14:26, Mk.6:50, Jn.6:20), and when he identifies himself to John (Rev.1:17). To his frightened followers, the recognition (or reminder) of who Jesus is, becomes a great comfort, as it was in his Resurrection appearance (Lk.24:39).

For his opponents, on the other hand, it only incites or increases their anger and determination to get rid of him (see the discourses in Jn.6:41-51 and 8:21-29). Sometimes these conversations are interpreted to imply that the hearers were confused, but here I must beg to differ. Both interviews are peppered with “I AM” statements (6:41, 6:48, 8:23 twice, 8:24, 8:28, 8:57). They knew exactly what he was saying: they simply chose not to accept it. This is clear from the conclusion at the end of John 8 (58-59), as they threaten to stone him.

The same is true of the trial scenes in Mk.14:62 and Lk.22:70. Jesus’ “I AM” statement is the capstone of their case against him – and he and they both know it. Although the phrase does not appear in Jn.5:18, it is clear that the point has been made: “The Jews were seeking to kill him, because he not only was breaking the Sabbath, but was saying that his own Father was God, thus equating himself with God!” See also Jn.10:30-33: “The Father and I are one!” Again, the Jews picked up stones to stone him… and when asked why, they replied, “We’re not stoning you about any good deeds, but for blasphemy, because you, being human, make yourself out to be God!!” And indeed that would have been heresy, had it not been absolutely true!

The use of “I AM” as an identifier is also clear in Jesus’ warning to his disciples in Mk.13:6 and Lk.21:8, against falling for impostors who would come pretending to his position. (“World-ending” is an ancient profession!)

Perhaps the most vivid of the scenes with his opponents is Jesus’ encounter with the posse that came to arrest him (Jn.18:5, 7, 8). He calmly greets them, and inquires what they want; and at his simple “ego eimi” – “I AM”, “they backed off and fell to the ground!” Please note: the Lord of Glory could not have been “captured” without his own permission!

The other major block of references where Jesus’ “I AM” statements are quoted, contain a predicate nominative. These too are instructive.

Jn.6:35 “I AM the Bread of Life.” Bread has been spoken of as the most basic sustenance. It was God’s provision for the ancient Hebrews in the desert, and now again in the first-century wilderness.

Jn.8:12 “I AM the Light of the world.” The first element of creation, light has always been associated with God’s presence and his ways.

Jn.10:7, 9 “I AM the Door.” The door to a sheepfold provided both access and protection. A responsible shepherd was said to sleep across the doorway, to protect his flock from predators.

Jn.10:11, 14 “I AM the good shepherd.” Old Testament prophets had berated the official “shepherds” for abusing the flock for their own gain. Ezekiel described God’s determination to take over the job, and Jesus proclaims himself to be the final fulfillment of that promise.

Jn.14:6 “I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” Each of these is worth a separate study.

“Way”, hodos, may refer to a road, a journey, a direction, or a manner of life

“Truth” aletheia, indicates the opposite of falsehood; reality; or an actual event.

“Life” (zoe), is one of three words translated this way; the only one that may (but need not) have an “everlasting” or “eternal” dimension. It may indicate simply being alive, but may also refer to one’s livelihood, or subsistence, or even be a term of endearment.

Jn.11:25 “I AM the Resurrection and the Life.” Martha had relegated resurrection to the future consummation, but Jesus does not. He goes on to explain that it is his very presence that confers Life (zoe).

Jn.15 “I AM the Vine.” Prophets (Isaiah 3, 5, and Jeremiah 12) had applied the “vineyard” figure to the people of Israel. Jesus’ parables also had critiqued their management (Mt.21, Mk.12, Lk.20), and warned of the corrective action of God. His teaching here explains the work of the true caretaker, as well as redefining the Vine (himself).
The “I AM” statements in Revelation are all focused on Jesus’ all-encompassing constancy: Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last (1:17, 21:6, 22:13), in varying combinations. An interesting slant is found in 22:16, where Jesus refers to himself as the “root and offspring of David.” Genealogy buffs know that a mere person is one or the other – not both. But it is the continuous, present tense that characterizes the Lord Jesus. This is also clearly revealed in the statement itself: “I AM” is a simple present tense. This is also seen in Jesus’ own quoting of the original Burning Bush statement in Mt.22:31 and Mk.12:26-27.

In a very real sense, both past and future are irrelevant, and consequently no cause for inordinate concern, to people who are joined to the only One qualified to use that simple yet profound declaration – “I AM.”

Word Study #18 – Witness

Few and fortunate are the faithful followers of Jesus who have not, at some point, been subjected to a massive guilt-trip by an enthusiastic, self-styled preacher-“evangelist”, roundly scolding them for the inadequacy of their “witnessing.” This peremptory judgment is usually followed by an offer of reprieve, in exchange for submitting to lessons on “effective witnessing.” The perpetrator of the guilt-trip then proceeds to outline a series of propositions (complete with chapter-and-verse proof-texts) which are to be carefully committed to memory, and retrieved on cue to demolish the defenses of a hapless target, thus fulfilling one’s supposed duty to “obey the Great Commission.” I am quite certain that what the Lord had in mind when giving that assignment was quite different from this (only slightly) more civilized version of collecting scalps! The only thing sadder than this abuse of the clear admonition of Scripture, is its deleterious effect on both the gullible “student” and his (not-so-unsuspecting) victim.

Let’s get one thing straight: Jesus did tell his disciples (Lk.24:48), “You all are witnesses of these things (the fulfillment of ancient prophecies by means of his resurrection)”, and later (Ac.1:8) “You all will be my witnesses.” Both of these statements are cast, not in the imperative (command) mood, but in the indicative: a simple statement of fact. A person who has observed or participated in any event is, by definition, a witness.

“Witness” and “testimony”, both translations of martus (the person) and its related words, martureo and marturomai (verbs), marturia, and marturion (nouns referring to the content of the testimony), are, first of all, legal, judicial, courtroom words. In antiquity, as in the first century, and still today, it is incumbent upon a “witness” that he report, as accurately as he is able, what he has personally experienced or observed – no more and no less. He does not volunteer information, but simply answers questions. Mere “hearsay” evidence is peremptorily thrown out of court!

In his first letter, John outlines this principle ably and succinctly (1:3) – “It’s what we have seen and heard, that we are reporting to you!” Luke, who did not have the privilege of first-hand experience, says (1:2) that in his account, he relied upon the “original eyewitnesses” for his information. He does not call himself a witness, but a researcher-organizer of the testimony of others. Paul, on the other hand, repeatedly refers to his own experience, in both oral and written testimony. There are New Testament accounts of purported “witnesses” whose “testimony” was pre-programmed by others: the false witnesses enlisted by the ecclesiastical authorities to testify at Jesus’ trial (Mt.26:59-60; Mk.14:55-58); the false report concocted by those same authorities to deny his resurrection (Mt.28:11-15); and the men brought in for the lynching of Stephen (Ac.6:11-15). Which sort of company do you prefer to keep?

More commendable uses of martureo and its derivatives in the New Testament fall loosely into three groups: simple evidence of a fact, or of a person’s reputation; verification of Jesus’ identity; and reports of his resurrection. Notable among the first group are: the requirement that two or three witnesses must agree in order for their testimony to be accepted (Mt.18:16, Il Cor.13:1, Heb.10:28); Jesus’ instructions to people to give evidence of his having healed them (Mt.8:4, Lk.5:14, and Mk.1:44); and the integrity (or lack thereof) of individuals or groups (I Thess.2:10, Tit.1:13, Mk.6:11, and Lk.9:5). This idea may also figure in Jesus’ word to his followers regarding their own prospect of being hauled into court (Mk.13:9, Lk.21:13). Even with their lives on the line, they are told not to plan out their “testimony” in advance. By the Holy Spirit, he promises to guide it as needed.

Jesus frequently offered evidence for his claims regarding his relationship with the Father: Jn.5:31-37, 8:12-18, and 10:25, and 37-38. Everything he did was intended to serve as that evidence/“witness”. This is reminiscent of the admonition attributed to Francis of Assisi, “Preach the Gospel at all times; use words only when necessary.” In Jn.15:26-27, both the promised Holy Spirit and the disciples themselves are entrusted with the same responsibility to give that evidence: “because you all are with me from the beginning.” (Are “lessons in witnessing” a substitute for having spent time with Jesus?) And Jesus himself reminded Nicodemus (Jn.3:11) that his own testimony dealt with what he knew and had
experienced.

The overwhelming majority of NT references to “bearing witness” (for anyone other than Jesus himself) concern the glorious news of his Resurrection! This was the reason Peter gave for needing to choose as a replacement for Judas someone who (1) had been with Jesus, and (2) could testify that he is alive! (Ac.1:22). Clearly, this was the central burden of the New Testament sermons (Ac.2:24,32; 3:15, 5:32, 10:39,41; 13:31). It was the message that Festus found so confusing (Ac.25:19), and against which the ecclesiastical authorities campaigned so vigorously: “Jesus is alive!!!!”

Still today, this is the source and the content of what we as his people have to offer to all who are still living in darkness, pain, or fear. Everything else—healings (Ac.3:11-15), changed lives (19-20), the consummated Kingdom (20-21) – is secondary to the fact that Jesus is alive and active among his people! As during his earthly ministry, it is his observable activity among us that serves as testimony (evidence) that the message is true! In the face of dire threats from the temple hierarchy, Peter and John (Ac.4:20) replied, “We cannot keep from speaking of what we have seen and heard!” Neither can we.

Faithful “witness” to our living Lord has nothing whatsoever to do with memorized “answers to questions that nobody is asking.” It has everything to do with our allowing him to create among us a fellowship (see W.S.#8) where his Life can be seen! Genuine “witness” is simply giving first-hand reports of that Life – when folks see it, and ask.

“You all ARE my witnesses!” (Lk.24:48).

Word Study #19 – The Kingdom (Part 1)

I have chosen to divide this study into three parts: one a generalized overview of Gospel references, another of more detailed examination of a few points, and the third, of its final consummation.

One outstanding contributing factor to the difference between an observable, practical view of Christianity and the theoretical “pie-in-the-sky-bye-and-bye” version is the understanding that a group promulgates of the Kingdom of God. Specifically, do they speak of it primarily in the present or the future tense?

Both of these occur in the gospel accounts, and elsewhere in the New Testament, but the Biblical balance is skewed heavily in the direction of the Kingdom as a present reality. Notice the prevalence of Jesus’ statements and his instructions to his disciples to echo them: “The Kingdom of God is (present tense) among you,” or, “The Kingdom of God has arrived” – eggiken – (perfect tense: a past event whose effect continues in the present and perhaps beyond). A few examples are in Lk.17:20-21; Mt.4:17; Mk.1:15; Mt.10:7; Lk.10:9-11.

Even more vivid, although frequently missed by English translators, is Jesus’ response to the hierarchy-types who accused him of a connection with the devil in his casting out of evil spirits, “If I am doing this by the finger [power] of God, then the Kingdom of God has gotten ahead of you!” (Mt.12:28 and Lk.11:20) Ephthasen is the aorist form of phthano, a rarely used word that speaks of one competitor in a race outrunning or overtaking another. The tense here, in both references, is aorist: something that has already happened!

Jesus put it even more plainly in Lk.16:16 and Mt.11:12: “The law and the prophets were (in effect until) John (the Baptist). Since then, the Kingdom of God is being proclaimed!” (present tense). The King has arrived! The Kingdom exists wherever the authority of the King is recognized!

In his inaugural address (Lk.4:18-21), Jesus set forth the principles upon which his Kingdom would operate:

It would be good news to the poor, who had been despised and marginalized by a society that equated riches with God’s approval. (Does that sound familiar?)

He declared that he had been sent to announce (keruxai) release to the captives (explained at least partly in Hebrews 2:15). A “kerux” was a herald: the cultural equivalent of a news anchor – a public messenger of what was presently going on.

He would give sight to the blind (both physically and spiritually) – one of the most frequent manifestations of his power to heal.

He would set at liberty people who had been crushed by oppression (tethrausmenous). This is the only NT use of thrauno, which denotes an utterly helpless and hopeless condition. Tradition has interpreted this, and the earlier reference to “captives”, in a political sense: but Jesus did not. Neither did he postpone any of it to some sort of idyllic future. He rather affirmed, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled (perfect tense) in your hearing!”

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His subsequent teaching – and activity – were simply a practical demonstration of his announced purpose: “proclaiming (keruxai again) the Lord’s accepted time.” (Eniauton refers to any defined period of time.) Interestingly, when messengers come from John the Baptist asking about his identity (Mt.11:5, Lk.7:21), Jesus lists those same elements, with a few additions, as evidence that he is indeed “the one who was to come.”

This same orientation is present in the majority of Jesus’ parables about the Kingdom. Of eleven that he specifically says describe the Kingdom, four are clearly descriptions of present conditions and six contain both present and future elements. Only one – the sheep and goats scene in Mt.25 – focuses on the future, and even that relies on the evidence of the present behavior of those judged. (I have not counted parallels as separate events.) It is helpful to look at these in detail, but that is beyond the scope of this post. We will consider some outstanding elements of these in Part 2.)

Jesus also found it necessary on several occasions to correct prevalent misconceptions about the Kingdom, some of which still persist, uncorrected, among his followers. The scribes, to whom he responded with one of his banquet parables, clearly had “bye-and-bye” in mind when they piously remarked (Lk.14:15), “whoever eats bread in the Kingdom of God is greatly privileged [blessed].” Jesus’ story points out that those invited do not all respond to the gracious invitation (16-24). Even more bluntly, he replies to a group fixated on a future kingdom (Lk.17:20-21), “The Kingdom of God is not coming with meticulous observations. Neither will they say ‘Look, here!’ or “There!’ For look: the Kingdom of God is already among you all!” To those who expected that a final political consummation was imminent (Lk.19:11-24), Jesus gave a reminder that faithfulness (or lack of it) before “the end” governed the eventual outcome. Even after the resurrection, the disciples were still asking, “Lord, is this the time you will re-establish the kingdom of Israel?” (Ac.1:6). Jesus’ reply communicates that their question is missing the point completely: he speaks instead of the gift of the Holy Spirit, who will empower the growth of his Kingdom among them.

During his time with them, Jesus had admonished his followers (Mt.6:33) to “keep seeking” for the Kingdom of God. This is a present imperative. And like most of his instructions, it is addressed in the plural – it is a mutual, group effort, not a lonely, individual quest. He encouraged one scribe, who had responded thoughtfully in a discussion, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God” (Mk.12:34).

He told his disciples that they were privileged to have “the mysteries of the Kingdom of God” revealed to them, when he explained the meaning of parables (Mt.13:11, Lk.8:10), and urged them to dispose of anything that would hinder their participation in the Kingdom (Mk.9:47 and parallels).

There are similar indications in various epistles, of the contemporary nature of the calling to faithfulness. More of those later.

However, there are definitely aspects of the Kingdom that are not yet realized. Jesus also spoke (Mt.25 and elsewhere) of “when the Son of Man comes in his glory and the Father’s”, and several times of the Kingdom as an inheritance to be anticipated. Someone has characterized this apparent ambiguity as “living between the already and the not-yet.” Faithful followers must maintain this healthy tension.

We will consider a few specifics in more detail in the next study.

Word Study #20 – The Kingdom, Part 2

One critical element necessary for the understanding of Jesus’ references to the Kingdom is found in the passage commonly labeled “the Lord’s Prayer.” Although it is reasonable to question whether Jesus ever intended it to become a memorized, rote recitation (I don’t think he did), by its grammatical structure, the prayer sheds an interesting light on the concept of the Kingdom. Parallelism of structure is a frequently used tool in many cultures, both ancient and modern, for illustrating or emphasizing interlocking relationships.

Three phrases here are identical in form:

- **hagiostheto to onoma sou**
- **eltheto he basileia sou**
- **genetheto to thelema sou**

The first element – the verb – in each phrase is a third-person aorist passive imperative. There exists no such form in English, and consequently all attempts to translate it fall far short. In English, we assume the subject of an imperative verb to be the second-person – “you” – the individual being addressed. A third person imperative requires a stated subject – in
this case, the noun – “name” (onoma), “kingdom” (basileia), and “will” (thelema). But then there is a problem: how to represent the verb. Some have rendered it “may” or “let” this happen – but that is far too weak, carrying a wishful-thinking flavor (for which Greek would have used the optative, rather than the imperative mood), or a request that the hearer “allow” it to happen (which would require a hortatory subjunctive). An imperative is much stronger than either of these. Whether a second or a third person, it is a command, not a suggestion or a wish. I have usually chosen to use “must” (which would usually be expressed with dei + an infinitive). That is still not right, but I think it is closer. Suggestions are most welcome!

The parallel structure, in any case, denotes a kind of connection, not quite an equation, but close, between the three elements, all of which are included in the summation, “as in heaven, so also on earth.” One could even say, then, that these are the basic ingredients of the Kingdom: it exists and flourishes wherever/whenever God’s name is recognized as holy (belonging uniquely and absolutely to him), and presently doing his will is the deliberate choice of his people. In one sense, the coming of the Kingdom may be defined by the preceding and following statements. This is already the case in heaven – and his people are called to model it as well as to pray for it, on earth: in effect, to incarnate the Kingdom.

Important aspects of the Kingdom are further illuminated in many of Jesus’ parables. One must be careful not to read too much into these stories. Parables are usually designed to make one primary point. Jesus’ purpose is not served by (as a dear teacher/brother/friend once put it) “counting and analyzing the hairs on the tail of the Samaritan’s donkey!” Nevertheless, a few observations and questions may be helpful – not as definitive “doctrine”, but as aids to understanding the impact of the stories on the original listeners. We will examine only the parables that overtly include some version of the phrase, “The Kingdom of God (or heaven) is like…” Others may also have bearing: these definitely do.

1. The wheat and weeds in the field (Mt.13:24-30). The workers are worried about the weeds, but the Master, conceding that they were planted by an enemy, chooses not to endanger his growing crop by allowing over-zealous weeding. How much good grain has been destroyed by workers more eager to pull weeds than to cultivate the crop? (Mark’s version – 4:26 – speaks only of the growth of the crop.)
2. The mustaard seed (Mt.13:31-32, Mk.4:30-32, Lk.13:18-19). It not only grows amazingly, but provides shelter for creatures!
3. The yeast (Mt.13:33, Lk.13:20-21) also grows – not just to get bigger or make more yeast, but to make bread – basic sustenance for people!
4. The treasure in the field (Mt.13:44). Notice the delight of the man: he does not think he is making a “sacrifice”!
5. The pearl (Mt.13:45-46), also, is deemed of ultimate value by the merchant – well worth whatever it costs.
6. The fish-net (Mt.13:47-50). A grand mixture of varieties, useful and not, will be sorted later. Compare this with the weeds (#1). These two combine present and future ideas, whereas #2-5 are strictly present.
7. Three vineyard parables. The two in Mt.21:28-32 and 33-41, while the Kingdom is mentioned only once (31), are sternly critical of the present unfaithfulness of the people entrusted with the care of the vineyard (long considered a symbol of the people of God), whereas the earlier one (20:1-15), describing the hiring of workers throughout the day, critiques the selfishness of even faithful workers who assumed that their seniority would confer higher status/salary.
8. The wedding banquet (Mt.22:1-13) highlights not only the rudeness of the first folks invited to the party and the consequent random inclusion of outsiders, but a man who is improperly dressed. It has been suggested that festive robes were customarily provided by the host. Had this man perhaps refused the gift, thinking his own “good enough”?
9. The ten virgins with oil lamps (Mt.25:1-13) also combines present and future. The girls are waiting for the arrival of the wedding party, but the focus is on having made (or not!) adequate preparations. (Why is there no criticism for not “sharing”?)
10. Similarly, the “talents” (Mt.25:14-30) and the “minas” (Lk.19:11-27) deal with an interim period. Only Luke’s version mentions the Kingdom, or the overt hostility of some of the subjects. Matthew has the servants’ responsibilities scaled according to their abilities (v.15), whereas Luke has them commissioned equally. Those who acted faithfully are equally commended in Matthew, but Luke records a variation. Both, however, exclude the slacker.
11. The sheep and goats (Mt.25:31-46) is the only one of the Kingdom parables to be quite specifically focused on the future, “when the Son of Man comes in his glory.” It is seldom pointed out that this “judgment” is explicitly said to be of the ethnoi – “nations” or “Gentiles” (same word), or that the criteria by which they are divided have nothing whatever to do with anything that either group “believed” (pisteuo, in any of its forms is nowhere to be found in the account), but rather concerns their behavior. Of interest, also, is the exercise of comparing the criteria Jesus lists here, with his “inaugural address” in Lk.4 (see part 1). I do not believe the similarity is accidental. Might these folks, although unwittingly, have actually been participating in Kingdom work? I suggest that it behooves us to be slow to pontificate about who may or may not be included.
I have deliberately refrained from compiling these observations into a neat pattern of conclusions. I don’t believe Jesus’ intention was to provide us with doctrinal weapons with which to clobber one another. I believe he sought to engage our hearts, minds, and energies in the work of his Kingdom.

I hope these questions can contribute to that effort.

Word Study #21 – The Kingdom, part 3

Some folks have associated Jesus’ statement that some of those present would “see the Kingdom come in power” (Mt.16:28, Mk.9:1, Lk.9:27) with the immediately following experience of the Transfiguration. Others chalk it up to a supposed “misunderstanding” (?!) of the time lapse before the “Second Coming”. I am more inclined to go with those who relate it to Pentecost, and the powerful activity of the Holy Spirit in the early church.

Surprisingly, there are only 27 uses of the word “kingdom” in Acts and the epistles. Describing the period between Jesus’ resurrection and the ascension, Luke notes (Ac.1:3) that “the Kingdom of God” was the content of the “graduate course” that Jesus conducted for his disciples during that time. Even so, they still had the wrong idea (1:6), clinging to the notion that a political coup for the nation was in store. Jesus’ reply (1:7-8) is one that much of his church has yet to grasp. He bluntly asserts that any such concerns are none of our business! The Kingdom of which he has been speaking will be established as the power of the Holy Spirit enables his people to spread out through all the known world as his “witnesses” (see W.S.#18) to his reign!

It took a while, but eventually the faithful disciples began to understand. “The Kingdom of God,” along with the news of his definitive defeat of death, became the core of their message. In Ac.8:12, we learn that in Samaria, “Philip was preaching about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ”. Early on, the realization became vivid, that the message was not a glory-trip, nor one of personal aggrandizement. Paul, in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Ac.14:22), after himself having been stoned, beaten, and run out of town, is found “strengthening the morale of the disciples, encouraging them to remain faithful, and (warning them) that it is necessary for us to enter the Kingdom of God through many hassles”! See also Ac.19:8, 20:25, 28:23 and 28:31.

With all its ubiquity, however, it is hard to find a concise “definition” of the Kingdom, beyond the certainty that the King is in charge! There is a sense in which every description of the New Testament church is actually an account of the Kingdom in action. Here again, I would refer you to Citizens of the Kingdom for fuller exploration. Paul asserts (Col.1:13) “He (God) has rescued us from the power [authority] of darkness and transported us into the Kingdom of the Son of his Love!” Everything else grows out of that triumphant truth! His redeemed, rescued people are expected to live out the present reality of that rescue! Both “rescued” and “transported” are aorist tenses: they have already happened!

Gal.5:19-24, I Cor.6:9-11, and Eph.4:17-5:20 all detail “before and after” descriptions of the life of “rescued” people. Note especially the “BUT” in I Cor.6:11! A radical change of lifestyle was expected of Kingdom citizens, not just a slightly sanitized substitute for the sordid situation of their surrounding society.

Paul admonishes the young Thessalonian church (I Thess.2:12) “…you all should live in a manner worthy of God, who is calling you into his own Kingdom and glory!”

Notice, however, that nobody is instituting a new legalism. Everybody knew that hadn’t worked. Paul reminded the Roman brotherhood (Rom.14:17), “The Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit!”

Neither does it require complex doctrinal reasonings and formulas, as he reminded the folks in Corinth (I Cor.4:20), “The Kingdom of God does not consist of talk, but of power!” – the present-tense experience of the power of the Holy Spirit! As committed disciples interact, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by their faithful life to the Resurrection of their King, onlookers can begin to glimpse the beauty of his Kingdom.

Of course, we all recognize that our best, most earnest efforts, our most careful faithfulness, still falls far short of the promised Kingdom. But not to worry! After all, one of the reasons Jesus said he came in the first place was to “take away our shortcomings!” (See W.S. #7). That’s one of his specialties!

Although they comprise only a small minority among the references to the Kingdom, there are also passages that speak of a
future dimension – a consummated Kingdom – far beyond anything we can imagine, let alone experience, in this present world. As an old man, imprisoned for his faithfulness, and possibly soon to face execution, Paul reminded Timothy (II Tim.4:1) of the much-anticipated prospect of the “appearance and kingly reign” of Jesus, at which time he will “judge” [sort out] (see W.S.#9 and 10) the living and the dead, and (v.18) of the rescue and vindication that he expects at that time. Peter also encourages his readers (II Pet.1:11) to remain faithful as they await “entrance into the eternal Kingdom” of Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews (12:28), while using a perfect tense (“we have received”), nevertheless offers the assurance that when everything else is shaken apart, this Kingdom will stand. During the Revelation, John was privileged to glimpse the time when “the kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdom of our God, and of his Christ (Anointed One)” (Rev.11:15), and he literally runs out of words in his effort to describe that glory.

Clearly, there is “more in store” for those who choose ways of faithfulness. The future is not irrelevant. It holds indescribable promise. BUT, “until then”, we already have a King to honor and obey, and fellow-citizens of his Kingdom with whom to learn to reflect his glorious graciousness.

Let’s start practicing now – and put some shoe-leather under the earnest prayer of our hearts, Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done – ON EARTH as surely as it is in heaven!

**Word Study #22 — “My Friends…”**

I owe this study to my 12 year old grandson, Thomas, who asked me, “Grandma, did you ever work on ‘friend’?” I hadn’t — didn’t really think there was much to investigate, but his comment, “Some people say they’re your friends, but they really aren’t,” got my attention. Jesus had that problem, too. Who hasn’t? So I started to dig, and — no surprise — saw some very intriguing patterns emerging.

Two words are traditionally translated “friend” in the New Testament, and two more have been added by modern translators, completely muddying the communication. *Hetairos* is used only four times, and only in Matthew’s gospel. Classically, the word referred primarily to political partisans, business or religious associates, or casual companions. Matthew uses it of children’s playmates (11:16), in the landowner’s reply to his disgruntled workers (20:13), in the host’s response to the improperly clad man at his feast (22:12), and Jesus’ addressing Judas in the betrayal scene (26:50). None carry any personal level of involvement or affection, and certainly no mutuality.

*Philos*, used 29 times, covers a broader spectrum, although a greater degree of personal involvement is usually implied. (Not always: it is used in Lk.23:12 of Pilate and Herod, in their shared frustration at the case against Jesus.) Jesus uses it in parables, often paired with “neighbors” or “family members” (Lk.15:6,9; 21:16; 14:10; Ac.10:24), or referring to a cordial relationship (Mt.11:19, Lk.7:34, Lk.7:6; 11:5,6,8; 15:29; Jn.3:29; Ac.19:31; 27:3). Two instances seem to fit better with the flavor of *hetairos* — Lk.12:4 and Jn.19:12 — but there, *philos* was the writers’ choice. There seems to be a change of the depth of meaning in John’s gospel, where Jesus speaks of Lazarus (11:11) as “our friend” andJohn notes (11:5) that Jesus “loved” (*egapa*) that whole family. And in his farewell word to the disciples (15:13-15), “promoting” them from the status of “servants” to “friends” for whom he is prepared to lay down his life, an even deeper relationship is indicated.

The most interesting and, I think, significant observation is that both *hetairos* and *philos* almost entirely disappear from the text after Pentecost! The faithful, after that time, consistently refer to one another as *adelphoi* — brethren! Please note that, although the preponderance of uses are masculine in form, this does NOT indicate the preferential treatment of males. It is simply the generic form of the word — all words have “gender” (not necessarily related to fact) in many languages. (For example, in Greek, “hand” is feminine, and “leg” is masculine, regardless of the gender of its possessor.) The point is, identification with the Kingdom/family of the Lord Jesus has introduced an entirely new level of relationship to his people. “Brother” still does refer to physical family relationships, as it did in the Gospels, but from the time (Ac.9:17) when Ananias addressed the newly-enlightened Saul as “Brother”, it is the term of choice among fellow-disciples. This usage is not unique to the Christian community: it was used classically of religious associates, or even military companions, and Peter (Ac.2:29), Paul (Ac.22:1), and Stephen (Ac.7:2) all used it in addressing their unbelieving (even hostile) Jewish audiences. However, the vast majority of the 346 New Testament references are to committed fellow-
disciples. Jesus had used it that way (Mt.28:10, Mk.3:33-34, Jn.20:17). Especially notable is his statement in Mt.23:8, flatly forbidding any hierarchical structure among his followers (which many still ignore, at their peril). Even John, an acknowledged apostle and elder, learned that lesson so well that he refers to himself in the introduction to his Revelation (1:9), as “your brother, and companion in the hassles, and the Kingdom, and endurance (that is) in Jesus.” “Brother” is the highest — and only — “title” legitimately applied to any follower of Jesus. As members of Jesus’ own family (Mt.12:49, Mk.3:34, Lk.8:21), we belong to one another in unique and wonderful ways. So-called “contemporary translations” do us a great disservice in reducing that God-given bond to the casual status of “friends.”

To top it off, the revisionists manage also to throw agapetos (watered-down to “dear friends”) into the mix. Agapetos is the participial/noun/adjectival form of the much-preached verb agapao, which seems to grow in its glow with every fresh-hatched “theologian” who gloms onto it. I will only say here that the word itself is far less “sanctified” than is usually proclaimed. If you need a “f’r instance”, how about Jesus’ disparaging comment (Lk.6:32) “Even sinners [losers] also love (agaposin) those who love (agapontas) them”? That doesn’t sound much like “godly love” to me! Liddell/Scott lists “regard with great affection or fondness; hold in high esteem; used of affection between children and parents, or God and man, or husband and wife.” Theologizing aside, a genuine depth of relationship is definitely in view. If you have a problem with the slightly archaic “beloved”, “dear people” or “loved ones” is more to the point than simply “friends.” And when it is paired with adelphoi “dear (or even “dearest”) brethren” is accurate. Reducing both of these to mere “politician-speak” (“my friends”) seriously cheapens the vocabulary.

This is a classic example of the poverty of language and understanding created by “translators” who are either bound to an agenda, or who have not troubled themselves to treat the original vocabulary with the precision and integrity it deserves. Here are four words, with four distinctly different meanings, merged into one term so vague as to communicate virtually nothing. Lowest common denominators simply do not work!

As casual associates progress through deepening friendship to Christian brotherhood, and thence to the precious gift of the mutuality of love learned in the Kingdom of our Elder Brother, we are privileged to grow together into his very image — no longer servants, but friends, and beloved brethren, whom Jesus has designated as members of his own family!

There IS a difference!

Word Study #23 – Why DID Jesus come?

You have all heard some version of these tear-jerking lines:

“Jesus was ONLY born in order to die!”

“If I/you had been the ONLY sinner on earth, Jesus would have come and died for me/you!”

“YOUR sinfulness sent Jesus to the cross!”

Impassioned speakers have used these declarations for years, maybe centuries, to create enormous guilt-trips, and the indictment is meekly accepted by thousands. The only trouble is, JESUS NEVER SAID THAT!!!

Increasingly annoyed by the self-centeredness inherent in that focus, which seems so contradictory to the God-ward and out-ward focus of all of Jesus’ words and actions, I decided to comb carefully through the Gospel accounts to discover what HE presented as the purpose of his coming. Seems like it should be a no-brainer to consider Jesus himself as the best authority on such a subject.

Now, before you get all up-in-the-air about “inspiration”, please understand that I am not denying the inspiration of the writers of either the Gospels or the Epistles. However, I do maintain that their explanations must be understood in the light of what Jesus himself has said. So let’s take a look at his own words.

Purpose, in the Greek language, may be expressed grammatically in three ways: with the particle hina and a subjunctive verb (usually translated “in order that”); with a simple infinitive (translated “to”); or with the use of the preposition eis, or the phrase eis touto (translated “for this reason”, or “this is why”). A fourth, more ambiguous form uses the particle dei, “it is necessary” — which may, but need not have a purpose implication. It is usually more of a forecast than a statement of purpose. Here is a simple list of references where Jesus is quoted as using one of these constructions.

Infinitives:
Mt.5:17 – to fulfill the law and the prophets (which he then proceeds to correct)
Mt.9:13 – to call not the just, but those who have failed
Mt.10:34 – to throw fire on the earth (separation, based on relation to him)
Mk.2:17 – parallel to Mt.9:13
Lk.12:49-53 – parallel to Mt.10:34
Mt.20:28 – not to be waited on, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom (a ransom secures release from captivity, and is the only – even oblique – reference to his death)
Lk.4:18-19 – to announce good news to the poor, to be a herald of healing to the blind and release to captives, to send out in freedom those that are “broken”
Lk.19:10 – to seek and to rescue those who are lost/destroyed.

hina:
Lk.22:29-30 – The Father gave him a Kingdom so that he could pass it on to the disciples
Jn.3:15 – both the conditional (believing/being faithful) and the subjunctive (“may have”) are in the present tense – not future.
Jn.3:16 – same combination of present tenses
Jn.3:17 – so that the world may (also present tense) be rescued/“saved”

Note that if these referred to a single event, the tense would be aorist, and the result future. Neither is the case.
Jn.6:38 – “I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but to do the will of him that sent me.” (used 3x in 38-40)
Jn.10:10 – “I have come that they may have life (present tense) and have it abundantly.”
Jn.12:46 – “I have come, a light, into the world, so that everyone who is faithful to me may not remain in darkness.”
Jn.12:47 – not to judge the world but to rescue it
Jn.17:2 – to give eternal life (Present tense), which he then proceeds to define as intimate acquaintance with the Father and with himself, to those who were given to him.
Jn.17:13 – “that they may have my joy complete among themselves.”

eis:
Mk.1:38 -- “That’s why I came out” (to preach in other communities)
Jn.9:39 – for discernment (eis krima)
Jn.18:37 – (before Pilate) eis touto – “That’s why I was born and came into the world, to bear witness to the truth.”

dia touto: Jn.12:27: “This is why I came to this hour” – Jesus does not explain this statement, but virtually everybody else does!

dei: Remember, this indicates a forecast, not necessarily a purpose:
Mt.16:21 – to suffer abuse from the hierarchy, die, and be raised
Mk.9:31-32 -- parallel
Lk.22:37, 24:26, 24:44 – will deal with these later
Jn.3:14 – to be “raised up” or “exalted”
Jn.10:16 – to round-up the “other sheep” who will listen.

Conspicuous by its absence is any reference to private, individualistic “forgiveness of sins”. See W.S.#7. Jesus certainly did make that offer on occasion (Mt.9:2-6, parallels in Mark and Luke, and Lk.7:47), but when challenged, the objection had nothing whatever to do with his death, but rather with his right/authority to forgive because of his identity with God! Where, then, did this distorted limitation of Jesus’ purpose come from? His comments in Lk.22:37 and 24:44 may be helpful. Jesus explains on both occasions, “everything that is written about me must be fulfilled.” Many times, he had found it necessary to correct misperceptions of what the “anointed one” would be or do. Religious authorities had concocted elaborate – but mistaken – ideas of a political emancipator, and other glorious (to them) job descriptions for the awaited “messiah.” Is Jesus perhaps cautioning his people to sort carefully which of the oft-quoted prescriptions of the Law and the Prophets really are “about him”’? Perhaps we need to look at these again, and instead of trying to cram Jesus into the traditions of an ancient sacrificial system, turn our energies rather to participating in the Kingdom that HE SAID he came to inaugurate! Not everything “written” is necessarily “about him.”
Notice also the accounts (Mt.27:11, Mk.14:61 and 15:9, Lk.23:5 and 13-22, Jn.19:6-16) of Jesus’ trial. The charge against him was his Kingship and Sonship – there was no “religious” element at all.

Jesus has come “in the Father’s name” – as his representative (Jn.5:43), as the Light that can enable us no longer to “walk in darkness” (Jn.12:46). He has come to rescue the world (12:47). He has fulfilled the (legitimate) promises of ancient writings (Mk.5:17), and ransomed his people from whatever captivity they suffer. He has come that his “sheep” may know abundant life (Jn 10:10), and to bestow “eternal life” – which he has defined as intimate acquaintance with both himself and the Father (Jn.17:2), upon those who trustingly follow him in faithfulness. He has covered all the bases – provided for
every need. My son Dan has an excellent summary in his blog post “Enough with salvation already!” which I commend to your attention.— nailtothedoor.wordpress.com

The crucial question here is the same as in so many other places and situations, and the only one that matters, in the last analysis:

WHO IS YOUR KING?

Word Study #24 – “In the Name of Jesus”

The word “name” (to onoma) appears in the New Testament text more than 200 times, with several different implications, many of which are poorly understood – largely for cultural reasons. More than 50 of those are merely identifying individuals – as our western culture would expect. A few are simply counting – used as a synonym for “people”, and 15-20, especially in the Revelation, refer to evil entities of some sort, or identification with them. But that leaves us with the vast majority – primarily those referring to the name of God, of the Father, of Jesus, or of the Lord – which are not so easily sorted by dwellers in 21st century western culture. The implications of these must be gleaned from the context, which means that any “conclusions” we may draw are merely conjecture, and open to challenge.

Classically, to onoma referred either to a specific person, to one’s fame or reputation, to someone’s financial account or credit, to one’s ancestors, or to a political or business attachment to some source of authority. (Liddell/Scott). The Arndt and Gingerich translation of Bauer’s lexicon (see appendix) contains a few more anthropological notes: “The belief in the efficacy of a name is extremely old….This (N.T.) period of literature sees in the name something real: a piece of the very nature of the personality whom it designates, that partakes of his qualities and his powers.” It may refer to attributes, ownership, or loyalty. “The use of a name without the attendant loyalty is seen as hypocrisy or deceit.” In a similar manner, millennia earlier, people had been warned against “taking the Lord’s name in vain” – i.e., outside the realm of honor and obedience to him.

A name is often assumed to convey the power of the one named, for good or ill. To “believe in the name” of someone is to certify that he is genuine. To “call on the name” of someone – human or divine – was an attempt to access his power or intervention.

The Gospels are replete with references to Jesus’ having “come in his Father’s name” – as his representative (Mt.21:9 and parallels, Jn.5:43). His deeds of power and compassion are offered as witness to the truth of that claim (Jn.10:25). Consequently, when he sends out disciples “in his name”, or when anyone claims to represent him, similar evidence is reasonably to be expected (Mt.16:17, Lk.10:17, Lk.24:7). Nevertheless, it is also clear that “in the name of Jesus” is NOT legitimately to be used as a pious version of “abracadabra”! False claims of his name are roundly condemned, as is obvious in his categorical rejection of those who claimed a non-existent relationship to him in Mt.7:22, and similarly referenced in Mt.24:5; Mt.13:6, Lk.21:8 and 21:8 and 17, and illustrated most dramatically in Ac.19:13-16. This sort of situation does require careful discernment, however: see Mk.9:38 and Jesus’ response in 9:39.

“Calling on” the name of Jesus (Ac.2:21, 4:12, 9:21, 15:17; Rom.10:13, I Cor.1:2, II Tim.2:19), like “trusting/believing/becoming faithful to” (see W.S. #1) his name (Jn.1:12, 2:23, 3:13-17) seems to carry a strong flavor of commitment to him and his cause, and a consequent expectation of obedience. That commitment was assumed to be evidenced by “being baptized in the name of the Lord” (Ac.2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5, 22:16), regarding which Bauer’s lexicon notes: “Through baptism ‘eis to onoma’ [literally into the name] of someone, the one who is so baptized becomes the possession of, and comes under the protection of the one whose name he bears: he is thenceforth under the control of …that one – wholly dedicated to him.”

Associating/acting “in someone’s name” was also assumed to access his power or intervention, as is evident in the various accounts of healings, both when disciples were sent out as Jesus’ representatives during and after his earthly ministry, and as the gathered group of committed followers took on their responsibility as the Body of Christ, ministering discipline (I Cor.5:4, II Thess.3:6) as well as healings (Ac.3:6; 4:7; 4:30; 16:18; James 5:14).

A huge amount of rhetoric has been expounded, (loosely) based upon Jesus’ encouraging his disciples to make requests “in his name.” In the context of this more accurate understanding of the use of the concept of “name”, it should be abundantly clear that he was NOT offering anyone a “blank check!” Instead of a license to append “in the name of Jesus” like an incantation to every prayer or admonition, his statement must be viewed as a caution: Be certain that the entreaty is motivated by, and is completely in harmony with the totality of his being – his personality – his Kingly position – and the work of his Kingdom – before attaching the name of Jesus to anything!
Contrary to many modern assumptions is the observation that there are more references to abuse/persecution “for the sake of his name” (at least 17), than there are to glorious “successes” (a few in Revelation, but not before that!) Consistently, those who associate themselves with the name of Jesus are reminded of their responsibility to take care to bring no reproach upon that name/reputation! (I Cor.1:10, Col.3:17, II Thess.1:12, I Tim.6:1)

It is “in his name” that praise and thanksgiving are to be offered to God (Eph.5:20 and many other places), and that the unity of the brotherhood is to be maintained (I Cor.1:10).

And it gets even better! The “name” given to Jesus after his triumph over death implies the awarding of a well-deserved title – “above all names” (Phil.2:9) – “above every conceivable rank or power” (Eph.1:21) – “higher than the name of any angels/messengers” (Heb.1:4). The day will come when that truth is universally acknowledged (Phil.2:10) – and “every knee shall bow” in submission to the name of Jesus! May God – and his people – speed that day!

But meanwhile, all who do acknowledge Jesus’ name have a clear assignment: to represent their Sovereign faithfully. Paul expressed this concern to the brethren in Thessalonica (II Thess.1:12): “That’s what we always keep praying for you all: that our God may make you worthy of the calling, and may fulfill (your) every good intention and faithful deed in (his) miraculous power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified among you all, and you in him.” The instructions are simple: (Col.3:17) “And everything – whatever you do, in word or deed, (do) everything in the name of the Lord Jesus …” - - as his representatives – by his power – and for his honor!

Amen!

Word Study #25 – “Gifts”

In a well-intentioned, but misguided effort to boost the “involvement” of congregational members long reduced to mere spectator roles, countless institutional “churches” have jumped on the bandwagon of “Gift Discovery” campaigns. A closer examination of their queries of “What are you good at?”, or, worse, “What are you passionate about?”, reveals that what they really mean is, “Which already-highly-defined slot in our corporate structure are you willing and able to occupy?” – an exercise that has absolutely no connection to the New Testament concept of the “gifts of God.”

The English word “gift” has been chosen as the translation for no fewer than nine different words in the Greek text. These can be loosely grouped into three categories:

1. “cosmic” gifts – dorea, dorema, dosis, classically representing a “bounty” from a king or other superior, a legacy, or a privilege granted
2. “material” gifts – doron, anathema, doma, classically applied to fees, bribes, votive offerings, or simple presents of any kind

Not one of these refers to learned skills or innate talents. Skills and talents are certainly also given by God, and should definitely be used in his service, but they are not “gifts” in the New Testament sense of the word.

We will examine the most frequently used word in each of these categories, in an effort to sort out the diverse implications of the terms. Please try to remember, these are not simply different ways of saying “gift”. They are different words, and not one single concept. It may be helpful to consider, in each case,

1. Who is the giver?
2. Who is the recipient?
3. What, exactly, is the gift, or for what purpose is it given?

Dorea is exclusively applied to the overwhelming gift of God to mankind: his life (Heb.6:4), his Son (Jn.4:10), his Holy Spirit (most of the rest.) Deliverance from death (Rom.5:15), and the privilege to participate in God’s own justice (5:17) are also included. No person is capable of giving these: see Ac.8:20, where Simon the magician is harshly judged for presuming that he could purchase the power to do so. Dorea is frequently paired with charis – in which case it is translated “gracious gift” or “gift of grace.” It may enable human generosity (II Cor.9:15) or service (Eph.3:17), but the source is clearly in God, and the result is the gracious inclusion of people in his glorious life.

Doron, on the other hand, except for one anomaly in Eph.2:8, is the province of mortals. It speaks of people giving presents to other people (Mt.2:11, Rev.11:10), and of people making offerings, usually at the temple (Mt.5:23-24, 8:14, 15:5, 23:18-19, Lk.21:1, and Heb.5:1, 8:3, 8:4, and 9:9). In both cases, the “gifts” are material things, or money. The recipients, too, are human: either individuals, or the temple hierarchy.
While both of the words above occur in the Old Testament (LXX), *charisma* does not. It is a strictly New Testament word, that appears only after Pentecost! More specific than *dorea*, it nevertheless consistently comes from God (mostly the Holy Spirit), although on occasion it was mediated by a person or group (II Cor.1:11, I Tim.4:14, II Tim.1:6). Paul is careful to avoid taking credit for *charisma* (Rom.1:11-12), where he is quick to clarify his desire “that I may share with you all some spiritual gift for your strengthening” by adding “to be mutually encouraged among you all by means of one another’s faithfulness.”

The vast majority of *charisma* references relate to the formation and function of committed disciples as the Body of Christ (see Citizens of the Kingdom, chapter 7). Rom.12:6 is the first specific reference to “gifts” in the Body, but 12:3-8 elaborates on the subject, as does the rest of the chapter. Here we meet the concept that “spiritual gifts” are intended to be the equipment needed for the mutuality that is essential to a faithful Body. I Cor.1:7 affirms that they assure the full provision for faithful activity, and I Cor.12:4-31 is the most complete treatise on the subject. Diversity of empowerment and function is emphasized. Service is the goal (5 and 6). “The manifestation of the Spirit is given, by means of each one, for everyone’s benefit” (v.7). These dative cases, traditionally interpreted as indirect objects (“to each one”), given the contextual emphasis on mutuality, are much more likely to intend dative of agency or means (see the section on this passage in Translation Notes, and “Uses of Cases” in the Appendix). The Holy Spirit is the giver, the recipient is either the body of believers or a person in need; the individual is the agent or means by which the necessary enablement (gift) is delivered – a sort of a “postal service.”

I Peter 4:10 (actually, also v.11) echoes the same concern: “Just as each one of you has received a spiritual gift, serve each other with it, as good trustees of the many-faceted grace of God.”

Notice again, that none of these “gifts” is a learned ability or natural talent, but the supernatural provision of God for the need at hand.

In no case are “gifts” represented as “diplomas” for having achieved a certain level of “saintliness”, or titles of honor (which Jesus had forbidden).

In no case are they the possession of any individual – and certainly not a permanent possession. They seem to be distributed almost at random, as needed (I Cor.12:11), and a perusal of the Acts account indicates that different folks may be called upon for different tasks at different times. The Spirit seems to use whoever is available!

The gifts of God are many and varied, but their purpose is one: to create (by means of *dorea*) and then to empower and manage (by distribution of *charismata*) a people who, together, can function as the Body of Christ in the world, “continuing the work of Jesus.”

The responsibility – and the privilege – are enormous. But so is the provision.

May we respond in faithfulness!

**Word Study #26 – “Truth”**

“Truth” – *aletheia* – is one of the words which, although already richly diverse in its classical usage, took on a whole new dimension in the New Testament. Jesus’ use of the term in one of his “I AM” statements – Jn.14:6 -- is as unique in literature as he himself is unique among people. So as we pursue Pilate’s (probably cynical) question, “What is truth?” (Jn.18:38), it must be with the realization that, ever since Jesus walked the earth, “truth” is no longer only a “what?”, but a “who?”, and one’s answer to that question determines the entire direction of his life.

The classical writers parallel many modern understandings of “truth”:

-- honesty; the opposite of lying, falsehood, or pretense
-- genuine, as opposed to artificial; correct, as opposed to mistaken
-- frankness or candihsness in persons, as opposed to hypocrisy
-- reality, as opposed to mere imitation, or, as in Plato, the “form” rather than a “shadow”

These are reflected in some of the New Testament uses of “truth” as well: in the idea of being “without deception” (Mt.22:16, Mk.12:14, Jn.4:23-24, Jn.8:40-46), or specifically “not lying or pretending” (Lk.4:25, 22:59, Mk.5:33, 12:32, Jn.16:7, Rom.9:1, II Cor.7:14, 12:6, Phil.1:18,) among others.

But in the New Testament, as Bauer’s lexicon notes, “Truth has a strongly practical side, which expresses itself in [behavior].” **Truth is something you DO**, not a theoretical statement of intellectual conclusions. John, in particular, writes
of “obeying the truth” or “walking in the truth” (Jn.3:31, I Jn.1:6, II Jn 4, III Jn.3-4), as do Paul (Rom.2:8, II Cor.3:8, Gal.2:14, 3:1, 5:7), James (5:19), and Peter (I Pet.1:22). This list can be expanded even more when one keeps in mind that \textit{pisteuo}, traditionally translated “believe”, actually means “be/become faithful to” (see Word Study \#1).

When the New Testament writers speak of “becoming faithful to the truth,” (traditional versions say “believing”) (I Thess.2:13, I Tim.4:3, II Tim.3:7), or “knowing (Col.1:6) the truth” (Paul uses \textit{epiginosko} here – a strongly experiential form of “knowing” (as does the writer to the Hebrews in 10:26) — they are not referring to any sort of intellectual assent to a list of propositions, but to a chosen way of life! I Jn.3:18 is especially interesting in this regard, as he admonishes his readers, “Dear children, let’s don’t love in theory [word] or in talk, but in action and truth!”

Also of interest are the instances where “truth” is paired with a noun in the genitive case. Remember that although the most common use of the genitive is to indicate possession, it may also refer to a source (“coming from”) or the content (“made of”, “consisting of”). Paul speaks of “the truth of Christ” (II Cor.11:10) or “of God” (Rom.1:25, 3:7), very likely an indication of source, and “of the Gospel (Gal.2:5) most likely content. Turning the cases around, John refers to the “spirit of truth” (Jn.15:26, 16:3, I Jn.4:6), and Paul to “the word of truth” (II Cor.6:7, Eph.1:13, Col.1:5, II Tim.2:15), more likely to be a possessive genitive. These come into sharper focus in the light of Jesus’ statements:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{"I AM … the truth" (Jn.14:6)}
  \item \textit{"Thy word is truth" (Jn.17:17)} (Remember that John had introduced Jesus himself as “the Word” – Jn.1:1)
  \item \textit{and John’s reminder, “The spirit is truth” (I Jn.5:6).}
\end{itemize}

These three are the only references that seem to make any effort to actually define the term.

Truth is also presented as an active force in human affairs:

\begin{itemize}
  \item --Jesus’ statement, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn.8:32)
  \item --Jesus’ prayer, “Set them apart [make them holy] by [in] the truth” (Jn.17:17)
  \item --James 1:18, where it is represented to be the agent of our birth into the family of God.
\end{itemize}

None of this should be seen as an attempt to minimize the understanding of “truth” as the absolute honesty and transparency, in both life and speech, expected of all God’s people. That is basic to all the citations here.

Warnings about opposition to the truth, or refusal to be obedient to it/him, (Rom.1:18, 1:25, 2:8; Gal.2:14, 3:1, 5:7; II Thess.2:10, 2:12; I Tim.6:5, II Tim.2:18, 3:8, 4:4, Tit.1:14, I Jn.1:6, 1:8,2:4) are in no case concerned about the intricate details debated during centuries of theological speculation by hierarchical councils of various descriptions. They are concerned with the behavior of those claiming to represent the Lord Jesus.

The same One who explained to Pilate that the purpose of his coming was to “bear witness to the Truth” (Jn.18:37), had earlier proclaimed himself to be the very personification of Truth! (14:6). What clearer synopsis, or identification, could there be, than “Everyone who is from [or, belongs to] the truth, listens to [obeys] my voice” (18:37)? The Way, the Truth, and the Life, are all about the Lord Jesus!

They all simply refer us back to the same question invoked in several of our earlier studies:

Who’s calling the shots?
Who is in charge?
Who is your King?

\textbf{Word Study \#27 – Hear / Listen / Obey}

Is there a parent walking the earth, who hasn’t confronted squabbling kids with an annoyed “DID YOU HEAR ME?!!” The question is not one of auditory acuity, although the sullen teenager’s “I heard you!” may try to confine it to that assumption. We deeply value a companion who “really listens”. And yet, when we’ve tried multiple times without success, to get Johnny or Susie to pick up their belongings, “LISTEN!” does not demand merely attention, but obedience.

All of these and more are encompassed in the use of the word \textit{akouo}. They always were. Although \textit{akouo} is the source from which our English word, “acoustics” (which concerns primarily the transmission of sound waves) is derived, the classical writers also used it in a much wider variety of situations. The primary uses listed in the Oxford lexicon are:

\begin{itemize}
  \item -- to hear: a sound, a message, or a reputation
\end{itemize}
--to pay attention, to respond to being called or summoned
-- to hear and understand; to be the pupil of a teacher

Traditional English translators, for the most part, took no account of this breadth, using “understand” only once, and noted the expectation of response or obedience not at all, in the 415 uses of akouo in the New Testament, although 6 times they did substitute “hearken” where there was unmistakable “pay attention” flavor.

Although some clues can be found in the tenses of any imperative uses – i.e., an aorist could lean toward “sit up and take notice” and a present toward “keep on listening”, one must tread carefully here, since there is no definitive lexical or grammatical way to determine without question which aspect of the word was intended. In examining the context in which the word appears, however, we must bear in mind that “Hear!” or “Listen!” refers to much more than simply bouncing sound waves onto eardrums.

The word “listen” actually does not occur at all in traditional translations. “Obey” is only used when akouo appears with the prefix hup- (hupakouo), in which case it is the only appropriate choice. However, obedience is certainly implied in a number of Jesus’ statements, as evidenced by the other verbs that are paired with akouo:

-- Mt.7:24-26 – hear and do
-- Mt.15:10 – hear and understand
-- Lk.11:28 – hear and keep
-- Jn.5:24 – hear and believe / become faithful
-- Jn.5:25 – hear and live
-- Jn.10 – hear and follow

His explanations of the Parable of the Sower/Seed (Mt.13:19-23 and parallels) focuses on people’s response to what they hear, as do his instructions to the disciples when they were sent out (Mt.10:14 and parallels).

Diakouo appears once (Ac.23:35) in the context of a court trial, in a usage similar to the more common diakrino (see W.S. #9), the implication being a careful examination.

Eisakouo (5 uses) has more of an implication of listening to a prayer (Zachariah and Cornelius), as does epakouo. Please see the list of prepositions often used as prefixes in the Appendix to Translation Notes, for the meanings they can contribute.

In the Synoptic Gospels, slightly more than half of the occurrences of akouo refer simply to being made aware of information. The balance shifts in John, especially when he is quoting Jesus. Most of the Epistles speak mainly of hearing and listening or responding to information. There are, however, several notable exceptions.

In addition to the prefixed form, eisakouo, the unaltered form is also used of prayer that is “heard” / answered (Jn.9:27, Jn.11:41-42, and I Jn 5:14-15.)

The use of akouo in admonitions to heed the word of the prophets (Lk.16:29,31; Mt.13:13-15 and parallels) certainly implies obedience.

The flavor of teaching/learning shows up in Mark’s comment (4:33) that Jesus spoke to his disciples “as they were able to hear (absorb?) it”. In his discourse in Jn.15:15 Jesus tells the disciples “Everything I heard from my Father, I made known to you,” and later, speaking of the Holy Spirit’s ministry to them (Jn.16:13), “He will not speak on his own, but whatever he hears, he will say."

That people who gathered to “hear” Jesus teaching probably could have been sorted into several categories, is evident in his frequent repetition of “The one who has ears to hear, had better listen / pay attention!” (This is often cast as a third person imperative: please see that form explained in the Appendix.) A similar intent may exist in the “voice out of the cloud” quoted in all the Synoptic Transfiguration accounts (Mt.17:3, Mk.9:7, Lk.9:35), “Listen to him!” Coming as it does right after Peter’s grandiose offer to build a memorial, it could even be read as “Shut up and pay attention!”

Jesus may also be intending such a nuanced understanding of akouo when he warns, “Take heed how (pos) you hear!” (Lk.8:18, KJV). Since it immediately follows the parable of the Sower, the response to what one hears is clearly in view. The parallel in Mk.4:24 (also KJV), “Take heed what (ti) you hear” (neither manuscript cites any textual variants) seems more likely to be calling for discernment as to what is worthy of one’s attention. Both are legitimate concerns.

So this is one of those word studies that does NOT end up with neat categories or explanations. Its value is rather to make us aware of greater breadth of meaning than we may assume in casual reading, and hopefully to encourage us to be selective in our hearing / listening, but to recognize also a call for response.

May we do so in faithfulness!
Word Study #28 – Life: eternal and otherwise

*Note: The following treatise is only a brief summary of this matter. A closer examination of the component parts may come later: especially if some of you all join in the study effort!

For probably as long as they have had the intellectual and linguistic capacity to do so, people have wondered – and speculated – about “life”: and their philosophical, religious, and even physiological conclusions have differed greatly. This is an instance where the same English word has been applied to three distinctly different Greek terms, resulting in the blurring, if not the complete loss, of important elements of understanding. Especially interesting in this regard is the sharp departure from classical usages that we see in the New Testament.

_Bios_ (source of the English “biology”), in classical writings, referred to one’s mode or manner of life, his livelihood, or merely his physical existence. The term was used of animals, as well as people. Some writers used it of the “real world” as opposed to mere philosophical speculation. It appears only 10 times in the New Testament, translated 5 times as “life” and 5 as “living.”

_Zoe_ (source of “zoology”) is even less common in the classics. Homer used it of physical existence; others referred to one’s substance or property, or even a term of endearment, “my Life!!” It may also refer to one’s chosen way of life. This is the term that dominates in the New Testament – there are 133 occurrences.

_Psuche_ (source of “psychology”), although a favorite of the 5th and 6th century BC philosophers, used by Homer denoting “ghosts, or departed spirits”, and as an entity that leaves the body if a person faints, more frequently referred to someone’s _personality, or conscious self_. At times it was used simply to count individuals. Some philosophers used it of one’s moral or intellectual self. Early physicians used it as the source of life and consciousness. It was the Stoics and Epicureans who divided the concept of _psuche_ (“soul”) from _soma_ (“body”). For Plato, it was “the immaterial principle of movement and life”. Hippocrates referred it to the emotions. Please note: these all date prior to the third century BC: they are NOT “Christian” ideas! There are 103 uses of _psuche_ in the New Testament, with widely varying translations, the most common of which are “life” and “soul.”

Interesting cultural observations can be made on the basis of words that are commonly used together: in this case, specifically, the combination with _aion_ (n.) and _aionios_ (adj.), which are usually translated with some form of “eternal.” Although _aion_ was also used of a lifetime, age, generation, or any clearly defined epoch, Epicurus often preferred the concept of “perpetuity.” For other uses of _aion_, see #86.

The only classical incidence of _aionios_ noted in Liddell/Scott as being used with _bios_ was in reference to Egyptian monarchs. This fits well with the ancient Egyptian cultural practice of carefully preserving bodies and organs, and providing them with artifacts, wealth, food, pets, and even servants for their welfare in the afterlife. It was the _physical life_ that they expected to be continued or replicated. No pairing of _bios_ and _aionios_ occurs anywhere in New Testament writings.

Pindar, Plato, Epicurus, Homer, and many other Greek writers/philosophers wrote of the _psuche_ – a disembodied entity that existed in a shadowy realm after death, occasionally interacting with the living; but their primary use of “eternal” (or, more frequently, “immortal”) referred almost exclusively to gods and heroes. This pairing, also, _never occurs in the New Testament_, even in the places where traditional translators rendered _psuche_ as “soul,” the 3rd to 5th century BC pagan term.

In all the New Testament writings, only _zoe_ is used in conjunction with any form of _aion_ – a combination that _never occurred in the classical writings_. The consistency of this choice indicates with unusual clarity that a very different concept is in view. _Zoe_ appears with _aion_ or _aionion_ 43 times, and the idea of something quite beyond ordinary existence is present in at least that many more of the uses. Might this not be a deliberate, overt rejection of the pagan concept of disembodied “souls”, in favor of Jesus’ statements, “I AM the …life” (Jn.14:6), “I have come that they might have life” (Jn.10:10)? All of these employ a form of _zoe_, as do Jn.8:12, “The one who is following me shall have the light of life”, and Jn.11:25, “I AM the resurrection and the life.” Many years later, as an elderly man, John put it very simply: (Jn.5:11-12) “God gave us eternal life! This life is in his Son. The person who has [holds on to] the Son has life; the one who doesn’t have [hold on to] the Son, doesn’t have the life!” Here too, _zoe_ is used throughout.

So where did all the rhetoric about “eternal souls” come from? Not from the New Testament! _Psuche_ and _aionion_ are _never used together there_. The English words do not appear together, even in traditional translations that arbitrarily use “soul” instead of “life” in about half of the appearances. To be fair, we must note that there are four places (yes, only four in...
the entire New Testament) where the traditional translators refer to “saving souls”: Heb.10:39, Jas.1:21 and 5:20, I Pet.1:9. Please refer to W.S. #5 for a discussion of the concept of “save”. I can only conclude that those translators were more heavily influenced by the “Golden Age” of Greek philosophy than by the message of Jesus, who had offered his followers the privilege to “enter into life (\(\textit{zoe}\))!” And Jesus spoke of “life (\(\textit{zoe}\))” – with or without the addition of \(\textit{aionion}\) (“eternal”) – primarily in the present tense!

He spoke of “laying down his \(\textit{psuche}\) for his sheep, maintaining that he had the authority both to lay it down and to reclaim it (Jn.10:15-17). Yet it was his “spirit” (\(\textit{pneuma}\)) that he committed to his Father from the cross (Lk.23:46), and Stephen offered the same commitment to Jesus himself at the time of his own death. I could not find any references to “the spirit of God” or “the spirit” of a person outside of the LXX (Septuagint) or the New Testament. The deliberate choice of \(\textit{pneuma}\) – classically more generally used of wind, or simple respiration – instead of \(\textit{psuche}\) may have been a further gesture of rejection of the pagan implications of \(\textit{psuche}\). Indeed, the writer to the Hebrews notes the difficulty of distinguishing between the two (4:12), and relegates that task to the Word of God! If only his people today had the grace to do likewise!

The focus of the New Testament is clearly upon \(\textit{zoe}\) – which is represented as originating in (“invented” by?) the Lord Jesus himself (Jn.1:21). Fully half of the references in the Gospels are specifically paired with a form of \(\textit{aion}/\textit{aionion}\), and many of the rest definitely imply a higher order of living. Even more significant is the fact that most of these occur with \textbf{present tense verbs}. Even statements like Jesus’ telling his opponents (Jn.5:40), “You don’t want to come to me in order that you may have life,” does not use a future tense, as is often assumed by those who use only English, but a present subjunctive form, which is required in this kind of a statement of purpose or intent. The same structure occurs in the much-quoted Jn.3:16, and also in John’s statement of the evangelistic purpose of his gospel (20:31). These are all talking about the \textbf{present}, not the future!

Yes, there are a handful of references to “in the world to come,” such as Mk.10:30 and its parallel in Lk.18:30, but these are the exception. Additionally, they express a \textbf{continuation of what has already begun}, not something that only begins in the future.

More common is Paul’s expression in I Tim.4:8, “a promise of life both now and in the future.” Both Gospels and Epistles are concerned with the quality, not just the duration, of life.

I will close this brief summary with a few of the passages where “eternal life” is succinctly defined – all using “\(\textit{zoe}\)”:

- Jn.6:63 (Jesus speaking) “The messages I have spoken to you all are spirit, and they are life!”
- Jn.11:25 (Jesus) “I AM the resurrection and the life!”
- Jn.14:6 (Jesus) “I AM the way, the truth, and the life!”
- Jn.10:28 (Jesus, of his “sheep”) “I am giving them eternal life, and they will never be destroyed!”
- Jn.12:50 (Jesus, of his Father) “His command IS eternal life!”
- Jn.17:3 (Jesus) “This is eternal life, that they may be acquainted with you, the only true [real, genuine] God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.”
- Col.3:4 “Christ, who is our life…”
- II Cor.4:10 “In order that Jesus’ life may be revealed in our mortal flesh [human nature]”
- I Jn 5:20 “We have our very existence in the True One, in his Son, Jesus Christ!
HE IS THE TRUE [GENUINE] GOD, AND ETERNAL LIFE!!”

THANKS BE TO GOD!!

**Word Study #29 – “To Know”**

What do you intend, when you say that you “know” someone/something? You know who they are? You are close associates or friends? You are able to perform a task? You are acquainted with certain facts? You can quote something from memory? You can recognize an artifact or idea, speak a language, or understand a culture? The English language incorporates all of these “meanings” – and more – some of which may be contradictory -- into a single word, “to know.” The New Testament writers, in contrast, employ eight \textbf{different} words, all of which traditional translators have rendered simply as “know.” Is it any wonder that confusion can result? An evil spirit screams at Jesus, “I know you!” (Lk.4:34), yet later, the ultimate blessing of “eternal life” is attributed to “knowing” him (Jn.17:3)! The reader of the average English text has no clue that these are different words. Unfortunately, they don’t all sort out quite that easily, but we can clear up some of the fog with careful attention to vocabulary. In this study, correct understanding of the differences between the original words will probably not materially change one’s understanding of most passages, as much as it will enhance our appreciation for the message.
The most commonly used of all of these words is *oida*. It is the perfect tense form of the verb *horao*, “to see”, and occurs at least 285 times in the New Testament. Classical uses of *oida* are obviously connected to the concept of “seeing.” They include looking at or paying attention to something, “mental” sight or discernment, to behold or observe an object or event, or to be acquainted with a fact. This is not foreign to us: “Oh, I see!” is equivalent to “I get it!” “I understand.” In the New Testament, it is concerned primarily with information, which may or may not influence one’s life. “I know” (*oida*) may be an expression of confidence or expectation, as in Eph.1:18, but it need not. It may concern awareness of someone’s reputation (Rom.16:15, I Thes.1:5), or of an event or idea (like all 13 occurrences in Acts).

*Ginosko*, the second most frequent NT usage, (196 uses), usually presupposes more personal involvement with the person, event, or principle that is “known.” Classically, it included recognition, discernment, or opinion that results from personal experience or observation. The word was also used of the marital relationship. Frequently, the NT writers used it to refer to the simple identification of individuals (Lk.24:35), of recognition or understanding of events or people (Mt.24:43), or of “finding out” (Jn.12:9) information.

The difference between *oida* and *ginosko* is most easily seen in passages where both are used. For example, look at Jesus’ upper room conversation with Peter in Jn.13:7. To Peter’s protest at the apparent impropriety of a master washing the feet of disciples, Jesus replies, “You don’t know (ouk oidas) what I’m doing now, but you will understand/know (gnose) later.” And Peter did learn the lesson – by experience – quite well, as evidenced by his later instructions to the brotherhood (I Pet.4:10), “As each one has received a spiritual gift, serve each other with it.”

It may also want to follow the interplay between *oida* and *ginosko* in John 7 and 8 or John 13 and 14, which is easily done by using Young’s concordance (see Word Study instructions), for further understanding of the different implications of the two words.

*Epiginosko* (the prefix epi is an intensifier) appears only 30 times translated “know”, 5 as “acknowledge”, and 3 as “perceive.” Classical definitions include to witness or observe, to recognize, to find out or discover, to become acquainted, or to decide or adjudicate. Many of the NT references are focused on recognition or identification (Mk.6:33 and parallels, Ac.3:10, 9:30, 12:14, 19:34; Lk.24:16 and 31), or reassurance (Lk.1:4; II Cor13.5, Col.1:6, I Tim4:3). Peter’s warning takes on an even more serious tone, when he uses *epiginosko* (the stronger term) both times in II Pet.2:21: “It would be better for them never to have become acquainted with the way of justice, than having known it, to turn back ….”

Other words are less frequent, and less “loaded”:

*Epistamai*, classically to know how to do something, to understand a matter, to know as a fact, in Homer, to know for certain, or in Aristotle referring to scientific facts, in the NT usage refers primarily to information, primarily about an individual’s past history (Ac.20:18).

*Proginosko* (source of English “prognosis”), to know or perceive beforehand, usually without being told, occurs only five times, and it must be remembered that it refers to knowing, not causation, despite the distortion by some translators. (II Pet.3:17 and I Pet.1:2 use the same word.)

*Sunoida*, used only four times, refers to shared knowledge (the prefix sun- is the preposition “with”).

*Diaginosko* (source of English “diagnosis”) appears only once, in a legal investigation (Ac.24:22).

*Agnoeo* (source of English “agnostic”) – the “a” is a negative prefix – is used four times as “not knowing” (Ac13:7, and Rom.2:4, 6:3, and 7:1), and 10 times as “to be ignorant”. Please note that this ignorance does not presuppose hostility – simply “not knowing.”

It is the frequently used *ginosko*, *oida*, and *epiginosko* that need more attention than they commonly receive. Notice, please, that none are “inferior” to others in any way; they are simply different. Notice also that none of these contain any admonitions regarding intricate details of dogma or argument. And Jesus bluntly informed his curious disciples (Ac.1:7) that “it is not for you to know” (*ginosko*) a roadmap of the future!

Although *oida* usually refers to knowing or figuring out facts, Paul clearly expects it to inform one’s way of life. In Gal.4:16 he points out that when they did not “know” God, they followed lesser leaders, and in Eph.1:18, “knowing” one’s calling is supposed to motivate a godly life. Phil.4:12, often (mis)quoted, expresses the apostle’s confidence that in the power of God, he “knows how to” deal with any situation. It is not an expression of infallibility or omnipotence on his part -- or ours!

*Ginosko* more commonly represents knowledge acquired by personal experience or relationship. It predominates heavily in Jesus’ prayer (Jn.17). When Jesus is explaining the meaning of parables, or someone is referring to God’s understanding of a person’s situation, *ginosko* is usually (though not always) the choice.

It is clear that something more than passing acquaintance is intended in Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian brethren (Eph.3:19) that they may “know” (*gnonai*) the love of Christ, which vastly exceeds “knowledge” (*gnoseos*). (The verb is wonderful! It is a form from which our “hyperbole” is derived!) A similar flavor occurs throughout John’s first letter. He is speaking of a very intimate involvement between Jesus and his people.
Epiginosko is usually reserved for very close acquaintance between people, or a thorough understanding of information. All three are important ingredients or enablers of faithfulness, which, in the final analysis, is intended to be the goal of all our pursuit of “knowledge”: that we may experience the full measure of the maturity/completeness that our King intends for us.

May we continue to grow in that knowledge!

Word Study #30 – Forgetting – and Remembering

Have you felt obligated to accept the burden of guilt perpetrated by those who insist, “You have not really 'forgiven' a person who has wronged you unless you have 'forgotten' the incident”?

Have efforts to “forget” life-altering events or betrayals nearly reduced you to despair?

Did it ever occur to you to investigate whether the much-quoted admonition to “forgive and forget” ever appeared in the New Testament at all?

Take heart, my wounded brothers and sisters who are serious about faithfulness: it isn't there!

And neither is the corresponding allegation, intended to shame you by example, that “God has forgotten all of your offenses.” Forgiven, certainly. Forgotten – well, hymns and sermons to the contrary, the subject is not even discussed in the New Testament writings.

There are only eleven appearances of the English word “forget” in the entire New Testament; and these combine three different Greek words, one of which, in 1 Pet. 1:9, the only time that lambano is translated that way, (a word that usually means “take, receive, accept, attain, or, rarely, take away”) and is therefore a bit suspect. The others, epilanthanomai and eklanthano are quite similar in classical usage, with the latter being perhaps a bit more emphatic.

Of the other occurrences, nine refer to people “forgetting” – all but one in a negative sense: Mt.16:5 and Mk.8:14 record the disciples' failure to pack lunch before their trip; James 1:24 and 25 admonish the man who looks in a mirror and forgets what he saw; and the writer to the Hebrews asks reprovingly, (12:5) “Have you forgotten (God's instructions)?” The same writer reminds readers not to forget to do good, to share, and to extend hospitality (13:2 and 16).

The only positive mention of “forgetting” is in Phil.3:13, where Paul speaks of forgetting his pedigreed past in order to devote all his energy to seeking greater maturity in Christ.

Twice, the reference is to God, and is one of encouragement: Lk.12:6 quotes Jesus as declaring that not even sparrows are “forgotten” by him, and again in Hebrews 6:10, “God is not unjust, to forget your work, and the love you all demonstrated for his name, and the way you've looked after his people.”

That's it, folks. That's ALL the New Testament says about forgetting!

Even in the Old Testament, where the LXX usually uses epilanthanomai to translate the Hebrew shakach, forgetting is warned against – “Don’t forget what God has done!” – not advocated; and when it is said of God, it refers to his judgment, not his mercy. Check it for yourself in Young's Concordance.

OK, let's give the guilt-trippers the benefit of all possible doubt, and consider that maybe we have to look at “remembering” in order to justify their scolding. This includes five Greek words, all quite similar, all related etymologically. They are anamimnesko (used only once), mimneskomai (the middle voice – see appendix to Notes – also used only once), mnaomai (15 times), mnemoneuo (19 times), and hupomimnesko (3 times). All of their classical definitions are very similar. All but two of the references (out of a total of 40) are simply to people remembering or being reminded of past events, messages, or behaviors.

The two referring to God, Heb.8:12 and Heb.10:17, are both instances of the same quotation the writer takes from the prophecy of Jeremiah. Recognizing the utter failure of the law to produce the life that God designed and desired for his people, the writer combines several of Jeremiah’s messages about the promised New Covenant: (8:10-12) “This is the covenant that I will establish....when I give my laws into their understanding, I will write them on their hearts ...They will all know about me, from the least to the greatest of them. I will be merciful about their injustices, and I will no longer remember [keep score of] their shortcomings [failures].” Please notice the conclusion, (Heb.8:13): “In saying ‘new’, he has made the first one “old”; and what has become old and been superseded is near to disappearing!”

It is possible, that with some intricate verbal gymnastics, people could turn that quotation into support for their proclamations about God “forgetting”, but in doing so, they ignore the whole message of Hebrews 7 through 10, which is
to highlight the inadequacy, the utter failure of the old covenant, and its sharp contrast with the New, as established by Jesus! In fact, I would even suggest that it is the “failure” of the Law that may even be the “failure” (translation of hamartia – see W.S.#7) that is in view in the prophecy! However, even if you give the guilt-preachers enough editorial license to ignore the context, there is still nothing that commands – or even suggests – that “forgetting” is advocated, much less demanded, of faithful people! Our instructions, repeatedly, are “Do not forget!” “Remember!”

Clearly, (again see W.S. #7), we indeed are instructed – expected – to “forgive [release]” our abusers, as Jesus himself demonstrated. But this has nothing whatever to do with the unrealistic requirement of “forgetting.” One brother put it this way: “To forgive is not to forget, but to refuse to be bound or limited by evil.” There are wrongs in this life that cannot be set right. They have passed into history, and their consequences, although they can certainly be redeemed, cannot disappear. But in deliberately forsaking vengeance and resentment, both the injured party and the offender can be set free, although the course of both lives may have been permanently, irretrievably and unforgettably altered. Yet, in those wonderful instances when, by the grace of God, reconciliation becomes possible, how much poorer would everyone concerned be, if all were “forgotten”? Remember – and give thanks!

We are instructed to “remember”, throughout the Gospels, especially John's, what Jesus said, did, and taught. In the Epistles, we are told to “remember the poor” (Gal.2:10), and those imprisoned for their faithfulness (Heb.13:3); to remember our former alienation from God and his ways in order to appreciate (and imitate) his graciousness (Eph.2:11); and the faithfulness of our brethren and teachers many times. Even those who have faltered in their faithfulness are admonished to “remember” the devotion of their “first love” (Rv.2:5, 3:3) for the Lord and for each other.

Remembering is a much more fruitful focus for our attention.

**Word Study #31 – Power**

Since, as we have seen in many of these studies, the principle message of the New Testament concerns the revelation, the establishment, and an invitation to participative citizenship in the Kingdom of God, it should come as no surprise that the concept of “power” is a frequent subject of discussion. Also not surprisingly, even a cursory English survey of the uses of “power” reveals a wide variety of ideas, due in large part to the fact that this single English word has been used to represent four different Greek words which, despite some overlap, have quite distinct meanings.

**Dunamis**, the word most frequently used (117 times), is the only one that refers to miraculous deeds, by Jesus or his followers (22 times specifically, and many more by implication). Interestingly, that usage appears to be almost unique to Biblical writings. Classically, the word was used for a person's ability to do a task, or to any natural capacity. Aristotle used it of the elementary forces, such as heat or cold; Galen, of the basic characteristics of substances, of medicines, or formulas; Plato of the “meaning” of a word; Archimedes of mathematical powers and roots; Heliodorus of magical substances or objects; and Herodotus of forces deployed for war. (Liddell/Scott) Not until the Septuagint (LXX) and New Testament writings is it applied to the activity of divine beings or miraculous works. Perhaps this is why it often appears in a phrase – “the power of God”, “the power of the Spirit”, “the power of the Lord”, “the power of Christ” (at least 43 times): to emphasize whose capability is in view.

Malevolent powers are also mentioned – Lk.10:19, Ac.8:10, Rom.8:38, I Thes.2:9) – as well as simple abilities of individuals – Mt.25:15, Ac.3:12, Ac.6:8, II Cor.8:3,4 – but the overwhelming majority of references are to a manifestation of the power of God, either directly (by Jesus), or through one or more of his people.

It is also interesting to note some of the words closely associated with dunamis:
- Jesus challenging his accusers that they know neither “the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Mt.22:29)
- Lk.5:17 “The power of the Lord was present to heal”
- Peter and John's declaration that “our own power or holiness” was not the source of the healing (Ac.3:12)
- I Cor.2:4: “demonstrations of the Spirit and power”
- I Cor.4:20 “The kingdom of God is not in words but in power”
- Rom.1:4 Jesus “declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection”
- “The power of his resurrection” II Cor.13:4, Phil.3:10, and many others.

**Exousia,** the second most frequently used among the “power” words (103 times), is quite distinctly different. Without exception, it refers to delegated authority. It is often paired with dunamis. When Jesus commissioned his disciples for their mission (Mt.10:1, Mk.3:15 and 6:7, Lk.9:1), he gave them both dunamis and exousia – the ability necessary for their
assignment, and the authority to use it. On the other hand, his reference to the power of the Holy Spirit to be conferred at Pentecost used only *dunamis* (Ac.1:8), as did the subsequent discussion with the temple hierarchy, who questioned their display of *dunamis* with, “Where did THAT come from?(4:7)”. Maybe they had given up on the “authority” question by that time. His opponents among the scribes and Pharisees had not challenged Jesus' ability to act as he did: that was obvious. They questioned his right (authority – *exousia*) to do so (Mt.21:23-27, Mk.11:28-33, Lk.20:2-8).

Political power, natural or supernatural, is universally represented by *exousia*, in conformity with classical usage (Lk.23:27, many times in Eph. and Col.) L/S lists “office, magistracy, consulate,” and “to exercise authority over a political entity”; as well as the abuse of that authority; but also notes *exousia* as simply “permission to act”. The Roman centurion who approached Jesus on behalf of his child [servant] understood this (Mt.8:9), noting that his own authority was delegated, and he himself also assigned responsibilities to inferiors. The same idea appears in several parables (Mk.13:34, Lk.19:17), and in Paul's accounts of his former assignment from the Jewish authorities (Ac.9:14, and 26:10, 12). In every case, *exousia* is assigned by a superior to a lesser person.

Jesus' conversation with Pilate (Jn.19:10,11) is an interesting case in point. When Pilate boasted of his authority (*exousia*) either to crucify or set Jesus free, Jesus' answer is often touted by deterministic “theologians” as “proof” that “God intended all this to happen”. However, the use of *exousia* in both Pilate's question and Jesus' answer may indicate simply that both men clearly understood the meaning of the word: authority can only be conferred by a higher authority, (whether divine or political is not specified), upon a petty politician! Pilate is much less “powerful” than he thinks he is! Jesus has essentially called his bluff – and he knows it.

In Romans 13, Paul maintains that no legitimate authority (*exousia*) exists, except that which is properly regulated “under God”!

*Ischus* (9 times) and *kratos* (11 times) are somewhat harder to separate, as both, classically, referred primarily to bodily strength. *Kratos* was also used as an attribute of the power of the gods in Homer (which may highlight the difference in the perception of divinity between the classical civilizations and the Biblical community – which would be an interesting cultural study!). It also referred to political sovereignty in the LXX, and to the possession of territory in Herodotus. Pythagoras used it as a “name” for the number ten.

*Ischus*, also primarily referring to physical strength, tended more toward the idea of brute force (Aeschylus), and was used by Plato and Idumeus of a powerful kingdom, and militarily, of a main body of troops (neither of which violates the concept of “brute force!”)

The words are similarly difficult to distinguish in the New Testament, often appearing paired with *dunamis* or *exousia*, as if the writer is trying to be sure that all the bases are covered! In Eph.6:10, three of the words are included: “Be strengthened (*dunamis*) in the Lord, by the force (*kratos*) of his strength (*ischus*)” (traditionally, “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might”).

In Rev.5:12 and 7:2, *ischus* is paired with *dunamis*, and in Jude 26, *kratos* is paired with *exousia*. Peter's urging the brethren to “serve” (“minister”) with the strength (*ischus*) supplied by God would lead one to conclude that the “diakonia” (serving) in view is more practical than theoretical. A similar flavor comes through in the admonition (Mk.12:30, 33; Lk.10:27) that love for God is to consume one's heart, “soul” (see W.S.#28), mind, and strength (*ischus*), all physical attributes.

*Kratos* in the NT often seems focused primarily on God/Jesus' eventual triumph (I Pet.5:11, 4:11; Rv.1:6; Eph.1:19; Col.1:11, I Tim.6:16; Rv.5:13) which is already being realized as a consequence of his having (Heb.2:14) *already* “destroyed the one who had – PAST TENSE!! – the power (kratos) of death” and set his captives free!

All of these “power words” – and more – are piled together in Paul's enthusiastic prayer recorded in Eph.1:17-23: that all of us, his people, may be supernaturally enlightened and enabled to know “...the exceeding greatness of his (Jesus') power (dunamis) that is available for us .... the energy (energian) of God's powerful (kratos) strength (ischus) was demonstrated definitively when he raised him from the dead, and seated him at his own right, in heaven, far above every ruler (arche) and authority (exousia) and power (dunamis) and title of nobility (kuriotetos)....!!!

To him be all honor and glory and praise!

**Word Study #32-- “Holy”**

“Holy” is another term that has been the subject of much (un-holy) conflict, finger-pointing, and general misunderstanding. I am under no illusion of ability – mine or anyone else’s – to straighten it all out; but perhaps a careful examination of the vocabulary can shed a little light.

*Hagios* is a word that can be used either as a noun or an adjective; and sometimes the translator must make a call, since the Greek grammar allows an adjective or a participle to be used as a noun when it represents a person, idea, thing, or situation
which carries the characteristics described by the adjective: e.g., “the faithful” may refer to the person who is faithful, and similarly with other descriptive designations.

In classical writings, ἁγίος referred to anyone or anything devoted to the gods, whether in service or in sacrifice. There was an occasional corollary of purity of intention or behavior, but that idea, in pagan worship, bore little resemblance to a Christian understanding of “purity.”

Hagizo, the verb form in ancient texts, referred to making something or someone “sacred” by a burnt offering. The later form, hagiazo, appearing only in the LXX and NT literature according to Liddell-Scott, retained the connotation of total devotion to God. Notice that in both cases, it is an active verb, denoting an overt act of setting apart for divine use or service.

Hagiasmos, only later theologically colored (and distorted) by its traditional translation “sanctification”, linguistically, is simply the derivative noun applied to the effect of that “setting apart.”

Anything more elaborate than that – of which there is no short supply in theology and tradition – is neither linguistically nor grammatically derived, and certainly does not appear in the New Testament text. Far from being the province of a few singularly exalted individuals, these words describe the life that is reasonably to be expected of anyone who is committed to the Lord – “set-apart” from the surrounding culture, and wholly devoted to him.

Interestingly, ἁγίος (the adjective), although applied in the Old Testament (LXX), as it was in pagan usage, to places, objects, garments, official assignments, and ceremonies, in the New Testament – except for a few historical references (as throughout the letter to the Hebrews, when highlighting the failure and inadequacy of the old system) – is almost exclusively applied to people. We read of “holy brethren” (I Thes.5:27, Heb.3:1), “the Holy One” (Mk.1:4, Lk.4:34, Ac.3:14, 1 Jn2:20, Rv.3:7), “holy messengers” (Lk.9:26, Ac.10:22, Rv.14:10), “holy prophets” (Lk.1:70, Ac.3:21, Eph.3:5, II Pet.1:21), “holy children” (I Cor.7:14), “Holy Father” (of which there is only one – God himself!– Jn.17:11), “holy apostles” (Eph.3:5). Please notice that in referring to the “holy temple” (I Cor.3:17 and Eph.2:21), Paul hastens to add “which you all are!” This reference, along with those to the “holy nation” and “holy priesthood” (I Pet.2:5-9) now belongs to the faithful brotherhood!

Other mentions of a holy “living sacrifice,” (Rom.12:1), “your holy calling” (II Tim.1:8), “the holy commandment” (II Pet.2:21), and the “first-fruits, roots, and branches” (Rom.11:16) are all unmistakably connected to the lives of the faithful.

This is even more universally the case when ἁγιος is treated as a noun, and has been traditionally rendered “saints”. Most of Paul's letters are addressed to the hagiois (the “saints”), clearly referring to the entire congregation of the faithful in each locale. He usually includes greetings both to and from the “saints” at both ends of the correspondence. Some translators, bound, I suppose, by the marble-statue-on-a-pedestal image, have rendered kleitos hagiois “called to be saints/holy” – but there is neither infinitive nor purpose construction in the text. The calling, at least in this text, is not a goal or a mandate: it is a simple statement of fact – a label. The person who accepts the calling to follow the Lord Jesus, is henceforth designated as a “saint/holy person” – the possession of his Lord, “set apart” for his sovereign purpose.

Please note, however, that this understanding does not by any means abrogate the constant necessity to grow into greater maturity in that position, nor does it imply any sort of magical “instant perfection”. We encounter elsewhere, for example, admonitions that “the saints” ought to be able to mediate each other's disputes (I Cor.6:1-2); the need for prodding to assemble the relief offering for the “poor saints”(Rom.15:26), and countless (often corrective – “saints” can also be scolded!) instructions to devote ourselves to mutual love and service. The point is, the designation “saints” or “holy brethren” is not reserved for a few rare, unusually devoted or powerful individuals. It is not an achievement, but simply a label – a way of referring to any and all citizens of the Kingdom of Jesus.

This is further reinforced when one notices that every occurrence of the noun form, in any of the New Testament writings, is plural. “Saints” are not lonely hermits obsessed with keeping away from the “dirty” world. Neither are they superheroes, swooping in to display magical powers. They are simply members of a devoted brotherhood, helping one another to learn to live lives of service – whether messy or glorious – controlled and empowered by their King.

Probably the best example of what Jesus had in mind for those who are “set apart” for his purposes (the lexical meaning of the verb form hagiazō, traditionally rendered “sanctified”), is found in his prayer recorded in Jn.17, especially verses 15-19, where the verb appears three times:

“I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not from (do not belong to) the world, just as I am not from (do not belong to) the world. Set them apart [Make them holy] by the truth: your word is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I also sent them into the world. And for their sake, I am setting myself apart, in order that they also may be truly set apart.”

All of Jesus' people are “set apart/made holy”, in order to be able faithfully to represent him in the world!

May we do so, together, with devotion and joy!
I suspect that people who are accustomed to liturgical “confessions” in which they are obliged to refer to themselves as “unworthy sinners” will be amazed to discover that the term “unworthy” (anaxios) appears only four times in the entire New Testament! It is a tragic reality that both hymnody and theological pronouncements, under the guise of “appropriate humility” (see W.S.#14), have bamboozled unsuspecting believers into continually wallowing in their imagined “unworthiness” instead of rejoicing and growing in the gracious provision of our Lord, who has (Col.1:12) “qualified us (KJV “made us meet) to share in the inheritance of his people, in the light!”

Who is really “unworthy”? In Ac.13:46, Paul and Barnabas, as they left the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, warned the authorities that in rejecting the message of Jesus, they had “judged themselves to be unworthy of eternal life.” Later, Paul wrote to the folks in Corinth (I Cor.6:2), amazed that they considered themselves “unworthy” to settle their own disputes, but rather used civil courts; and later warned them (11:27,29) to evaluate their “worthiness” to share in the observance of communion, in which admonition he listed (1) divisions, centered upon people and their ideas, (2)lack of concern for the poor members of the group, and (3) failure to “discern the Body” (see Chapter 7 of Citizens of the Kingdom) and their relatedness to it, as disqualifying a person from participation.

That's ALL, folks. Those are the only references.

Nevertheless, a great deal is said about “worthiness”, and it is true that some references indicate its perceived lack: we should also examine those. The concept is expressed in two “families” of words: axios (adj.)/axioo(verb)/axios(adv.), and hikanos (adj.)/hikanoo(verb). In classical usage, they are somewhat similar. Axios may refer to a price or monetary value, as well as to a person's character. It often carries the idea of being deserving of reward or honor, or even retribution. Hikanos, occasionally translated “worthy” (5 x out of 38), more frequently expresses ideas of competence or sufficiency (of quantity or ability), or appropriateness.

Axios was also used in a courtroom setting, where Pilate (Lk.23:15), Lysias (Ac.23:29) and Paul (Ac.25:11) all declare that nothing “deserving of death” has been proven. Jesus spoke of workers “deserving” their wages (Mt.10:10, Lk.10:17), and Jewish elders told Jesus that a centurion “deserved” his attention (Lk.7:4), although the man himself maintained that he did not (7:7) and elsewhere (Mt.8:8 and Lk.7:6), hikanos is chosen in that same situation.

Axios also describes persons of similar status, as in John the Baptist's oft-quoted statement about his “not being worthy” to untie Jesus' sandals. This may be what has triggered the “humility competition” in many churches, but John was simply making the point that he, personally, did not have the status of the promised Messiah. Some versions of that quote also use hikanos. In the parable of the prodigal, the son who had wasted his inheritance rightly admitted his “unworthiness”, but note that the father did not leave him there.

“Deserving,” of course, works both ways. Heb.10:29 warns that disregarding Jesus “deserves” greater severity than disregarding Moses, having already established (3:3) that Jesus “deserves” the greater glory. And Jesus himself warns prospective disciples that to be “worthy” of him requires that one give him absolute priority over all other affections (Mt.10:37).

The rest of that statement (Mt.10:38) has been grossly abused. The phrase, “taking up one's cross” has become so ubiquitous, that practically any unavoidable difficulty, aggravation, or inconvenience is likely to be piously labeled, “just the cross I have to bear.”

WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE THAT STATEMENT FOR THE BLASPHEMY THAT IT IS!!!

The cross, for Jesus, was NOT an unavoidable inconvenience! Neither was it a case of submission to illness, natural disaster, or insurmountable evil! Jesus was speaking sober truth when he said he could have called upon all the hosts of heaven to rescue him! He CHOSE not to do so, in order to ransom the people of his Kingdom from the domain of death and fear (Heb.2:14-15), by his triumph over both! Cross-bearing entails voluntarily suffering completely undeserved – and avoidable – injustice for the sake of the Kingdom of Jesus! (This topic definitely “deserves” its own separate study, but it is integral to this one, since Jesus includes “cross-bearing” as a criterion of “worthiness” for his followers.) Ac.5:41, where the verb form occurs with an intensifying prefix, is an early example of disciples making this connection. See also II Thes.1:5. The writer to the Hebrews notes (11:38) that the world was not worthy of the disciples whom it persecuted and killed.

If “worthiness” was really entirely out of reach, we would hardly have so many admonitions to behave in a manner “worthy of the Lord” (Col.1:10), “worthy of his calling” (Eph.4:1), or “worthy of God's calling into his Kingdom” (I Thes.2:12). Some of the characteristics listed as part of that “worthiness” are (Col.) bearing fruit, and growing in acquaintance with
Jesus; (Eph.) avoiding status-tripping, and displaying generosity, gentleness, and mutual care and concern.

John the Baptist had also admonished his listeners to “bear fruit worthy of [appropriate for] a changed life (Mt.3:8). Perhaps the difference is clarified by the use of both words together, in Col.1:10 and 12. As noted above, in v.10, Paul instructs his readers to live worthily (axios), and then reminds them (v.12) that the Father has enabled (hikanoo) them to do so.

It might be prudent for us to take a lesson from the three uses of axios in Revelation 5. We are told, in answer to the question in v.2, “Who is worthy (axios) to open the book?”, that “no one in heaven or on earth, or below the earth” was able to do so. But in v.9, the Lamb is acclaimed as “worthy to take the book and to open its seals.” We are not told the content of the book – although many folks have undertaken to pontificate about it – only that the opening of its seals results in horrific judgments upon the earth, and finally in everyone around the throne breaking out in praises to the Lamb (v.12). The lesson? That the province of God's people is NOT to pass – and certainly not to exact – judgments upon the world – or each other! -- but to occupy ourselves with exuberant praises to the Lamb, who is “worthy (axios) to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!!!”

It would be most appropriate (hikanos) for the people of God to leave behind their programmed protestations of unworthiness (anaxios), and concentrate their attention upon worthy (axios) representing their Lord and King in his world! The Lord has made you/us worthy to be citizens of his Kingdom, a part of his very own Body! Let's quit contradicting his Word, and get on with the business of living its truth!

Word Study #34 – The Cross

As we approach this topic, please remember that it is in no way intended to diminish or disparage the enormous impact upon the human family of Jesus' act, in allowing himself to be tortured and put to death by people who had rejected the invitation to enlist in his Kingdom. “He came to his own (world, people), and his own refused to welcome him” (Jn.1:11) summarizes incalculable suffering.

I do, however, intend to put that event into a more Biblical perspective, by calling your attention to the overwhelmingly greater attention paid by the New Testament writers to the glorious truth and power of his Resurrection! By becoming narrowly fixated only upon the cross, (nearly, if not altogether, to the point of idolatry), well-meaning writers and speakers have badly skewed the Biblical message.

It was very difficult to find historical information about “crosses” or “crucifixion.” The early classical historians and writers, Herodotus and Thucydydes in the 5th century BC, and Homer at least a century earlier, used stauros to refer to any kind of stakes or pilings driven into the ground as a foundation for a building, as fencing, or as fortifications. Not until Polybius in the second century BC, and Didorus Siculus in the first, does Liddell/Scott mention any use of a “cross” as an instrument of execution. In the first two centuries AD, of course, it is common in Plutarch, Josephus, and Lucian, among others. I found one suggestion that the Roman Empire may have copied the practice from Carthage, in North Africa; but apparently that particular form of brutality came on the scene comparatively late in ancient history, and was inflicted primarily upon the lowest classes of criminals.

Most writers of “history” tend to concentrate on gruesome descriptions of the process (which was indeed horrible), and leap from there into complex doctrinal dissertations that have no New Testament basis. They frequently try to relate it to the Old Testament sacrificial system and its law – conveniently ignoring the fact that in that system, the prescribed form of execution was stoning. I do not intend to argue the fine points in which such writers/speakers delight. I would only ask, as many times before, “What did Jesus say?” Can one claim to be proclaiming Jesus, without consulting him?

Of the 28 occurrences of stauros in the New Testament, eleven are simply describing the circumstances of Jesus' death. The only other references in the Gospels are the parallel passages in Mt.10:38 and 16:24, Mk.8:34 and 10:21, and Lk.9:23 and 14:21. These are considered in the previous post (#33). The verb form, stauroo, to crucify, is a bit more frequent, with 46 New Testament uses, of which 25 are in accounts of Jesus' trial and death, and 4 in accounts of his resurrection! Only in Mt.20:19 and 26:2 is Jesus himself quoted, and in both instances, he is giving a simple forewarning to the disciples of what is about to happen. In no case does Jesus himself make any statement about either the causes or the implications of that event.

Peter's two sermons, recorded in Ac.2:36 and 4:10 – the only uses of stauroo in that earliest history of the church – vividly point out to the listeners that although they thought they had disposed of Jesus, HE IS ALIVE!!!, and thereby demonstrated to be “both Lord and Christ [the Anointed One]” (chapter 2), and (chapter 4) active among his people!
There is a bit more reference to the cross in the Epistles, but much less than I expected. Paul speaks of the cross eleven times, and uses the verb form eight times. Some of the “accomplishments” attributed to the cross, that are seldom mentioned in modern teaching, include Eph.2:16 – the reconciling of Jew and Gentile into one Body, Col.1:20 – making peace by reconciling everything to himself (Jesus), Gal.5:24 – those who belong to Jesus have (active voice) “crucified the human nature with its cravings and passions”, and its parallel in Rom.6:6 – “our old person was (passive voice) crucified together with him … so that we may be no longer enslaved to failure.” In Gal.6:14, Paul affirms “In no way will I brag, except about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified, as far as I am concerned, and I with respect to the world.”

Paul becomes somewhat more theoretical about the subject in both of his letters to Corinth. Scolding the group for their divisions, he asks (1:13) “Paul wasn’t crucified for you, was he?”, making the point, in the first two chapters, that no one but Jesus deserves their loyalty. There, as in Gal.5:11 and Phil.2:8, where this is only one element of Paul's description of Jesus’ obedience, his intention seems to be to highlight the degradation assumed by society at large to be associated with crucifixion. He notes that the willing acceptance of this dishonor by Jesus should be a strong motivation for eschewing the elevation of any individuals. Only once does Paul make any connection with “charges against us” (Col.2:14) – something Jesus himself never mentioned at all – yet, tragically, that has become, in the minds of many, the sum total – the only focus – of their “gospel message”! (Please refer to W.S.#7, for a study of “forgiveness”, and note that Jesus' authority to forgive was derived from WHO HE WAS/IS – “God-with-us”-- and is not connected in any of the Gospel accounts to his death.)

In this regard, it is useful also to include some of Paul's references to Jesus' death, where the cross is not specifically mentioned, in trying to reconstruct the message. Please refer to the end of chapter 12 of Citizens of the Kingdom for a summary of these. One is made to wonder, why we hear so little about most of these.

And don't forget that even Paul, whom folks that delight in designing “doctrines” love to quote (often not very carefully), qualifies his statement about Jesus' death (I Cor.15:3) with the assertion (v.14), “If Christ hasn't been raised, our preaching is useless!” It will be necessary to save a more detailed examination of the primacy of the resurrection for the next posting. I will only note here that in contrast to the 28 references to the cross, there are 40 to anastasis, the primary word used for the resurrection. The verb form, anistemi, occurs 112 times (as opposed to 46 uses of “crucify”), and that is without taking into account the other words used in the glorious message that JESUS IS ALIVE – and in him, we too shall live!

Stay tuned.

Word Study #35 – The Resurrection

During his time on earth, Jesus said very little about the implications, or even the fact, of his resurrection, except to assure his confused followers that it was going to happen (Mt.16:21, 17:23; Lk.9:22, Jn.2:19, Mk.9:31, 10:34). My favorite of the direct quotes comes later – from Rv.1:17-18: “Don't be afraid! I AM the first and the last! I 'm the one who is alive! I was dead, but look! I am alive forever! And I have the keys of death and hades.” And yes, I know he did not use any of the “resurrection” words in that statement, but the message is certainly, gloriously, there!

That illustrates the difficulty of working on this subject as a word study. It is a concept that permeates the whole New Testament, in many different forms. The task is further complicated by the fact that there are only two Greek words specifically used for the purpose, but traditional translators have used them interchangeably, and rendered them variously as “to rise, to arise, to raise, to be raised, risen, to stand up, to awaken,” and many more. The classical writers aren't much help here, either. Anistemi – one of the primary verbs – was used of just about any kind of “getting up”, whether from sleep or a sick bed (Herodotus), to arise as a champion or to rise from one's seat as a token of respect (Homer), to produce witnesses, to mount a rebellion, to set up a building or statue, or, rarely until the New Testament era, to rise from the dead. Egeiro, the other most-used verb, has virtually the same list of meanings. I have been unable to discern a difference. Egeiro is used more frequently in the New Testament, unless one includes the noun forms. Anastasis, “resurrection”, would push the balance the other way.

In addition to prophesying his own situation (Mt.16:21 and parallels), Jesus listed “raise the dead” among his instructions when he commissioned his disciples for their journey (Mt.10:8), and also as evidence for his identity in replying to the messengers from John the Baptist (Mt.11:5 and 11). Accounts of his own activity in that regard include (Lk.7:14) the raising of the widow's son at Nain, (Lk.8:54) Jairus' daughter, and of course (Jn.11) his friend Lazarus. Recorded incidents of disciples following those instructions are in Ac.9:36-42 (Peter and Dorcas), and Ac.20:7-12 (Paul and Eutychus) –
although Dr. Luke, in this latter account, questions whether the boy was actually dead.

Because the verb forms are so frequently used of other situations – getting up and going somewhere – I have chosen to focus primarily upon the noun, *anastasis*.

The resurrection of Jesus was (and should still be!!) the primary burden of the gospel message! It was presented as the ultimate proof of Jesus' identity. Peter cites it early on (Ac.1:22) in his urging that a replacement be found for Judas “to become a witness with us of his (Jesus') resurrection.” In his Pentecost sermon (Ac.2:31-36) he declares that the resurrection reveals Jesus as the source of the Holy Spirit's coming, and provides evidence that “God made this Jesus, whom you all crucified, both Lord and Christ [the Anointed One]!” The complaint of the Council, a short time later (Ac.4:2) was that the apostles were “teaching the people, and proclaiming, in Jesus, the resurrection of the dead!”, and as the brotherhood met together (4:33), “the apostles gave testimony of the Lord Jesus' resurrection.”

Paul attracted curious attention in Athens by “preaching about Jesus and the resurrection”(Ac.18, 32), and answered his accusers, before the Sanhedrin (Ac.23:6) and the Roman court (24:15) that the resurrection was the basis for the charges against him. This totally confused Festus, who explained his dilemma to Agrippa (Ac.25:19), that the Jews had brought no accusations of evildoing, as he expected, but “some argument about their own religion, about a certain Jesus who had been put to death, whom Paul said was alive”!

Why, then, in so-called “Christian” teaching or “doctrines”, is the balance so heavily weighted toward Jesus' death, rather than his resurrection? Because a “cross” is so much easier to symbolize (read, “idolize”) than an empty tomb? Because it is still a symbol of condemnation and blame, and can be used to induce crippling guilt and abject submission? The truly Scriptural “symbol” of our faith is the Resurrection life – both his and ours!

The Epistles contain two complementary strands of teaching concerning the Resurrection: establishing the certainty of that fact, as a validation of Jesus' identity, and exploring the results that should consequently be evident in the lives of his followers.

In Rom.1:4, Paul reiterates that the resurrection shows Jesus to be God's Son. The writer to the Hebrews lists it (6:2) among the most basic teachings, that form the foundation for everything else, and Peter (I Pet.1:3) represents it as the source of the “living hope” with which the faithful are gifted, and later (3:21) the producer of a “healthy consciousness of God.” Paul even goes so far as to declare (I Cor.15:17) that if Christ wasn't raised, we might as well forget the whole thing! Of the principles listed in the first paragraph of that chapter, the resurrection is the only one that includes extensive documentation – fully half the paragraph!

Elsewhere, emphasis is strong, upon identification of faithful individuals with the Lord to whom they belong. Peter (I Pet.3:21-22) and Paul (Rom.6:3-11) both connect the expected transformation of life with the symbolism of baptism – the “burial” of the former life, and “resurrection” to the new. A similar theme appears in Col.2:12 – “buried with him in baptism, you all were resurrected together, in him....” and its corollary (3:1-3)“since you all were resurrected together with Christ, keep seeking what is above...” He goes on in the rest of his letter to outline the characteristics of a resurrection life. Eph.2:1-10 also contains a vivid before-and-after picture: “You all had been dead...” whereupon he proceeds to describe the life of a person who has not been “raised with Christ”. (v.4) “But God ... made us alive!” and then proceeds to describe the graciousness and kindness thus manifested, and (v.10) its expected results.

Brother Paul summarized the matter even more eloquently (if that is possible), in his letter to Philippi (3:10-11): “I want to know [become intimately acquainted with] him, and the power of [that comes from] his resurrection: and the sharing of [that comes from] his sufferings, being transformed together by [with] his death, if somehow I may arrive into the resurrection from the dead.”

Please notice: “suffering” and “death” are neither denied, nor minimized, nor avoided; but they are bookended – with the Resurrection! Paul's aspiration – and ours – starts with Jesus' resurrection, and ends with our own!

And that makes an enormous difference.

All praise to the glory of his graciousness!

**Word Study #36 – Hope**

Years ago, in another state, we lived near a group of devoted followers of the Lord Jesus, whose first language was not English. When accosted by zealous “soul-savers” who demanded, “Are you saved?”; their usual – and quite Scriptural (Titus 1:2, 2:13, 3:7) – reply was, “I have a good (or “blessed”) hope!” This usually provoked an attack by the questioner:
“HOPE?? If you don't KNOW you are saved, you aren't!” This was followed by a memorized lecture on the questioner's carefully canned and footnoted version of the necessary remedy. As a consequence, the two groups, who could have related as brethren with much mutual benefit, seldom interacted at all, largely because of one misunderstood English word. How sad!

We have already considered (Word Study #5) the continually progressive nature of “salvation”, which should, but probably won't, put to rest such arrogant discourtesy; we need also to look at the lexical meaning of *elpis*, “hope.”

Classically, it wasn't complicated at all. Synonyms include “expectation, confidence, or one's reason to believe in something or to expect an event.” The uncertainty that accompanies much English usage of “hope” – (“I hope it will – or won't – rain!”) is completely absent from both classical and New Testament usage. Early English translators coped with this semantic anomaly by translating the verb form, *elpizo*, as “trust” (18 times, as opposed to “hope” only 10 times), but the Greek word does not “mean” different things in different contexts. It uniformly conveys “confident expectation”.

Similarly, simple expectation is apparent in the 16 “more ordinary” uses of *elpizo* in the New Testament – fully half of the total. “I hope to see you,” or “I hope you know,” appear frequently in the epistles; lending with the “hope” of repayment (Lk.6:34-45), a farmer planting in “hope” of a harvest (I Cor.9:10), and Felix “hoping” that Paul would offer him a bribe (Ac.24:26) certainly involve expectation. So on what grounds do folks feel justified in changing the meaning of the word when it refers to less tangible matters?

Peter's admonition (I Pet.1:13) to “set your hope [confidence] completely on the grace being brought to you all in the revelation of Jesus Christ,” and Paul's explanation (Rom.8:24-25) of the true import of “hope” in relation to one's confidence in Jesus' provision, clearly intend to convey similar assurance. When Paul writes to Timothy (I Tim.4:10) of “hoping in the living God” as the motivation for his life of constant perseverance despite the concomitant privations, he is not describing wishful thinking, but a settled conviction.

When we turn to *elpis*, the noun form, the reference is almost entirely to one's Christian commitment and expectation, as opposed to the “ordinary” affairs of life (which involve only 5 of 53 uses of the word), and the certainty of expectation is, if anything, even more vivid. Interestingly, the word *elpis* does not appear at all in any of the Gospels. Might that be because of the constant, observable presence of the One who is later identified (I Tim.1:1) as “Christ Jesus, (who is) our hope [confidence]”? Paul asks, rhetorically, in Rom.8:24-25, “Who hopes for what he (already) sees?” Perhaps the time when his people needed “hope” the most, was after Jesus' physical departure? This seems plausible, when one realizes that ten of the references, (Ac.2:26, 23:6, 24:15; Col.1:5, 1:27; I Thes.4:13, 5:8; and Tit.1:2, 2:13, 3:7) specifically mention either the Resurrection (Jesus' or ours) or his Return; and several others could be interpreted that way. As Peter put it, (I Pet.1:3) “According to his (God's) great mercy, he has given us another birth, into a living hope [confidence], by means of Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead!”

Among the abundant and glorious benefits of Jesus' resurrection is the way it “spills over” upon all who follow him! It is this truth that enables all the other “hopes” of his people, including (Rom.5:2) “We revel in the hope [confidence] that comes from (source genitive) the glory of God!”, and (Rom.12:12) “Your confidence [hope] is the means (dative) to keep this truth that enables all the other “hopes” of his people, including (Rom.5:2) “We revel in the hope [confidence] that comes from (source genitive) the glory of God!”, and (Rom.12:12) “Your confidence [hope] is the means (dative) to keep

When the five uses of *elpis* in the letter to the Hebrews deserve particular attention, partly because (please see the introductory material in Translation Notes) it was probably written to a second generation congregation, who therefore lacked the privilege of personal memories of the initial arrival of either Jesus himself or “ambassadors” of his Kingdom. They may have been somewhat worn down by years of persecution; hence the early admonition (3:6) to “hang on to our determination and [hope] confident expectation firmly until the end.” Again in 6:11, the instruction is to “demonstrate the same eagerness for complete confidence [full assurance] of hope [expectation] until the end; and 6:18, a reminder to “come running to take hold of the hope that he (Jesus) offered.” In 7:18-19, after a rehearsal of the inadequacy and failure of the old system and its hierarchy, it is summarized, “The previous commandment is set aside, because of its weakness and uselessness – for the law didn't make anything [or, anyone] complete – but a better hope is introduced, through which/whom we come near to God!”

The only place where *elpis* is not traditionally translated “hope” is Heb.10:23, where someone substituted “faith” - an entirely different word. This is probably one factor which contributed to the erroneous assumption that “faith” was a
doctrine to be “professed”, rather than a faithful way of life (see Word Study #1). In the PNT, I offer the alternative, “Let’s hang on to our commitment to our hope without hesitation” – which I consider a more accurate representation of the text – and in harmony with Heb.11:1 – much quoted but little understood or heeded: “Faithfulness is the basis [foundation] of our hope [expectation], the proof [legal evidence] of what is unseen.”

The object of one's hope is made obvious by his faithfulness – and is intended, among other things, to serve as an incentive (I Jn.3:3) to purity of life, (II Thes.2:16) eternal encouragement, (Gal.5:5) justice, and (Rom.12:12) indescribable joy! Such a life will provoke curiosity, which is why Peter (I Pet.3:15) urges his readers to be ready to answer questions about that hope. This admonition is not a “hunting license” but a mandate to be approachable! (See W.S. #18)

“May the God of hope [or, God, the source of hope] fill you with all joy and peace, in faithfulness, so that you may overflow with hope [confidence] in [by] the power of the Holy Spirit!” (Rom.15:13)

AMEN!!!

Word Study #37 – The Law – part 1 – in the Gospels

Ever since the first Council of the first century Christian church (Acts 15), faithful followers of Jesus have differed in their attitudes toward “the Law”. Some of them point to “verses” by which they demand adherence to the entire Old Testament system, and others resist any standard of conduct whatsoever. There is also a broad spectrum in between those positions. Can we find any coherent pattern in the New Testament? Possibly not; but careful examination can yield helpful principles.

“Law” – nomos – was used, classically, both of established civil or religious codes, and the habitual custom of a group. Aristotle used it of his natural observations, and several centuries earlier, Alcman had applied it to the music used to accompany recitations of epic texts. (L/S)* Bauer* notes that early writers applied the term to instructions purportedly received from Zeus, Hermes, or Apollo; and therefore the word was naturally adopted in the LXX to refer to the principles codified by Moses. “Since the law and its observance are the central point of Jewish piety, the word became synonymous with their religion.” Actually, the LXX mixed nomos with logos and onoma almost at random (L/S)*, but this does not occur in New Testament writings. Thayer* adds that over time, nomos was expanded to include the prophets, and all of the “sacred literature”, since the Jews did not distinguish between civil, moral, and ceremonial requirements. (*See the Bibliography in Translation Notes for reference to these lexicons.)

Out of 195 occurrences of nomos in the New Testament, only 50 are in the Gospels. Only Luke (2:23,24, 39) adds the phrase “of the Lord”, and this appears only in his narrative of Jesus being taken to the temple as a baby. Elsewhere in the same passage, he refers to “the law of Moses” (2:22), or simply “the law” (2:27). The Pharisees, opposing Jesus, refer to “our law” (Jn.19:7), as does Nicodemus advocating for his fair treatment (Jn.7:51). Pilate challenges the mob to deal with Jesus “according to your law” (Jn.18:31), to which they respond, “we have a law...”. They also used it as a tool to crush those whom they presumed to dominate (Jn.7:49) “This crowd, that's not acquainted with the law – they are cursed!”

BUT – let's get to our perennial question: WHAT DID JESUS SAY? And the answer is, “not very much”, but what he did say was hugely significant. For starters, he never called it “the law of God.” Five times (Lk.24:44, Jn.1:45, 7:19, 7:23, 8:5) Jesus refers to “the law of Moses,” while John himself comments in his introduction, (1:17) “The law was given through Moses, but graciousness and truth (came into being) through Jesus Christ.” Addressing his opponents, Jesus pointedly refers to “your law” (Jn.8:17, 10:34); and speaking to the disciples (15:25) he calls it “their law.” Elsewhere, he uses no possessive at all, and says simply “the law.”

As he lays out the “constitution” of his Kingdom, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says plainly (Mt.5:17), “Don't conclude that I came to destroy the law and the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill [make complete]!” He then devotes a large section of that sermon to correcting prevalent misconceptions about the Law. Similar corrections are recorded scattered through Mark's and Luke's accounts. Jesus summarizes the true intent of the law (Mt.7:12, 22:36, 22:40, 23:23), as love toward God and one's neighbor, or turns a questioner to its principles (Lk.10:26, Mt.12:5). The same positive idea appears in Mt.19:16 and parallels in Mk.10:17 and Lk.18:18, but without the word “law.”

There are, however, two strong statements that are consistently overlooked by folks who adhere to a “flat book” interpretation of Biblical authority (assuming equal force and authority between the Old and New Testaments). Both
Matthew (11:13) and Luke (16:16) record Jesus’ announcement of a very basic “change of government.” The accounts are worded slightly differently, but the message is clear. “The law and the prophets were (in effect) until John (the Baptist). Since then, the Kingdom of God is being proclaimed!” Things are different now!

Luke follows that declaration by a partial quote, which Matthew recorded elsewhere in more detail (5:18): “Until heaven and earth are done away with [pass away], one iota or accent mark will not be removed from the law, until it all happens [is completed]!” Matthew connects this with v.17, where Jesus declared his purpose to fulfill the law. (Please see the discussion of pleroo and teleioo in word study #13.)

Remember that enroute to Jerusalem (Lk.18:31, 22:37) Jesus had told his disciples everything that was about to happen, “so that everything written … about the Son of Man will be completed [fulfilled]”. Remember also that he had just spent three years sorting out for them which parts of “everything written” were actually “about him”! His “list” differed sharply from that of the powerful religious leaders -- and many of the “lists” currently in vogue today.

In John's account of the crucifixion (remember, he is the only one of the gospel writers who says that he was personally present), he records (19:28) that Jesus “knew that everything had been completed...” and (19:30) surrendered his life with the words, “It has been completed!” – a shout of triumph, not a whimper of defeat! This is a perfect tense (see appendix to the Notes). Luke reserves that conclusion until after the resurrection (24:44) “This is what I told you!”

As we turn in the next post, to consider the “law” in the early church (Acts) and the epistles, please remember that with Jesus' death and resurrection, a monumental transition has occurred.

“Everything has been completed!” The new Kingdom has been established!

**Word Study #38 – The Law (Part 2 – Acts and Epistles)**

Throughout the book of Acts, a refrain recurs persistently: Stephen (6:13) and Paul (18:13, 8:15, and 21:28) are both accused of “teaching things contrary to the law.” Even Jewish converts (15:5, 21:20), as unaware as many well-meaning people today that a new Kingdom has been established, argued fiercely that Gentile converts must be forced into a Jewish mold. Appearing to be “devout according to the law” (22:12, 21:24, 22:3) was taken as a compliment. The keeping of the law was not discouraged; neither was the observance of legitimate civil law. Both were respected (religious law – 13:15, 24:14, 25:8, 28:23; and civil – 19:37-40), and the justice required by both was requested (23:3, 25:11). Nevertheless, something new was in the air.

Speaking of Jesus' resurrection, Paul's message (13:39) was, “In this man (Jesus), everyone who is faithful is made just from all those things that the Law of Moses couldn't make right!”

The rest of the New Testament could be said to consist of elaborating upon that one glorious piece of news: **Jesus has done what no one else could do!**

I was surprised to discover that the law is not mentioned at all in Mark's gospel, in Paul's letters to Corinth (II), Colossae, Philémon, Thessalonica (I and II), Timothy (II), and Titus, either of Peter's letters, those of John and Jude, or the Revelation! Of course, Paul manages to make up for it in his letter to the Romans (and you thought laws today were complicated??!). In many cases scattered through Romans, it is unclear whether Paul is referring to civil or religious law. Try reading it both ways, realizing that nomos can refer to either. Some places, of course, it is clear; when he speaks of Jewish convention. But perhaps some of this ambiguity is deliberate, since one of the main points (3:19-20) is that no one is able to keep any law perfectly. Notice, he is not saying that law (civil or religious) *causes* violations: it rather *reveals* them.

The remedy (3:22) is the faithfulness OF the Lord Jesus. Please notice the genitive case here (refer to the grammatical appendix to Translation Notes.) A genitive form indicates primarily possession, and may also designate a source. The “standard” translation, “faith IN Christ”, cannot possibly be correct, as that would require a dative case (or a preposition with the accusative). It is Jesus' faithfulness upon which we may depend!

Both the death/resurrection figure of baptism (chapter 6) and that of marriage laws (chapter 7) are closing in on the same concept: a completely new life, as the gracious gift of God, in identification with Jesus' resurrection! (8:3) “For what could not possibly come from the law, in its weakness because of human nature, God (created, by) sending his own Son.”

Paul devotes much of his letter to the Galatians to the same theme: the futility of achieving faithfulness by adherence to the law. He concludes both arguments the same way: (Gal.5:14, Rom.13:8). The fulfillment of the law, is simply to live in love for one's neighbor – an echo of Jesus' own summary (Mt.7:12, Lk.10:26, Mt.22:36).

In the Ephesian letter, another element is added (2:15), “He (Jesus) eliminated the law of commands and decrees, in order
that he might create (Jew and Gentile) into one person, thus making peace!

In Philippians, Paul summarily renounces the privilege and prerogatives of his own “pedigree” with respect to the law (chapter 3), in favor of identification with Christ.

The clearest treatment of all comes in the letter to the Hebrews, which is almost entirely devoted to the superiority of Jesus to everyone and everything that had gone before. The futility and failure of the old system is methodically laid bare, and summarized (7:18-19) “the previous commandment [instruction] is set aside, because of its weakness and uselessness – for the law didn't make anything [or, anyone] complete, but a better hope is introduced, through which we come near to God!” Chapter 8 speaks of Jesus mediating “a superior covenant, which is established upon superior promises” (v.6), and, referring to the old prophecy of a “new covenant” (8:13), “in saying “new”, he has made the first “old”, and what has become old and been superseded, is near to disappearing!”

Heb.10:1: “The law had only a shadow of the good things that were coming, not the real thing!” That the writer may have been exposed to Plato's ideas of “shadows” and “forms” does not impugn the integrity of the message. It is simply a useful way of making the point. A “shadow” is ok, as long as it leads one to the reality (Jesus) that has cast the shadow. “He (Jesus) is taking away the first, in order to establish the second!” (10:9)

The writer then concludes the argument (10:19-25) with a confident summary of the complete solution for all the problems and inadequacies of the old ways: There is no longer a “veil” between God and his people (please see chapter 8 of Citizens of the Kingdom), as Jesus has provided for us complete freedom of access (19). He himself is the only “priest” (mediator) that we need (21).

This provides the grounds for the brotherly admonition:
(22) “Let's approach him with a true heart, in abundant confidence [complete faithfulness].”
(23) “Let's hang on to our commitment to [acknowledgment of] our hope [expectation] without hesitation – for the one who made the promise is faithful!”
(24) “Let's concentrate on prodding each other, with love, and good deeds” - no longer the rigid requirements of an unbending law, but the joyful response of our hearts to the King's glorious invitation to share his own life!
(25) “Let's don't neglect getting together … but keep on coaching each other, more and more...!”

The rest of the letter, recognizing the seriousness of faithfulness, continues in the vein of encouragement to constancy. Faithfulness is no effortless “trip to glory”. But “The one who made the promise is faithful”, and it is his faithfulness upon which we may depend, from which we may learn, and which, by constant, deliberate exposure, we may absorb! “The law (that comes from) the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, (definitively) set you all free from the law (that comes from) failure and death!” (Rom.8:2)

Thanks be to God!

**Word Study #39 – “Works”**

The long-standing “faith vs. works” controversy is a vivid example of the compounded error that results from misunderstood vocabulary and manipulated “proof-texts”. Any consideration of this subject must include the discussion of “faith/humanness” in Word Study #1, which you should review before going any farther.

Several different Greek words have been translated by the English “work/works”. The concept itself is really quite simple: someone is doing something. Classical uses of **ergon** include heroic or noble deeds (Homer), one's business or profession, anything done or made (Xenophon), or action as opposed to mere words or argument. Lesser-used, similar words include **praxis** (business or moral action), and **pragma** (matters or affairs).

The verb forms, primarily **ergazomai** (used 28 x in the NT) usually referring to one's employment, **katergazomai** (14 x) to earn, achieve, or conquer, and **energeo** (7 x) to be active or effective, do not seem to have attracted as much “theological combat.” Perhaps they are so obvious that twisting the meaning is more difficult!

Actually, there is very little New Testament basis for all the fuss. Jesus plainly expected of his followers behavior that would allow people to “see your good works and glorify your Father” (Mt.5:16) , and he offered his own “work” as evidence of his identity (Jn.5:36, 10:25, 10:32-38, 14:10-12). He challenged some half-hearted adherents, “Why do you call me “Lord, Lord”, and not do what I say?” (Lk.6:46)

“Work” (**ergon**) frequently refers to a specific assignment, either for Jesus himself (Jn.17:4) or someone else (Ac.13:2, 14:26), or for the tasks assigned to servants (Mk.13:34). It may refer to Jesus' miraculous healings (Mt.11:2, Jn.9:3,4), and Paul describes the content of his message (Ac.26:20) as "preaching a changed life* and turning back to God, practicing deeds [works] worthy of a changed life*

* (see Word Study #6 on “repentance”)
When people who ought to know better respond to an admonition like Paul's to Titus (3:8) that “those who have become faithful to God (should) be careful to keep practicing good deeds” (traditionally, “to maintain good works”), with a horrified accusation of “That's works-salvation!” as if they were confronting the prince of evil himself, it would be comical if it weren't so tragic – even pathetic.

Although in no case is “work” represented as the cause of one's identification with Jesus, it is consistently expected to be the result of that relationship. Please refer to Rom.13:12, I Cor.15:58, Eph.2:9-10, Col.1:10, II Thes.1:11, I Tim.2:10, 5:10, 6:18, and many other similar statements.

God's gift of various service-ministries in the Body of his people (Eph.4:11-12) is clearly explained to be for the purpose of (pros) “equipping God's people (eis) to do the work of service”; and even the very creation of that Body is for the purpose (epi) of the “good deeds [works] which God already prepared, so that (hina) we could live [walk] in them” (Eph.2:10). Every one of these is expressed in a purpose construction.

Face it, folks: everyone is continuously doing “works” of some sort: as we have seen, the word refers to “anything that is done or made”! The only question is the choice of the model, or arbiter, of these “works.” Jesus chose to do the “works” of his Father (Jn.5:36), and bluntly pointed out the source (8:39-41) of his opponents' behavior. Committed followers of the Lord Jesus are continually admonished to display “works” worthy of their new calling (Ac.26:20, Rom.13:13, and others as noted above). The reputation of our King is on the line, as we interact as his representatives in his world.

I suspect that one reason for the misunderstanding with which Paul and James are contending in Romans 4 and James 2, was the prevalent Jewish attitude toward their Law (see the previous 2 postings.) They do not contradict each other! Both apostles make the point that observance of the minutiae of the Law (“the works of the Law”) has nothing to do with genuine faithfulness to the person, Jesus Christ. But both are equally adamant that one's behavior constitutes irrefutable evidence of to whose Kingdom he belongs.

Don't forget that when Jesus spoke of judgment (see word studies 9 and 10) in Mt.25 and Lk.16, he said not a word about what the several individuals “believed”, or to what intricacies of “doctrine” or dogma they may have subscribed. His focus was entirely upon their behavior, specifically their treatment of people in need. Their behavior revealed – it did not create or determine – their allegiance (or, if you prefer, their “spiritual status.” The same idea is obvious in the interview with Zacchaeus (Lk.19:1-10), where Jesus declared, "Today salvation [deliverance] has come to this house" in response to his declaration of restitution to those he had been cheating. No one asked what Zacchaeus "believed."

Likewise, all the similar passages in Revelation – 18:6, 20:12, 20:13, 22:12 – speak of “giving to (each one) according to his/her/their works/deeds.” Paul wrote to Titus of people who “claim to know God, but deny him by what they do” (1:16). Jesus begins six of the seven messages to the churches (Rev.2 and 3) with “I know your works”, and gives them instructions on how to straighten up.

There is no legitimate distinction or conflict between “faith/faithfulness” and “works/behavior.”

A much healthier focus would be patterned after the report of the onlookers at Pentecost (Ac.2:11), who spoke of how the newly Spirit-baptized brethren were proclaiming the wonderful works of God! That same refrain echoes around his throne (Rev.15:3) as everyone celebrates his marvelous works and triumphant justice! We have the promise (Heb.13:21/) that “he will establish you all, in everything good, for doing his will!” There is only one appropriate response: “And everything – whatever you do – in word or deed – do everything in the name (W.S. #24) of the Lord Jesus, continually giving thanks to God the Father through him!”

That is the “work” of a lifetime – and more!

Word Study #40 – Service/Ministry

The handling of the verb diakoneo, with its accompanying noun forms, diakonia and diakonos, provides a vivid illustration of how far the contemporary church has departed from the New Testament pattern, and from the clear instructions of Jesus. Classically, this family of words referred to any kind of service, the person who performed such service (Thayer summarizes quite well, “to attend to anything that may serve another's interest.”), or the care or support thus rendered. It was actually a very simple idea, even when broadened to include the giving, acceptance, or fulfillment of some specific assignment.

Jesus employed this concept in speaking of his own purpose, “not to be waited-on, but to serve” (Mt.20:28), and in expressing his expectation that his followers should display a similar attitude (Mt.23:11 and parallel in Mk.9:35), giving them the example (although the word is not used on that occasion) by washing their feet (Jn.13). Please refer to chapter 11 of your Bible.
of Citizens of the Kingdom for a fuller exploration of this event.
In parables and narratives, diakoneo is frequently used of preparing and serving a meal (Lk.10:40, 12:37, 17:8; Jn.12:2, Mt.8:15, and Mk.1:31), or of a more generalized looking-after-needs (Mt.27:55, Mk.15:41, Lk.8:3, Phm.13), and the relief-offering sent by the Gentile churches to their Judean brethren (Rom.15:25, 15:31; II Cor.9:12, 8:19-20).

Whence, then, came the lofty, nearly-untouchable idea of “ministry/ministers” as members of an institutional, clerical hierarchy, quite set-apart from a disenfranchised “laity” (a word created from laos, “people”, though with the usually unspoken demeaning modifier, “common” or “ordinary.”) Certainly not from Jesus, who flatly forbade titles or elevated positions, reminding us that we are “all brethren” (Mt.23:11-12). See chapter 6 of Citizens of the Kingdom.

I strongly suspect that these varied and distorted translations (which, after all, date only from the 17th century) are the artifacts of the hierarchical patterns that had developed in the institutional churches of the intervening centuries, for they certainly do not occur in the text. Of course this is not the only place where it has become a common practice to alter the text to match one's “doctrine”, rather than the more faithful reverse process!

Notice the irony that it is the same word which Jesus used of his own purpose to serve, and to urge his followers to offer each other even the most menial of service, that has been wielded as a weapon to demand superior status and/or authority! In the first century, the meaning folks “heard” from the use of diakoneo was simple, selfless service. This was the behavior expected of every faithful follower. In fact, all of the other, more specialized assignments enumerated in Eph.4:12 are specifically said to be for the purpose of enabling that service!

Official positions of course were not unknown in the first century: but they were represented by different words: leitourgia/leitourgos (“to serve in public office; to perform public duties for either the state or the gods”) – notice the English cognate, “liturgy”-- and huperetes (“an officer or agent of a government or hierarchy; the rendering of military service, or to serve any entity in a subordinate role: an assistant.”) These appear rarely in the New Testament; the former often referring to the Jewish legal hierarchy or priesthood, the latter when John Mark traveled with Paul and Barnabas as an assistant (perhaps in a sort of apprenticeship).

It is instructive to note the individuals to whom Paul applies the term diakonos. They include Timothy and Erastus (Ac.19:22), all those traveling with him to carry the relief offering to Judea (II Cor.3:3), Onesiphorus (II Tim.1:18), Onesimus (Phm.13), Tychicus (Eph.6:21 and Col.4:7), Epaphras (Col.1:17), Stephen's household (I Cor.16:15), Archippus (Col.4:17), and Phoebe (Rom.16:1). He labels them ALL with the same word he applies to himself!

Interestingly, it is only Phoebe who is described with an additional title: Paul speaks of her as a prostatias – which L/S defines as “a presiding officer, guardian, patron, or protector” – and says that she has filled that position for him and for many others! We have no clue what that position entailed, or whether it was civil or religious. This is the only use of that word in the New Testament. It is in addition to the more common role of diakonos, (which is here used with a feminine article) in the church at Cenchrea.

Official translators, bound by their definitions of “ministers”, could not bring themselves to use the word here, but substituted “servant” – a perfectly good translation, if it were not used as if the meaning were different.

Only five times (out of 30) is diakonos traditionally translated “deacon”, and interpreted as if it were an official title. Four of those are in I Tim.3:8, 10, 12, 13, where qualifications are listed. Nowhere in this passage is there any word indicating an “official position” (see above). Look at the context: Should this not describe any faithful follower of the Lord Jesus? Similar qualifications are applied to both men and women: Note that it is a cultural decision, not a linguistic or semantic one, to translate gene as “wife” rather than simply “woman” (both are correct). Other references that specifically connect women with diakoneo and its related words are Mk.8:15 (Peter's mother-in-law), Mt.27:55 (the women who supported Jesus and his disciples in their travels, and Lk.10:40 and Jn.12:2 (Mary and Martha).

Paul also frequently uses diakonia to refer to an assignment that he was given: (1) to carry the news of Jesus' Kingdom (Ac.12:25, 20:24, 21:19; II Cor.5:18), (2) to deliver the relief offering to Jerusalem (II Cor.4:1), or similar assignments given to others (Col.4:17 and I Tim.4:6). Perhaps “assignment” or “a task assigned by the Lord” would sometimes be a better translation. Such assignments may vary with the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

The recipients of our service may also vary: they may reach as far as the “outside world” (Ac.21:19, II Cor.5:18), or be directed specifically toward the brethren (I Pet.4:10-11, I Cor.12:5, Col.1:25), or toward anyone in need (II Cor.8:19-20, 9:12; Mt.25:44, Rom.5:25). Ultimately, it is all service to the Lord Jesus (II Cor.3:3, Col.4:7, I Tim 4:6, 1:12).

“There are different kinds of service (diakonion) but the same Lord; and there are differing jobs to do (energematōn), but
the same God who does all the work (energon).” I Cor.12:5-6

There is no better or more accurate conclusion than I Pet.3:10:
“Just as each one has received a spiritual gift [empowerment], SERVE EACH OTHER WITH IT, as good trustees of the many-faceted grace of God,”
determined, with our brother Paul, to “complete (our) race, and the assignment (we) received from the Lord Jesus”
(Ac.20:24).
This is the essence of diakonia: ministry/service.

Word Study #41 – Apostles

This will be the first of a series of postings dealing with the various functions, frequently mistakenly labeled “offices”, served by different folks at different times in the New Testament church. They were simply jobs that needed to be done, for which the Lord, by the Holy Spirit, assigned responsibility “as he pleased.” A good introduction to the subject would be for you to review chapters 6, 7, and 8 of Citizens of the Kingdom, which deal with a distinctly different approach to “leadership” in the New Testament church from the one that is common in the 20-21st century corporate structures that carry the name of “churches.”

Notice from the outset, that except when referring to a specific, named individual, every function is plural. Notice also that different people appear to have served different functions at different times. This should make it clear that IN NO CASE was any of these viewed as a lifetime position, assignment, title, office, or rank. Remember that Jesus himself had strictly forbidden that (Mt.23:1-12).

I choose to deal with these functions in alphabetical order, in order to avoid any appearance of hierarchical classification.

We will begin with apostles: generally the first persons from whom a new group would have heard about the Lord Jesus and his Kingdom. Apostolos is one of those words that, through the centuries, has acquired a somewhat mystical aura that never existed in its linguistic etymology. Classically, it referred to anyone sent anywhere for any purpose! This could be the ambassador or envoy of some royal personage, the commander of a military (usually naval) force, an export license for a business, or a slave sent on an errand. The verb, apostello, was similarly inclusive: simply, “to send.” In the New Testament, it was used of everything from Jesus “sending” the Holy Spirit, to his promise to return [“send back”] the donkey he borrowed on Palm Sunday! (So much for “status”!)

The synoptic gospels refer to the 12 original disciples as “apostles”, usually in the context of Jesus' sending them out as his representatives. “Ambassadors” or “envoys” would be a logical choice here, given that the burden of Jesus' message concerned the Kingdom he had come to establish (See word studies 19, 20, and 21.) This may have been the thought behind Peter's eagerness (note that this was his own idea, before Pentecost) to replace Judas as a “witness to Jesus' resurrection.” The group took this action on their own: Jesus had told them simply to wait for the Holy Spirit. And while they were not scolded for the choice of Matthias as an “apostle”, we never hear of him again.

As the church took root and grew, understandably, the experience of the men who had spent those three years walking and working with Jesus was respected. After all, they had “been there, done that.” But it was not long before the work – and the authority – needed to be shared more widely. Some of the original 12 may have filled multiple roles: we do not know, for example, if the “Philip” chosen as a “deacon” in Ac.6 (see previous post), the “apostle” of that name (Mt.10:3, Jn.14), and the “evangelist” who went first to Samaria and then to Gaza (Ac.8), are the same person, or two, or three. It was not an uncommon name. “Elders” (see next post) shared the mediator role with “apostles” at the Jerusalem Conference (Ac.15), and Paul and Barnabas (Ac.13:3), Judas and Silas (Ac.15:27 and 32) are also included with that label in Luke's account. In various epistles, Paul adds Andronicus and Junia (Rom.16:7), Epaphroditus (Phil.2:25), Titus and other brethren (II Cor.8:23), and Tychicus (II Tim.4:12). The same word is applied to all, though translators reluctant to use “apostle” for any but those traditionally so labeled have changed it to “messenger” in some cases.

So – what makes a person an “apostle”? Paul speaks of a number of things which he labels “signs of an apostle”: endurance, signs and wonders [demonstrations of the power of God] (II Cor.12:12), having seen Jesus, and the conversion of a brotherhood (I Cor.9:1-2), Jesus' appearance to him despite his former career as a persecutor (I Cor.15:7-9), and his (Paul's) choice neither to flatter nor dominate them, his self-giving and self-support. He notes in I Cor.9:5-13 that as an apostle, he had a right to take along a wife on his travels as Peter and the others did, and to expect support, but he deliberately failed to claim those rights, as evidence that he was not working for his own gain. He had some rather caustic things to say about “false apostles” who had no such scruples (II Cor.11:5-13.)
Apostles, one of God's gifts to the church (Eph.4:11), are usually itinerant, but they are not independent or free-lancers! Notice how Peter (Ac.10), following the explicit instructions of the Spirit in his visit to Cornelius, nevertheless took along other brethren as witnesses (10:23 and 11:2), and carefully reported back to the others in Jerusalem. Likewise, Paul and Barnabas (Ac.12:25 and 14:26) and later Paul and Silas (18:22) reported back to the church at Antioch, from which they had been sent out. Paul writes in Gal.2:7-9 about his own checking out of his message and activity with those who had served as apostles for longer than he.

The work of an apostle is likewise quite varied. It includes evangelizing (the many “missionary journeys”), strengthening and encouraging the young congregations (Ac.14:22, 16:40, 18:11, 20:1), correcting errors (Galatians and Corinthians), teaching (Ac.15:35, 18:11, Timothy and Titus), and moderating/mediating disputes (Ac.15, and much of both Corinthian letters).

Perhaps the best description of the work of a faithful apostle can be found in Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders (Ac.20:17-35). He reminds them of his behavior among them: refraining from pulling rank, teaching publicly and in homes, completing his assignment from the Lord Jesus to bear testimony to the grace of God, urging them to conform their lives to God's plan, and setting an example of doing honest work in order to care for the weak.

It is hard to read such a statement, and then accept the ideas advanced by those who insist that there is no longer any need for apostles! There is no such nonsense in the New Testament! Faithful apostolic teaching will continue to be needed until the Lord comes!

Even Jesus himself is called an “apostle” (Heb.3:1), and he spoke often of having been “sent” by the Father with an assignment to fulfill. This is sprinkled like a refrain throughout the gospel of John. Paul, in most of his letters, describes his task as having been “sent by Jesus, according to the will of God.” Others were chosen and sent by the Holy Spirit through the agency of a gathered congregation.

When was the last time you enjoyed a prayer meeting like the one described in Ac.13:1-3? Dare we assume that the Spirit has not spoken, just because we have not heard him? Or must we admit that maybe we just weren’t listening?

We impoverish ourselves if we refuse to continue that pattern.

**Word Study #42 – Elders, Overseers, Shepherds**

Let's begin this one by understanding what “elders” are NOT. Nowhere in the New Testament are “elders” represented as members of a rotating, democratically elected committee, demographically varied in proportion to its congregation, and commissioned to direct the affairs (either “temporal” or “spiritual”) of the group, and to hire or fire its “leadership.” Neither are they scrubbed and eager young men fulfilling a “mission” requirement!

Elders – *presbutes* – are, most basically, (are you ready for this?) “old people”!

“Elder” is a term of respect: the respect accruing from age and experience!

The term was applied to ambassadors, because it was elder, experienced statesmen who served in that capacity. A “council of elders” often directed the affairs of a city or state.

The elders in the New Testament church, likewise, had to have been older folks: in letters to both Timothy and Titus (I Tim.3:4-5 and Titus 1:6), Paul lists among their qualifications, “Look how their kids turned out!” to see if they were capable of proper leadership.

In the Gospel narratives, and through Acts 6, “elders” referred to the ruling council of the Jews, or, more generically, to their ancestors (“the traditions of the elders” Mk.7:3). Until this point, and occasionally thereafter, they are represented as antagonistic to Jesus and his message, and viewed as powerful adversaries.

Beginning in Ac.11:30, however, “elders” are mentioned in leadership roles in the church. They are *always* spoken of in the plural, and share advisory duties with the apostles (Ac.15), but interestingly, not one of them is ever individually named. Notice also that their duties were not at all dictatorial: the decision reached in Ac.15:22 was made by “the apostles and elders and the whole church”, although the resulting letter was authored by “the apostles and elders” (v.23).

In each city where a new fellowship formed, the founding apostles “appointed elders (plural) for them in every church” (Ac.14:23). Although the participle *cheirotonesantes* was used in the ancient Greek democracies (5th and 6th centuries BC) of elections by raised hands (the literal meaning of the word), by the first century it was used of any appointment or assignment. In neither case was a permanent position or title conferred.

Paul uses the same word to refer to his own work (II Cor.5:20) – traditionally translated “ambassador”, as it is in Eph.6:20, although there is no apparent reason for the change. It is the same word.
The most specific information we have about elders in the New Testament comes from Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. Timothy, a young man who seems to have served a kind of apprenticeship with Paul (Ac.16), and later was sent as Paul's deputy into a number of difficult situations, is reminded that while his youth should not inhibit the contribution he can make to the brotherhood, (I Tim.4:12), he must be careful to treat local elders – both men and women (5:1-2) – with deference and respect – even, or perhaps especially, when correction is needed.

It is interesting, and should be instructive, that the qualifications detailed in I Tim.3:1-7 for “oversight” – *episkopes* – (the English term “bishop”, used 4 times, doubtless derived from the 16-17th century clerical structure, not from the lexical meaning of the word) – are identical to the qualifications posted to Titus (1:5-10) for the “elders” – *presbuterous* – that he was to establish in the congregations of Crete. Oversight is mentioned there also in 1:7. Cross-check the two lists. The order varies, but they match.

This parallel, as well as the use of the same terms in Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders (Ac.20:17-38), “Watch out for yourselves, and for all the flock in which the Holy Spirit set you as overseers (episkopous), to shepherd (poimainen) the church of God,” indicates clearly that “oversight” and “shepherding” are simply two of the tasks entrusted to the elders of a group. **They are not titles, or separate assignments to separate individuals.**

L/S lists the lexical definitions of *episkopes* as: an overseer, guardian, tutor, supervisor, or inspector. It appears only five times in the entire New Testament, and its derivative terms a total of six. The verb form, *episkopeo*, in I Pet.5:2, also addressed to “elders”, similarly includes an admonition to “tend” or shepherd the flock (*poimainan*).

This brings us to another task of the elders: “shepherding.” Jesus himself of course, is “exhibit A” of a “shepherd”, by his own testimony (Jn.10). In fact, well over half the references are to Jesus (9 out of 16). After his resurrection, Jesus assigned this task to Peter (Jn.21:6). Peter himself, having learned by sometimes hard experience, described what is necessary for faithful shepherding (I Pet.5:2-5).

How this pattern of self-giving care, “shepherding”, on the part of plural elders, morphed into the image of a singular “pastor” as an employee, or a corporate CEO, is a tragic puzzle.

L/S defines *poimaino*, in virtually all references after Homer, as “to herd or tend flocks, or, in the case of people, to tend and cherish, guide and govern.” Four of the references appear in the Revelation, representing Jesus' continuing care for his people (2:27, 7:17, 12:15, 19:15). *Poimaino's* appearance with the Old Testament image of a “rod” in the hand of the shepherd, (since we know who the Shepherd is), should convey a sense of security and protection from harm, rather than the threat with which it is so often associated.

Only once in traditional translations is *poimen* rendered “pastor” (the Latin-derived word), and that is in Eph.4:11, which translators and commentators have mistakenly represented as members of their accustomed organizational hierarchy, and therefore employed the labels of that system. I consider the listing to be chronological rather than hierarchical, with gifted persons being supplied by the Holy Spirit to the group as they are needed. Please notice that here also, **all the terms are plural.**

They all describe the function of the elders – always plural, and of both genders (see I Tim.5:2 and Titus 2:2-5) – in each congregation. Their characteristics and duties include:

- Ac.15 – mediating conflicts
- I Tim.3:2-7 – exemplary personal and family life
- I Tim.3:7 – faithfully represent the church to outsiders
- I Tim.4:14 – conferring responsibility upon younger members
- Titus 1:9 – able to teach the Word, and refute opponents
- James 5:14 – praying for the sick/weak
- I Peter 5:1-5 – no status-tripping! Set an example; not working for profit.

There is much speculation, and little solid information about the passage in I Timothy 5:9-15 regarding the support of elderly (over 60) widows. Some think it may have been a sort of an order; but considering the qualifications listed – good deeds, having raised children, welcomed strangers, relieved suffering, washed the saints' feet – it may have been simply to support them, after the death of their husbands, so that they could continue this same sort of service.

Comparing these assorted duties to Paul's description of his own activity (Ac.20:17-38), may lead one to conclude that elders are simply charged with responsibilities on the local level, similar to those required of apostles in their more itinerant work: “for the purpose of equipping God's people to do work of service, and to build up the Body of Christ, until we all arrive into the unity of faithfulness, and of intimate acquaintance with the Son of God: (that is) into mature adulthood – into a measure of the maturity (whose source is) the completeness of Christ!” (Eph.4:12-13)

A worthy goal for any of the faithful!
In the gospels, Jesus is the only subject of the verb, except in the Luke 2 announcement of his birth, and the Lk.3:18 account of John the Baptist's introduction of his ministry. The disciples sometimes “preach,” as do some of the healed individuals, but other words are used on those occasions. Therefore, since Jesus seems to have “invented” the idea of “preaching the gospel”, he is the logical one to consult about what that entails.

Out of the 17 times that Jesus is said to be “preaching the gospel”, or making direct reference to it, six are specifically identified as “the gospel of the Kingdom” (Lk.4:43, 16:16; Mt.4:23, 9:35, 24:14; and Mk.1:14). Please refer to Word Studies 19-20-21 for this subject. In three instances, the recipients of the gospel / “good news” are the poor (Mt.11:5, Lk.4:18, 7:22). Elsewhere, it is combined with healing (Lk.9:6), teaching (Lk.20:1), changing one's life orientation in favor of faithfulness to the Kingdom (Mk.1:15) – see W.S.#6, the “loss” of one's self-centered life or possessions (Mt.8:35, 10:29), the permanent inclusion of the incident of the extravagant gift of perfume in any future “gospel” narrative (Mt.26:13, Mk.14:9), and Jesus' post-resurrection mandate that it be preached to “every creature” (Mk.16:15) – interesting that Mark says “creature” instead of “person”. Does this have implications for other creatures as well?

Most of these incidents may be seen as simply manifestations of Jesus' Kingdom – solid evidence for his opening statement, “The time has been fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has arrived!” (Mk.1:15). Note that both of these verbs are perfect tenses (see appendix to Translation Notes). **This is not a prediction, but an announcement!**

Modern day “evangelists” or “preachers of the gospel” will search in vain for their strident accusations of “sinfulness” and guilt, or purported demands for human sacrifice. **Jesus never said that, folks!** He simply graciously invited all who would, to become a part of the Kingdom that he had come to establish.

In Acts and the epistles, the list of people doing the “evangelizing” broadens considerably. It includes Peter and John (Ac.5:42), Philip (see discussion in w.s. #41, and add his identifying “label” in Ac.21:8), Paul (most of his letters, but especially numerous references in Romans, Galatians Ephesians, and Thessalonians), “all those scattered after the martyrdom of Stephen” (Ac.8:4), and many others.

It is worthy of note that while Paul asserts several times (note especially the extensive discussion in 1 Cor.9) that it is reasonable to expect that people carrying the Word to places “where Christ is not known” be supported by other brethren, he is so deeply concerned that the gospel message be offered without charge, that he considers self-support to be a matter of integrity.

The more significant question concerns the content of their message, which is easily identifiable by the phrase, “the gospel of ---”. By far the most common is “the gospel of Jesus, the gospel of Christ, the gospel of Jesus Christ, or of the Lord Jesus Christ.” (I counted 21, but may have missed a few). It is reasonable to assume, especially in light of the accusations leveled against apostles on several occasions, that this involved a reporting upon Jesus' life, activity, and teaching: at least 3 or 4 times, the phrase “Jesus and the resurrection” is noted (see the centrality of this event in the gospel message in W.S.#35). “The gospel of God” to which Paul refers in I Cor.11:7, Rom.1:1, and I Thes.2:2, 2:8-9, may sound a bit more generic, but is probably little different, since that notably verbose brother seldom fails to expound on distinctions when he thinks elaboration is required!

“The word of the gospel” or “the word of the Lord” (Ac.8:4, 15:7, 15:35) would appear to refer more directly to Jesus' teachings. “The word of truth of the gospel” (Col.1:5) stands in sharp contrast to the competing philosophies and cosmologies that Paul is trying to counteract, as does his reference to the “truth of the gospel” in Gal.2:5.

Another phrase used multiple times,”the gospel of peace” (Ac.10:36, Rom.10:15, Eph.2:17, 6:15) usually appears in the
context of the bringing together of Jewish and Gentile believers. Please see chapter 2 of Citizens of the Kingdom on “unity”, and chapter 7 for discussion of Eph.2 and its effect on the Body of believers. Ever since the announcement by the heavenly hosts in Lk.2, it is no gospel which does not include the creation of peace among formerly hostile people who join the Kingdom.

Paul also makes reference to competitors seeking to impose “another gospel” (Gal.1:6-9,2:14; I Cor.9:18, 15:12-18; Phil.1:12-18, Col.1:23), as does Peter (I Pet.4:17). Most of these are individuals seeking either to impose legal regulations as a condition of acceptance (Col.2:16), or, conversely, to revert to pagan licentiousness (Col.2:8, I Pet.4:4).

It is one thing to hear the proclamation of a new Kingdom – a completely new way of living – and quite another to adopt it as one’s own: to become a citizen of that Kingdom. Jesus spoke of it as a complete re-orientation of life – metanoia- (See W.S.#6), and urged “becoming faithful to (others translate it merely “believe”) the gospel” (See w.s.#1). His later followers spoke of “obeying the gospel” (Rom.10:16, II Thess.1:8, 3:14; Heb.4:9, I Pet.4:17). Paul also wrote of people “serving together in the gospel” (I Thes.3:2, Phil. 1:7, 1:17, 1:27, 2:22, 4:3.), and sharing in the hassles occasioned by that service (II Tim.1:8).

The familiar advertising of “fire insurance” and rhetoric about a “free one-way ticket to glory” did not come from the New Testament! The genuine gospel message is far more beautiful, and more far-reaching, than that. Paul hearkens back to the original “good news” announced even before Jesus’ birth (Mt.1:23), of “Emmanuel – God with us”-- when he characterizes the “mystery of the gospel” (Col.1:27) as “Christ among [in] you all: your hope [expectation] of glory!”

A true “evangelist”, at his Master’s command, extends “to every creature” (Mk.16:15) the gracious invitation to become a part of the Body – a citizen of the Kingdom – of the Lord of Glory!

May that tribe increase!

Word Study #44 – Preachers, Priests

The word kerux, “preacher”, like “evangelist” in W.S.#43, appears in the New Testament only three times! I am convinced that this constitutes confirming evidence that the New Testament focus is upon the functions that need to be performed in the brotherhood, and not upon any ranking or titles conferred upon its participants. Paul refers to himself twice as a “preacher” – I Tim.2:7 and II Tim.2:11 – and Peter (II Pet.2:5) calls Noah a “preacher of justice”. That is all. Consequently, as before, clues to the “job description” need to be gleaned from the verb (action) forms of the words.

Liddell/Scott identifies a kerux as “a herald, a public messenger, a crier who made proclamations and kept order at assemblies, an auctioneer, or a messenger between nations at war.” This latter description is interesting in a Kingdom context. Is a “preacher” a messenger from the Prince of Peace to any who had been “at war” with his Kingdom?

In their reference to the verb form, kerusso, L/S add, “to invite people to become colonists!” Both Herodotus and Plutarch use it that way. This historical reference, along with the New Testament contexts, tends toward a parallel to the evangelistic task. In no instance is this “job” described as a hierarchical function within a single congregation. “Preachers”, like “evangelists” and “apostles”, seem to have been primarily itinerant, proclaiming Jesus to the previously ignorant.

In the gospels, John the Baptist, Jesus, and his disciples are said to be “preaching.” In the case of Jesus and the disciples, the word is sometimes combined with “teaching” (Mt.9:35), “healing” (Lk.9:2), and “casting out demons” (Mk.1:38, 3:14). By far the most common reference is to “preaching/announcing the Kingdom” (Mt.4:17, 23; Mt.9:35, 10:7, 24:14; Lk.8:1, 9:2). It is primarily John the Baptist, not Jesus, who emphasizes “repentance” and “forgiveness” in his preaching (Mt.3:1, Mk.1:4,7; Lk.3:3). Please see also the previous post (#43), as some of these usages overlap.

The account of the early church in Acts, and Paul’s epistles, continues in the vein of an introductory proclamation to people or groups, and considerably broadens the base of “proclaimers.” Here, too, the subject matter is expanded to include Jesus’ resurrection (Ac.4:2, 17:3; I Cor.15:11-12 – actually the whole chapter). It also parallels the subjects listed in W.S.#43. “Preaching Jesus”, or “preaching Christ”, predominates, as well as “preaching the Word.” In contrast, again, to modern emphasis, “cross/crucified/crucifixion” is mentioned as the subject only once (I Cor.1:18-23). How, then, did that come to be the only acceptable focus for so many people? Folks who claim to “preach Christ” need to look again at all the wonderful things that such “preaching” includes: “Jesus Christ as the Son of God (II Cor.1:19); “the message of faithfulness”(Rom.10:8); “explaining about the resurrection” (Ac.17:3), “admonishing and teaching every person, in order that we may present every person mature in Christ” (Col.1:28), and persisting, like brother Paul imprisoned in Rome, in “preaching the Kingdom of God” (Ac.28:31)! “Inviting people to become colonists” (see above) of the Kingdom, seems to
describe the task quite delightfully!

Do not neglect to note the warnings in II Cor.11:4 and much of Galatians, concerning the acceptance or propagation of “another gospel” – an erroneous or distorted version of the one Paul had proclaimed. The “real thing” comes (I Cor.2:4) not in fancy rhetoric and eloquent language, but in the simple demonstration of the power of God!

How carefully do you sift and evaluate what purports to be the “preaching of the gospel”?

At about this stage of a survey of the “job descriptions” in the New Testament church, someone frequently protests, “But if “pastors” and “bishops” represent just two of the tasks of “elders/old people”, and “preachers” are itinerant evangelists, then who's in charge at home in the local congregation?”

The short answer is, NOBODY BUT THE LORD JESUS, through his Holy Spirit, with the elder members providing a degree of oversight and evaluation of the contributions of all the members!

Some groups, under the mistaken impression that they need “official” human leadership (to mediate – or replace? – the Holy Spirit?) have decided to pick out an individual – or several – whom they then elevate above the rest and call them “ministers,” (see W.S.#40), or “priests.” Sorry, but that doesn't work in a New Testament church. Hierus, “priest”, does not appear at all in Paul's epistles. In the Gospels and Acts, it refers exclusively to the Jewish officials who uniformly opposed everything that Jesus did or said, except for one single reference (Ac.6:7) to a few individuals who had come to faith. The writer to the Hebrews spends considerable time in chapters 7, 8, and 9, reviewing the responsibilities of priests under the old covenant, and explaining Jesus' superiority, noting that he has removed all need for their intricate ceremonies. Jesus’ position is compared to that of Melchizedek, who had no connection to the Levitical priesthood, but is called “a priest forever.”

The discussion in Hebrews also incorporates the word archiereus, “high” or “chief priests,” who, in the Gospels and Acts accounts, are also uniformly mentioned as Jesus' opponents. Chapters 2 through 6 proclaim Jesus himself as the ultimate “high priest”, and the only mediator who is needed, in contrast to the multiplicity of the ancient hierarchy.

There are only two places where any form of “priesthood” refers to contemporary followers of Jesus, and none of these singles out any individual. I Peter 2:5 and 2:9 speak of the entire brotherhood of believers as “priests”: “You yourselves, also, as living stones, be continually built (into) a dedicated household, into a dedicated priesthood, to bring to God spiritual sacrifices that will be well-received because of Jesus Christ.” and “You all are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a set-apart [holy] nation, a people especially reserved for the purpose of sending out messages about the excellence of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light!”

Likewise, in the Revelation, (1:6, 5:10, 20:6), referring to the crowds singing praises around the throne, all of God's people are proclaimed to be his “priests.”

As Dan noted in his response to W.S.#42, Martin Luther and other “reformers” had a lot to say about “the priesthood of all believers” – but somehow, both they and their descendents have neglected to treat that concept as a practical reality. Indeed, reference to “the priesthood of believers” has become nothing but a hollow buzz-word, if the privilege and responsibility to teach the word, proclaim the Kingdom, and organize the observance of its symbols is restricted to a narrow hierarchy of individuals, as it was before the arrival of our King!

These are tasks assigned to every citizen, for the benefit of every other such citizen, and for the glory of the Lord who has called us all!

“He has made US a kingdom – priests to God his Father! Glory and power to him forever! Amen!” (Rev.1:6)

Amen indeed!

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**Word Study #45 – Prophets**

As we examine the responsibility of prophets, we arrive at a situation that is unique in two different ways. First, the New Testament provides us with a simple and concise definition of the task: (I Cor.14:3) “The one who prophesies [delivers God's message] is speaking to people: edification, admonition, and encouragement.” And secondly, this definition departs markedly from the classical usages of the word as recorded in L/S: “the keepers and spokespeople of an oracle, who speaks for the god; the highest order of the ancient Egyptian religion; a foreteller of the future; an herbalist or quack doctor”!

The only firm parallel between these two is the idea of speaking for (“God's message” versus “the god”) but somehow, both they and their descendents have neglected to treat that concept as a practical reality. Indeed, reference to “the priesthood of believers” has become nothing but a hollow buzz-word, if the privilege and responsibility to teach the word, proclaim the Kingdom, and organize the observance of its symbols is restricted to a narrow hierarchy of individuals, as it was before the arrival of our King!

These are tasks assigned to every citizen, for the benefit of every other such citizen, and for the glory of the Lord who has called us all!

“He has made US a kingdom – priests to God his Father! Glory and power to him forever! Amen!” (Rev.1:6)

Amen indeed!
reference to the future had either a very practical connection to specific instructions, as when “prophets from Jerusalem”
came to Antioch and warned of an impending famine, in order that these distant brethren might send relief (Ac.11:27), or a
specific intention to encourage beleaguered disciples to confident faithfulness (Mt.10:18). Sadly, many who claim today to
“speak in the Lord's name” fit more clearly into the ancient pattern of purported future-telling, than the prescribed New
Testament mandate for “edification, admonition, and encouragement”. Please note also that Paul's definition makes no
reference to an attempt to frighten one's hearers into compliant submission to the speaker's agenda!

Chronologically, the first “prophet” we meet in the New Testament is Zachariah (Lk.1:67), when his son John was born. He
simply reported what he had been told about the child and his assignment. The second is elderly Anna, specifically
identified as a “prophetess”, in the temple after Jesus' birth (Lk.2:36-38). Besides these two, most of the gospel references
are to the Old Testament prophets, relating their messages to Jesus himself, or to John the Baptist. A notable exception is
Caiaphas' cynical statement of Jesus' fate (Jn.11:51), where John offers his opinion that the high priest had no clue of the
implication of his words.

At Pentecost, however, everything changed! The gift of the Holy Spirit's coming is related, by Peter, to the earlier prophecy
of Joel (Ac.2:17-18), that now all God's people may prophesy! Old and young, sons and daughters, share in this gracious
gift, in order better to serve each other and their world. Suddenly, “prophets” seem to be cropping up all over! Our Lord
now intends to speak to all of us through all of us:
Ac.13:1 mentions “prophets and teachers” (both plural, please note) in the congregation at Antioch, having a prayer meeting
when Barnabas and Saul were commissioned for their first journey by a perceived word from the Holy Spirit.
Later, in his beautiful description of a “coming together” for worship, in I Cor.14:26-33, Paul clearly assumes that everyone
is eligible to participate: (v.31: “You can ALL prophesy [speak for God], one at a time, so that all may learn and all may be
encouraged.”) This is not a free-for-all: in v.29, he gives very careful instructions for the evaluation and orderly control of
participation. But clearly, everyone is expected to be involved.

Some folks are inclined to get bent-out-of-shape (in both directions!) over the following section about women. Please see
chapter 13 of Citizens of the Kingdom for a discussion of this. Here, I will simply remind you that just a few chapters
earlier (I Cor.11:4-5), their participation in the “praying and prophesying” is assumed.
In I Cor.14:39, Paul closes his treatise on prophecy by urging the whole congregation to seek earnestly for that privilege.
Anyone may prophesy. But not all are called “prophets” (I Cor.12:29). Although several folks are designated “prophets” in
addition to those already mentioned — Judas and Silas (Ac.15:32), Agabus (Ac.21:10), and the four daughters of Philip
(Ac.21:9), among others, there is no record of anyone being chosen for the job by anyone else. They just emerge. A person
seems to have acquired that label by consistent, trustworthy exercise of the gift.

Prophecy appears on all the lists of gifts of the Holy Spirit (see W.S.#25) – Rom.12:6, I Cor.12:10, Eph.4:11, and I Pet.4:10-
11. Clearly, it was expected that both the brotherhood as a whole (Ac.13:1-3) and individuals (I Tim.4:14) would receive
the Lord's instructions through the carefully evaluated exercise of prophetic gifts in the group.
One does not “decide”, “plan”, or choose to prophesy. Please notice that in no instance is a “prophecy” represented as a
carefully prepared study-paper or sermon. “God's message [prophecy] didn't come from a person's own desire, but people
spoke from God, as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit” (II Pet.1:21). That is not to deprecate the value of study or
sermons: these belong more in the category of “teaching” – see the next posting – which is also necessary, and may include
a prophetic word on occasion, but is an entirely different form of contribution. Likewise, “preaching” (see previous post) is
not prophecy, although it may, on occasion, contain it.
In I Cor.14:6, Paul lists “a revelation, knowledge, prophecy [a message from God], and teaching” as useful contributions to
the welfare of a brotherhood. All are necessary for healthy growth – a “balanced diet” for the Body of Christ.

Prophets and teachers, although occasionally itinerant, are the only functionaries besides the ubiquitous elders, who are
assumed to exist in every congregation.

Claiming to “prophecy in Jesus' name” is no guarantee of authenticity (Mt.7:2). Jesus, Peter, and John all warned the
faithful to be discerning of false prophets (Mt.7:15, 24:11, 24; Lk.6:26, Ac.13:6, II Pet.2:1, I Jn.4:1, Rev.16:13, 19:20,
20:10). Counterfeits are easily detected by people who are well acquainted with the genuine article. The counsel and
wisdom of experienced elders is extremely valuable in such situations.

It behooves us to heed that wisdom, rather than, as some have done, to conclude out of sheer frustration that “the time of
prophecy has passed.” True, this gift is not permanent (I Cor.13:9), and it is only partial – but it will only be superseded
when we are all directly with the Lord.

Perhaps it is just such a dilemma that Paul had in mind when he wrote (I Th.5:20) “Do not scorn prophesying [messages
from God].” A faithful brotherhood must evaluate, not automatically discard, what may be a prophetic word.
Paul's definition with which we began, serves as a valuable measuring tool. Genuine prophecy [messages directly from God] speaks to people for

– edification – being “built” into the Body the Lord intends,
– admonition – instructions for faithful life and interaction, and
– encouragement – sometimes translated “comfort”; I frequently use “coaching”.

Any message that does not meet these criteria may safely be discarded, with confidence that it is not from God!

But don't forget that Paul admonished the entire group at Corinth (I Cor.14:1) “Strive for spiritual things – especially that you all may prophesy [speak for God]!”

Hearing our Master's voice, and sharing the insight thus received, as we interact with our brethren, is a large and much needed part of the Lord's plan for the faithful functioning of his Body in the world.

May we determine to handle it faithfully!

**Word Study #46 – Teachers**

In a first-century setting, the word “teacher” (didaskalos) would have conjured up a very different picture from either the 20th century denizen of chalkboards or the 21st century operator of a computer and “smart-boards” in front of a class. If you were of Greek heritage, you thought of Socrates, Plato, and their cohorts, surrounded by eager “disciples” (mathetes), deeply engrossed in philosophical dialogues. Your Jewish counterpart would think of a rabbi, inculcating the intricate details of the Law into his young charges, or arguing its fine points with others of his status. So it was no surprise to either group when a new Teacher appeared on the scene, with a cadre of disciples. “Teacher” or “Master” (the British version of the same word) was one of the primary respectful titles by which Jesus was often addressed. However, very early on, people recognized that there was a difference.

Matthew (7:29, Mark (1:22) and Luke (4:32) all note that one thing that “amazed” the hearers was that Jesus taught “with authority, and not like the scribes” who usually needed to buttress their arguments by quoting others of their number. (Does that sound like any “theological” teaching you have heard?)

Jesus' teaching was unique in that he undertook to correct the prevalent misunderstandings that were touted as “the Law.” In fact, this makes up a large part of his “Sermon on the Mount” (Mt.5-7), which is bookended by references to his “teaching.” Luke, referring to his first account, summarizes it as “all that Jesus began to do and to teach” (Ac.1:1) as he begins “Volume 2.”

It is also notable that Jesus’ “teaching” was often connected with healing (Mt.9:35), casting out demonic powers (Mk.1:27), and feeding the crowds (Mk.8), further demonstrating his identity.

Jesus' frequent use of parables to make a point was not particularly rare in the culture, but his subject-matter certainly was. All the synoptic writers describe “teaching and preaching [proclaiming] the Kingdom”!

Most of these items are also included in his instructions to the disciples whom he sent out as his representatives (Mt.10, Lk.6:1-6 and 10:17). Their discipleship seems to have served as a kind of apprenticeship, as both Matthew (10:24-25) and Luke (6:40) record the reminder that “a disciple is not above (huper) his teacher,” but when fully trained, will be “like (hos) his master”, and Matthew adds (23:7) the blunt prohibition against assuming a title of any kind, reminding them “You all have one Teacher, and you are all brethren.”

This sets the instructions that have been called “The Great Commission” (Mt.28:19-20) in an interesting light. Faulty translation, due to poorly understood grammar, has led to many an unwarranted guilt-trip, as well as serious neglect of our responsibilities. According to most interpretations, “Go” and “preach [evangelize]” (this latter borrowed from a late manuscript of Mark's version) are treated as if they were continuous imperatives (commands) issued to every “believer,” (which, if true, would require a present tense in the imperative), while “baptizing” and “teaching” are reserved for the “clergy” – a word which, incidentally, does not exist in the New Testament. In point of fact, there is only one imperative in the entire passage – matheteusate.-- “make disciples.” It is a second person plural, aorist imperative: which indicates definitive action, by all the hearers. Interestingly, the sense of this word changes with the case of its object. (L/S). If the object is genitive or dative, it refers to being disciples of or to another person. If, as in this case, the object is accusative, (panta ta ethne), “all the nations [Gentiles – same word]”, then it becomes a transitive verb and refers to “making” the object to become disciples. It may be that the risen Lord is thereby deliberately opening the door once-and-for-all (aorist) to “all nations”! It took the disciples a while to internalize that idea, but the grammar is unmistakable.

All three of the other verbs are present participles, implying continuous action. They govern dependent clauses, modifying matheteusate, the main verb. Poreuthentes, is temporal or spatial: “as” or “while” you are going [or even “wherever” you are going]. Baptizontes (baptizing) and didaskontes (teaching) refer to what the “making disciples” involves. A “how-to”,

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if you please. Please note that the subject of the sentence has not changed. Matheteusate is second person plural. THE WHOLE THING IS EVERYBODY'S JOB! Please see chapter 10 of Citizens for more discussion.

This seems to have been well understood in the early church. The teaching job comes after the new disciples are recruited and baptized. It was a major part of their early gatherings (Ac.2:42 and 4:33), as those who had “been there” shared the resurrection message. Paul reassured the congregation at Colossae (3:16) that they are perfectly capable of “teaching and admonishing one another.” Jesus had after all, promised that the Holy Spirit would “teach and remind” his people of all that he had said and done (Jn.14:26). Timothy (II Tim.2:2) is reminded to find faithful folks to whom he can pass on the responsibility of teaching. Paul lists “teachers” (plural) among the gifts to the church in Rom.12:7, I Cor.12:28, and Eph.4:11, but also assumes that anyone (I Cor.14:26) might have a “teaching” to contribute.

Indeed, the expectation that multiple folks will be involved in teaching is obvious in the scolding by the writer to the Hebrews (5:12), “By this time, you all ought to be teachers, but you have need for someone to teach you again the very basic principles of God's words!” Both Timothy (I Tim.5:17) and Titus (1:9 and 2:3) are reminded that an elder must be a patient and able teacher, and warned of those who teach a mistaken, warped, or deliberately distorted version of the message (II Tim.4:3 and Tit.1:11).

Teachers (Ac.13:1) were together with prophets (see previous post) in the prayer-meeting in Antioch when two of their number were commissioned for itinerant service. I Cor.12:29 implies that (although Paul in chapter 14 directs that anyone may teach) not all are “teachers”. Probably the situation is similar to the directions for prophesying. Those who fill that function responsibly and well, acquire the label – but in obedience to Jesus' instructions (Mt.23:7), it is deliberately to be avoided as a title or status.

So – what is the “teacher” to teach? Jesus said it quite simply in the Commission mentioned already: “teaching them to follow my instructions!” We will consider this in more detail in the next post.

Word Study #47 – Teaching, Doctrine

There are two nouns that have been translated “teaching” or, more traditionally, “doctrine”, in the New Testament. Didache, used 29 times, appears usually to be used of the act of teaching, and didaskalia, used 19 times, of the content of what is taught, although these are not clearly divided categories. If any of you can come up with a better distinction, I will gladly add it to this post.

More important than that, however, is the realization that neither word bears any resemblance whatever to the neatly sorted and proof-texted lists of theological propositions commonly promoted as “doctrines”, to which individuals are required to subscribe in order to be considered acceptably “orthodox.” (Remember James' statement (see w.s. #1) that the devil himself could readily subscribe to those lists of “beliefs.”) In 17th century England (Shakespeare and King James were contemporaries), the word “doctrine” simply meant “teaching.” In early American history, it referred to a political pronouncement (“the Monroe Doctrine”).

When Jesus warned his followers to “beware of the didache (teaching, doctrine) of the scribes and Pharisees” (Mt.16:12), it was their behavior that he had been challenging. More frequently, he critiqued their “teaching (didaskontes) as “doctrines” (didaskalias) the commandments of people” (Mt.15:9, Mk.7:7), which sounds suspiciously like the folks today who harangue their hearers about their carefully contrived and footnoted “statements of doctrine.” This may seem to you like a tired refrain, but I will ask you once again, What did JESUS say? And if you can find any instance of the Lord Jesus arguing any kind of systematic theology, please let me know.

Jesus' teaching [doctrine] that amazed his hearers was his ability (Mk.1:27 and Lk.4:32) to command the departure of unclean spirits, (Mk.11:18) to drive the opportunistic merchants out of the temple, and (Mt.22:33) to make the scholarly scribes and Pharisees look silly!

Jesus advocated one single test of “orthodoxy”: (Jn.7:16, 17) “My teaching is not mine, but (has its source in) the one who sent me. If anyone wants to do his will, he will know about the teaching [doctrine], whether it comes from God.” Folks, it's all about following instructions!

When Peter and John were arrested for “teaching in the Name (see W.S. #24) of Jesus” (Ac.3 and 4), they replied simply, (4:19) “If it is just [right] before God to listen to you rather than God, you must judge!” and proceeded to continue to teach as before (5:28-29) the message of Jesus' resurrection, as evidence of his vindication and supremacy! In Athens, Paul's “preaching about Jesus and the resurrection” (Ac.17:18-19) precipitated the Areopagus discussion about “what new thing this teaching [doctrine] is”. As noted in W.S. #35, Jesus' resurrection is the central theme of the whole New Testament: both the definitive proof of his identity, and his credential as the rightful Sovereign of his Kingdom!
Remember that the “teaching assignment” given to Jesus’ followers in Mt.28:20 was quite specific: those to whom the news of the Kingdom is carried, are to be taught to follow the King’s instructions! Paul praised the group at Rome (6:17) for turning from the futility of their former lives, to a life of “obedience to the example of the teaching” (didache) they had received. He reminded those at Colossae “Since you were resurrected with Christ (3:1),” get about the business of incorporating that fact into your lives. Timothy and Titus both received very explicit instructions for teaching – and modeling – faithful living.

As was the case with prophecy (W.S.#45), there is also false teaching that must be discerned and corrected. It may involve (Rom.6:17) those who cause divisions in the brotherhood, (Gal) those who try to reinstitute Jewish legal requirements, or (Col.2:22) similar ascetic practices from pagan traditions. There is a rather explicit list in I Tim.1:3-11, along with the reminder (which has never gone out of date), “The goal of the commandment is love from a clean heart and a good understanding, and faithfulness without pretense (1:5)”. The warning is repeated in 4:1-4. In fact, the whole letter (I Tim) could be considered a “teacher's manual.” Clearly, again, it is Jesus’ words that are to be taught. Subjects specifically labeled in the Gospels as “his teaching and doctrine” include his parables, the Sermon on the Mount, his warnings about the scribes and Pharisees, and his relationship with the Father.

Unlike prophecy, which, as we have seen (W.S. #45), entails a direct message from God, usually bearing upon a specific situation, faithful teaching does draw upon the knowledge, experience, and study of the teacher. II Tim.2:15 succinctly expresses the goal: “correctly handling the message of the truth.” The Scripture is the primary source – and it should be incumbent upon anyone who presumes to teach, to learn to understand it accurately – for it is indeed “useful for teaching, for reproving, for correction, and for education in justice, in order that God's person may be mature, prepared for every good effort.” (I Tim.3:16-17). And remember that, unlike “moderns” who claim that “scripture” in the first century referred only to the Old Testament, our brother Peter begs to differ, (II Pet.3:16), including both “brother Paul” and other writers in that designation. There were many more writings (the literal meaning of graphe or grammata,) circulating in the first century church, which required as much evaluation and discernment as the prophecy and teaching. (Note that Paul referred to letters incorrectly attributed to him – II Thes.2:2.)

It is also prudent to bear in mind James' warning that “we who teach will receive stricter judgment.”(3:1).

Nevertheless, when our risen Lord ascended “higher than all the heavens”, he gave “apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers” to his church: “for the purpose of equipping God's people to do work of service [ministry], and to build up the Body of Christ, until we all arrive into the unity of faithfulness,of intimate acquaintance with the Son of God: that is, into mature adulthood – into a measure of the maturity whose source is the fullness [completeness] of Christ. (The purpose is ) that we be no longer babies, agitated and carried around by every wind of teaching [doctrine], deceitfully manipulated by people who are deliberately trying to mislead us, but as we interact truthfully, in love, we may grow up in every way into him who is the Head – Christ. From him, the whole Body, joined together [harmonized] and knit together, through the proper functioning of every available ligament, according to the measured working of each individual part, makes bodily growth for building itself up in love.” (Eph.4:12-16)

That's everybody's job, folks! Let's get busy!

**Word Study #48 – Ordain**

It would be difficult to find a word that provides a clearer example of how hard “official” translators will beat the bushes to try to find (or create) justification for an idea that arose completely apart from the New Testament text, than the English word “ordain.” It entered the English language around 1250AD, from the Latin, via French. This, please note, was after more than a thousand years of “evolution” which, tragically, had transformed a loving, mutually participatory brotherhood into a huge, hierarchical institution, in which a comparatively few individuals (“ordained clergy” * of many ranks) held frightening power over a “laity”* who were kept compliant by their enforced ignorance of the New Testament message, due primarily to their lack of access to it.

*Please note that neither of these terms exists anywhere in the New Testament.*

How else can one explain the use of “ordain” to represent no less that thirteen different Greek words in the text, with no more than three such representations (in some cases an extremely tiny minority) in the case of any single original word? And even the English word, according to the Oxford dictionary, expressed multiple meanings: “to enact by law or edict, to decree or to give orders, to destine, to order or command, to appoint to office,” as well as “to invest with ministerial/sacerdotal function in a church.”

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Only in Heb. 5:1 and 8:3 is there any hint, in the New Testament, of a “sacramental”* ceremony, conveying ecclesiastical responsibilities, privilege, and status – and that deals with the commissioning of the Jewish high priests, under the old system! (* another word that is not found in the New Testament)

We will briefly examine each of the Greek words involved, and note their more common uses, as well as their lexical meanings.

**Diatasso**, which primarily concerns the giving of instructions, occurs thirteen times in the New Testament. It was translated “ordain” only three times: I Cor. 7:17 (referring to whether one was “called” to be married or single); I Cor. 9:14 (the provision for itinerant preachers to be supported); and Gal. 3:19 (regarding the giving of the Law.) Other uses are as varied as the lexical meanings listed by Liddell/Scott (L/S): “to appoint or assign” (Lk. 3:13, Ac. 20:13, Tit. 1:5); “to give orders” (Lk. 8:55, Ac. 18:2, 23:31); “to arrange, undertake, or pledge” (I Cor. 16:1, 11:34), among others.

**Kathistemi**, a somewhat stronger word, used nineteen times, was also translated “ordain” only three times: Titus 1:5 regarding the choosing of elders, and the Hebrews references already cited. L/S lists “to cause, place, or station” (Mt. 24:45, 47); “to bring to a destination” (Ac. 17:15), “to bring before a judge or magistrate” (Lk. 12:4), “to set a battle array, to institute laws, to be set as a guard,” or occasionally “to stand against or oppose” (Jas. 4:4). Most common is “to make” (as, to give someone a job) (Mt. 25:21, Ac. 7:10, Ac. 6:3). Interestingly, the Titus reference contains both diatasso and kathistemi: Paul is reminding Titus that he was instructed to put in place elders (plural) in every city, to provide the necessary oversight for each group.

**Kataskeuazo**, primarily (L/S) “to equip or furnish, to build or construct”, is used six times (out of 11) as “to prepare” – Mt. 11:10, Mk. 1:2, Lk. 1:17 and 7:27 – of John the Baptist “preparing” the way for Jesus; and Heb. 11:7 and I Pet. 20:20 of Noah “preparing” the ark. It was used three times in Heb. 3:3 and 4 of building a house; and only once as “ordain” (probably referring to instructions), in the preparation of the tabernacle objects.

**Krino**, used 110 times, usually in reference to judgment (see Word Study #9), either legal or intellectual, is only once rendered “ordain”, in reference to the verdict at the Jerusalem Conference (Ac. 16:4).

**Horizo** (8 uses total) twice refers to Jesus as “ordained” by God to judge the world (Ac. 10:42, 17:31). The classical “to divide or separate with a border or boundary, to determine or define” would fit just as well, as it does in Lk. 22:22, Ac. 11:29 17:26, Heb. 4:7.

**Poio** – usually “to do” or “to make”, is found in the New Testament 538 times, only one of which was translated “ordain” – Mk. 3:14 – referring to Jesus’ choice of the 12 disciples. Did someone just decide that a more “official sounding” word was needed for that event? The writer apparently did not think so.

The same question could be asked about the single case where ginomai (“to be, to become” – 557 times) has been rendered “ordain” – the choice of Matthias (Ac. 1:22). Both of these choices are clearly editorial, as are many of the other 47 cases where a variant rendering was chosen only once.

**Prographo** – Jude 4 – “to write beforehand”, and proetoimazo – Eph. 2:10 – “to prepare beforehand”, each used only once in the entire New Testament, may well have been rendered “ordain” to convey a sense of destiny, which does not exist etymologically in either of those words.

**Proorizo**, on the other hand, “to determine beforehand,” does carry that flavor. It only appears five times – and only once translated “ordain” (I Cor. 2:7), referring to God’s plan for redemption. This subject deserves more attention, which we may give it at another time.

**Tasso**, (9 appearances, 2 as “ordain”), classically referred primarily to orders or instructions – military or civil – or appointments to any kind of service. This is seen in Ac. 15:2, Mt. 28:16, Ac. 22:10, 28:23: the change to “ordain” in Rom. 13:1, again, seems capricious. Ac. 13:48 speaks of “those ordained for eternal life” in traditional versions, conveying a determinate sense which is absent in the grammatical structure. “Whoever became faithful was appointed [enrolled] for eternal life” would more closely approximate the grammar of the sentence.

**Tithemi**, basically referring to putting or laying something somewhere, whether a person, a vote, a bank deposit, a burial, an offering, a will … has 75 New Testament uses, only two of which were translated “ordain” – again, rather obviously because the translators (not the writers) thought a more specific term was needed in Jn. 15:16 and I Tim. 2:7. They were fine with using “appoint” six times, and “lay” or “lay down” fourteen times with reference to burial, four times to a sickbed, and five to laying a foundation.

**Cheiriotoneo**, only used twice, was rendered “ordain” when applied to elders (Ac. 14:23), and “choose” when applied to the folks sent to accompany Paul’s relief mission (II Cor. 8:19). Please see the discussion of “elders” in W.S. #42. A discrepancy like this, like those previously mentioned, cannot be other than editorial – which is not “the task of a translator” (please refer to the essay of that title.).

Conspicuously absent from all of these references is any indication of a ceremony elevating an individual to a lifetime position of status, with power over the welfare – physical or spiritual – of his fellows, or the monumental task of standing as a necessary link or mediator between any person and the grace of God! It’s not there, folks!

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The Body of Christ is neither a many-headed monster, an efficiently structured corporation, nor a layered pyramid scheme! It is a living, breathing organism under its one Head, the Lord Jesus himself. All its members – loyal citizens of his Kingdom – “ordained” since before the beginning (Eph.1:4-6) to belong to him – share the task of “the measured working of each individual part, building itself up in love, for the praise of his glory!”

Thanks be to God!

**Word Study #49 – The Church**

Here is another place where the process of word study presents a surprise. In all the Gospels, the word “church” – *ekklesia* – occurs only three times: once in Matthew's account of Peter's recognition of Jesus' true identity (16:18), and twice in Jesus' instructions for reconciliation among brethren (Mt.18:17). It is plentiful in the later writings, appearing 112 times, but to our usual question, “What did Jesus say?”, we must answer, “not much,” although I think that many of his references to his Kingdom (see W.S.#19, 20, 21) apply equally to the church.

*Ekklesia* was not uncommon in classical usage. As early as Homer, it referred to any assembly legally summoned for a particular purpose: legal, civil, or military. It is even used this way three times in the account of the riot in Ephesus (Ac.19:32, 39, 41), of both the angry mob and the legal jurisdiction to which the town clerk referred them. The concept was taken over into the Latin *comitia*, from which our ubiquitous “committee” is derived, and the LXX translators used it of the Jewish congregation. L/S notes that “in the New Testament, it refers to the church as a body of Christians. The word was not applied to a building until the Codex Justinianus,” dated from the 4th to the 6th century AD – well after Constantine had re-structured the “church” as a civil institution.

But we are concerned with the faithful, New Testament pattern. Very likely, the lack of Gospel references is due to the more common use of *sunago* and its related words (note the English cognate, “synagogue”) which was the usual gathering-place of the Jewish faithful. If this is the case, then Jesus' deliberate choice to use a different word takes on sharp significance. When he says “I will build my church” (Mt.16:18), he is clearly about to “do a new thing”, as Isaiah had prophesied long ago (43:18-21). Please notice that Jesus says that HE intends to do the building! Later, (Ac.2:47), Luke notes that as the group of believers grew, “THE LORD added to their number.” In recent years, it has become “in vogue” for individuals – mere people – to set out to “build” or “plant” churches. With all due respect to these folks, some of whom, I'm sure, are quite sincere, THAT IS NOT OUR JOB!!! Peter casts it properly in the passive voice (I Pet.2:5), “You yourselves, also, as living stones, be continually built into a spiritual household...” We need to be available, as building materials – but leave the building to the Master Builder! He knows what he is doing!

There's plenty of work that is assigned to us. It is “through the church” that “rulers and authorities”, whether in heaven or earth, are to see a demonstration of the “many-faceted wisdom of God” (Eph.3:10)! For this purpose, Jesus has been provided to us as “head over everything with respect to the church, which is his Body (Eph.1:22, Col.1:18). Paul has furnished us with an “instruction manual” (I Cor.12) for learning to function as members of that Body – each actively contributing to the interdependent unit. See a more detailed discussion of this matter in Chapter 7 of *Citizens of the Kingdom* – “Discerning the Body”.

The closest we come to a “recipe” in the New Testament for a gathering of the church is found in I Cor.14:23-25. I have never seen a group try that, have you? It would be a truly wonderful meeting! Although, admittedly, it would probably be upsetting to anyone who has a need to be in control. The description in Ac.2:42-47 is similarly attractive, and just as rare. This is also discussed in *Citizens of the Kingdom*, chapter 7.

Being composed of very human people, of course, “the church” was not all glorious sweetness and light. Jesus himself (Mt.18:17) had given instructions for dealing with conflict, with the help of the church. An excellent practical example is described in the conference at Jerusalem (Ac.15, and *Citizens*, chapter 8) concerning the inclusion of Gentiles. Paul emphasizes in I Cor.6:4 that the church, and not civil courts, should be called upon when mediation is needed.

So, what is “the work of the church”? The church at Antioch sent out and supported Paul, Barnabas, and Silas (and possibly others) to carry the message into unreached areas. Other congregations also supported their work (Phil.4:15, II Cor.11:8, 12-13), and a sizable group cooperated to send relief to needy brethren (II Cor.8).

“The church” was also charged with the care of widows who had no family – which would have been a serious concern in groups under persecution. The section of Ac 2:42-47 lists some of their activities.
Most of the church groups seem to have met in people's homes. Ac.2:46 speaks of “breaking bread from house to house”, and Paul mentions groups meeting in the homes of Aquila and Priscilla (I Cor.16 and Rom.16), and Titus Justus (Ac.18:7) in Corinth; Nympha (Col.4:15) and Philemon (Phm.2) in Colossae; Lydia (Ac.16) in Philippi; John Mark's mother in Jerusalem (Ac.12:12); and probably Gaius (Rom.16) wherever Romans was written from. Occasionally, as in Ephesus (Ac.19:9) at the beginning, a rented hall was used – perhaps to accommodate a larger group, or before a host was available. It was natural, then, for Paul to refer to the church (I Tim.3:15) as “the household of God.” About half of the references are plural, which probably indicates more than one congregation in a location. In any event, real estate does not seem to have been a concern.

Neither is there any reference to the church as “a place to go on Sunday” to sit and listen to a learned lecture (or less-learned diatribe) and professionally performed music or other entertainment. There is no prescribed agenda or “liturgy.”

It is important to note that, except for his instructions to Timothy and Titus, who seem to have been serving as his “deputies”, Paul addresses his letters to “all God's people [the “saints”] at …. [a location], and not to officials of any kind. In Phil.1:1, leaders are included in the address, but are not primary. This makes one wonder about the addressing of the “mail” in Rev.2 and 3 to “the messenger” (aggelos)-- traditionally rendered “angel” (see discussion in chapter 13 of Citizens of the Kingdom. Might this person have been some sort of corresponding secretary? But even in this case, everyone is called upon to heed “what the Spirit says to the churches.”

So what is this New Creation called “the church”? I like the suggestion of a student years ago, “a combination of a colony of the Kingdom and a support group!” These are people gathered, as in Ac.2:42-47, to celebrate and share the resurrection life of their King. As in Ac.11:26, to learn his ways, in order to represent him faithfully to those outside, As in Ac.12:15, for mutual support and prayer in the face of persecution. They deliberately avoid (Heb.10:25) neglecting to get together, since they need to keep coaching and encouraging one another, (I Cor.14:12) each seeking to excel in what will edify the church, as they (Heb.10:24) concentrate on prodding each other with love and good deeds. They serve as a “demonstration project” of the wisdom and glory of God (Eph.3:10) being “built together into a permanent dwelling place for God, in the Spirit.”(Eph.2:22).

Quite enough to keep us all busy!

**Word Study #50 – Worship**

I don't know how many printed cards or form-letters we have received, over the years, from all varieties of “churches” that we have visited, bearing some variation of this standard message: “We were delighted to have you worship with us today. We hope you enjoyed the service, and that your needs were met. Our church offers many exciting programs for all ages. Please do not hesitate to call on us for your pastoral needs. We hope to see you again.”

Such drivel is immediately consigned to the recycle bin: yet another group has vividly demonstrated its total ignorance of (1) what worship is about, (2) what church is about, and (3) how easy it is to spot phony “hospitality.” Whether they loudly thump their Bibles, quoting chapter and verse, or scarcely open the pages at all, does not seem to make a difference. Although their stated agendas may label themselves “liberal” [“accepting/welcoming”] – translation: “Anything goes, here!”-- or “conservative” [“faithful”]-- translation: “You gotta do it MY way!” – , their attitudes are identical. Jesus, not surprisingly, said it best: (Mt.15:9, Mk.7:7) “Your worship of me is empty: you are teaching as 'doctrines' the commandments of (mere) men.”

We may be forgiven for imperfectly understanding the concept of “worship.” This English word has, after all, been used to represent no less than a dozen different Greek words – none of which, however, makes any reference to sitting in the audience of a lecture (scholarly or otherwise), a political speech, or a professional concert (classical, country, rock or rap, or anything in between!) Nor do any of them provide a clue as to what sort of “needs” are supposedly to be addressed. “Enjoyment”, likewise, is totally absent. Because, to put it most simply, worship is not about you or me and our “needs”! It is about the object of our devotion! When the Magi spent weeks, months, or perhaps years making their way across hostile deserts to “worship” before the King they had sought, do you think it was to acquire some sort of “warm fuzzy feeling”? I doubt it. Their tenacity, and subsequent openness to guidance, reveals rather a deliberate expression of fealty to an acknowledged superior! That
“pledge of obedience [allegiance]” is also precisely what Satan later asked of Jesus (Mt.4:9-10, Lk.4:7-8), and what Jesus flatly refused to give, with his unequivocal statement that one's allegiance is due only to God! (See W.S.#4).

Of the multiplicity of words used in the New Testament, the majority only occur once or twice, and are usually traditionally translated in other ways, as in Lk.14:10 (doxa much more often is rendered “glory” or “honor”) or Ac.17:25 (therapeuo is usually used of healing). Although some overlap exists, it is helpful to look at the lexical meanings of the most common words.

Latreuo (16x rendered “serve”, and only 3x “worship”) classically (L/S) referred to human servitude – either as a slave or a hired worker – as well as to “serving the gods with prayers and sacrifice”. Bauer adds “the carrying out of religious duties, usually of a cultic nature”, and Thayer also focuses on the performance of prescribed rites. Not surprisingly, many of the New Testament occurrences of latreuo are descriptions of the old ways that were left behind by both Jews and Gentile converts (Ac.7:42, Heb.10:2, Ac.26:7, Rom.1:35, Heb.13:10), although there is also occasional mention of “serving God”(Ac.27:33, Rom.1:9, Rev.7:15) in a more enlightened way.

Proskuneo, by far the most common (59x), carries the greatest implication of acknowledging a sovereign by bowing to the ground, or falling at his feet, although the word was also used in common courtesy as a formal greeting. This word referred to the gesture of submission required by political conquerors, the refusal of which resulted, not uncommonly, in peremptory execution. It was, however, also used of supplication, as when someone begged for Jesus’ attention (Mt.8:2, 9:18, 18:26; Mk.5:6). It’s going on all the time, in the joyful scenes around the throne (Rv.4:10, 5:14, 7:11, 11:1, 11:16, 14:7, 15:4).

Interestingly, although in pagan culture, physical obeisance was often an effort to avert the wrath of the gods (L/S), in the N.T. it is a scene of joyful celebration of the triumph of the Lamb! Interestingly, proskuneo is always an active verb—never a noun or an adjective.

Various forms of sebo, sebaomai, and sebazonai are sprinkled throughout the narratives, L/S notes that these refer to “the reverential awe that prevents one from doing something disgraceful”, and is used to describe “religious” people like Jewish proselytes (Ac.18:7, 16:14) who were open to the Christian message, as well as the varied objects of pagan worship (II Thes.2:2, Ac.17:23). This term became more politicized when the emperor adopted the title “Augustus” (sebastos) and demanded to be worshiped as a god (by the burning of incense). Our first century brethren would have surely been shocked at the ease with which so many today who call themselves “Christian” remain so ambivalent about the priority of their Kingdom loyalty!

Jesus' most detailed discussion of “worship” (proskuneo), interestingly, was with the woman at Jacob's well in Samaria (Jn.4:20-24). He quickly steered the conversation away from details of place – which no longer matters – (4:21) – to the object and attitude (22-24) which does matter. The Father is seeking (present tense) for those who will worship him “in spirit and truth.” “God (is) spirit” – there is no verb: but both nouns are nominative. The latter pneumati and aletheia are both dative objects of the preposition en.

There is no easy resolution to the arguments between trinitarian and non-trinitarian positions here; but both “sides” frequently obscure or ignore the connection to Jesus’ own definition of “truth” (Jn.14:6) – see W.S.#26 – and that the “true [genuine] worshipers” are designated by the same word. Their identification with Jesus, therefore, is most obvious.

One more word that needs attention, although it, too, is only traditionally rendered “worship” once, (against 3 x “religious/religion”): threskia, sometimes classically used of formal cult worship, but succinctly and deliberately re-defined by James (1:26-27) when he points out quite bluntly that “religion” which does not extend help to the needy is useless! – and the “real thing” consists of caring for widows and orphans, and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world. This is presented, not as the cause, but as the inevitable effect/evidence of genuine worship.

A cursory survey like this cannot possibly produce a neat “definition” of as far-reaching a term as “worship.” One can, nevertheless, glean an assortment of elements that must be included in any such definition:

— Worship may involve a single individual (Mt.8:2, 9:18) or a group assembled for the purpose (Rv.4:10, 5:14)
— The focus is upon the one who is worshiped, not the worshiper. (Jn.4:23, Heb.1:6, Rev.15:4)
— Location is irrelevant (Jn.4:21)
— It is the appropriate response of gratitude for being included in the Kingdom (Heb.2:28)
— No faithful messenger of God will accept any hint of worship personally directed toward him (Rv.19:10)
— The beginning of an understanding of genuine Christian worship might be simply:
---to declare our admiration and absolute allegiance to our King
---and to report for duty in his service.

What observations can you add?
Word Study #51-- Disciples

"Are there still disciples?"

The plaintive-sounding question grabbed my attention when it appeared on my blog's list of “search terms.” I wish I could have located the writer, for I have not infrequently asked the same question. Fellow-disciples can be terribly hard to find! By definition, a “disciple” is a student – a learner – an apprentice – to a Master teacher (see W.S. #46). But sadly, most of the folks that many of us encounter, who claim the Lord Jesus as their Master, seem to feel called-upon to provide neatly proof-texted “answers” to every sort of theoretical question, rather than to embark together upon a limitless quest to learn and emulate the Master's ways.

I must believe there are still disciples – but how I wish I knew how to find them! Such creatures are enthusiastically un-welcomed in so many “churches”!

The word mathetes, “disciple”, was common in the Greco-Roman world, ever since the 6th - 4th centuries BC, when it was applied to the pupils of classical philosophers and rhetoricians, or of those who explored mathematical, scientific, or astrological studies. Interestingly, it appears only twice in the LXX (Jer.13:21 and 20:11), revealing a vastly different understanding of faithfulness from the one we discover in the New Testament, where the word appears 269 times. All of these occur in the gospels and Acts.

It is not uniformly obvious to whom the term refers. There are references to “the disciples of John (the Baptist)” – Mt.9:14, 11:12, 14:12; Jn.1:35, 37; “the disciples of the Pharisees” (Mt.9:14, 22:16); and a group of Pharisees on one occasion described themselves as “disciples of Moses” (Jn.9:27-28). And when the reference is to “Jesus' disciples”, the term is alternately applied to the twelve, who are also called “apostles”, to the crowds eager to hear his teaching, and to a few individuals who were very quiet about their support “for fear of the Jews” (Jn.19:38).

Although “the disciples” occasionally seems to have referred to an inner circle, larger than the 12, but smaller than the crowds, who received more careful explanations and explicit teaching than the general public (Mk.4:34), and on occasion served as assistants (in all the crowd-feeding scenes), even that seems to have been a somewhat fluid group (Jn.6:66).

Jesus' own teaching about “being” his disciple appears much more restrictive and deliberate, requiring one's giving that task priority over all other loyalties (Lk.14:26-27). The parallel passages in Mt.10:37 and Mk.10:29 carry the same flavor, although they do not use the word “disciple.”

The goal that Jesus sets for disciples is clear: (Lk.6:40, Mt.10:24) – “to become like one's Teacher.” Jesus also specifies (Jn.8:31) that it is necessary to “continue [live, persist] in my word” in order to be a disciple; (Jn.13:35) to be readily identifiable by outsiders, by the mutual love of disciples; and (Jn.15:8) to be a fruitful branch of his Vine.

Whatever else may be implied here, it certainly includes mutual, continuous effort that results in a reflection of the Lord Jesus' own life!

As the disciple group expanded – Luke records 120 present in the prayer meeting of Ac.1:15 – so did the vocabulary, and the terms “disciples”, “brethren”, and “the church” seem to be used almost interchangeably. I wonder if the shift to “brethren” or “churches” in the epistles may not have been deliberate, in obedience to Jesus' instructions forbidding the elevation of any individual (Mt.23:10-11) – see also chapter 8 of Citizens of the Kingdom. Paul's corrective in I Cor.1:11-13 would make a lot of sense in such a context.

Calling a person a “disciple” was used in a manner similar to the way some folks today would characterize each other as “a believer” – except that a much deeper level of commitment was assumed, both to the Lord and to the group. Whether Ananias of Damascus accepting the frightening assignment of ministering to Saul, the blinded persecutor (Ac.9:10), Dorcas in Joppa caring in practical ways for the needy in her congregation (Ac.9:36-40), young Timothy in Lystra (Ac.16:1) recommended by his home congregation to travel and study with Paul, or the thousands whose names we may not know until we meet around the Throne, we may find in each – and each other – challenge and encouragement to faithfulness in our own situations.

The entire group of disciples was involved in mutual care: (Ac.9:19-25) looking after the newly converted Saul in Damascus, (Ac.11:29) deciding to send famine relief to Judea; and (Ac.19:30) first keeping Paul out of the arena when the mob demanded his hide, and then being encouraged by him before he left town! The term was applied to whole congregations in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Ac.14), and specifically included Gentile converts (Ac.15:10). Travelers were frequently recommended to one group of disciples by another (Ac.18:27, 21:4, 16).

It is instructive – or should be – to note Paul's discovery of a group in Ephesus (Ac.19:1) who, though imperfectly taught, he clearly recognized as “disciples”. They responded warmly to his corrective teaching – but notice also that he had not summarily read them out of the kingdom upon first encounter! Would that such graciousness – on both sides – were more prevalent today!
Such warmth contrasts sharply with the late 1st/ early 2nd century writing of Ignatius. The earliest writer to advocate strongly for hierarchical structure in the nascent church (he demanded submission to a single “bishop” rather than to plural “elders”), Ignatius wrote in a condescending-sounding tone in a letter to a Roman congregation (thought to have been written enroute to his expected martyrdom), “As long as a Christian's blood has not been shed, he is only a beginner in discipleship.”

With the advent of the extreme veneration of martyrs, and the dominance of the hierarchy, devoted followers of Jesus were even that early, denied the designation applied by the Lord Jesus to ALL HIS LOYAL FOLLOWERS/STUDENTS!

I guess it all boils down to the same old question: whose word do you accept? What did Jesus say?
I choose to cast my lot with my gracious Lord, whose invitation, “If you all remain in [continue to live by] my word, you are truly my disciples” (Jn.8:31), has never been rescinded.

“Are there still disciples?”
Yes, thank God – and there always will be, as long as some of us continue to seek for faithfulness.
May we help each other to do so!

Word Study #52 – Spirit – part 1  (A general survey)

Arguably the most profound discovery in our years of working on the word “spirit” can be summed up very simply: “There is no easy, succinct summary!”

The classical uses of pneuma are varied. Its earliest appearance in literature, according to Liddell/Scott, is in the ancient tragic dramas, where it referred to a blast of wind. Later, Thucydides used it of both a breeze, and an influence. Hippocrates and other physicians used it for the “breath of life” (at either the beginning or the end), for ordinary respiration, and even for flatulence! Others referred to any odor, to the “breath” (grammatically) with which a Greek vowel is pronounced, an immaterial being (including people who had died), or the rhetorician's declaration of a sentence in a single breath.

The LXX used it of both the “spirit of God” and “the spirit of a man”, and Plato of divine inspiration. Bauer adds that in non-Biblical literature the reference was to “what lives after death in the underworld,” or what one “gives up” at death. It was considered the source of insight, feelings, and will – a part of the human personality separate from either sarx (flesh) or soma (body). Both Bauer and Thayer then launch into lengthy descriptions of theological disputes, but these have nothing to do with the etymology of the word, or its usage in the New Testament. They are later interpretations.

The New Testament uses pneuma in three primary ways: the Holy Spirit, the human spirit, and evil or unclean spirits. There are also a few references (Lk.24:37, 39; Heb.12:23, I Pet.3:19) that could be interpreted in a more “ghostly” fashion. Most of the references to evil or unclean spirits are in gospel accounts of Jesus banishing them (at least 29 times), or entrusting his disciples with the authority to do so, and similar situations in Acts (at least 7), although several epistles also warn against “seducing spirits” (I Tim.4:1), “deceptive spirits” (II Thes.2:2), “another spirit” (II Cor.11:4), and a “spirit of bondage” (Rom.8:15). John (Jn.4:1-6) gives careful instructions for determining the validity of “spiritual” claims, which folks today would still be wise to heed, with regard to all the “spirituality” talk going around: “Any spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus, is not from God”! In the Revelation, reference is also made to spirits connected with the “animal/beast” that opposes God. The most important thing to derive from all of these is the proclamation – and demonstration – that none of them is capable of standing against the Lord Jesus or his representatives!!!

All too often, people want to sort everything into an influence or activity of either the Holy Spirit or evil spirits, forgetting that it is often necessary to deal simply with the human spirit (about 40 times in the NT), which may, but need not, be influenced by either one. It is simply a part of human individuality, and people must choose, many times throughout life, to what sort of spirit they will subject their own! Paul speaks of “serving God with my spirit” (Rom.1:9), of being “present with you in spirit” (I Cor.5:3), of having his “spirit refreshed” (II Cor.7:13) by the faithfulness of brethren. He admonishes his readers to be “fervent in spirit” (Rom.12:11). In I Cor.2:11, he refers specifically to the “spirit of man”, and there are many more such instances. Many refer to people's attitudes, inclinations, or dispositions (I Cor.4:21, I Pet.3:4, Gal.6:1), or simply to the end of their lives (Mt.27:50, Jn.19:30, Lk.8:55, Ac.7:59).

The KJV translators tried to solve the ambiguity problem by (usually, not always) changing the word to “Ghost” when it appeared with hagios (holy). In the instances where pneuma appears with only the definite article (“the”), the context usually makes the reference fairly obvious. These provide descriptions, definitions, and demonstrations of the Holy Spirit. Descriptive designations usually include a genitive case which denotes the source or possession of the spirit. They include:
“The Spirit of God” (at least 19 times, including Mt.3:16, Rom.8:9,14; I Cor.3:16, 6:11, 7:40, and references to “the seven spirits of God” in Rev.1:4, 3:1, and 4:5); “the Spirit of Jesus” (Phil.1:19); “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom.8:9); the Spirit of the Father (Mt.10:20); “the Spirit of the Lord” (Lk.4:18); and “the spirit of the living God” (II Cor.3:3). Others reflecting his activity include “the spirit of life” (Rom.8:2), “the spirit of adoption” (Rom.8:15), “the spirit of truth” (Jn.14 and 16); “the spirit of wisdom” (Eph.1:17), and “the spirit of promise” (Eph.1:13).

Jesus provided several definitions, including Jn.4:24 “God is spirit”, Jn.6:63 “The spirit makes alive”, “the words that I am speaking are spirit and life”, and “the Spirit of truth” in Jn.14 and 16. Paul echoes a similar understanding in Rom.8:10, “the Spirit is life”. In II Cor.1:22 he explains that the Spirit is a down-payment, or guarantee, of the believer’s inheritance, and states plainly in II Cor.3:7, “the Lord is the spirit.” These together give clear indications of the intimate connection of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, as Peter explained in his Pentecost sermon (Ac.2:33). This is not to provoke trinitarian arguments – for one perspective on that subject, please see chapter 2 of Citizens of the Kingdom. I am not sure that most such arguments contribute much to faithful living.

We glean the best idea of the Spirit’s nature and intentions by observing demonstrations of his activity. Although the Holy Spirit was active in the ancient prophets (see Stephen’s sermon in Ac.7), the sign to John the Baptist of Jesus’ identity (Mt.3:16, Mk.1:10), and Jesus referred to his “anointing” in his “inaugural address” (Lk.4:18), he was not readily available to most people while Jesus was on earth (Jn.7:39). Jesus promised his coming, and explained the purpose as (Mt.13:11, Lk.12:12) to provide necessary words of testimony when on trial, and (Jn.14:26) to teach and remind disciples of all that Jesus had said. The over-riding purpose (Jn.16:14) is the glory of Jesus! After Pentecost, the Holy Spirit really got busy! He (Ac.2:4) -- “gave the disciples things to say”, (2:17-18) -- enables all God’s people to prophesy, (8:2) -- gave specific instructions to Philip (and even carried him off once -- 8:35!), (10:11) -- coached Peter’s encounter with Cornelius, (11:28 and 21:11) – sent messages through Agabus, (16:6,7) – changed Paul’s travel plans, (4:8) -- empowered Peter’s speech before the council, and much more.

The epistles explain some of the activity in greater detail. In Rom.8, we learn that in addition to providing evidence that we belong to Jesus (also II Cor.3:6 and Eph.1:3), he is available to (Rom.8:4-13) empower and regulate the Christian life (v.4 – enabling behavior far beyond mere human capability). This is also documented in I Cor.6:11, II Cor.6:6, and Eph.3:16. He creates unity in the brotherhood (Eph.4:3 and Phil.2:1) – even uniting Jew and Gentile, which “everybody knew” was impossible (Eph.2:18) -- and provides “gifts” (see W.S.#25) for its maintenance and growth. He expects us to work at that job as well, exercising those gifts (I Cor.12:4-13) for the benefit of all, and teaching one another (Eph.5:18). It is only by his power that a believer can stand before Caesar – or any other gods of nationalism – and declare his superior allegiance to Jesus and his Kingdom (see W.S. #4), even when it may cost him his life (I Cor.12:3).

He fills the hearts of his people with the love of God (Rom.5:5), and reassures us that we belong to him (Rom.9:1), creating “joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom.14:17).

His presence transforms life, gradually removing all traces of the old ways (I Cor.6:11), and recreating it in the image of Jesus (Gal.5:15-25).

He enables continual prayer (Jude 20), and when we are at a loss to know how to pray, steps in and does it for us!(Rom.8:26)

He creates, enables, and sustains our life in Christ!

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #53 – Spirit, Part 2

Jesus told Nicodemus (Jn.3:8), “The spirit [wind] blows where he [it] wishes; you hear his[its] voice [sound], but you don't know where he [it] comes from and where he [it] is going.” So it should come as no surprise that some confusion should arise about the Spirit's activity. Why else would John, later, as an old man, have deemed it necessary to give such careful instructions about discerning the provenance of things attributed to “the spirit” (I Jn.4:1-6)? There is no true spirit from God that does not acknowledge the Lord Jesus! This is the acid test.

With this in view, we will first consider several aspects of the Spirit's assignment that Jesus himself introduced. In Jn.14:16, Jesus refers to the Spirit of Truth as a parakleitos, which, unfortunately, was traditionally translated “comforter”, conjuring up the image of a fuzzy, “security-blankie” that will “make everything ok.” This is NOT what Jesus, (who, please remember, was soon to suffer torture and death), had in mind. (See #138 for more detailed treatment)

The verb, para kaleo, from which the term is derived, refers to “calling or summoning a friend for support in a trial; to exhort or encourage; to demand or require; to intercede; as well as to comfort or console.” The noun, then, must refer to
anyone so summoned. *Parakaleo* is worthy of a word-study on its own – which exercise I commend to you. After an exhaustive review of its more than 100 New Testament uses, one student remarked, “That sounds like my basketball coach!” He explained that the best coach for any sports team has an excellent knowledge of how the game should be played, and also knows his players. He trains them carefully, sometimes with a hug, and sometimes with a kick in the pants, whichever is appropriate for the the occasion! That has been one of my favorite images of the job of the Holy Spirit ever since. The Christian life is not about “how I feel”, or “where I end up.” It's about learning to play faithfully and well, on the winning team!

The same passage contains the promise (v.17), “He is staying beside you, and will be *en* [in, among] you all.” This English translation, lacking a plural form of the word “you,” (see the introduction to *The Pioneers' New Testament*, and W.S.#142), has led to a very privatistic interpretation of the “indwelling Holy Spirit,” completely ignoring the fact that in both cases, the “you” is plural. The same thing is true of Paul's statement in I Cor.3:16, 17, and even more vividly in I Cor.6:19, where “body” is singular, but “your” is plural. This very likely indicates that the reference is to the composite Body of Christ, as much if not more than to an individual's physical body. If the individual members of a group are intended, a different form, *hekastos humon* (each one of you) is used. Were we properly to appreciate the primacy of the Body of believers, as described in the New Testament (and chapter 7 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*), I think we would have fewer problems with people claiming private “revelations” and going off on tangents. This is why I prefer the translation “among” to “in” when the object is plural.

John's report of Jesus' discourse, continued in chapter 16, includes two more misused passages. We are frequently told that the Holy Spirit's job is to “convict us of “sin.” Are you aware that *Jesus never said that?* Look carefully at v.8. “The world” is the object of that sentence. And Jesus goes on to say that it is because they are not faithful to him! Far too many sincere, but very mistaken people, take upon themselves the job of trying to “convict the world” – which is the Holy Spirit's responsibility – and berate their fellow “believers” if the Holy Spirit hasn't made them feel sufficiently “sinful!” (Please see Word Studies # 6, 7, and 121 for more on this subject.) This part of the Spirit's work does NOT apply to those who are seeking to follow Jesus, but to the uncommitted!

His work with respect to faithful disciples is outlined in 16:13-15. Here, it is the preposition that is misunderstood. He is to lead us “in (en) all truthfulness.” *En* has no directional implications. It has a dative (static) object. The directional kind of “in” [into] is represented by *eis*, which requires an accusative object. Please see #182 for more detail on this distinction. Jesus is talking to people who are already committed to him, who are already “in the truth” (and we have seen that Jesus himself is equated with that truth (W.S.#26). The rest of the paragraph presents the “course syllabus” for the Spirit's teaching. “Signing up” is the beginning, not the end. There is much for the believer to learn.

Finally, consider the many accounts recorded in Acts of disciples being “filled with the Holy Spirit” to put to rest once and for all the arguments about whether this is a single occurrence at conversion, or if it happens with baptism, or at some subsequent time. The evidence leads to the choice “all of the above” – and more! It should be obvious that at least some of the group “filled” at the prayer meeting described in Ac.4:8 had also been present at Pentecost. Had they been “missed” the first time? I don't think so. They needed help with another challenge. For the folks in Samaria (Ac.8) it was subsequent to their conversion and baptism. For Cornelius and his group, it was before they had been baptized. In Ephesus, Paul apparently sensed something missing, and the gift came even later (Ac.19). Peter and Stephen both seem to have received an extra “booster shot” several times when needed. It is past time for God's people to stop trying to program the Holy Spirit to fit their theological or denominational agendas, and welcome him whenever, wherever, and however he shows up! And the more the better! We've been graciously given instructions for recognizing him when he comes, and for avoiding the counterfeits that are still rampant in our world.

Jesus has triumphed, but his team still needs coaching, until the final “whistle.” He has provided a “Coach” who knows the game plan very well. Did you know the “game” even has an umpire? The only use of *brabeuo* (classically, “to judge or act as umpire”) in the New Testament, is in Col.3:15: it is the “peace of Christ” that holds that position among his people! Our job is to learn from the Coach – welcome the rulings of the Umpire – and give all our energy to the game!

**Word Study #54 – Your/Our Calling**

Many a faithful follower of Jesus has agonized over the concept of “God's calling” on his life. This concern is exacerbated by the common declaration, “God has a wonderful plan for your life!” which is too frequently followed by threats about the dire consequences of an individual's failure to find and follow a hypothetical, predetermined outline in precise detail. “Missing one's calling” is a pervasive fear among many sincerely devoted disciples. This is another case where a careful
survey of New Testament teaching provides both challenge and comfort.

There are seventeen different Greek words that traditional translators have occasionally rendered “call.” Seven of these refer exclusively to “naming” a person or place, or describing its characteristics. Five are simply summoning a person, or gathering a group, and one, epikaleo, describes appealing to or calling upon either God or some person in authority. Only four – and these not exclusively – are used concerning a call from God.

Kaleo (and its passive form, kaleomai), classically, was quite broad. Liddell/Scott lists “to call or summon, to invite to one's home, to summon to court, to demand or require, or to call by name.” Klesis, the noun form, could be simply one's name or reputation, but also a summons, an invitation, or an invocation. L/S notes that only in the NT it is used as a “religious calling”, and in most instances, that is open to interpretation.

Kletos, the participle or adjective, refers to “anyone or anything that is invited, welcomed, called, or chosen.” We will confine this study to the minority of references that are specifically designated as relating to God.

One of the most common references is to the Lord's gracious invitation to join his Kingdom. Almost exclusively addressed in the plural, it nevertheless deals with one's initial conversion. Rom.9:24,25 reminds us that this call extends equally to Jew and Gentile; and a lengthy section of I Cor.7:15-20, as well as I Cor.1:26, stresses that it reaches across all social barriers, the effects of which are summarily erased by that supreme commitment. Peter's Pentecost sermon also opens the promise to “you, and your children, and those who are far off, whoever the Lord shall call” (Ac.2:39). Rom.1:6 includes “all who belong to Jesus”, and I Cor.1:9 speaks of being “called into (eis) the community [fellowship]” of God's Son.

Other references highlight the expected effects of that calling:

Gal.5:13 – We are called into a liberty that excludes both bondage to the Law and the excesses of licentiousness.
Col.3:15 – As God's chosen people, we are called in one Body, to peace (this statement follows a detailed description of the resultant life).
Heb.9:15 – By the provision of the New Covenant, which the writer compares to a duly executed will, the “called” receive a promised inheritance.
I Pet.3:9 – We are “called” to return blessing for cursing, and I Pet.2:21 – to endure patiently whatever suffering results from deliberately following Jesus' example.

Those who are “called” simply see things differently (I Cor.1:24): they operate in a different sphere (Eph.4:1), with different standards. The life of those who are “called” is one of constant effort toward the goal of conformity to the image of the Lord Jesus (Phil.3:14), continually urged on to greater faithfulness (II Thes.1:11), taking care to become “neither lazy nor unfruitful” in the Kingdom (II Pet. 1:10).

It may surprise you to discover that in only 5 instances are any of the “called/calling” words applied to a single individual! Notice, please, that this count does not include Rom.1:1 and 1:7, or I Cor.1:1 and 1:2, where there is no verb in the text. Translators completely violated the meaning of those phrases when they inserted “to be” in each case, when the grammar of the text simply indicates naming – “called an apostle” and “called [saints] God's people.”

The only places where a “call” is directed to a single individual are:
Heb.11:8 – Abraham was “called to go out”, and he obeyed.
Ac.13:2 – The Holy Spirit instructed the group at Antioch to send Paul and Barnabas out “for the job to which I've called [assigned] them.”
Ac.16:10 – After being “forbidden” to go several different places, and experiencing a vision, Paul and his companions “concluded that God had called us” to Macedonia.
Gal.1:15 – Paul recognizes that it was God's call that halted his career of persecuting the church.
I Tim.6:12 – Paul urges his young apprentice to “grab hold of the eternal life (see W.S.#28) to which you were called.”

So yes: specific, individual “calling” does happen: but it is by no means the norm. Clearly, there are also other instances of specific instructions being given to individuals; but they are not labeled “calling” in the New Testament. We will look at some of these in the next post.

Please also see W.S. #12, “God's will”.

But meanwhile, be encouraged! Your “calling” is to live faithfully as a citizen of Jesus' kingdom!
I Pet.2:9 – He has “called you all out of darkness, into his amazing light!”
I Thes.5:24 – “The one who is calling you is faithful!” and will enable us to live faithfully (v.23).
Rom.8:28 – “We know, then, that for those who keep on loving God, he keeps working everything together for good, for those who are being called according to his plan.”
II Tim.1:9 – “He delivered us, and called us with a holy calling … before time began!”
Eph.1:18 – “(I pray that) the eyes of your hearts may be flooded with light, so that you may know the confident expectation [hope] (that proceeds from) his calling!

If you are committed to Jesus’ Kingdom, and to faithfulness to him as King, you have not “missed your calling”! We just need to learn to follow instructions.

And as we saw in the last two posts, we have an excellent teacher for that effort.
Thanks be to God!

Word Study #55 – Following Instructions

OK, this is not technically a “word study”. It is more a topical survey: but it is so closely related to the previous post, that it deserves our attention. We saw in our study of “calling” that that designation primarily applies to one's inclusion in the Kingdom, and his participation in the transformed life to which we are all “called”, together. There are occasions, however, when a person is handed a very specific assignment: and this can occur in a number of ways.

Jesus, of course, personally chose twelve of his disciples, and later 70 more, to whom he delegated the responsibility to “preach the Kingdom” ahead of his own arrival (Lk.10:1). After Pentecost, his methods were more varied. Sometimes, as with the early (Ac.3 and 4) accounts of Peter and John, their assignment was simply a case of acting faithfully, when an opportunity arose, on the instructions they had been given years earlier (Lk.9:2, 10:9).

In Ac.6:1-6, the congregation perceived a need, and were instructed to suggest godly individuals to take care of it, who were then “appointed” by the apostles. Interestingly, at least two of these quickly “outgrew” their original assignment, with Stephen (ch.7) becoming a powerful advocate for “the Way”, and subsequently being martyred, and Philip (ch.8) becoming an itinerant evangelist.

Philip’s case is interesting. His trip to Samaria may (or may not) have been on his own initiative, but after his successful mission there (8:26), a messenger instructed him to head for the Gaza road, and (v.29) the Spirit directed him to the Ethiopian’s chariot, and then (39-40) even “carried him off” after the assignment was completed! Perhaps in order to receive a “specific assignment” we need to be busy at the tasks we already perceive!

Ananias, on the other hand, (Ac.9:10-19) is introduced simply as “a certain disciple” – just one of the folks in Damascus. But the Lord spoke to him directly, in a vision. And although at first he argued about it, his obedience gifted all the rest of us, down through the centuries, with the ministry of Paul! We never hear of Ananias again. He was just listening when the Lord needed to recruit someone.

Peter also was busy (Ac.10) when the Lord directed (by means of a “messenger”) Cornelius to send for him. Knowing that the assignment would give Peter cultural problems, the Spirit designed an object lesson, as well as explicit directions to respond to the summons. Wisely, Peter included other brethren as witnesses, who aided in responsibly reporting to questioners, later.

Barnabas (Ac.11:22-26) was sent by the apostles to Antioch, to check out the gathering there. He had already established a reputation for gracious faithfulness (4:36, 9:27). He seems to have recruited Saul on his own initiative (v.25).

We are not told how Agabus (Ac.11:28, 21:10) became known as a prophet, but his word was taken seriously by the group at Antioch, who immediately organized famine relief. Paul later refused his counsel, but his prophecy proved to be correct.

Then of course, there is Saul/Paul. It is important to note that not all of his instructions were as dramatic as his Damascus Road encounter with Jesus (Ac.9). I don't know why so many folks seem to think that is the one that should be normative. After he was committed to the Lord, it did not require such drastic measures to get his attention! The congregation at Damascus (9:24-45) sheltered, accepted, and nurtured Saul, and helped him escape the city. Barnabas enabled his acceptance by the other apostles (v.27). The Holy Spirit spoke to the prayer meeting in Antioch (Ac.13), to commission their first journey, and they were sent out by both the group (v.3) and the Spirit (v.4). During the trips, however, the “leading” seems to have been more a matter of necessity! When they were run out of one town, they went on to the next! The account of the second journey is interesting. The second trip was undertaken at Paul's own initiative (Ac.15:36-41), and the Lord is neither blamed nor credited for the argument with Barnabas that resulted in their separation.

Wouldn't you like to know how they were “forbidden by the Holy Spirit” to preach in Asia, and how “the spirit of Jesus would not allow” their next attempt, to Bithynia? It was only after these frustrations, that Paul “saw a vision” and his group “concluded that God had called” them to Macedonia. Interestingly, we are told that it was simply Paul's annoyance (16:18) that precipitated the healing of the fortune-teller. Later, another vision reassured him of the Lord's protection in Corinth.

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Honesty requires the conclusion that there are more questions than answers in the latest account. After two years in Ephesus (19:21), Paul “set out in the Spirit” to go through Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem. Both of those are in the opposite direction from Jerusalem. He was warned of trouble by many brethren (20:22, 21:4, 21:10), but consistently rejected their counsel. Yet he took the advice (21:18-26) of the elders in Jerusalem, which resulted in his arrest and imprisonment. Please note that in no case are any of these decisions attributed to “God's will”! It is presented simply as narrative. Those who claim to explain it as “God's plan”, cannot draw any direct evidence from the New Testament. It is clear, however, that the power of God was entirely adequate to use what may have been mistakes, or even just stubbornness, on the part of his devoted servant, for his good purposes. This should be an encouragement to us all!

Other disciples did allow themselves to be “led” by the counsel of brethren. Paul recruited Timothy (Ac.16:3), who was highly recommended by his home congregation, as an assistant and apprentice, and Silas, (Ac.15:40) who shared his second journey. Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders” (Ac.14:3) in every new congregation, and urged Titus (Tit.1:5) to do likewise. From Corinth, where he had met and worked with Aquila and Priscilla (Ac.18:1-3), Paul took them along to Ephesus, (18:18), where they in turn corrected the teaching of Apollos, preparing him for more responsible service, to which the Ephesian brethren subsequently recommended him.

So where does all this come out? The mandate (“call”), as we saw in #54, is to faithful Kingdom living. During this process, specific guidance can come in many ways: from the Lord himself, a vision, a messenger (heavenly or otherwise), brotherly counsel by either congregations or individuals, or merely through circumstance and opportunity. Our job is simply to follow the instructions we already understand, remaining alert to more specific guidance through any of these sources.

May we do so faithfully!

Word Study #56 – The Chosen

In the final conflict, with all the forces of evil arrayed against him, “The Lamb will conquer them, because (1) he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and (2) those with him are called and chosen and faithful” (Rv.17:14). It is no surprise that the Lord's identity should be the primary cause of his victory: but how incredibly gracious, that his faithful followers should be not only included, but credited, as well!

A large segment of “Christian teaching”, sadly, neglects to take into account the order of the words describing “those with him.” Its advocates insist that only the “chosen” are ever “called” to be his. The overwhelming evidence of the New Testament, however, as well as the simple vocabulary, yields a very different scenario. Thayer (see Appendix) notes, in his rather ponderous treatment of kaleo, that only those who have responded to an invitation are considered to be among the “called”, or the invited guests. Those who have refused are not included in that terminology. (See Jesus' parable in Lk.14:24).
The invitation is exceedingly broad. It is the choice that is crucial, and even after it is made, faithfulness is required. Mt.22:14 and II Pet.1:10, the only other places where “called” and “chosen” are used together, maintain the same order.

The primary words which are translated “choose” eklego, and “chosen” eklektos, are really quite straightforward. Liddell/Scott defines the verb form as “to pick or single out, to select or choose”, and even on occasion “to levy taxes or tribute”, and the noun/participle/adjective as “selected, choice, chosen.” Even in New Testament usage, they frequently refer simply to the everyday choices of life, whether of associates (Ac.1:2, Jn.6:70, Ac.6:5) or of prestigious seats (Lk.14:7). The choice by the KJV translators to change the English word to “elect” in reference to believers, is a reflection of their theological presuppositions, not of the text. The word in the text is identical, in every case.

Paul uses eklektos (Rom.8:33, Col.3:12, II Tim.2:10, Tit.1:1) in a manner almost synonymous with “saints” or “brethren”, as does Peter (I Pet.1:2). It is a “label” of the identity of those who belong to Jesus, and it is used to urge persistence in faithfulness. Peter, likewise, uses it first of Jesus himself (I Pet.2:4), then (v.9) to re-define the concept of “God's chosen people”, which then also becomes an impetus for faithful living.

In the Gospels, the “chosen ones” (the faithful) are singled out for both protection (Mt.24:22,31; Mk.13:20,22,27; Lk.18:7) and responsibility (Jn.15:16-19). Disciples are not “chosen” to sit around and bask in the glory of their “election”, but to get busy about bearing good fruit for the Kingdom, actively loving each other, and enduring any resultant persecution with
patience and faithfulness born of their identification with the Lord Jesus! Jesus himself, of course, is identified as “chosen” – scornfully by the Jewish leaders (Lk.23:35), and honorably by Peter (1 Pet.2:6), and it is “in him” (Eph.1:4) that we in turn are “chosen.” The deliberate extension of this term to Gentile believers (Eph.1:4, Col.3:12-15) is extremely significant, in view of the prevailing assumption that it applied only to ethnic Jews (appearing in the LXX more than 100 times). Here again, it is essential to bear in mind that a person's response is the critical factor.

This also sheds much-needed light on the complicated, much-debated schemes that people have concocted concerning Paul's “arguments” (actually, explanations) in Romans. Reading chapters 9-11 in the light of understanding the importance of one's response, reveals, not some sort of divine “shell game”, but simply the affirmation that regardless of one's ethnicity, his response to God's call is the critical component of his “chosen” status. Neither Jew nor Gentile has been categorically either excluded or included. “All Israel” has been re-defined as all who embrace Kingdom citizenship. Please notice the conditional clauses in 11:22 “if you keep on staying in his generosity”, and 11:23 “if they do not keep on in unfaithfulness.” The calling has not changed, nor been rescinded (11:29), but it IS conditional. People's responses can and do change. I am well aware that folks prone to proof-texting can string together disconnected “verses” from these chapters to make elaborate systems (usually to exclude someone), and conflicting claims. But our brother Paul did not write “verses” to be rearranged like puzzle pieces. He wrote a letter, and at least to this translator, it is neither complicated nor exclusionary, if viewed as a whole.

The same principle applies to those who find in-group vs. out-group “destiny” in Romans 8. Read the whole paragraph (18-30). Paul's point is to encourage the brethren to remain faithful, in the midst of severe opposition. He reminds them of the glorious prospect of the consummated Kingdom, of the Spirit's gracious provision and intercession in our weaknesses and ignorance, and the ultimate power of God to use everything to which life subjects us for eventual good – both his and ours! V.29 is an encouragement, not a threat! These hassles do not catch God unawares: he knew it all along, and is quite capable of using everything for the benefit of those he “predestined” – NOT, please note, to be “saved” or “lost”, but to be “conformed to the image [likeness]of his Son!” It it these whom he chose, called, made just, and glorified! All four verbs are cast in aorist tenses (see grammatical information in Translation Notes), denoting action that is already accomplished in/by the Lord Jesus! Accomplished, in the same, all-too-human people who still need the Spirit's intercession and instruction, and each other's mutual support! This is the impetus for the paean of praise with which the chapter closes.

Regarding the “destiny” aspect of “choice,” as noted in W.S.#48, proorizo, only once associated with choice, appears only 6 times in the entire New Testament, and two of them are in the passage just cited. The others are Eph.1:5 – we are “destined” for adoption as sons of God, and Eph.1:11 – to be a part of God's glorious plan for all his creation! In the frightened disciples prayer in Ac.4:28, it was they who saw the circumstances of Jesus' death as pre-determined (notice that we are not told if that was an accurate assessment or not). In I Cor.2:7, Paul again emphasizes God's plan for his people to share his glory!

This is the sum-total of New Testament references to “predestination”!

All who have answered the “call” and enlisted in the Kingdom, are “chosen”, and “destined” to be with the King! These are the called and the chosen!

May we also prove faithful!

Word Study #57 – Mystery

“Mystery” is a term that has suffered abuse in two different ways. There have always been self-styled “teachers” who dodge the inexplicability and total lack of Biblical basis for their complex, high-flown “doctrines” by intoning, with an air of solemn superiority, “Oh, that ...that is a part of the mystery of God!” These individuals do not even deserve the respect of refutation.

Throughout the course of Christian history, there have also been numerous cycles during which “scholars” claim to have “discovered” links between Christian faith and the Greek and near-eastern “mystery religions”. Although it is possible to find such “links” in corrupted versions of Christian thought and practice, the New Testament, although the word “mystery” does appear there, bears no credible resemblance to any of those observances. In fact, more frequently, it calls for the direct opposite in both belief and practice.

Many, if not most, of the “mystery” cults involved some variety of fertility worship, due to their derivation from the seasonal myths of Demeter and Persephone, Orpheus and Eurydice, or other underworld connections. Their version of
“resurrection” (loudly touted as a parallel) was merely a temporary return from the abode of the dead, repeated yearly, and celebrated with orgiastic fertility rites, or equally temporary asceticism. Communication with the deities was achieved with hallucinogenic substances, strong drink, or, as at Delphi, the noxious vapors of thermal springs.

All of these were very ancient – the Dionysian cult is dated by some historians as early as 6000 BC, the Eleusian about 2000 BC, and the Orphic in the 4th century BC. Although the second century AD writer, Justin Martyr, spoke of them as “demonic imitations of the true faith”, the actual fact was probably more likely the reverse: the syncretistic corruption of the New Testament message by the adoption of magical, secretive overtones of the “mysteries.” I had often wondered how the simple, symbolic observations instituted by Jesus morphed into a notion of magical, inherently powerful “sacraments” (please see chapter 9 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*). I have to wonder if this transformation was not effected by exactly that syncretism. It certainly does not appear in the New Testament.

Another major contrast is seen in the lack of conflict between the contemporary civil religion (emperor-worship) of the Roman Empire, and the “mysteries.” These were considered supplementary, and did not compete for people's devotion, whereas commitment to the Kingdom of Jesus (see W.S.#4), which required absolute faithfulness, and refused political compromise, was often a matter of life or death for its adherents.

According to Liddell/Scott, *musterion* could refer either to secret knowledge imparted only to initiates, to the paraphernalia used in ceremonial rites, to medicinal recipes or remedies, or to military secrets! Interestingly, it is this latter category that was taken over into the Latin “sacramentum”, although Jerome, in the early 5th century AD, used that substitute seven times (Eph.1:9, 3:9, 5:32; Col.1:27, 1 Tim.3:16, Rev.1:20, 17:7) in his Latin Vulgate translation. I could not discern any pattern to these choices – can you?

By that time, of course, to further confuse the situation, the simple symbols of commitment had long been distorted into the magical notion of “sacrament”, along with several other ceremonies (see above).

The New Testament does use the word *musterion*, 26 times. In the New Testament, it is not an esoteric secret inaccessible to human minds, but always refers to *information that has been revealed*, although it does require a degree of spiritual discernment.

The most common (7 x) is the assertion (Rom.11:25, 16:25-26; Eph.3:3-6, Col.1:26-27, 2:2, 4:3) that God's eternal plan for his people includes both Jewish and Gentile believers. This is typified in the end of Paul's letter to Rome, “The mystery that from all eternity has been kept secret, has now been revealed.....His revealed purpose is that this plan be made known, so that all the nations [all the gentiles] may come to him in faithful obedience!”

The emphasis on the revelation of things formerly hidden appears another 6 x (I Cor.2:1, 2:7; Eph.1:9,3:3 – expounded in vv.9-12 – and 6:19), including the establishing of the Lord Jesus as the head over everything, and his intentions that his glorious grace, power and wisdom be demonstrated to everyone, everywhere, THROUGH HIS CHURCH!

*Musterion* occurs only once in each of the synoptic gospels – parallel passages – (Mt.13:11, Mk.4:11, Lk.8:10) when Jesus is explaining to the inquiring disciples the parable of the Sower/Seed/Soil. He characterizes this explanation as evidence that the “mysteries of the Kingdom of God” are being revealed to those who have accepted his call to that Kingdom, not to curious spectators.

Only 5 times is *musterion* used in the plural: twice here, and three times in I Cor.4:1, 13:2, 14:2. Might this be implying reference to multiple bits of information? The other 21 uses in the New Testament are singular, usually referring God's single, over-arching purpose for creation.

Three of the four references in the Revelation (1:20 and 17:5,7) are simply explanations of symbolism, while the other (10:7) refers again to God's original purpose. This may parallel Paul's summary statement to Timothy (1 Tim.3:16), which basically reviews Jesus' own history: specifically regarding his true humanity, his vindication attested by his resurrection (“made just...seen by messengers” – please remember that “messengers” may be either human or supernatural – the word is the same), the spread of his message to the gentiles/nations, and his ascension in glory!

Finally, sharing in the “mystery”, which is now revealed, rather than hidden, confers tremendous responsibility upon its participants: **no longer under dread oaths to preserve secrecy as in the ancient mysteries, but instructed to make it known as broadly as they can** (I Cor.4:1 and 13:2)!

This is also evident in Eph.3:9-12, a portion of which may serve us well as a closing summary. Marveling at the privilege of his assignment, Paul aims to “shed light on what is our responsibility, derived from the mystery ....to make known, now, to the rulers and authorities in heaven, through the church, the many-faceted wisdom of God! This is the plan of the ages, which he made in Christ Jesus our Lord!” And his people are entrusted with its execution!
In short, with an accurate understanding of the word (and the concept) “musterion”, faithful followers of Jesus will abandon their obsession with their “sacred rituals” (borrowed from the ancient “mysteries”), in favor of their sacred responsibility, rightly to represent the King and his Kingdom!

“Oh, the depth of God's wealth, and wisdom, and knowledge! How (far) beyond reasoning are his judgments, and beyond comprehension his ways! …

Glory to him forever! Amen!” (Rom.11:33, 36)
Amen, indeed!

Word Study #58 – Abide / Remain / Continue

It is unfortunate that traditional translators have most frequently (59 out of 119 incidents) chosen “abide” – the word least familiar to speakers of modern English, and therefore the most easily corrupted by unwarranted “mystical” interpretations – to represent a rather ordinary word like meno. The classical uses of meno include nothing esoteric at all. Liddell/Scott lists “to stay or wait, to endure or remain, to keep or preserve, to abide by an opinion or conviction”, among similar ideas. This single word has been split, by those traditional translators, into multiple variants, including “continue (11 x), dwell (15 x), endure (3 x), remain (17 x), and tarry (9 x), and nearly as many more used only a single time each. NONE of these connote the “abiding” image of “saints” sitting silently in serene bliss, doing absolutely nothing but languishing in the light of their halos!

Of the total, about a third refer simply to being, living, temporarily waiting, or staying in a particular location, as do nearly all of the cases where meno appears with a prefix: epimeno, katameno, parameno, prosmeno, and hypomeno. Eighteen describe a person's condition or circumstances, as in Jn.5:38, 8:35, 12:46; I Cor.7:8, 11, 20, 24, and others; and fourteen indicate simple survival (Heb.12:7, Mt.11:23, I Cor.15:6). Persistence is advocated in various epistles (II Tim.3:14, I Jn.2:24, Heb.3:14), as well as repeatedly in John's writings.

John shifts the focus substantially, and departs markedly from these more classical connotations, to give greater attention to relationships, rather than merely location, duration, or condition. Actually, this departure, almost unique to John's work, is one very strong piece of evidence for the (disputed) single authorship of all the material attributed to him. He uses a form of meno at least 58 times, more than any other writer, and only 10 of these fall into the usual categories. Most of the rest refer to deep and enduring relationships, but they are relationships with very practical implications. They are typified by Jesus' own unity with the Father (Jn.14:10).

Another outstanding deviation in John's work is his choice of verb tenses. One would ordinarily expect the concept of “remaining” to be expressed in the present tense – especially if referring to the establishment or endurance of relationship. In other writings, a temporary condition is usually expressed in the aorist tense, and an on-going state in the present. John, however, uses an aorist tense five times: the first “remain” in Jn.15:4, both conditional statements in 15:7, the imperative in 15:9, and the conditional clause in I Jn.2:24. I'd really like to ask him why! It is possible that he has in mind a definitive point of commitment – the aorist is used that way in reference to “becoming faithful”. All the rest of his verbs are present (continuous) tenses. Usually, the present tense indicates that no terminal point is in view.

Each of the primary admonitions has a very comforting air of reciprocity. Not only does Jesus state confidently “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (Jn.14:10), but he applies the same reciprocity to his followers: (15:4) “Remain in me and I in you”; (15:9-10) “Follow my instructions and you will remain in my love, just as I have followed my Father's instructions and remain in his love”; (8:31) “remain in my word” and (I Jn.2:14) “The word of God is living in you”; (II Jn.2 and 4) “The truth remains in/among us” and “your children walking in the truth.” Although meno is not used there, the same idea appears in Jesus' prayer (Jn.17:21): he expects his own relationship with the Father to be replicated in ours with him! There are ample lists of evidence of the development of that relationship – Jn.15:5 – bearing fruit; 15:8 – the glory of God!; I Jn.2:6 – copying Jesus' behavior; 2:10 – love for the brethren; 2:17 – doing God's will; 3:24 – the presence of the Holy Spirit; 4:12,13,16 – maturity in love.

Note especially the juxtaposition of truth and love in II Jn.1 and 2, also echoed in I Pet.1:22. That realization would go a long way toward bridging “doctrinal divides”, from both directions! How frequently do you see “love” as the hallmark of those who claim to be champions of the “truth”? Or a passion for the “truth” among those whose battle-cry is “unconditional love”? If these do not go together, then neither is genuine!
There are very explicit conditional statements associated with faithful “remaining / continuing”. Jn.8:31 – “If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples.” Jn.15:7 – “If you remain in me and my teachings remain in you” is the requirement for answered prayer. Jn.2:24 – If what you have heard remains in you, you are staying with the Son and the Father.” Paul, too, recognized that one is rewarded (I Cor.3:14) if his work survives the test, and uses a prefixed form, epimeno, in Rom.11:22,23) to declare that the spiritual status of both Jew and Gentile is dependent upon their “remaining” in faithfulness or unfaithfulness.

Likewise, neither Jesus nor John minced words about negative evidence: Jn.5:38 – (Jesus to the Pharisees) “You don't have the Word of God among you, because you are not faithful to the one he sent!”; Jn.3:14 – “The one who doesn't love, remains in death!”; Jn.3:36 – “The wrath of God remains” on those who are not faithful to his Son (in contrast to v.35, eternal life is experienced by those who are). Note that all of these are present, not future, tenses! He is not talking about “destiny” here, but about the present state of affairs!

So how does one “abide / remain / continue” in the Lord Jesus and his word / truth? He has provided not only careful directions, but the perfect demonstration: his own example of deliberate obedience to the Father’s instructions (Jn.15:9), to the point that he could credit his Father with everything he did (Jn.14:10)!

Everyone who becomes deliberately faithful to him need not live in darkness (Jn.12:46).

“...you ought to walk [live, behave] as he did!” (I Jn.2:6).

Very simple – but not easy.

May we urge – and help – each other faithfully to abide/continue/remain in him!

Word Study #59 – Mercy

“Mercy” is another word that, due to its having been used traditionally to represent four different Greek words, is very frequently misunderstood. Sometimes mistaken as a synonym for “grace” – which will be treated in a later post – it has typically been co-opted by the compilers of creeds, confessions and liturgies as a component of what I sometimes call the “cockroach syndrome.” You are surely familiar with the unfortunate caricature: God sitting sternly up on a cloud, making black marks in his ledgers, noting the details of every infraction by his creatures, and, in response to their programmed, groveling pleas for “mercy” (see W.S. #6), saying grudgingly, “Well, I could – and maybe should – just stomp you like a cockroach as you try to scurry away and hide, but I won't, because after all, I really AM merciful!”

It would be difficult to find anything (short of the abrupt descent of a celestial boot!) more antithetical to the true mercy of God, as revealed in and by our Lord, Jesus Christ! He ought to sue those guys for libel!

The most common word translated “mercy” is the noun, eleos (28 x) – verb form eleeo (33 x). Classically, it refers to mercy, compassion, or pity, or, when combined with poieo (to do or to make), the giving of alms. (Liddell/Scott). This character trait was personified and worshiped at Athens and Epidaurus – which, interestingly, was a center of medical treatment.

The other words were used much more rarely: oiktirmos / oiktirmon, “sympathetic, compassionate” (5x and 3x respectively), and hilaskomai (2 x) and hileo (1 x). These latter two, which are the only ones used classically of “appeasing angry gods”, unfortunately seem to have claimed the primary attention of doctrine-writers. In the New Testament, they appear only in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Lk.8:13), and in Hebrews in reference to the duties of the high priest under the old (obsolete) covenant (2:17 and 8:12). These are hardly the best authorities!

Thayer distinguishes between eleos and oiktirmos by noting that the former is a mercy that leads to action to alleviate or eliminate misery, while the latter offers pity for a hopeless situation – but the uses of oiktirmos in Lk.6:36, Phil.2:1, and Col.3:12 do not fit that analysis. They all imply action.

The most common use of eleeo is in reference to Jesus either being asked to heal someone (5 x in Matthew, 2x in Mark, and 3 x in Luke), or having done so (Mk.5:19, Phil.2:27), or in Elizabeth's celebration of the healing of her sterility (Lk.1:58). Indeed, Mary, Elizabeth, and Zachariah provide a delightful catalog of evidence of “the mercy of God” in Lk.1:50-78: (51) scattering the arrogant, (52) de-throning the powerful, (53) feeding the hungry and dismissing the uncaring wealthy, (54) keeping his promise, (57-58) enabling Elizabeth to have a child, (67) enabling Zachariah's prophecy, (68) providing redemption, (71) deliverance from the hatred of enemies, (72) remembering his covenant, (74-75) giving his people the privilege to worship him without fear – see W.S. #16 – and the removal of their failures – see W.S.#7, and (78) guiding them into the ways of peace!
“Loving generosity” might be the best description of that list!

The celebration of God's mercy continues in the epistles: Eph.2:4 – God, who is rich in mercy … made us alive together with Christ! Titus 3:5 – the mercy of God rescued us (see W.S. #5) from the futility described in v.3; 1 Pet.1:3 “according to his mercy,” he gave us new birth into hope (#36) by the resurrection of Jesus (#35); 1 Peter 2:10 – “You all are experiencing mercy” by having been made God's people!  Heb.4:16 – because Jesus understands our humanity, we find mercy, and grace to help in our time of need!”

“Mercy” is occasionally added (4x) to the more usual greeting of “grace and peace”, which has sometimes been called a melding of the standard Hebrew (peace) and Greek greetings. However, the usual Greek greeting, chaire, is not derived from charis. I wonder if Paul changed it deliberately? We will take a more detailed look at this when we consider “grace”.

For the faithful, it is essential to note that the mercy of God is not a treasure to be hoarded, nor a pardon to be begged-for, but a trait to be learned and shared! Very early, Jesus included that expectation in the Beatitudes (Mt.5:7) and parables. The inquiring lawyer in Lk.10:37 grudgingly recognized that “showing mercy” was the point of Jesus' story of the Samaritan, and the parable of the debtors (Mt.18:33) stresses that mercy received must also be passed on. Even more pointedly, Jesus quoted their own scripture to the nit-picking scribes and Pharisees (Mt.9:13 and 12:7), that God values mercy above their showy “sacrifices”, and (Mt.23:23) also above their meticulous tithing of herbs. Please note that “mercy” is attached, (not antithetical) to “justice” and “faithfulness”! There is no hint of an “Anything goes” attitude here.

In the same vein, James warns that failing to show mercy to one's brother places his own situation in jeopardy (2:13-15). Paul urges the Corinthians (II Cor.4:1) that the mercy they have received is intended to provoke faithful living. In Phil.2:1, Rom.12:1, and Col.3:12, he uses the less common oiktirmos, but the message is the same: mercy received must result in merciful and faithful behavior.

James (3:17) characterizes godly wisdom as including being “full of mercy and good fruit”; Jude uses the same word (21 and 22) with more solemn overtones, of the rescue of an errant brother. In I Cor.12:8, Paul lists “showing mercy” among the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to be exercised in the growth of the brotherhood – “with cheerfulness [good humor].” No reluctant toleration here. The idea of “loving generosity” fits very well.

Paul eloquently summarizes the intent of the gracious gift of God's mercy in Rom.12:1-2:

“I encourage you all, therefore, brothers, because of God's compassion [mercy], to present your bodies a living offering, set-apart, pleasing to God: this is your logical worship. And do not (continue to) pattern yourselves by this age, but be (continuously) completely changed, by the renewal of your mind, so that you all will recognize what God's will is: what is good, and pleasing, and complete [perfect].”

There is nothing to add but “Amen!”

Word Study #60 – Grace

“There, but for the grace of God, go I!” has become, in some circles, a “proudly humble” way of calling attention to another's unfortunate (or otherwise degraded) condition. The obvious but unspoken (and unwarranted) assumption that such “grace” is absent in the experience of that “other”, and the consequent air of condescension, seem totally to escape the notice of the speaker. This is evidence of a serious misunderstanding of the nature, purpose, and expansiveness of the “Wonderful Grace of Jesus” so enthusiastically, but narrowly, and, sadly, quite selfishly celebrated in song and sermon. Are you bothered by the inclusion of “selfishly”? Count the occurrences of “I, me, my” in that and other similar songs! That is diametrically opposed to New Testament attitudes!

A more accurate understanding of “grace” would move such a speaker to action (mercy! See W.S.#59), rather than to a piously superior sort of pity!

Grace – charis – was a very common word, with a long list of classical uses, including “outward beauty, grace, or favor; kindness or good will; thankfulness, or an expression of gratitude; a favor (personal or political) done or returned; a grant made in legal form; gratification; homage or worship; majesty; something done for the pleasure or “sake” of someone.” Its mythological personification was worshiped as the wife of the Greek god Hephaestus, and the attendants of Aphrodite (“the Graces”). (L/S). Bauer adds “gracious care: the action of someone who volunteers to do something to which he is not bound or obligated; the practical application of good will by gods or men; the condition of a person so favored.” It is probably the “lack of obligation” idea that has given rise to the popular evangelical phrase “unmerited favor”, although no etymological data includes any analysis of whether a favor is deserved or not.
New Testament usage is also quite wide-ranging. Charis can refer to a simple “thank you” (Lk.7:19, 6:32, 33, 34) to a person or a group (II Cor.4:15); to giving thanks for a meal (I Cor.10:30), or profound thanksgiving to God (Rom.6:17, I Tim.1:12, II Tim.1:3, I Cor.15:57, II Cor.2:14, 8:16, 9:15, Col.3:16). The aspect of “favor” or “good will” appears in Lk.1:30, 2:52; Ac.2:47, 7:10, 7:46, and political maneuvering in Ac.24:27 and 25:9.

Charis can describe that gracious attribute of God seen in his calling of people to himself and his Kingdom, and enabling their conversion and transformation of life (I Cor.1:4, 15:10; Gal.1:15, I Tim.1:14). This “grace” has observable results: when Barnabas was sent to Antioch by the apostles to check out the new group that had formed there, he “saw the grace of God” (Ac.11:23), and welcomed them as true brethren. We aren’t told what he “saw” – but he clearly recognized it as a “family trait.” Charis was also recognized as the active force in people becoming faithful in Achaia (Ac.18:27), and Paul urged the newly faithful in Pisidian Antioch (Ac.13:43) to continue (W.S.#58) in it, despite bitter opposition. In Eph.2:5-7, Paul waxes eloquent about the results of being “rescued” (W.S.#5) by God's graciousness: being made alive with Christ, identified with his resurrection (W.S.#35) and seated together with him, as a demonstration of his gracious kindness! Notice how quickly the narrative moves away from their former, alienated condition, into the glorious, gracious provision of God! Why is it now more in vogue to dwell on people's degradation? As one student observed, “It doesn't say that I need to be – or to pretend to be – total scum in order to experience grace!”

Somehow, sadly, in subsequent centuries, the balance has tipped strangely, and what was supposed to be the beginning of a lifelong process of transformation has been placed on hold, until the final consummation! Not so in true New Testament teaching! The focus here is on the grace that enables Kingdom living! Charis is the fuel that runs the “engine” of the transformation of life among those who are faithful! It involves “being made just” (W.S.#3) (Ac.15:11, Rom.3:24, and chapters 4 and 5); enabling honest behavior (II Cor.1:12), enabling service, both to the brotherhood and to those outside (Eph.4:7, Heb.12:28). It includes both generosity, and the means with which to express it (II Cor.9:8 and 14), confidence in prayer for help (Heb.4:16), and “coaching” (W.S.#53) when needed.

The faithful are admonished to let charis motivate and regulate our speech (Eph.4:29, Col.4:6), and to be careful stewards of such a gracious gift (I Pet.4:10, Rom.12:6), using each manifestation of God's grace to serve one another. Both James (4:6) and Peter (I Pet.5:5) paraphrase the statement they had heard from Jesus himself (Lk.14:11) that God actively opposes (the same word that James uses in the next sentence to tell his readers how to treat the devil!) the arrogant, but gives grace to the unassuming (“humble” W.S.#14).

The expectation of faithful living as a response to God's grace (II Cor.6:1, II Pet.3:18, Titus 2:11-15) is carefully and deliberately distinguished from the establishment – or defense – of the Law. This was obvious already in John's prologue statement (1:17), “The law was given through Moses, but grace/graciousness and truth (came into being) through Jesus Christ!” There are many warnings (Rom.4:4, 4:16, 11:6; Gal.1:6, 5:4; Heb.13:9; Rom.5,6, and 11) against trying to combine the new life with the old legalism, and also against the opposite problem, interpreting freedom from law as an excuse for licentiousness (Jude 4), which, he notes, actually amounts to denying the Lord Jesus! Heb.10:29 and 12:15 have a similar tone.

Luke, Paul, and the writer to the Hebrews frequently represent charis as not only supplying the enablement for an assignment (W.S.#55), but view the very assignment itself as a gift of grace (Ac.14:26, 15:40, 20:24; Rom.1:5, 12:6; Gal.2:9, Eph.3:2, 7, 8; 4:7; II Tim.1:9; Heb.2:9, 12:28).

In II Cor.8 and 9, especially 9:8 and 9:13, virtually everything connected with the offering for famine relief is included under the rubric of “grace”.

Paul urges Timothy not only to “be strong” in the grace that has come to him, but to be careful to pass it on (II Tim.2:1,2) to faithful people who will do likewise. This should be seen as the primary responsibility of every person entrusted/gifted with a task in the Body! (See Chapters 6-8 of Citizens of the Kingdom). “The grace/graciousness that is in Christ Jesus”, like the “mercy” we studied in the last post (#59), is not a treasure to be hoarded and admired, but a trust to be shared!

The final paragraph in Paul's letter to Titus (2:11-14) provides an excellent summary of the effects and expectations that accompany the grace of God – who is called, in deliberate defiance of the Roman emperor's edict, “our Savior / deliverer” (W.S.#4) in v.11. The application of the same title to Jesus, “our great God and Savior” in v.13 is not a contradiction, but a reiteration of that designation.

“His grace/graciousness was revealed (aorist tense: already accomplished) to all people (v.11); teaching/educating us (present participle: continuous action) to deny (aorist participle – a definitive act) ungodliness and worldly desires/longings, in order that (purpose clause) we may live (aorist subjunctive – purpose) sensibly and justly in the present age (v.12) while
we are waiting (present participle – continuous) for our blessed expectation/hope, and the appearance of (or, from) the glory, of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (v.13).” All the nouns are genitive, indicating either possession or source. “He gave himself for us [on our behalf], in order to (purpose) ransom us from all lawlessness, and to cleanse for himself a prepared people, eager for good deeds [things to do]!” (v.14).

In short, his purpose is to establish his Kingdom among us!

“Thanks – charis – be to God, for his indescribable gift!” (II Cor.9:15)

Word Study #61 – Redeem, Redemption

“Redeem/redemption” appears a total of 25 times in the New Testament narratives. These terms have been used to translate seven different Greek words, five of which refer almost exclusively to the ransom of slaves or captives (prisoners of war). Remember that in the prevailing cultures, for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, slavery had been the lot of many defeated populations, all over the then-known world. The concept was painfully familiar. So was the sometimes remote, sometimes common possibility of a compatriot accumulating sufficient goods to buy one's freedom, or even of earning it for oneself. Prisoner exchange, likewise, was not unknown. Any of these options would be called “apolutrosis” – ransom, or redemption.

Apolutrosis, the most common of the words, used 9 x in the New Testament, lutron (2 x), lutrosis (2 x), and antilutron (1 x), all nouns, and lutroo (3 x), the verb form from which they are derived, uniformly refer, in classical usage, to either the ransom of a prisoner or slave, or the redemption of a pledge or obligation – either the process or the price of such a transaction.

Agorazo, “to purchase”, and its prefixed form, exagorazo, both verbs, more frequently refer to ordinary commerce (28 x, more than the sum of all the “redeem” words), although they may also be used for the purchase of slaves, either for their freedom or simply a change of ownership. Twice, exagorazo is used in Paul's admonitions about “redeeming the time” (Eph.5:16 and Col.4:5), which likely implies making responsible use of it.

In the first century cultural context, nobody needed an explanation of “captivity”, either. Four of the five words translated that way are derived from aichme, “spear”, and refer to prisoners of war: the nouns aichmalosia and aichmalotos, used once each, and the verbs aichmaloteuo (2 x) and aichmalotizo (3 x). The other, zogreo used only once, refers to captured animals which were kept in cages.

Both Matthew (20:28) and Mark (10:45) record Jesus' statement that he intended to give his life as a “ransom (lutron) for many” (pollon). Luke refers, in the infancy narrative (2:38) and the despairing lament of the disciples enroute to Emmaus (24:21) to the expectation that Jesus would “redeem Israel”, but only quotes Jesus himself once (21:28), “Your deliverance [redemption] is coming near” in reference to his final triumph. In fact, Jesus himself does not use the word “sacrifice”, so common in modern parlance, even a single time in reference to his own mission, nor do any of the Gospel writers: “redemption / ransom” is their chosen term in every instance.

Please note, in the light of this choice of vocabulary, that the primary idea communicated is a change of ownership or jurisdiction, rather than the “get-out-of-jail-free” notion that is so commonly preached: and this makes an enormous difference in the expectations for the consequent life of those who have been “redeemed!”

Although the verb he chose in Col.1:13 is errusato – “rescued” (W.S.#5), rather than one of the “redeem” words, probably the best description of the situation is Paul's triumphant reminder, “He has rescued us from the power of darkness, and has transplanted us into the kingdom of the Son of his love!”

The writer to the Hebrews chose apallaxe – also “to set at liberty” – in describing the effect of Jesus' having passed through death and come out the other side, thus having destroyed the one who held the power of death, (Heb.2:14-15), upon those whose fear of death had held them in lifetime bondage. The idea is the same.

There is an impressive list of oppressors from which our Lord has “bought” our redemption, in addition to that primal fear. Exagorazo: Gal.3:13 and 4:5 – the curse and bondage of the Law

lutroo: Titus 2:14 – all lawlessness, and 1 Pet.1:18 – the empty / futile ways of our ancestors


Please note that these latter two are taken away (aphesis), not just ignored or overlooked! And please remember that although this is certainly included as part of the “package” of redemption, Jesus' right to “forgive / take away” failures and transgressions was predicated on who he is / was – God in person! – (see W.S.#7). Neither he nor his critics related it to his death.

Even his choice of timing lends evidence to the focus on redemption from bondage. As our son Dan pointed out when we
were considering this study, Jesus’ death and resurrection happened at Passover – the celebration of deliverance from bondage in Egypt – and not on the Day of Atonement, with its focus on “sins”. How have so many people missed that observation?

Do not forget, also, that redemption is much more than mere escape from negative things and circumstances! The deliverance described in Col.1:13 is into the Kingdom of the Son of God! Apolutrosis includes (Rom.3:24) being made just; (Rom.8:24) being adopted (see Translation Notes) as sons of God, and eventual release from the constraints of our bodies; (I Cor.1:30 and Eph.1:14) becoming the set-apart possession of the Lord Jesus; for which we have already been provided (Eph.1:14 and 4:30) with his seal of ownership, in the person of his Holy Spirit.

On a practical level, having been “bought” (agorazo) by our Master, it is reasonable to expect (I Cor.6:30) that we become eager to reflect honor upon him; (I Cor.7:23) that we refuse to allow ourselves to become enslaved to anyone or anything else; and (II Pet.2:1) make every effort not to deny or discredit him in any way.

Even if this were “all there is”, the condition of those so “redeemed” would be glorious! But there is more! A future also awaits, as the culmination of Jesus’ act of redemption! In Heb.9:15-17, the transaction is cast in the context of a will, under which the heirs only acquire their inheritance after the death (refer to 2:14) of the testator. The Holy Spirit is described (Eph.1:14) as the down-payment on that inheritance, until it is complete, and Rom.8:23 also intimates that, despite the present reality of the Holy Spirit, this is only the beginning!

Those gathered around the throne (Rev.5:9, and 14:3,4) celebrate the redemption of “people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” into the Kingdom of the Lamb.

You may have noticed that there is one question that we have not addressed: “To whom was the ransom owed or paid?” This is neither an oversight nor deliberate avoidance. The reason for its lack is simple. Although centuries of “theologians,” and preachers of many persuasions, have adamantly proclaimed the accuracy of their “logically” devised theories, the New Testament itself does not speak to that issue. Since this is a New Testament study, I will not presume to do so either.

Our attention can be much more profitably focused upon seeking faithfully to fulfill the purpose of the One who has redeemed us for himself! He has graciously provided us with very clear instructions for that exercise.

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #62 – The Nations

“Nations”, as we think of them today – independent political entities – did not exist until relatively modern times. Modern usage has considered the term “nation” (a cohesive group, bound together by a common language, culture, and history) to be synonymous with “country” or “state” (a political entity defined by geographical boundaries, laws, and governance) – which, historically, it is not.

Old Testament references to “nations” and “kingdoms”, like those in Homer, usually referred to a single city and its environs, each with its own “king” (more like a warlord).

In the first century, virtually every “nation” in Europe, the middle east, and parts of Asia and Africa was dominated by Rome, as they had been earlier by Greece under Alexander, and earlier still by Persia, under Cyrus. None of these empires were ever termed “nations”. They were composed of many conquered nations. The “nation” [ethnicity] with which one identified had little to do with political boundaries. The conquerors arranged and rearranged boundaries for their own convenience (much as they do today) with little regard for cultural, tribal, religious, or other loyalties. They appointed various levels of petty despot to do the local governing, with varying degrees of autonomy (and success). In the first century, some of these were Herod, Pilate, Claudius Lysius, Felix, and Festus. (You can fill in corresponding names for the 20th and 21st centuries!)

Jesus seems to have assumed this sort of structure in the parable (Lk.19:12-27) of the nobleman who traveled abroad “to receive a kingdom” and returned. This was probably a political grant from a higher potentate.

Liddell/Scott lists different categories of meanings for ethnos, the most common of the words rendered “nation..” (Other words rarely rendered “nation” are genea -1x– usually “generation” and genos -2 x– “kind, kindred, or offspring”.) The earliest, historically, represented “any body of people living together; a band of comrades; particular tribes, or even swarms or flocks of animals”! Later, implications of “foreign” or “barbaric” were added. In Athens, ethnos was applied to non-Athenian athletic clubs, in the LXX, to non-Jews, and more generally, to people of a class or caste beneath one’s own, as well as to trade associations.
Consequently, a modern translation of *ethnos* as “nation” would be more accurately considered a cultural artifact of the time of translation, than a concept present in the original text. The common thread in many of these translations is the concept of “other”. It is mostly concerned with what a person is *not*, dividing “us” from “them”, and “in” from “out”. Of all the 164 New Testament uses of the word, only ten refer to one’s own people. (Usually one’s own are called *laos*, “people”. Others are “*ethni*” – Gentiles, or nations). For Jews, the dichotomy was either *iondaioi*, Jews, vs. *hellen*, Greeks; circumcision vs. uncircumcision, or *laos*, people, vs. *ethni*, nations or Gentiles.

For Greeks, it was *hellen* vs. *barbaros* (barbarians), a term which originally applied to anyone who did not speak Greek, but after Herodotus (4th century BC), acquired the connotation of “brutal” or “rude”, although it continued to be applied, often in a disparaging way, to any foreigner.

*Hellen* (Greek) is also used, although less frequently (only 26 times) in the New Testament, usually as a more specific term of ethnic identity than *ethnos*, which is arbitrarily rendered “nation” (64 x) or “Gentile” (93 x), and applied to anyone who was not a Jew. Five times it was traditionally translated “heathen” – Ac.4:25, II Cor. 11:26, Gal.1:16, 2:9, 3:8. This is not a different word. The choice among the alternative terms, “nations”, “Gentiles”, and “heathen”, by traditional translators, is completely arbitrary. The word in every instance is *ethnos*.

One outstanding feature of the New Testament appearances of *ethnos* is the frequency of its being paired with “all”, “every”, or “many” (31 x), from the charge to Abraham (Rom.14:17,18) to Jesus' instructions to his original disciples (Mt.28:19, Mk.13:10, Lk.24:47), the glorious scenes in Rev.5:9, 7:9, 10:11, and many more. This, along with Paul's more specific descriptions (especially in Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians) reveals a massive paradigm shift! *Ethnos* is no longer a term of exclusion, but of gracious inclusion into the Kingdom – the people (*laos*) of God!

It took a while for those people to internalize the shift, and the writers are not shy about documenting their struggles. We don't know whether the confrontation with Peter that Paul describes in Gal.2 was before or after the former's experience with Cornelius (Ac.10) and/or the conference in Jerusalem (Ac.15), but rough spots are frankly acknowledged. Much of Paul's correspondence with the group at Corinth involves clashes of backgrounds, as do many of his other letters. This may even show up in the vocabulary, since frequently, the term *hellen* is substituted for *ethnos* in settings that may have involved Gentile proselytes. Ac.14:1, 16:13, 17:4, 18:4 describe scenes in the synagogues of Iconium, Derbe, Thessalonica, and Corinth, and the crowd present at Pentecost (Ac.2:8-11) represented “many nations”. Might the shift in “label” have indicated that these folks, while not fully assimilated, were at least no longer considered rank outsiders?

But the objective was much higher than that. Jesus' prayer for his people was that they all be as completely “one” as he was/is with the Father (Jn.17:21), and that prayer specifically included (v.20) “also those who are faithful to me because of their word”! This is the content of “God's mystery” (W.S.#57) finally revealed to his people (Eph.3:3-9, Col.1:26-27, Rom.16:25-26). The “in” group has been re-defined: no longer identified by any ethnic identity, but by faithfulness to the King of Kings! And while the Law, the Prophets, and the Old Testament histories are full of admonitions to avoid those of alien “nations”, the New Testament is filled with celebration of their inclusion!

Despite his earlier hesitation. Brother Peter also finally got on board (I Pet.2:9-10). Writing (1:1) to “scattered refugees” (traditionally, “strangers”) who have been brought together by their adherence to the Lord Jesus, he encourages them to seek continually for greater faithfulness, reminding them, “You all are a chosen generation – a royal priesthood – a set-apart [holy] nation (*ethnos*) especially reserved for the purpose of sending out messages about the excellence of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light! Once, you were not (even) a people (*laos*), but now you are God's people(*laos*)!” In v.11, he refers to them as “temporary residents and foreigners” in the world from which they came!

Paul writes in a similar vein to the brethren in Ephesus (2:11-22) of their transition from being rank outsiders (11 and 12), through the work of Christ (13-16) in creating one Body out of two peoples, and describing their present status (17-19) as “fellow citizens with God's people” and members of his own household! This is an ongoing process for all concerned (20-22), as the whole group is built together “into a permanent dwelling-place for God”!

At least 54 of the 93 places where *ethnos* is traditionally translated “Gentiles” refer specifically to their inclusion in the people of God. In the Kingdom, “in” and “out” is completely independent of national origin. It depends entirely upon one's loyalty to the King, which is expected to transcend – indeed, to replace – any and all other allegiances (W.S.#4). In the middle of a section of detailed instructions for the interaction of the widely varied members of that Kingdom in Colossae, Paul reminds them (Col.3:11-12) that not only do the former divisions no longer matter, but they have ceased to exist! They/we are now all “God's chosen people (W.S.#56), holy [set-apart for him] and loved!” and charged with representing the grace and power that accomplished such a feat to the rest of the world.

May we learn to prove faithful to that assignment!
Word Study #63 – Patience

References to patience in the New Testament are primarily representations of three word “families”, which, while quite different in “flavor”, are extremely difficult to separate in any definitive manner. “Easy” definitions do not hold up under closer scrutiny. The best we can do is to outline a “territory” covered by each word-grouping, recognizing that there will be overlap that escapes our best efforts. Frequently, two or more of these are found in the same sentence, so they are clearly not synonyms. Translators have almost randomly said “patience and longsuffering,” “endurance and patience,” “forbearance and longsuffering,” or some similar combination.

Makrothumioe (v.) and makrothumia (n.) are used 11 x and 13 x respectively. Liddell/Scott lists simply “to be longsuffering toward another, to persevere, to bear patiently.” Bauer adds “to delay” and “to be even-tempered”, upon which Thayer elaborates “to be patient in bearing the offenses of others, to be slow in avenging or punishing.” Peter (I Pet.3:20, II Pet.3:9, 3:15) and Paul (Rom.2:4 and 9:22) both ascribe this characteristic to God, but Paul also admonishes the brethren at Ephesus (4:2), Colossae (1:11 and 3:12), and Thessalonica (I Thes.5:14) to exhibit the same attitude toward one another. He appears to be appealing for a generosity of spirit that teaches gently (II Tim.4:2) rather than imposing demands. Usually (not always) it is demonstrated by someone more mature in the Kingdom toward those less experienced. I have frequently used “generosity” or “generous-mindedness” to render these words, intending them as a description of attitude, not necessarily with material implications.

Hupomeno (v.) and hupomone (n.), used 17x and 32x respectively, on the other hand, deal primarily with one's response to being abused. Thayer makes a helpful point in noting that the distinction is best seen where both words are used together, or in their opposites. Hupomeno / hupomone refer to “a temper which does not succumb under suffering,” whereas makrothumia is “self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate a wrong.” Hupomone is the opposite of cowardice or despondency, and makrothumia is the opposite of wrath or revenge.

Hupomone is the “patience” usually associated with those under persecution (Lk.21:19, Rom.5:3, 15:4 and 5; II Cor.6:4, Heb.10:36 and 12:1; and Rev.2:2,3,19; 3:10, 13:10,14:12), as is its verb equivalent (I Pet.2:20, Rom.12:12; Mt.10:22 and 24:13; Mk.13:13, Heb.10:32 and 12:7; I Tim.2:12).

Finally, we turn to anoche (only used twice) and anechomai (15x). The noun appears only in Romans 2:4 and 3:26, referring to the amazing kindness [forbearance] of God. The verb is variously rendered as “forbear” (Eph.4:2 and Col.3:13), “endure” (II Thes.1:4, II Tim.4:3), and “suffer” (Mt.17:17, Mk.9:19, Lk.9:41, I Cor.4:12, II Cor.11:19;20; Heb.13:22). L/S notes that anoche classically referred to an armistice or truce, and Trench offers the reminder that a truce is only a temporary cessation of hostility. The word was also used of forbearance, or “bearing with” someone – in more contemporary parlance, “putting up with” difficult people or situations. This is quite clear in Paul's instructions to Timothy (II Tim.4:2), whom he sent as a “trouble-shooter” to fledgeling congregations on several occasions. “Administer discipline,” he tells his young deputy, “give rebukes, keep on coaching, with all generosity of mind (makrothumia) as you teach.” Makrothumia does not imply “anything goes” – it is simply the attitude with which instruction is to be given. Likewise, there is nothing in hupomone to imply that “patience” under persecution requires one to adopt “door-mat” status. The beleaguered fools who received the letter to the Hebrews were reminded (10:36),”You all have need of patience [endurance], in order that when [after] you have done God's will, you may obtain the promise.”

Don't back down, but persist in faithfulness, willingly enduring whatever fall-out that produces. And despite the somewhat negative flavor of the passages already quoted, there is no grudging condescension in anechomai.
In Eph.4:2, it is used in combination with makrothumia — “with a generous attitude, putting up with each other in love.” In Col.3:13, it is paired with charizomai, “being gracious toward one another.” Although traditionally translated “forgive”, charizomai actually has the same stem as charis — “grace” (see W.S.#60).

We are instructed to forbear [put up with] one another's immaturity and peculiarities, and to forgive [be gracious about] error or offense, but in both cases, patiently to “keep on coaching” (W.S.#53) the team toward greater faithfulness. Discernment enabled by the Holy Spirit is often required, properly to identify and respond to the situation with which we are confronted.

We all have a lot to learn!

Word Study #64 – Bearing Fruit

“Everybody knows what that means, right? To bear fruit is to reproduce!”

At least, that is the proclamation of some enthusiastic folks who feel a need to count “conversions”, to display them like scalps on a belt, and to put-down anyone who sports fewer “trophies”. This is another of many places where the “tune” would be mightily modulated by a serious look at the New Testament.

Yes, there are a few possible places (Romans 1:13, Phil.1:22, and maybe Jn.4:36 and Col.1:6), where karpos, the most common word translated “fruit” might be referring to conversions — although probably not the “four-step” variety — out of 66 appearances of the noun form and 8 of the verb! Not quite an overwhelming percentage! At least 35 – probably 38 – of the references are simply agricultural images, many of them in parables. Two refer to physical birth, and at least 18 to the expected behavior of followers of Jesus. These harmonize well with the variety seen in classical usage. According to Liddell/Scott, in Homer, karpos referred exclusively to agricultural produce — “the fruit of the earth.” Herodotus and Plato both spoke of wine as “the fruit of the vine”, and later writers used the word of any produce or crops. Xenophon used it of returns or profits on one’s work or investment. When describing the actions of persons, it signified reward, or the fulfillment of an oracle or prophecy. Bauer adds “result, outcome, advantage, gain, or product.”

Turning to the best authority of all, we should ask again, “What did Jesus say?”

He talked a lot about fruit (43 x) and harvests (20 x). Harvest, therizo, therismos, is a similar word, but generally confined to agricultural or seasonal ideas. Therizo is the only one used of “end times”. All the synoptic gospels include the parables of the Sower (Mt.13:3-9 and 19-23, Mk.4:3-9 and 14-20, Luke 8:5-9 and 10-15) and the vineyard (Mt.21:34-43, Mk.12:1-12, Lk.20:9-16). The focus in the former, according to Jesus’ own explanation, concerns varied responses to the message of the Kingdom, while the latter explores the stewardship of its resources and the treatment of the King’s representatives.

Likewise, in pointing out that the value of a tree is judged by the quality of its produce (Mt.7:16-20, Lk.6:43-44), Jesus seems to assume that an observer can readily discern the quality of the fruit, and that no further elaboration is required. He gives the most detailed teaching in Jn.15:1-17. Here, Jesus represents himself as the vine, the source of life and growth (1,4), and his followers as its branches (2-6). The Father himself does the pruning (katharizo, also rendered “cleansing”, which we will save for another post). If you have ever worked with grapevines, you know how technical this job is. One must recognize which buds are the fruiting ones, and take care not to remove too many, but also ensure that branches do not compete with one another for sunlight and room to grow! A good harvest requires an expert vintner. Here, it is Jesus’ word (v.3) that governs the pruning. I think this is probably the reason for the slight digression (vv.9-15) in which he stresses the absolute necessity (5,7,10) of not only “remaining” (W.S.#58) tightly connected to him, but also of “following instructions” (10,12,14,17) (W.S.#55).

It is especially essential (see intro to PNT, and W.S.#142) here to distinguish between singular and plural forms of “you”. Most of this is a group assignment! (Branches, after all, are mostly attached to the vine by their attachment to other branches!) In the PNT text, plurals are identified by either “you all” or an italicized “you”. Huge errors occur when plurals are read as singular address.

There are also two grammatical constructions in this passage, both very easily identified, that are critical to understanding the message. A clause indicating purpose is introduced by the particle, hina, “in order that” a desired result may occur. These are seen in v.2, pruning is done in order that a branch may produce more fruit;
v.8, God's purpose is **that** you may bear much fruit, and become my disciples;
v.11, “I have said these things **in order that** my joy may be in/among you all”;
v.16, “I chose (W.S.#56) you, and appointed you, **that** you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, **in order that** whatever you all ask the Father in my name (W.S.#24), he may give you.”
v.17, “I am giving you these instructions **so that** you all may keep on loving each other.”

Other clauses are **conditional**, (regardless of modern rhetoric to the contrary). They are introduced by *ei*, or *ean*, both forms of “IF”, or, if negative, “unless”. They occur in:

v.4, “**unless** [if you don't (*ean me*)] you all remain in [on] me”, you cannot bear fruit.
v.6 “**unless** someone remains in me, he is thrown out like a branch and is dried up”
v.7, “IF you all remain in me, and my messages remain in/among you, you all shall ask ...”
v.10, “**IF** you all follow my instructions, you will remain in my love ...”
v.14, “You all are my friends, **IF** you continue to do as I am instructing you.”

Additional conditional statements continue throughout the rest of the discourse.

It remained for faithful followers to elaborate on precise definitions of the “fruit” that was to be borne. Paul wrote to the Romans (6:21,22), contrasting the “fruit” [results] of their lives before and after commitment to Jesus and his Kingdom, and to the Galatians (5:19-23) and Ephesians (5:8-10) in the same vein. Characteristics of the new life mentioned in these include (Rom.) a life devoted to God [holiness], (Gal.) love, joy [rejoicing], peace, generosity of mind, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, (Eph.) goodness, justice, truth, and finding out what is pleasing to the Lord!

Changed lives had already been urged by John the Baptist (Mt.3:8 and Lk.3:8) when he demanded “fruit worthy of repentance” (W.S.#6) of his hearers.

Remember that “justice” is the lexical meaning of the word traditionally translated “righteousness” (W.S. #3), which endows its “fruit” (Phil.1:11, Heb.12:11, Jas.3:18) with a decidedly different “flavor”!

Twice (Phil.4:17 and Rom.15:28), the sharing of material gifts among brethren are termed “fruit.”

The letter to the Hebrews closes with a description of the appropriate offering [“sacrifice”] of praise to God as “the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (W.S. #24).

Paul's admonition to the Colossian church (1:10) is a succinct summary: “behave in a manner worthy of the Lord, in order to please him fully, bearing fruit in every good deed, and continually growing in your acquaintance with God!”

Quite a contrast to “scalp-collecting”, bearing this sort of fruit is a worthy goal for us all!

**Word Study #65 – Clean, Prune, Purify**

*Katharos* (adj.) and its related words, *kathairo and katharizo* (verbs), and *katharismos* (noun), are as varied in classical usage as their English counterparts. Although there are many words which, to be properly understood, could be more accurately rendered by the use of a single, consistent translation (for example, see the discussion of “righteousness/justice” in W.S.#3), this is one where such an exercise would be extremely difficult. Some version of the concept of “cleanliness”, to be sure, is present in all of its manifestations, but I have not succeeded in finding a term that would fit for every occurrence.

*Kathairo or kathaireo*, the older form of the verb, for example, was used of “ridding a land of monsters and robbers, cleansing a wound, sifting or winnowing grain, pruning a tree, or performing religious purification rites” (L/S). The later form, *katharizo*, added “to clear ground of weeds, to cleanse (heal) from leprosy, or medical purgation.” The noun, *katharismos*, simply described the performance of any of these activities, and the adjective, *katharos*, the result of the process.

Perhaps a list of the adjectival uses of *katharos*, with illustrative New Testament references, would be helpful:

1. simple, physical cleanliness – Mt.23:25, Lk.11:39 (parallel passages regarding the washing of dishes), Mt.27:59 (“a clean linen cloth”), and similar in Rv.19:8, 19:14, and 15:6; and Heb.10:22 (“bodies washed with clean water”).
3. “without debt, guilt, or liability” – Ac.18:6, 20:26 – Paul's statement that he is no longer responsible for their response to his message.
4. “ritual or ceremonial purity” – Jn.3:25, Lk.2:22, Jn.2:6, Mk.7:19, Lk.11:41, Mk.1:44, Lk.5:14
5. “honest, correct, without blemish, sound, morally pure” – Jas.4:8, Tit.1:15, as well as parallels to the “ceremonial” kind listed above
6. “the healing of lepers” – Mt.8:3, 10:8, 11:5; Mk.1:42, Lk.4:27,7:22, 17:14,17.

Other uses are a bit harder to classify. Jesus, on occasion, deliberately blurred the line between physical cleanliness, ceremonial purity, and dedicated lives (Jn.13:10 – 11 and 15:3), as did the Holy Spirit's instructions to Peter (Ac.10:15, 11:19). Especially in the upper room scene, Jesus' intended meaning shifts sharply. And although the discourse on the Vine / branches is clearly an agricultural reference (see previous post), the implication of removing any hindrance to fruitfulness is clear. Similar admonitions are also seen in Heb.9:14, Ac.15:9, Titus 2:14, I Jn.1:9.

James 1:7 re-defines religious “purity” in very practical terms, and in no uncertain language.

This approach is at once more and less stringent than the “purification” demands of the Law. The advocates of the Law had compiled a handy check-list for assaying the ceremonial “purity” that they deemed requisite for proper worship. Jesus provided no such cut and dried convenience, but instead required – and offered – the total transformation of the focus of one's life. Once this transformation is in progress (Lk.11:41, Jn.13:10), the practiced eye of the vine-dresser can readily make continual corrections to the health, direction, and growth of a branch. Notice that (Jn.15:2) it is the fruitful branches that receive this attention. Unfruitful ones are simply cut off and discarded. And it is not a condition of their becoming a part of the Vine, but of continuing in that condition, and of increasing their fruitfulness.

We should also take note of who is responsible for the pruning / cleansing / purification. We have already seen that the Father is designated as the vintner (Jn.15:1); however, in Eph.5:26, Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus himself “cleansing the church to make it his own”. In Jn.15:3, “the Word that I have spoken” is credited with rendering Jesus' followers “clean”; and in II Cor.7:1 and James 4:8, the responsibility is placed squarely upon the shoulders of aspiring disciples themselves. Looks pretty much like a mutual effort.

Peter (I Pet.1:22) uses a different, less common word, hagnizo (#32), which more commonly applies to “religious purity”, when he declares that his readers have accomplished this, “by obeying the truth.” It is well to remember that both “the word” – #66 – (Jn.1:14) and “the truth” (Jn.14:6) (see W.S.#26) are also references to Jesus himself.

It remains for us to consider the discussions in the letter to the Hebrews, the understanding of which has been severely inhibited by the common practice of “proof-texters” who lift a few phrases entirely out of their context. For example, the frequently quoted phrase, (Heb. 1:3), “when he (Jesus) had made a cleansing of “sins” – (the word is hamartia, failures or shortcomings, and not paraptoma, transgressions – see W.S.#7) – if taken in its context of the statement of God's earlier attempts to make his ways known, which did not work (v.1), looks entirely different, declaring that Jesus' successful mission (v.2 and 3) was to remedy the shortcomings / failures of the old system! This contrast is the announced purpose of the entire treatise, and occurs like a refrain throughout.

Likewise, Heb.9:14, in the context of its entire paragraph, also highlights Jesus' superiority over the former priesthood, and those who quote the end of 9:22 “without the pouring-out of blood, deliverance doesn't happen”, totally ignore the beginning of the sentence, “According to the law……” V.23, immediately following, continues the emphasis that a better way was needed – and provided! Remember that “blood” and “life” are frequently used synonymously. (see Citizens of the Kingdom, chapter 12.)

Finally, how can anyone be aware of the glorious expression of confidence in Heb.10:19-23, the assurance that “our hearts have been cleansed (perfect tense) (lit., “sprinkled”) from consciousness of evil, and our bodies have been washed (also perfect tense) with clean water” (perhaps a reference to baptism), and still submit meekly to a requirement that they “confess sinfulness” in every worship service, and countless hymns? That simply doesn't compute! The perfect tense expresses “a past action with present consequences”!

Paul had earlier written to Titus (1:15), “Everything is clean, for clean people! But for the impure and unfaithful, nothing is clean: their mind and conscience has been polluted!”

For all who belong to Jesus, heart, mind, and conscience have been cleansed!

Accept the joyful admonition in Heb.10:23-24:
“Let's hang on to our commitment to [acknowledgment of] our hope [expectation] without hesitation! For the One who made the promise is faithful! Let's concentrate on prodding each other (with) love and good deeds!”

And whether in song or liturgy, give heed to the Spirit's word to our brother Peter (Ac.10:15):
“What God has cleansed, don't you call unclean!”
Word Study #66 – The Word

There are many instances in the New Testament where confusion has resulted from a single English word having been used to represent multiple Greek words (see explanation in “Helps for Word Study”), and it is necessary to separate the disparate concepts for accurate understanding. This, however, is one of the much less frequent places where nearly synonymous Greek words have often been artificially divided in order to bolster “theological” arguments. Careful perusal of a non-theological lexicon like the historic Oxford work of Liddell and Scott, as well as the actual context of the New Testament uses of rhema and logos, reveals more similarity than difference. The two words are even used interchangeably on occasion: compare Mt.26:75 and Mk.14:72, which use rhema, with Lk.22:61, where the description of the same event uses logos; and the representation as the agent of creation and of its preservation, where II Pet.3:5-7 uses logos, and Heb.11:3 and 13 uses rhema. Any separation of meanings, therefore, must be made with caution and humility, since the sense must be derived from the context: the difference is not lexical.

It is true, however, that rhema represents considerably less diversity than does logos. Rhema refers simply to “anything said or spoken, the subject of a speech or matter”, and grammatically, “a phrase as opposed to a single word, or the verb, or predicate, in a sentence.” Logos, on the other hand, may refer to “computation or accounting” (Mt.18:23 and 25:19, Lk.16:2, Heb.13:17, 1 Pet.4:5); to “explanation, legal principle, or the statement of a theory or argument” (Mt.10:13, 22:46; Mk.12:13, Ac.22:22, 18:15); “inward or overt debate, thinking, reasoning” (1 Cor.1:17, 2:4, 2:13, 4:20); “a continuous statement or narrative” (all the references to “preaching the word”); “a divine utterance” (“word of God, words of Jesus”); and various other forms of speech, argument, and discussion.

You may notice that none of these definitions make any reference to anything written – only to speech.

In the New Testament, therefore, it is more fruitful to explore other questions. One's understanding and attitude, for example, will vary according to whose “word” he encounters. This is expressed by the genitive case, which may indicate possession or source. There are many places where logos refers simply to a statement or conversation of ordinary people (Mt.12:37, Mt.10:14, Lk.23:9, Ac.15:24, Mt.22:46, and many others.) At least 21 times, something is specifically labeled “the word of God”; 23 times “the word of the Lord, of Jesus, of the Lord Jesus Christ, of Christ.” or, when Jesus himself is speaking, “my word. Even more frequently, (45 x), the choice is simply “the word”, referencing some aspect of the message of Jesus, regardless of who was speaking it.

Another use of the same (genitive) form indicates not possession, not source, but the content of the “word”. Here again, both logos and rhema are used in this way, joined by “of”:
- “the word of eternal life” (Jn.6:6) – rhema
- “the word of this life” (Ac.5:20, Phil.2:16, 1 Jn.1:1) – rhema
- “the word of truth” (Ac.26:25, II Cor.6:7, Eph.1:13, Col.1:5, II Tim.2:15, Jas.1:18) – rhema
- “the word of exhortation” (Ac.13:15, Heb.13:22) – logos
- “the word of this salvation [rescue, safety]” (Ac.13:26) – logos
- “the word of the prophets” (Ac.5:15), or “of prophecy” (II Pet.1:19, Rv.1:3) – logos
- “the word of his grace” (Ac.20:32) – logos (all the rest on this list, also)
- “the word of promise” (Rom.9:9)
- “the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge” (Rom.12:8)
- “the word of reconciliation” (II Cor.5:19)
- “the word of faithfulness” (I Tim.4:6)
- “the word of righteousness / justice” (Heb.5:13)

A significant deviation in usage from the classical definitions occurs in another large group of references. The word is also, in the words of Heb.4:12, “alive and powerful!” It is active: (these all use logos)
- to heal (Mt.8:8) and to cast out evil spirits (Mt.8:16)
- to demonstrate the power and authority of Jesus (Lk.4:32,26)
- to pass judgment (Jn.12:47,48)
- to make disciples clean (Jn.15:3 – see previous post).

It “grew” and “multiplied” (Ac.6:7, 12:24).

It was spread from the forming groups of disciples (I Thes.1:8), and was at work in their formation (2:13), able to “build them up” (Ac.20:32) and assure their inheritance.

It makes all foods holy (I Tim.4:5) and provides nourishment for faithful living (4:6).

It is the agent of new birth (Jas.1:18, I Pet.1:23), able to save and sustain those lives (Jas.1:21).

It was at work in the creation of all that exists (Heb.11:3), as well as its preservation (1:3).
Both *rhema* and *logos* are also used when the context is negative: “every idle word” (Mt.12:36) and the charges against Stephen (Ac.6:11,13) use *rhema*, while “speaking against Jesus” (Mt.12:32) and “those who corrupt the word” (II Cor.2:17) or handle it deceitfully (4:2) use *logos*. The words of such people can also have power (II Tim.2:17), “spreading like gangrene”, and any who ignore or distort the true word are to be avoided (I Tim.6:3 and I Thes.3:14). It was people who refused to hear the Father's word (Jn.5:38) who failed to acknowledge and trust the Lord Jesus, and those in whom the word was not welcomed/received (Jn.8:37) who deliberately set out to destroy him.

By contrast, those who “hear / listen” (W.S.#27) and “accept” the word (Jn.12:47,48) are the ones who become faithful. These are admonished to remember, to be mindful of that word (II Pet.3:2, Jude 17), not to be ashamed of it (Mk.8:38), to “keep” it (Lk.11:28), and “continue in” it (Jn.8:34), with the result being the privilege to live in the freedom thereby engendered. Those who “received / welcomed” the word (Ac.2:41) were baptized as a testimony to their commitment (see chapter 10 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*). They are then urged to “encourage one another with these words” (I Thes.4:18), to “hold on to faithful words” (II Tim.1:13), and to handle the word correctly (II Tim.2:15), taking care that it not be discredited (Tit.2:5). James (1:22) is even more specific: hearing / listening is not enough: DOING the word is essential. John the elder agrees (I Jn.3:18) “Dear children, let's don't love in theory (*logos*) or in talk, but in action and truth!”

“And now, I turn you all over to the Lord, and to his word of grace [his gracious word], that can build you all up, and give (you) the inheritance among all those who have been made holy!”(Ac.20:32)

“Everything he says” is useful for that!

**Word Study #67 – The Gospel**

We have dealt with this group of words before, in the study of “evangelists” (W.S.#43). However, the primary focus there was on the *people* so designated, and their activities. Due to the ubiquity of abuses of the English word, “gospel”, it may be useful also to concentrate more specifically upon the *message* itself.

There is a sense in which every one of these studies is a “gospel” message, since they are all offered as “good news” of the graciousness, power, and provision offered to all of us who choose to identify with the Kingdom of the King of Kings, in sharp contrast to the “bad news” so often mistakenly perpetrated under the label of “gospel,” in efforts to compel submission.

As we shall see, distortion of God's message and intentions is not a modern problem. Jesus himself had to deal with “establishment-types” who resisted his message of welcome and transformation so adamantly that they eventually felt it necessary to get rid of him, and carefully plotted his demise. **The Good News is that their schemes failed**! In the power of his resurrection, “He destroyed death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel” (I Tim.1:10)! In the process, “Through death, he destroyed the one who had the power of death, – that is, the devil – and rescued those who, by fear of death, were held in slavery all their lives” (Heb.2:14,15)! “He (God) rescued us from the [power] authority of the darkness, and transported us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love” (Col.1:13)! Folks, **This is good news** – a news-flash that has been transforming people's lives and relationships for more than 2000 years!

*Euaggelion*, literally, means “a good (or favorable) message.” Historically, it was usually used of the report of a military victory. The word appears a few times in the LXX, as a verb, mostly referring to victories, but also in the prophesies of Isaiah which are familiar from “The Messiah” – Is.40:10, 52:7, 60:6 – and the passage (Is.61:1) that Jesus quoted in Nazareth (Lk.4:18) as he introduced his Kingdom. It only occurs three times as a noun (I Sam.4:10, 18:22, 25). It also referred, classically, to a reward given to a messenger who delivered good news, or a sacrifice offered in gratitude.

In the New Testament, Mark opens his account clearly labeling it (1:1) “The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus himself began his ministry with the triumphant announcement (Mk.1:14), “The time has been fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has arrived!” Both verbs are in the perfect tense, which refers to past action with present effects/implications! The requisite response is cast in the present imperative (indicating progressive, continuous action): “Change your ways [re-orient your lives] (see “repent”, W.S.#6), and become faithful (W.S.#1) to the gospel [good news]!” There is not a word about assenting to a list of “doctrines”, or groveling in one's supposed “unworthiness” or “sinfulness”. It is a simple, gracious invitation to become loyal to the King and his Kingdom! (Please see the introduction to *Citizens of the Kingdom.*)

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As his disciples walked together with Jesus, and observed/assisted with his teaching and healing, it became clear that this was no “free ride.” Jesus soon began to speak of “losing one's life for my sake and the gospel's” (Mk.8:35), and the adoption of a new set of priorities that could involve the leaving of family and property (Mk.10:29), but also the creation of new relationships that would be even closer – along with persecutions (v.30).

Early on, too, Jesus made clear that this “gospel” is intended to be available to all nations [Gentiles] (Mk.13:10) – see also W.S.#62 – an aspect that took his followers a bit longer to assimilate.

One can almost hear the wonder in Peter's voice as he recounted his unprecedented visit to Cornelius. It is helpful to observe the elements included in his message on that occasion (Ac.10:34-43), which he later characterized as “the gospel” (Ac.15:7-8):

v.35 – “in every nation, one who respects him (God) and does justice” is acceptable to him.

v.36 – “The good news of peace, through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all”

v.38 – a brief summary of Jesus' earthly activity

v.39 – “they” did away with him

v.40 – “God raised him!”

v.41 – “We saw him!”

v.42 – God made him judge of the living and the dead

v.43 – he takes away (W.S.#7) the failures of all who are faithful to him!

Paul provides a similar summary definition of the gospel in Rom.1:1-6, adding (v.4) that Jesus was “certified” as the Son of God by his resurrection, and (v.5-6) the purpose of all this was to enable all who belong to him to learn faithful obedience. “Its source and goal are faithfulness!” (Rom.1:17)

To the folks at Ephesus, he also emphasized the inclusion of Gentiles as “fellow heirs, joint members of the Body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus (Eph.3:6), which he later (6:19) equated with “the mystery of God (W.S. #57).

In I Thes.1:5, he reminded them that the “gospel that you all have received” is not a matter of theoretical debate, but of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, and is expected to result in faithful living. Notice, please, that the rare reference to the destruction of the opponents of the Gospel (II Thes.1:9) is intended as encouragement to the beleaguered faithful. It is NOT part of a “sermon” to threaten prospective converts!

To be sure, the faithful are sternly warned against people who advocate “another gospel” (II Cor.11:4, Gal.1:6), who “pervert the gospel” (Gal.1:7), or refuse to “obey the gospel” (I Pet.4:17, II Thes.1:8, Rom.10:16), terms which usually apply to those who tried to impose the strictures of the Jewish law upon Gentile converts, as if it represented some sort of superior “spirituality”. But these admonitions are aimed at the faithful, who may be in danger of being deceived by such teachings, and not at the perpetrators of the error, who are left in the Lord's hands.

There is nothing complicated or obscure about “the truth of the gospel” (Gal.2:5, 2:14, Col.1:5). It is hidden (II Cor.4:3,4) only from those who are willfully disobedient. Paul admonished his co-workers in Philippi (1:27) to “continue acting like citizens worthy of the gospel … standing firmly in one spirit, with a single identity, working faithfully as a team for the gospel.” That is by far the best insurance against error!

“Healthy teaching” (I Tim.1:11) is “patterned after the good news of the blessed God!”

This is the gospel message that we, his followers, are expected to acknowledge, to incarnate, and to share:

“The Kingdom has arrived, because the King is alive and active among us!

Come and see!

Learn together to follow his instructions – and to live!”

Word Study #68 – Confess and Deny

These are words for which the most common misunderstanding results from the extreme narrowing of their application in modern English. Today, they are usually used in a legal, or quasi-legal context, and deal with admitting or concealing criminal – or at least unsavory – conduct. This, however, comprises only a very minor part of classical and New Testament uses of the terms.

Homologeo, and its prefixed form, exomologeo, traditionally translated “confess, profess, promise, and thank”, had a much broader classical domain. The literal meaning, from “homos”, “the same”, and “lego”, “to speak or to say”, was “to say the same thing, to agree.” It was used mathematically of correspondence or coordination, socially of a promise or agreement to do something, logically or philosophically of admitting ignorance and of granting or conceding a proposition, and of
common consent or consensus in a group discussion. Some of these aspects appear in New Testament usage. By far the most frequent – at least a dozen times – refers to acknowledging one's identification with Jesus (Mt.10:32, Lk.12:8, Jn.9:22, Rom.4:11, 10:9, 10:10, 15:9; Ac.24:14, Phil.2:11, Heb.4:14, 13:15; I Jn.4:2, 4:15), and his reciprocal acknowledgment of those who do so (Mt.10:32, Lk.12:8, Rv.3:5).

The more frequently “preached” association with “sins” occurs only five times, two of which involve John the Baptist and not Jesus (Mt.3:6, Mk.1:5). It is significant that every one of these, including also Ac.19:18, Jas.5:16, and I Jn.1:19, uses the term hamartia, (failure, shortcoming, error). Paraptoma (deliberate transgression) is never mentioned at all (see W.S. #7). James, in particular, links “confession” within the brotherhood to mutual prayer for one another's strength and healing. And in Ac.19, it is the result, not the condition, of the conversion of the magic practitioners. Even in these few references, there is nothing to suggest that one is asked, (much less required) to sift repeatedly through a list of “no-no's” to find items to “confess”, or to apologize for some sort of vague, unknown offenses (just in case you missed one!). It is simply an acknowledgment that one has not perfectly measured up to the Lord's – and our own – goal.

Other references raise puzzling questions. Why did the traditional translators choose to depart from the usual rendition, “confess”, and choose “thank” in Mt.11:25 and Lk.10:21 – the only time they did so? Did they reject the idea of Jesus simply “agreeing” with the Father?

Denial, on the other hand, represents three different words. Antilego, literally “to speak against, to dispute or question, to declare opposition, to contradict,” concerns factual disputes (Ac.28:19, 22; Lk.20:7, Jn.19:12), back-talk(Tit.2:9), or overt contradiction (Ac.13:45, Lk.2:34). Arneomai, and its prefixed (stronger) form, exarneomai, refers to people: “to deny, to disown, to utterly reject, or to refuse any association.” They occur in contrast to homologeo in Mt.10:23 and parallel Lk.12:9, and II Tim.2:12,13; and repeatedly in the scene with Peter before Jesus' crucifixion (Mt.26, Mk.14, Lk.22, Jn.18). This is the charge leveled against the Jewish leadership (Ac.3:13,14) and against unfaithful former brethren (I Tim.5:8, II Tim.3:5, Tit.1:16, II Pet.2:1, I Jn.2:22,23, Jude 4). Once, arneomai has nothing whatever to do with faithfulness, Lk.8:45, the “not me” response to Jesus asking who touched him in the crowd.

One aspect that does not occur in classical usage appears in I Tim.5:8, II Tim.3:5, Tit.1:16, Rv.2:13 and 3:8, where one's profession of faithfulness is evaluated (or negated) by his behavior. Likewise, its usefulness in determining the reliability of both human and spiritual “messengers” (II Pet.2:1, I Jn.2:22) goes beyond classical parameters, although the idea of “self-denial” is not entirely unique to the Christian message. The two concepts are frequently used together, by way of contrast, usually either between acknowledging the truth of a statement of fact and opposing or rejecting it (Ac.23:8, I Jn.2:22, 4:2), or making similar statements about one's relationships: not very complicated at all.

The very same word that describes Peter's “denial” of association with Jesus, and the behavior that negates one's “profession of faith” (I Tim.3:5, II Pet.2:1, Tit.1:16), is used in Jesus' admonition to self-denial in all three parallels, and Paul's similar message in Titus 2:12.

But were the traditional translators unaware that John the Baptist was simply acknowledging, and not contradicting, the reality of his own status (Jn.1:20) under cross-examination?

Homologeo is not always positive: it is used of Judas' “promise” to the chief priests to betray Jesus (Lk.22:6), of Jesus' warning to impostors (Mt.7:23), and Herod's promise to Salome (Mt.14:7)!

Likewise, arneomai is not always negative. It may be simply honest, as in (Heb.11:24) Moses' refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, or the temple authorities' recognizing that they could not deny the miraculous healing of the lame beggar (Ac.4:16). Paul echoes Jesus' own statement (Mt.10:33) when he reminds Timothy (II Tim.2:12) of that warning, but quickly adds (v.13) that this does not in any way inhibit or deny Jesus' own faithfulness. The congregations that Jesus commends, in the messages to Pergamon and Philadelphia, are cited for (Rv.2:13) “not denying” his (Jesus') faithfulness, even under brutal persecution, and despite their minimal power, (Rv.3:8) having “kept my word, and not denied my name (see W.S.# 66 and 24).

Used in a manner consistent with the New Testament, both of these terms/concepts are an integral part of faithful living. Like most “abused words,” they need simply to be restored to their intended understanding. A good start would be to revise and re-define the practice of “confession” and restore it to the joyful acknowledgment of belonging to the Lord Jesus – a celebration, rather than a mournful duty – looking forward to the day when “Every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!”
Word Study #69 – Reconcile, Reconciliation

Although the English word, “reconcile”, has varied implications, all the way from “what you do with a bank statement” to “to render no longer opposed, to bring to acquiescence, to win over to friendliness, to bring into agreement or harmony, to settle a quarrel, or to make compatible”, when applied to “religious” matters, it becomes a concept for which common understanding has been skewed by almost exclusive focus on only one of the ten New Testament appearances of its related words.

Complicated theological treatises have been created, adding intricate and ominous details to Paul's simple statement, in a subordinate, conditional clause (Rom.5:10), “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son,” and totally ignoring the main clause, “much rather, now that we have been reconciled, shall we be kept safe [“saved’] in his life!” Paul himself says nothing whatever about the rationale, the need, or the process of that reconciliation, although involved and fanciful technical explanations have become a favorite playground for people who enjoy thundering judgment at others. For Paul, it is subordinate to his encouraging message of safety!

The very basic linguistic principle of looking at the way words are used is especially helpful in a situation like this, where a root word, allasso, used six times and exclusively translated, in traditional versions, as “change”, appears with three different prefixes, all traditionally translated “reconcile”. These include apo, “away from, usually connoting avoidance or departure, but also derivation or origin”; dia, “through, thoroughly, and occasionally causation”; and kata, “down, concerning, near, about, or direction toward.” These prefixed forms are themselves narrowly used: apokatalasso in Eph.2:16 and Col.1:20,21; diallasso in Mt.5:24, and katallasso in Rom.5:10 (twice), and II Cor.5:18, 19, 20, as well as I Cor.7:11, where it simply refers to an estranged marital relationship.

Lexically, there is little difference noted in any of the lexicons, except that Bauer restricts dialassomai, used six times and exclusively translated, in traditional versions, as “change”, (seen in isolation in Ac.6:14, Rom.1:23, I Cor.15:51, 52; Gal.4:20, and Heb.1:12), remains integral to the understanding of all of its forms. These are practical words, not merely records in a ledger. Change is expected.

When Jesus directed his followers to “make things right” (dialлагεθι) with an offended brother before making an offering (Mt.5:25), he expected observable results: a transformed relationship. (This is the only appearance of any of these terms in the gospel accounts).

Likewise, the context (Eph.2:13-22) of Paul's use of apokatallasso combines the creation of a new relationship with God “in Christ Jesus” with the contemporaneous destruction of barriers between people, who are themselves being re-created into one Body, “fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household (v.19)”. The same theme is prominent in the Colossian passage (1:19-22): extending, here, not only to formerly alienated people, but to “things on earth and things in the heavens!”

The same situation is described in II Cor.5:17-21, where katallasso appears three times, and the noun form katallage twice. All creation has been made new! Not only for us (v.18), but for the world (v.19) is the “message of reconciliation” offered (v.20). And it is immediately paired with an assignment (see diakonia in W.S. #40): God has “made us responsible for the message of reconciliation!” A clear mandate for “show and tell”!

There is one unrelated word that is once translated “make reconciliation” (Heb.2:17), and once “be merciful” (Lk.18:13): hilaskomai, used only these two times in the entire New Testament. Homer used it of sacrifices in efforts to appease the gods of Olympus, in his stories of their often capricious manipulation of human affairs. Plato occasionally applied it to interpersonal conflict. Significantly, even the two New Testament references also seem to assume that more pagan notion of negotiating a temporary truce with God, in contrast with all the previous passages, where the initiative comes from God's side, and results in a total, permanent transformation. The Hebrews reference, even though it describes the Lord Jesus, does so in the context of a parallel with the duties of the Jewish high priest under the old system (which, the writer asserts repeatedly, did not work!) The publican [tax collector] in Jesus' parable quoted by Luke exhibits a similar attitude, of a desire to appease a God whose displeasure he feared. He is commended only because of being compared with the Pharisee, whose self-congratulatory attitude was even worse!
Notable in all of these words is the preponderance of aorist tenses, which signify either punctiliar past or decisive, singular action. The reconciliation offered in the New Testament is an accomplished fact. Only once is the verb in the present (progressive or continuous) tense: when speaking of what God was in the process of doing, in the person of Christ (II Cor.5:19). Reconciliation is a “done deal”, although its message (II Cor.5) still needs to be delivered and received.

We would do well to consider whether this accomplished fact is evident in the message we proclaim, and in the fellowships that claim to represent its Author. Reconciliation is one of the primary components in the building (Eph.2:20-22) of “God's permanent dwelling place”, for which his people are deliberately being “built together”

Any purported “reconciliation with God” that does not include the reconciliation of former human enemies into one Body, one brotherhood, one Kingdom, is not only patently false, but diabolically fraudulent!

May we build – and be built – in faithfulness!

Word Study #70 – Peace

Of all the aphorisms glibly quoted about what “Peace is.....”, I have never heard the one that would best describe its contribution to the New Testament message: Peace is practical! A faithful person does not stop at “wishing” someone “peace”: he is obligated to DO something about it (Jas.2:16)!

I have chosen to focus this study upon the primary word, eirene, and not the six other less frequently used words also sometimes translated “peace”, which refer only to “silence” or “quietness” (considered in #139).

Although a plurality of the appearances of eirene in the New Testament are found in simple greetings or leave-takings (33 times), almost as many (27) occur in direct admonitions for the life, corporately or individually, of the faithful brotherhood!

This is a marked departure from the classical uses of the word, in which the cessation of armed conflict by a treaty predominates. In the New Testament, this aspect is seen overtly only in Lk.14:22, Ac.12:20, Ac.24:2, and perhaps Rom.3:17 and Rv.6:4, although John the Baptist's admonition to soldiers to “do violence to no one” (Lk.3:14) certainly would carry that idea (and have interesting and salutary effects on military activity!), as would Paul's admonition in Romans 12:18 to “live peaceably with all people.”

Lexicographers uniformly note the LXX usage, and its correspondence to the Hebrew greeting, “shalom”, wishing safety, security, health, and general well-being to the person or group addressed. This usage, of course, is seen in most of the epistles, often in closing as well as greetings, and also in Jesus' dismissal of people he had healed, and in his instructions to the disciples whom he was sending away to preach. It is interesting that in this latter setting, the greeting of peace is to be offered quite indiscriminately (Lk.10:5,6). Jesus reassures them that it just won't “take” if the person or household is not capable of receiving it. This seems to assume some degree of power in the greeting – perhaps a prayer? Or at least a blessing. In any case, the disciple is not to pass such a judgment prematurely. Later, however, John (II Jn.10) excludes from those instructions people who are clearly known to have deliberately distorted the message.

Seven times “peace” is listed as an attribute of God (Rom.15:33, 16:20; I Cor.14:33, II Cor.13:11, Phil.4:9, I Thes.5:23, Heb.13:20), and three times as a primary component of the Gospel (Rom.10:15, Eph.6:15, Ac.10:36). (see also W.S.#67) Interestingly, though, the much-touted phrase, “peace with God”, appears only once (Rom.5:1)! This is yet another instance where common “evangelical” focus has been skewed by a “generally accepted doctrine” that totally lacks New Testament derivation. The vast majority of New Testament references relate to the peace that the Lord Jesus has created – and required! -- among his people!

“Peace / security / well-being” was widely anticipated as a characteristic of the Messianic Kingdom (Lk.1:79, 2:14, 19:38,42), and this is probably at least one reason for Jesus' teaching on the subject in his final instructions to the disciples (Jn.14:27 and 16:33), bequeathing to his followers not just the “peace” of the common greeting, but “my peace”, which holds firm even under the anticipated persecution, rather than enabling them to escape it.

Although Luke mentions in Ac.9:31 that the young church enjoyed a period of peace (traditional translators used “rest”, but the word is eirene) from persecution after Saul's conversion, most of the “peace” is experienced in the midst of or in spite of the hostility of opponents. It is often focused within the group, between brethren of diverse backgrounds (Mk.9:50, II Cor.3:11, Eph.2:14-17, 4:3; Col.1:20, 3:15; I Thes.5:13, II Tim.2:22, I Pet.3:11, Jas.3:17).
Peace is represented as the goal toward which the faithful are encouraged to strive (Jn.16:33, Rom.14:19, I Cor.7:15, II Tim.2:22, Heb.12:14), both among themselves and toward those outside (Rom.12:18, Heb.12:14, Jas.3:8, Ac.10:36). It is also intended to become characteristic of the personality of a faithful person, being listed among the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal.5:22), and described as a result of fixing one's attention upon the affairs of the Spirit (Rom.8:6). The peace offered to the faithful is paired with “doing good” (Rom.2:10), “joy” (Rom.15:13), the opposite of confusion (I Cor.14:33), love (II Cor.13:11 and Eph.6:23), the unity of the Spirit (Eph.4:3), God's act of setting his people apart in holiness (I Thes.5:23), wisdom and justice (Jas.3:17,18), the protection of their hearts and minds (Phil.4:7), and the very presence of God (Phil.4:9)! The result of reconciliation (see last post), in repeated instances, is described as making, or having “made peace” among formerly alienated people and groups.

Peace is represented as the creation and the gift of the Lord Jesus, and attributed (also only once) to the giving of his life (Col.1:20). The Biblical writers go into much less explanatory detail regarding that provision than do most of their subsequent interpreters! Here, it is stated as a simple fact.

The gift also requires concerted effort on the part of recipients! Note the instructions that follow the promise of peace in Phil.4:8-9, where the focus is upon deliberately paying attention to things that contribute to peace, and upon continual practice! Actualization of the gift of peace is not automatic! It requires concerted efforts on behalf of justice (Jas.3:18). Yes, I know the traditional translators said “righteousness” – but please see W.S.#3. It is the same word, only separated by the “doctrines” of folks who prefer to privatize their “faith”, keeping it sanitized and theoretical, and to avoid the often messy responsibility of faithfulness (W.S.#1).

The more accurate understanding is available from II Cor.13:11, “…be [live] in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you all.” The present active imperative, eireneuete, indicates constant effort in that regard. It would be equally valid to render it “keep making peace.”

Peace is not a “reward” to be passively received, or a blissful state in which to luxuriate with “no troubles”, but an assignment to be faithfully fulfilled!

Paul states rather bluntly in Rom.2:10 that God's offer of “peace”, whether to Jew or Gentile, is to “all who are doing good,” and urges his readers (Rom.14:19) to “earnestly pursue matters of peace, and the things that build each other up.” He elaborates on this theme in Eph.2:14-22. Be careful not to carve this beautiful description of the peace that Jesus has created into tiny, isolated phrases to “prove” some obscure point of “theology.” Allow the whole picture to soak into your consciousness, and to transform your perception of the brotherhood that the Lord has created for his Kingdom! It is glorious!

Yes, that sort of a combination of diverse people is bound to make some sparks. But the remedy lies precisely in the peace that Jesus has created! Peace is not only the atmosphere in which the Kingdom survives and thrives, but the “umpire” or “referee” (Col.3:15) whose skill can sort out any resulting friction! That the “rules of the game” (Col.3:12-17) often need mediation should come as no surprise. It is evidence of life and growth – not failure!

The intensity of effort required in this regard is evident in the frequency with which we are urged to “pursue” it (Rom.14:19, II Tim.2:22, Heb.12:14, I Pet.3:11). Dioko is the same word that is used of persecution! Are we that relentless in pursuit of the characteristics of the Kingdom?

Only the “God of peace” (I Thes.5:23) can make us fully his – but (v.24) he is perfectly capable of doing the job. We are simply expected to co-operate!

“(May) God's peace, which greatly exceeds all understanding, protect (our) hearts and (our) minds, in Christ Jesus” (Phil.4:7)!

“May the Lord of Peace himself give you all peace – through everything [every situation], in every way!” (II Thes.3:16.)

Word Study #71 – Pleasure / Pleasing

The impetus for this study was one of my favorites among “contemporary” Scripture-based songs of praise, “Thou Art Worthy!” It quotes the traditional translation of Rv.4:11, “Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created!” I love the concept: all of creation –including us! – existing solely for the pleasure of its Creator!

I was startled to discover, however, that the translation itself is incorrect. The quoted passage uses none of the words usually rendered “pleasure”, but is the only place in the New Testament where thelema, “will”, is translated that way. A
correct translation would substitute the “means” or “agency” understanding of the preposition *dia* (through) for the commonly assumed “purpose” construction. Either of these can be valid on occasion. Please see similar uses of *dia* in Heb.2:10, and the translation notes associated there. The result would read, “through your will they exist, and were created.”

I still like the song and its message, though!

Even though it doesn’t occur where I expected / wanted it, there are nevertheless helpful things to be gained from the study of the word “pleasure.” It includes three basic “families” of words: one, *eudokeo*, which is usually positive in its associations; one, *aresko*, often negative, but occasionally positive, and entirely positive in its prefixed form, *euarestes*; and one uniformly negative, *hedone*; along with two more, *spatalao and truphao*, which are used only once each, both describing wanting, irresponsible indulgence in luxury (I Tim.5:6 and Jas.5:5).

*Eudokeo* usually expresses the perspective of the person or group that is pleased, content, happy, or in agreement with a situation or decision. It combines the prefix *eu-* (well, good, or favorable) with the common verb *dokeo* (to think, to seem, to have an opinion). It is used in quoting the voice of God's approval of the Lord Jesus on the occasions of his baptism (Mt.3:17, Mk.1:11, Lk.3:22) and his transfiguration (Mt.17:5 and II Pet.1:17), although it is also used (with a negative) of God's disapproval of those who complained in the desert (I Cor.10:5) and of the offerings under the old covenant (Heb.10:6,8,38).

Paul uses it to express his own desire to share with the Thessalonian group not only the Christian message, but his own life as well (I Thes.2:8), and his wish “to depart and be with Christ” (II Cor.5:8), as well as II Cor.12:10, where he speaks of “taking pleasure” even in his own weakness, because of the opportunity thus provided to experience the power of God. He applies the same term to the Macedonian and Asian congregations' decision to send famine relief to Judea (Rom.15:26,27), and also to God's pleasure (I Cor.1:21) to redeem the faithful by his message, (Gal.1:5) to reveal the Lord Jesus to Paul, and (Col.1:19) that all of God's own completeness should have its permanent residence in the person of Jesus! Jesus himself spoke of the Father's pleasure (Lk.12:32) in giving his own Kingdom to his worried but faithful followers! The noun form, *eudokia*, equates God's pleasure with his will (Eph.1:5,9; Phil.2:13, II Thes.1:11). When the prefix *sun-* (with) is added, the resulting word means simple consent or agreement, whether for good (I Cor.7:12,13) or ill (Lk.11:48, Ac.8:1, 22:20, Rom.1:32).

*Aresko*, on the other hand, is much more mixed, frequently expressing the perspective of one person trying to please another. It ranges from Salome “pleasing” Herod (Mt.14:6, Mk.6:22) and Herod's brutality “pleasing” the Jews (Ac.12:3) to admonitions toward “pleasing” the Lord (I Cor.7:33, I Thes.2:4,4:1; Col.1:10, II Tim.2:4, I Jn.3:22, Jn.8:29). “Pleasing people” can be either an effort to bring them to faithfulness (Rom.15:2, I Cor.10:33) or evidence of unfaithfulness (Rom.15:1, 15:3; Gal.1:10, I Thes.2:4, 2:15).

A similar, slightly related word, *arkeo*, refers more to contentment arising from sufficiency or satisfaction, especially in the passive voice, which occurs in half of its New Testament uses (Lk.3:14, I Tim.6:8, Heb.13:5, III Jn.10). This is not nearly as strong a word as *aresko*, but carries a similar idea.

There is nothing ambiguous, however, about *hedone* (English cognate – hedonism). Luke (8:14) lists it along with “cares and riches” as a deterrent to faithful living; Paul warns Titus (3:3) against serving “lusts [unwholesome longings] and pleasures”. Peter describes (II Pet.2:13) markedly unholy behavior. James (4:1,3) pinpoints it as a basic cause of warfare and strife.

Perhaps the greatest clarity may be seen in yet another word, only used twice in the New Testament: *apolausis* – pleasure, enjoyment, advantage, benefit. (English cognate, “applause”!) In I Tim.6:17, Paul reminds his young assistant to focus not on “uncertain riches” (see next post), but “on God, who richly provides us with everything for our benefit [enjoyment]!” In contrast, the writer to the Hebrews (11:25) commends Moses for refusing “to temporarily have [enjoy] the benefit of copping out” (traditionally, “to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”) Both the gracious provision of God and the careless denial of his ways are represented by the same word. The difference is one's focus.

Careful attention to focus can enable discernment whether “pleasure / enjoyment” is a gift to be gratefully received or a trap to be avoided. *Ascetic renunciation of all things deemed “pleasurable” is as much a denial of the graciousness of God as is mindless pursuit of “pleasure”*. The pertinent question is, *whose* pleasure?

Any loving father (heavenly or earthly!) takes pleasure in seeing his children enjoy his good gifts. And that pleasure is multiplied when the gift is received with wide-eyed wonder and a delighted hug of thanks, and treasured precisely because it came from the father! Such “pleasure” – on either side – need cause no apprehension regarding faithfulness. The “pleasure” which is severely critiqued by James (4:1,3; 5:5), Paul (I Tim.5:6, Tit.3:3), and Peter (II Pet.2:13), as well as
the Lord Jesus himself (Lk.8:14), is self-centered, self-gratifying, and certainly to be avoided.

But, as always, the remedy is prescribed just as clearly as the problem: seeking the “good pleasure” (*eudokia*) of the will of the loving Father (Eph.1:5, 1:9; II Thes.1:11), who has himself provided the motivation and the ability to do so (Phil.2:13): “For God is the one who is working among you all, (to enable you) both to desire and to work for his pleasure!”

As brother Paul put it, (Rom.5:11), “Not only that (speaking of our reconciliation), but we are also thoroughly enjoying God, because of our Lord Jesus Christ!”

Thanks be to God!

## Word Study #72 – Riches

OK, let's begin by getting the primary cop-out out of the way. If you ate a meal today, slept under adequate shelter last night, and reasonably expect to do so tomorrow, compared to much of the world, you are rich. So am I: despite having made a fine art out of “pinching pennies”, I nevertheless have a few to “pinch.” I expect most of you do, too: so let's admit it, and focus on the more Biblical question of the faithful use of whatever resources we have.

*Plousios* (adj. and adv.), *plouteo* (v.), *ploutizo* (v.), and *ploutos* (n.), speak, classically, of any kind of abundance, plenty, or wealth, while *chrema* – possessions or money – less frequently used (only 7x), is more narrowly defined.

Under the old covenant, or in classical times, abundant wealth or possessions were viewed as evidence of the blessing of God (or “the gods”). Jesus, however, had quite a different interpretation (Lk.6:24, Mt.19:23-24, Mk.10:25, Lk.14:2), and in his parables, the “rich” protagonists (Lk.12:16, 16:1, 16:19-22) are not exactly heroes.

But notice, please, that Jesus does not criticize their wealth, per se, but rather their attitude toward it, and their use of their resources. Zacchaeus (Lk.19:2), Joseph of Arimathea (Mt.27:57), and the women who provided for the needs of the disciple band “out of their own possessions” (Lk.8:2,3) are in quite a different category from the young man who turned sadly away from discipleship (Mt.19:23,24; Mk.10:25, Lk.18:23,25). He had a problem of priorities, not simply prosperity.

The warning recorded in Mk.10:24 concerns, according to some manuscripts, “them that trust in riches”. While spotty textual evidence allows the option that this could have been a later editorial comment, Jesus' acceptance of the individuals mentioned above indicates that it may have been his intention. The parables in Lk.12:13-21 and 16:19-31, likewise, do not condemn the wealth, but rather its selfish hoarding and use.

None of the words translated “riches” appear at all in the Acts account, but *chrema* does, four times: in Ac.4:37, contrasting Barnabas' generosity with the behavior of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11); Ac.8:18 and 20, recounting Peter's encounter with Simon the magician; and Ac.24:26 regarding Felix hoping to receive a bribe from Paul.

An entirely different “flavor”, which appears to have no classical precedent other than the simple concept of abundance, is present in the epistles. Paul speaks of “the riches of the grace of God” (Eph.1:7, Tit.3:6), and his “generosity” (II Cor.8:2), of God's mercy (Eph.2:4), his glory (Rom.9:23, Eph.3:16, Phil.4:19), and goodness (Rom.2:4). Peter applied the term “riches” to the privilege of entrance into the Kingdom (II Pet.1:1).

The faithful are admonished to appreciate (Eph.1:18) the riches of their inheritance in the Lord Jesus, and to become (I Tim.6:18) “rich in good deeds”, having been granted (Col.2:2) “the riches of full assurance of understanding”, and (Col.1:27) “the riches of the glory of the mystery” (W.S. #57) of their inclusion in the Kingdom. The term seems to have been completely redefined in the context of the Kingdom.

Paul warned Timothy not to “trust in uncertain riches” (I Tim.6:17), and (6:9) pointed out the perils of “wanting to be rich”, in harmony with Jesus' own teaching about the “deceitfulness of riches” (Mt.13:22, Mk.14:19) in inhibiting commitment to the Kingdom.

James mounted quite a tirade (Jas.5:1-6) against the selfish use of worldly wealth, even assigning responsibility to it for conflicts and wars (4:1-3) (which sounds sadly contemporary!), and especially condemning it as a criterion for status in a brotherhood (2:1-7).

Nevertheless, Paul also exults over “the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom.11:33), and James notes (2:5) that God has granted to those who are poor from the world's perspective to be “rich in faithfulness, and heirs of the Kingdom”. Paul holds up Jesus' example of leaving his well-deserved “rich”condition (II Cor.8:9) in order to elevate his people to his own “riches” – in order to enable (8:2) their generosity! The often (mis)quoted comment in Phil.4:19, if seen in its proper context – a “thank-you” note for a generous contribution from a very poor congregation – far from the “blank check” touted by prosperity cults, is simply reassurance that such generosity will continue to be enabled!
Jesus sorted it out quite plainly in the message to the Laodicean church (Rev.3:17-19) which, sadly, has many modern clones, who have allowed apparent material prosperity to obscure their spiritual destitution. Their riches have not exempted the wealthy from the devastation described in Rv.6:15 and 13:16; they find themselves in the same sinking boat as everyone else. But perhaps the most contemporarily relevant message is found in the picture of economic collapse in Rev.18. Notice that the people who are distraught at the fall of “Babylon” are (v.3) those who “got rich from the extravagance of her luxury!” It is those accustomed to that luxury (vv.9-13) and its purveyors who mourn their losses. The “cargo” listed includes no necessities – except perhaps grain, although at least some ordinary varieties would surely have been locally produced. It is “the fruit of your selfish passions …. all the delicacies and splendid things” (v.14) that are gone.

And where are the people of God – the citizens of his Kingdom – in all this? For these, the word is (v.20) “CELEBRATE over her, heaven [sky], and God's people [saints], and envoys [apostles] and spokesmen [prophets]! God has passed judgment on her for you all!” [or, God has exacted judgment on her judgment of you all!]

Those committed to Kingdom values have already learned to function quite apart from the “permission” of the adherents of the rulers of the commerce of the world (13:15-17), and consequently are untouched by its demise. The mutual care described among the community of the faithful throughout the New Testament simply continues as usual. Financial collapse does not cause a true Kingdom brotherhood to moan about its budget! They simply ramp up their already-functioning mutual aid!

With which group do you identify?

Word Study #73 – Honor

“Honor”, a frequent request on the “search” lists, represents two different “families” of words. However, we will deal here with only one: *timao / time*, because the other, *doxazo / doxa*, is much more frequently (and probably more correctly) translated “glory” (144 x for the noun and 54 x for the verb, against only rendered “honor” 6 x for the noun and 3 for the verb). That will require a separate study.

*Time*, the noun, classically referred primarily to “honor or esteem accorded to the gods or to one's superiors, or bestowed by them as a reward”, to the dignity of civic office, an honor, or a compliment. It was also used of the appraised value of an object or property, or its price; and of either a penalty or compensation awarded in the settlement of a lawsuit.

*Timao*, the verb, is parallel: to honor, esteem or value, to estimate value or worth, to pay due regard to a person, or legally to assess a reward or penalty.

Eight times in the New Testament, *time* simply designates a price: the money involved in Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Mt.27:6,9); the price of property (Ac.4:34 and 5:2,3); the value of books burned in Ephesus (Ac.19:19); and the “price” with which Jesus ransomed his people (I Cor.6:20, 7:23).

Closely related, the idea of value of household utensils (Rom.9:21, I Tim.2:20,21), or of usefulness (Col.2:23) is also fairly straightforward.

After that, however, when referring to people, the situation becomes somewhat more complicated. Even the instances where people are instructed simply to render “due respect” to others (Rom.13:7 – government officials, I Tim.6:1-3 slaves to masters, I Pet.3:7 – husbands to wives, or I Thes.4:4 – one's own inclinations), and where Jesus himself laments the lack of respect accorded to a prophet by his own countrymen (Jn.4:44, Mt.13:57, Mk.6:4), when it comes to mutual relations within the Christian brotherhood, Paul emphasizes (Rom.12:10) an extra measure of devotion to be expressed there, and (I Cor.12:23,24) special care to be taken of those upon whom the rest of the world would place less value. Peter contrasts the “value” placed upon Jesus himself (I Pet.2:7) by his opponents (the “builders”) with the true value seen by the faithful. In 2:17, he expresses an interesting (and appropriate) attitude toward the world's hierarchies: “Honor (timesate- aorist imperative: a decision?) everyone, love (agapate- present imperative) the brotherhood, respect (phobeisate – present imperative) God, honor (timate- present imperative) the king!” The king is to be “honored” just like everyone else – not scorned because the brethren know the emptiness of hierarchy – but God, and the brotherhood, are in a special, more elevated category!

There are times, however, when “honor” itself clearly includes some practical evidence of respect. Jesus' scolding of the Pharisees (Mt.15:4-8, Mk.7:6-13) for creating a loophole for failure to support one's parents, Luke's account of the provisions supplied to Paul's group by the inhabitants of Melita (Ac.28:10), and Paul's instructions to Timothy (I Tim.5:3) regarding the care of widows, are plain enough to raise the possibility that a similar idea is present in I Tim.5:17 with regard to faithful elders (remember, however, W.S. #42, that these are old people, not officials!).
Paul speaks approvingly (Rom.2:7) of people “seeking glory and honor and immortality” by the perseverance born of good deeds, and assures them that the result will be “praise and honor and peace” (v.10). The writer to the Hebrews, however, offers a reminder that even under the old system, the “honor” of priesthood was not intended to be a result of personal ambition, but only the appointment of God (Heb.5:4), and also contrasts Jesus' faithfulness with that of Moses, as the difference between the “honor” due to a builder and the admiration of the building he has produced (3:13). Nevertheless, Peter (I Pet.1:7) encourages the expectation on the part of the faithful of “commendation and glory and honor” when Jesus comes.

It remains to consider the places where “honor” becomes an aspect of the praises offered to God himself. Jesus dealt with this matter very specifically. His own testimony should lay to rest the arguments of those who try to “demote” the Lord Jesus to a lower “status” than whatever nebulous entity it is that they call “God”. He states unequivocally (Jn.5:23) “The one who does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent him”, and (8:49) plainly equates the honor ascribed to each as one and the same.

Usually, in scenes of praise, “honor” is combined with other words, including “glory and honor” (I Tim.1:17, Heb.2:7,9; II Pet.1:17, Rev.4:9,11; 5:12, 21:24, 26), or “honor and power” (I Tim.6:16, Rev.4:11, 7:12, 19:1). The creatures around the throne give “glory and honor and thanks” to the One who is alive forever (Rv.4:9). There are even longer lists, as in the exuberance of Rv.5:12: “The slaughtered Lamb is worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!”

Forget the technicalities of defining the terms! Far better to simply follow the example of the living creatures, the elders, and “every created thing in heaven and on earth and beneath the earth and on the sea” (5:13), ascribing to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb “Blessing and honor and glory and power” – falling down before him in worship!

Amen!

**Word Study #74 – Glory**

“Glory” is NOT a railroad terminal! It is not even a place. Centuries of songs (perpetuating the “Christian” mythology that equates it with similarly fanciful ideas of “heaven”) to the contrary, **doxa** refers to “reputation, splendor, magnificence, brightness, or exaltation” – but never to geography. The only “verse” that could even be twisted to support such a notion is I Tim.3:16, where the traditional translations refer to Jesus having been “received up into glory”, is a glaring example of the incorrect translation of the preposition en (in), which describes a state or condition, and requires a dative object, as if it were eis (into), which does imply destination or purpose, and requires an accusative object. There is not even a variant reading to that effect in any of the manuscript evidence. “Glory”, in that case, describes the triumphant **circumstances** of Jesus' ascension, not its **destination**.

Although “glory” was ascribed to potentates of various kinds – “the kingdoms of this world” (Mt.4:8, Lk.4:6, Rv.21, 24, 26), kings themselves (Mt.6:29, Lk.12:27, Ac.12:23), and even to some people's delight in ungodly behavior (Phil.3:19, 1 Thes.2:6, 1 Pet.1:24), as well as to assorted gods and heroes of antiquity, the vast majority of New Testament references are to the praise, honor, and worship due to God.

In the LXX, **doxa** had been used for the bright light that indicated God's presence, either in the pillar of fire in the desert or in the “holy” precincts of the tabernacle or temple. This idea is also seen in Paul's description of Moses communicating with God (II Cor.3:7-10), which serves as a prelude to his explanation that even greater “glory” is available, in the Lord Jesus (4:6), to all of his people (3:18)!

Throughout the gospel accounts, the terms “the glory of God”, “the glory of the Father”, “the glory of the Son”, appear in various combinations. This is because, as Jesus pointed out very explicitly in Jn.12:28, 13:31-32, 14:13, and evidenced repeatedly in his prayer (Jn.17), “they” are actually one and the same. There is no such thing as acknowledging the “glory” of one without the other (Jn.5:23, 8:50-54).

Paul was granted a similar vision and understanding when he wrote (II Cor.4:6) of “the illumination which comes from the recognition of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ”!

And in the final consummation, the description of the city where the Lord's people continually enjoy his presence (Rv.21:23), “God's glory illuminates it, and the Lamb is its lamp!” A lamp is required in order to make light accessible and useful!

Throughout his earthly ministry, people saw, or acknowledged, or marveled at the glory of God as they observed Jesus' multitude of healings (Mt.9:8, 15:31; Mk.12:12, Lk.5:25-26, 13:13, 17:15, 17:18, 18:43), his teaching (Lk.4:15), and his other miracles (Jn.2:11, 11:4:40).

Jesus himself usually spoke of “glory” in connection with his return (Mt.16:27-28, 24:30, 25:31; Mk.8:38, 10:27, 13:26;
Lk.9:26, 21:27, 24:26), although John records a greater emphasis on the recognition of his true identity (1:14, 7:18, 8:50, and the prayer in Jn.17) than do the synoptic writers. Jesus scolded those (Jn.5:41-44) who sought “glory” from one another, rather than from God. Traditional versions use “honor” here, but the word is doxa.

It is also important to note the manner in which Jesus advocates that his followers contribute to “the glory of God”. It is NOT by making a flamboyant announcement before a public performance of some sort, or a preface to a big brag thinly disguised as a “testimony”, that “this is all for the glory of God!” Jesus rather directed his people to live in such a way that “people may see your good deeds [works (W.S.#39), behavior], and glorify your Father” (Mt.5:16), noting that the Father would be “glorified” by their “bearing much fruit (W.S.#64) and becoming – not recruiting – his disciples (W.S.#51)!”. He then set the ultimate example in his own prayer (Jn.17:4), “I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do!”

The surpassing glory of the Lord Jesus himself, whom both Paul (I Cor.2:8) and James (Jas.2:1) call “the Lord of Glory”, runs through the epistles like a refrain. It is contrasted with human failings (Rom.3:7) – he has none! – and is the vehicle for praise to God (Rom.16:27). Jesus is himself the “image” (W.S.#15) of God's glory (I Cor.1:7), and the goal of the transformation he accomplishes in Jesus (II Cor.3:18). Incredibly, his people are described as a part of “the riches of the glory of his inheritance” (Eph.1:18), and the venue of his own glory, for all the world to see, is his church (Eph.3:21)! The confession (W.S. #68) of his lordship (Phil.2:11) produces glory to the Father, and it is “according to his riches (W.S.#72) in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil.4:19) that God intends to supply all we need in order to serve him. It is “to his eternal glory” (I Pet.5:10) that we are called, and his presence among us (Col.1:27) constitutes our “hope [expectation] of glory”!

Although the primary use of “glory” in the epistles is simply an expression of praise and honor to God, or a declaration of his greatness, goodness, and graciousness, it is also considered (Rom.6:4) the operative force in Jesus' resurrection, the motive (Rom.15:7) for Christian hospitality, and the result of the faithfulness of the brethren who had sent famine relief to Judea (II Cor.8:19). Indeed, it is intended to be the goal (I Cor.10:31) of everything we do! The admonition to “glorify God in your body” (I Cor.6:20) is interesting in this regard: the noun “body” is singular, but the possessive is plural. This opens the possibility that the reference could be either one's physical body, or the collective Body of Christ. In either case, it is an awesome privilege and responsibility to be actually expected to contribute to the limitless glory of God! It is the very purpose for our existence (Eph.1:12!)

Jesus had prayed (Jn.17:24) that his disciples might “behold his glory”, and there are at least five instances where people are reported to have been privileged to “see the glory of God” : Stephen (Ac.7:55) just before his death; Peter (II Pet.1:17) and his companions, when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain; John, (1:14) in the introduction to his gospel, of his acquaintance with Jesus; and in Jesus' gentle rebuke to Martha at her brother's tomb (Jn11:40).

Several places in the epistles, that amazing prospect is expanded even to the point of sharing that glory! And it's not just “pie in the sky bye and bye”. In Rom.8:30 and I Cor.2:7, we learn that God planned and provided for all this “before the beginning!” Most of the references are present tense: Rom.2:7,10 – this gracious provision is to be constantly “sought” by faithful living, a concept that is repeated in II Thes.2:14, II Pet.1:3, I Pet.5:10. By focusing our attention on the Lord Jesus, we are continually being transformed (II Cor.3:18) into his likeness and glory, and even the hassles to which we are still subjected become tools toward that goal (II Cor.4:17). God is presently calling his own into his “kingdom and glory” (I Thes. 2:12), and that calling becomes a present source of hope for its future fulfillment (Rom.5:2, Col.3:4, I Pet.4:13-14), as does the gracious presence of Jesus among us (Col.1:27, Eph.1:18). Paul considers his own trials to contribute as well (II Tim.2:10).

For the faithful, as always, its all about Jesus! The writer to the Hebrews (2:10) refers to him as “the one because of whom and through whom everything exists, leading many sons into glory” – that is, his own personal possession, as he is “crowned with glory and honor” (2:9). The only appropriate response is to join with the elder, John, (Rev.1:6), in his acclaim:
“He has made us a kingdom, priests to God his father! Glory and power to him forever!”
Amen!
Word Study #75 – Light

Of the six words translated “light” in the New Testament, two, *lampas and luchnos*, apply almost exclusively to a physical lamp or torch, something portable, and hand-kindled. The only exceptions are Mt.6:22 and its parallel Lk.11:34, where Jesus calls the eye the “light/lamp” of the body, Jn.5:35 where he refers to John the Baptist as a “light”, and Rv.21:23 where “the Lamb is the light” of the holy city. In each of these references, the more common term, *phos*, is used in the next breath, so it is reasonable to assume that the writers simply felt it necessary to differentiate a source for the “light” they had in mind. Three of the words are used only twice each: *pheggos*, (classically, daylight, moonlight, splendor, luster, or delight) as ambient light (Lk.11:33), or moonlight (Mt.24:49 and parallel Mk.13:24); *phoster* (classically, that which gives light, stars, radiance, or a window) in Phil.2:15 “you shine as lights”, and Rv.21:11 “[light] radiance like a precious stone”; and *photismos*, (classically, any kind of illumination, frequently metaphorical) in II Cor.4:6 “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” and 4:4, “the light of the gospel”.

In contrast, the primary word, *phos*, or in earlier Greek, *phaos*, used 70 times, could have referred classically to any of these: L/S lists “light of sun or moon, light of a torch, lamp or fire; the light of the eyes; a window; light as a metaphor for deliverance, happiness, or victory; or illumination of the mind.” Bauer adds “the bearers of enlightenment,” whether material, human, or supernatural.

The New Testament appearances of *phos* can be sorted into several categories – and you may wish to vary these boundaries. (Feel free!) Some clearly refer to ordinary illumination – daylight, firelight, lamplight (Mt.10:27, Mk.14:54, Lk.8:16, 12:3, 22:56; Jn.11:9, Ac.16:29, II Cor.4:6). Others are specifically contrasted with “darkness”, which may be understood simply as a natural state, or in a metaphorical sense of ignorance or evil (Mt.4:16, 6:23; Lk.11:35, Jn.1:5, 3:19-20, 8:12, 11:9; Ac.26:18, Rom.2:19, II Cor.4:6, 6:14,11:14; Eph.5:8, I Jn.1:5).

As was the case in the LXX, visible light occasionally represents the presence of God or one of his messengers (Mt.17:2, Ac.9:3, 12:7, 22:6, 9, 11; Ac.26:13, I Tim.6:16, Rv.21:24, 22:25).

The faithful are termed “children of light” (in contrast to “this generation” or to “darkness”) in Lk.16:8, Jn.12:36, Eph.5:8, I Thes.5:5. They even become a source of light (Mt.5:14,16; Lk.2:32, Ac.13:47, 26:23) to those in ignorance.

Light – or one's attitude toward illumination – is a clear revealer of people's allegiance, motives, and activity. John observed that even when light is available, some folks prefer darkness “because their deeds were evil” (Jn.3:19). Quite bluntly, he explains (3:20) “Everyone who practices wickedness hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed. (21) But the one who is acting in the truth (W.S. #26), comes to the light, in order that his deeds may be revealed, that they were performed in [for] God!” Repeatedly, behavior that is hidden or kept secret is assumed to be evil (Eph.5:12-13, I Jn.2:9) – that is the only reason for hiding!. Darkness has tried (Jn.1:5) to defeat the light – and failed utterly!

“Children of light” (see above) are to have nothing to do with secrecy and darkness. If only people (especially any designated as “leaders”) in churches would recognize that all secrecy is consistently connected with darkness, not the light of the Lord, how very much pain and deliverance could be averted!

John reminds his readers (I Jn.2:8) “The darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining!” Because, as he had written so eloquently in the introduction to his gospel, “Light came into the world”(1:4-9) in the person of the Lord Jesus! Later, (8:12, 9:5, 12:35, 36, 46) he quotes statements of Jesus himself, including two of his early “I AM” statements (W.S.#17), to corroborate that identification. Although James (1:17) speaks of the “Father of Lights”, in the rest of the New Testament, it's all about Jesus!

Followers of Jesus are urged to “walk in the light” (I Jn. 1:7), “trust in the light” (Jn.12:36) while it is available (also I Jn. 1:7), to “let your light shine” (Mt.5:16) in order that observers may give glory (W.S.#74) to God, to “speak in the light” (Mt.10:27).

“Once you all were darkness, but now (you are) light, in the Lord! Behave as children of light! The harvest of the light (is) in all goodness and justice and truth. Find out what is pleasing to the Lord, and don't participate with the unfruitful deeds of darkness: rather, rebuke them. The things they do secretly are shameful even to talk about, but everything is being exposed [revealed] by the light. Everything revealed IS light!” (Eph.5:8-14), is probably one of the best descriptions we have of the transformation of life that results from a genuine, wholehearted commitment to the Kingdom of Jesus. There are no exceptions to the complete openness and honesty, and the consequent total avoidance of secrecy or deception, that is expected of Kingdom citizens. “He that loves [keeps loving] his brother, stays in the light” (I Jn.2:10).

For children of light, to put it bluntly, anything that needs to be said or done in darkness / secrecy probably ought never to be said or done at all! Please refer to #129.
Peter offered an appropriate reminder (I Pet.2:9), “You all are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a set-apart [holy] nation, a people especially reserved for [committed to] the purpose of sending out messages about the excellence of the one who called you out of darkness, into his amazing light!”; and Paul (Col.1:12) adds that the Lord not only called us, but “qualified us for a share of the inheritance of his people in the light!” – that glorious “light” of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Cor.4:6), which no darkness can defeat (Jn.1:5)!

May we continually encourage and help one another to “walk as children of light”

**Word Study #76 – “Sacrament”**

I have usually tried to provide studies of words that have appeared in the “search” lists on my web site. However, this is one, although it has been requested several times, to which I am unable to respond by examining its New Testament usage. The reason is quite simple: the word “sacrament” does not appear anywhere in the New Testament. Neither does the concept that it represents.

For a discussion of this subject, and a treatment of a few examples of symbolic observances that have sometimes been incorrectly labeled with the term “sacrament”, please refer to Part III, “Symbols of the Kingdom”, and especially chapter 9, “Symbol or Sacrament?”, in *Citizens of the Kingdom.*

That's the best I can do, folks. It's pretty hard to “study” a word that's not there.

I'm afraid this is an instance that would probably fall into the category of what Jesus termed “the traditions of the elders” – and he did not have a very high opinion of those, their accompanying pomp and ceremony, or the way they had so often become tools for the oppression of “ordinary folks” by a dominant hierarchy (see Mt.15:2-6, and Mk.7:3-13). Paul also warned of the emptiness of “traditions” (Gal.1:14 and Col.2:8). Only in II Thes.2:15 and 3:6 did he use “tradition” (*paradosis* – “anything handed down, transmitted, or bequeathed”) in a positive light, and in both of those, he was referring to the teaching that he himself had given them. This was also the case in I Cor.11:2, where the same word was (“traditionally”) rendered “ordinance”. (Word Study #48 explores the varied uses of the concept of “ordain”.)

The closest thing to a concept of “sacrament” in the New Testament, if it is understood as persons benefiting from the presence of God among them, is Jesus' promise to be present in any gathered group of his followers (Mt.18:20, Jn.14:23,25), especially when they are actively following his instructions (Mt.28:20). No ceremony or hierarchy is needed, intended, or even helpful. He had clearly stated, earlier, that no person was to be elevated above the rest (Mt.23:8) : “You have one Master, and you are all brethren.” The elevation of any individual is an act of direct disobedience to his instructions!

If we as his people have any “sacred” task, it is that each one mediate the gracious presence of the Lord Jesus to one another, as we/they function together as the Body of Christ, serving each other, and the world around us, “in his Name” (W.S. #24).

May we do so in faithfulness!

**Word Study #77-- Rest**

For far too long, in “Christian” circles, the word “rest” has evoked one of two images, neither of which has any New Testament derivation. It is presented either as a “do-nothing” accessory to the artificial “faith-works” discussion (W.S. #1 and #39), or as an image of lolling around on a cloud enjoying (?!?) one's wings, halo, and harp! Of the 15 different Greek words that have been translated “rest” at some point, not a single one carries that imagery.

Two of those words, *loipos* and *epiloipos*, refer simply to a remainder or remnant, to “leftovers”, or to other individuals not previously mentioned – “the rest of the people...” These are not relevant to the concept at hand.

Seven words appear only once or twice with this translation: *eirene* (Ac.9:31), usually translated “peace” (W.S.#70); *hesuchazo* (Lk.23:56), “to be calm, quiet, or tranquil”; *katakenao* (Ac.2:26), “to settle down in a dwelling; *episkenao* (II Cor.12:9),"to have one's dwelling"; *koimesis* (Jn.11:13), “sleeping”; *epanapauomai* (Lk.10:6, Rom.2:17), “to rest in or upon”; and *sabbatismos* (Heb.4:9), “the rest required on the Sabbath.” The first three of these occur in other contexts, with
Katapausis, and its verb form, katapauomai, occurring primarily in the Hebrews 3 and 4 discussion comparing God's “rest” after finishing his work of creation, the entry of the Jews into Canaan, and the greater “rest” secured by Jesus, was classically defined as “putting down or deposing from power, a place of calm or rest, to cause to cease or to hinder” (as in Ac.14:18, where Paul and Barnabas had trouble restraining the people of Lystra from sacrificing to them as gods), or “to rest while one is well-off.” It appears also in Stephen's sermon (Ac.7:49), highlighting God's rejection of the idea that he could be contained in or confined to “a house”.

Anesis, classically applied to the loosening of the strings of an instrument, the relaxation of stress (the opposite of thlipsis, “strenuous effort”), or the solution to a problem, is used only five times in the New Testament: three times translated “rest” (II Cor.2:13 and 7:5, II Thes.1:7), once as the “liberty” granted to Paul by the centurion guarding him (Ac.24:23), and once (II Cor.8:13) reassuring his readers that they were not being asked to support the laziness of others, but to serve a genuine need by the relief offering.

The most common word, anapausis (n.), with its verb forms, anapaueo (active) and anapauomai (middle and passive), was classically the most versatile. It included “rest from wandering” (Homer), “recreation” (Plato), “cadence” (in poetry or rhetoric), “to bring to a close” (Hermogenes), “to halt or rest troops, or to regain strength” (Xenophon), “to relieve someone, or to allow land to lie fallow.”

In the New Testament, Jesus used it of a cast-out evil spirit “seeking rest” (Mt.12:43, Lk.11:24). Rev.14:11 and 4:8 describe the thoroughly delightful scenes around the throne where no one rests, day or night, from the praises of God / the Lamb! After their missionary journey, Jesus invites his disciples to “rest a while” (Mk.6:31), and gently rebukes them – “Go ahead and take your rest” – in the garden (Mt.26:45, Mk.14:41). Paul frequently uses it of “refreshment” (I Cor.16:18, II Cor.7:13, Philemon 7), and Peter (I Pet.4:14) speaks of the spirit of God's glory “resting on” his people who are under duress. The faithful “under the altar” (Rev.6:11), who impatiently ask, in effect, “How long, Lord, till you clean up this mess?!” (Don't we all?!!) are told to “rest a little longer”, and the Spirit (Rev.14:13) speaks a blessing on “those who die in the Lord”, that “they can rest from their labors, for their deeds [works] follow after them.”

But maybe that doesn't mean, as is frequently assumed, that there is no more work to be done! I have deliberately left for last, Jesus' gracious words recorded in Mt.11:28-30, to which this study owes its impetus. It began in a conversation with my brother-in-law (Thanks, Bob!) after we had sat through a less-than-inspiring, “feel-good” type of sermon. One of the fragments of poorly-used “verses” that had been quoted was Mt.11:28, “I will give you rest.” Following along in my Greek text, as I usually do, I had been startled to see that “rest”, in that quote is not a noun, but a future active verb! And there is no word in that passage that one could properly translate “give”, nor is there any dative case that could designate a recipient of a gift. The plural “you” is in the accusative case, a direct object. Literally, although it sounds awkward to us, he is saying, “I will rest you all.”

It had always seemed odd to me that this phrase, oft-quoted as an “invitation”, was in a paragraph about the “yoke” with which Jesus offers us his “training”. The connection had seemed fuzzy, until our conversation turned to our fascination with watching neighbors, who farmed with horses, in their field work. This would have been familiar to the rural folks who first listened to Jesus' message. The meaning is only lost on our mechanized generation!

A young animal is trained for work by being yoked together with a stronger, more experienced one. The “teaching” member of the pair needs to be gentle and patient, and to lead without abusing the “student”. The harness assembly has to be carefully fitted to the size and strength of each animal, in order to enable them to do very strenuous work without injury. After a row or two of plowing, the farmer would always “rest” his team in a shady spot, both to recover from the heavy work, and to “re-charge” for the completion of the task!

The Lord Jesus represents himself as both the lead animal in the yoke (v.29), carefully and patiently teaching his disciple, bearing that part of the load which the “new recruit” cannot, but gradually enabling him to assume his rightful share; and as the master, who considerably “rests” his team, to enable their endurance, and the successful completion of their work. When the yoke is perfectly fitted, the load, or the task, seems much lighter! See also #181.

Might that image also inform the blessing in Rev.14? Met' auton is as likely to intend “with them” as it is “after them.” Frankly, I think I find the image of a refreshing rest under the Tree of Life, as a prelude to even more delightful work in tandem with the Lord of Glory, a far more attractive prospect than sitting around on a cloud!

How about you?
Word Study #78 – “Meek” is not “Weak”

“Meek” is another word which, despite Jesus' placing a high value upon the trait it describes (Mt.5:5, 11:29), is often used today rather scornfully or disparagingly, even by people who claim to be his followers. In modern parlance, “meek” has come to denote a subservient, doormat-type of individual, easily kicked-around and abused, lacking either the ability or the backbone to protest or retaliate. Such a characterization could hardly be farther from the actual meaning of praoς / praus (adj.) and praoτες / prautes (n.). (The different spellings are artifacts of different Greek dialects, the former in each pair being Attic and the latter Ionic in origin.)

The words imply an attitude of courtesy (Bauer), gentleness (L/S), or a mild and considerate disposition – but not as a result of weakness! “Meekness” can only exist where great strength is under strict control! It describes a domesticated animal that has been carefully trained for its master's purposes, or even the taming of wild beasts!

Such an understanding meshes well with the Mt.11:28-30 passage discussed in W.S.#77. The “meekness” with which Jesus describes himself is not the unhappy lot of the subjugated, but the deliberate choice of the almighty God, for the benefit and the education of his people!

None of these words are ever translated in any other way in the traditional versions. However, the words with which they are sometimes paired can cast considerable light upon their intended meaning. In the passage noted above, for example, Jesus characterizes himself as “meek and lowly”, using the word tapeinos, often rendered “humble” (W.S.#14), also a deliberate choice on his part. Paul also juxtaposes those two words in Eph.4:2 and Col.3:12. Similarly, he combines “meekness” with “gentleness” – epieikeia – classically defined as “reasonableness, equity, fairness, virtue, tolerance, or capability” – in II Cor.10:1 and Tit.3:2, and with both “longsuffering” (makrothumia) – Col.3:12 – and “patience” (hupomone) – I Tim.6:11. Please refer to W.S. #63 for the distinction between these words. Prautes appears between “faithfulness” and “self-control” on the list of the “fruits” [produce] – (W.S.#64) of the Spirit in Gal.5:22-23, a very appropriate association. Peter holds up the ideal of a “meek and quiet spirit” (I Pet.3:4), using hesuchia, more commonly translated “calm, tranquil, cautious, or of gentle character”. The adjectival form, hesuchios, is also the word chosen to describe the tranquil characteristic of the life desired by the beleaguered faithful in I Tim.2:2.

Perhaps the most vivid example of “meekness” as a deliberate choice rather than a helpless default is to be found in Paul's admonition to people and/or groups involved in administering discipline to erring members (I Cor.4:21, Gal.6:1, II Tim.2:25). In each case, “meekness” is to characterize an attempt to correct or restore a person to faithfulness and to the brotherhood. Please note, in no instance is an error to be ignored, overlooked, or minimized. There is no hint of an apologetic “I might be mistaken, but...” The offense is to be confronted plainly, but not arrogantly. The goal is not exclusion, but restoration.

In a similar vein, James urges his readers to “receive the word with meekness” (1:21), and to demonstrate their faithfulness (3:13) by their behavior “with meekness” – both of which could as accurately be rendered “without arrogance.” This is also the attitude which Peter advocates (I Pet.3:15) in explaining one's “hope” (W.S.#36) to challengers -- meta prautetos kai phobou, “with gentleness and respect” (see treatment of phobos in W.S.#16). This is not a “plan of attack”, but a calm and respectful explanation.

The ultimate paradigm, of course, is the Lord Jesus himself (Mt.21:5), who chose a lowly beast of burden, rather than a regal steed, for his arrival in Jerusalem. That choice was not only a deliberate fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy (Zech.9:9), but also an identification with his own statement (Mt.5:5) of who will “inherit the earth”! But do not forget that immediately after this event, he proceeded to clear the cheating profiteers out of the temple! This was NOT a violation of his “meekness”. His power was carefully controlled, and not destructive.

For too long, those who presume to “teach” have acted as if all the gospel references to Jesus “knowing” what lay ahead for him, referred only to his impending death. Such an assumption is seriously in error. He was indeed well aware of that prospect. But please note that in nearly every place that Jesus mentioned his death, he also foretold his resurrection, and often his subsequent glorification! (W.S.#34 and 35)! Re-read Jesus' prayer in John17, and notice his supreme confidence in the inheritance into which he was moving! Absolute security in that expectation is what enabled the “meekness” with which he lived, taught, -- and departed.

His is the ultimate definition of “meekness” – the gentleness of incredible power, under strict control, deliberately rejecting both personal aggrandizement and self-defense. Such an attitude can only be inspired by total confidence, in one's identity, his destiny, and to whom he belongs.

Blessed indeed, are the meek!
In order correctly to understand the concept of “inheritance” – kleronomeo (v.), kleronomia (n.), and kleronomos (heirs) – in the New Testament, it is necessary to bear in mind that we are here confronted with three different cultures – Hebrew, Greek, and Roman – none of which correspond directly to our own, or to each other. An exhaustive treatment of these is obviously not in the purview of this study: for more detail, I found the Jewish Encyclopedia (online), and Gibbon's classic The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire most helpful. I will recount here only a few salient points.

In all three, as in many other ancient cultures, an heir acquired not only the property, but also the obligations and debts of the deceased. Accordingly, it was not uncommon for a prospective heir to renounce or abandon his heritage. In Roman law, there was even a provision for a debt-ridden father to arrange for his son to be legally adopted by another, in which case the debt “died” with the father.

Adopted sons shared equal status with natural ones. Since inheritance was patrilineal, adoption involved only the husband. A wife could have her own property, but it was treated entirely separately. Only a Roman citizen could execute or receive bequest from a will. If a slave was to be a beneficiary, his freedom had to be granted first, in the legal document.

In the ancient Hebrew tradition, the obligation of an heir was similar, but the (even more ancient) principle of primogeniture was also observed, although this convention could be abrogated by the father, as it was in the case of Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, or Ephraim and Manasseh. The firstborn (prototokos) was entitled to a “double portion” of the estate: it was divided into one part more than the total number of sons, and the firstborn received two such portions – but also double the responsibility, not only for the debt or other obligations of the father, but also for the welfare and support of the rest of the family. In the absence of a firstborn son, a servant might be considered the heir (see Gen.15:2,3). It is significant to note that the Hebrew emphasis on the firstborn was not unique. In fact, it represented a very humane departure from surrounding cultures, some of which demanded a fertility rite of burning one's first-born son in sacrifice to the gods! (Lv.18:21, 20:3,4).

The Greek culture, here as in other areas, was considerably more lenient. All the sons of a family were considered equal, and entitled to equal portions. Daughters, too, could be included at the discretion of their brothers. In the other groups, daughters received a dowry, but not an inheritance, except with special dispensation as in Num.27. Please also see the treatment of “sons” in the essay, “The Task of a Translator.”

The English readers' understanding of the situation is further complicated by the occasional alternative use of the word diatheke. Liddell/Scott defined this word, as does the writer to the Hebrews, as a legal will, which takes effect upon the death of the testator (Heb.9:15-20). The concept became confused by the consistent use of the term in the LXX to refer to the several “covenants” that God had instituted with his people. L/S lists only a single classical use of diatheke as a covenant, by the dramatist Aristophanes, but notes that it is “frequent in LXX”. One is made to wonder, then: did the LXX translators in the third century BC deliberately depart from the primary meaning of the word? Or did their subsequent interpreters misunderstand? It is true that the concept of “blood covenant” is not unique to cultures with an Old Testament heritage; but neither is it the primary translation of diatheke. A legal will has no necessary connection with the killing of either an animal or a person. It does, however, have no force until the death of the testator is duly certified (Heb.9:16). Perhaps the traditional translators recognized that problem when they used “covenant” 20 x for diatheke, and “testament” 19 x. But using different translations for the same word compounds, rather than solving, misunderstanding. English usage, of course, still refers to one's “last will and testament”. And perhaps we would do well to recognize that what we call the “Old Testament” or the “New Testament” (as in Jesus' words in the “Last Supper” narratives), represents God's repeated attempts to communicate his legacy to his intended heirs, and not just another in a long series of failed “covenants”. That would cast an interesting light on Stephen's sermon (Ac.7), and the entire letter to the Hebrews, as both detail the many situations in which the original heirs had chosen to opt out of the responsibility portion of their legacy, while clinging tenaciously to the property / privilege!

Another word resembling, but not directly connected to the kleronomeo / kleronomia group (which etymologically include “nomos” – law, or legal), is kleros, classically translated as “a part or lot, or anything which is assigned by lot”, and later morphed into “a piece of land, farm, or estate; a legacy”. The LXX refers to Canaan having been divided “by lot”; and to various decisions made or officials appointed by the casting or drawing of “lots”, a procedure that is not fully explained (except by the fertile imagination of commentators!). Because of the connection to the inheritance of land, it was occasionally used of one's heritage in other contexts (1 Pet.5:3, Ac.1:17, 25); and because of the “choice” connection, it
became a reference to gambling (the guards “casting lots” for Jesus' robe – (Mt.27:35, Mk.15:24, Lk.23:34, Jn.19:24) or to the selection of Matthias (Ac.1:17-26), as well as a simple “share” or “portion” as in Ac.26:18, Col.1:12, Ac.8:21.

With this background, then, in the next post, we will move on to consider the unique New Testament usages of these different aspects of “inheritance”. The vocabulary treated here can help us to distinguish whether a reference is to the inheritance of a “firstborn” (prototokos), to lineal, birthright inheritance (kleronomia), to inheritance established by a duly certified will (diatheke), or simply to one's share (kleros) of some commodity or partnership. It is critical to remember that, in any case, inheritance involves responsibility, as well as privilege or possession, and that both acceptance and abrogation of one's inheritance have serious consequences.

**Word Study #80 – Inheritance – Part II, New Testament references**

As we consider the different aspects of “inheritance”, you may want to refer to the previous post, which treats the etymological and cultural considerations in more detail.

The word least frequently used in New Testament writings is prototokos, “firstborn”, which appears only 9 x. Except for Heb.11:28, where the writer recounts the Passover experience in Egypt, the word is exclusively applied to the Lord Jesus himself. It is used twice in the infancy narratives (Mt.1:25, Lk.2:7), relating physically to Mary, but all the rest are clear statements of Jesus' primacy. Paul uniquely refers to him as “the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom.8:29), the one to whom we are all destined to be conformed; “the firstborn of all creation” (Col.1:15), the one who created and sustains all the rest; and “the firstborn from the dead” (Col.1:18), by his glorious resurrection demonstrating his position to be of the absolute highest rank. A similar thought accompanies the reference in Heb.1:6 to his “introduction” to the world by the Father. The joyful consummation is likewise celebrated in Heb.12:23 and Rev.1:5. Remember (and give thanks!) that the Firstborn, besides being the deserving recipient of all glory, power and praise, has accepted responsibility for the welfare of all the rest of the family!

Only a little more frequent is the term kleros, translated 8 x as “lot” (Mt.27:35, Mk.15:24, Lk.23:34, Jn.19:24) in the scene at the cross, Ac.2:21 regarding Matthias (and also 3 x in 1:17 and 1:25, where “part” is used, as it is in Ac.8:21 of Peter's rebuke to the conniving Simon). Only in 1 Pet.5:3 is it translated “heritage”, where the church is called “God's heritage.”

Diatheke, as noted in the previous post, presents a problem, in being translated half the time as “covenant” and half as “testament”, which Heb.9 explains, is a reference to a legal will. Inheritance by will differs from familial inheritance in that blood relationship is not required, although (see previous posting) under Roman law, citizenship was required. As citizens of his Kingdom, and members of his family, of course, Jesus' people qualify on both counts!

Many of the passages where diatheke appears, clearly reference the historic “covenants” (Lk.1:72, Ac.3:25, 7:8; Rom.9:4, 11:27; Gal.4:24, Eph.2:12, II Cor.3:14, Heb.8:9, 9:4, 9:15; Rev.11:19.)

Four refer to the prescribed legal technicalities required in any “covenant” or “will” (Gal.3:15,17; Heb.9:16,17.)

Most significantly, however, the letter to the Hebrews details two elaborations upon Jesus' announcement (Mt.26:28, Mk.14:24, Lk.22:20), which Paul quoted in I Cor.11:25, of a “new covenant / testament / will”, explaining the inadequacy and failure of the old (Heb.8:9, 10; 9:15) – also seen in II Cor.3:14 – and describing Jesus' establishing of a “new” (Heb.9:15) and “better” (Heb.7:22, 8:6) one, “not like the old” (Heb.8:9). Identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of ancient prophecies, stating that God had always intended to remedy the weakness and failure of the former “covenants” (Heb.8 and 9), the writer details their failings. Unfortunately, many interpreters have used distorted fragments of this passage to identify the death of Jesus with the ancient ritual sacrifices – which are here declared to be an exercise in futility – completely ignoring the fact that it had already been established (Heb.2:14,15) that the real purpose and effect of that event, because he emerged triumphant on the other side of the grave, was to destroy death itself! The later references (Heb.10:15-17, 12:24; 13:20) emphasize that triumph, and (10:29) the glorious accomplishment of setting aside the faithful as God's own possession. We are strictly warned not to depreciate this accomplishment!

More dominant than all of these other words combined are kleronomoeo (v),”to inherit”, kleronomia (n), “inheritance”, and kleronomos, “heir”. Four times in the synoptics, in parable (Mt.21:38, Mk.12:7, Lk.20:14) and personal encounter (Lk.12:13), the term applies strictly to legal, temporal inheritance, and five times (Ac.7:5, Rom.4:13,14; Gal.4:30, Heb.11:8) to God's promise to Abraham. In Gal.4:1, Paul refers to the legal requirement of majority (age) for inheritance. A formal declaration by the father was necessary to establish his son as an heir, when he attained legal age. Might this be the prototype of the “voice from heaven” recorded at Jesus' baptism and again in the transfiguration accounts?
Jesus' own inheritance, already discussed above as the Firstborn, is also noted in Eph.1:18 — as consisting of his people! — and Heb.1:2 and 1:4, as his being “heir of everything” and his consequent supremacy over all created beings.

All the rest (at least 30 references) refer to the heritage of the Lord's faithful people!

Of special interest is the invitation to those among “the nations / Gentiles” (Mt.25:34), W.S.#62, to “inherit the kingdom prepared for you all from the foundation of the world!” This is an unmistakable reaffirmation that the intention was always the inclusion of all who would choose faithfulness.

“The Kingdom” (W.S.#19,20,21) is identified with inheritance in I Cor.15:50, Gal.5:21, Eph.5:21, Jas.2:5, and “the promise” in Gal.3:29, Heb.6:12, 6:17, 9:15. “The promise” is also related in Mt.19:29, and in discussions with several of Jesus' questioners (Mk.10:17, Lk.8:18,10:25) to “eternal life” (W.S.#28). Remember: one does not receive an inheritance after HE dies, but as explained in Heb.9:15-16, after the death of the person who wrote the will!

Thus Paul writes to the folks at Ephesus in the aorist tense — the inheritance has already been conferred (Eph.1:11), and to the Romans (8:17) and Galatians (4:7) in the present tense — “we are heirs!”

To be sure, there is more to come — Col.3:24 looks forward to the eventual receipt of “the reward of the inheritance” and I Pet.1:4 to the bestowal of the “inheritance that cannot decay, or be polluted, or fade away”, already secured by the Lord Jesus, but presently “kept in heaven”.

Paul (Eph.1:14) considers the Holy Spirit's presence and power among us as merely a “down-payment” or guarantee of all that awaits the final consummation, when, with Jesus himself, those who remain faithful (Rev.21:7) “shall inherit all things”, and (Heb.1:14) also finally “inherit salvation!” (W.S.#5)

“Dear people, NOW we are God's children (tekna): and it hasn't been revealed yet what we will be! But we do know that when he [it] is revealed, we will be like him – for we shall see him as he is!” (1 Jn.3:2)

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #81 – The Temple

In much the same way as an understanding of the inheritance of God's people (W.S.#79, 80) has been altered throughout their long history, their perception of references to the temple of God has varied as well. A bit of history can do a lot to dispel some rather serious misunderstandings, and careful attention to the New Testament uses of the two words translated “temple” adds interesting and challenging light to the subject.

First, the history. We are told (II Sam.7) that God was not at all impressed when David got the bright idea to build him “a house”, reminding him that he (God) had the whole universe at his disposal for a “dwelling”. Even when Solomon was granted a “building permit” — thought to have been around 957 BC — he recognized that it could not “contain” God in the sense that a temple was interpreted among surrounding cultures. (More of this below.) That impressive edifice was eventually destroyed in the Babylonian conquest, during and after which prophetic messages of “re-building” were recorded. Subsequent to those prophecies, we have records of at least three such restorations: by Ezra and Nehemiah after the exile (538 BC); a re-dedication under the Maccabees in 164 BC after the desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC; and the temple complex built under Herod the Great in 20 BC, which was in use during Jesus' earthly ministry. So much for claims of “yet unfulfilled prophecy” regarding a physical reconstruction of “the temple”! “Been there, done that.” – at least three times!

More significant to the followers of Jesus, however, are the vocabulary considerations. There are two words translated “temple” in the New Testament. Hieron, occurring primarily in the synoptic gospels and Acts, uniformly refers to a physical location — including all the associated courtyards and buildings, where people gathered, begged, walked, taught, argued, and even set up commercial enterprises. The same word was also used of pagan temples (in the NT, the temple of Artemis of Ephesus). Before Homer, hieron was also used to refer to offerings and sacrifices (L/S), or any “sacred” objects, rites, or omens. After Homer, used with the definite article, the meaning narrowed to any “holy place”. The Jewish temple continued to be one of many gathering places for the faithful, after Pentecost, in addition to their meetings in homes (Ac.2:46, 5:42).
Naos, on the other hand, referred to the inner precincts of a pagan shrine, where an idol “lived”. In a Jewish context, it was the inner court, the “holy of holies”, where they, too, supposed the presence of God to dwell. It was this orientation that Paul was challenging in Ac.7:48 and 17:24, as he tried to make his hearers aware of the transcendence of the Lord he proclaimed. Understanding the word to refer to that portion where only the chosen priest was allowed to enter (Lk.1:9) emphasizes the audacity of the distraught Judas Iscariot, when he despairingly hurled the silver he had been paid for his treachery “into the naos” (Mt.27:5) – the sacred inner sanctum!

It was the naos that was separated from the more public parts of the temple area (hieron) by the thick curtain / veil which was torn in pieces at the time of Jesus’ death. The implications of this event are HUGE! The division between God and man – between “sacred” and “secular” – is forever removed! Jesus has opened the way, once and for all! (Heb.10:20). Please see chapter 8 of Citizens of the Kingdom for a fuller discussion of this event.

A hint of something even more monumental occurs in Jesus’ statement (Jn.2:18-21) to his critics, after the “temple cleansing” incident. John notes (v.21) that Jesus was really talking about “the temple of his body”!

This is the concept that Paul picks up, in I Cor.3:16-17, 6:19, and II Cor.6:16. In each case, it is naos (in the singular) that he chose to use; and in each case, the “you”, whether as a subject or a possessive, is plural, while “body” and “temple” are uniformly singular.

In the I Cor.3 passage, Paul has been describing the task of “building” – by all participants – on the “foundation” which is the Lord Jesus himself. He then demands, “Don’t you all know that you (plural) are God's temple (singular)?”, and employs the plural “you” twice more in the same thought. Only the warning to be careful not to “mess it up” reverts to the singular. One person can indeed do that! – but functioning as the Body, or the naos – dwelling – of the Spirit of God requires group cooperation! The preposition en usually indicates “in” when its object is singular, but “among” when the object is plural.

The discussion in I Cor.6:15-20 is not quite as clear-cut: somata is plural in v.15, plainly referencing the physical body as “parts” of Christ’s, which Paul then undertakes to explain. But in v.19, he reverts to the singular “body” and “temple”, with the plural subject and possessive. Likewise, in II Cor.6:16, Paul asserts that “WE are the temple (sg.) of the living God!”

Only together can we become the Body of Christ, or the Temple of God / the Holy Spirit!

These two phrases are essentially synonymous, according to Jesus! (cf. Jn.2:21)

It has usually been assumed that II Thes.2:4 referred to an event similar to Antiochus' statue of Zeus (2nd.c. BC) or Augustus' image of himself (contemporary to the writing?) in a physical temple – but the passages cited above open the additional possibility that this “temple”, too, could be the church – any or every “church” that submits to, or is co-opted by state control?

“Temple” references in the Revelation, a highly symbolic narrative (necessary in an era of intense persecution), are mixed – perhaps on purpose. The faithful are called “pillars” (support structure) in the temple of God (Rv.3:12), where they “serve him day and night” (7:15). “Messengers” come and go from “the temple” (chapters 11,14,15), as do “voices” (ch.16).

But there is no ambiguity in Rv.21:22, where John describes the consummate “City of God”: “I didn't see a temple in it; for the Lord God, the all-powerful, and the Lamb, are its temple!”

Finally, fully united, the faithful and their Lord – the awe-struck apostle runs out of words to describe the glory of the scene.

We can only echo his parting prayer:

“Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!”

Word Study #82 – Dwell / Dwelling

Since both Paul and John have pointedly explained that the “temple”/ “dwelling” of God is no longer – if indeed it ever was (see previous post) – in a “house made with hands”, but in the gathered Body of his people, it is helpful to explore the concept of “dwelling” itself. This is neither as simple as it sounds – a place to live – nor as complicated as the inventors of “doctrine” would try to make it, with all their rhetoric about “indwelling” (a word which does not occur anywhere, even in traditional translations of the New Testament), “abiding” (which does – W.S. #58), and other contrived “theological” intricacies with which they summarily include – or, more frequently, exclude – those with whose vocabulary and diagrams they agree or differ.
The concept of “dwelling” appears in New Testament writings in three families of words: *meno*, translated that way only 15x out of 120 occurrences; *skeno*, 5x; and *oikeo*, 9x: the latter being made more specific and sorted out by the addition of prefixes, as in *egkatoikeo* (1x), *enokeo* (5x), *perioikeo* (1x), *sunokeo* (1x), and most frequently *katoikeo* (48x). The vast majority of the uses of most of these words refer simply to *geographical location*, where people live or stay.

*Enokeo*, however, “to dwell or inhabit, to be at home in”, has “God” (*II Cor.6:16*), “the Spirit” (*Rom.8:11, II Tim.1:14*), “the Word of Christ” (*Col.3:16*), or “faithfulness” (*II Tim.1:5*) as its subject. This is probably where the “indwelling” idea comes from – but please note, the reference is not private, but corporate, except in the final example. The elaborate images constructed from those few references completely fail to take into account that in four of the five, the object of “*en*” is plural: *humin* (you all), *hemin* (us), or *autois* (them). When the object of the preposition *en* is plural, “among” is a better translation than “in” (as, “inside of”): implying the corporate Body of Christ, not lonely individuals. The only singular reference is to the faithfulness of Timothy’s grandma.

A similar situation exists for *katoikeo*, “to settle or colonize, to inhabit, to take up residence,” the most frequent of the words, where it is not referring simply to location. Speaking of the Lord Jesus, in *Col.1:19* and 2:9, in whom “dwell” all the completeness of God, the object of the preposition is singular, “in him”, as is the subject in *II Pet.3:13* where “righteousness / justice” is said to “dwell” in the new heaven and new earth. Since both the object and its possessive modifier are plural in *Eph.3:17*, (“your hearts”), that passage may be read either individually or collectively, but the James 4:5 reference to the Spirit that dwells *en hemin*, is more likely to intend “among us.”

*Oikeo*, without prefix, also speaks primarily of habitation. Paul’s lament in *Rom.7:17,18* of his personal struggle to obey, is cast in the first person singular. One should note that this is not the accusatory diatribe that is so frequently hurled at prospective “converts”, but the testimony of Paul’s own difficulties. Neither is there any indication that Paul – or anyone else – expected it to be normative. Instructions to faithful disciples in a non-believing marital relationship are likewise singular (*I Cor.7:12,13*). But reference to the Spirit of God – *Rom.8:9,11* and *I Cor.7:12,13* (twice) – revert to the plural, *en hemin*, “among you”. The verbs are plural as well, although *Rom.8:9* also contains a singular component, a warning to any who might ignore or disparage the Spirit’s activity.

As is frequently the case, John uses different vocabulary and has different emphases, from those of the other writers. It is not clear – unless they are simply trying to support an already-established “doctrime” – why traditional translators rendered *meno*, usually translated “remain, continue, stay, abide” – as “dwell” in *Jn.6:56, 14:10, 14:17*; and even in 1:38 and 39, where the disciples of John the Baptist are clearly asking about Jesus’ current residence. “Stay” would be more appropriate, since he was not at home at the time. The same is true of Luke’s only two uses of *meno*, in *Ac.28:16,30*, describing Paul’s situation in Rome.

Likewise, in John’s letters, whether the object of the preposition *en* is singular (*I Jn.3:17,24; 4:15, 16*) or plural (*I Jn.4:12,13; II Jn.2*), one of those more common translations would make more grammatical sense. Notice that elsewhere, in the same letter, *meno* appears 14x, and is translated 11x “abide”, 2x “continue”, and 1x “remain”. Please refer to W.S.#58 for a fuller discussion of *meno*.

In any case, *meno* does not imply the settled, permanent residence that often accompanies *katoikeo*. Geographical references are temporary; those involving the presence of Father, Son, or Holy Spirit are contingent on the response of a person or group. Note the conditional constructions.

Even more unique is John’s use of yet another word, *skeno*, literally, “to pitch a tent, or make an encampment”. This is the “habitation” of an army on the move! And look where it appears in John’s writing! In *Jn.1:14*, he is describing “The Word made flesh [human] and dwelling among us!” An interesting light on Jesus’ campaign to establish his Kingdom!

The same word appears again only in the Revelation! In *Rv.7:15*, John speaks of the huge crowd of the faithful in joyful worship around the throne, and marvels, “The one seated on the throne will pitch his tent with them!”

In *Rv.12:12*, he calls “those who are camping out in heaven” to exuberant celebration, even as they are included in the scorn of the “beast” who opposes God’s name and his “tent”.

And finally (21:3), upon the arrival of the New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb, “God’s tent is with his people! He will camp with them, and they will be his people, the God himself will be with them, their God!”

Wait a minute! Isn’t it all over by then? Most of us thought that by that time, the “pilgrim people” could finally settle down in cozy glory! But no – we are still “camping”!

Where are we headed? We are not told. **It’s not about geography, folks.**
The only permanence is the gracious presence of the Lord among his people – plural – and mostly present tenses (16x), 5x aorist (already accomplished), and only three in the future tense.

That's why we need so desperately to meet, share, and interact as his people: it is among those who have accepted the invitation to citizenship in his Kingdom that we are intended to experience, and enjoy, the presence of the King – “until he comes” – and even after that!

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

**Word Study #83 – The Promise**

The concept of “promise” is closely related to the previous two postings. This is another idea which has been mightily embellished in “accepted teaching”, with little regard for what is actually discussed in the New Testament writings. It involves one single word-family: *epaggelia, epaggelomai, and epaggelma*, although the English word “promise” also traditionally occurs, only once each, as a variant translation for *homologeo* and *exomologeo*, both usually rendered “confess” (W.S. #68), both describing nefarious behavior, of Herod (Mt.14:7), and Judas (Lk.22:6), as does the use of *epaggelomai* in Mk.14:11 of the Jewish council.

Classically, both the noun and verb forms originally referred merely to an announcement or edict: a command (Polybius), or a legal summons (Aeschylus). Only later did they also include “an offer or promise, made of one's own free will”, or an expectation, including the purported curative property of a potion or drug (Galen). Consequently, even though most of the New Testament uses of the words fall into the category of an offer or a promise, this background should be kept in mind, and should influence our understanding, at least to the extent of serving as a reminder that a “promise” is not a casual or trivial thing, and is not to be taken lightly.

One significant grouping of New Testament references is historical:

− God's promise to Abraham
   1. of descendants (Ac.7:5, Rom.4:13-20, Heb.6:13, 11:11)
   2. of the land in which he wandered (Ac.7:5, Heb.11:8-10)
   3. of the extension of his blessing to all future faithful (Gal.3:8, 14-18; Gal.4:23,38; Heb.7)
− God's promise to the people of Israel at the time of the Exodus (Ac.7:17)
− And more generally, “to the fathers [ancestors]”, in which case no specifics of the “promise” are mentioned, except that its fulfillment is connected with Jesus' resurrection (Ac.13:32,33; 26:6-8, Rom.9:5, 15:8).

A similar theme, with different words, is found in the study of “Inheritance / Covenant” (W.S. #79, 80.)

When we turn to the rest of the New Testament, neither geography nor genealogy figure into any mention of the “promise”. On at least two occasions, Romans 9 and Galatians 3, Paul takes great pains to redefine the concept of “children / heirs of the promise” as intending all who are faithful to Jesus, and no longer necessarily lineal descendants of Abraham. This theme also appears, in less detail, in Eph.2:12, and throughout the letter to the Hebrews. Jesus himself is recorded as having used the word “promise” only once – Lk.24:49 – when he instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for “my Father's promise”, which he then specifically identified as the coming of the Holy Spirit. Luke quotes that admonition again in Ac.1:1-4.

In his Pentecost sermon, Peter announces that it has been fulfilled (Ac.2:33), in Jesus' (himself, in this case, not his followers!) “having received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father” after his resurrection and exaltation, and having subsequently “poured out” upon his faithful followers the powers that had just been demonstrated. Peter ends by declaring (2:39) that “the promise is for you all, and for your children, and for all who are far away, whoever the Lord our God will call!”

The only qualifications are (1) a deliberate change in the orientation of one's life (W.S.#6), and (2) submitting to baptism (Ch.10 of Citizens of the Kingdom), in the name (W.S.#24) of the Lord Jesus, in order that one's failures [shortcomings] be removed (W.S. #7). He urges them to “be rescued” (W.S. #5), not from some dreaded future terror, but (v.40) “from this crooked generation”!

In Eph.1:13, Paul expands the understanding of “the Holy Spirit of promise”, explaining that this is the “guarantee”, or “seal” [stamp of ownership], that we have become God's possession. This is also the idea in II Cor.7:1, which refers back to 6:16-18, where God's calling to become a part of his family is described. Please note that in both of these, the promise is
conditioned upon the response of the ones to whom it is offered!

The promise is related, in Ac.13:23, to Jesus' own resurrection, and it is his faithfulness (the form is a simple possessive genitive) upon which the faithful may depend (Gal.3:22). Eph.3:6 reiterates the breadth of the reach of the promise: that Gentiles, too, “are to be fellow-heirs, and joint members of the Body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus!” Notice, please, that this is cast in the present tense! I wonder if this has always been a problem for the faithful? Paul needed to remind Timothy (I Tim.4:8) that the promise is “for life now and in the future”. Please refer to the discussion of “eternal life” in W.S.#28. We do injustice to the text if we confine “the promise of life” (II Tim.1:1, Jas.1:2, II Pet.1:4, I Jn.2:25) exclusively to either the present or the future. Both are crucial to proper understanding. When Heb.9:15 speaks of an “eternal inheritance”, remember (W.S.#79,80) that an inheritance is received during one's lifetime, after the death, not of the recipient, but of his benefactor! Heb.6:10-12 describes the stubborn endurance necessary for “inheriting the promises”, and Heb.8:6 points out that the covenant / will which Jesus mediates [administers] is established upon “better promises” that was the earlier, now-obsolete one (v.7).

It is “after having done God's will” (an aorist tense), that the promise is received (also aorist – a “done deal”!). James' reference to “inheriting the kingdom” (2:5) is very contemporary: he is talking about behavior in the present-day brotherhood!

A few of the references (II Pet.3:4,9) refer specifically to Jesus' promised return – simply that it is going to happen – no details are given. Most details are derived from the fertile imaginations of commentators! Others, like Ac.26:6, Eph.3:6, Gal.3:14, 22, 29, while not identifying the content of the promise, connect it solidly to Jesus.

There could be no better summary than Paul's, in II Cor.1:20 – “For whatever God's promises are, the “yes” is in him (Jesus)!”, and Peter's “Through him we've also been given very great and valuable promises, in order that through these, you all might become sharers of divine nature!”

It's all about Jesus, folks!

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #84 – The Body

There are few single words that have engendered the controversy and misunderstanding that has long surrounded the term “body”, and at the same time suffered an equivalent lack of attention to its major New Testament uses. (Another word in the same category will follow.) Out of the 145 occurrences of soma in the New Testament, more than half of which refer either to a lifeless corpse (25 x) or the physical body of an ordinary person (51 x), the greatest abuse has occurred by the co-opting of a single phrase (which appears only one single time) into a complicated “doctrine” which then takes on a life of its own. Three examples will suffice, though I am sure you can find others.

1. At least as early as medieval times, and even in some of the second and third century “church fathers”, devout people lit upon Paul's lament in Romans 7 of a persistent problem in his own experience, as if it were an endorsement of the dualism that had pervaded eastern mysticism for millennia: the assumption that anything connected with the physical body (or any other material thing) was inherently evil. Although anyone who takes faithfulness seriously is bound to feel that way on occasion, such an assumption is directly contrary to the majority testimony of Scripture. Such folks have chosen to ignore totally Paul's surrounding admonitions (Rom.6:6,12; 8:10) regarding the total transformation of mortal life accomplished by Jesus' resurrection, and substituted all sorts of ascetic practices, which Paul had already summarily dismissed as worthless (Col.2:23 and elsewhere) for achieving “holiness”.

2. I Peter 2:24, a portion of a larger series of quotations from Isaiah and other ancient prophets, is the only New Testament statement directly connecting Jesus' body with “sins” (hamartia, “failures”, not paraptoma “deliberate transgressions” – see W.S.#7). This brief quote has metastasized into a complex “doctrine” that posits a vindictive, vengeful God who demands capital punishment for every conceivable infraction or error – which notion Jesus himself actively opposed (see John 8). It is true that skillful manipulators can cherry-pick “verses” from Romans to “prove” almost anything they choose, but simple integrity demands the inclusion of the whole message. These folks choose to ignore the many more numerous statements (Heb.2:14-15, Rom.5:10-11, 21; Rom.6:4) that the glorious accomplishment of Jesus' death – and resurrection – was to destroy both death and people's fear of its perpetrator!
3. The repeated references to the scene at the Last Supper (Mt.26:26, Mk.14:22, Lk.22:19, I Cor.10:16-17, and 11:24-29), regarding which centuries of “theologians” have demonstrated that the political prevarications of the 1990's regarding “what the meaning of ‘is’ is”, are not at all original!

Jesus frequently used the same sentence structure when explaining his parables (“the seed is the Word”, “the harvest is the end of the age”, etc.) that he used when he told his disciples, “This is my Body”. In each case, “this is” functions as a simple synonym for “this represents”. Time and energy spent arguing the details of some sort of magical transformation of simple food, or its supposed supernatural power, would be much better devoted to exploring the task of becoming the Body of which he spoke!

Historically, *soma* was a very versatile word. In Homer, it referred exclusively to dead bodies, but later, in the 5th century BC, it was used by Pindarus as the opposite of “spirit”, and by Plato as the opposite of “shadow” (seen in Col.2:17) or “soul”, as well as an animal body as opposed to a plant — although Paul includes plants in I Cor.15. Lysias uses it as a compilation of civil rights, or a civic assembly, and Aristotle of a mathematical proof or a three dimensional figure. In the third century BC, it was first applied to any person, and later primarily of slaves (as in Rev.18:13).

Considerable attention is devoted to the “body” in the New Testament. Jesus considered it of greater importance than food and clothing (Mt.6:25), but less than “life” (*psuche*) — see W.S.#28. It can be destroyed (Mt.10:28), but also redeemed (Rom.8:23) and transformed (Phil.3:21). It is to be handled with care and appropriate honor (Rom.6:8, I Cor.6), because the physical body of the faithful person, like all the rest of his life, is “for the Lord” (I Cor.6:15), and belongs to him. Indeed, it is to be offered as a “living sacrifice” to God (Rom.12:1) — and a sacrifice, regardless of its content, must be of spotless purity. Such an offering could not possibly be acceptable if the body were inherently evil!

Most significant of all, if judged by the proportion of attention accorded to it in the New Testament, is the awe-inspiring concept of the faithful as comprising the very Body of Christ! For a fuller discussion of that subject, please see chapter 7 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*. Paul approaches this wonder from three different angles:

- the inclusion of the faithful from all backgrounds in a single unit: “one body” (Rom.12:4,5; Eph.2:16, 4:4; Col.3:15) without distinction
- the intended function of each member [part] of that Body for the benefit of the whole (1 Cor.12:12-27, Rom.12:4-8)
- and the mutual responsibility that such unity entails (Eph.1:23, 4:4, 4:12, 4:16; Col.1:8, 1:24, 2:19), symbolized in the observance of “communion” — W.S. #8, *koinonia* — (1 Cor.10:16-17, 11:24-29).

Do not forget that it is “in (en) one Body” (Col.3:15) that we are called. Not “into” — that would require the preposition *eis*, and imply the initial invitation to participation. It is we who have already accepted the invitation, and are consequently being incorporated into that one Body, who are then “called” [given further instructions — W.S.##55] , some of which follow in vv.16,17. The complicated inventions, theories, and requirements concocted by self-appointed teachers and hierarchies of every description are completely beside the point.

The only thing that matters is Col.2:19 — “holding on to the Head [Jesus himself]. It's from him that all the Body, supplied through its joints and ligaments, and knit together, keeps growing with the growth that comes from God!”

The task of every member of that Body (please note that every function listed in Eph.4:11 is plural) is for the purpose of “equipping God's people” for the job of “building up the Body of Christ!” (Eph.4:12). “The purpose is that we be no longer babies, agitated and carried around by every wind of teaching, deceitfully manipulated by people who are deliberately trying to mislead us, but as we interact truthfully in love, we may grow up in every way into him who is the Head – Christ. From him, the whole Body, joined together [harmonized] and knit together by the proper function of every available ligament, according to the measured working of each individual part, makes bodily growth for building itself up in love.” (Eph.4:14-16).

Amen, Lord! May it be so!

**Word Study #85 – The Flesh – Incarnation**

“The Word became flesh, and lived [camped out] among us!” (Jn.1:14)

How can anyone who is aware of what else John has just said about “the Word”, and to whom it refers, possibly accept the NIV translators' obsessive use of “sinful nature” as their preferred translation of *sark*, “flesh”? No, they do not use it in this reference, of course: this is a classic case of the blatant manipulation of the message by selective translation, which is not
truly translation at all! How can an academically honest “translator” justify arbitrarily adjusting the text, to support a preconceived “doctrinal” conclusion?

Homer, Hippocrates, and many others classically used σαρξ as a synonym for σῶμα, “body” (see previous post). Bauer succinctly defines it as “the material that covers the bones of a human or animal”, and L/S adds “the pulp of a fruit”! Classical, LXX, and New Testament writers all refer to “flesh and blood” as evidence of genuine humanity. Jesus himself used it as proof of the reality of his resurrection (Lk.24:39)! A person's provenance “according to the flesh” is simply his genealogy. Bauer, L/S, and Trench all note that the reference is to the physical, natural order of things or people, including their physical abilities, limitations, or illnesses, as well as the seat of their affections. This sometimes includes procreation (Jn.1:13), but not with any “sinful” connotations. It is for these reasons that I have deemed “human” or “human nature” to be more accurate translations of σαρξ. Bauer also notes that the LXX attaches no negative aspect to σαρξ, although Epicurus (3rd. century BC) does, considering it inferior to the πνεῦμα (spirit) or ψυχή / nous (mind).

The characterization of God-ordained marriage as “becoming one flesh” is a gracious gift, not an accusation. This is even more obvious in Paul’s admonition that such a relationship be carefully and responsibly guarded, both in I Cor.6:16-17 where “body” and “flesh” are used interchangeably, and in Eph.5:29-31.

Genealogical references are common in the New Testament – Jn.3:6, Rom.1:3, 4:1, 9:3, 5:8, 9:14; I Cor.10:18, Gal.4:23, Eph.2:11, Phil.3:4, Heb.2:14, 12:9 – as are references to simple human experience or frailty – Mt.26:41 (where Jesus calls “the flesh” “weak”, not “evil”), Lk.3:6, Jn.8:15, Ac.2:31, Rom.6:19, I Cor.1:26, 29; 7:28; II Cor.4:11, 5:16, 7:5, 12:7; Gal.1:16, 4:13; Phil.1:22, Col.2:1,5; Heb.5:7. None of these carry overtly moral connotations.

There are occasions, of course, where the faithful are warned to be careful where they focus their attention. It is one thing to be aware of one’s “human nature”, and even to accept or acknowledge its limitations or weaknesses, and quite another to allow one's thoughts and behavior to be ruled by it.

We are instructed to “put off” (Col.2:11) – and here, the majority text does not include either of the “sin” words, but uses both σαρξ and σῶμα in the genitive case, which is the reason for my rendering the phrase “putting away the body's human nature” rather than the traditional rendering, “the body of sin”. We are warned against (Col.2:23) “the gratifying of the human nature [flesh] and (Eph.2:3) its passions”; but we are also encouraged to see that Jesus' own life be “revealed in our mortal flesh” (II Cor.4:11), and to govern “the life I now live in the flesh” by Jesus' own faithfulness (Gal.2:20!)

It is no secret that “flesh” and “spirit” are in competition – sometimes severely – for our attention and our loyalty (Gal.5:13-19), but we are not helpless pawns in this game. “The one who is cultivating his human nature [flesh], from that human nature will reap decay; but the one who is cultivating the spirit, will reap eternal life from the Spirit” (Gal.6:8). Or, as one student paraphrased it, “you don't plant corn and expect to pick beans!”

For a broader perspective on the concept of “human nature”, both its positive and negative potential, please refer to chapter 3 of Citizens of the Kingdom. The human - nature and all - was a part of the creation that its holy Creator deliberately pronounced “very good”! But, also like the rest of creation, it has not always been put to its intended use. Hence the need for a new creation (II Cor.5:17), which has been richly provided in the Lord Jesus, who not only embodies it, but enables his people to do likewise!

The New Testament writers take great pains to establish the true humanity of the Lord Jesus. The confession that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” (Jn.4:2:3, and II Jn.7) is held to be the acid test of faithfulness! The writer to the Hebrews repeatedly asserts that this was absolutely necessary in order for Jesus to accomplish our redemption (Heb.2:14, 5:7, 9:14, 10:20). Peter (I Pet.3:18, 4:1,2) echoes that thought, and Paul (Eph.2:15, Col.1:22) adds that this was the only way the Lord could unite Jewish and Gentile believers. John's whole prologue (Jn.1:1-18), as well as the first paragraph of his first letter, targets the amazing, almost too-good-to-be-true reality of what has come to be called “the Incarnation” – a word derived from the Latin equivalent, carnis, of the Greek σαρξ, and related to the English “carnal”, which has suffered the same distortions as “flesh”. Lexically, there is nothing inherently evil in any of these words, which simply refer to ordinary natural things or situations. “Carnally minded” (Rom.8:6), does not mean “evil-minded,” but simply having one's attention focused on the wrong part of human life. It is applied to ordinary [unredeemed] people (I Cor.1:3-4), weapons (II Cor.10:4), ceremonies (Heb.7:16), and “things” (Rom.15:27, I Cor.9:11), as opposed to others that are transformed by being deliberately focused on the Lord.

It is that very “ordinariness” that makes Jesus' willing identification with our human condition so overwhelming. Paul marvels at Jesus' willingness to “empty himself” of all his divine prerogatives (Phil. 2:6-8) for our benefit, and holds that
attitude up as an example for the faithful (2:5). Hebrews 2:9 and 2:14-18 elaborate on the same theme. Jesus is able to come to our rescue and serve as our example precisely because he himself has “been there, done that” (Heb.2:10-16), and emerged triumphant! Please see also #150.

The word became flesh, and lived among us! – and continues to do so, as he promised, in his living Body! (W.S.#84)

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #86 – “The World”

“The world” has long been a difficult and ambiguous concept for people and groups seeking to be faithful. We are assured that “God so loved” it (Jn.3:16), but warned that we aren't supposed to (I Jn.2:15). Jesus wants the Good News of his Kingdom preached “into all the world” (Mk.16:15), but promises to “show himself” (Jn.14:19-22) only to his disciples, and specifically not “to the world.” The dilemma Paul describes in 1 Cor.5:9-13 is a constant challenge for the people of God, of whom, although they must continue to interact with “the world” in which they live, a much higher standard of behavior is expected. How do we sort this out?

For starters, we need to recognize that the English word, “world”, represents three vastly different Greek words. Oikoumene, used only 14x, classically referred to any inhabited region. Later, it was narrowed to the Greek world as opposed to “barbarian” (non-Greek) territory, and later still, to the Roman Empire. The reference is primarily political (Lk.2:1, 4:5), cultural (Ac.17:6, 19:27), or geographical (Ac.11:28, 24:5, Rom.10:18, Rev.3:10,6:14), although it is also noted that “the whole world” is deceived by Satan (Rev.12:9), judged by the Lord Jesus (Ac.17:31), and subjected (Heb.2:5) to his sovereignty.

Aion (32x), on the other hand, with its adjectival form aionios (61x), had no classical reference to “the world” at all. L/S lists “a lifetime; an age or generation; a long, but clearly marked-out space of time; an epoch”, and for the adjective, “perpetual”, or “a title held for one's lifetime.” Even Trench, who usually endorses traditional versions, laments the translation “world” rather than “age” because of the resultant failure to distinguish aion from kosmos, which he characterizes as the difference between measuring time, or space, noting that aion is the only one ever spoken of as “ending”! (“Eternal”???) Thayer notes Plato's and Aristotle's use of aion as “life force”, and says that the idea of “perpetuity” only entered with Hebrew rabbinc influence. Herodotus and others considered that numerous “ages” (aion) comprised “eternity”, for which he used the same term.

A similar thought is seen in New Testament references to “this age” (Mt.12:32), “the age to come” (Mk.10:30, Lk.18:30), and “the end of the age” (Mt.13:39, 24:3, 28:20). Traditional versions use “world” for all of these.

“This present age” carries considerable negative connotation, especially when referring to its “children” (Lk.16:8, 20:24) being preoccupied with their own affairs (Mt.13:22, I Tim.4:10), with its being ruled by malevolent powers (I Cor.2:8, II Cor.4:4, Eph.6:12), and itself characterized as “evil” (Gal.1:4). The faithful are cautioned not to be patterned after its ways (Rom.12:2), nor to be overly impressed by its philosophers (I Cor.1:20, 3:18), but to live carefully (Tit.2:12) in order to be found worthy (Lk.20:35) of the age yet to come.

In view of the preponderance of temporary implications of aion, it is puzzling why the adjectival form has almost exclusively been translated “eternal” and popularly understood to mean “endless”. I rather suspect that the adjective probably refers more to the quality than the quantity of whatever noun it modifies, but this whole idea should have serious further study by a faithful brotherhood. It is beyond the scope of this brief summary. At the very least, aion, age, should be carefully divided from the more general term “world”. (Please see also #28)

Kosmos, the most frequently used term (187x), also represents the greatest variety of classical usage. L/S lists “order, or good behavior (Aristotle); “the natural order of things” (Herodotus), or “the order of government – especially the constitution of Sparta”; “the order of the universe (Pythagoras) or “the earth as opposed to the heavens or the underworld”; “ornament or honor” (Homer); or, among various philosophers, “any specific region of the universe or its inhabitants.” Not until the New Testament writers did the term acquire the negative connotations of a kingdom of evil, or estrangement from God.

The context usually reveals whether the use of kosmos intends simply the physical creation and/or its human inhabitants (Mt.13:15,38; 26:13; Lk.12:20, Jn.1:9, 6:14, 16:28, 21:25; Ac.17:24, Rom.1:8, I Cor.14:10, Eph.1:4, Heb.4:3); people ignorant of God's ways (Mt.5:14, 26:13; Jn.1:9, 3:19,14:31, 16:8, I Cor.1:20-28, 3:19; Gal.4:3, Eph.2:2,12; I Jn.3:1); overt antagonism toward Jesus, his people, or his Kingdom (Mt.18:7, Jn.1:10, 3:19, 7:4-7, 12:31, 14:30,15:18-19, 16:11,20,33; Rom.3:19, I Cor.4:9-13, Col.2:8, Heb.11:7, 38; Jas.4:4, and all of II Peter), or the contrast between the faithful and their
surroundings (Mt.5:14, 16:26, Lk.12:30, Jn.12:25, 14:22, 27; all of Jn.17, 18:36-37; I Cor.2:12, 5:10, 6:2; I Cor.7:31-34, 11:32; Gal.6:14; Phil.2:15; Heb.11:38; all of James, I Jn.3, 5:19).
Please note that these lists are not exhaustive. Feel free to add to them.

There are many instances describing Jesus' own relation to the kosmos. He is its Creator (Jn.1:10), its Light (Jn.1:9, 8:12, 9:5, 12:46), he takes away its failures ["sins"] (Jn.1:29) – and see W.S.#7, he is its Savior (Jn.4:42, 3:17, 12:46, I Tim.1:15) – W.S.#5. He came to give it life (Jn.6:33), and to give his life in its behalf (Jn.6:51) – note that these are different grammatical constructions. He was sent by the Father into the world (Jn.10:36, Heb.10:5), in order to speak to the world from the Father (Jn.8:26), for judgment – W.S.#9 & 10 – (Jn.9:39); to reconcile – W.S.#69 – it to himself (II Cor.5:19). His kingdom is neither derived from nor controlled by the world (Jn.18:36-37), but he has overcome the world (Jn.16:33). It is all subject to him (I Cor.3:22)!

This lends a very sobering weight to John's summary statement to the faithful in I Jn.4:17: "We are just like he is, in the world!" And if we look at descriptions of faithful disciples in relation to the world, the similarity is striking. Mt.5:14: "You are the light of the world!" Mk.16:15: "As you all are going into the world, preach the good news!" Jn.17:14: "The world hated them, because they are not from [do not belong to] the world, just as I am not from [do not belong to] the world". I Cor.2:12: "We did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God!" You can find many more. At the same time, we must remember that "the world" is also God's good creation, which, like all of his creation, can be used rightly or wrongly (see previous post, and chapter 3 of Citizens of the Kingdom. Its "wisdom", (I Cor. 1-3) apart from his, is "foolishness", but its "goods" (I Jn.3:17) are to be used for the welfare of the brotherhood. Although our time of identification with the world and its ways is represented as negative, and in the past tense (II Cor.1:12 and elsewhere), it is that very "world" that Jesus came to "reconcile to himself" (II Cor.5:19), and which will eventually be fully subject to his reign (Rev.11:15)! Another place where it is the focus that matters?

Perhaps this constitutes at least a partial resolution to the dilemma regarding John's statements with which we began, of God's love for the world (Jn.3:16) and his warning against love for the world (I Jn.2:15). The same word – agapao – is used in both places (we will deal with that in a later post), but the form in the first is aorist (past, "snapshot") tense, and the latter a present (continuous) tense. I think this is probably significant, but am not sure of the implication. Does anyone have a suggestion? John's own elaboration in I Jn.4:9,14,17 may offer some assistance. James (4:4) treats a similar idea in terms of "friendship".

It may, however, be “on purpose” that the concept of “the world” is so difficult to nail down.

John's “we are just like he is in the world” may be intended as a perennial challenge to us as his people – his functioning Body – to discern together, in every situation, the specifics of that responsibility.

Faithfully representing its (and our) Creator, Owner, and Sovereign, may we walk kindly and confidently through his world.

Word Study #87 – Love --“Debunking the 'Love' Myth”

A favorite theme of the crowd who try to flaunt their superior wisdom by thundering authoritatively, “THE GREEK SAYS.....” is the canned, neatly-sorted lecture on “different words for different kinds of love”. The only problem, other than the fact that this represents nobody’s original first-hand study, is that it is flat-out mistaken, as even a minimal perusal of New Testament usage makes abundantly clear.

Agape, which such speakers effusively characterize as “self-giving, Godly, sacrificial love”, is the word used (in verb form) in Lk.6:32-35 and parallels – “even sinners love those who love them”; in Mt.6:24 – a slave juggling two masters; in Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees (Lk.11:43) “loving the highest seats in the synagogues,” and (Jn.12:43) “the praise of men rather than God!” So let's back off from the artificially created stereotypes, and take a sober look at the background of the words. Incidentally, only two words, not three, are used in the New Testament. L/S lists, for agapao, “to greet with affection, to show affection” (Homer), “to caress or pet” (Plutarch), “to be fond of, to prize, or to desire” (Plato), “to be pleased or contented” (Homer), “to tolerate or put up with” (Plato), and “to be fond of doing something” (Aristotle). The noun form, agape, which some “scholars” mistakenly insist “never occurs in pagan writings”, according to the same lexicon has “the love of husband and wife” (Philodemos, 1st Century BC) as its first entry; and then moves on to (LXX and NT) “the love of God for man or man for God, brotherly love, charity, or alms”, but notes that it was also a title for the Egyptian goddess, Isis!
The same reference work lists for the other word, *phileo* (the one supposed to mean “only friendship”), includes “to love or regard with affection; the love of gods for men, or men for children or animals; to welcome or entertain a guest; the love of man and wife; to be fond of doing something”. If these lists look nearly parallel, it just might be because they are! The noun form, *philos*, in the New Testament occurs only as “friend” (W.S. #22). This may be applied casually, but L/S also quotes Aristotle, “A friend is another self!”

Both words are used by Jesus in the gospels of the mutual love between Father and Son (*agapo* – Jn.17:26, 3:35, 15:9; *phileo* – Jn.5:20); of Jesus’ love for his disciples and others (*agapo* – Jn.13:1, 14:21, chapters 15 and 17; *phileo* – Jn.11:3,36); and of Jesus’ admonitions regarding his people’s love for him (*agapo* – Lk.7:47, Jn.8:42, 14:15, 24; 17; *phileo* – Mt.10:37, Jn.16:27). However, *phileo* is far less common (only 22 x total) than *agapo* – 86 x as “love” and 27 x as “charity” and *agapao* 135 x.

Instructions regarding the love of one’s neighbor (Mt.19:19, 22:33-39, Rom.13:8-10, Jas.2:8), one’s enemy (Mt.5:44, Lk.6:27), and “the brethren,” or “one another” (Jn.13:34-35, 15:12, 15:17; Rom.12:9, 13:8; Gal.5:13, Eph.1:15,4:2; Col.1:4, 2:2; I Thes.3:12, 4:9; Heb.10:24, I Pet.1:22,2:17, and most of I Jn.) consistently use a form of *agapao*.

One rather surprising observation – also involving both words – is the choice of the tenses of verbs and participles. References to the love of either the Father or Jesus toward people are almost exclusively in the aorist tense. I’m not sure what to make of this. In some cases, it is a historical reference, which is understandable; or mentioned as the motivation for some action, as in “because he loved” (aorist)...he gave his Son...” But I was surprised to discover only four places where this “godly love” is expressed in the present (continuous) tense: Jn.16:27, Heb.12:6 and its parallel in Rev.3:19; and Rev.1:5. I think it is significant that two of those four declare, “Those whom I love, I discipline!” (Heb.12 and Rev.3) – where both words are present (continuous) tense.

When disciples are instructed to love, however, the forms are almost uniformly present. Is this because such love (again, both *agapao* and *phileo*) requires constant effort and attention? Because it is the consistent response of a permanently transformed life? Or simply because it is expected to become a character trait, a habitual behavior? Or have you another suggestion?

Another frequent theme is the appearance of these words in conditional clauses: a grammatical structure introduced by “if” (**ei, ean**), “in order that” (**hina, hos**), or “because” (**dia touto, hoti**). In fact, I have found no reference at all to the popularly-touted phrase “unconditional love.” I’m sure that its perpetrators mean well: they intend to be “welcoming”, and they are correct that Jesus called many folks whose lives were less than exemplary. But they forget that Jesus himself also says plainly, “This is why the Father loves me, because I am laying down my life” (Jn.10:17), and (Jn.16:27)” “The Father loves you because you have loved me!” In the longer discussion in Jn.14:15-24 he repeatedly predicates the promise of his own and the Father’s presence and love upon “following my instructions”! And in Jn.15:9-17, it depends upon the disciples’ replicating his love in their own interaction. Paul (I Cor.2:9, 8:13, II Cor.9:7), James (1:12), and John (I Jn.3 and 4), all assume that the life Jesus offers must be reciprocated with loving obedience in order to be actualized.

Love in the brotherhood is to be patterned after Jesus’ own example (Jn.13:34, 15:12,17; Eph.5:2, I Thes.4:9, I Pet.1:22, 2:17, and all of John's first letter). The same pattern is to be seen in Christian marriage (Eph.5:25-33, Col.3:19). Is the church’s failure to “love as Jesus loved” partly responsible for the failure of so many homes? The church was intended to set the example for husbands and wives to follow! Where else can anyone learn “another kind of love?” It may be easier (for churches and families) to “split” than to commit to the hard work of faithful love – but it does not follow the New Testament pattern.

Like so many things we have examined before, perhaps here too we need to check our focus: to replace nit-picking the non-existent intricacies of the words with careful attention to the object we choose for either *agapao* or *phileo*. Is it directed toward “the praise of men” (Jn.12:43), “the highest seats” (Lk.11:43), and other elements of “this present world” (II Tim.4:10), or toward the Lord Jesus, his Father, his Kingdom, and his people?

In I Thes.4:9, Paul writes that “you yourselves are being taught by God to love each other.” Jesus, of course, provided the ultimate example (Jn.14 and 15), and much later, John (II Jn.6) succinctly defines the “kind of love” he was talking about. This is how the Body is created (Eph.3:17), and is intended to grow (Eph.4:15-16; Col.2:2), and function (Gal.5:13 and Eph.4:2). “May the Lord guide your [our] hearts into the love of God, and the endurance (supplied by) Christ!” (II Thes.3:5) Amen!
Word Study #88 – Obedience /Obey

(See also word studies 27, 39, and 55 for more on this subject.)

“Why do you all keep calling me, 'Lord, Lord,' and you don't do what I say?” (Lk.6:46)

“If you all love me, you will follow my instructions [keep my commands].” (Jn.14:15)

A perfectly reasonable question, and a perfectly reasonable statement, from the Lord Jesus himself. Yet rare is the assembly of “believers”, seduced, as so many are, by the popular “unconditional” rhetoric, where serious attention is paid to those words.

You may notice, in the second quote, that I have violated my own rule about not using multiple translations for the same word. This is deliberate – although I do offer the alternative – because of the popular application of negative connotations which associate “commands” with threats: “You’ll be in big trouble if you don’t ……”, whereas “instructions” imply “Wonderful things can happen if you do…” or simply, “this is how it works.”

Entole, classically “a command or order”, but also “an authorization, prescription (medical), recipe, or power of attorney”, may signify either of these understandings. The difference, the interpretation, is entirely dependent upon the relationship between the people giving or receiving the commands / instructions.

The concept of obedience (v. hupakouo, n. hupakoe) in the New Testament is likewise colored by the relationship. The gospel writers marvel that the forces of nature (Mt.8:27, Mk.4:41, Lk.8:25), and even evil spirits (Mk.1:27) have no choice but to obey Jesus' orders. Yet “obedience to the gospel” on the part of some of the priests (Ac.6:7), and others who chose loyalty to Jesus' Kingdom (Rom.6:17, 16:19; II Cor.7:15, Phil.2:12, Heb.5:9), is in every case voluntary, and a cause for celebration, not compulsion! As Paul expressed it quite matter-of-factly, (Rom.6:16), “You all are slaves to whomever you obey,” whether for good or ill. Everybody chooses to obey someone or something.

This becomes clear if one lists the words used as objects of hupakouo: servants/slaves to masters (Eph.6:5, Col.3:22), the desires of the mortal body (Rom.6:12), “the teaching you were given” (Rom.6:17, Phil.2:12), “the gospel” (Rom.10:16, I Thes.1:8), children to parents (Eph.6:1, Col.3:20), Jesus himself (Heb.5:9), Abraham to his calling (Heb.11:8), “to the faith / faithfulness” (Rom.1:5), “the truth” (I Pet.1:22), “righteousness / justice” (Rom.6:16), and others where the object is not specified but is clearly intended to be the Lord Jesus and his Kingdom.

Classic uses of hupakouo are “to hearken, pay attention, to answer, listen, heed, or regard; to accept an invitation, to submit, comply, obey; to yield to a remedy (medical), to conform to a theory or principle (in grammar, science, or philosophy), or “to answer” as in the task of a doorkeeper.” You will note that most of these are more an indication of a general attitude than any specific details.

This is also the case with the lesser-used term, peitharcheo, “to obey a ruler or superior”. This has only four New Testament uses, of which there are two referring to God (Ac.5:29 and 5:32), and two to people: (Tit.3:1) magistrates, and Ac.27:21, where Paul is telling the ship's captain, “You should have listened to me!”

A related, also less frequent word, peitho, more commonly rendered “persuade” (21x) or “trust” (8x), and only 7x “obey, (Ac.5:36, 37; Rom.2:8, Gal.3:1,5; Heb.13:17; Jas.3:3), as well as its negative apeitheo which, like the corresponding noun form apeithia, is rendered equally “disobedience” and “unbelief”, illustrates vividly that those are not two concepts, but one – highlighting the appropriateness of the two statements of Jesus with which we began. One does not “believe” if he does not “obey!”

Interestingly, “obey” in any of its forms never occurs with “commands” as its object! Obedience, whether to a person, to the Lord, or to the principles of his Kingdom (or of another kingdom!), is a much broader concept, referring more to an orientation of one's life than to any specific behavior. Perhaps the concept of “allegiance” is more to the point. In fact, even commands/instructions (entole), in the New Testament, are not provided as a “check-list” as they had been in the past (and still are, by some groups!) They are to be “kept” (tereo), rather than “obeyed” (hupotasso). Quite a variety of objects occur with tereo, (classically “to watch, guard, or maintain, to test by observation of trial, to keep an engagement”). These include “the commandments (of the Law) – Mt.19:17, Ac.15:5,24; Jas.2:10; “your own tradition” (Mk.7:9), “the good wine” (Jn.2:10), “my (Jesus') sayings” (Jn.8:5,52,55), the Sabbath (Jn.9:16), “my (Jesus') commandments” (Jn.14:15,21,23,24,15:10), “Thy word” (Jn.17:6); the disciples (Jn.17:11,12,15); “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph.4:3), and many more.

It is instructive that the “commandments / instructions” that Jesus himself speaks of “keeping”, primarily in Jn.14 and 15, uniformly concern the love that he directs and teaches his disciples to have among one another. Period.

Paul gets more specific on occasion, I Cor.14:31, Eph.6:2, Col.4:10. But even he spends more time detailing the failures of
the “commandments of the Law” (Rom.7:8-13, I Cor.7:19, Eph.2:15, Tit.1:14) – as does the writer to the Hebrews (7:5, 16, 18; 9:19) – than he does instituting replacements.

Of course the whole New Testament is, from one perspective, a “blueprint” or “instruction manual” for the building of the Kingdom. Many admonitions, in both gospels and epistles, are cast in the imperative mood, and compliance is expected. Kingdom living is described in detail, but most of its specifics are not labeled “commands”. Hence, again, the quotation with which we began. The prime example of obedience is described in Phil.2:6-8, where Paul notes Jesus' deliberate renunciation of his well-deserved, privileged position, in favor of meticulous – one might even say “extreme” – obedience. This is the attitude (v.5) that his people are urged to emulate – II Cor. 10:5 – “subjugating every mind [thought] for obedience to [of] Christ” [i.e., modeled after his!]

We all have a lot to learn!

Word Study #89 – Bless, Blessed, Blessing

As is so frequently the case, a study of the concept of “blessing” bears little resemblance to common assumptions about the word. In all the 44 New Testament uses of the verb, eulogeo, the 8 uses of the adjective or participle eulogetos, and the 13 uses of the noun form, eulogia, only one, II Cor.9:5, where Paul applies it to the generosity of the relief offering which the Gentile churches sent to their famine-stricken Judean brethren, makes reference to anything material being given or received. The other words, makarios (49x), makarizo (2x), and makarismos (3x), have no such reference at all. So although giving thanks for “every good gift” (W.S.#25) is certainly appropriate, the common admonition to “count (or brag about) your blessings”, if applied to acquisitions, benefits, possessions or prerogatives, might well be questioned.

Classically, eulogeo (etymologically, a combination of the prefix eu-, “good or well”, and logeo, a form of lego, “to speak or say”), usually intended “to bless or praise a god, to honor a person, or to call down or bestow blessings on someone” (L/S), and the noun form, eulogia, “a eulogy, glory or good repute, or a gift or bounty”. The New Testament, however, tends toward a narrower usage. Frequently, it is paired with “pray / prayer” – proseuchomai, or even treated as its synonym (I Cor.14:16), as when Jesus preceded his feeding of a crowd (Mt.14:19, Mk.6:41,8:7; Lk.9:16) with prayer, and in accounts of the Last Supper (Mt.26:26, Mk.14:22, Lk.24:30, I Cor.10:16). The use of aorist participles in those latter accounts makes “after he had prayed” a more likely rendition than the common idea of “blessing the bread” as if it were somehow magically changing its substance or character. People, and God, are “blessed” in the New Testament. Inanimate objects are not. Jesus “blessed” children (Mk.10:16), his disciples (Lk.24:50,51), and humanity in general (Ac.3:26). Simeon (Lk.2:28), the disciples (Lk.24:53), and faithful people (Jas.3:9) are said to “bless God.” The crowds that greeted Jesus in Jerusalem (Mt.21:9, 23:9, Mk.11:9,10; Lk.13:35, 19:38; Jn.12:13) proclaimed Jesus and his Kingdom “blessed”. The faithful are admonished to “bless” their persecutors (Mt.5:44, Lk.6:28, Rom.12:14, I Cor.4:12, I Pet.3:9), as well as to pray for them (Mt.5:44), and actively to do good to them (Lk.6:27).

Blessing also has to do with the conveying of an inheritance (W.S.#79, 80), as in Heb.11:20,21 and 12:17, Gal.3:14, I Pet.3:9, and most notably, Jesus' gracious invitation to the Gentiles/nations who had behaved in a faithful manner (Mt.25:34) even without recognizing him, addressing them as “blessed by my Father”, and offering them the inheritance “prepared for you from the foundation of the world”!

The title, eulogetos, “the Blessed” or “the Blessed One”, is applied exclusively to God (Mk.14:61, Lk.1:68, Rom.1:25, 9:5; II Cor.1:3,11:31; Eph.1:3, I Pet.1:3), never to anyone else.

“Blessing” is on the list of praises ascribed to the Lord Jesus in Rev.5:12,13; 7:12, although all the other uses of eulogia are specifically from God.

Makarios, on the other hand, is in another category altogether. Classically, it was used primarily of the “bliss” of the gods, or of dead heroes, although it was also used in extremely deferential address, as “honored sir...” It conveyed an especially close relationship with one's patron gods. This was the word Jesus chose for the faithful, according to both Matthew's (5:3-11) and Luke's (6:20-22) account of the “beatitudes”, in which he enumerated the results of the characteristics he expected of the citizens of his Kingdom. This deviated as sharply from the extant cultural definitions and expectations as it does from ours today. He also applied it to Peter's recognition of his identity (Mt.16:1), and the privilege extended to his disciples to see (Mt.13:16, Lk.10:23) what many generations had longed for. It describes the condition of a servant who is found to be carefully following his master's
instructions (Mt.24:46, Lk.12:37, 38,43); the person who (Mt.11:6, Lk.7:23) “does not take offense” at Jesus and the things he is doing; and the one whose hospitality is extended to folks unable to reciprocate (Lk.14:14). Jesus gently corrected the enthusiast who cried out in the crowd, “Blessed is the one who bore you and nursed you” (Lk.11:27) by responding, (v.28) “Rather, blessed are those who are listening to the Word of God, and keeping it!”

Paul uses “blessed” of God (I Tim.1:11, 6:15), and of Jesus' return (Tit.2:13); and James (1:12,25) of the person who persists in working at faithfulness. It is the preferred description of the faithful in the Revelation – 1:3, those who read and hear the message; 14:13, those who die in the Lord; 16:15, who stay alert for the Lord's coming; 19:9, who are invited to the Lamb's wedding feast; 20:6, who are a part of the first resurrection; 22:7, who keep the sayings of this book; and 22:14, who do as Jesus commands.

I think, despite the one single instance where Paul calls himself 

makarios

to be presenting his case before Agrippa (Ac.26:2), it is safe to say that for the most part. Mary's statement to Elizabeth (Lk.1:48) refers to 

people's perception of

the privilege granted to her – not to an exalted status. 

Makarios is received from the gracious hand of the Lord, as the result of a relationship of obedient conformity to his directions.

Eulogeo and its associated words, however, are within our prerogative – and indeed our responsibility – to share and convey to others, be they brethren, or antagonists, or the Lord himself. Nineteen of the uses of eulogeo refer to “blessing” received by people, and ten by God. In fifteen instances, people are doing the “blessing” (or instructed to do so); eight times it is God/Jesus. And there are nine references where it could be a synonym for prayer. We see an interesting slant in Heb.6:7: rather than calling the provision of sun and rain on the fields “blessings”, the writer suggests that the 

land

is “blessed” when that provision is 

rightly used
to bear a fruitful harvest! The “blessing” appears not to be the provision, but the reward for its intended use!

Indeed, in the case of either eulogeo or makarios, “blessing” consists, not of “stuff”, nor favorably manipulated circumstances, nor of abilities, power or prestige, but rather of connectedness, through the Lord Jesus, to the Kingdom of God and its gracious Sovereign.

“(Eulogetos) Blessed (be) [praise to] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed (eulogesos) us with every 

spiritual blessing (eulogia) in the heavens, in Christ!” (Eph.1:3)

May we gratefully receive, and faithfully share, his gracious blessing!

**Word Study #90 – Praise**

It was only during work on the previous post, “bless” (#89), that it became evident that “bless” and “praise” have sometimes been used interchangeably as translations for the same word, and often appear together, especially in the praise scenes in the Revelation. There is also frequent implicit overlap with the use of “glory” (W.S.#74) and “honor” (W.S. #73). Consequently, the idea of praise to the Lord, throughout the New Testament, is far more ubiquitous than the use of any of the specific words so translated, which include six nouns and three verbs.

In three of these instances, it is an aberrant translation of a word more commonly rendered differently: “praise” is used only once for eulogeo (against 43 x “bless”) – Lk.1:64; once for arete (against 4x “virtue”) – 1 Pet.2:9; and four times for doxa (against 144x “glory”) – Jn.9:24, 12:43 (2x), 1 Pet.4:11.

Twice, it is the only translation of a rarely used word – 

ainesis

which is only seen in Heb.13:15, and 

ainos

in Mt.21:16, Lk.18:43. This narrows our study conveniently to one noun and three verbs.

The most frequently appearing word is the noun 

epainos

which even so is only used 11x. It is classically defined as “approval, praise, or commendation”, and is applied equally to gods and men. The New Testament uses bear out that division, with Rom.2:29, 13:3; 1 Cor.4:5, II Cor.8:18, I Pet.1:7 and 2:14 referring to praise accorded to people, and Eph.1:6,12,14; Phil.1:11, and possibly 4:8 to the praise of God.

Second is the verb 

aineo

which makes 9 appearances. This too, classically, spoke of “praise or approval, and a recommendation or advice”, as well as “a way courteously to decline an invitation.” It is a very frequent admonition in the LXX, describing or urging praises to God, although it is also used disparagingly of praises to pagan gods. Aineo describes the praises of the heavenly host announcing Jesus' birth (Lk.2:13), the awe-struck shepherds (Lk.2:20), and the jubilant crowd on Palm Sunday (Lk.19:37), as well as the constant praises offered by the empowered disciples both before (Lk.24:53) and after Pentecost (Ac.2:47), and the joyful celebration of the healed man in Ac.3:8. Rom.15:11 is quoted from
the LXX, and Rev.19:5 casts “a voice from the throne” as a holy cheerleader calling both small and great to praises.

*Epaineo*, the verb form of *epainos*, common in the LXX, is less so in the New Testament, translated 4x “praise”, and once each “laud” and “commend.” All but the LXX quote in Rom.15:11 refer to people – most of whom (I Cor.11:17,22, and Lk.16:8) were not behaving very well. Its classical definitions are very parallel to those listed for the noun.

Finally, we have the four appearances of *humneo*: “to sing praises, to celebrate or commemorate in a hymn, to tell over and over, or ‘harp on’, repeat, or recite.” The classical epics would fall in this category, as would the later efforts of troubadours, celebrating the triumphs of gods, heroes, and conquerors. However, it is also how Paul and Silas passed the night in their Philippian jail (Ac.16:25), and how Jesus and his disciples concluded their final Passover together (Mt.26:30, Mk.14:26), in addition to the LXX quote in Heb.2:12 (from Ps.22:28).

Although the word is used at least 16x in the LXX, Trench notes that the connection with pagans celebrating their gods and heroes led to some degree of avoidance in both Jewish and early Christian practice. Alexander had been criticized (3rd century BC) for accepting “hymns” to himself and his accomplishments instead of deferring to the gods. Among the “church fathers”, notably Origen and Jerome, it became a requirement that a “hymn” be a direct address of praise and glory to God.

Some historians see in passages like Lk.1:46-55, 68-79; Ac.4:24, 16:25; Eph.5:14, I Tim.3:16, and II Tim.2:11-14 snippets of what they interpret as an early hymn. Others call them “creeds”, which is another problem altogether!

Whether or not any specific examples remain for us, music was certainly included in the worship of the New Testament church. Paul encouraged the churches at Ephesus and Colossae (Eph.5:19 and Col.3:16) to “keep teaching and admonishing each other with psalms (*psalmois*), hymns (*humnois*), and spiritual songs (*odais pneumatikais*), singing in the thankfulness [grace] that's in your hearts, to God.” “Psalms” are the most ancient, at least in the Judeo-Christian tradition. These were probably some of the ones preserved in the Old Testament records. The word is derived from the verb, “to touch, or to pluck a stringed instrument”, with which the singing was usually accompanied. With “hymns”, the lyrics were predominant, as they celebrated honor and mighty deeds, whereas “songs” could be dirges, joyful songs of praise, or simply a recitation of lyric poetry. Singing is also part of the agenda Paul described in Corinth (I Cor.14:15), both “with [by means of] the Spirit and by means of [using] the understanding [mind]” – with either prescribed or Spirit-led language and music. It is the suggestion of James (5:3) for celebrating one's rejoicing, and one of the vehicles of praise and tribute to the King in his consummated Kingdom (Rev.5:9, 14:3, 15:3).

In our day, as throughout the history of the people of God, “singing praises” may still be either rightly or wrongly focused. As someone has observed, “you can't always tell whether they're singing to/about the Lord or their girl/boyfriend!” In the third century, Augustine, coming out of a culture not all that different from ours, prescribed three requirements for “Christian” music:

It must be sung.
It must be praise.
It must be to/about God.

That might still be an appropriate guide! Songs of praise have habitually accompanied movements of renewal among the Lord's people, both the source and the expression of great joy.

After all, by his gracious provision, (Eph.1:6), “We exist for the praise of his glory!” We might as well start practicing!

“Let everything that hath breath, praise the Lord!” (Ps.150)

### Word Study #91 – Pray, Prayer

It is important to remember, in undertaking a study of the uses of “pray/prayer” in the New Testament, that in the Elizabethan English of the KJV, “pray” did not necessarily have anything whatever to do with God, but “I pray thee” was merely a polite way of saying “please.” This is seen in fully half of the appearances of *deomai*, nine of which were traditionally translated “beseech”, primarily in Luke and Acts, and *erotao*, in which 23x the translators used “ask” (as in, to ask a question, make a request, or issue an invitation), “beseech” 14x, “desire” 6x, and “entreat” once, with the same sense in six of the 14 times where it is rendered “pray.” Consequently, we are dealing here with a concept in which context is
critically important.

The actual lexical definitions of the five verbs and four nouns in this group are not so very different from one another. Classically, deomai was used by Homer as “to be in need or want”, by Plato and Herodotus as “to beg a thing from a person,” and by Plutarch and Thucydides as “to beg a favor.” Dei, as a particle, usually intends “it is necessary.”

Erotao is listed as “to ask a question, to beg, or to entreat, to make a request of a person”.
Euchomai did refer to “prayer” as commonly understood, but also as “an unrealizable wish, to long for, to vow, or to promise.”
Parakaleo, “to summon friends for help, to invite, to exhort, to encourage,” is dealt with in W.S.#53, “The Spirit,” and #138, “comfort”.

Only proseuchomai refers exclusively to the prayer of worship.
Among the nouns, only deesis, “entreaty, petition”, and proseuche, “a prayer, or place of prayer” are commonly used. Enteuxis, “conversation, petition, intercession”, appears only once (I Tim.4:5), and euche, “a prayer, vow, wish, or aspiration,” is rendered once “prayer” (Jas.5:15), and twice “vow” (Ac.18:18 and 21:23).

Much more helpful in understanding is to address three questions:

Who is doing the praying?
To whom is it addressed?
What is the subject of the prayer or request?

A few examples can serve to illustrate the value of such observations.

Deomai, as noted above, half the time is simply one person making a request of another: Ac.8:34 – the Ethiopian asking Philip to explain what he was reading; Ac.21:39 – Paul requesting the commander to allow him to speak to the crowd; Lk.5:12 and 9:38 – people begging Jesus for healing; or II Cor.5:20 – Paul urging his readers to accept his message. When addressed to God, (Mt.9:38, Lk.22:32, Rom.1:10, Ac.8:22,24; I Thes.3:10), it is usually with a very specific request in mind, although that is not completely clear in Ac.4:31 or 10:2.

Erotao, similarly, is usually one person making a request or asking a question of another: Lk.5:3 – Jesus asking Peter to launch his boat; Lk.14:18,19 – guests begging off from the banquet invitation; Ac.10:48 – Cornelius asking Peter to stay a while; or Ac.23:18 – Paul asking the guard to take his nephew to the commander. However, in John's gospel, and only there, it is used of Jesus' communication with the Father (Jn.14:16, 16:26, 17:9, 15, 20). Might this be a testimony to John's depth of understanding of the mutuality and equality of their relationship?

Euchomai, except for Jas.5:16 where the flavor is more like the requests represented by deomai, leans more toward the “wish” idea, as when (Ac.27:29) the sailors “threw out the anchors and wished for daylight”. Likewise, parakaleo, except for Jesus' statement in Mt.26:53, is almost entirely inter-personal: the healed man who asked to go along with Jesus (Mk.5:18), the “Macedonian call” to Paul (Ac.16:9), or Paul encouraging the sailors to take food (Ac.27:34).

Proseuchomai, on the other hand, never represents simply a person-to-person situation. It is always directed to God. Even more significantly, it seldom concerns a specific “prayer-request.” It is also the only one that occurs in the imperative mood. Only three times in the gospels is an object specified: praying for one's persecutors (Mt.5:44, Lk.6:28), Jesus praying for the children (Mt.9:13), and the admonition to pray that the flight from Jerusalem not be in winter (Mt.24:20, Mk.13:18). The rest of the praying, whether by Jesus or others, 19x, has no object mentioned. Thirteen times, it refers to Jesus' final night in the Garden Curiously, proseuchomai does not appear in the writings of John at all, in either his gospel or his epistles – and only twice in the Revelation. I have never encountered any speculation on a reason for that – have you?

Jesus usually seems to have preferred a “solitary place” for praying (Mt.14:23, Mk.1:35, 6:46; Lk.5:16,6:12, 9:28), although on several occasions his disciples were present, and asked to be taught (Mt.6:9, Lk.9:18, 11:1,2). Lk.9:18 is particularly puzzling in this regard: “He was praying privately, and his disciples were with him”. (The traditional version says he was “alone”. Not sure what the “dictation theory” advocates do with that!) Jesus emphasized that prayer was not the place (if there is one) for showing off one's piety (Mt.6:5,6,7; Mt.23:14, Mk.12:40, Lk.18:10,11; 20:47); that one must forgive before (or in the process of) praying (Mk.11:25); and one must pray in faithfulness (Mk.11:24).

In the early church, prayer preceded the commissioning of people for specific assignments (Ac.1:24, 6:6, 13:3, 14:23) and was a frequent corporate experience in the group, led, apparently, by both men and women (I Cor.11:4,5). Paul writes of his
prayers on behalf of the churches (Rom.1:9, Eph.1:16, Phil.1:4,1:8; Col.1:3,1:9,4:12; I Thes.1:2, II Thes.1:11; and also of his own felt need for their prayers on his own behalf (II Cor.1:11, Phil.1:19, Col.4:3, I Thes.5:25, II Thes.3:1, Phlm. 2), as well as encouraging their prayers for each other (II Cor.9:14, Jas.5:16, Phil.4:6).

Prayers are connected with healings (Ac.9:40, 28:8, Jas.5:14), release from prison (Ac.12:12, 16:23, Phlm.2), and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ac.2, and 8:15), as well as taking leave of brethren (Ac.20:36, 21:15).

You may notice that this survey has left a large group of occasions – some already listed concerning Jesus himself, and some reporting about others – where nothing specific is said about the object of the praying: the Transfiguration accounts (Lk.9:29 and parallels), Jesus' baptism (Lk.3:21), Saul in Damascus (Ac.9:11), Peter in Joppa (Ac.10:9 and 11:15), Cornelius at his home (Ac.10:30), Paul in the temple (Ac.22:17), and Paul's admonitions in Rom.12:12, Eph.6:18, I Thes.5:17, I Tim.2:8, among others.

One student suggested, “It sounds like just sort of hanging out with the Lord!”

I rather like that. In fact, I think it sums up proseuchomai very well. Perhaps it is often simply making ourselves available, and waiting for instructions.

After all, (Rom.8:26) “We don't even know how we ought to pray” – but that's ok – the Holy Spirit can compensate for our ignorance, as long as we are “hanging out” and available.

“By means of all prayer and petition, keep on praying at all times in the Spirit, being constantly alert about it” (Eph.6:18).

“Don't worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer (proseuche) and petition (deesis), with thanksgiving, your requests must be made known before God.” (Phil.4:6)

Proseucheste “Keep on praying [hanging-out with the Lord!], incessantly!” (I Thes.5:17).

Word Study #92 – Giving Thanks

You may be surprised – I certainly was! – to discover that Biblically, eucharisteo, “giving thanks”, is strictly a New Testament word! It does not occur in the LXX at all, although the idea is frequently present, and occasionally translated “thanks”, in eulogeo, “bless” (W.S. #89), aineo, “praise” (W.S. #90), and exomologeo, “confess” (W.S. #68), which are also included in references to “prayer” (W.S.#91) and “worship” (W.S.#50);but this primary word for “giving thanks” is nowhere to be found.

In the New Testament, “thanks” is also sometimes used to translate charis (7x, as opposed to 129x “grace”), and homologeo(1x out of 21x), examologeomai, (2x out of 11x), and anthomologeomai, (only a single appearance), which are all related to “confession” in the sense of “acknowledgment” (W.S.#68). Since most of these deviations fit equally well into the discussions of their primary translations, we will confine this study to eucharisteo (verb), eucharistia (noun), and eucharistos (adj.).

Classically, all of these referred to any expression of gratitude – by anyone, to anyone, for anything – or to an agreeable, grateful nature or personality trait. Occasionally, it was also used of the bestowing of a favor, as well as the obligation thereby incurred. The word is not rare in classical literature, which makes one wonder about its absence from the LXX, in view of its frequency in the New Testament. Could that be an artifact of the greater intimacy of the relationship between God and his people, introduced by Jesus’ own example, made possible to his people by his life, death, and resurrection, and symbolized by the destruction of the temple veil? (See Citizens of the Kingdom, chapter 8).

In all but two New Testament instances, the “thanks” are addressed to God: and these two, while not exemplary, offer significant insight. The first is in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Lk.18:11). Notice that although ostensibly (and ostentatiously!) “Praying”, the Pharisee's focus is pros heauton – “toward himself”! – as he “thanks God” for his self-perceived superiority. Jesus does not compliment that!

The other is when the eloquent lawyer, Tertullus, attempts to ingratiate himself to Governor Felix, when presenting the Jewish hierarchy's case against Paul (Ac.24:3). In all the rest of both examples and admonitions, the giving of thanks is addressed to God – but not as persuasive flattery for a corrupt governor! “Thanks” with such an ulterior motive should be understood as insulting to God!

There are three scenes where Jesus himself is represented as giving thanks: before distributing food to the crowds
(Mt.15:36, Mk.8:16, Jn.6:11,23); as he broke the bread at the Last Supper (Mt.26:27, Mk.14:23, Lk.22:7,19; and quoted by Paul in I Cor.11:24); and at Lazarus' tomb (Jn.11:41). Only in this last instance does he specify the object of his thanksgiving, and his statement is instructive: "Father, I thank you that you listened to me. I knew that you are always listening to me, but I said that because of the crowd standing around ..." The giving of thanks can be a powerful teaching tool, as it also was for Paul (Ac.27:35) during the shipwreck. In his letters, Paul gives thanks to God for the faithfulness of individuals or groups (Phil.1:3, Col.1:3, Phm.4, I Thes.3:9), for the brethren who came to meet him on the way to Rome (Ac.28:15), for the generosity of the relief offering (II Cor.9:11), for the gift of praying in tongues (I Cor.14:16), and even that he had not baptized many in Corinth (I Cor.1:14), which he mentions in order to defuse the factionalism there.

The object of the giving of thanks is clarified by the use of the prepositions, and the sentence structure, with which it is accompanied. Both of the common prepositions, peri and huper, are used with genitive case objects. The case of its object affects the meaning of any preposition. Peri, "about, or for", indicates motive, care, or "with regard to". Paul often writes that he is giving thanks peri humon - "about you all", (his readers), and/or their faithfulness (Rom.1:8. I Cor.1:4, Col.1:3, I Thes.1:2, 3:9; II Thes.1:3).

Huper, on the other hand, indicates "for the sake of, on behalf of, as a representative of." Here it sometimes seems to include more of our concept of prayer, as it is connected with food (I Cor.10:30), and Paul's anticipated release from prison (II Cor.1:11), as well as the more general huper humin - "on your behalf" (Eph.1:16), and specific gratitude for the help of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom.16:4). Paul urges Timothy that both "prayers (deesis, proseuchais, enteuxis)" and "thanksgiving (eucharistias)" be made huper "on behalf of all people" – including "rulers and others in authority” – who probably are not doing anything of the kind on their own! (I Tim.2:1).

Distinguishing between prepositions and their objects would avoid many major misunderstandings. Some of the common rhetoric about "giving thanks for everything" is a case in point. In Eph.5:20, "giving thanks huper panton" is a part of Paul's description of mutual teaching and celebration in the brotherhood, with everyone contributing! (5:15-20). Since panton, the genitive plural of pas ("all"), is identical in its masculine, feminine, and neuter forms, there is no reason to shift gears and read a neuter "everything" as the object of huper, when Paul has been talking about everyone, which would also be a much more logical object of "for the sake of," or "on behalf of".

The similarly translated – but not at all equivalent – admonition in I Thes.5:18, often rendered "Give thanks for everything", contains neither of those prepositions, but simply en – "in"– which always has a dative (location or atmosphere) object. The grammatical structure is clear: the reference of "this" ("this is the will of God") is the imperative verb, "give thanks", and not, as some would have it, "everything that happens" – even events that are clearly evil.

Other objects of thanksgiving are identified by a clause introduced by hoti, "because" – (I Thes.2:13, Rev.11:17), or a participial explanation of something that God has done. This is more frequent in I Cor.15:57, II Cor.2:14, 8:16, 9:15, where charis is used rather than eucharistia.

Significantly, however, more frequent than any of these, are declarations of or admonitions to thankfulness with no expressed object – Col.3:15-17, 2:7; I Cor.14:17-18, Rev.4:9,7:12. The giving of thanks is an expected part of prayer (Phil.4:6, Col.4:2, I Tim.2:1), not as an effort to manipulate God, but rather a mind-set that pervades the entire consciousness of the faithful.

Thankfulness is an ingredient of the “recipe” for continued growth in Kingdom living (Col.2:7), the antidote for complaints against other brethren (Col.3:15), and an alternative to unwholesome conversation (Eph.5:4). It is among the praises offered around the throne of the Lamb (Rev.4:9, 7:12, 11:17)

“And everything – whatever you all do – in word or deed – (do) everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, (continually) giving thanks to God the Father through him!" (Col.3:17)

Word Study #93 – Rejoice!

Although seldom used today in ordinary conversation, the concept of “rejoicing” is pervasive in the New Testament writings. Traditional translators have used the same English word for four different “word families”, varying primarily in their intensity, except for one, which does not seem to fit with the others at all.

Agalliao, with its noun form agalliasis, appears a total of sixteen times, frequently translated with the modifiers
“exceeding” or “exceedingly.” This is in harmony with the classical definition, “to rejoice exceedingly, to glorify, or to exult.” In the LXX, it was often used in connection with a celebration at the inaugural anointing of a king, and in other classical writings, of paying honor to a god.

In the New Testament, it speaks of the joy of those who have become faithful (Ac.2:46, 16:34), and it is usually connected with a recognition of the hand of God at work (Lk.1:44, 1:47, 10:21; Jn.5:35, 8:56; Ac.2:26, Heb.1:9), as well as anticipation of his activity (I Pet.1:6, 8; 4:3; Jude 24, Rev.19:7).

The fifteen total uses of euphraino, and the noun euphrosune, on the other hand, while occasionally connected to God (Ac.2:28 and 14:7; Rom.15:10, Gal.4:27), are usually used on a more mundane level. Classically, these referred to any sort of “festivities, mirth, or merriment”, often including luxurious feasting. This is clearly the situation in two major New Testament accounts, both parables, where it is used of the “rich fool” (Lk.12:19) selfishly planning to celebrate his plenty, and the feasting (and subsequent complaints) at the return of the “prodigal son” (Lk. 15:23,29, 32). It also appears describing the partying (Rev.11:10) of the people committed to their “dwelling on earth”, after the killing of God's faithful witnesses.

Interestingly, it is also the response advocated, for the faithful, to the fall of Babylon (Rev.18:20)!

The anomaly of the group (7x “boast”, 4x “rejoice”, 22x “glory”) is kauchaomai, with kauchema and kauchesis. In the classical writings, these words virtually always have negative connotations, referring to loud, boisterous boasting or bragging, and in the noun form, to pride or superiority. I would be curious to ask Paul why he used it as he did, unless it was simply to contrast his attitude with that of the more common idea. The negative flavor does appear in the New Testament (Jas.4:16, Rom.2:17,23, and 3:27, I Cor.15:31), but it is not dominant. Paul makes heavy use of these terms in II Corinthians: to leverage the response of the group to relief efforts (7:4,14; 9:2), (“Don't make me sorry I had bragged about your generosity”); to encourage their obedience to his teaching (10:8,13,15); and (12:1) to illustrate the emptiness of bragging about one's “spiritual experiences”. Occasionally, he uses it of satisfaction at having faithfully executed one's responsibility (II Cor.1:12, 11:16; I Thes.2:19, Gal.6:6, Phil.2:16), but also to remind his readers that it is inappropriate (Eph.2:9) to claim personal credit for what the Lord has done.

Nevertheless, Rom.5:2, Phil.1:26, 3:3; Heb.3:6, and Jas.1:9 suggest that kauchaomai is not always out-of-line, which makes one wonder at the translators' (and the writers') choice of words. Similar questions arise where kauchaomai is translated “glory” (see W.S.#74).

By far the most frequently used word is chairo (“rejoice”42x, “be glad”14x, “joy” - as a verb – 5x, and 12x as a greeting or farewell.) Its noun form is chara, “joy”, 53x. Chairo may represent a sort of median between the exuberance of agalliao and the more ordinary enjoyment of euphraino. L/S lists “to take pleasure in, to express joy, laughter, to be glad to hear something, or to delight in doing something.” Bauer adds that a hoti clause may give the reason for the rejoicing, and a participle may describe what one is delighted by. He points out that a prepositional phrase with en, as noted in the previous post, is circumstantial, and not causal. In the imperative or vocative forms, chairo serves as a greeting or farewell. Chairo and agalliao appear together in Mt.5:12, Lk.1:14, I Pet.4:13, Rev.19:7, intensifying the thought.

Chairo and euphraino are joined in Ac.2:26 and Rev.11:10, leaning toward celebration. Actually, the term represents quite a spectrum of responses. It can refer to casual curiosity (Lk.23:3) or even connivance in wrongdoing (Lk.13:7, 15:5; Ac.13:48, Rom.12:15, 10:21; Jn.5:35, 8:56; Ac.2:26, Heb.1:9), as well as anticipation of his activity (I Pet.1:6, 8; 4:3; Jude 24, Rev.19:7).

Chairo is the only one of the four words that consistently applies specifically to life “in the Lord”, and requires seeing beyond immediate, often unfavorable circumstances.

Mt.5:12 and Lk.6:23 record Jesus' words regarding the faithful (or “blessed” – W.S.#89) response to persecution. Notice that in each case, he specifies that the abuse is “for the sake of – heneka – the Son of Man” (Lk.) and “for my sake” (heneken emou) (Mt.). Clearly, this must have been a necessary caveat, since Peter (I Pet.4:13-15) later also found it prudent to add a blunt warning that readers be sure that the “persecution” was for faithfulness, and not deserved, for some less noble reason!

Jesus also offered another guideline for his disciples' rejoicing – it should not be because of the powers granted to them for ministry, but simply because of their inclusion in the Kingdom and its work! A similar theme occurs in Jn.4:36, and Paul picks up the same idea in Phil.1:18 and Col.1:24-25, where he identifies the price paid for Kingdom service as contributing to the Lord's own efforts, a statement similar to Peter's noted above.

The faithfulness of fellow disciples (Col.2:8, I Thes.3:4), even when it involves personal cost (Phil.2:17-18), is a cause for
celebration. A generally celebratory, joyful demeanor comes with the territory of becoming truly united in one Body (I Cor.12:26), in concern for one another. Concern for the welfare of the faithful is probably also the motive behind Jesus' saying that he was “glad” he was not there when Lazarus died (Jn.11:15), so that his followers could be fully convinced of his power / identity. Paul's statement regarding his own weakness in II Cor.13:9 is similar.

“As for the rest, my brothers – be constantly rejoicing in the Lord!” (Phil.3:1)  
“Keep on rejoicing in the Lord! Again, I'll say, keep on rejoicing!” (Phil.4:4)  
“Always keep rejoicing!” (I Thes.5:6)  
“Continue to love him, whom you have not seen, being faithful toward him … and celebrating with indescribable and glorious joy!” (I Pet.1:8)

Word Study #94 – Persecution, Tribulation

In both of the previous two studies, the concept of “giving thanks” and/or “rejoicing” occasionally referred to persecution, tribulation, suffering, or, as some want to call it, “sacrifice”, on behalf of Jesus and his Kingdom. None of these four words appear frequently in the New Testament, but their prevalence in “accepted Christian teaching” requires an examination of what really is said in Scripture regarding these subjects. Contrary to popular assumptions, not one of them is ever presented as having been instigated, caused, or commanded by God, in the New Testament.

Since they represent somewhat different concepts, we will deal with these words in two separate posts. “Persecution” and “tribulation” are used together four times (Mt.13:21, Mk.4:17, Rom.8:35, II Thes.1:4), almost as synonyms, and often assumed to be a normal consequence of faithful living. Persecution and tribulation are not a matter of choice. Both are externally imposed. The only choice is how one will respond.

Jesus described persecution / tribulation as one reason for the falling away of many who had initially been enthusiastic about the Kingdom (Mt.13:21, Mk.4:17), and Paul reminded the converts in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch that the violent opposition they were experiencing was “only normal” (Ac.14:22).

Classically, dioko had more frequently referred to a chase, as in a war or a hunt, or the eager pursuit of an object, person, or goal. This latter is seen also in Rom.14:19, I Cor.14:1, Phil.3:12,14; 1 Thes.5:15, II Tim.2:22, Heb.12:14, I Pet.3:11. It is also used of haste, of the wind driving a ship (Homer), or avid pursuit of an argument (Plato), as well as “to drive away” (Herodotus). Not until the New Testament did the idea of pursuit or legal prosecution acquire the flavor of being abused, driven away, or attacked because of one's faith commitment, but after that, it appears to be the dominant idea.

Jesus gave careful instructions regarding the response of his disciples to persecution: from “rejoicing” in the confidence of the confirmation of their Kingdom citizenship (Mt.5:10-12, echoed by Paul in Rom.12:14 and I Cor.4:12), to prayer and kindness toward the perpetrators (Mt.5:44), and prudent advice that when it gets too hot in one town (Mt.10:23), it's time to move! He matter-of-factly warned that persecution would come (Lk.21:12, Mt.23:34), explaining that disciples could expect the same treatment that he himself was encountering (Jn.15:20).

Paul, interestingly, speaks more of his own past record of “persecuting the church” (Ac.22:4,26:11; I Cor.15:9, Gal.1:13,23; Phil.3:6) than he does of the persecution he personally endured (Gal.5:11, 6:12; II Cor.12:10, II Tim.3:11). And please remember: this “persecution” was not merely social exclusion, financial hardship, or being “talked-about”. Beatings and stonings, prison and death were harsh realities, and not uncommon. We should not neglect II Tim.3:12, which has often been mis-used, leading some to try to provoke opposition, under the banner of “Everyone that wants to live in a godly manner in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Such people need to be reminded of Peter's warnings regarding “suffering”, which will be treated in the next post (I Pet.2:19-23, 3:14-18, and 4:15).

Thlipsis, classically “pressure, oppression, affliction” (L/S), “distress brought on by outside circumstances” (Bauer), seems to focus more on the affected person, than on the particular circumstances of the persecution. Only five times does it clearly refer to anything but the price of faithfulness: Jesus used it (Jn.16:21) of a woman's labor in childbirth, James referred to the desperate condition of widows and orphans (1:27), Paul, of final retribution for the unfaithful (Rom.2:9, II Thes.1:6) and the Corinthians' complaint (II Cor.8:13) of being “burdened” by the expectation of a relief contribution. Elsewhere, 39 times, the reference is to being hassled – sometimes more, sometimes less severely – as a direct result of faithfulness to
Jesus' Kingdom. The one probable exception is the description of political turmoil in Mt.24 and Mk.13 (similar account in Lk.21). A careful reading of these passages reveals that here it is the earlier classical understanding of *thlipsis* that is intended, as whole nations and kingdoms are disrupted (Mt.24:6-8 and Mk.13:7-8), providing a context for more specific attacks upon the faithful, and a fertile field for perpetrators of deception. (Remember, when you hear predictions by self-styled “world-enders” in times of political unrest, that Jesus himself warned against that very thing in Mt.24:23-27 and Mk.13:21-23).

Please note also that *in no case* does *thlipsis*, translated 17x “affliction” and 21x “tribulation”, refer to a single, historical or future event, but consistently to the *conditions* under which the faithful need to enter the Kingdom (Ac.14:22), to receive the Word (I Thes.1:6), to support one another (Phil.4:14) with joyful generosity (II Cor.8:2), to endure patiently (Rom.12:12), and to encourage one another's faithfulness (II Thes.1:4).

Jesus put it very realistically (Jn.16:33): “In the world, you have (present tense, not future) hassles (KJV – tribulations). But take courage! I have conquered (perfect tense!) the world!” Notice that this statement occurs even before either his death or his resurrection!

This is why Paul could write (Rom.5:2,3) “We revel in the hope [confidence] of the glory of God! Not only this, but we even appreciate our hassles [tribulations], knowing that hassles produce endurance ...”

Read, and soak up, his confident description in II Cor.1:4-7, of both the comfort and the responsibility conferred by the Lord's presence in the midst of those hassles. Later in the same letter (4:17), amid stress that would probably have crushed most of us, he can declare, “Our temporary, insignificant hassles are producing for us a fantastically overwhelming, eternal amount of glory!” and in 7:4, “I’m overflowing with joy, in spite of all our hassles!”

Please note here: in no case does Paul attribute the “hassles / tribulations / afflictions” to “God's will” (see W.S.#12), or to God's causative action!

The Lord knows (Rev.2:9) and limits (v.10) them, and “coaches” us through them (II Cor.1:4), refusing to allow them to separate us from his love and care (Rom.8:35). **He does not deliberately hassle his own!**

Thanks be to God!

**Word Study #95 – Suffering, Sacrifice**

For the purpose of this study, a supplement to #94, although the Elizabethan English word “suffer” was also used as a synonym for “allow” (*aphiemi, didomi, eao, epitrepo*) and “endure” (*anechomai*), these will not be considered here. We will confine ourselves to the references where “suffer” is used to translate *pascho, pathema*. These words probably include the broadest range, scripturally, of any of the four words mentioned in the previous post: but even so, the New Testament writers do not apply it to mere annoyance or inconvenience, as so many folks are prone to do today.

Classically, the word includes the plight of a victim of any kind of oppression, the experience of any misfortune, the payment of a legal penalty, any abuse or ill-treatment, but also of well-being, or the receiving of benefits! (L/S). Thayer indicates that it can be used of any sensate experience, but usually one of evil, illness, or bad fortune. Medically (L/S), it was used of symptoms or troubles.

Similar diversity is also seen in the New Testament. *Pascho* is used in the complaint of Pilate's wife about her dream (Mt.27:19), the plight of the woman who could not be helped by doctors (Mk.5:26), the group of Jews abused by Pilate (Lk.13:2), the mutual dependence of the human body (I Cor.12:26), and the punishment deserved by a person convicted of a crime (I Pet.4:15).

However, the majority of the 39 New Testament appearances of the verb form and 14 of the noun refer specifically to the sufferings of either Jesus (24x), or his people (25x) as a direct result of their faithfulness. Jesus spoke repeatedly of his anticipated suffering of rejection by the elders and priests of the Jewish hierarchy (Mt.16:21, 17:12; Mk.8:31, 9:12; Lk.9:22, 17:25), as well as the specific event of his death (Lk.22:15, 24:26). Notice that Jesus himself, in contrast to popular emphases, spoke more frequently of “suffering” in connection with his being rejected by those who should have welcomed him, than he did of his actual death. It is important to note that fully half of these, in both categories, end with the declaration of the equal certainty of his resurrection.

Repeatedly, that is the key: for the Lord Jesus himself, and for his people, whatever their circumstances. His resurrection, and by extension, theirs/ours, is the power that enables endurance. Paul clearly understood this (Rom.8:18), as did Peter (I Pet.4:13).

In fact, if you will check all of Paul's uses of *pascho and pathema* – I Cor.12:26, II Cor.1:5-7, Gal.34, Phil.1:29, 3:10; Col.1:24, I Thes.2:14, II Thes.1:12, II Tim.1:12, 3:11 – you will see that they all refer either to his own (Paul's) mistreatment, or that of his readers. Only in Phil.3:10 does he connect it to the sufferings of Jesus. Neither Jesus nor Paul, on any occasion, makes any connection of these words with “forgiveness” (W.S. #7) as has been widely taught as
“doctrine”. Look it up, folks. It's not there, and neither is any hint that “suffering” was ever “sent” or “caused” by God! (see “trials”, W.S.#11)

In Ac.9:16, Ananias is told by Jesus that Paul will need to suffer many things “on behalf of my name”, which Paul then passes on in Phil.1:29 “for his sake”; and in II Thes.1:5, he refers that beleaguered group's suffering “on behalf of the Kingdom of God”. In each case, the preposition is huper; “on behalf of.” As we saw in W.S. #94 regarding persecution and tribulation, suffering also is viewed simply as one of the consequences to be expected, as a part of identification with Jesus and his Kingdom. (See also W.S.#34, the cross.)

The writer to the Hebrews, in illustrating the shortcomings of the old, obsolete system, is the only one to propose a reason for the suffering of the Lord Jesus: Heb.2:9-10 – so that his death and subsequent glory would destroy (14-15) the power of death over his people, and to make him mature (teleios) for that assignment; Heb.5:8 – it was the way he “learned obedience” (for the same purpose); and Heb.9:26 – to definitively abolish (the word is athetesis, used of the nullification of a contract or treaty) the “failures” [“sins’] of his people. This latter passage is the only place in the entire New Testament where that connection is made. So how did it become the only thing so many people include in their distorted version of “gospel teaching”? Because a good guilt-trip makes it so easy to manipulate people?

Later, the same writer describes the early sufferings of his readers (10:32, 34) – the latter containing the same word with the “together” prefix – as encouragement for their continued faithfulness. “Don't give up now!” See vv.32-38.

Peter's first letter, written to refugees scattered across Asia Minor by severe violence against the brotherhood, is almost entirely devoted to encouraging their faithfulness under duress. Again, resurrection hope predominates. Whether Jesus' sufferings (1:11, 4:1, 4:13, 5:1) or theirs (2:19-23, 3:14-18, 4:13-19, 5:9-10), it is faithful behavior in spite of suffering which promises participation in the Kingdom — both present and future. Twice (3:17-18 and 4:13-19) he reminds them “just make sure that your suffering is not deserved” for some less noble reason! Please see W.S. #12 for a discussion of the references to “God's will.”

“Sacrifice”(thuo, thusia), on the other hand, as it is used in the New Testament, is always performed at a person's own initiative. Classically, the only use of either word was the slaughter of animals for food, or burnt as offerings to the gods, or referring to the festivities surrounding those ceremonies. Bauer adds that later, the Rom.12:1 reference was interpreted as an advocacy of martyrdom, but there is no evidence that such was the original intent.

Sixteen times in the New Testament, the word refers to pagan sacrifices to idols. Paul deals with the dilemma this causes in I Cor.8. Nineteen times, the reference is to the sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament Law — most of them emphasizing its futility (Heb.5:1, 7:27, 8:3, 9:9, 10:1, 5, 8,11) – or to Jesus' statements that sacrifice is not what God wanted (Mt.9:13, 12:7, Mk.12:33, Ac.7:42). In Lk.15:23,27, 30; Jn.10:10, 10:13, thuo is used simply as slaughtering an animal for food. In Mt.22:4, Mk.14:12, Lk.22:7, the reference is to the killing of the passover lamb, which only once is connected to Jesus (I Cor.5:7). Remember, in that context, that the Passover was a celebration of deliverance from slavery, and had nothing to do with “sin.” That connection is only made in Heb.9:26 and 10:12 where the focus is on the impotence and futility of the old sacrificial system. Interestingly, Jesus never used the word of himself or of anything he did, although Paul does once (Eph.5:2).

“Sacrifice” on the part of God's people is used in a positive sense in the New Testament only five times, but these are significant. Remember, of all these concepts, sacrifice is the only voluntary one. All imply deliberate action. In Rom.12:1, Paul urges, “present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God”, not killing, but living in worship and obedience to him. In Phil.2:17, Paul speaks of the “sacrifice” of their worship, and doesn't mind at all if it costs his own life. In Phil 4:18, he refers to the gift of support that the Philippian church had sent to him in prison as “an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God”. Heb.13:15-16 advocates a “sacrifice of praise” in worship and thanksgiving, with the assurance that this, like “doing good and sharing”, is pleasing to God.

In the Biblical concept of “sacrifice”, there is no hint of the popular notion of “giving up” some pet vice or pleasure in order to curry favor before God. The “sacrifice” pleasing to God is simply the willing offering of oneself — to be used as he sees fit — for his Kingdom and for his world — “a living offering, set-apart, pleasing to God. This is your logical [reasonable] worship!” (Rom.12:1)

Let's be reasonable, folks!
Word Study #96 – The Mind

When I saw “What does the New Testament say about the mind?” on the search list, my first thought was “Not much!” Bad response! “Mind” has been used to represent seven different Greek words in the New Testament. None of them are particularly common. Their classical usage is similar, but not synonymous. Sorting them is challenging.

Three of these words can be rather quickly laid aside, because of their rarity.

Phronema, “thought, purpose, aspiration,” or, in a negative sense, “presumption, arrogance” (L/S), appears only in Rom.8:7 and 8:27, referring, in both cases, to the focus of attention, whether on the human nature or on the Spirit. Ennoia, “thinking, reflection, cogitation”, or “a notion, concept, or idea” (L/S), a common word in the Greek philosophers, likewise appears only twice: I Pet.4:1 and Heb.4:12, both of which tend toward the sense of a deliberately determined attitude by which one's life is consciously ordered.

Psuche, more commonly translated “life” or “soul”, is rendered three times “mind”: Ac.14:2, Phil.1:27, Heb.12:3. For a more thorough treatment of this word, please refer to W.S.#28.

This leaves us with four words, which may be a little easier to distinguish, since they appear in more contexts.

Noema, “perception, thought, purpose, idea, concept, understanding, mind” (L/S), used six times, occurs only in Paul's writings. In II Cor.3:14, 4:4, and 11:3, the reference is to the blinding of the “understanding” of those who have refused the guidance of the Holy Spirit; II Cor.2:11 is more specific about where that blockage comes from (the traditional translation there is “devices.”) The only positive references are Phil.4:7, promising the protection of their/our minds by the peace of God, and II Cor.10:5, a reminder of the faithful disciple's responsibility (a present active participle), to “subjugate every mind [thought] into the obedience of Christ (like his)”.

In both positive and negative contexts, noema seems to be quite definitely subject to an individual's conscious decision.

Gnome, “intelligence, means of knowing, thought, judgment, opinion, verdict, intention, consent” (L/S), occurs eight times. This is the word used when Paul states that he has no “word from the Lord” on a matter, but offers his opinion (I Cor.7:25, 7:40; II Cor.8:10), or defers a decision about Onesimus' future to Philemon's approval (Phm.4). In Rev.17:13 and 17, the ungodly have also made a deliberate decision to join the enemies of God. Paul's decision regarding his itinerary (Ac.20:3), and his admonition (I Cor.1:10) to the Corinthian brotherhood to settle their differences, also represent thoughtful determination.

Dianoia, “thought, intention, purpose; notion, idea, intelligence, understanding, intellectual capacity” (L/S), is used thirteen times: once (traditionally translated “imagination”) (Lk.1:51), three times “understanding” (Eph.1:18; 4:18; I Jn.5:20), and nine times “mind”. The associated words in the parallel passages quoting the admonition to “love God” are interesting. In traditional translations, Mt.22:37 includes only “heart” (kardia), “soul” (psuche), and “mind” (dianoia). Mk.12:30 says “heart, soul, mind, and strength (ischus),” and Lk.10:27 uses “heart, soul, strength and mind”. For treatment of psuche see W.S.#28, and for ischus see W.S.#31. The passage they all are quoting, Dt.6:5; in the LXX uses only dianoia, psuche, and dynamis, completely omitting any word for “heart”. The traditional OT translation says “heart, soul, and might”. The OT text includes one of the Hebrew words for “heart”, and makes no mention of “mind”! This would be an interesting topic for textual scholars to investigate. However, the presence of dianoia in all three synoptics, probably as a LXX quote, would certainly indicate that (1) the mind is definitely expected to be fully involved in one's love of God, and (2) it is an entity completely separate from any of the others mentioned.

Paul's reference to one's dianoia in Eph.2:3, 4:18, and Col.1:21, as well as the Lk.1:51 passage, make it abundantly clear that the unredeemed “mind” can be disposed to lead one into opposition to the Kingdom; but the prophecies quoted in Heb.8:10 and 10:16, as well as Peter (I Pet.1:13, II Pet.3:1), Paul (Eph.1:18), and John (I Jn.5:20), are equally emphatic that the mind/understanding can and must be enlightened, transformed, and reminded to be consciously and deliberately pointed in the right direction.

Nous, the most common of the words, appearing 24 times – 17 as “mind” and 7 as “understanding”--shows even more vividly that while the mind certainly controls a person's attitudes, thoughts, and behavior, it is also itself controlled by his deliberate decision. L/S lists “the mind, in the sense of being employed in thinking, perception, feeling, or deciding; to have one's mind directed toward something; resolve or purpose; reason or intellect;” or even (Anaxagoras) “the active principle of the universe”! Like dianoia, nous can be either a positive or negative force, as Paul laments in Rom.7:23-35. This is the only word used of “the mind of the Lord” (Rom.11:34, I Cor.2:16) or “the mind of Christ” (also I Cor.2:16), except for a single occurrence of phronema in Rom.8:27.

Paul warns of the danger of “corrupt minds” (I Tim.6:5, II Tim.3:8), or their being “defiled” (Tit.1:15), “reprobate”
(Rom.1:28), characterized by “vanity” (Eph.4:17), “shaken” (II Thes.2:2), or having inflated ideas of one's own importance (Col.2:18); but he also holds out the option of choosing to have one's life “transformed (see next post) by the renewing of your mind” (Rom.12:2), and to be “renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Eph.4:23), until “we have the mind of Christ” (I Cor.2:16)! He urges the Corinthian church, threatened by factions, to be “joined together in the same mind” (I Cor.1:10). After his resurrection, Jesus graciously “opened the minds [understanding]” of his mourning disciples, “to understand the Scriptures”, and to realize that he was really alive and in their midst (Lk.24:45). Only then did things begin to make sense to them. It requires “a mind that has wisdom” (Rev.17:9) or a person “that has understanding” (Rev.13:18) to discern the Lord's hand – and that does not start only at the end of history!

But there are times when even a wise and devoted mind is not enough. Paul goes to great length to explain (I Cor.14:14-19) that while worship, the singing of praises, and prayer may at times need to go beyond the reach of one's mind/understanding, that does not obviate the need for the mind's involvement. Expressions both with and beyond the understanding are intended to be supplementary, and not mutually exclusive.

Close attention to many of these references reveals, however, that faithfulness is not a “mind trip”! The mind/understanding, while necessary and helpful, is not an end in itself. Probably the best summary may be found in Rom.12:2: “Be (continuously) completely changed, by the renewal of your mind (nous), so that you all will recognize what God's will is” – whereupon Paul spends the next couple chapters describing the practical outcome of that transformation.

When, using a third person imperative of phroneo, Paul writes to the Philippians that they must adopt and internalize the “mind” of the Lord Jesus (Phil.2:5), it is in the midst of admonitions to faithful living.

Committing worries and concerns to the Lord, (Phil.4:7), he concludes, “God's peace, which greatly exceeds all understanding (nous), will protect your hearts and minds (noema) in Christ Jesus!”

May this confidence spur our hearts and minds to determined faithfulness!

Word Study #97 – Transfigured, Transformed, Changed

This study is the result of a conversation after church (Thanks, John!), when a brother remarked about people tossing around words like “transfiguration” without ever stopping to wonder what they actually mean. A quick check revealed that the word used by both Matthew and Mark is metamorphoo, whose noun form, transliterated, is recognized by every grade-school science student as “metamorphosis” – what happens when the caterpillar they have carefully fed with leaves, and watched as it spun its cocoon, emerges to their wonder and delight as a beautiful butterfly. It's still the same critter – but it has been transformed into its intended, mature destiny.

Back at home with my reference books, I was startled to discover that metamorphoo (L/S “to transform, to change”) is used only four times in the entire New Testament: these two references to Jesus on the mountain (Mt.17:2, Mk.9:2), Romans 12:2 speaking of the faithful person's mind (W.S.#96) being transformed to become capable of understanding and following the Lord's instructions, and II Cor.3:18, of the process of their/our maturing to reflect the Lord's own radiance – to be transformed into his very image – God's original intent (Gen.1:26) at Creation!

How very beautifully that all fits together! Especially in the light added by Luke. Only he, who does not use metamorphoo at all, says anything about the topic of Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah: his “departure” (exodos) – yes, the same word as “Exodus”-- that was about to be “completed” (pleroun, from pleroo, to complete or to fulfill). This has been traditionally interpreted as a reference to Jesus' death: but L/S lists no classical references to death for exodos. Only “going out, or the marching forth of a procession or a military expedition” are mentioned. The word occurs only here, in Heb.11:22 (of the historical exodus), and II Pet.1:15, of which the traditional interpretation is also open to question, due to Peter's subsequent reference to the same event (vv.16-18) as a revelation of Jesus' glory. I take this to be another of many signposts in the direction of seeing Jesus as focused upon his ultimate defeat not only of death, but of all the forces of evil, which is/was his own mature destiny, rather than the traditional notions of “sacrifice” (W.S. #95). He was “departing” for the ultimate “expedition” – and conquered gloriously!

Of course, once you start tracking a word, one thing invariably leads to another. The English word “transform” also represents another Greek word, metaschematizo, used only five times, which, besides describing a change in a person or thing (L/S), as in Phil.3:21 - “He (Jesus) will transform our body to be like his”, also refers both to disguise and deception (I Cor.11:13,14,15), and (I Cor.4:6) to a simple analogous illustration. “Change”, also, can be for the better or worse. This adds five more Greek words to be considered, most of which seem to
And we all, with faces that have been uncovered, reflecting the Lord's own radiance, are being transformed or some other means, is the beginning of the transformation of all who choose to follow him. Not change. His true identity was supernaturally revealed to them (II Pet.1:16-18). He asserts that they were privileged to be "eyewitnesses of his magnificence [glory]." Jesus did not change. They were transformed, but literally changed their minds about Paul after he was unharmed by the snakebite. 

The changes/transformations advocated in the New Testament go far beyond merely abstractly "changing one's mind" or opinion. This is explored in more detail in W.S.#6, dealing with the call to metanoia (noeo is the verb form of nous #96). Lexically, metanoia, metanoeo, is also a change of mind – but it is one that involves, like most of the "mind" references in the previous post, the entire re-orientation of one's life. 

One key to that transformation lies in another phrase that appears in several of the references – Rom.12:2, Eph.4:23, Col.3:10: "the renewal of your/our minds" or "understanding." In Titus 3:5, "renewal" is paired with "regeneration." Both the Ephesians and Colossians passages call for the "putting off" of one's former life, in favor of the new – and very different – life in Christ. The mixed tenses of the imperatives and participles imply both decisive, punctiliar action (aorist), and continuous (present) effort. "Renewal" represents four Greek words, three of which, anakainoo (II Cor.4:16, Col.3:10), anakainosis (Rom.12:2, Tit.3:5), and anakainizo (Heb.6:6), are related, and one, ananeomai (Eph.4:23) is used only once. L/S records no other meanings for any of these. They are quite parallel to the ideas in II Cor.5:17 referring to a "new creation" and Eph.2:15 and 4:24 to a "new man [person]."

You may have noticed that all of these references refer to a major alteration in the nature, life, and behavior of individuals or groups – all, that is, except the two instances that initiated this investigation: the use of metamorphoo in the three disciples' experience with Jesus. Did Jesus himself somehow "change" there on the mountain? He needed no "transformation" to become what God intended, although Heb.2:10, 5:9,7:28 do speak of his "maturing" (W.S.#13). I think the key to the discrepancy here may be in Jesus' charge to his awe-struck companions (Mt.17:9), "Don't tell anyone the vision (horama)" until after the resurrection. Horama is used 11 times in the New Testament, all but this one in Acts (9:10, 9:12, 10:3, 10:17, 11:5, 12:9, 16:9, 16:10, 18:9) – and all are referring to a supernatural experience imparting information or instructions not available in any other way. I think Peter must have understood it this way, from his comment in II Pet.1:16-18. He asserts that they were privileged to be "eyewitnesses of his magnificence [glory]". Jesus did not change. His true identity was supernaturally revealed to them (emprothen auton). And this revelation, whether by vision or some other means, is the beginning of the transformation of all who choose to follow him.

"And we all, with faces that have been uncovered, reflecting the Lord's own radiance, are being transformed [metamorphosed!] into his image, from glory to glory, according to the pattern of the Lord's spirit." (II Cor.3:18) Every verb form is in the present tense. It is continuously happening, from the beginning of one's "turning to the Lord" (v.16). May we continually delight in – and cooperate with! – that metamorphosis! Thanks be to God!

Word Study #98 – Gain, Profit, Reward

One place where the result of a "transformed" life (W.S.#97) becomes vividly evident is in one's attitude toward these concepts. It is common that they are treated as if they were nearly synonymous, but that is seldom the case, although translators have often confused the different words in their texts. "Where you start" exerts a great deal of influence upon "where you come out": there is a huge difference between the conclusions drawn by the advocates of "pie in the sky bye and bye", those who prefer their "pie" now rather than later, and a few of us who aren't convinced that "pie" has anything to do with the gospel message at all!
The traditional translation “gain”, for example, represents eight different Greek words, four of which are used only once or twice. Porismos (I Tim.6:5,6), prosergazomai (Lk.9:16), and diapragmateuomai (Lk.19:15), are all classically used of simply earning a living. The idea of earning appears also to be why poieo was rendered “gain” once (Lk.19:18), even though that word is normally taken to mean “to make” (102x), or “to do” (353x). The Luke references are all in Jesus’ parable of the “pounds” or “talents”.

Ergasia, used six times, similarly refers to “one's business or trade, productive labor, or a company of workmen” (L/S) – this last seen in Ac.19:24-25 – although it carries a different sense in Lk.12:58, which is Jesus' advice to work at settling a dispute out of court, and Eph.4:19, which seems to fit better with the appearances of pleonekteo (used five times), dealing with greed, fraud, or unfair advantage (II Cor.2:11, 7:2, 12:17,18; I Thes.4:6).

The more common kerdos (n.), and kerdaino (v.), combining the idea of financial profit or advantage (Mt.6:26, 25:17,20,22; Mk.8:36, Lk.9:25, Jas.4:13) with the concept of other sorts of advantage (Phil.1:21, 3:7,8; Mt.18:15, I Cor.9:19-22, I Pet.3:1) focusing on either conversions to the Kingdom or progress in Kingdom living, is also used, sometimes with the prefix aischro- (“shameful”), to warn against any mercenary motivation for one's “Christian service”. Paul is quite blunt in his assessment of such a motivation, in his own example of self-support (II Cor. 7:2, 12:17,18 and Ac.20:34,35), where he simply describes his activity in Ephesus, and his disparaging of those who choose not to follow that example (I Tim.3:3,8; 6:5, Tit.1:7,11). Peter (I Pet.5:2) registers a similar opinion.

“Profit,” on the other hand, also representing eight different words, uses totally different vocabulary, and none of those words make primary reference to financial concerns, with the possible exception of the use of opheleo in Mt.15:5 and Mk.7:11, regarding the support of one's parents. The classical use of opheleo and its noun form opheleia, includes primarily “to help, advantage, to render service or benefit or to receive such service”, although it also referred to spoils of war (L/S). The adjective form, ophelimos, adds “useful, serviceable, profitable”, and is applied to physical exercise (I Tim.4:8), godliness (same reference), the Scripture (II Tim.3:16), and good deeds (Tit.3:8).

“To be useful” would probably fit most of its contexts (Mt.16:26, Jn.6:63, Rom.2:25, 3:1; I Cor.13:3, 14:6; Gal.5:2, Heb.4:2,13:9), and even the frustration of both the Jewish Council (Jn.12:19) and Pilate (Mt.27:24) at the failure of their schemes. Less frequently used, chresimos (II Tim.2:14), euchrestos II Tim. 2:21,4:11; Phm.11), and ophelos (Lk.9:25, Jas.2:14-16) likewise refer to “usefulness, helpfulness, or assistance.”

Prokopto, speaking of moral or intellectual progress, or physical growth, may be used in a positive (Lk.2:52, Gal.1:14) or negative (II Tim.2:16, 3:9, 3:13) direction, as well as simply of the passing of a day (Rom.13:12.). Sumphero, more frequently “bringing together” in classical usage, in the New Testament displays primarily its secondary meanings, “to confer a benefit, to be useful, expedient, or fitting”, being rendered 7x as “expedient” (Jn.11:50, 16:7, 18:14; I Cor.6:12, 10:33, 12:1, 12:7), and 6x as “profit” or “profitable” (Mt.5:29,30; Ac.20:20, I Cor.7:35, 10:33; Heb.12:10).

Of course, the “biggie” for the “pie-in-the-sky” folks, is the concept of “reward”, representing two different words: apodidomi, which refers to any kind of payment or exchange – even a bribe! – and misthos, where “reward” is the primary choice of traditional translators, in spite of the fact that the classical usage (L/S) emphasizes “hired service, wages, pay, or allowance for public service, or a physician's fee” more highly than “recompense or reward.” Both of these terms primarily spill over into the next post: however, a few observations are relevant here.

1. Material wealth is never mentioned as a “reward”, either here or hereafter. In fact, the nature of a “reward” is not specified at all, in most cases, although public adulation is called a “reward” – in a less than admirable sense – in Mt.6:1-5.

2. Some of the conditions leading to a “reward” are:

Mt.5:12, Lk.6:23 – endurance of persecution for faithfulness to Jesus
Mt.5:46, Lk.6:35 – loving enemies, doing good to those who hate you
Mt.6:1-5 – praying, giving alms, privately rather than ostentatiously
Mk.9:41 – offering a cup of water in Jesus' name
I Cor.3:8, 14 – faithfully building on Jesus' foundation
I Cor.9:17,18 – preaching the gospel without compensation
II Jn.8 – maintaining faithfulness

3. “Reward” is also used of the consequences of unfaithfulness: (Ac.1:18, II Pet.2:13, Jude 11, Rev.11:18).

Very interestingly, the only mention of specifically monetary “reward” is the Ac.1:18 reference to the money that Judas
received for his betrayal of Jesus! Is that the company you want to keep?

Just perhaps some of us would “profit” from an bit of an attitude adjustment!

Word Study #99 – Labor, Payment, Recompense, Wages

In the former post (#98), we discovered that the New Testament usage of such terms as “gain”, “profit”, and “reward”, includes very few parallels to today’s common economic interpretations of those words. So are we to assume that we are offered no guidance for life in the “real world”, and therefore must adopt the financial value system of the culture in which we find ourselves? Only after subjecting them to careful scrutiny through the lens provided by the transformation (#97) of life toward the “image” (#15) of the Lord Jesus.

“Labor”, for example, representing kópos (n.) and kópio (v.), may apply simply to “hard work, exertion” or “toil and trouble”, referring both to one’s secular employment (Mt.6:28, Lk.5:5, I Cor.3:8, 14; 4:12; II Tim.2:6) and to efforts on behalf of the Kingdom (Jn.4:38, I Cor.15:10,58; II Cor.6:5, 10:15, 11:23; I Thes.1:3, 3:5; Heb.6:10, Rv.2:2). See also “work” (W.S.#39), for references using ergazomai and ergates.

Note that Paul frequently takes great pains to point out that he has been careful to support his Kingdom work by his own manual labor (Ac.18:3, 20:34, I Cor.4:12, I Thes.2:9, 3:5), although he also commends those who have shared in contributing to his needs – the letter to Philippi is basically a “thank-you-note”.

Another recurring theme is Paul’s assessment of the Christian motivation for work: in order to share with those in need (Ac.20:35, II Cor.9:11, Eph.4:28), as well as to provide for one’s own necessities and to lead exemplary lives in society (I Thes.4:11). Nevertheless, he accompanies these instructions with a significant caveat: (I Tim.6:8) “Let’s be content with having food and clothing”, and goes on to warn of the dangers of excessive desires.

“Payment” and “wages”, interestingly, are both traditional translations of the same two words. Apódidomi, variously rendered “pay” (10x), “give” (10x), “reward” (6x), “sell” (3x), “deliver” (2x), “yield” (2x), and “repay, restore, perform, and recompense” (1x each), is listed classically as “to pay a debt, to render what is due, the yield of a crop, to give an account, to sell something for its worth, or to give or take a bribe”? It is used in both parables and examples of indebtedness (Mt.18:25,34; Lk.7:42, Mt.5:26, Lk.12:59), as well as being often translated “reward” (see W.S.#98).

Místhos, on the other hand, primarily carries the idea of “wages paid to a hired worker” in classical usage. Traditional translators rendered it this way in Jn.4:36, Mt.20:8, Lk.10:7, and Jas.5:4 – this last in criticism of employers who neglect or refuse promptly to pay a just wage – although they usually have chosen (often questionably) to render it “reward.” They have used the more accurate concept of “hiring” for the verb form in Mt.20:1,7, rendered the participle as “hired servants” in Lk.15:17,19 and Mk.1:20, and correctly applied it to Paul’s “rented house” in Ac.28:30. If apódidomí intends “the payment of a debt”, and místhos intends “a deserved payment for work”, we may need to re-think the idea of “reward”, as noted at the end of #98. This is another of many concepts that need to be re-examined and clarified in the context of a faithfully studying brotherhood.

Another word, opsonion, further complicates the situation. Classically, “a salary paid in money, the pay of a policeman or soldier, an allowance paid to a victorious athlete, a student, or a family member; the wages of labor”, it occurs only four times in the New Testament. Two of these are straightforward: the instruction of John the Baptist to soldiers, “Be content with your pay” (Lk.3:14), and Paul’s question, “Does a soldier serve at his own expense?” (I Cor.9:7). The other two are more problematic. Despite his having repeatedly harped on the theme of his own self-support, (see kópio above), and been effusive in his thanks to various churches for their generosity in contributing to his needs, Paul, in his argument in II Cor.11:8, writes, “I robbed other churches, taking wages (opsonion) for ministering to you all!” He is referring to the contribution received from Macedonia (Philippi) (11:9), which he acknowledged in his letter to them (Phil.4:14-19) as a gracious gift!

Similar ambiguity is seen in the statements, also in II Cor.11, as well as 2:17 and 12:13-15, and warnings about greed on the part of elders and teachers (I Tim.3:3,8; Tit.1:7,11) juxtaposed with admonitions (Gal..6:6, I Cor.9:1-15) to share in their support. This may suggest that both avenues of support are acceptable – neither exclusively – or perhaps allow latitude for different approaches in different situations. It should be clear, however, that Kingdom work is never represented as a career or business!

The fourth appearance of opsonion? Romans 6:23. If you can figure that one out, in the context of the other uses of the word, please add your insight with the “comment” button! I'm sure Paul intents to contrast “wages” with “gift” – but that's
as far as I can go!

Finally, there remains the use of “recompense” – six different words, none of them frequent. Four of them use prefixes altering the understanding of *didomi* (“to give”): *antapodoma* (Lk.14:12 and Rom.11:9), *antapodosis* (Col.3:24), *apodidomi* (Rom.12:17), *antapodidomi* (Lk.14:14, Rom.11:35, 12:19; II Thes.1:6, Heb.10:30). One is a prefixed form of *misthos* – *antimistha* (Rom.1:27, II Cor.6:13), and one, *misthapodosia*, combines the two words (Heb.2:2, 10:35, 11:26). All refer simply to “repayment of what is owed or earned” (L/S), along a spectrum ranging from a simple social obligation (Lk.14:12), through reciprocal relationship (II Cor.6:13), all the way to divine vengeance (Rom.12:19, II Thes.1:6, Heb.10:30). Although the use of *misthapodosia* in Hebrews – the only New Testament appearance of the word, was traditionally rendered “recompense of reward”, there is only that one single word in the text. Recurring as a refrain throughout, is the expectation of eventual justice, whether positive or negative from the perspective of the recipient.

So yes, the Kingdom does have an “economic policy”. It does speak to the ordinary concerns of daily needs, including responsible labor, just compensation, generosity of sharing, and avoidance of greed.

We will conclude this section with an examination of the people involved in the work of this Kingdom.

**Word Study #100 – Servants, Workers, Citizens, Children, Sons**

This is a challenging study to organize, primarily because traditional translators have been extremely inconsistent in their treatment of the text’s original vocabulary. Not only does each of these English terms represent multiple Greek words, but several of the Greek words have been artificially divided into multiple English concepts. I have chosen to confine this study primarily to those references in which the words are applied specifically to faithful followers of the Lord Jesus.

Of the nine Greek words traditionally translated “servant”, four, *therapen*, *oiketes*, *misthios*, and *misthatos* are never connected with serving God at all, but refer only to workers, either employed or enslaved, in household or agricultural service.

*Diakonos*, people who simply do whatever needs to be done, has been treated in W.S.#40, and often, though not exclusively, applies to Kingdom service. Please refer to that earlier study.

*Pais* may refer either to a servant or a minor child, and there is no way to be certain which is intended. We will consider that among the other words relating to children.

*Huperetes* denotes more of an official position, rather like a deputy, officer, or assistant. It is used of the men in the high priest's courtyard with Peter (Mt.26:58, Mk.14:54, 65), of John Mark's serving as an assistant to Paul and Barnabas (Ac.13:5), an official at the synagogue (Lk.4:20), Jesus' disciples (Jn.18:36, Lk.1:2), and Paul (Ac.26:16, I Cor.4:1), as well as 11x of government officials.

*Doulos* is by far the most frequently occurring term (120x). Classically, it always referred to slavery – either one born into bondage, a prisoner of war, or even a child sold by indigent parents. Slaves were wholly-owned possessions of their masters, although some held positions of great responsibility. It was not uncommon for a faithful slave to be set free, either by his master's generosity, by earning and purchasing his freedom, or by being “redeemed” (W.S.#61) by another. Paul frequently used *doulos* to describe his own service to Jesus (Rom.1:1, Gal.1:10, Phil.1:1, Tit.1:1), as did James (1:1), Peter (II Pet.1:1), and Jude (1): service that they had freely chosen.

Insight into the “status” of slaves is available throughout the gospels – for example, in Mt.8:9, a servant does whatever he is told; Mt.10:24,25 – the relationship is likened to that of a student and a teacher; Mt.13:27,28 – the servants bring a problem to the master, and receive instructions for action; and you can find many others. I highly recommend this exercise! Start with Mt.24:45-50, Mk.13:34, Lk.15:22, and go on from there!

Paul makes an eloquent case in Rom.6:16-20 that a person is a servant/slave to whomever/whatever he chooses to obey, and urges (I Cor.7:22,23) that a definitive choice be made.

He speaks approvingly of others also as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ – Timothy, Epaphras, Tychicus – sometimes preferring the prefixed term, *sundoulos* – “fellow-servant/slave”.

It is interesting that on two occasions (Rev.19:10 and 22:9), the “messenger” – usually assumed to be a supernatural being of some sort – who delivered the revelation to John, flatly refused John’s “worship”, with the declaration, “*sundoulos sou eimi*” – (“I am your fellow-servant!”) **Among faithful servants of the King, there are no superiors** – none deserving of greater deference than all the rest – except the Sovereign himself!!! And Jesus himself reminded his followers, shortly before his departure (Jn.15:15), “I no longer call you servants, but friends!” (See W.S.#22)
Ergates – workers – and sunerges – fellow-workers – frequently parallel doulos and sundoulos. Although conventionally applied to hired workers rather than slaves, in the Kingdom context they are used synonymously. Paul prefers the prefixed term here too, applying it to Timothy, Sysygos, Urbane, Priscilla and Aquila, Philemon, Archippus, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke. As in other references to “work” (W.S.#39 and 99), notice that the “work” that occupies one's attention can be positive or negative, and requires committed discernment.

We have noted above that under Roman law, a slave did have the possibility of gaining freedom. If this was granted before a magistrate and legally registered, he could even attain coveted Roman citizenship (Ac.22:28). Citizenship conferred considerable privilege. It was also granted to select allied cities (of which Tarsus was one – Ac.21:39) and their inhabitants, and could be inherited by birth, or earned by service to the state, as well as by purchase. A Roman citizen had legal rights (Ac.16:37-38, 22:25-26, 23:27, 25:16) not available to others. But the New Testament proclaims a citizenship far beyond that offered by Rome (Please refer to W.S.# 4,19,20,21, 149, and Citizens of the Kingdom.) Politia, politeuma, and politeuo, although variously translated in traditional versions, all refer to Kingdom citizenship conferred by faithfulness to the King, the Lord Jesus Christ. The scene of transformation described in Eph.2:12-19 is graphic – from alienated foreigners to “fellow citizens with the saints [God's people]” – sumpolites – as is a similar reference in Col.1:13. As ransomed, free citizens, the faithful remain sundoulos to their King! This is explored in greater detail in Citizens of the Kingdom.

And that is not all! The faithful are designated not only citizens of the Kingdom, but members of the very family of the King (Mt.12:48-50).

Of the seven words rendered “child/children”, only three are applied to Kingdom citizens. Brephos and nepios refer to babies or very small children. Paidion is a pre-pubescent child of either gender, held up as an example of unpretentious love (Mt.18:3,4), and used as a term of affection throughout his letters by the elder apostle, John. Pais, as noted above, may refer either to a child or a young servant, although David (Lk.1:61, Ac.4:25), Israel (Lk.1:54), and Jesus himself (Lk.2:42, Ac.4:27,30; Ac.3:13,26) are all designated as pais to God, but other people are not. Elsewhere, the term does not specify whether it refers to a child or a servant, and traditional translators use them randomly. This leaves teknion, teknon, and huios. Teknion, the diminutive (affectionate) version of teknon, appears only nine times, seven of them in I John, as the elder lovingly addresses his younger brethren (2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 4:4, 5:21).

Teknon, which does not specify gender, is used classically of any offspring, human or animal. It may include both sons huioi and daughters thugaters, and need not refer to physical descent. Geographical provenance (Mt.23:37, Lk.13:34, 23:28) or philosophical or theological affinity may also be understood – “children of light” (Eph.5:8), “of wrath”(Eph.2:3), “of the devil” (1 Jn.3:10), or “of God” (Jn.1:12, 11:52; Phil.2:15, 1 Jn.3:1,2) – all of which employ teknon, despite being translated “sons” by some translators in many passages. (You can find these sorted out in Young's Concordance.)

Huios, on the other hand, specifically intends “sons”. Please refer to the essay, “The Task of a Translator” for more detail. Despite Paul's single use of teknon in Rom.8:16,17, it is usually huios that carries the weight of “inheritance” (W.S.#79,80). John uses huios only of Jesus, except where he designates the faithful as “sons of light” in 12:46. Other writers use it prolifically – Mt.5:9, 5:45, 8:12; Lk.6:35, 20:36; Rom.9:26; Gal.3:27; 1 Thes.5:5 – of “sons of the Father, the Kingdom, the Highest, the living God” (all mis-translated as “children”), as well as Rom.8:14,19,29; Gal.4:6,7; Heb.2:10,12:5-8, and Rev.21:7, where the correct word, “sons”, was used.

The declaration of the privileged status called “sons of God” does not exclude faithful females, but confers upon them equally exalted status! Gal.3:23-4:7 must be read as a unit, not cherry-picked for “verses”!

Servants – certainly! Workers – expected to be. Citizens – privileged to be! Beloved children – indeed! And “The whole creation is waiting with eager anticipation for the revealing of the sons of God!” (Rom.8:19)

May our gracious Elder Brother – and his faithful people – speed the day!

**Word Study #101 – “Follow Me!”**

Having started the publication of Word Studies a couple years ago with a consideration of the word, pistis, usually translated “faith”, and its corresponding verb form, pisteuo, usually rendered “believe”, and discovered in the process that neither of these words is accurately understood by those English equivalents (please see W.S.#1), it seems appropriate to me to begin this second series with an examination of the only invitation that Jesus is ever quoted as having issued to prospective disciples: “Follow me!” We have not a single record of his having handed anyone a list of “doctrines” to which he required them to subscribe; not a word about the desperate condition of mankind, nor about how he proposed to remedy it. Even if the traditional translation “believe” is used, on the few occasions when Jesus speaks of “believing”, the direct object is
simply “me” (himself), and not “this or that about me”. His more usual invitation is graciously beautiful in its simplicity: “Come and see!” and “Follow me!”

This study should be viewed in tandem with #55, “Following Instructions”, which is an important corollary. But that is for the already committed. Here we will look at “following” from the perspective of one considering “faithfulness” (the better translation of pistis), which intends “personal loyalty”, as opposed to mere intellectual assent to a body of propositions. Far too often, that essential element is lost in intricate “theological” arguments – but loyalty to Jesus and his Kingdom is all that he ever asked.

Historically, akoloutheo included many of the nuances shared by various English uses of “follow”: L/S lists “to accompany a person, to be guided by a person or principle; to be consistent with, to be in logical sequence (as in argument or debate); to be part of someone's retinue or train, to render obedience or conformity to a superior.”

Of its 90 New Testament appearances, the vast majority (60+) refer simply to physical accompaniment, whether by curious crowds or devoted disciples. But Jesus' calls to various disciples and others, (Mt.8:22, 9:9, 19:21, 27, 28; Mk.8:34,10:21; Lk.5:11, 27, 28; Jn.8:12, 12:26, 13:37), clearly have a much deeper commitment in view. Especially obvious is this sense in Mt.10:38, 16:24; Mk.8:34, 10:21, where Jesus connects following him with self-denial (#68) and cross-bearing (#34), and Jn.10:4, 5, 27, where following is cast in the intimate, trusting, protective relationship between sheep and shepherd, and thus carries considerably more freight.

Those who responded to the call to “follow” Jesus did accompany him on his travels; they also were deputized to extend his work. “Following” became an apprenticeship, for the task of continuing his work after his departure. Jesus' parting instructions quoted in John 14-16 clearly assume that the torch is being passed to those who have been “following.”

Akoloutheo frequently appears with prefixes, in which case it is also exclusively rendered “follow”:
- exakoloutheo – I Pet.1:16, 2:2, 2:15, referring to a negative sort of conformity
- epakoloutheo – Mk.16:20, I Tim.5:10, I Pet.5:21, I Tim.5:24, with a much more positive sense of accompaniment or conformity
- katakoloutheo – Lk.23:55, Ac.16:17, simply physically following after someone
- parakoloutheo – Mk.16:17, I Tim.4:6, II Tim.3:10, Lk.1:3, implying attainment, understanding, and companionship
- sunakoloutheo – Mk.23:49, also physical accompaniment.

Interestingly, the gospels do not use either of the other two words also occasionally rendered “follow” in the epistles, except for the single appearance of dioko (usually – 28x – translated “persecute”) in Lk.17:23 (a very poor translation). There, Jesus is instructing the faithful to neither join (apelthete) nor persecute (dioxete) – thereby implying that they should simply ignore – the “world-enders” who pretend to have inside information about his return. Classical uses of dioko included “to pursue or chase, as in hunting or warfare; to seek diligently, an object, a goal, or a lover; to drive or chase away; legally, to prosecute; to pursue an argument; to persecute.”

The ten occurrences of dioko in the epistles which are traditionally translated “follow” – Rom.9:30,31, 14:19; I Cor.14:1; Phil.3:12,14; I Thes.5:15; I Tim.6:11; II Tim.2:22, Heb.12:14 – refer to the determined, deliberate pursuit of some aspect of faithfulness.

Mimeomai (II Thes.3:7,9; Heb.13:7, III Jn.11), also occurring only in the epistles (English cognate, “mimic”), refers to following (copying) exemplary faithfulness.

Classical usage, besides mimicry, included “portrayal as an actor, or to use as a model, to emulate.”

Perhaps we may safely assume that these latter admonitions – to be serious about “pursuing” various elements of a faithful life (what is good, justice, faithfulness, love, peace, holiness, spiritual gifts), and to seek to “imitate” those whose maturity in faithfulness sets a commendable example – are addressed to folks who have already responded to the call to “follow.”

The epistles, after all, are not “evangelistic tracts” as they are sometimes represented, but instructions written to existing brotherhoods, for their life and interaction together.

Interestingly, mimeomai is the only one of the three to have a noun equivalent (mimetes - “follower”) in the New Testament. Paul urges his readers to “be followers of me”, “of us”, “of the churches”, “of God”, and “of what is good.”

In the gospels, those who respond to the Lord's “Follow me” are thereafter termed “disciples” (#51).
Paul elsewhere calls them “saints” (#32) – people unequivocally committed as the exclusive possession of God. And describing one of the joyful assemblies singing praises around the throne (Rv.14:4), John identifies the participants as “those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes”!

This surely incorporates all the fullness of the ideas of “following” – personal loyalty, total commitment, constant presence, patterning, and obedience.

May we “earnestly seek” to be numbered among them, and to cultivate the increase of that celebratory throng!
In the last study, we considered Jesus' primary call to prospective disciples: simply to “follow” him. Once that choice is made, however, questions remain, even—perhaps especially—for folks seriously committed to faithfulness. “Following” usually assumes that one is going somewhere. Where are we going? How shall we get there?

In asking this, we are in good company. The early disciples were just as confused as we.

Perhaps the clearest understanding of the use of hodos, “the way,” among early followers of Jesus can be gained from an examination of his conversation with Thomas and Philip, recorded in John 14:1-16. Both disciples are thinking in concrete terms: “If we don’t know where we are going, how can we get there?” indicates that Thomas is focused on a destination (as are so many today, who can think of no goal but “getting into heaven”), and Philip is focused on an official “introduction”—or maybe some sort of high-powered “spiritual experience”—with the Father—“the really BIG guy”. Jesus, recognizing that both have totally missed the point, gently corrects them. “I AM the Way”, he explains. “It’s not about going anywhere in particular, Tom—it’s about sticking with me!” And “Phil, open your eyes and look! Don’t you get it? All that I AM, and all I’ve been doing, shows you the Father!” The critical key to this whole discussion is Jesus’ use of “I AM” (See W.S.#17)

The point he is trying to make, for them and for us, is that he himself is not only the Leader and Guide, but also both the journey and the goal! And to this end, he makes use of a very ordinary word, in an extraordinary way. Although there are nine other words also translated “way”, none used more than twice in the New Testament, they add nothing of significance. “Hodos,” used 83 times in the New Testament, is the one that deserves the focus of our attention.

Classically, hodos was used in three primary ways: of place: a road or highway, or the course of a river; of action: a trip, journey, or sea voyage; and metaphorically: of one's culture, manner of life, intent, method, or system. With prepositions, it could indicate (with pro) “on the way, forward, profitable, or useful”, (with kata) “along the road, or by the way...”, and with a prefix (para) only a single NT use—“along the way.”

20 of the NT uses refer simply to a physical road or pathway, and 15 to a trip somewhere, although some of these may fall into both of those categories.

The 8 references to “preparing the way”, although describing the actual road construction that was done in honor of a conqueror or royal personage (remember that first century Roman road-building rivaled modern highway construction, and lasted longer. Some of those roads are still in use!), clearly intended more far-reaching preparations, as intimated in Lk.1:76-78 and later references to the ministry of John the Baptist. The goal is not just a smooth highway, but “a prepared people, ready for the Lord.”(Lk.1:17)

Most significant for our purpose are the “metaphoric” uses of hodos. References to a way of life, or cultural norms, may be seen in Mt.10:5, Ac.14:16, and Rom.3:16, speaking of the behavior of “the nations” (W.S.#62), or of unfaithful individuals (Ac.13:10, Jas.1:8, 5:20; II Pet.2:15, Jude 11), as well as in a more positive sense: “the way of peace” (Lk.1:79, Rom.3:17), “the way(s) of God” (Mt.22:16, Lk.20:21, Ac.18:26, Rom.11:33, Heb.3:10, Rv.15:3), “the way of righteousness/justice” – W.S.#3 – (Mt.21:32, II Pet.2:21), “the way of life” (Ac.2:28), “the way of salvation” – W.S.#5 – (Ac.16:17), “the way of truth” – W.S. #26 – (II Pet.2.2, 2:15).

But even these pales in comparison to the transformation effected by the Lord Jesus. The crucial statement referenced above in John 14, is preceded by another: “But even these pale in comparison to the transformation effected by the Lord Jesus. “The crucial statement referenced above in John 14, is preceded by another: “W.S. #26 – (II Pet.2.2, 2:15).”

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But even these pales in comparison to the transformation effected by the Lord Jesus. The crucial statement referenced above in John 14, is preceded by another: “You all know the way where I am going.” (v.4). Not only had they been watching and participating in Jesus’ “way of life” and conduct for the past three years, but he had continually been trying to prepare them for what lay ahead. Although he had warned them repeatedly of the trauma of his rejection and execution by the very people who should have welcomed him most eagerly, (with none of the modern theological jargon that accompanies such subjects today), that was not the focus of these final hours.

Rather, (Jn.16), it is the benefit that would accrue presently for faithful disciples as a result of his “going to the one who sent me” (16:5), “going to the Father” (16:9), and the enabling they would consequently receive from the Spirit, to continue following the Way he had showed them.

This, I am convinced, is among the primary reasons why subsequent followers became known as “people of the Way.” This designation appears all through the Acts account of the early church-- from the folks Paul pursued to Damascus (Ac.9:2, 22:4, 22:14), to Priscilla and Aquila instructing Apollos (Ac.18:25,26), and even used by their opposition in Corinth (Ac.19:9) and Ephesus (Ac.19:23). These emphasize that the new movement was a way of living, not merely a “philosophy” or a “new religion” as the Areopagos Council assumed (Ac.17:19-32).

The first century Roman Empire was a pluralistic society at least as broad as our own. “Gods” were plentiful, and frequently added (for insurance?). They only required an occasional offering to remain beneficent, so nobody minded. The “powers that be” didn't really care much what anyone “thought” or “believed”, as long as they behaved according to the emperor's demands – which of course included accepting him as a superior part of the pantheon, and offering incense to him.

In the last study, we considered Jesus' primary call to prospective disciples: simply to “follow” him. Once that choice is made, however, questions remain, even—perhaps especially—for folks seriously committed to faithfulness. “Following” usually assumes that one is going somewhere. Where are we going? How shall we get there?

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as well. It was transformed lives, subject only to an authority much higher than his, that they could not handle. And that is an accurate description of “the Way.”

So really, these two studies are simply two perspectives on the same principle. To “follow” the Lord Jesus is to continue along “the Way” – in his company, according to his instructions, and toward the unity with him, with his Father, and with one another for which he prayed (Jn.17).

His “I AM the Way” is the only answer to our puzzled queries of “where?” and “how?”

May we help each other to follow faithfully in the Way.

Word Study #103 – Free, Freedom

Despite the protestations of popular hymnody and preaching, Jesus himself never connected the idea of “freedom” with either his death or his resurrection. It was the mission announced in his “inaugural address” (Lk.4:18), and his identity as the King of Kings, that authorized him to set his people free!

Actually, Jesus referred specifically to being “free” on only three occasions: a discussion with prospective disciples (Jn.8:32-36), a conversation with Peter about the tribute-tax (Mt.17:26), and in Mt.10:8, using a different word, instructing his disciples not to make any charge for the service to which he had commissioned them.

Even Paul, who is so widely (mis-)quoted in various retributionary theories about Jesus' accomplishments, never makes any such correlations with “freedom.”

So it is appropriate that we lay aside the baggage of song and story, and investigate, “What does the New Testament say about Jesus' very important provision of freedom to the people of God?”

The primary words with which we are concerned are the adjective, eleutheros, “free”; the verb, eleutheroo, “to set free”; and the noun, eleutheria, “freedom, liberty”.

The noun form, classically, referred to manumission (the formal release of a slave), to political victory, or to thanksgiving for such liberation.

In addition to those ideas, the verb included the clearing of an entrance or passage, the release of a debtor or prisoner, or acquittal in court.

The adjective could apply to anyone who was not a slave, to the status of favored cities in the Roman Empire, and to anything or anyone that was unencumbered, or legally permissible.

Of the 23 New Testament uses of the adjective, 17 are simply in contrast to cultural slavery. In agreement with Jesus' instructions, Paul does not seem to think that questions of social status matter very much. In I Cor.7:20-22, he simply advises, “Don't let it bother you. But if the opportunity arises to be released, by all means, take it!” He repeatedly asserts (I Cor.12:13, Gal.3:28, Eph.6:8, Col.3:11) that social status must make no difference whatever in the brotherhood, in terms of either responsibility or privilege.

Of the 11 uses of the noun, four refer to the Jewish law (two in the verb form), and once to one's “lower nature” (four in the verb), while three refer to the indulgence of one's human nature. Both of these are also labeled “slavery” (douleia) or “bondage/imprisonment” (desmos). The verb only appears 6x.

It is important to consider, then, from what the Lord's people are “set free”, how this is accomplished, and to what end, or for what purpose freedom is granted.

Here, Jesus' discussion in Jn.8:30-36 is normative. Notice that he is speaking (v.30) to “the Jews who had become faithful to (trusted) him.”, but saying that in order to be his disciples (W.S.#51), they need to “continue” or “remain” (meno – W.S.#58) in his word (W.S.#66). This will result in their becoming acquainted (gnosesthe – W.S.#29) with the truth (#26), which is then represented as the agent of their being set free (v.32). The substitution of “the Son” (v.36) as that agent foreshadows Jesus' statement in Jn.14:6, in which he asserts that he is himself the personification of “the Truth”.

To their protests that they have “never been slaves” – Come on guys! Have you forgotten Egypt? Or the present occupation by Rome? – he explains that slavery (v.34) also exists where people habitually choose their own ways above God's instructions.

Paul picks up the same theme in Rom.6:16-22: one must simply decide whom or what he will obey. “Freedom from the law” does not mean flaunting all regulation, but rather, subjection to a much higher law, which James calls “the perfect law of freedom”! (Jas.1:25, 2:12). “Freedom/liberty” is not personal autonomy that grants a license to “do your own thing” regardless of its effect on anyone else. It is the privilege, by enlisting in Jesus' Kingdom, to learn to “do his thing”! This is
the true “land of the free and home of the brave!”

The same idea appears throughout the letter to Galatia, with regard to the Jewish Law. In both cases, the call is to freedom from oppressive slavery, whether to one’s own whims or to a detailed legal system, into what Paul terms (Rom.8:21) “the glorious liberty of the children of God!” Or, as he put it in Col.1:13, from the power of darkness, into the Kingdom! Discipline and discretion do not inhibit, but rather enhance true freedom!

It is also significant that people – as well as all creation – need to be set free from their “natural condition” – whether (Rom.8:12) simple mortality (“decay”), “natural things” (Gal.4:8) (animism?), enslaving power systems (Gal.4:9), or “the flesh” (human nature) (Gal.5:13, 1 Pet.2:16). One's natural inclinations are not acceptable excuses for unacceptable behavior, but slavery, from which any genuine representation of the Good News offers release and freedom!

How is this deliverance to be accomplished? By “continuing to live in my (Jesus’) word” (Jn.8:31); by “acquaintance with (him who is) the Truth” (Jn.8:32); by “the Son setting you/us free” (Jn.8:36); by the sovereign decree of the king (Gal.5:1); by “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom.8:2); by “presenting your/or selves to him for obedience” (Rom.6:18,22); and with the help of the brotherhood into which we are “baptized into one Body” (1 Cor.12:13)– the Body of Christ!

And to what end is all this directed? “The glorious liberty of the children of God!” (Rom.8:21). This liberty enables people to “become servants/slaves to each other, out of love,” (Gal.5:13); “as free people, not using freedom as a cover-up for wrong, but as God’s slaves” (1 Pet.2:16); as Paul testifies, “For although I was free from all, I made myself a slave to all, in order that I may win more” (1 Cor.9:19)– the only genuine “evangelism”.

Best of all, this freedom does not entail the forcible abuse or subjugation of any person or group; no compulsion, no destruction of life or livelihood. Everybody wins!

Remember that “Where the Lord’s spirit is, there is freedom!” (2 Cor.3:17) may well have been written from jail! By a man who saw himself as incredibly free!

“Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty with which Christ has set us free! And don’t be subjected again to the yoke of slavery!” (Gal.5:1) ANY kind of slavery!

Basically, freedom from all other bondage or obligations enables Kingdom living, after the pattern established by the King.

“If the Son will set you free, you will actually be free!” (Jn.8:36)

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #104 – Building / “On Building Churches”

Some years ago, I tried to comfort and encourage a very earnest young man, who was deeply distressed at having been sharply criticized by the “superiors” in the corporate structure of his denomination (a problem addressed in chapter 6 of Citizens of the Kingdom) for failing to succeed at their stated goal of “building churches.” Neither he nor those “superiors” had ever noticed that Jesus said that was his job (Mt.16:18), and that he had never subsequently delegated it to anyone else. I don't think that observation helped him much; he had been pretty thoroughly indoctrinated into a “corporate” model of “church”, a model that exalts a few, discourages most, and bears no resemblance whatever to the New Testament church.

Because, of course, to Jesus, the “building” process had absolutely nothing to do with either impressive-looking real estate, or the weekly entertainment of an audience of thousands of admirers.

The theme of “building” does appear, in at least four different aspects, in the New Testament narratives, but with a distinctly different flavor. Most of these occurrences employ a form of oikodomeo, of which classical uses include “to build a house, to design or fashion something, to construct on a foundation (physically or philosophically), to edify, or to be emboldened.” The other verb, kataskeuazo, “to equip or furnish, construct or build, prepare, arrange, establish”, appears only ten times, and refers primarily to physical construction, although that sense is broadened in four references to “preparing the way” of the Lord (see #102). All the rest are in Hebrews, and reference the old, obsolete ways.

Out of 24 uses of oikodomeo, 14 refer simply to physical construction, and most of those describe activity under the old covenant: Noah's ark, the temple, a synagogue, the tombs of the prophets. The rest are in parables (Mt.7:24-26, Lk.6:48,49; Mt.21:33, Mk.12:1, Lk.12:18) except for the physical location of Nazareth (Lk.4:29). Other than Jesus' then-enigmatic statements (Mt.26:61, Mk.14:58, Jn.2:20) and reactions to them, in which he was referring to his resurrection, the only
The gospel use of *oikodomeo* in a sense other than physical construction is his word in Mt.16:18, “I will build my church.” But after Pentecost, everything changes. The transition is marked by the fulfillment of the event described in Ps.118:22 and quoted in Mt.21:42, Mk.12:10, Lk.20:17, Ac.4:11, 1 Pet.2:7, where, in each case, the participial form, “builders”, is used. The power of this figure is lost for those who are unacquainted with ancient construction, due to the mistaken use of the word “cornerstone” in most translations.

A cornerstone, today, is strictly ornamental. It is usually formally added at the dedication of a building – its space and shape carefully prepared beforehand and left vacant until its ceremonial installation. The scene described in scripture, however, is that of the construction of the ubiquitous Roman arch. Its keystone, a carefully fashioned, wedge-shaped component at the very top, holds the whole thing together. Without it, the arch would collapse, and the whole building with it. The message is, that the (self-appointed) builders were clueless – and discarded the most crucial component because of its odd shape, ignorant that it was, in fact, absolutely essential. Both the phrase “the head (*kephale*) of the corner”, and Isaiah’s *akrogoniaion*, which combines *akros* – high, with *gonia* – knee, or corner, make it obvious that the stone in question, which is identified with the Lord Jesus, is ON TOP, and necessary to the entire structure, not a decorative “dedication” or memorial!

With Jesus himself holding everything together, as Paul asserts in Col.1:17, the figure changes completely. The construction materials, “you all”, are now “living stones” (1 Pet.2:5), being built into a “spiritual house” and a “dedicated priesthood.”

Paul chimes in also with plural you’s in every case: Eph.2:20 - “you all also are being built on the foundation of apostles and prophets”, Col.2:7 - “rooted and built up in him (Jesus)”, Eph.2:22 - “in him, you all are being built together into a permanent dwelling place for God, in the Spirit.” (These latter references use prefixed forms of *oikodomeo.*) Notice the passive voice of the verbs. The “building materials” are being acted upon, they are not the agents of the action.

Of the six uses of the noun form, *oikodome*, building, three refer to the temple complex, which Jesus expected to be destroyed – “not one stone left upon another.” Three refer to the new orientation: I Cor.3:9 – “you all are God’s building”, II Cor.5:1 – “a dwelling made without hands, a home from God”, Eph.2:21 – “the whole building grows into a holy temple in the Lord!” Here we see a transition to active verb forms.

It remains to consider the other lexical domain of *oikodomeo* and its related words, usually translated “edify”. This is an admissible choice, but only if one remembers that it is the same word as the one translated “build”. Unlike the former group of references, most of these are active. And please remember, they are all from the epistles – letters which were written to groups that are already committed to the Lord, though at varying stages of maturity. The task of “building” is intended to be shared by the brotherhood – but (I Cor.3:10) “Each one must watch out how he builds,” and later in the same letter (ch.14), Paul details both hazards and assets, emphasizing (v.12) “seek to excel in what will edify the congregation.” Whether the question involves the use of tongues and prophecy, or any of the other group activities listed in v.26-31, the mutual goal is that “all may learn and all be encouraged” (v.31).

The same concern occupies Eph.4:12 – God’s people are to be equipped, by workers with varied responsibilities, (v.11), to all be involved in “building up the Body of Christ” toward maturity (v.13). The goal is enabling the “whole Body” – v.16 – for “building itself up in love.” One’s speech (v.29) is to be focused on “building what is needed” in order to “give grace to the listeners.” Similar instructions are found in I Cor.8:1, 10:23; I Thes.5:11, Rom.15:2, II Cor.10:8, 13:10; I Tim.1:4.

Conspicuously absent is any reference to real estate, or to attracting crowds of curious spectators. The direct object of “build” is overwhelmingly focused upon “the congregation”, “yourselves”, “the Body of Christ”, and “each other”!

“Building the *church*” is the Lord’s job. Mt.16:18, with which we began, is the only place where “church” is the direct object of the verb, “to build.”

“Building up” each other is our job; as well as being responsible to present ourselves to the Master Builder in order to be built into the Body through which he can continue to redeem his world.

Building / edifying seems to include any activity that serves to enhance the faithfulness of a Body of disciples.

May we continually build and encourage each other to that end!
Word Study #105 – To Plant (“Church planting”), To Grow (“Church growth”)

While we are talking about buzz-words, let’s look at a couple more – “church planting” and “church growth”. It is no surprise that neither of these phrases can be found in the New Testament. However, there are a few references to the verbs, phuteuo, to plant, as well as speiro, to sow; and auxano, to grow. The words themselves are not at all ambiguous. An examination of their subjects and objects, however, can be instructive. (One “plants” cuttings or immature seedlings, but “sows” seed.)

Most of the synoptic uses of phuteuo are in parables referring to the planting of a vineyard. Paul uses it in a similar way in I Cor.9:7. The concept of “vineyard” is interesting, and will be explored later. For our purpose here, we will merely observe that the person who did the planting did so in the expectation that the vines would grow to maturity and bear fruit (in that order!)

Two other occurrences are found in Jesus' matter-of-fact response to the Pharisees' taking offense at his teaching (Mt.15:13), one (Lk.17:28) to the “business as usual” going on in Sodom before its destruction, one (Lk.13:6) to the unfruitful fig tree, and one (Lk.17:6) to Jesus’ enigmatic statement about the power of faithfulness. In his letter to Corinth, Paul uses the figure of “planting” and “watering” (I Cor.3:6,7,8) to describe his and Apollos' work among the people there. He does not specify what he “planted.”

The references to “sowing”, on the other hand, both in synoptic accounts (Mt.13:3-19, 13:24-30, 13:31-32; Lk.8:5), and in John's (Jn.4:36-37), focus understandably on the seeds rather than plants. And Jesus very kindly illuminates the details for us. In Mt.13:37, “The one who sows the seed is the Son of Man, and the good seeds are the sons of the Kingdom” (in contrast to the weeds); and in Mk.4:14, “The sower sows the Word,” or (Lk.8:11) “The seed is the Word of God.”

The epistles are less specific. Paul speaks (I Cor.9:11) of his having “sowed spiritual things” for them; of planting seeds as an illustration of the difference between one's “natural” and “resurrection” body (I Cor.15:36-44); of “reaping” what one “sows” (Gal.6:7-8) in terms of one's chosen manner of life; and with respect (II Cor.9:6-10) to generosity in sharing one's resources. James concludes a treatise about consistent living (3:18) with “a crop of justice [righteousness] is sown in peace, by those who make peace.”

And that, folks, is all that is said about “planting”!

The intermediate step, naturally or supernaturally, is growth. But here too, both physical and spiritual expectation differs sharply from common rhetoric. You don't pick grapes the first year you plant cuttings, nor harvest wheat immediately after grain is sown. What is planted must first grow to maturity, before bearing fruit. Creatures, or people, must also be nurtured to maturity (at least, they should!) before they are expected to reproduce! (Please see W.S.#13 and #64)

Some of the seeds will sprout, and some won't (Mt.13, Mk.4, Lk.8). The same word, auxano, is used of the growth of a child (Lk.1:80, 2:40), of lilies (Mt.6:28), of seeds (Mt.13:32), of the brotherhood (Eph.2:21), and even of the word of God (Ac.12:24, 19:20)! Peter (I Pet.2:2) admonishes his readers to “grow up!”, and in II Pet.3:18, to “Grow in grace, and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul advocates “increase / growth” (same word) in “the fruits of justice” (II Cor.9:10), “your faithfulness” (II Cor.10:15), “the knowledge of God” (Col.1:10), “the increase / growth of God” (Col.2:19), and “to grow up into him (Jesus)” (Eph.4:15).

The only place in the New Testament where “growth” refers to an increase in population is Stephen's sermon in Ac.7:17, where he refers to the Israelites in Egypt. “The church” is what happens while all this “growth” is taking place! As Paul reminded the folks at Corinth, “You all are God's farm!” (I Cor.3:9). It is the atmosphere in which growth happens. But there is not a single reference to “grow with “church”as its subject – or its object.

I will conclude with a look at the description of a time when the “population” of the church did increase dramatically, but none of the “planting” or “growing” words appear. This is the scene described in Ac.2:42-47.

A huge group had joined their fellowship at Pentecost, but nobody seems to have immediately organized a lecture tour for Peter, whose sermon had precipitated such a large response. Instead of launching a splashy media campaign (yes, there
were “media” in the first century – that was the function of a “herald” *kerux*, the group simply continued (Ac.2:42) “paying eager attention to the apostles' teaching, to sharing, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers.” Luke goes on to describe their sharing of resources, and notes (but does not detail) the experience of “wonders and signs”. Meeting “in the temple and from house to house” (v.46) daily, they were simply praising God, enjoying each other, and being gracious toward all the people!

Luke's concluding statement is the kicker: “And the Lord added those who were being rescued [“saved”] to their community, every day!” The church grew – simply by BEING the church!

They were not trying to “sell” a theology or philosophy, or to start “a new religion”. There was no need to mount an “outreach campaign”.

They only needed to become God's “demonstration farm”, so that folks could see the Kingdom in action.

If people today could see a demonstration of “the real thing”, that just might happen again.

I would love to be a part of a group of folks willing to try it!

**Word Study #106 – Compassion**

“Compassion” was one of the words that appeared several times on the “search” lists. This topic was addressed in Word Studies #59 - “mercy”, and #60 - “grace”, and the present study should be viewed as a supplement to those, to which I would encourage you to refer. There, you may recall, we (tentatively) concluded that “mercy” generally assumed some sort of merciful act or behavior, whereas “grace” appears more as a description of the character trait or motivation that results in generous action, although there is overlap in their use. “Compassion” probably falls somewhere between these two, bearing some of the “flavor” of each. All have their utmost manifestation in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, and all are expected to be replicated in the lives of his followers.

*Splanchnizomai,* the primary word translated “compassion”, seems at first glance a rather odd choice. Its primary classical use was in reference to the entrails of a sacrificed animal, or the powers of those individuals who were thought to be able to “read” future events by examining or consuming them! I suppose that its later reference to all of one's inner organs as the seat of one's emotions is no more repulsive than the modern English usage of “heart” or “guts” in a similar way. That might seem just as strange to folks unacquainted with our culture.

In the New Testament, *splanchnizomai,* which appears only a dozen times, is traditionally rendered “moved with compassion” 5 times, and “have compassion” 7 times. It is used only in the synoptic gospels, preceding accounts of Jesus' healing (Mt.14:14, 20:34; Mk.1:41, 9:22), the raising of a young dead man (Lk.7:13), feeding people (Mt.15:32, Mk.8:2), and teaching crowds (Mt.9:36, Mk.6:34). It describes the attitude on the part of the protagonist in three parables: the master's release of a debtor (Mt.18:27), the “good Samaritan” (Lk.10:33), and the prodigal son (Lk.15:20). Every occurrence of the word is immediately followed by an act expressing the compassion felt by the individual in question.

A few other words are also translated “compassion”.

*Eleeo,* treated in detail in #59, usually translated “mercy”, was rendered “compassion” three times: in Mt.18:33 regarding the debt noted above, Mk.5:19 – Jesus' instructions to a healed man to tell the folks at home of God's “compassion”/mercy to him, and Jude 22 regarding a disciple's responsibility to rescue an errant fellow-disciple from self-destruction.

*Oikteiro,* of which the only New Testament use is Rom.9:15, is related to the noun and adjective forms universally translated “mercy” (also see #59).

*Metriopatheo* also used only once (Heb.5:2), refers to Jesus' sympathetic understanding of our plight as a result of having shared our humanity. In this, it closely parallels *sumpatheo,* also used only in Hebrews – 4:15 where it also refers to Jesus' being able, in his function as high priest, to “sympathize” with our “infirmities”, and 10:34, where the readers are commended for their sharing in the sufferings of those imprisoned or otherwise persecuted for their faithfulness.

L/S defines *sumpatheo,* and its adjective form, *sumpathes,* as “a feeling of sympathy” (our English cognate is “sympathy”). Its etymological make-up, however, is more specific, combining *sum-* (a form of the preposition “with”), and *pathe* (“suffering, or misfortune”). This parallels the Latin “com-” (also “with, or together”), and *passio,* (suffering), which is the etymological source of “compassion”.

These seem to lean heavily toward a deeper involvement than simply “feeling sorry” for someone. They require sharing his distress to the point of strong motivation toward action to alleviate his suffering.
Only Peter uses the adjective form, sumpateis – and he piles on four other descriptive terms to make sure we get the point. Addressing attitudes and behavior in the brotherhood (I Pet.3:8), he admonishes his readers: “Finally, all of you, be like-minded (homophrones), sympathetic (sumpateis), loving the brethren (philadelphoi), compassionate (eusplanchnai), unassuming (tapeinophrones).

Peter is talking about a deep level of involvement here, far more than a pleasant Sunday morning handshake! Of the descriptive words he chooses, not only sumpateis, but also homophrones – “of the same mind” (see #96), philadelphoi “familial love”(#12, #87), and tapeinophrones “humble-minded” (#14), are used only here in the New Testament, although related words are referenced in the word studies noted. Please refer to these for more detailed discussion, as all are important, if a “colony of the Kingdom” is to function as intended.

Only eusplanchnai appears anywhere else. You can easily see its relation to our primary word, splanchnizomai. The prefix, eu- denotes “good” or “well”. L/S says “good-hearted”. The single other use is in Eph.4:32, where Paul combines it with chrestoi (kind) and charizomai ( gracious -#60, forgiving-#7) in describing interactions in the brotherhood.

So perhaps we should characterize “sympathy / compassion” as “grace / mercy” with shoe-leather under it. They appear to be coming at the same general idea from slightly different directions: a gracious character trait, of which the Lord Jesus provides the prime example, that motivates both sharing a deep understanding and concern for another's condition, and action – doing whatever is possible to alleviate his difficulty, disability, or distress.

The aggregate represents an essential element of the brotherhood shared by Kingdom citizens – and an assignment guaranteed to keep us VERY busy!

**Word Study #107 – Assurance**

From observing the “noise level” about the terms “Christian assurance” and “assurance of salvation” in some circles, one would expect to find the New Testament liberally salted with references to this word. Its appearance on the “search” lists indicates the likelihood that some folks are looking for ammunition to use in these battles. Well, people, you're not going to find it in a careful word study.

The English word “assurance” only appears nine times, in any form, even in traditional translations. Once each, it is a (mis)translation of pistis (see W.S.#1) Ac.17:31 – against 239 renditions as “faith”, which isn't much better – and pistoomai , II Tim.3:14, a verb form which has only a single New Testament appearance. Once – I Jn.3:19 – it is used for peitho (against 22x “persuade”, 8x “trust”, and 7x “obey”-- W.S.#88) ; once – Ac.2:36 – for asphalos (against 2x for an arrest!); and once for sumbibazo –Ac.16:10 – where it does not parallel any of the four other uses of the word.

Four times it was the choice for plerophoria, the only word for which “assurance” is the only -- or even the primary – traditional translation: Col.2:2, I Thes.1:15, Heb.6:11, and 10:22, in each of which “confidence” or “conviction” would suit just as well.

Not a single reference contains either a threat that some inadvertent misstep will cause one to “lose”, or a guarantee that, having once been sufficiently frightened to “raise his hand” in a “revival”, one will be permanently protected from ever “losing” his “salvation” (W.S.#5). Both caution (Heb.3:13-14) and reassurance (I Jn.3:19-21), are present, however.

So since responsible word study simply doesn't have a dog in that fight, and since the concept of assurance, also labeled certainty, confidence, and “being sure”, is abundant, I invite you to lay down your weapons, and feast instead on the veritable banquet of encouragement that the Lord has provided for us. You can find additional studies on this subject in W.S.#1, pistis, and #36, elpis.

**Plerophoria**, mentioned above as the only word consistently rendered “assurance” by traditional translators, is classically defined as “certainty, fullness of assurance, complete satisfaction”. In the Colossians passage, Paul connects it to “an accurate understanding of God's mystery, Christ”, which is developed as a result of “your hearts (being) encouraged and defined as “certainty, fullness of assurance, complete satisfaction”. In the Colossians passage, Paul connects it to “an

A similar idea is approached from a different angle by the use of peitho, only once rendered “assurance”, but 26x connected to “persuasion”. These are about equally divided between attempts to convince someone (Mt.27:20, 28:14, Lk.16:31, 20:6;Ac.13:43, 14:19, 18:4, 19:8,26; 21:14, 26:28, 28:23, Rom.5:11), and expressions of confidence (Ac.26:26, Rom.8:38, 14:14, 15:14; II Cor.2:3, 5:10; Gal.1:10; Phil.1:25, 3:3; I Thes.3:4, I Tim.1:5, 12; Phm.21, Heb.6:9,11:13). The same word is used in other contexts regarding obedience (#88) and trust (#1).
Asphaleia, asphales, and asphalos, referring about equally to **physical security** (including arrest – Mk.14:44, jail – Ac.16:24, and the sealing of Jesus' tomb – Mt.27:64,65,66) and **certainty about facts** (Ac.2:36, 21:34, 22:30, 25:26; Phil.3:1), are similarly divided in their classical usage: “safety, caution, legal security, steadfastness, soundness, (opp. risk)”.

Turning to the traditional word “sure”, we encounter a variety of terms, also.

**Bebaios**, classically “firm, steadfast, steady, durable, guaranteed, confirmed”, is used in reference to the promise of God (Rom.4:16, Heb.2:2, 9:17), the words of prophecy (II Pet.1:19), our hope/expectation of the fulfillment of both (Heb.3:6, 3:14, 6:19), and our own calling (II Pet.1:10) which latter is not automatic, but requires effort/“diligence”!

**Stereos**, “firm, solid, solidified, settled”, is applied to God’s foundation (II Tim.2:19), constancy in faithfulness/loyalty (I Pet.5:9), and the “solid food” (Heb.5:12,14) intended for mature disciples.

Both **ginosko** (Lk.10:11, Jn.6:69) and **oida** (Rom.2:2, 15:29, Jn.16:30) – usually rendered “know” (W.S.#29) – are rarely rendered “be sure”.

“Confidence” represents **tharrheo**, “to be of good courage, to be unafraid, to be confident” (II Cor.5:6, 5:8, 7:16); **pepoithesis**, “trust, confidence, boldness” (II Cor.1:15, 8:22, 10:2; Eph.3:12, Phil.3:4), **hupostasis**, “origin, foundation, substructure, confidence, courage, resolution” (II Cor.11:17, 9:4, Heb.1:3, 11:1, 3:14), and **parrhesia**, “outspokenness, freedom of speech, liberaliy, lavishness, freedom of action, without fear”.

A treasured element of citizenship in the Athenian democracy, **parrhesia** appears in the New Testament with two traditional translations – another case where it is important to remember that “confidence” and “boldness” are the same word.

**Boldness is not arrogance or self-promotion**, but simply the confidence that is born of identification with the Kingdom!

“Confidence” in the Lord to whom we belong (Ac.28:31, Heb.3:6, 10:35; I Jn.2:28, 3:21, 5:14) is the source of the “boldness” with which we may approach both the Lord of Glory himself (Eph.3:12, Phil.1:20, I Tim.3:13, Heb.4:16,10:19; I Jn.4:17), and others in his name (Ac.4:13,29; 9:29, 14:3, 18:26, 19:8).

Consequently, having followed brother Luke's example and gotten our facts straight, and realized the resources cited by brother Paul of the power of the Holy Spirit and the support of fellow Kingdom citizens, we may live confidently in **genuine** “Christian assurance.”

“Let's approach him (Jesus, our high priest), with a true heart, in abundant confidence, [or, complete faithfulness]” (Heb.10:23).

“Let's hang on to our commitment to [acknowledgment of] our hope [expectation] without hesitation – **for the one who made the promise is faithful!”** (v.23)

Thanks be to God!

**Word Study #108 – Full, Fullness, Fulfillment**

Treatment of **plerophoria** in the previous post, relating to “full” assurance, trust, or understanding, leads us to the family from which that compound word is derived. Although some of the uses of the adjective, **pleres** “full”, refer simply to the capacity of a container (Mt.14:20, 15:37, Mk.6:43, 8:19), or a fully developed (mature) head of grain (Mk.4:28), and most of the rest describe dominant features of someone's personality, whether positive (Lk.4:1, Jn.1:14, Ac.6:3,5,8; 7:55, 9:36, 11:24) or negative (Ac.13:10, 19:28); 35 of the 91 appearances of the verb **pleroo** mention the fulfilling or accomplishment of prophecy or obedience to the Law, 7 simply the passage of time, 7 the completion of an assignment, and 10 parallel to the uses of the adjective, there remains a considerable contingent that deserves more specific attention.

Classical uses of the words related to **pleroo** are as varied as the English associations with “filling” or “being full”. They include complete payment (“in full”), accomplishing / completing an assignment, duty, or task; the “fulfilling” of prophecy or purpose, the "full" phase of the moon, maturity, to gorge or to satiate one's appetite, to consecrate, or even to impregnate!

As is the case with other words, however, New Testament usages also can deviate markedly from classical patterns. For example, although the many references to “fulfilling” the law and the prophets would have been readily understandable to first century audiences, I have been unable to find any classical parallel to Jesus' expressed legacy to his confused and troubled disciples (Jn.15:11, 16:24) and his prayer to the Father on their behalf (17:13) that **his** (Jesus') **joy** might “be fulfilled" in / among them. This legacy is referenced later as well (Ac.13:52, Rom.15:13, I Jn.1:4, II Jn.12), and also evident in interactions in the brotherhood (Phil.2:2, II Tim.1:4). In this regard please see also #92, “Rejoice”, and look for “joy” in a later study.
In this case, Jesus seems concerned that this aspect of his own life and personality – his joy – be transferred and/or reproduced in the lives of his disciples, and only so would it be “fulfilled” [made complete]! Try to get your head around THAT!

Paul writes of “being filled” with (Rom.15:14) all knowledge; (II Cor7:4) comfort / encouragement; (10:6) obedience; (Eph.3:19) the fullness of God; (5:18) the Spirit; (Phil.1:11) the fruits [harvest] of righteousness [justice]; (4:19) the supply of needs to enable generosity; (Col.1:19) certain knowledge of God's will – all of which evidence one's development toward maturity in Kingdom living. On the surface, all these ideas seem to parallel those treated in #13 – teleios, “mature”, [perfect] – but the reach of pleroo is much farther than that vision of maturity.

The idea of “completeness” becomes quite central to the understanding of the New Testament uses of these words, and particularly of the noun form, pleroma, almost exclusively rendered “fulness”. Especially in Ephesians and Colossians, Paul has borrowed the vocabulary of incipient Gnosticism to highlight the unique completeness of Jesus. Please note that he has borrowed the VOCABULARY, NOT THE IDEOLOGY, as some critics would like to assume. In fact, he has re-defined virtually all of the terms that he uses.

Scholars differ on the dates they ascribe to this Eastern philosophy / mythology. Some see its beginnings in the first century BC, and others not until the second or third centuries AD. Like any philosophical system, it probably did not emerge full-blown on the scene in the eastern Mediterranean. We have noted before the syncretistic nature of many cultures there. Many and varied ideas had arrived, both with ardent proponents and with casual business people, along the trade routes that intersected in the region, where they merged and diverged in dizzying profusion. The idea was to keep one's bases covered: a new idea, a new deity, could easily be added to the mix, (“just for good measure”), as in the Athenian altar “to an unknown god.” Across several centuries and cultures, Alexandrian, Persian, Jewish and other adaptations had emerged, with syncretistic manifestations appropriate to each. What follows is a grossly over-simplified summary.

The Gnostic system had strong intellectual appeal, being based on gnosis – “knowledge”. (#29). Adherents posited a remote supreme being, designated pleroma – much too “divine” to be able to interact with matter, which was viewed as “evil”. The creation and administration of the material universe was delegated to various levels of “emanations” known as “aeons” (yes, the same word as aion, noted in #55). These were thought to have “emerged” from the pleroma, in a sequence becoming gradually less “divine” until some of them eventually could interact with matter. Jesus was assigned a place, by these philosophers, somewhere among these lesser beings, or sometimes among the arche (called “principalities and powers” in the NT), who were thought to supervise earthly affairs. Also in the hierarchy of “emanations” were sophia “wisdom” and gnosis “knowledge” – sometimes personified, sometimes not – which were expected, by their skilled deployment, to “rescue” the “enlightened” from the evil bonds of the material universe. All these intermediaries had to be courted or placated by intricate systems of asceticism and legalism, in order for the requisite “wisdom and knowledge” to be revealed.

“Salvation” was defined as liberation from both matter and ignorance. “Faith” (pistis) was acceptance of the concomitant dogma. The “soul” (psyche) was a disembodied entity (which had been “rescued” from matter by this esoteric knowledge), rather than simple human life (#55).

Some of this bears a sobering resemblance to the ideas of people and groups today that focus on escaping from the “evil world” instead of following Jesus' example of redeeming it! It is not difficult to see gnostic-inspired teaching as a possible source of the corruption of “pistis” (#1), either, and the increasing focus upon debates about fine points of “doctrine” rather than Kingdom living.

With this brief background, it is easy to appreciate Paul's strategy in Eph.1:23, 3:19, 4:10,13; and Col.1:11-17 and 2:2-10. Holding up the Lord Jesus as himself the agent of creation (Col.1:16), as well as the chosen bodily dwelling (Col.2:9) of “all the fullness (pleroma) of deity”, the only way “everything holds together” (Col.1:17), and the repository of “ALL the treasures of wisdom (sophia) and knowledge (gnosis)” (Col.2:3), Paul neatly disposes of pretty much the entirety of the Gnostic or proto-gnostic hierarchy. “And you all,” he concludes, “have been made complete (the perfect passive participle of pleroo) in him – who is the head of all arche and authorities.” (Col.2:10).

There is no need either to adopt or to refute as “evil” any or all of the intermediaries invented by proponents of these – or any other – complicated systems. You already have all that there is, in your identification with Jesus! This is the Lord Jesus whom we serve, and who has called us not only to populate his Kingdom, but even to function as members of his very own Body! The earthly, physical body could not possibly be evil, if Jesus chose to inhabit one! The definitive answer to the advocates of any sort of syncretism is simply Jesus. Don't bother to waste time and energy defining or discrediting any system's individual elements. As Creator, Sustainer, and reigning Lord of all that exists, Jesus is clearly superior to it ALL.
His people need no supplements!
“In him, all God's completeness [fullness] was pleased to make its permanent residence” (Col.1:19) … “and you all have been fulfilled [made complete] in him!” (Col.2:10)

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #109 – Tradition, Ordinance

Here are two perfectly good and useful words/ideas whose value has been obscured, if not totally destroyed, by people or groups who have a “doctrinal” axe to grind. I treat these words together here partly due to this commonality, but also because both are also used by “traditional” translators for the same word, paradosis.

Paradosis, in classical usage, combines two very different strains of meaning, probably due to its derivation from the verb, paradidomi – literally, “to give” (didomi) with the prefix para- “along, beside, toward”, but also “against”. It is used both positively, as of a bequest or the delivery of a message, and negatively, of betrayal or examination by torture! Both senses are also represented by the noun, which most frequently refers to the transmission of history, legend, or doctrine, but also to surrender for legal prosecution.

Paradosis appears only 13 times in the New Testament, 12 of which are rendered “tradition” and one (I Cor.11:2) “ordinance.” There is no obvious reason for the single deviation. Of those usages, eight are in accounts of Jesus' discussions with Pharisees regarding “the traditions of the elders” (Mt.15:2-6 and Mk.7:3-13). In both of the instances referenced, Jesus and his disciples are criticized for failure to observe a requirement of “tradition”, to which Jesus responds by pointing out quite bluntly that nit-picking about details of “tradition” actually amounts to outright violation of the explicit commands of God (Mt.15:3,6; Mk.7:8,13).

These traditions were initially designed, with the very best of intentions, to guide people into faithfulness to their God. It was only when the observance of traditions obscured the need for obedience to God's overtly stated directives, that they lost any positive value. Please note, it's not the “tradition” itself that Jesus criticizes. Washing one's hands before eating, for example, is a good idea, simply from a health perspective. But elevating even a good idea to a level that takes precedence over God's instructions, creates problems. Jesus' frequent conflicts with the religious authorities over Sabbath observance provide additional insight, which we will examine in a later study.

Paul sings a similar tune in Gal.1:14, regarding his zeal for the Law before he met Jesus, and also regarding the details of pagan ritual (Col.2:8) formerly observed and still being advocated by some individuals among the Colossian brethren. Actually, there are only three places where paradosis is used in a positive light: I Cor.11:2 (where it is translated “ordinance”), and II Thess.2:15 and 3:6. In each of these, Paul refers to the teaching that he himself has given to each group. (I used “principles” in the PNT. I considered that choice more accurate, since the lexical meaning of the word refers to “anything handed down.”)

“Tradition” is not inherently wrong, but it must be constantly judged/ evaluated in the light of the Lord's specific instructions. It is NOT, as some groups insist, equal in authority to the scriptures themselves. In fact, it was failure to distinguish “the traditions of men” (Mt.15:6; Mk.7:13) from the instructions of God, that caused problems for Jesus and his associates, and has continued to do so through all the centuries since the first!

“Ordinance”, on the other hand, in addition to the I Cor. reference above, represents seven other Greek words, of which four – diatage (Rom.13:2), kitis (I Pet.2:13), dogmatizomai (Col.2:20), and diatagma (Heb.11:23) – refer exclusively to civil law or royal decree. One, dogma, refers to both civil and religious law (Lk.2:1, Ac.16:4, 17:7; Eph.2:15); one, dikaioma (Lk.1:6, Heb.9:1, Heb.9:10) exclusively to the Jewish Law; and only one, paradosis (I Cor.11:2) to the instructions of a Christian teacher.

The verb, diatasso, which refers to the giving of any sort of instructions – (Lk.8:55) Jesus telling the little girl's family to give her some food, (Lk.3:13) the terms of the license given to tax collectors, (Tit.1:5, I Cor.7:17, 16:1) various instructions for arranging local leadership in new congregations, and (Ac.18:2) Claudius' decree that expelled all Jews from Rome – certainly does not carry any normative weight with respect to faithfulness!

Nowhere is diatasso applied either to the establishment of a hierarchy (see W.S#48) or to the observance of any ceremony, as has been advocated by groups who (correctly) reject the concept of “sacrament” (W.S.#76) but still want to cling to some of its “magic.”

In classical usage, all of these words have primarily civil rather than “religious” connotations.
Diatasso lists “to appoint, to distribute, to classify; to make arrangements, to pledge oneself, to set an army in array, to make testamentary distribution, to bequeath”.

Diatage – “command, ordinance; testamentary disposition, or a medical regimen”

Diatagma – “ordinance or edict”

Dogmatizo – “to decree by ordinance, to lay down a judicial opinion”

Kisis – “(most commonly) creation; founding or settling, creation of authority”

Dogma – “notion, decision, judgment; a public decree or ordinance, opinion or belief”

Dikaioma – “judicial amendment of a wrong; pleadings in a suit, credentials”

Only the latter two are used of the Old Testament Law – see references above.

So where do we come out?

A “tradition” (paradosis) has value, IF it involves, enables, or enhances faithfulness to the Lord Jesus and his Kingdom – but ONLY as long as those who observe or adhere to it constantly judge (test) its effect on their obedience to his directives. Like any symbols (see chapter 9 of Citizens of the Kingdom) traditions can be a valuable teaching tool, as long as they are not invested with magical powers, used to abuse or exclude other disciples, or otherwise to distort the message of Jesus and his Kingdom. Likewise, “ordinances” – which, please bear in mind, both lexically and in New Testament usage, are primarily civil pronouncements – are to be respected, insofar as they are properly ordered and observed UNDER the ultimate authority of the only true King (I Pet.2:13).

Carefully shared discernment by a faithful brotherhood is essential in determining whether the observance or the violation of any specific tradition or ordinance best expresses our faithfulness to the King and his Kingdom. May we help each other to find the Way.

Word Study #110 – The Sabbath (Part 1)

Few issues generated as much controversy during Jesus’ earthly ministry as did the concept of sabbath observance. Please refer frequently to the previous study of “tradition” as we consider this as one example among many of a perfectly good and right principle gone awry under the weight of well-intentioned augmentation by “experts” to ensure the meticulous observance of God’s command.

The Jewish sources I was able to find base sabbath observance on the joyful celebration of two events: God’s having “rested” after his work of creation, and decreed similar weekly respite for his people – a privilege, in the ancient world, reserved for the wealthy and the powerful, but now extended to all; and the associated connection with their freedom from slavery in Egypt, where they certainly had enjoyed no rest. The former was “symbolized” by refraining from any activity deemed “creative”, or the exercise of any sort of control over one's environment, and the latter by celebratory ceremonies – both of which, as we noted previously, are good and effective teaching tools.

The difficulty arises from efforts, though inspired by the very best of intentions, to enforce the observance of a directive by carefully (perhaps obsessively?) defining and enumerating specific proscribed activities. The Talmud organized these into 39 categories, each of which was further subdivided, itemized and explained, and all of which were strictly forbidden. The resulting “law” could be abrogated only when deemed absolutely necessary to save human life.

Jesus himself, as well as the apostles, habitually attended a synagogue on the sabbath, observing the accepted tradition. This was also a very practical decision: they went, frequently in order to teach, because that was the time and place where people gathered! This was clearly the case in Paul's journeys, as well, seeking out synagogues in the Gentile world. Controversy arose over the details: primarily healing (9x), but also such “trivialities” as picking a snack (“harvesting”) in the grain field. It was here that Jesus chose to take a stand. Cutting through the layers of tradition, he posed the prior and more basic question: “Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good, or to do evil [wrong]? To save life, or to kill?” (Mk.3:4, Lk.6:9). His point is, neglecting or refusing to do “good” that is within one's power, IS to do evil. With Jesus, we move out of the realm of prohibition, and into the realm of participation: actively doing the bidding of God.

He reminded them that although God “rested” on the seventh day, he did not retire! “My Father is still working, and so am I!” (Jn.5:17) (Please refer also to “rest” #77)

The authorities had eloquently demonstrated that although they made exceptions for the care of livestock (Mt.12:11, Lk.13:15-16, 14:5), and for their own ceremonies (Mt.12:5, Jn.7:22), they flatly refused to do so for the welfare of ordinary people (Lk.13:14, Jn.7:23). Jesus, in contrast, cares for people.
This is the context for his statement (Mk.2:27), “The sabbath came to be for the benefit of people, not people for the sabbath.” (This, too, is practical: it has been amply demonstrated in many settings that productivity increases if there is “time off” – but that is not the point here.)

A day set aside for rest, for worship, for sharing with the people of God, is a beautiful gift, to be enjoyed, and for which to give thanks! It is “the son of man [of God] (who) is Lord of the sabbath” (Mt.12:8, Mk.2:28, Lk.6:5) – and he is deeply concerned for the welfare of his people. For those who choose his Kingdom, he is also Lord of every other day in their lives, as well! But it is entirely appropriate to choose one in which to celebrate!

Interestingly, though, there is not a single instance in the New Testament where any particular day is commanded to be observed – except by the Jewish religious authorities who opposed Jesus! The expanding community after Pentecost is recorded as meeting together every day (Ac.2:46, 47; 5:42, 6:1, 16:5, 17:2) for fellowship, teaching, sharing, meals, and celebration! “The first day of the week” is mentioned as a meeting time in Troas (Ac.20:7) and as the time to collect funds for famine relief (I Cor.16:2), but nowhere else except the resurrection accounts. I like the idea of a resurrection celebration, but nowhere is it mandated.

Paul expresses a rather casual attitude in Rom.14, as an aside to his discussion of the observance (or not) of dietary regulations (14:5,13), emphasizing that neither days nor food should be allowed to become an issue in the brotherhood – “Someone judges one day beyond another; someone judges every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who pays attention to a day, does so for the Lord. And he who continues eating, is eating with respect to the Lord, for he is giving thanks to God.” His main concern (v.13) is “Then let’s no longer keep passing judgment on each other, but rather judge this: that no one place a cause of stumbling or falling away before his brother.”

Paul's only specific mention of the word “sabbath” is in Col.2:16, where he warns against regulations that require special observances.

The only other New Testament use of “sabbath” (a different form of the word), occurs in Heb.4:9. We really need to see this in the whole context of chapters 3 and 4. The writer begins (3:1) with the best solution for any situation: “Fix your attention on Jesus!”

The subject under discussion is the failure of those who were delivered from Egypt under Moses' leadership to “enter the rest” that God had offered. The diagnosis of the reason is blunt: “because of their unfaithfulness / disobedience” (3:16-19). The argument is a bit tough to follow in the beginning of chapter 4, but the admonition is clear: “Hang in there!!!” (3:6, 3:13, 3:14, 4:1, 4:3, 4:10, 4:11).

“There’s still a sabbath remaining for God's people” (4:9), and “entering that rest” depends entirely upon maintaining identification with the Lord Jesus! (see references above)

We have been provided most graciously with three essential resources / “tools” for that “maintenance work”:

3:13 – the “coaching” of one another in/by the brotherhood
4:12 – evaluation and instruction by the Word of God
4:14-16 – the merciful intervention of our “great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God”.

Jesus himself is the promised “sabbath rest” for his faithful people! (continued in #146)

Thanks be to God!

**Word Study #111 – Joy**

Having dealt with the verb forms of these words in the study of “rejoicing” (#93), it may seem a bit redundant to return to the noun, “joy”. Several requests, and the prevalence of the concept among the beleaguered brethren of the early church, however, encouraged me to spend some time with the nouns as well, specifically augmenting the New Testament uses of agalliasis, euphrosune, and chara with their appearances in the Septuagint, which may aid in distinguishing between the terms. Especially interesting is the observation that euphrosune, which appears only twice in New Testament writings, is by far the most frequently used in the LXX – more than both of the others combined!

Bauer observes that agalliasis does not appear at all in “secular” writers, though he finds a few instances of referral to pagan deities, as well as Messianic contexts in the LXX. The distinctions show up much more clearly in the Septuagint than in the New Testament, although that impression may be colored by the handicap that my LXX concordance is much less comprehensive than Young's.

Agalliasis seems to refer primarily to the euphoria of return from exile, of coronations, and of celebratory worship. Chara also refers to freedom from captivity – L/S connects it with good news, or joy at an event – but it also includes a strong
sense of the presence of the Lord, especially in the psalms. *Euphrosune* describes pretty much any sort of a party – even the debauchery of Artaxerxes, and the celebrations of the defeat of Haman (Esther). It also appears in the prophets’ announcements (especially Isaiah and Jeremiah) that “the party’s over” and exile is on the horizon, as well as the celebrations at both the beginning and the completion of the rebuilding of wall and temple under Ezra and Nehemiah. Although *euphrosune* is frequently paired with one of the other words in celebrations of return from exile or defeat of enemies, it is also disparaged in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes as levity or frivolity.

In the New Testament, the situation is markedly different. We have noted already that *euphrosune* appears only twice: one of which, (Ac.2:28) is an Old Testament quotation from Ps.15, and the other (Ac.14:17) is a part of Paul’s frantic attempt to prevent the offering of pagan sacrifice to him and Barnabas, in Lystra. *Agalliasis* is used only five times: twice traditionally translated “joy” (Lk.1:44, Jude 24), and three times “gladness” (Lk.1:14 – paired with *chara*, Ac.2:46, Heb.1:9), all of which carry a celebratory air.

*Chara*, by contrast, appears 56x, (less than 20x in LXX), usually rendered “joy”, but 3x “gladness”. It is not clear why the traditional translators changed their word choice in Mk.4:16, Ac.12:14, and Phil.2:29.

L/S records uses of *chara* ever since the sixth century BC dramatists Aeschylus and Sophocles. They observe references to non-specific joy and delight, to the celebratory reaction to good news, and to enjoying an event, a thing, or a companion. Thayer notes that *chara* is the opposite of mourning, and suggests that an accompanying dative case identifies the cause and the genitive case the source of the “joy”. This can be a difficult call. There are many “causes” or “sources” of joy specifically mentioned, and not all are accompanied with a convenient genitive or dative case. For example:

Mt.2:10 – the Magi followed the star with “great joy”
Mt.13:20, Mk.4:16, Lk.8:13 – some people are said to have “received the Word with joy”
Mt. 13:44 – the finder of treasure sells all his belongings “with joy” to enable the purchase.
Then there is the “too-good-to-be-true” syndrome, which accompanies the joy of the disciples as the reality of Jesus’ resurrection dawns on them (Mt.28:8, Lk.14:41); and the exuberance of Rhoda upon recognizing that Peter is really at the door (Ac.12:14) after his miraculous release from prison.

The satisfaction of a job well done, or the faithfulness of one’s proteges (Lk.10:17, Ac.20:24, Rom.15:32, II Cor.7:13, Phil.1:24, 2:2, 4:1; I Thes.2:19,20; Heb.12:2, 13:17; III Jn.4) causes great joy.

I'm sure you can find more.

There is, however, another theme in the New Testament references to “joy” that is not found elsewhere, and this is especially significant. It is not at all surprising that all the healing and deliverance that accompanied Philip's preaching in Samaria (Ac.8:8) should have resulted in “great joy in that city”, or that the report of many conversions should have brought “great joy to the all the brethren” (Ac.15:3) as Paul and his companions made their way to Jerusalem. But when the same reaction is reported among the disciples in Pisidian Antioch (Ac.13:51) after persecutors ran Paul and Barnabas out of town, one is made to realize that something quite different is going on here.

Might it just possibly be related to the prayer (Jn.17:13) accompanying Jesus’ parting conversation with his followers (Jn.16:20-24), as he bequeathed them his own joy, even on the way to his impending torture and death? Or to the power that enabled (Lk.24:52) their return to Jerusalem after his Ascension, “with great joy”, even though they were still mightily scared of the authorities there? Or to the strength to “endure joyfully” the confiscation of their possessions (Heb.10:34) and the “testings” of which James warned (1:2)?

None of these match well with any of the classical definitions.

And please note that none of these refers to any “pie in the sky” as a consolation prize!

James continues his admonition (1:3,4) by explaining that faithfulness under duress produces endurance (see #63), which is an essential component of maturity [completeness] in Kingdom living.

Peter (I Pet.1:3-9) indeed includes the anticipation of Jesus’ return in encouraging his readers to continue in faithfulness: but remember, as he speaks of joy in the “inheritance” provided by Jesus’ resurrection, that one receives an inheritance while he (the recipient) is living (see #79 and #80), not after his own death!

Bauer notes that the occasional use of *chara* (at least 10x) with a form of *pleroma / pleroo* (see #108) probably indicates the highest or most complete form of “joy”. Please check out Jn.3:29, 15:11, 16:24, 17:13, Ac.13:52, Rom.15:13, Phil.2:2, II Tim.1:4, I Jn.1:4, II Jn.12.

This is a joy born and nurtured in and by relationship, with the Lord Jesus and with each other. This is the joy that Jesus prayed — and modeled — for his disciples, and that Paul and John both hold forth as the ultimate gift, in all its “fullness”[completeness]. Far exceeding the bounds of shallow celebration, or gloatiing over enemies, it is the very atmosphere of the Kingdom.
“May the God of hope [or, God, the source of hope] fill you all with all joy and peace, in faithfulness, so that you may overflow with hope [confidence] in [by] the power of the Holy Spirit!” (Rom.15:13)

Word Study #112 – Keys

Our brother Jim asked a fascinating question at church a couple weeks ago: “What are keys for?” He went on to observe that we frequently think of locking doors for “protection” of ourselves or our property, and seldom of using a key to open a door. That made me curious: his suggestion that in contrast, the New Testament descriptions of the Kingdom say more about opening doors than about locking them sounded right – so I decided to check. It’s not unusual for Jim to be much more perceptive than most folks – but this is over the top! It is beautiful!

Keys – kleis – interestingly, only occurs six times in the New Testament. “Lock” never appears at all; “to shut” (four different words) about 20 times, and “to open” (anoigo) more than 70 times!
In fact, the only place where Jesus speaks of keys locking anyone out (Mt.23:13 uses the verb form and Lk.11:52 the noun), is in criticism of the scribes and Pharisees for their attempts to prevent “ordinary folks” from entering the Kingdom! (Luke uses gnoseos – knowledge – instead of “kingdom”; this is sometimes, I think spuriously, attributed to Gnostic influence, ignoring the fact that “knowledge” of the Law was very important to first century Judaism as well.) In the Revelation, one messenger uses a key (20:1) to confine the dragon in the “bottomless pit”, but another uses it (9:1) to let locusts out. Jesus himself almost seems to display the “keys of death and hades” (1:18) as trophies of his resurrection, and reassures his struggling followers (3:7,8) that when he opens a door for them, no one can slam it in their faces! Jesus' keys, in harmony with all the rest of his life and ministry, are all about setting people free!

Digging around farther yielded more nuggets. Many of the references to “shut” are rather ordinary: a door is shut when the family retires for the night (Lk.11:7); when the disciples fear a raid by the authorities (Jn.20:19,26); in situations of imprisonment (Ac.5:23, Lk.3:20, Ac.26:10). A period of drought is described as “heaven [the sky] being shut” (Lk.4:25, Rv.11:6). Persistent refusal of the Lord's message “shuts up” people away from faithfulness (Rom.11:32, Gal.3:22,23).

But how much more numerous – and more glorious – are all the things that are “opened”!
The eyes of the blind – Mt.9:30, 20:33, Jn.9:10,14,17,21,26,30,33; 10:21; 11:37; and even the eyes of Tabitha [Dorcas] when she was raised from death!
There are visions of heaven [the sky] being opened – at Jesus' baptism (Mt.3:16, Lk.3:21, Jn.1:51,52), to welcome Stephen as he was stoned (Ac.7:56), to give Peter needed instructions (Ac.10:11), and to show the elderly disciple, John, the wonders revealed throughout the account of Revelation.
Graves were opened at the time of Jesus' resurrection. (Mt.27:52,53)
Prison doors yielded to messengers of God (Ac.5:19, 23; 12:10), and to jailed apostles (Ac.16:26,27).
Repeatedly, doors are flung open to let people in (Mt.25:11, Lk.12:36, 13:25; Ac.12:14,16), and to admit the true Shepherd to the sheepfold (Jn.10:3).

This term is also frequently used figuratively, of opportunities, as the Lord enabled the spreading of his message (I Cor.16:9, II Cor.2:12, Ac.14:27, Col.4:3), and also of Jesus' gracious promise that the “door” will be opened to his faithful people who persist in “knocking” and seeking his ways (Mt.7:7,8; Lk.11:9,10). A prefixed form (dianoigo) is needed to convey the divine intervention involved (Lk.24:31,32) in order for the eyes of the grieving disciples at Emmaus to be “opened” to recognize the risen Lord as he “opened” the scriptures for them to understand.

Most of these, of course, required/employed no “keys”. But there is one more situation that does: the much-discussed “binding and loosing” conversation in Mt.16:18-19 and its related passage in Mt.18:18. These common words, deo and luo, are most commonly used of imprisonment and release, of healings, and of legal obligations. Much of the “theological” controversy about these two exceptional references, I believe, results from failure to (1) look at both passages together, and (2) pay careful attention to the grammatical constructions which are carefully (and, I believe, deliberately) parallel. Both the vocabulary and the grammar are nearly identical. It is true that the ch.16 statement is addressed to Peter personally: the verbs, and the pronoun, are singular, whereas the one in ch.18 is addressed to the entire brotherhood, since all terms are cast in the plural. However, the rebuke that Jesus addressed to Peter immediately afterward (v.21-23) should make it abundantly clear that he had not been thereby elevated to some sort of exalted status or authority. People who see either or both statements as conferring judicial privilege or prerogative, upon either an individual or the disciple group as a whole, have
failed to notice that both statements employ **perfect passive participles**. Unfortunately, both passages are traditionally (incorrectly) read as if they were future active verbs. Correct attention to the actual grammatical structure reveals that the situation described is one of **responsibility to discern** and communicate accurately the action/decision that has **already taken place** “in heaven” – NOT the power to dictate that decision!

Whether the issue is admission to the Kingdom (note: the keys are to “the Kingdom”, not to “heaven”) as in chapter 16, or the forgiveness of an erring brother as in chapter 18, the “binding” or “loosing” “will be” – a future tense, that may sometimes carry the force of an imperative – “**what has already been done** (perfect passive) in heaven”. This is a very common use of a participle, called “circumstantial”, and is frequently translated as a dependent clause. The tense of the participle represents its “time” in relation to the primary clause of the sentence. A perfect tense, remember, describes a **past** action that continues, at least in effect, into the present, or beyond. The passive voice indicates that the subject is **acted upon**; it is not the actor. Clearly, in neither case is anyone entrusted with a signed, blank check. In both, the person or group is cautioned only to **mediate what has already occurred**. This calls for **careful discernment**, not an executive decision.

Paul was probably following these – or similar – instructions when he dealt (II Cor.2:1-11) with the restoration of the person disciplined by the brotherhood in I Cor.5. Notice especially I Cor.5:4 and II Cor.2:10. Although his vocabulary is different, the idea is the same: “incarnating” the gift of restoration **already** provided by the Lord.

So perhaps the whole idea of “keys” in the Kingdom is somewhat parallel to the training “yoke” Jesus offered in Mt.11:28-30 (W.S.#77); or to the parent who, not without trepidation, tosses his car keys to his teenager! They are still Dad's keys! But part of growing up requires learning to use them responsibly. And that learning involves serious risk. It is the one who **owns** the keys (Rev.1:18), who opens doors for his people that no one can shut (3:7), who nevertheless is willing, himself, to “stand at the door and knock” (3:20), waiting for it to be thrown open in welcome by disciples willing to learn.

May we recognize – and heed – his voice!

**Word Study #113 – Miracles**

“Do you believe in miracles?” has to be one of the silliest questions ever posed by people who presume to pass judgment on one another’s “faithfulness” or “intelligence” (or lack of either!) by their replies to simplistic, programmed doctrinal examinations. Nowhere in the New Testament is anyone asked to profess such a “belief” (see W.S.#1). Miracles are the gracious acts of God which are designed to enable ordinary citizens of Earth to perceive his grace, his power, his love, and his glory, in order that they might choose to become faithful citizens of the Kingdom of his beloved Son! They are intended to draw attention, not to some spectacular “wow” factor, but **beyond** any specific event – beyond the limits of time or space or normal human expectation – to the realm of life as its Creator originally intended for it to be lived.

There are three primary words which are used to speak of such events: **dunamis**, rendered 8x “miracle” and 77x “power”; **semeion**, 22x “miracle” and 51x “sign”; and **teras**, consistently rendered “wonders”, 16x. This last only appears in the plural, **terata**, and is **always** accompanied by at least one of the other two words. Trench speculates that this may be because **teras** was so frequently used in pagan contexts of omens and portents, that Christian writers took care that the term not be interpreted magically. The ancients frequently assumed that unusual appearances in the sky or creatures behaving strangely were messages from the gods, so this would have been a valid concern. Trench further suggests, “These different words do not so much represent different **kinds** of miracles, as they do miracles contemplated from different points of view.”

Both **dunamis** and **semeion** may refer to healing, to exorcism, to the credentials or identification of Jesus or his representatives, or simply generically to his activities among people of all descriptions. As noted in W.S.#31, **dunamis** generally refers to the power or ability to do something. Lexically, it also described any natural capacity that could be cultivated, for either good or ill, as well as a manifestation of divine power. I share the lament expressed by Trench that traditional translators, seemingly at random, chose to use “miracles” 8x (Mk.9:39, Ac.2:22, 8:13, 19:11; I Cor.12:10,28; Gal.3:5, Heb.2:4), and “mighty works” 12x (Mt.11:20,21,23; 13:54,58; 14:2; Mk.6:2,5,24; Lk.10:13, 19:37; II Cor.12:12), instead of opting for consistency. Surely they did not consider the deeds of Jesus himself less “miraculous” than similar activities which he enabled Philip, Paul, and other brethren to perform!
The same question could/should be raised regarding the traditional treatment of *semeion*. This, too, had classical uses that were related to the activity of pagan gods and heroes, as well as to the proof of an argument, an instance or example, or an indication of the future. In the New Testament, it usually includes the ethical end and purpose of an event, the prime object of which is to lead observers to something beyond their experience. “It must go beyond nature, valuable, not so much for what is accomplished, but for what it indicates of the grace and power of the doer, or his connection to a higher, spiritual world” (Trench). In order to be a “sign”, an event must be something that could not have “just happened” – the raising of Lazarus who had been dead for four days (Jn.11:47), the healing with a simple word of a man lame from birth (Ac.4:16), or the feeding of a large crowd with a very small amount of food (Jn.6:14).

Please note, that confining the term “miracle” to occurrences that are clearly beyond nature, IN NO WAY needs to diminish our appreciation of divine activity in the natural course of life. It is no more necessary or appropriate to label all of God’s creation as “miraculous” than it is to declare that “all the children are above average!” Nature also bears testimony to the power and glory of God (Rom.1:19,20) but it is not all “miraculous.” Neither are the birth of a child (unless under unusual circumstances like those of Sarah, Elizabeth, and Mary), gradual (even if astonishing) recovery from illness or accident, or provision for various needs through normal human channels. All of these can – and should – be recognized as gracious gifts of God (see James 1:17). But everything designated a “miracle” in the New Testament was immediate, and also immediately and clearly recognized by participants and spectators alike as completely out-of-the-ordinary.

John takes special care to explain how certain ones of Jesus' acts became “signs” (2:11, 2:23, 4:54, 6:2, 6:14), and even notes Jesus' complaint (6:26) that for the vast majority, the real intent of the “sign” was missed completely. (All of these use *semeion*.)

The demands of skeptical authorities for a “sign” from Jesus (Mt.12:38-39, 16:4; Mk.8:11-12, Lk.11:16,29,30; Jn.2:18, 4:48, 6:30) seem to carry more of the pagan, “magical” flavor, as do the warnings against the performance of impostors and false prophets (Mt.24:24, Mk.13:22, II Thes.2:9, Jn.4:48, Rv.13:14, 16:14), but genuine demonstrations of the power of God do serve as validation of the message, not only carried by Jesus, but also his delegated representatives (Mk.16:17,20; Jn.20:30, Ac.2:22,43; 5:12, 14:3, Rom.15:19, II Cor.12:12, Heb.2:4).

That the true import of these can be seriously misunderstood is evident in the episode with Simon the magician in Samaria (Ac.8), as well as in those who dismissed Jesus' acts as empowered by “the prince of demons” (Mt.9:34, 12:24). Therefore, it is absolutely essential that true disciples who are assigned and empowered to mediate the touch of the Lord, acknowledge plainly, as did the early apostles, that “God did these things by the hands of” various ones of their number (Ac.2:43, 4:22, 6:8, 14:3, 15:12, 19:11). Here, as so frequently in other situations, careful discernment on the part of the brotherhood is absolutely essential, to distinguish between genuine signs and dangerous deception (Mt.24, Mk.13, Lk.21).

Conspicuous by its absence is any suggestion of a requirement that anyone “believe” that a miracle of any kind had occurred in the absence of evidence. To the contrary, when any reaction on the part of either the beneficiary or the spectators is mentioned, it is one of amazement at the unexpected graciousness of what they had seen or experienced. There is absolutely no Scriptural precedent for the practice of “blaming the victim” that is common among some flamboyant, self-styled “healers”. Remember that in the only recorded incident where disciples' attempts at healing had “failed”, Jesus attributed the failure to the “faith/faithfulness” of the disciples, not that of the supplicant father or his son (Mt.17:14-18 and parallels).

We may much more appropriately join in the prayer of some of our earliest brethren (Ac.4:30) as they faced persecution and prison: “And now, Lord …Reach out with your hand for healings and signs and wonders to happen, through the name of your holy child [servant] Jesus!” His gracious answer enabled their confident propagation of his message (v.31).

Amen, Lord! Let it continually be so!

**Word Study #114 – Vineyards, Vines, and Fig Trees**

It has long been assumed, by teachers and preachers of varied theological and philosophical persuasions, that biblical mentions of vineyards, vines, and fig trees invariably represent the nation of Israel. That this assumption has at least some factual basis is evidenced in the violent reactions of the hierarchical leadership to Jesus' use of those figures in parables – Mt.21:45, Mk.12:12, Lk.20:19. However, an extensive search for historical precedent for that connection has yielded very
little documentation. If you can find more, please add them to this collection.

Most of the Septuagint references to any of these words are primarily agricultural. There are at least 11 instances of legal requirements regarding the husbandry of produce: provisions for the poor, protection for a neighbor's property, stewardship of the soil.

The enjoyment of one's own “vine and fig tree” symbolizes prosperity and security – describing the Promised Land before they entered it (6x), the restoration of the people after exile (15x), the “bribe” offered by the Assyrians (6x), and a non-specific state of “blessedness” (6x). The destruction of that idyllic state is prominent in the judgment meted out for the nation's unfaithfulness (38x). The growth or budding of vines or trees simply indicates the coming of spring at least 8x, and 3x in the New Testament.

In fact, there are only five Old Testament passages where specific, overt reference is made to the Israelite nation in relation to vines and trees. Isaiah 5:1-7 recounts the Lord's lament over the failure of his carefully planted and tended vineyard to produce the hoped-for harvest. His only recourse is to tear it up and start over. Jeremiah 2:20-21 describes similar displeasure, and 12:10 (actually, vv.7-14) lays a considerable portion of the blame upon the individuals entrusted with its care. And Hosea 9:10 and 10:1 describe God's efforts to create a productive vineyard out of plants carefully transplanted from the wild, meticulously nurtured, but rendered unproductive by the people's failure to renounce their idolatry and selfishness.

The theme is nowhere near as prominent in the New Testament as I expected, either. Mention of vines and figs in the epistles occur only in James' comment (3:12) regarding a plant bearing only its own kind of fruit, and Paul's reminder that one who plants expects to eat the harvest (I Cor.9:7). Neither has any national or ethnic tone.

Jesus did pick up these ideas quite vividly in four parables, only one of which appears in all three synoptic gospels: Mt.21:33-41, Mk.12:1-9, Lk.20:9-16. This is the one which most nearly parallels Isaiah's and Jeremiah's complaints, and which drew fire from the hierarchy-types, who “recognized that he was talking about them” – the tenant farmers who conspired to defraud the owner of the vineyard, and subsequently abused and killed his messengers/servants/son. Jesus' sentence of eviction closely parallels the earlier prophets' warnings of destruction. Only this time, there is no possibility of return mentioned (Mt.21:41-44, Mk.12:9, Lk.20:16), but a simple, peremptory statement that the vineyard will be given to others who will produce its fruit.

The unfruitful fig tree in Lk.13:6-8, on the other hand, although it has been barren for three years (the approximate length of Jesus' earthly ministry), is given “one more year” – v.8 – (perhaps the care and fertilization efforts of his people after Pentecost?) before finally being cut down.

The barren figs along the road (an event, not a parable) recounted in Mt.21:19-21 and Mk.11:13-21, however, have no such reprieve. That scene always bothered me, as I did not think Jesus would be petulant, as it seems to the casual observer. But when we lived in California, and had two lovely fig trees in our yard, it made sense. We learned that tiny figs appear on the branches in the spring before any leaf buds are evident. A tree fully leafed-out, with no fruit (even unripe) visible, would rightly be seen as worthless. It would never bear.

Likewise, exposure to the needs of an agricultural community, as well as a subsistence economy, provides insight into the parable of the vineyard workers in Mt.20:1-8. A denarius was a standard wage – enough for one day. The earliest-hired laborers appear to have considered it reasonable. Those not hired in the morning probably spent the day worrying whether they would feed their families that night. And perhaps the owner, too, was under pressure. Grapes must be harvested when they are ready, lest they be spoiled by getting over-ripe, or damaged by weather. The master's repeated trips to the employment center may have been in desperation to complete the harvest at the proper time. This would have made the last group the most necessary of all! His generosity may have been spurred by his need.

And finally, the affair of the two sons (Mt.21:28-32) replays a frequent theme of Jesus' entire ministry – that behavior is a much more significant and reliable indicator of faithfulness than pious talk!

It remains to consider the sharp shift of focus in Jesus' final conversation with his disciples recorded in Jn.15:1-8. That focus is no longer on the failed figure of a vineyard, or on any political or religious institution, but on the “real thing”! He announces, “I AM (see W.S.#17) the genuine [real, true] vine” (v.1). This is the ultimate “demonstration farm”, and the Father is the farmer (georgos, the expert on all the crops, not merely ampelourgos, the vinedresser.) Cultivating and maintaining vines requires a high level of skill. My husband learned from his own father to recognize which were fruiting buds, and which would produce only leaves or new branches. A healthy vine needs a balance of all three, but the pruning must be done before anything starts to grow or to become obvious to the untrained eye. The direction
of growth is selected in the pruning process. Anything diseased or damaged must be eliminated, along with excessive vegetative growth, or branches that compete for a place in the sun. Although a healthy twig can be planted to clone a supplementary vine, only those remaining attached to the vine will bear fruit.

The fruit is borne on the branches, but the life that produces it comes through the parent vine. And please notice, that although branches need – and receive – individual attention from the vinedresser, all of the words are plural. It is only together that we/they “bear fruit and become disciples (v.8)”. Please refer also to W.S.#64, “Bearing fruit”, and #65, “Pruning”.

So in a very real sense, the concept of the disciple group as branches of the Vine, which has been identified as the Lord himself, is an apt supplement to the descriptions of that same group as members of the Body of Christ (#84, and chapter 7 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*). Both are vivid examples of the lengths to which the Lord of Glory has been willing to go, in order that his people may enjoy the privilege of being an integral part of his Kingdom – and indeed, of his own Life!

May we be found fruitful – and faithful – in that privileged position!

**Word Study #115 – “Conversation”**

Requests for a study on “conversation” sent me beating the bushes for etymological dictionaries!

The English word is used 13 times by traditional translators for the noun *anastrophe*, as well as once for *politeuma* and once for *tropos*. The verb *anastrepho* is translated “have conversation” twice. But in none of these does the implication parallel our modern use of “conversation” as “sitting around with a cup of coffee and talking about things.” This time, our misunderstanding is a result of the English language, not the Greek.

Like all languages, English has changed both its structure and its vocabulary over the years. In the mid-14th century, “conversation” referred to “living together and having dealings with others; one's manner of conducting himself in the world” – which is much closer to the Greek words in the text.

In the early 16th century, the domain of “conversation” added criminal behavior, and in the late 16th century, it included sexual intercourse. By the late 18th century, it was the legal term for adultery! (I found the most useful source to be an Etymological Dictionary by Douglas Harper, who lists his own sources as the Oxford English Dictionary, and others by Klein, and Weekley.) None of these varied definitions is a part of the modern understanding of “conversation”, and only the oldest is included in the lexical information on any of the Greek words so translated in the New Testament.

According to Liddell/Scott, *anastrepho*, of which only the middle and passive forms were rendered “conversation”, was used classically as “to dwell, to go about in public, to be engaged in some activity, to conduct oneself, to behave.”

Classical uses of the noun form, *anastrophe*, likewise included “one's dwelling or abode, mode of life or behavior, civilized life, occupation, or concern.” Active voice occurrences, in both cases, carry the more literal sense of overthrowing, reversing, or returning, but they are not relevant to the “conversation” question.

*Politeuma*, with only a single New Testament appearance, was classically a reference to citizenship, with its duties and privileges. Please see W.S.#100, as well as the essay on “citizenship” in #150, and the small book, *Citizens of the Kingdom* which is also available as a free download on this site.

*Tropos*, usually used in an adverbial phrase, refers to the manner or custom in which anything is done.

Are you seeing any pattern here? This is not the first time that misunderstanding of a word has led well-meaning people to assume a theoretical rather than a practical focus for their ideas of “faithfulness [faith]” (W.S.#1). “Conversation”, like “faithfulness”, is used in the New Testament to refer not to talk, but to behavior!

*Anastrepho*, for example, only translated “had our conversation” in II Cor.1:12 and Eph.2:3, where Paul is clearly referring to his/their manner of life before their conversion, is rendered “abide” in Mt.17:22 regarding Jesus spending time in Galilee; “be used” in Heb.10:33 of the mistreatment of believers; “behave yourself” in I Tim.3:15; “live” in Heb.13:18 and II Pet.2:18; and “pass” in I Pet.1:17 – all referring to one's manner of life.

*Anastrophe*, used 13x, and uniformly translated “conversation”, is also an obvious reference to one's manner of life or behavior, whether in the unconverted past (Eph.4:22, I Pet.1:18, II Pet.2:7), the setting of an example of appropriate living
Realism also requires a recognition that while “holy” (W.S.#32) living may result in the conversion of others (I Pet.3:1), it may also provoke persecution and false accusation (I Pet.3:16). Peter, perhaps even more than most other writers, seems to assume persecution, simply advising his readers to be certain that abuse is not deserved, for some less noble reason (see also I Pet.4:14-16).

The single use of politeuma in Phil.3:20 is poorly translated in traditional versions, as the lexical reference to citizenship fits the context much better. Certainly behavior is also in view. During the process of the transformation of life by the power of the Lord Jesus, an observable difference is expected. This is part of learning citizenship!

Tropos appears only 6 times in the New Testament, and was rendered “conversation” only once (Heb.13:5). Elsewhere, it is rendered “manner” (Jude 7), “means” (II Thess.2:3, 3:16), and “way” (Rom.3:2, Phil.1:18), and clearly refers to something being done or accomplished.

So, what are we to say for “conversation”? Primarily, that it does not belong in a (later than 14th century) English translation of the New Testament – at least, not as a rendition of any of the words for which it was used historically. Certainly one's “way of life” will be accompanied with “conversation” about its source, goal, and practice. But as we have seen before, a life transformed by commitment to Jesus' Kingdom is a demonstration project to be lived, not a theory to be debated.

I like the quote attributed to Francis of Assissi, “Preach the gospel at all times – use words only when necessary.” Kingdom living will provoke conversation – but does not consist of it. “The Kingdom of God does not consist of talk, but of power” (I Cor.4:20) – the power of the King's resurrection!

Thanks be to God!

**Word Study #116 – Admonish, Admonition, Exhort, Exhortation**

Here is another requested word that is frequently misunderstood as a result of the evolution of the English language. Most people presently tend to associate it uniformly with giving orders, if not overtly scolding, when that concept, although present, is only a minimal part of classical usage. Traditional translators have used “admonish” or “admonition” to represent four different Greek words.

Two, noutheteo (v.) and nouthesia / nouthetia (n), are related, and derived from nous, one of the words translated “mind.” (W.S.#96). Their classical uses include “to give advice, to warn, to put in mind (remind)”, and only secondarily “to chastise” and “rebuke”. The verb form appears 8x in the New Testament: 4x rendered “admonish” (Rom.15:14, Col.3:16, I Thes.5:12, II Thes.3:15) – of which three refer to mutual activity among the brotherhood – and 4x as “warn” (Ac.20:31, I Cor.4:14, Col.1:28, II Thes.5:14). Frequently, both are associated with teaching, and only twice (II Thes.3:15 and I Thes.5:14) with correction. Note that both of these are addressed to the group, and not to any individual or official. The noun appears only 3x, twice (I Cor.10:11 and Eph.6:4) regarding instruction and once (Tit.3:10) correction.

Chrematizo, only once rendered “admonish” (Heb.8:5), regarding God's instructions to Moses, is translated “warn” (also with respect to God's instructions) 4x: Mt.2:12 – the Magi, Mt.2:22 – Joseph, Ac.10:22 – Cornelius, and Heb.11:7 – Noah. Specific revelation is referenced in Lk.2:26 (Simeon), and the giving of the law in Heb.12:25, whereas Ac.11:26 and Rom.7:3 are simply labeling. In classical writings, chrematizo could also refer to business dealings, negotiations in public assemblies, the administration of justice, or the instructions received from an oracle. A very versatile word!

Hupodeiknumi, which is also translated “warn” in Mt.3:7, Lk.3:7, and Lk.12:5, as well as “show” (as in “reveal”) in Lk.6:47, Ac.9:16, 20:35, is never rendered “admonish”. Please note also that none of these references to “warning” are ever in the context of a threat to the hearers. They represent simply the provision of information and instructions for action. Contemporary speakers who claim to speak for the Lord would do well to remember this!

Paraineo, used only twice in the New Testament, is translated once as “admonish” (Ac.27:9) and once “exhort” (Ac.27:22), both describing Paul's advice to the sailors on the voyage to Rome. These fit well with the classical usage, “to recommend or advise, to propose a course of action.”
The alternate translation of *paraineo*, “exhort,” is more commonly used to render *parakaleo* (19x). Please refer to W.S.#53 for additional exploration of this concept. *Parakaleo*, historically, was used “to summon or send for” a person, or “to invoke the gods.” Subsequently, it was used of a summons for a trial, the calling of a witness, or an appeal in court. Etymologically, it is made up of “*kaleo*”, to call or invite, and “*para*”, alongside of. Later, it was used of proposals, demands and requirements, or exhortation, encouragement, and entreaty. Only traditional translators of the Septuagint and the New Testament ever rendered it “comfort”. They did so 23x. There is no classical precedent for that choice, which has led to serious misunderstandings of the Biblical message. (Please see #138)

“Beseech”, used 43x for *parakaleo*, with its later connotations of abject begging, is rather weak for this word. “Exhort, urge, encourage, or admonish” would much more accurately convey the force of the word.

*Parakaleo* usually (25x in the synoptics) appears in people's appeals to Jesus for healing, where it has traditionally been rendered “beseech/besought, pray, or entreat”, and only once refers to the preaching of John the Baptist (Lk.3:18) as “exhortation.”

In the usage of *parakaleo* in Acts, the idea of requests persists, but is almost equally balanced with “exhortation”, directed both toward “the brethren” (11:23, 14:22, 15:32, 16:40, 20:2) and toward groups who were yet to become committed (2:40). It is not surprising that in the epistles, which were, after all, written for the instruction and encouragement of the brethren in each locality, *parakaleo* appears more frequently than in the gospels and Acts combined – 61x. Its ubiquity is somewhat obscured by the traditional translators' shifting among “beseech, comfort, desire, and exhort” – when in every instance, it is instruction or encouragement that is in view.

As you can easily see, these observations are rather widely scattered. Perhaps the best summary can be gleaned from brother Paul:

“I myself have been persuaded about you all, my brothers,... that you are also able to keep reminding [admonishing] each other...” (Rom.15:14)

“Christ's word must continually reside among you, richly, in all wisdom, as you keep teaching and admonishing each other ...” (Col.3:13)

and the writer to the Hebrews:

“Keep on coaching [exhorting] each other, every day ... so that not one of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of failure [sin]...” (Heb.3:13).

“Admonition” and “exhortation” of and for one another is the best insurance for remaining faithful disciples. May we continually encourage one another in this direction!

**Word Study #117 – War, Warfare, Fighting**

I hope that the folks who were asking for this study did not expect some sort of simplistic answer. Many such “answers” have been promoted throughout history, none of which are supported by exhaustive examination of the text. It should raise questions in the minds of thinking people, that during the first three centuries of the Christian church, military involvement was grounds for expulsion from the group. That policy was only changed under Constantine – the military conqueror. Biblically, even as early as John the Baptist (Lk.3:14), soldiers asking for guidance were told, “Do violence to no one!” (Can you imagine an army operating like that?)

References to these concepts include two primary word-families. The most common includes strateia – “warfare” – (2x), strateuomai – “to make war” – (7x), stratiotes – “soldier” – (26x), strateuma – army – (8x), antistrateuomai – “to make war against” – (1x), sustratiotes – “fellow-soldier” – (2x), and stratiologeo – “to enlist or recruit” – (1x). Although the people mentioned as “soldiers” are invariably members of the occupying Roman legions (only one of whom, a subordinate of Cornelius – Ac.10:7 – is described as “devout”), and “centurions” (commanders of 100 soldiers) appear 24x, the “warfare”, both strateia (n.) (II Cor.10:4 and I Tim.1:18) and strateuomai (v.) (II Cor.10:3, I Tim.1:18, Jas.4:4, I Pet.2:12), refers entirely to the spiritual struggle to live in faithfulness – or, in the latter two instances, the forces against which that struggle is engaged.

Paul does use the unwavering, primary loyalty and obedience required of military personnel as an illustration of the absolute commitment required of Kingdom citizens (II Tim.2:4), and in arguing for the support of persons assigned a particular task (I Cor.9:7), but he certainly does not endorse signing up for Caesar's legions! His speaking of Epaphroditus (Phil.2:25) and Archippus (Phm.2) as “fellow-soldiers” is parallel to calling others “co-workers” and “fellow-servants/slaves.”

The most salient reference in this “family” is II Cor.10:3-4: “Although we are living as (ordinary) humans, we are not doing battle by those standards. The weapons of our battle are not (merely) human, but powerful, by means of God …. (v.5)
Second in frequency is the use of *polemeo* (7x) and *polemos* (16x). These references are divided among “ordinary” strife between kingdoms or nations (Mt.24:6, Mk.13:7, Lk.21:9; Lk.14:31, I Cor.14:8), conflict between people (Jas.4:1,2) – which James matter-of-factly attributes to human selfishness – and, predominately in the Revelation, various phases of the cosmic struggle between good and evil. Please notice that NONE OF THESE WARS ARE INITIATED OR FOUGHT BY PEOPLE! The perpetrators are: the Beast (Rv.11:7, 13:4,13:7), the Dragon (Rv.12:17), “the spirits of demons” and Satan (Rv.16:14, 20:8) who gather kings (but no actual battle is recorded), and a horde of locusts (Rv.9:7-9). When (19:19-20) the Beast has kings and their armies assembled for battle, they are all destroyed by divine intervention. And when the Lamb conquers other kings who are allied with the Beast it is NOT because he and his companions are so “rough and tough and mean” or armed with superior weaponry, but (17:14) “Because he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and those with him are called, and chosen, and faithful!” His only weapon is “the sword of his mouth” (Rv.2:16 and19:21, and see also Eph.6:17).

Note also that there is only one ever mentioned who “passes judgment and makes war in justice” (19:11) – the rider on the white horse, whose name (v.13) is “the Word of God”. (So much for “just wars.”)

Two other, less frequent terms deserve our notice. *Mache / machomai*, appearing 4x each, refers entirely to disputes between individuals. Translations usually tend toward “fight” or “strive”, to describe arguments among Jesus’ critics (Jn.6:52), disputes about the Law (Tit.3:9), “foolish discussions” (II Tim.2:23, 24), and fuss over possessions (Jas.4:1,2). All of these are to be avoided. *Agonizomai* (7x) is otherwise primarily used of athletic contests, or contention in a court of law. Like its English cognate “agony”, it refers to the sense of intense effort. Paul’s messages, to Timothy regarding “fighting a good fight” (I Tim.6:12 and II Tim.4:7), and to the Colossians about the urgency of his prayers on their behalf (Col.1:29,4:12) are supplemented by Jesus’ instructions to “strive to enter the narrow gate” (Lk.13:24), and, strangely, his statement to Pilate of what his disciples would have done if his Kingdom “were of this world.” (Jn.18:36). This last was not, as is commonly supposed, a military statement. *Agonizomai* is never used of military action. Jesus’ people do not even engage in less-widespread violence, even in his – or their own – defense.

The references to weapons (*hopla* – 6x, and *panoplia* – 3x) are likewise instructive. *Panoplia* simply adds the prefix “pan” – “all”. Only in Jn.18:3, where it describes the armed officers who arrested Jesus, and Jesus’ parable in Lk.11:22, does the word refer to conventional weapons of war, in the New Testament. In Rom.6:13, Paul twice uses the secondary meaning of “tools or instruments”, regarding the proper use of one’s physical body. Elsewhere, he stresses that the “weapons” of which he speaks are a different kind: I Cor.10:4 – “not carnal [human]”, Rom.13:12 – “the armor of light”, II Cor.6:7 – “armor of justice [righteousness]”, and the classic passage in Ephesians 6:11 and 13-17.

Notice that the goal here is not conquest, domination, or even physical self-defense, but merely to “stand firm” (v.11). Truth (W.S.#26), justice (#3), the gospel (#67) of peace (#70), faithfulness (#1), and deliverance [salvation] (#5) are all defensive equipment; the only “offensive weapon” – the sword (see above) – is the Word of God. It should be abundantly clear, therefore, that for citizens of Jesus’ Kingdom, although in this life conflict, oppression, and even apparent defeat appear to be a “given”, those citizens do not resort to the methods or the weapons of “normal” warfare. The outcome of the battle is assured, for those who are “called and chosen and faithful”, in the ultimate victory of the Lamb – the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords!

Thanks be to God!

**Word Study #118 – Heaven**

OK, I might as well admit it at the beginning: I have procrastinated about this study, because I know it will rattle a lot of cages. Ask the average individual who has an “evangelical” bent, of whatever “flavor”, why a person should identify with / “believe in” Jesus, and you are likely to hear some variation on the theme, “in order to go to heaven when you die.” Search the New Testament, however, and you will fail to find a single reference to that objective. It simply isn’t there, folks. Oh yes, I know that people have concocted elaborate collections of “proofs”, by combining poorly translated phrases gleaned from dissected bits of “verses” completely isolated from their contexts. Most of these owe their “successes” (read, “believability”) to the mistaken notion that the “Kingdom of God” (Matthew calls it the Kingdom of heaven) is entirely a future phenomenon – an idea that we have shown to be in error in studies #19, 20, and 21.

A careful perusal of the word “heaven” itself results in a very different picture. *Ouranos*, (as well as its related words) is the only Greek word ever translated “heaven.” It is also rendered “sky” and “air”.

Thanks be to God!
These choices were made wholly at translators' discretion: there is no guidance in the grammar or vocabulary to lead one way or another, except one's perception of the context — (birds, for example, fly in the "air" — Mt.6:26). If one wishes to translate "literally", therefore, he must concede that any of these three words is an equally legitimate choice, in every instance. Historically, the primary meaning of ouranos, according to Liddell/Scott, was "the vault or firmament of heaven/sky, where the stars and other heavenly bodies are set". It also included "the universe", "climate", or "anything shaped like the vault of heaven: a roof, ceiling, lid, tent, or pavilion" or even "the roof of one's mouth, the palate", as well as being considered the abode of the gods (but not of dead mortals, however illustrious or exemplary their earthly lives may have been.)

Many of these ideas appear in the New Testament. "Heaven" is a part of creation, along with the earth and the sea (Mt.13:27, Ac.2:5, 2:19, 4:24; Eph.1:10, 3:15; Col.1:16, 1:23; Rev.5:13, 10:6,14:7, 14:15). With them, it will eventually "pass away" (Mt.5:18, 24:35; Mk.13:31, Lk.16:17, 21:33; Rev.20:11).

It is where the stars are (Mt.24:29, Mk.13:25, Heb.11:12, Rv.13:10, 9:1); the location of clouds (Mt.24:30, 26:64, Mk.14:62, Ac.1:11); where rain comes from (Lk.4:25, 17:29; Jas.5:18), and how one can predict the weather (Mt.16:2,3; Lk.12:56). It provides a metaphor for great distance or extent ("from one end of heaven to the other" Mt.24:31 and parallels), and "every nation under heaven" (Ac.2:5, Eph.3:15).

But the New Testament also expands the reference to include "the throne of God" (Mt.5:34, Ac.7:49), the dwelling of the Father (14x in Matthew alone), the "place" where both Jesus (Jn.3:13;6:38) and the Holy Spirit (1 Pet.1:12) came from; where Jesus presently resides (Mt.16:19, Ac.3:21, 7:55, Heb.9:24, 12:25; I Pet.3:22), and from whence he is expected to return to earth (I Cor.15:47, Phil.3:20, I Thes.1:10, 4:16; II Thes.1:7).

Heaven is represented as the source of visions (Jn.1:32, Mt.3:16, Mk.1:10, Lk.3:22, Ac.2:2, 9:3, 22:6, 10:11, 11:5-10, II Cor.2,2, II Pet.1:18, and throughout the Revelation), the source of the "assignments" of both John the Baptist and Jesus himself (Mt.21:25, Mk.11:30, Lk.20:4,5), and also of "signs", especially regarding the Lord's identity (Mt.6:1, Mk.8:11, Lk.11:16) and his return (Lk.21:11, Mt.24:30).

It is the abode of some (not all) "messengers" (see reference to aggelos in "Helps for Word Study" lesson 3, and W.S.#140) — (Mt.18:10, 22:30; Mk.12:25,13:32; Lk.2:15, 22:43), and also of "powers", both benign and malevolent (Mt.13:25, Lk.21:26).

The names of faithful disciples are recorded there (Lk.10:20, Heb.12:23).
"Rewards" — Lk.6:23,(W.S.#98) and "treasures" (Mt.6:20, 19:21, and parallels) are "on deposit" there.

Decisions regarding matters on earth (Mt.16:19, 18:18) are represented as being made "in heaven".

Interestingly, however, the much quoted parable of the respective fates of the rich man and the beggar (Lk.16:19-31) does not employ the word ouranos at all, nor do the accounts of any of the individuals raised from death: Lazarus (Jn.11), the daughter of Jairus (Mk.5:35-43, Lk.8:49-56), the widow's son (Lk.7:11-17), and Tabitha / Dorcas (Ac.9:36-42). None of these regaled their audiences with tales of "visits to heaven" or anything of the kind. We will look at the entirely separate issue of "death" in the next study.

The epistles, which we have referenced only briefly up to this point, reveal a slightly different perspective. Both Paul (Eph.4:10) and the writer of Hebrews (7:26) speak of Jesus' exaltation "above" or "higher than" the heavens, and Paul details the obligation of all creatures "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" to worship at his feet (Phil.2:9).

Peter refers to the heavens, although "made" by the word of God (II Pet.3:5), "passing away" (3:7, 3:10), "being on fire" (3:12), (Wait a minute! That's not where we have been told the fire was!), and he looks forward, as does John, repeatedly in the Revelation, to "a new heaven and a new earth" (3:13), in which, at last, "justice will settle down to live"!

Our hope (Col.1:5), our Master (Eph.6:9, Col.4:1), the focus of our behavior (Phil.3:20), our destined "dwelling" (physical body?) (II Cor.5:2), our enduring – as opposed to confiscated – possessions (Heb.10:34), our inheritance (I Pet.1:4), are all presently "in heaven", despite the surprising discovery that nothing is said about anybody but Jesus and the two "witnesses" / martyrs from Rev.11:12,13,15 actually "going there"! (Rom.10:6, Heb.9:24, 4:14).

In fact, Peter (Ac.2:34), Paul (Rom.10:6) and John (3:13) all assert that this is impossible for ordinary mortals!

Although in John's visions recorded in the Revelation, there are numerous scenes of thousands "around the throne" singing praises, remember that neither the time, the individuals (except for their faithfulness), nor the geographical (or cosmological) location is specifically identified.

In the final scene, the New Jerusalem is seen "coming down from God out of heaven (Rev.21:2) after the introduction of the "new heaven and new earth."

Stay tuned, and review the studies of the Kingdom (#19,20,21) and "Life" (#28) in preparation for an examination of the New Testament approach to the "destiny" of the faithful.
Word Study #119 – Heaven: It's NOT about “after you die”!

Let’s get one thing straight from the beginning. Scripture is clear, and Jesus said plainly, that he desired (Jn.17:24), planned (Jn.6:39-40), and provided (Jn.14:1-4) for his people to **share life with him – permanently**. Paul (I Cor.15) even goes so far as to say that without the resurrection (#35), we might as well forget the whole thing (v.17-18)! Although he represents the resurrection of committed disciples to have taken place, symbolically and practically, at their conversion and baptism (Rom.6:1-9, Col.2:12), and asserts that their / our new life has already begun, he clearly expects something more (I Thes.4:13-18) when Jesus returns.

Huge amounts of ink have been spilled over when, exactly, that resurrection takes place. None of the references to it make any mention of “heaven”, as we have seen. Opposing “sides” have stockpiled their textual “weapons”, some to insist that it is all instantaneous at the moment of physical death (cit ing the thief on the cross), and others to maintain that those who have passed on are “asleep” (a common euphemism for death both in and out of Scripture) until the Lord’s return (as suggested in the I Thes.4 passage). This whole controversy strikes me as rather silly, since, if “time shall be no more” (Rv.10:6), the “timing” couldn’t possibly matter – or even be discernible!

When Jesus spoke of “eternal life” (W.S.#28), it was almost always in the **present** tense, and predicated, as in Jn.3:36, upon obedience and faithfulness to the Son of God, and not upon subscribing to any list of “doctrines”. Indeed, the tense is occasionally even **perfect**: Jn.5:24 – (the faithful person) “has passed from death into life”! John reiterates that statement in his first letter (3:14) – it must have made an impression on him!

Nevertheless, (physical) death was / is still a “fact of life”: it was for Jesus himself, and has been for even the most faithful of his people. Jesus is the only one who said anything about “where” he was “going” – and his statement was simply, “I am going to the Father” (Jn.14:12, 28; 16:28), or “to the one who sent me” (Jn.16:5). For Paul, (Phil.1:23) “to depart and be with Christ” was an attractive prospect. But notice that this is embedded in a much longer discourse about faithful **living**.

Most of the references to a person having died say no more than that: whether the person was faithful – like Simeon, (Lk.2:28), John the Baptist (Mt.14:10-11 and parallels), Stephen (Ac.7:54-56), Dorcas (Ac.9:36), and James (Ac.12:1) – or unfaithful – like both Herods (Mt.2:19, Ac.2:23), Ananias and Sapphira (Ac.5), and Judas (Mt.27:5) – or innocent, like the children of Bethlehem (Mt.2:18)-- they just “died”. Please also refer to the previous post regarding the people who committed his spirit to the Father at his death (Lk.23:45). Matthew (27:50) and Mark (15:36) speak of his having released his spirit, and John (19:30) says “yielded.” As he was stoned, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” (Ac.7:59). Please note that the word used in each case is **pneuma** – “spirit / breath” (W.S.#52) – and not the pagan concept of “soul” **psyche**. (Refer to discussion in #28, “life”).

We have also treated the word **aion, aionios** in the study on “life”, and seen that its reference is virtually impossible to pin down. The easy cop-out, rendering it “eternity, eternal, or forever” simply does not work in many places. For example, do you really think Jesus intended to say that he would accompany his disciples (Mt.28:20) “to the end of eternity”? I don’t think so!

Jesus’ responses to people who asked him about “eternal life” – even if the questioners thought they were referring to an afterlife – were exquisitely **practical** – “Do this, and you will live / enter into life!” is the refrain. Like “entering the Kingdom”, (#19,20,21), this happens **during one’s physical life on earth**! And a more accurate (yes, “literal”) translation of Jesus’ statement in Jn.11:26, in answer to Martha’s postponement of resurrection until the “last day” (v.24), is “Everyone living, who is faithful to me, will not die forever!” If he had meant “never die”, he would have used **oudepote**, and not **eis ton aion**. Millions of faithful people have died – but not forever!

The epistles, concerned as they are with the faithfulness of living brotherhoods, make rather few references to death, except to say that it is really not a problem. Although Paul, who was probably thoroughly tired of sitting in jail, writes to the Philippians that he’d really like to “depart the be with Christ” (1:23), which he calls “far preferable”, his focus is that “Christ be magnified in my body whether through life or through death” (v.21).

In other contexts, “death” or “dead” is used as a description of total alienation from God and his ways (Rom.6,7,8), of people’s condition before their commitment to Jesus’ Kingdom (Eph.2:1, 2:5, Col.2:13), of the expected complete abandonment of one’s former way of life (Rom.6:11, 8:10, Heb.6:1, 9:14), or as identification with Jesus in his death and resurrection life (Rom.6:1-13, 8:11, I Cor.15, Eph.5:14).

Since the epistles were frequently written in a context of extreme persecution, however, the reality of the constant threat of
execution is not ignored. Jesus had given fair warning that the time would come when (Jn.16:2) “everyone who kills you will perceive that he is offering service to God!” Paul himself (Ac.9:1, 22:4) had shared that perception before he met Jesus! But in his new life, he expressed a new attitude in II Cor.1:9-10, and II Cor.4:11,12 is buttressed with v.16-18. John relays Jesus' message in Rv.2:10 to beleaguered brethren, and Paul reassures the Roman church (8:38) that death does not have the last word.

I really believe the primary lesson here is that it's not about what happens to ME, either before or after physical death. It's about faithfully representing Jesus and his Kingdom, regardless of the consequences either now or later!

We can say this because there is yet another glorious truth, far too frequently neglected in what passes for “Christian teaching”. Paul refers to it in II Tim.1:10 – (Jesus) “DESTROYED death, bringing to light life and immortality through the Good News!” and I Cor.15:26 – “The last enemy to be destroyed is death!” “So then, if we are living, we are living for the Lord, and if we die, we are dying for the Lord. Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord!” (Rom.14:8).

The situation is even more vividly described in Heb.2:14,15: “through (his) death, (Jesus) once-and-for-all destroyed the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and rescued those who, by fear of death, were held in slavery all their lives!” One who does not fear death, cannot be enslaved or otherwise coerced!

“He (Jesus) died on behalf of everyone, in order that those who are alive might no longer be living for themselves, but for the one who died and was raised on their behalf!” (II Cor.5:15). Jesus himself said it most simply: “Because I am alive, you also will be alive!” (Jn.14:9)

Where? When? Here is one follower of the Lord Jesus who really doesn't care. In the words of an old hymn, “It's heaven to me, wherever I be, if he is there!” And of that, his promise is certain.

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #120 – Convert, Conversion

Here is another word, requested several times, of which the commonly understood meaning has departed markedly from its historical usage. It needs to be studied in conjunction with “transformation” (#97) and “repentance” (#6). All three of these share more in common than is usually realized, and all imply *deliberate alteration in one's behavior*, rather than simple assent to a set of theoretical propositions or “beliefs.”

Even in traditional English translations, *epistrepho*, the primary Greek word, out of 39 New Testament appearances, is rendered “convert” or “converted” only 7x. It is much more commonly (and correctly) translated “turn” (16x), “turn about”, “turn again” (4x each), “return” (8x), and “come” or “go again” once each. Likewise, *strepho*, the same word, but without a prefix, is rendered “converted” only twice, and some form of “turn” 16x. Obviously, the translators thought they were dealing with a different concept in those aberrations: but perhaps that was due to the theological understanding of their own era taking precedence over etymology. This is not a rare occurrence.

Liddell / Scott lists 14 meanings for *epistrepho*. Remember, they have compiled the ways that a word has been used historically. By far the most common, as well as the earliest use, is simply “to turn around”. This is followed by: to put an enemy to flight, to return, to turn towards, to turn one's attention toward or pay attention to, to turn or convert from an error (to correct), to repent (exclusively LXX and NT), to cause to return, to curve or twist (as a path), to be distorted, crooked (of a tree), or curled (hair), to conduct oneself or behave in a particular way, (and as a participle) earnest or vehement.

The uses of *strepho* are even more varied, including: to cause to rotate on an axis, to overturn or upset, to plow, to sprain or dislocate a joint, to twist or torture, to plait (braid), to wrestle, to turn something over in one's mind, to give back, (in alchemy) the transmutation of metals, to turn to or from an object or person, the revolving or cycling of heavenly bodies, to turn or change.

Of New Testament usage, likewise, the vast majority, for both words, involves physically turning around or returning: Jesus, or someone else, “turned and said ...” or “returned” to where they had been before. As we consider the passages where this is not the case, please keep in mind that the idea of physical turning is the primary meaning. This implies, as we saw in “repent”, a *deliberate change of direction and/or attention*. The most frequent traditional use of “convert” or “be converted” for *epistrepho* (there are only 7) is in quoting the prophecy of Isaiah (6:9-10) regarding the deliberate choice of the Israelite people not to pay attention to God's instructions: Mt.13:15, Mk.4:12, Jn.12:40, Ac.28:27. The others are Jesus' instructions to Peter (Lk.22:32) that he should “strengthen his brethren” after recovering from his desertion; James urging
his readers (5:19-20) to seek the restoration of one who falls into error; and Peter's admonition to his listeners to “repent and be converted” (Ac.3:19) to remedy their distress at recognizing their rejection of Jesus as the Promised One. The only appearance of the noun form, epistrophe, (Ac.15:3) celebrates the enrollment of Gentiles into the Kingdom.

There are nine instances where “turning to God”, whether applied to the people of Israel (Lk.1:16,17) or to the Gentiles (Ac.9:35, 11:21, 14:15, 15:19, 26:20; II Cor.3:16, I Thes.1:9), is mentioned; in each, a change of life / direction is clearly indicated, not merely an acknowledgment of some theoretical argument. This is also the case in Ac.26:28, “turning from darkness to light”.

Turning can also go the wrong direction, as in Gal.4:9 and II Pet.2:21.

The uses of strepho (the same verb, but without a prefix), are even more heavily weighted in favor of physically turning around. The exceptions are Jesus’ declaration (Mt.18:2) that Kingdom membership requires “being converted” to the attitude of small children; (Ac.7:39) the Israelites’ desire to return to Egypt; and (Ac.7:42) God’s consequent “giving them up”.

In view of this evidence, I am inclined to suggest that other contemporary uses of the term “convert” may be more accurate than the usual “Christian” usage. For example:

- an engine may be “converted” to run on a different kind of fuel
- a factory may be “converted” to make a different product
- land may be “converted” to raise a different crop
- zoning may be “converted” to allow different developmental use

I'm sure you could get any number of good illustrations from these and other such modern usages. They all share the implication of tangible, observable change – none are restricted to theoretical constructs or opinions.

As we saw in the studies of faith / faithfulness (#1), repentance (#6), life (#28), transformation (#97), and many others, “conversion” is a much more active concept, with more readily observable results, than is commonly supposed. It might well be characterized as the process of “naturalization” into Kingdom citizenship, “with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities thereby incurred.”

It is the beginning of the life that the gracious King has designed and prepared for his people.

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #121 – Convict, Conviction

Many of the words that are favorites of folks whose “gospel preaching” consists primarily of attempts to put their audience (read, “victims”) on a massive guilt-trip, occur rarely, if at all, in the New Testament, and seldom with the connotations which those “preachers”’ trumpet with such insistence. But this has to be one of the most abused words of all. In the traditional KJV that is so dear to their hearts, the English word “convict” appears only one single time (Jn.8:9), and “conviction” not at all! So much for their need to gloat over having brought people “under conviction”, to boast of the “strength of one's convictions”, or of threatening folks with tender consciences that they must ransack their memories in order to be “convicted” of forgotten (or imagined) transgressions. There is no such teaching to be found in the New Testament – anywhere! (If you can find any, please feel free to comment. But be certain that you accurately quote a New Testament passage!)

The Greek word, elegcho, translated “convict” only in minor manuscripts of the John 8 passage cited above, where it describes the scene of the wannabe executioners slinking away at Jesus’ rebuke, does occur elsewhere, with other translations: “convince” 4x, “rebuke”5x, “reprove” 5x, and “tell one's fault” 1x. Classically, it represents the language of the courtroom, or of philosophical debate. L/S lists “to disgrace, or put to shame; to treat with contempt; to cross-examine or question; to accuse one of doing wrong; to test or bring to proof; to be convicted (legally) of wrongdoing; to bring convincing proof; to refute (in a debate); to put right or correct; to decide a dispute; to expose a wrong or betray a weakness.”

The common English understanding of “convict” more closely parallels the passages where elegcho is rendered “convince” – Jesus challenges his accusers that they cannot “convince / convict” him of failing God's standard (Jn.8:46); Paul describes an outsider being “convincing / convicted” (I Cor.14:24) by the prophetic messages of all the brotherhood to acknowledge that “God is surely among you all!”; and James makes the point that one dare not pick and choose only parts of the Law for observation, but that the Law itself passes equal judgment (“conviction”) on every transgression (2:9). Only in his letter to Titus (1:9) does Paul use elegcho in the context of debate or instruction.
Although **elegcho** was rendered “rebuke” and “reprove” 5x each, the more common word for those terms in Greek was **epitimoao** (24x). Trench distinguishes between the two words, taking issue with the use of the word “reprove” for **elegcho**, considering that it fails to take into account the possibility of “being brought to one's senses.” He holds that **epitimoao** carries the notion of blaming, with no indication of whether the blame is deserved or not, and no assurance of its having any effect; whereas he thinks that **elegcho** describes a confrontation that at least causes a person to see his error, and hopefully to remedy it. This is more or less consistent with the L/S listing of “to assign blame, to censure, or the assessment of a penalty by a judge, for **epitimoao**, although earlier, the term was also used for honor, or a price (the meaning of the root word, **timao**). **Epitimoao** is used of Jesus “rebuking” a storm (Mt.8:26, Mk.4:39, Lk.8:24), evil spirits (Mt.17:18, Mk.1:25, 9:25; Lk.4:35, 9:42), and a fever (Lk.4:39), however, and in all of those cases, the effect was both expected and dramatic – so that particular differentiation is probably not valid.

Certainly the use of **elegcho** in I Tim.5:20, Tit.1:13, 2:15; Heb.12:5, Rv.3:19 (translated “rebuke”) anticipates a change in behavior, as it does also in Jn.3:20, 16:8; Eph.5:11 and 13; II Tim.4:2 (translated “reprove”). Only the confrontation between Herod and John the Baptist (Lk.3:19) seems to have no expectation of improvement.

The instructions for dealing with a brother's error uses **elegcho** in Mt.18:15 and **epitimoao** in Lk.17:3. In II Tim.4:2, both words are used together. The usage, therefore, seems to suggest that the terms are nearly, if not entirely, synonymous.

**Epitimoao** is the word used of the discussion between Jesus and Peter in Mt.16:22 and Mk.8:32-33, as well as in the incident of the disciples scolding the crowds for “bothering” Jesus with their children (Mt.19:13, Lk.18:15) and his correcting (Lk.9:55) their misunderstanding. This was also the demand of the Pharisees who thought Jesus should forbid the praises of his disciples and the children in the Palm Sunday procession and later in the temple (Lk.19:39), and also describes the efforts of the crowd who tried to silence the blind men who were calling to Jesus for help (Mt.20:31), as well as to refer to Jesus' instructions to his disciples (translated “charged them”) (Mt.3:12, 8:30, 10:48, 12:16; Lk.9:21).

It remains for us to examine the much-quoted passage in John 16:8-11, which is frequently cited as justification for much of the guilt-tripping perpetrated under the guise of “evangelism” (See #18, 43, and 67). First of all, please note that the subject of the verb, **elegxei** (future tense), no matter how you choose to translate it, is **parakletos**, the “coach”, the Holy Spirit. **It is his job, not ours!**

Please note also that the object of the verb is “the world” (**ton kosmon**), **not** the disciples, nor those who are contemplating joining them! Indeed, it is in the disciple group, coached and enabled by the Holy Spirit, that “the world” is intended to see a demonstration of Kingdom living, and the revelation that “the ruler of this world” **has been defeated!!!** (Jn.16:11) As we have seen, it is perfectly in order for more mature members of the Kingdom to **correct the brethren** when necessary – please refer to #116, and see earlier references to the epistles to Timothy and Titus in this study, and the familiar Mt.18:15 passage – but **it is not our job to reform** (convict, rebuke, or reprove) **the world**, or to attempt to force Kingdom behavior upon those who have no commitment to our King. Kingdom behavior must be enabled by the Holy Spirit – there is no other way! It is as the “outsider” experiences the life of the gathered group of disciples (I Cor.14-24-25), prophesying (see #45) and interacting under the instruction of the Holy Spirit, that he will be “convinced / convicted”, acknowledging the presence of God.

May we continually strive to become the welcoming brotherhood where this can happen!

Word Study #122 – “Surrender”

This is another word about which we hear far too much! Ubiquitous in hymnody, mystical literature, and groups with a pietistic orientation, **it does not exist in New Testament writings!** Find it if you can! And with good reason: surrender is the last recourse of the conquered – those who have lost a war – a last-ditch effort to avoid total destruction! It is uniformly coerced – and **there is no coercion** in genuine Christian teaching! Jesus' invitation is to deliberate, voluntary enlistment in his Kingdom! His people are called to **join the winning team**, not to plead for relief from disaster!

Now, it is certainly true that Jesus also spoke of “denying” (#68) one's own self-interest, and “forsaking” possessions and other attachments (Mt.19:27,29; Mk.1:18, Lk.5:11, 14:23). But please note the tone of the parables with which he commended such action: Mt.13:44-46. There is no coerced, mournful resignation or renunciation here!
The finder of the treasure in a field is so excited about his discovery that he hurry to sell everything he has in order to purchase the field – apo tes charas – out of his joy!

Likewise, the merchant, who had been seeking (present tense – continuous effort) for fine pearls, upon finally discovering one of supreme value, deemed it well worth the expenditure of “all that he had.”

These gentlemen were neither mourning nor boasting of what they had “sacrificed” (#95) / “surrendered”. They were celebrating their great good fortune!

The writer to the Hebrews describes even Jesus’ endurance of an ignominious death as being “for the joy that was set before him” (Heb.12:2) – and that expectation as being fully and gloriously vindicated! Even such a dire situation is represented, not as “surrender”, but as ultimate triumph!

So where did all the “surrender” themes come from? My best guess is that it was an artifact of medieval mysticism, which arose as a lonely, introspective pursuit, that resulted when devout individuals were crowded out of the increasingly oppressive and opulent hierarchical institution that had replaced the simple New Testament brotherhood. Lack of a brotherhood leaves one who wishes to be faithful no alternative but a choice between two equally impossible options: either to withdraw into individualism, or to “forget the whole thing”. An extremely painful position.

It was also perhaps enhanced by the elevation to “sainthood” of spectacular “converts” like Augustine, who, tired of their lascivious luxury, “surrendered” it in favor of its opposite; or others who had actively opposed the Kingdom before signing on with the King.

The resulting atmosphere, in which “you have to be really, really bad – or at least say that you are – in order to be properly converted”, creates a dilemma which we have witnessed, in which serious young people have protested in confusion, “I want to commit my life to Jesus, but I can't say I ran away from him or fought against him! It isn't true!” It is just plain wrong to put people into such a situation!

If a Kingdom citizen's deepest desire is faithfully to serve the King, what or to whom is he supposed to “surrender”? I strongly suspect that this teaching is just another effort to play on the vulnerability of sincere people, to feed their tendency to focus on self-condemnatory introspection (which, in addition to being contrived, is only self-centeredness in another costume), and keep them feeling “guilty” enough to be manipulated!

Lord, deliver us from those who demand “surrender,” and free us joyfully to seek your Kingdom above all!

**Word Study #123 – Victory**

We have seen how folks at one end of the Christian spectrum err in the direction of self-deprecation and obsession with “surrender” and “sacrifice” (see previous post), but folks at the other end depart just as far from the New Testament message in their insistence upon celebrating having achieved “victory in Jesus” to the exclusion of any recognition of a need to grow up, and to become mature, disciplined disciples.

Unlike “surrender”, nikao, “to be victorious, to conquer, to win, to be successful, to prevail” (L/S) does at least appear in the New Testament: twice it is rendered “conquer”, once “get victory”, 24x “overcome”, and 1x “prevail.” Seventeen of these occur in the Revelation, ten of which refer to folks who have remained doggedly faithful in the face of severe persecution (2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:5, 3:21, 12:11, 15:2, and 21:7). Three refer to the triumph of Jesus himself (3:21, 5:5, 17:14), and four to the temporary, apparent victory of the forces of evil (6:2 – twice –, 11:7, and 13:7.

In the rest of the New Testament, one reference is to Jesus (Jn.16:33) as he reassures his disciples that he has already overcome the world, and one is in the parable (Lk.11:22) where he speaks of a strong man being “overcome” by one stronger than he. The remaining eight are confined to two epistles. In Rom.3:4, Paul is referring to God’s victory in his just judgment, and in Rom.12:21 he urges his readers not to allow themselves to be “overcome by evil”, but proactively to “overcome evil with good.”

John, in his first letter (2:13-14), addresses the young men of his congregation as those who “have been gaining victory” – a present perfect tense – over the evil one. The perfect tense describes action that began in the past, but continues into the present, and perhaps beyond. Later (4:4), he reminds them that their victory over the anti-Christian spirits of the world (v.1-3) is because “the Spirit that is in / among you all is greater than what is in the world.” The game isn’t over yet! And in 5:4-5, his assertion is that following the Lord’s instructions is not burdensome, because those who have been born of God (enlisted in the Kingdom) are (present tense) in the process of overcoming the world. The “victory” (nike) that has conquered (aorist tense) the world, is identified as their / our faithfulness! This is yet another place where the dynamic
understanding of *pistis* (#1) is absolutely essential.

The noun *nike*, and its later form, *nikos*, is used only five times total. In I Jn.5:4, referenced above, and also I Cor.15:54,55,57, it is celebrating his people's sharing in Jesus' victory over death / the grave (refer also to Heb.2, although the word is not there), and Mt.12:20, which quotes a messianic prophecy of Isaiah (42:1-4). **In every instance**, the “battle” in which both Jesus and his people have “overcome / conquered / been victorious”, is the ultimate struggle against the forces of evil and death. There is no reference whatever to the petty annoyances of life to which some folks love to apply it. (an irritating sibling or co-worker? A persistent bad habit?) Perhaps they have never recognized the real enemy? As in so many of our other studies, the real issue, whether on a personal or a corporate level, is “Who's in charge here?” And the reply is clear (Rv.17:14) — **The Lamb will conquer them, because he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings**, and those with him are called (#54) and chosen (#56) and faithful (#1)!

There are a few other words that are rarely rendered “overcome” or “prevail”. Peter uses *hettaomai* (II Pet.2:19-20) in warning his readers that they will become slaves to whomever / whatever they choose to allow to “conquer” them (similar to Rom.12:21 using *nikao*).

Luke employs *katakurieuo* (Ac.19:16) along with *ischuo*, to describe the defeat of the impostor-exorcists at the hands of a man possessed by an evil spirit. *Ischuo* also appears in Ac.19:20 of the growth and success of the true message of the Gospel, and in Rv.12:8 of the dragon and his cohorts. *Ischuo* is more commonly used as one of the “power” words (#31), having primary reference to physical strength.

The prefixed form, *katischuo*, occurs only twice: emphasizing the inability of the “gates of hades/death” (Mt.16:18) to “prevail” against Jesus' church, and the way the chief priests were able to beat down Pilate's objections (Lk.23:23) to their lynch-mob.

Perhaps the most fascinating word of all in this group is *hupernikao*, the prefixed form of *nikao*. Liddell/Scott records only three writers to have used it: two of them renowned medical doctors – Hippocrates in the 5th century BC, and Galen in the 2nd century AD; and Paul in Rom.8:37.

The preposition *huper* may refer to something being “above, over, or beyond” normal expectations; or, if a relationship is being described, it can mean “on behalf of, for the benefit of” a person or cause.

As a prefix, it carries the flavor of “exceedingly” or “excessively” (English cognate, “hyper”!)

Medically, an active form of the verb might refer to a patient having “conquered” or “prevailed” to recover from his illness; a passive form might indicate that he succumbed to it. But Paul is not speaking of disease.

He has just listed a host of situations or conditions that might threaten one's confidence or trust in the love of God. The subject is the all-encompassing completeness of God's provision for every eventuality (not to avoid it, but to get through it), by the triumph of Jesus' resurrection, even in the face of the most brutal persecution. It is **“in all these things”** that we are gaining an exceptional victory (traditionally, “more than conquerors”) through the One who loved us.”

Slowly and carefully re-read vv.31-38, and let the picture soak into your consciousness.

No shallow boasting of “victory” over a stubbed toe, an unpleasant associate, or even a bad habit, is here. Rather, we are being provided with the “ammunition” required, to exercise the faithfulness described by John (I Jn.5:5), and to participate joyfully in the triumph of our King!

Thanks be to God!

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**Word Study #124 – Wait, Waiting**

This has been a surprisingly difficult study. It began, as several recent ones have, from a conversation at church. There is nothing like an interactive group of the Lord's people to motivate earnest investigation of faithfulness. It is truly a gift of the Lord's graciousness!

Jim had commented, almost as an aside, that whereas we usually think of ourselves as “waiting” for the completion of God's plans, he had been impressed at Peter's assertion that God himself was “waiting” for his people to get on board with his program (I Pet.3:20). That sparked speculation about how we might be inhibiting or delaying the fulfillment we seek. Are we keeping him waiting?

One excellent thing about such discussions is the way they send you “back to the Book”!
The concept of “waiting” in the New Testament is represented by no less than eight different Greek words! The lexicons are only of minimal help, and Trench's work on synonyms does not treat these at all, so we are reduced to etymology and context to try to distinguish between them. Three of the words appear only once, so there is no comparison available to us. Two of these are prefixed versions of meno (#58). Anameno (I Thes.1:10) speaks of waiting for Jesus' return, and perimeno (Ac.1:4) is Jesus' instruction to his disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to “hang around” until they received the Holy Spirit's empowerment for their assignment. The preposition ana can indicate either “up” or “again”, and peri is usually “around” or “in the vicinity of”. The third word, prosedreuo (I Cor.9:13), refers to people – either Jewish or pagan – who “wait” to perform ritual duties at an altar. Three other words are prefixed forms of dechomai (“to accept, receive, or welcome”) which we will examine in a later post. It is not translated “wait” in the New Testament.

Apekdechomai, (“to await eagerly, to expect anxiously”), is used 7x. Although the people doing the waiting – uniformly for Jesus' return – are usually disciples (“we” 5x) Rom.8:23,25; I Cor.1:7, Gal.5:5, Phil.3:20; and in Heb.9:28 “those who are waiting/looking for him,” in Rom.8:19, “all creation” is eagerly anticipating the “revealing of the sons of God” that will accompany that glorious denouement. The use of two prefixes would tend to emphasize the atmosphere of every reference as one of joyous anticipation.

Ekdechomai, (8x), with only one prefix, is usually a more ordinary form of expectation: the lame man “waiting” for the pool to be stirred-up (Jn.5:3), Paul “waiting” for his companions in Athens (Ac.17:6) or for the arrival of Timothy (I Cor.16:11); a farmer waiting for the harvest (Jas.5:7), and ordinary politeness at a church dinner (I Cor.11:33). But it is also used of Abraham's faithfulness to God's call (Heb.11:13), of God's delaying the execution of his judgment (I Pet.3:20), and of Jesus waiting (Heb.10:13) for the final subjugation of his enemies! These latter two are the only references to “waiting” on the part of anyone but “ordinary” humans, other than the Rom.8:19 passage cited above. I am not sure of the implication of that observation.

Prosdechomai, occurring 14x, although its only use in Homer was “to await or expect”, later was more commonly used of welcome or acceptance, sometimes (not always) into the presence of a superior. New Testament references are weighted more heavily toward the older usage, including “waiting for the Kingdom of God” (Mt.15:43, Lk.2:25, 38; 23:51); for Jesus' return (Tit.2:13, Jude 21); and for a master's arrival (Lk.12:36), but also Jesus' welcome of the “wrong” kind of people (Lk.15:2), admonitions to “receive” [care for] traveling disciples (Rom.16:2, Phil.2:29), and the “acceptance” of persecuted status on the part of the faithful (Heb.10:34) and their refusal (11:35) to “accept” escape.

Prosokao, also with 14 uses, although occasionally referring to “ordinary” waiting of people for other people (Lk.1:21, 8:40; Ac.10:24, 27:33) usually leans more toward the idea of expectation (Mt.11:3 and parallel Lk.7:19; Mt.24:50 and parallel Lk.12:46; Lk.3:15). This is true even on a totally human level (Ac.28:6, 3:5). However, there is an urgency evident in II Pet.3:12,13,14, regarding the Lord's return, probably due to the severity of the persecution that the readers were facing. Finally, proskartereo, usually translated (8x) “continue” – (which would really fit better with #58) – is only twice rendered “wait” – Mk.3:9 when Jesus requested the use of a boat, and Ac.10:7 of Cornelius' servant. We will consider the others with the idea of “watch” (coming next!)

So where does this leave us?
Maybe our focus needs to be less on the specific idea of “waiting” and more on what we should be doing while we are waiting! The contexts of the listed references provide a clue: here are a few, and you can check out others.

I Thes.1:10, for example, is preceded by v.9, which speaks of their having “turned away from idols to become slaves to the true and living God.” The discussion in Rom.8:18-30 includes dependence, not only on the Spirit's intercession, but also on cultivating his fruit. I Cor.1:7 is enclosed in an admonition (4-9) regarding growing into the community designed to prepare us for his coming. While the disciples were “waiting in Jerusalem” for the coming of the Holy Spirit, they spent some of their time “organizing” – Ac. 1:15-26 – (which was NOT a part of the Lord's instructions!) as well as “paying constant attention to prayer” (v.14), which was. Later, Peter, who had earlier led the organization effort, writing to brethren under severe persecution (II Pet.3:12-14), reassures them that their longed-for deliverance will come – and urges them to live faithfully in the peace and justice for which they are waiting. (He was not laboring under the modern delusion that one needs government legislation or permission to live faithfully!!!)

Perhaps the most significant of all, although it does not use any of the “waiting” words, is the announcement of the Lamb's wedding feast, in Rev.19:7. The waiting, of course, is over by then. But the invitation asserts joyfully, “His wife / Bride has prepared herself!” and explains that her radiant garments consist of “the just deeds of God's people” (v.8)
None of this should be taken as any kind of disparagement of waiting, or eager anticipation. That is very much in order. But it just might be that the “preparation” part is more practical that we tend to think. Maybe we and our Lord and Bridegroom are both “waiting”.

May we faithfully wait – and prepare – and speed the day!

**Word Study #125 – “Watch!”**

Here is another example of a word with multiple meanings and implications which have been distinguished poorly, if at all, in most English translations. Representing eight different Greek words, whose primary meanings range from guarding a prisoner through the simple measuring of time and ordinary sleeplessness to sobriety and diligent faithfulness, the use of the single English term “watch” seems careless at best. “Utterly irresponsible” might be a better analysis.

Most of the words, seldom used, can be sorted rather easily. *Koustodia*, transliterated from the Latin *custodia*, a Roman military assignment, is used in the New Testament only of the guards assigned to Jesus’ crucifixion (Mt.27:65,66; 28:11). *Agrupnia*, simple lack of sleep, appears only in II Cor.6:5 and 11:27, as Paul describes the trials of his life, although the verb form, *agrupneo*, is three times (out of 4) connected with deliberate, careful faithfulness and prayer (Mk.13:33, Lk.21:36, Eph.6:18), or, in Heb.13:17, serious responsibility for other members of the Body. *Tereo* (translated only 2x “watch” (Mt.27:36,54) – vs. 57x “keep”, in the sense of careful observance – and its prefixed form, *paratereo* (5x) – Mt.3:2, Lk.6:7, 14:1; 20:20; Ac.9:24 – refer simply to observation: “watching” to see what was going to happen, or, in the latter case, to apprehend Paul.

This leaves three, however, that require more detailed attention.

*Phulake*, for example, and its related words *phulax* and *phulasso*, had quite a variety of classical uses, by far most of which, at least in the noun form, referred to a prison (35x), or to the guards – *phulax* – (KJV “keepers”) assigned to administer them (Ac.5:23, 12:6, 19). But as early as the third century BC writings of Herodotus, *phulake* was also applied to a period of time, originally a period of guard duty. In Roman times, the night was divided into four “watches”. Earlier jurisdictions had used three or five such segments. This use is seen in Mt.14:25, 24:43; Mk.6:48, Lk.12:38. Liddell/Scott also lists the idea of guarding with a view to protection, as in the case of the shepherds in Lk.2:8, or the more common use as a bodyguard. The verb form, *phulasso*, is never traditionally rendered “watch” in its 30 New Testament appearances. It is primarily translated “keep” (21x), and refers, parallel to the most common use of *tereo*, to “keeping” the law, the word of God, or any people, things, or principles committed to one's trust. It is also used of taking precautions, or admonitions to “beware” (Lk.12:25, II Tim.4:15, II Pet.3:17, I Jn.5:21), and of God's protection of his people (II Thes.3:3, II Tim.1:12,14; Jude 24).

*Nepho*, originally used only in the present (continual, progressive) tense, is traditionally rendered “watch” twice, and “be sober” three times. Earlier writers used it consistently as the opposite of *methuo* “to be drunk”, often as total abstinence. Later, it referred to self-control of any sort, or being sober and wary. One might paraphrase, “take things/life seriously!” The sense can readily be discerned from the words with which it is paired:

I Thes.5:6 – “Let us watch (*gregoreo*) and be sober (*nepho*)” (PNT – “Let's don't be sleeping like the rest, but be alert and sober.”)

I Thes.5:8 – “Let us, who are of the day, be sober [alert] , clothed in a breast plate of faithfulness and love”

II Tim.4:5 – “Be sober in everything …Fulfill your assignment!”

I Pet.1:13 – “Be sober [alert]; set your hope [confidence] completely on the grace being brought to you”

I Pet.4:7 – “Be sensible (sophronesate) and calm [sober] (nepho) for the purpose of prayer”

I Pet.5:8 – “Be careful [sober] (nepate), be watchful (gregoresate)”

Do you notice the pairing with forms of *gregoreo*? This brings us to the last, and most common, of the words traditionally translated “watch.” (I Pet.5:8, referenced above.)

*Gregoreo* is simply defined, lexically, as “to be fully awake”, but its New Testament usage is much richer than that. It was traditionally translated “be awake” – I Thes.5:10, “whether we wake or sleep”, (referring to physical life or death), and “be vigilant” (I Pet.5:8, referenced above) once each, and 20x “watch.”

Of these, four (Mt.26:38, 40; Mk.14:34,37) are from scenes in the Garden where Jesus asks for companionship in his lonely prayer. Nine are admonitions to faithful preparation for Jesus’ / a master's arrival (Mt.24:42, 25:13; Mk.13:34,35,37; Lk.12:37, I Thes.5:6, Rv.16:15) – more on that in the next study. Seven are combined with instructions for persistent prayer to buttress one's own faithfulness and avoid being deceived or turned away (Mt.24:43, Mk.14:38, Lk.12:39, Ac.20:31, I
In each of the latter two groups, the idea is much more heavily skewed toward alertness than simple physical wakefulness.

Interestingly, although the concepts are closely connected, especially in the parables quoted in Mt.24, Mk.13, and Lk.12, the actual words for “waiting” and “watching” do not appear together, except in hymns and sermons! Combining the two ideas, unfortunately, too often leads to equating them, and therefore to unwarranted passivity in the understanding of both. While a degree of this is present in many of the “waiting” passages (see previous post), “watching” is most decidedly active, not passive. Agrupneo, phulasso, nepho, and especially gregoreo, all require deliberate effort, whether in prayer or overt action. “Watching” is NOT a spectator sport!

Neither is it a lonely, individualistic pursuit. Notice that every one of the imperatives is plural.

May we learn to wait – and watch – together – in determined faithfulness!

Word Study #126 – “Are you Ready?”

From billboards to bumper stickers, novels, movies, songs, and sermons, we are bombarded with the (usually designed to be threatening) question: “Are you ready to meet God?” or “Jesus is coming: are you ready?”

Laying aside for the moment the most egregious error in such a message – which is failing (or refusing) to recognize that the word of the Lord's coming is NOT a threat, but a promise, greatly to be anticipated – let us rather consider just what it is to be “ready”. Please review studies 124 and 125 as we undertake this one.

Different aspects of “readiness” – for many different occasions – are represented in the New Testament by three different “families” of words, which, although quite distinct in their implications, are seldom distinguished by English translators. See if you can suggest alternate words that would convey the differences.

Interestingly, only one of these, hetoimazo, hetoimos, is ever used in connection with the Lord’s return, although a second, kataskeuazo, appears four times regarding John’s preparations for Jesus’ first appearance.

I have chosen to pass over the four instances where mello, a versatile word used for anything that is “about to happen”, is translated “ready” (Lk.7:2, Ac.20:7, Rv.3:2, 12:4), because there is no idea of preparation involved. The reference is simply temporal: the more common translations are “shall” (25x), “should” (19x), and other indications of the immediate future. Likewise, prothumia / prothumos was classically used of willingness or eagerness to do something, and in the New Testament, four times with respect to the relief offering collected by the Gentile churches for the Judean famine (II Cor.8:11,12; 8:19, 9:2), once (Ac.17:11) of the eagerness with which the Bereans received Paul's message, once of Paul's desire to preach in Rome (Rom.1:15), and twice as Jesus warns his disciples that although their “spirit is [ready] willing” (Mt.26:41, Mk.14:38), their human nature is not. Prothumia speaks of desire and enthusiasm, but lacks practical substance.

Paraskeuazo, appearing only 4x, leans a bit more heavily upon practicality regarding the offering (II Cor.9:2,3), and also refers to preparations for battle (I Cor.14:8), or simply the preparation of a meal (Ac.10:10). The noun form, paraskeue (Mt.27:62, Mk.15:42, Lk.23:54, Jn.19:14,31,42) refers exclusively to the Jewish Day of Preparation before the Passover Sabbath.

Kataskeuazo, referenced earlier, more often used in the sense of building: a house (Heb.3:3,4), the tabernacle (Heb.9:2,6), or Noah’s ark (Heb.11:7, I Pet.3:20), is also used in prophecy, by Gabriel (Lk.1:17) and both John the Baptist and Jesus quoting Isaiah (Mt.11:10, Mk.1:2, Lk.7:27). Both words are classically used of producing, preparing, or procuring something, or making preparations; but both are also used of fraudulent legal manipulations, to influence a court or “pack” a jury! I have not detected this aspect in any of the New Testament references, although I am sure that it happened – case in point, Ac.23:12-16, describing one of the plots against Paul (with the use of hetoimos).

The most common, and most versatile, of the words referring to “readiness” is hetoimos(17x), hetoimazo (29x). Liddell/Scott notes virtually any kind of preparation, whether for a meal, warfare, or any other event; to have cash-in-hand for payment of an obligation; the feasibility of a task; a promise made good; or lack of hesitation. New Testament uses include preparations identical with those in which paraskeuazo is used: preparing the way / people for Jesus’ arrival (Mt.3:3, Mk.1.3, 14:12; Lk.1:17, 3:4), and later, preparing the Passover meal (Mt.26:17,19; Mk.14:15,16; Lk.22:8,12,13), and the discussion (more frequently using prothumia) of the relief offering (II Cor.9:5).

Commander Lysias’ orders to assemble a military escort for Paul (Ac.23:23), and preparation for battles – which, please note, did NOT take place – (Rv.9:7, 15; 16:12); Paul’s request to Philemon for a guest room (Phm.22), and the women’s
preparation of embalming spices (Lk.23:56, 24:1), as well as ordinary preparation of meals or lodging (Lk.9:52, 14:17; 17:8, Mk.14:15; Mt.22:4), all employ forms of *hetoimazo*.

The adverb, *hetoimos*, expresses Paul's acceptance of whatever fate awaits him in Jerusalem (Ac.21:13), as well as his deliberate travel plans (Ac.21:13), and Peter's assessment of the Lord's readiness to exercise judgment (I Pet.4:5). Earlier, Peter had used the adjective *hetoimos* in boasting of his loyalty to Jesus (Lk.22:33). Six times, the reference is to God himself doing the preparing: Mt.20:23 – arranging positions in the final kingdom; Lk.2:31 – the working out of the deliverance planned *for all people*; I Cor.2:9 – the unimaginably glorious inheritance “prepared for them that love him”; Heb.11:16 – the city, whose builder and maker is God; Rv.12:6 – refuge from persecution for the “woman” (the church?), and I Pet.1:5 – “the deliverance [salvation] that is prepared to be revealed in the last time”; and twice (Jn.14:2,3) Jesus speaks of “preparing a place” for his disciples.

Paul urges both Titus (3:1) and Timothy (II Tim.2:21) that they, and those they teach, to be “ready / prepared *for every good work*”, and Peter (I Pet.3:15) advocates constant readiness to respond to questioners who are puzzled by “the hope that is in / among you”.

Only in a few parables does Jesus connect “readiness” with his return. The parable about the feast (Mt.22:1-13 and Lk.14:16-24) uses the “ready” words only with respect to the preparations made by the host. It is their rude behavior that excludes the invited guests. The judgment scene in Mt.25:31-46 refers to “the kingdom prepared” for those who have acted mercifully, and “the fire prepared” (*not for people*) for “the devil and his messengers”. Again, people are not charged with making the preparations.

In contrast, the story of the girls awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom (some manuscripts say “the bride”) places the responsibility squarely upon the guests. The ones who were welcomed were the ones who had been careful to keep their lamps working! (A reflection of Mt.5:14-16?)

Most significant of all is Jesus' teaching in Mt.24:42-51 and Luke 12:35-48. The Master has been out of town, leaving his servants to tend to his affairs, and entrusting some with the responsibility to care for the others. Those whom the Master finds faithfully fulfilling their assigned duties are commended, and rewarded – not with starry crowns, but with greater responsibility! Notice that the one incurring the most severe punishment is the servant “in charge”, who abused those entrusted to his care! (Lk.12:45,46 and Mt.24:46-49), and treated his assignment as one of privilege rather than responsibility. Luke adds (47,48) the observation that the Master's expectations (and reaction) are commensurate with the degree to which the servants were aware of his wishes.

Please note that *nothing at all* is said about what anyone “thought” or “believed”, or to what sort of doctrine, dogma, or creed he subscribed! (Refer also to W.S.#10). Jesus does indeed encourage his people to “be ready” for his coming (Mt.24:44, Lk.12:40,47). It behooves us therefore, to check with him regarding what that “readiness” entails!

As long as you are busy following the Master's instructions, YOU ARE READY!

Go out to meet him in unmitigated JOY!

**Word Study #127 – Tear, Divide, Split, Break, Open**

This study started at church, too: with the question, “Is the word about heaven being 'torn open' in Mark 1:10 the same as what happened to the temple veil when Jesus died (Mt.27:5, Mk.15:38, Lk.23:45)?” A quick check confirmed that it is.

I was surprised to discover that *schizo* (L/S – to separate or divide, physically or intellectually; to split wood, to have differing opinions, to shatter, tear, or cut) appears only ten times in the New Testament. Four of these are cited above. Five times, it is translated “rend” – the three above regarding the temple, and again in the Mt.27 reference speaking of rocks shattered by the earthquake, and the guards' decision (Jn.19:24) not to tear apart Jesus' robe. Twice, it is rendered “divide” – Ac.14:4 and 23:7, of divided opinions in the crowds; once “make a rent” (Lk.5:36) of a new patch on old fabric; once (Jn.21:11) when the fish-net was not broken; and once “open”, in the Mt.1:10 with which we began.

The noun, *schisma* (L/S – “a tear in a garment, a division of opinion, plowing, or cloven hoofs”) occurs only eight times. It is translated “division” 5x – Jn.7:43, 9:16, 10:19; I Cor.1:10, 11:18 – all referring to divisions of opinion among people; “rent” twice – Mt.9:16, Mk.2:21 – which are parallel to Luke's use of the verb (5:36) above; and “schism” once – I Cor.12:25 – regarding divisions in the Body.
Schizo / schisma seems to share the more drastic end of a spectrum of words describing breaking or dividing, with regnumi (5 uses) and its prefixed form, diarregnumi (also 5 uses). Both are listed by L/S as “burst, break, rend, or shatter”, and in passive form, “to be wrecked, broken, torn, or disjointed.” They also refer to the dramatic tearing of clothing (Mt.26:65, Mk.14:63, Ac.14:14), the bursting of wineskins by the fermentation process (Mk.2:22, Lk.5:37), the destructive activity of evil spirits (Lk.8:29, Mk.9:18, 9:42) or pigs (Mt.7:6), as well as Luke's account of a broken fish net (Lk.5:6).

The idea of “division” is usually less dramatic, and much more frequently represented by merizo (14x) or diamerizo (12x). L/S lists “to divide, to distribute or separate” groups of people, objects, ideas, or animals. This may involve simple sharing of goods and/or responsibilities (Mk.6:41, Lk.12:13, Ac.2:3, II Cor.10:13, Heb.7:2), but also with a more hostile slant, a “house divided against itself” (Mt.12:25, 25:32, Lk.6:22, 19:9, Rom.1:1, II Cor.6:17, Gal.1:15), or “to set apart for office” (Ac.13:2), but can also have the sense, also noted in L/S, of “to banish, or set apart for rejection (Gal.2:12).

Dichostasia (L/S “dissension, sedition”), appearing only 3x (Rom.16:17, I Cor.3:3, Gal.5:20), seems to include only the negative aspects of division.

I had previously assumed that Mark's use of schizo in his account of Jesus' baptism was just the effusive vocabulary of an excited young man, which is evident in so much of his writing. Matthew and Luke say simply that “heaven was opened”, and John reports the descent of the dove, but does not mention “heaven” at all.

Anoigo, the word used in Mt.3:16 and Lk.3:21, is a very ordinary word, used of opening doors (literal and figurative), prisons, eyes, mouths, treasures, and also of visions (Ac.7:56, 10:11, and frequently in the Revelation). It appears 70 times in the New Testament, sometimes referring to miracles, but only part of the time.

Looking at all of these word uses, however, leads me to suppose that Mark is really much more insightful that he usually gets credit for. Maybe more so than all the rest! Consider: these are Mark's only uses of schizo. Might he not have intended that we make a connection? Might the “heavens” have been “split open”, not so much to let the dove / Spirit out, but to allow people to see IN?

The Gospel accounts vary as to who saw what. With the testimony equally divided, I think it is safe to say that at least Jesus and John saw and heard what had happened, and possibly others.

Now fast-forward to the scene in the temple at the time of Jesus' death, which must surely have caused enormous consternation. Remember, that huge, thick curtain was designed to prevent people from seeing or entering “the place where God dwelt”. (Please refer to Citizens of the Kingdom, chapter 8). But Jesus had spent the last three years trying to show the Father to anyone who was willing to look! (Jn.14:9). His death, and subsequent destruction of both death, its power, and the one who controlled it (Heb.2:4), also destroyed the last vestiges of any validity for any pretense of the separation of people from their God! The veil was deliberately destroyed so that those who had so long been excluded could not only see in, but also enter in to the very presence of the One we worship!

The writer to the Hebrews also notes that the temple / tabernacle was “a representation of the heavenly things” (Heb.9:23,24), but Jesus has transported his people to the “real thing”!

In both the cases, the dramatic splitting open of the curtain and of heaven itself is not the work of any earthly power. Jesus' ministry of restoration is gloriously bookended by two displays of the gracious hand of God, crashing through aeons of separation and tearing them to shreds, in his mighty, amazing gesture of welcome – not only to his Son, but to his people!

Thanks be to God!
Word Study #128 – Guilt and Shame

I am just plain fed-up!

Whether it's the “creeds” and “confessions” of liturgical groups, or the “praise songs”, “old hymns”, or pious-sounding, flowery prayers of groups that consider themselves less formal, the ubiquitous requirement to wallow in self-deprecation about “all my guilt and shame” is so blatantly opposed, not only to Jesus' teaching, but to his entire life and interaction with people, that I often feel like walking out! Or at least, carrying a protest sign: “JESUS NEVER SAID THAT!!!” Please show me one single place where he did!

Neither noun --- neither “guilt” nor “shame” – appears a single time in the entire New Testament, in connection with earnest followers of Jesus! In fact, “guilt”, in any context, is completely absent. This subject has been addressed previously in the postings on repentance (#6), forgiveness of sins (#7), and “humility” (#14), but I think we need to look at these two words individually. They are symptoms of a pervasive disease, that is potentially fatal to the genuine message of Jesus, not to mention the welfare of his people.

The concept of “guilt” is not totally absent from New Testament writings. Twice, Jesus uses anaitios (L/S – guiltless, without fault or blame), once of himself (Mt.12:7) and once of priests performing their legitimate sabbath duties (Mt.12:5). There are three words traditionally translated “guilty”. Hupodikos (L/S – a legal term, referring to trial and conviction) is used only in Rom.3:19, making the point that whether Jew or Gentile, the whole world has ignored God's instructions. Opheilo (L/S – referring primarily to monetary debt, legal obligation, or duty) was only once rendered “guilty” (Mt.23:18), regarding one's obligation incurred by oath. Its other translations are “ought, must, should” 18x, “debt” 5x, and “duty” 4x. Enochos (L/S – legal liability or a court sentence), is translated “danger” 5x (Mt.5:21,22 – 4 uses – and Mk.3:29), 1x “subject” (Heb.2:15), and 4x “guilty” (Mt.26:66 and Mk.14:64 regarding the verdict at Jesus' mock trial; James' indictment – 2:10 – of people picking and choosing only parts of the law to observe; and I Cor.11:27.) This last is the only one that could conceivably be applied to “believers” – and it is directed toward those who are doing active damage to the function of the Body.

It is difficult to sort out the “shame / ashamed” words. Aischunuomai (5x), epaischuneo (11x), and kataischuneo (12x) (L/S – to dishonor, disfigure or tarnish; to disdain, to be ashamed (and consequently not do something), to be ashamed of having done something; to feel shame, or to cause another to do so) are exclusively rendered “ashamed” in the New Testament, except for two instances where for some reason, “confounded” was used (I Cor.1:27, I Pet.2:6), and two (I Cor.11:4,5) where “dishonor” was chosen. The only reference to a committed person being “ashamed” is with reference (Rom.6:21) to his former life. But Paul immediately follows that remark with v.22, “But now that you have been set free ---” and paints a picture of sharp contrast.

Many references are admonitions to not be ashamed when persecuted or put-down (I Pet.4:6, II Tim.1:8, 12, 16; Heb.12:12, Phil.1:20); nor of the Gospel itself (Rom.1:16, 9:3, 10:11); of Jesus (Mk.8:38, Lk.9:26), or of each other (II Cor.7:14, 9:4), and to take care that God / Jesus have no reason to be ashamed of us (Heb.2:11, 11:16). There are statements that opponents were – or ought to be – ashamed (Lk.13:17, I Pet.3:16, Tit.2:8), and that brethren who are in error should be corrected, in order that they may be restored (I Cor.4:14, 6:5, 15:34; II Cor.10:8, II Thes.3:14), but none implying continuing “shame” on the part of faithful followers.

The other words are somewhat harder to pin down. Aischune, the noun form of “shame”, only appearing 6x, is likewise never applied to the faithful. The one reference to Jesus, (Heb.12:2), says that he “endured the cross, despising the shame” (NOT “assuming” or “bearing” it!) The verb is kataphroneo, (L/S – “to look down upon, to be disdainful of, to think contemptuously of, to disregard, or neglect!”) This looks more to me like triumph and complete superiority than the much-touted “submission”! Where did the notion of his “bearing” or “becoming” shame come from? Certainly not the New Testament!

Paul (II Cor.4:2, Phil.3:9), Jude (13), and John (Rv.3:18) all speak of the “shame” of the disobedient, and Luke (14:9) describes the embarrassment of an egotistical guest. Notice the translation in II Cor.4:2 is “dishonesty”. That bears further study. Is requiring people to “confess” “shame” without any reason, really urging them to dishonesty?

Entrepomai, used 9x, represents a historical alteration of meaning. L/S lists “to command respect, to hesitate or feel misgivings, to reverence or feel regard for,” and only later “to feel shame or fear.” In Mt.21:37, Mk.12:6,Lk.20:13, and Heb.12:9, “reverence” was chosen; in Lk.18:2,4, “regard”; and only 3x, I Cor.4:14, II Thes.3:14, Tit.2:8, “ashamed.” I will welcome your thoughts on how these choices might have been made. They are all valid translations of the word..... Other words for dishonorable behavior are used more rarely: aschemosune (2x), atimia, atimao (negative forms of timao, to honor) 8x, entrope (2x), making little or no reference to its effect, or the perception of the actors. It is interesting that the only two uses of paradeigmaitizo are Mt.1:19 of Joseph's reluctance to embarrass Mary publicly, and Heb.6:6, the charge.
that those who turn away, put Jesus himself to public shame. (If you have downloaded the PNT, please add that in brackets to the end of the verse! I will correct it in the next version.)

So, where does all this leave us?
Very simply: seek to live in such a way that we will have nothing of which to be ashamed, that we will not make the Lord ashamed of us, and that none of us will cause shame to other brethren.

But **scrap the platitudes about “guilt and shame”!!!**
YOU ARE NOT A “WRETCH”!!!
YOU ARE NOT A “WORM”!!!
If you belong to Jesus, **YOU ARE NOT “FULL OF GUILT AND SHAME”!**
And it does **NOT** make you “holier”, more appreciative, or more faithful, to wallow around “confessing” or singing songs, bemoaning some artificial construct of “guilt and shame”!
And for Jesus’ sake – (please note that I am using that phrase as Paul did, and not as a profanity!) – **quit assuming that that sort of behavior is “praising the Lord”!!!**
Praise him rather for setting you FREE from any and all “guilt” or “shame”, to follow him!

Word Study #129 – Hidden things, Secrets, Darkness

This study is an outgrowth of the former post. When I ran across the only reference for *aischune* that was not translated “shame”, but rather “dishonesty” (II Cor.4:2), where Paul asserts, “we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty”, I thought this required attention. I have long advocated for the total avoidance of “hidden things” or secrecy of any kind in a Christian brotherhood (having been victimized by that practice), so the connection of “hidden things” with “shame” or “dishonesty” seemed quite relevant to these efforts. Of course, with careful study, one frequently learns that nothing is as simple as he would like it to be. This was no exception. Please refer also to #75.

Both “hidden” and “secret” are traditional translations of the **same words**, with very few, seldom-appearing exceptions. Almost all (8 out of 12 words) are some variant of the verb *krupto*: primarily *kruptos* (noun, adjective, and adverb forms), another adverb *kruphe*, and the prefixed forms *apokrupto / apokruphos, perikrupto, and egkrupto*. L/S lists roughly the same usage for all of them: “to hide with a notion of protection, to hide oneself, to cover or bury, to conceal or keep secret, to engage in intrigue, to connive”, or in the adjectival forms, “hidden, secret, disguised, underhanded, hard to understand, obscure.”

Similar variety is also represented in New Testament usage. There are things and people that are “hidden” for **protection** (Mt.7:24, 13:44; Jn.7:10, 8:59, 12:36,19:38; Col.3:3). Some refer simply to ordinary **privacy** (Mt.1:18, 24:26, 26:26; I Pet.3:4). Some things are “hidden”, **waiting for the proper time** to be “revealed” (Mt.11:25, Lk.10:21, Eph.3:9, Col.1:26, 2:3; Mt.13:35, Rom.16:25). Some are rather ambiguous as to whether the “hiding” is a positive or a negative thing (Mt.10:26, Mk.4:22, Lk.12:2, 8:17, 8:27, 9:45, 18:34; Mt.5:14, Lk.1:24, Mt.13:33, Lk.13:21). And some are indeed **nefarious**, and strictly warned-against (Mt.25:18, 25:25; Rom.2:16, I Cor.4:5, II Cor.4:2, Eph.5:12, Rv.6:15,16).

Another perspective of interest is **“who is hiding (or trying to hide) what, from whom, and why?”** Jesus’ admonition in Mt.6:4, 6, 18, for example, is an encouragement to keep one's faithfulness private between the disciple and the Father, whose “seeing in secret” is **loving affirmation**, quite in contrast to the **warning** expressed by the same word in Rom.2:16 or I Cor.4:5. Whether or not we **welcome** the time when “the secrets of all hearts will be revealed” simply depends upon what is **in** our hearts!

Also interestingly, there is no overt suggestion that “things hidden from the beginning of the world” (Eph.3:9, Col.1:26, Mt.13:35, Rom.16:25) were **deliberately concealed** by the hand of God: only that they are **exclusively and deliberately revealed** (note the context of the above references) by his will and timing, and under his instructions.

The only people from whom the message of the Kingdom is **deliberately** withheld (II Cor.4:3, Lk.19:42, Mt.11:25, Lk.10:21) are those who have rejected the call of the King, in whom alone are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col.2:3). It is he, also, in whom the very lives of those who trust him are “hidden” by the protective hand of God (Col.3:3), after having already chosen to begin the promised Kingdom life.

*Lanthano / lathra* (L/S – “to escape notice, unseen, secretly, privately, imperceptibly”, but also “treacherously, by stealth”) in the New Testament usually refers to privacy (Jn.11:28, Mt.1:19, 2:7; Ac.16:7), with only the latter two references bearing
any underhanded flavor. The verb form carries a tone of attempted avoidance (Mt.7:24, Lk.8:47), but in a protective sense. *Aphanes* (an adverb formed by adding the negative prefix “a” to the stem of *phaneros*, translated “manifest”, referring to any sort of revelation (Lk.8:17, Mk.4:22, I Cor.3:13, 14:25; Eph.5:13), is only used a single time, in Heb.4:13, and, like the citations in Mt.6 above, whether it is a threat or a promise depends upon whose side one has chosen to join!

It is in the matter of “choosing sides” that the concept of “darkness” is thrown into the mix. All but 4 of the 59 references use some form of *skotia / skotos* (L/S – “darkness, blindness, obscurity, gloom, uncertainty, deceit, ignorance, death”). Occasionally it refers simply to the onset of evening (Jn.6:17, 20:1), the eclipse at the time of Jesus’ death (Mt.27:45, Mk.15:33, Lk.23:44), or the eventual destination of those who actively oppose the Lord, his people, and his ways (II Pet.2:4, 17; Jude 6, 13; Heb.12:18, Mt.8:12, 22:13, 25:30). A few times the implication appears to be privacy (Mt.10:27, Lk.12:13). But most of the time, it is a description of intellectual or spiritual ignorance, whether as a result of opposing the Lord (Rom.1:21, 11:10; Eph.4:8, Mt.8:12, 22:13, 25:30, II Pet.2:17), or simply not having heard of his ways (Mt.4:16, Lk.1:79, Ac.26:18, Rom.2:19).

Darkness is also represented as the realm of overt evil (Lk.22:15, Jn. 3:19, Eph.5:8, 11,12; 6:12; I Thes.5:4,5), from which the faithful are urged to make a definitive break (I Pet.2:9, Col.1:13, Eph.5:11, II Cor.6:14, Rom.13:12, Mt.6:23, Lk.11:35). John seems to draw the battle lines with the greatest clarity, both in his gospel (1:5, 8:12, 12:35,46) and in his first letter (I Jn.1:5,6; 2:8,9,11). Please refer also to study #75, “Light”, by way of contrast.

The key to the connection with “secrecy” lies in Jn.3:19-21: “The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil. Everyone who practices wickedness hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed. But the one who is doing [acting in] the truth, comes to the light, in order that his deeds may be revealed, that they were performed in [for] God.”

Paul harmonizes very well with this tune in the paragraph that contains the reference with which we began: II Cor.4:1-6.

While it may be necessary in hostile environments for faithful brethren to operate quietly with respect to the darkness that surrounds, and sometimes threatens them (Mt.7:24, Jn.7:10, 8:59, 12:36), within a faithful brotherhood, there is no such need! “Renouncing the shameful, hidden things” (II Cor.4:2), and “things hidden in darkness” (I Cor.4:5), we may take our places in complete, trusting mutuality as the Body of our Lord Jesus! “Once, you all were darkness, but now you are light, in the Lord! Behave as children of light!”(Eph.5:8)

Amen!

**Word Study #130 – Wisdom, Wise**

If you are trying to follow a “train of thought” here, the “departure station” was the reference in the previous post, where Paul asserts that in Jesus (Col.2:3), “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”! We have already dealt with “knowledge” (#29), and since the words are often used together, it is reasonable to assume that they are connected, but not synonymous. (The astute observation of our son’s late father-in-law was, “Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is having enough sense not to put one in a fruit salad!”)

In exploring “wisdom”, though, we are faced with another dilemma: two Greek words, sometimes interchangeably and sometimes identically translated as “wise” and “prudent”. Scholars with much higher credentials than mine have tried and failed to make a neat distinction between *sophos* and *phronimos*. L/S leans heavily toward practicality for *phronimos*, but also retains that flavor in more than half of the listings for *sophos*. Trench insists that only *sophos* has a moral component, and is used only with respect to God or to good men – but that simply is not true (see Rom.1:22, I Cor. 1-3, II Cor.1:12, Col.2:23, Jas.3:15,17). Bauer's approach is more balanced, including both natural worldly wisdom and that which comes only from God in the treatment of *sophos*, and relegating *phronimos* primarily, although not exclusively, to matters of judgment or opinion.

Both words, to a degree at least, appear to be subject to one's conscious choice, as well as being a native, gifted, or learned ability. Plato and Aristotle used both words: the former for flights of philosophical fantasy as well as carefully reasoned argument, and the latter of scientific or mathematical understanding. So perhaps we also may be forgiven for our occasional confusion! Primarily because of the contexts in which they occur, I usually use words like “sensible” or “reasonable” for *phronimos*, and reserve “wise” for *sophos*, but I would not insist upon either choice.

Words related to *phronimos* (used 18x), *phronesis* (2x), *phronimoteros* (1x), and *phronimos* (the adverb – 1x) appear much
less frequently than *sophia* (51x) / *sophos* (21x) / *sophizo* (2x) / *sophoteron* (1x). The older term, “prudent” fits well for most of the former group, as they refer to people behaving sensibly, from the world’s standpoint, in their situations (Lk.16:8 - 2x, Mt. 7:24, 24:45, 25:2:9 - 4x , Lk.12:42). Please note, that simply using “good judgment” is nowhere represented as “wrong”. “Worldly wisdom” is only criticized when it is valued above that which comes from God, or contradicts Kingdom principles, as in the warnings recorded in Rom.11:25, 12:16; I Cor.4:10, II Cor.11:19. Indeed, using one’s best judgment is recommended in Mt.10:16, Lk.1:17, I Cor.10:15, and Eph.1:8.

The uses of *sophia* / *sophos*, on the other hand, require some sorting. L/S lists “cleverness or skill in a craft or art, skill in matters of common life, sound judgment, practical wisdom, learning, speculative wisdom, natural philosophy”, and notes that only among the Jews was it considered an attribute of God. This is not really surprising, if one considers the antics ascribed to the Greek and Roman deities. Both Paul (I Tim.1:17, Rom.16:7) and Jude (25) actually use the phrase, “the only wise God”. Might they have had exactly that contrast in mind?

Paul is careful to distinguish, in the first three chapters of I Corinthians, between “the wisdom of the world” and “the wisdom of God” – but he uses *sophia* / *sophos* for both. James also makes a clear distinction in Jas.3:13-17, offering a reliable standard by which the “real thing” may be recognized.

When the Ephesian and Colossian churches were under assault by advocates of mystical Eastern cults which claimed a superior, esoteric “wisdom”, Paul reminded them (Eph.1:8, 1:17, 3:10; Col.1:9, 1:28, 2:3, 2:23, 3:16) that disciples have already been made partakers of the very wisdom of God himself – “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” in the Lord Jesus Christ – and consequently have no need of anything “beyond” that (Col.3:16) “Christ’s word must continually reside among you all, richly, in all wisdom, as you keep teaching and admonishing each other”!

The wisdom required for that assignment is plainly and overtly recognized as the gift of God. Jesus had promised it for times of trial (Lk.21:15). It was listed right up there with the Holy Spirit among the qualifications sought for the first deacons (Ac.6:3), and heavily relied upon by Stephen (Ac.6:10), Paul (Rom.2:6,7; I Pet.3:15), and James (1:5).

A “word of wisdom” is listed among the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church in I Cor.12:8, paired with a “word of knowledge” – the combination being a necessary component of faithful discipleship (#51). Someone has said, “knowing what needs doing, AND what to do about it”. “Walking in wisdom” (Eph.5:15, Col.4:5), likewise, is essential for faithful witness (#18). Even Jesus himself, as a child, “increased in wisdom” as he matured (Mt.13:54, Mk.6:2, Lk.2:40,52), but for us “ordinary mortals”, it seems primarily to be the result of gracious revelation (Mk.11:25, 23:35; Rom.16:19, Eph.1:8, 1:17, Col.1:9).

A few other words are rarely rendered “wise”: *sunitemi* (once – II Cor.10:12-- “wise” and 24x “understanding”), *sunetos* (only used 4x, and invariably rendered “prudent” – Mt.11:25, Lk.10:27, Ac.13:17, I Cor.1:19), and *magos* (rendered 4x “wise men” in Mt.2, and 2x “sorcerer” in Ac.8 and 13). This latter word is Persian, and referred to astrologer-priests. By way of contrast, several of the words appear with the negative prefix, “a-“, and are rendered “unwise, foolish, without understanding”: *asophos* (Eph.5:15), *anoetos* (Rom.1:14,Gal.3:1,3; I Tim.6:9, Tit.3:3), *asunetos* (Rom.1:21, 10:19; Mt.15:16, Rom.1:31), and *aphron* (Rom.2:20, Eph.5:7, I Pet.2:15). The contexts of most of these give the impression that the ignorance in each case was a matter of choice, unlike *moros*, which seems to be a condition that can be remedied. Perhaps Paul's (Eph.5:17) admonition, “be not unwise, but understand what the Lord's will (#12) is,” the gracious invitation of James (1:5) to simply ask when we lack the wisdom for faithful living, and Paul's reminders (Col.3:16 and I Tim.1:17) of the Word (#66) as the vehicle for communicating and sharing that wisdom, provide the best summary for those of us who are serious about learning faithfulness.

“Oh, the depth of God's wealth and wisdom and knowledge! How (far) beyond searching are his judgments, and beyond comprehension his ways! For who knew the Lord's mind? Or who became his advisor? Or who gave anything before to him, that it should be repaid to him? Because everything has its source, existence, and goal in him! Glory to him forever!” (Rom.11:33-36, PNT)

**Word Study #131 – Treasure**

This subject needs to be studied in combination with W.S.#72, “Riches”, which I commend to your attention. The concepts are parallel, not only in their partial reference to material prosperity, but also in the diversity which both encompass.

The verb, *thesaurizo*, used 8x in the New Testament, refers (L/S) classically to the collection, preservation, or storage of
anything of value: primarily fruits or grain. The use of a public granary, or reserving resources of any kind for a particular purpose, is also included, as is the less-noble idea of hoarding.

The noun, thesaurus, used 18x, referred to the vaults of a bank, a granary, any receptacle for valuables, a mine, a military strong-room or magazine, a cavern or subterranean dungeon, an offertory box, or the contents of any of these, as well as to anything or anyone that was highly valued.

More rarely, the “borrowed” Persian terms, gaza (Ac.8:27) and gazaphulakion (Mk.12:41, 43; Lk.21:1, Jn.8:20) were used of a formal national or religious “treasury.”

Much of the same diversity is seen in the New Testament. The “treasures” opened when the magi presented their gifts (Mt.2), for example, were probably articles of their traveling baggage!

Paul urged the Corinthian brethren (I Cor.16:2) to set aside (“save up”) their promised contribution to the relief offering in a systematic way.

The “treasures of Egypt” in the context of Heb.11:26, probably referred to all the perks of royalty that Moses abandoned in favor of identification with God's people.

In the previous two posts, we noted “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col.2:3) reserved for the faithful in their identification with the Lord Jesus.

A similar connection appears in II Cor.4:7, where Paul speaks of the glory of God having been entrusted to us in “earthen vessels”, reminding us that the treasure [glory] involved is the Lord's and not ours to brag about.

Interestingly, the “treasure” words appear more than twice as often in the gospels as they do in the epistles, although many are in parallel passages. In these, it is as important to note what is NOT said, as to hear what IS said.

For example, consider the story of the wealthy young man who was contemplating discipleship (Mt.19:21, Mk.10:21, Lk.18:22). Only Luke quotes Jesus as saying “sell all you have” – the others say “what you have” or “your possessions” – but all specify, “give to the poor”, NOT “to the temple hierarchy”. Not even to Jesus' own ministry. Paul, too, goes to great pains to emphasize (II Cor.12:14) that he does not ask anyone to support his work, or him personally – only to share with needy brethren. Certainly there is no encouragement or mandate to support the flamboyant lifestyle of the “builders” of megachurches or TV shows! “Giving TO THE POOR is the vehicle for “laying up treasure in heaven”, as is Jesus' concluding invitation, “Come, follow me!” (W.S.#101).

Jesus weighs in, in a similar vein, in his criticism of the “rich fool” (Lk.12:21) who accumulates treasure for himself ...”, and in his instructions not to “store up for yourselves treasures that are subject to bugs, corrosion, or theft (Mt.6:19, Lk.12:33,34) – obviously material possessions of various kinds.

I suspect that it is selfishness that Jesus is addressing, rather than the specific items of anyone's hoarding.

This is also evident in James' later distillation of that teaching, (Jas.5:1-6), where the abuse of others in one's accumulation of goods is the principal focus.

Peter (II Pet.3:7) and Paul (Rom.2:5) deal just as sternly with the eventual results of choosing to ignore justice and right in favor of one's own self-interest. Please note: this is NOT represented as punishment or retribution, but simply the inevitable result of selfish behavior.

Note also that Jesus did not hesitate to include “for yourselves” in the alternative, “heavenly” storing-up, and its effect upon one's heart.

Jesus also uses the idea of “treasure” in a context that is clearly not material at all. In Mt.12:33-37 and Lk.6:43-45, he points out that a person's communication reveals the character of what is “stored” in his heart, and that any final analysis will be made on the basis of simple and very obvious evidence.

Matthew also records two teaching incidents that do not appear in any of the other accounts. Both concern “the kingdom of heaven”, which is referred to by the other writers as “the kingdom of God”. Please refer to studies # 19, 20, 21, and 118 for exploration of these concepts.

After an extended period of teaching about the Kingdom, Jesus remarked to his disciples (Mt.13:52), “Every scribe [teacher?] trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure both new things and old.” He had just been explaining to them a collection [“treasure”?] of parables, and it is reasonable to assume that he expects that teaching to be remembered and replicated. This assumption would fit as well with Paul's uses of thesaurus in II Cor. and Col. already cited.

Earlier in that same teaching session (Mt.13:44), Jesus had likened the kingdom itself to a “treasure”, so valuable that its discoverer deemed it worthy of the exchange of “everything that he has” – a stark contrast to the incident where the wealthy young man turned away (Mt.19 and parallels). And please note that in neither case is the “treasure” deferred to some sort of future existence! I strongly suspect that the excited buyer of that field had already started to dig up his treasure by the
time the ink was dry on his deed!

It is significant that “treasure” is spoken of as “in heaven” only three times, out of the 26 New Testament occurrences of *thesaurizo / thesauros*. Perhaps if proper attention is paid to what we seek to collect or preserve here on earth, and how we choose to use it, we need not worry unduly about the rest.

May we help each other faithfully to administer whatever kind of “treasure” comes under our control, and to value the Kingdom itself above all!

**Word Study #132 – Walk**

“He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” (I Jn.2:6, KJV, 1611).

“The one who keeps saying he's living in relationship with him (Jesus), ought to walk [live, behave] as he did!” (I Jn.2:6, PNT, 2013.)

Even among the staunchest advocates of a “literal” interpretation of scripture (which usually means the KJV), I have never met one who refuses every form of transportation other than his own two feet, on the grounds that that is how Jesus got from place to place.

Clearly, locomotion is not what the apostle had in mind, although something dynamic certainly is! “Walking” is a matter of considerable concern in the New Testament, having been used to represent six different Greek words. Three of these appear only a single time.

**Emperipateo** (L/S – to walk among, to tarry among, or later, to trample or insult) occurs only in II Cor.6:16, where Paul quotes the LXX promise of God in Lv.26:12 to “pitch his tent” and “walk” among his people.

**Dierchomai** (L/S – to go through, to pass through), although used 17 times with that classical translation, is only rendered “walk” in one parable (parallel accounts in Mt.12:43 and Lk.11:24), of a cast-out evil spirit seeking another body to invade.

**Orthopodeo**, (L/S – to walk straight or uprightly) has no classical listings other than the Gal.2:14 passage. Thayer says it does not exist elsewhere, though Bauer suggests a connection to a third century BC noun used by Sophocles referring to “progress.” Did Paul “make this one up”? It does make etymological sense.

**Stoicheo** (L/S – to be drawn up in a row or line, as in battle, to move or march in sequence, to agree with, to submit to) and Bauer – “to follow in someone's footsteps, to adhere to a person or principle” was uniformly translated “walk” in its five uses: Ac.21:24, Rom.4:12, Gal.5:25, and 6:16, and Phil.3:16, all referring to living according to prescribed principles.

**Poreuomai**, (L/S – to go, walk, or march, to be driven or carried, to proceed (in law or philosophy), and Bauer – to depart from somewhere, to follow someone or something, to go to one's death, to conduct oneself, to live, to walk) is much more commonly rendered simply “go” – 119 – or “depart” – 11x, with “walk” used only 9x. It refers to behavior in all but one of these. In Lk.13:33, Jesus simply indicates his intention to travel, but Lk.1:6, Ac.9:31, 14:16; I Pet.4:3, II Pet.2:10, 3:3; Jude 16,18 clearly carry the idea of one's manner of life, the latter six in a distinctly negative sense.

By far the most common of the “walking” words is *peripateo*, with 97 New Testament appearances, 92 of them traditionally translated “walk”. All but six of the uses in the gospels and Acts refer simply to traveling on foot (a total of 42), but not a single one of its 49 appearances in the epistles lean that way. It must be noted, of course, that the “walking” in the gospel accounts is not all “ordinary” locomotion: “the lame” (Mt.11:5, 15:31, Mk.2:9, Lk.5:23, 7:22, Jn.5, Ac.3:6, 8, 9, 12; 14:8, 110) whose healing is evidenced by their walking, or the little girl who had died (Mk.5:42) “walking around”, or Jesus himself (Mt.14, Mk.6) walking across the lake, are hardly ordinary, everyday strolls. But there is an even sharper shift in the epistles, at which the gospels only hint, as in Jn.8:12, 11:9, 10; and 12:35, where Jesus clearly connects “walking in light” or “in darkness” with the faithful following of his, his instructions, and his ways.

L/S lists “walking around, to walk up and down (in the schools of philosophy) while teaching or engaging in debate or discourse, to dispute or argue”, or simply “to live or conduct oneself.”

Bauer adds “the activities of daily life. This latter implication is clearly the one in view in most of the epistles.

Paul is definitely referring to the transformation of life and behavior in his admonitions to “walking in newness of life” (Rom.6:4), “walk not after the flesh [human nature] but after the Spirit” (Rom.8:1,4), “walk by faith and not by sight” (II Cor.5:7), “walk in the Spirit” (Gal.5:16), “walk worthy of our calling” (Eph.4:1), and “walk as children of light” (Eph.5:8) in sharp contrast to the readers' former life. (I Cor.3:3, II Cor.4:2, Eph.2:2, 4:17; Col.3:7).

One's general lifestyle (Col.1:10, 2;6; I Thes.2:12, 4:1; I Jn.1:6, 2;6), behavior toward outsiders (Eph.4:17, 5:15, Col.3:7, 4;5; I Thes.4:12), and toward each other in the brotherhood (Rom.14:15, II Cor.10:3, 12:18; Phil.3:17,18; II Thes.3:6, I Jn.1:7, and the whole of John's last two letters), are likewise addressed.
These instructions mesh well with the lists (although no form of “walk” is used there) in Eph.4:22-32 and Col.3:5-15, of behaviors to “put off” and put on”; a deliberate process to enable the realization of the transformed life that is possible only in the power of Jesus’ resurrection. (Col.3:1-4).

The epistles also contain warnings concerning people – some within and some outside the fellowship – who choose to “walk” [live, behave] in the “darkness” (see #129) rather than the “light” (#75). Notice especially John's discussion in I Jn.1 and also in 2:11, probably elaborating upon Jesus’ conversation which he had reported earlier (Jn.8:12 and 11:9-10). He now represents the choice, which Jesus had mentioned previously in connection with clarity of direction for the disciples, as affecting their mutual interaction as well. Paul, too, calls for discernment based upon how people choose to “walk.” (I Cor.3:3, II Cor.4:2, Phil.3:18, II Thes.3:6,11).

Of course, the ultimate in beautiful companionship, hinted in II Cor.6:16, which we noted in the beginning, and its LXX antecedents, is fulfilled at last in the Revelation. In Rv.3:4, Jesus himself welcomes the faithful – those who have not “dirtied their garments”(after he had given them clean ones!) – not to lounge around each on his private la-z-boy cloud, but “they shall walk with me in white!” Jesus, apparently, is still on the move, and so are his devoted followers.

The glorious vision of the holy city, his long-awaited Bride, has everyone “walking” – in the light of the glory of God, shed by the Lamb which is equated with the Lamb. (Rv.21:24).

“The one who keeps saying that he's living in relationship with him(Jesus), ought to walk [live, behave] as he did”! (I Jn.2:6) “Walk [live] in a manner worthy of God, who is calling you into his own Kingdom and glory!” (I Thes.2:12)

May we walk together into faithfulness!

Word Study #133 – Accepting and Receiving

I have long been troubled by the pervasiveness of insistence upon (or bragging about) people being coerced into “accepting the Lord.” I suppose this notion, which is never mentioned in the New Testament, is enhanced by the familiar pictures of Jesus standing forlornly outside a closed door, which has neither doorknob nor latch string, as if begging for admission. What a travesty upon the character of the Lord of Lords and King of Kings! The wonder of wonders is not that a mere human should be so arrogant as to claim to “accept” the Lord of Glory, but that the Lord himself, in his incredibly gracious kindness, should deign to “accept” such bumbling, stumbling creatures as ourselves, into his Kingdom – his family – even his very Body! “Acceptance” is the gracious welcome proffered by a superior toward an inferior supplicant – not the rote recitation required of a hapless victim who has succumbed to the “theological” arguments of a well-trained accuser!

Indeed, the word “accept” appears only six times in the most traditional of translations (KJV), and is used for four different Greek words, all of which appear many more times with other renderings, but never with our Lord as the direct object! In Ac.24:3, Tertullus is referring to favors received from the Roman overlords; in II Cor.8:17 and 11:4, Paul refers to his readers' acceptance of his message; in Lk.20:21 and Gal.2:6, the reference is to God's refusal to play favorites; and in Heb.11:35 to people who refused to “accept” deliverance from persecution at the price of unfaithfulness.

The adjective, “acceptable”, appearing 11 times, and representing five different words, uniformly refers to people or behavior that God considers acceptable. Likewise, of similar words rendered “accepted” (7x), five refer to God's acceptance, one to the failure of a prophet's own people to listen to him (Lk.4:24), and one to Paul's desire that his service be accepted in the spirit in which it is offered, by the brethren in Jerusalem (Rom.15:31). Most notable in this latter group is the much-neglected discovery announced by Peter as a result of his encounter with Cornelius (Ac.10:34,35) – “Then Peter opened his mouth and said, ‘In truth, I perceive that God does not play favorites, but in every nation, the one who respects him and does justice is received [accepted] by him!’”

Funny – it doesn't say a word about reciting a litany about what an awful, “sinful” person he is! This must be another place where the “literal” crowd managed to hit the “delete” button and substitute their own formula!

It is certainly true that the verbs in question – apodechomai, dechomai, prosdechomai, and lambano – are very common in both the New Testament and classical writings. In many cases, they seem nearly interchangeable. Apodechomai, used only once as “accept” appears five times translated “receive”; dechomai, 2x as “accept”, is rendered “receive” 52x, “suffer” 1x, and “take” 5x. Lambano is rendered 2x “accept”, 133 x “receive”, 104 x “take”, and scattered translations of “attain, bring, call, catch, have, and obtain.” Prosdechomai, which we noted in #124 and 125, “Wait”, and “Watch”, also includes “allow, look for, receive, take, and wait for.”
Their classical uses are also scattered, but one idea they all have in common is “receive”, in the sense of making someone welcome. This may apply to anyone, of any social status, be he compatriot or stranger. Jesus used it of the disciples he had commissioned (Mt.10:14, 40, 41; Mk.6:11, 9:47; Lk.9:5, 48, 10:8), and equated people's reception of them with their welcome (or not) of him. *Dechomai* is also frequently used of the welcome accorded the gospel message in various places (II Cor.8:11; Ac.8:14, 17:11; I Thes.1:6, 2:13) as well as of its bearers (II Cor.7:15, Gal.4:14, Col.4:10). There is nothing liturgical, spooky, or “spiritual” about this: it is welcome, pure and simple. *Lambano* was occasionally used, classically, of involuntary “possession” by a spirit or deity, but the other words were not. More frequently, *lambano* is used to emphasize that “grace” (Jn.1:16), “fullness” (Jn.1:16), “my (Jesus') testimony” (Jn.3:31,32,33; 5:34,41), “honor” (Jn.5:44), and the Holy Spirit (Jn.7:39, 20:22; Ac.1:8; 2:38; 8:15, 17, 19; 10:47), among others, are gifts received from the gracious hand of the Lord, and not the achievement of human effort. Indeed, Paul asks pointedly (I Cor.4:7), “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you brag as if you didn’t?” This is in a paragraph sternly critical of status-tripping in the body of believers. Literally everything about a disciple's life is a gracious gift from the Lord, to be received with thanksgiving and employed for the welfare of the brotherhood and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Other classical uses of the various words should also be kept in mind, and may color some interpretations. For *apodechomai*, L/S lists: to accept advice from, to follow as a teacher, to admit to one's presence, to approve or receive favorably, to be content or satisfied with, to recover or receive back something that was lost or stolen. For *dechomai*, they list: to accept as legal tender, to exchange, to understand, to accept apology and forgive, to accept as an ally, to await the attack of an enemy, to welcome, to accept responsibility for, to approve. For *prosdechomai*, to admit to one's presence, to admit an argument, to be capable of, to undertake, to take liability upon oneself. For *lambano*, to grasp or seize, to take by violence, to exact punishment, to catch, to find out, to detect, to apprehend with the mind, to receive hospitably, to receive in marriage, to receive as produce or profit, to receive permission, to purchase. This is enough of a sample to show that the variety is considerable. Perhaps the most reliable key to the proper use of “accept” among those who seek for faithfulness, lies simply in its New Testament usage. The verb appears only six times, and never refers to requirements placed upon people. Our appropriate assignment concerns the adjective – used 18x – three times as often – to act and interact in a manner acceptable to God, and giving honor to the Lord Jesus. Take a cue from brother Paul, who wrote to the Roman brethren (Rom.12:1,2):

“I encourage you all, therefore, brothers, because of God's compassion [mercy], to present your bodies, a living offering, set-apart, pleasing [acceptable*] to God: this is your logical worship. And do not (continue to) pattern yourselves by this age, but be completely changed, by the renewal of your mind, so that you all will recognize what God's will is: what is good, and pleasing [acceptable*] and complete [perfect].”

*The word is euarestos, “pleasing, pleasant, acceptable, in good taste”.

A focus upon becoming “acceptable”, rather than forcing an artificial and unwarranted “acceptance” upon others, is much more likely to bear good fruit for the Kingdom!

**Word Study #134 – What's New?**

From the many unexpected and sometimes shocking aspects of his earthly ministry, and the establishment of the New Covenant announced by the Lord Jesus at his last meal with the disciples before his betrayal, to his triumphant edict from the Throne quoted in Rev.21:5, “Look! I am making everything new!”, it had been obvious to anyone who was paying attention that something quite out-of-the-ordinary was happening whenever Jesus, or sometimes even his followers, appeared on the scene. This was a realization sometimes greeted with delight, and other times with dismay, depending upon the stock in the status-quo held by the observers/participants.

What I did not realize until beginning this study, was that the two Greek words in these accounts, which are both translated “new”, are not synonymous at all! At first I was skeptical of Trench's assertion that *neos*, the lesser used of the two – only appearing 11 times – is merely a temporal observation, referring to a person or event younger or more recent than the others to which it is compared, whereas *kainos*, used 44 times, refers to the quality, kind, or condition of its object. However, the lexicons all bear out that contrast, with L/S offering “fresh, newly made or invented, innovative, without precedent” for *kainos*, and “youthful, young, or recent” for *neos*. Bauer concurs, listing “unusual, something not previously present, with implication that 'old' is obsolete; unknown, remarkable” for *kainos*, and “young, new, fresh” for *neos*. Thayer adds...
“superior to what it succeeds” and “previously non-existent” for *kainos*.

Examination of the New Testament uses of both words reveals that both are used in Jesus’ teaching about patching a garment and wine in wineskins, but *neos* describes the wine (“newly made”), and *kainos* the skins which had not been previously used, in all three synoptics. The “new teaching [doctrine]” attributed to Jesus (Mk.1:27, or the “new ideas” discussed in the Areopagos Council (Ac. 17:19-21), both use *kainos*, as does the “new commandment” (Jn.13:34, I Jn.2:7-8, II Jn.5) which Jesus initiated. The related noun, *kainotes*, appearing only twice (Rom.6:4, 7:6) likewise refers to the total transformation of life expected of one who chooses to follow Christ.

This meshes well with repeated references to the “new creation” – uniformly *kainos* – that also describes the radically changed life of the committed (II Cor.5:17, Gal.6:15). Eph.2:15 is especially significant in this regard, representing Jesus as having deliberately “created” out of redeemed and reconciled Jew and Gentile, “one new (kainos) person”. *Anthropos*, the generic term for “man” – the species – may be taken as either “person” or “humanity”.

All of these carry the expectation of a life never seen before – probably never even imagined! – and not a temporal reference. The only place where *neos* appears in a similar context is Col.3:10 – and the “new life” in view was indeed temporally “new” to those folks, although Paul goes on to speak of their being “continually renewed” (*anakainoumenon*) – a present passive participle – as well.

Perhaps the most significant of all is the uniform (except for a single reference in Heb.12:24) use of *kainos* in both gospel and epistle references to the “new covenant”. In this regard, please also refer to the treatment of “covenant” in W.S.#79 and 80. We discovered in that study the fallacy of the assumption that a “covenant” could never be abrogated. It was always a two-way proposition: “If you will do this, then I will ----” A breach by either party consistently renders a covenant of no effect.

Most relevant here is the matter of fact statement in Heb.8:13: “In saying 'new', he has made the first one 'old', and what has become old and been superseded is near to disappearing!” The writer goes on, in chapter 9, to re-cast the term *diatheke*, formerly rendered “covenant”, in the light of a legal will, and to explain that a will only takes effect upon the death of the testator. It has no necessary connection with the much-touted idea of “blood covenants”, sacrifices, or capital punishment. In this way, it becomes patently clear that the “new covenant” is something entirely apart from the old system, and that forcing artificial parallels is of no value. Jesus has done something entirely new! “(He) also made us capable administrators of a new covenant [will], (whose source) is not a written (legal document), but the Spirit! For the legal document kills, but the Spirit makes alive!” (II Cor.3:6)

This may be one reason why the Lord Jesus himself, much earlier, had remarked (Mt.13:52), “Every scribe trained for the Kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasures both new things and old.” Only with the discernment of the Holy Spirit can his people accurately sort out which “new” and “old” things actually belong together!

A different word altogether, used only once, is employed in Heb.10:20, speaking of “the living way he (Jesus) recently made new for us, through the curtain”, giving his people access not only to “holy” places and things that had been forbidden under the “old way”, but even to God himself! *Prophots* refers to recent events: to newly-drawn water, or food that is fresh (not spoiled). Jesus has indeed “done a new thing!”

*Kainos* appears more frequently in the Revelation than in any other part of the New Testament. We had a foretaste in Peter's reference to “a new heaven and a new earth” (II Pet.3:13), which is repeated in Rv.21:1. But when the Lord's triumph is complete, the glorious announcement from the Throne is “Look! I am making everything new!”

New names (identities – see #24) have been given to the faithful (Rv.3:12). The folks singing around the throne do so with a “new song” (Rv.5:9, 14:3) of praise to the glory and worthiness of the Lamb.

A “new Jerusalem” – the prepared Bride – is introduced (Rv.3:12, 21:2) The “new creation” is finally realized: and Paul's announcement of hope in II Cor.5:17 has finally come to complete fulfillment:

“So if anyone is in Christ, (he is) a new creation [or, creation is new!] Old things are gone! Look! Something new – *kainos* – innovative, unprecedented, and superior to all that has gone before – has happened!”

Thanks be to God!
Word Study #135 – Creation

Having just considered the gift – and the challenge – of the “new creation” that results from commitment to Jesus' Kingdom, it seems appropriate to look at what the New Testament says about creation itself. Not nearly as much as do the pulpit-pounding advocates of “Creationism”, who claim to represent “the Biblical view”!

Ktisis, translated 6x “creation” and 11x “creature” – and also 1x “building” (Heb.9:11) and 1x “ordinance” (I Pet.2:13) – for reasons unknown – is not a common topic. Ktisma, also translated “creature”, appears 4x; kistès, “creator”, only once (I Pet.4:19), although the participial form of ktizo is translated that way in Rom.1:25; and ktizo, the verb “to create” 12x, and once more translated as “make”.

I was surprised to find that historically, none of these words had referred to the origins of the world, the universe, or even of humans. The historian Herodotus used them to refer to the founding of a city or country, the organizing of a governing body, or the building of any sort of edifice. The verb form also included the production or invention of any object, or the perpetration of a noteworthy deed. References to the “creation” as it is popularly understood are found exclusively in the LXX and the New Testament.

Both Greek and Roman traditions did include “creation stories”, but with a different twist. Hesiod, a Greek epic poet, contemporary with or slightly after Homer (about 700 BC), describes different “ages” of man – gold, silver, bronze, iron – during which people were becoming progressively (or perhaps one should say “regressively!”) more barbaric, and were destroyed and re-created repeatedly by the gods. Ovid, the Latin poet, in his Metamorphoses, (first century BC/AD), describes a primeval state of chaos, which the gods tried to organize, with little success. Neither of these writers makes any attempt to “start from scratch.”

In contrast, the New Testament contains several mentions of “the beginning of creation” (Mk.10:6, 13:19; II Pet.3:4), and even presents Jesus himself as “the beginning of creation” (Rv.4:11), and Paul goes even farther and represents him as the very agent and purpose of creation (Eph.3:9. Col.1:16) – “all things were created by him and for him”! A similar statement in Rv.4:11 affirms, “Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they exist, and were created!”

Notice, please, that the burden of these declarations has nothing whatever to do with today’s prevalent obsessions with “when” or “how” any of this happened. The whole focus is upon who is responsible, and why creation exists. We would do well to focus our own attention similarly!

Paul goes to great pains in Rom.1 and again in Rom.8 to make the point that in creation, God has provided ample evidence of his character and purpose; and the descent of people into the depravity and chaos that sounds very similar to the contamination of depravity described in Romans 1 spread to the whole of creation, the hope revealed in Romans 8 – the expectation of deliverance into the glorious New Creation – is contagious as well!

No wonder “the whole creation is waiting with eager anticipation for the revealing of the sons of God!” (Rom.8:19). It is these to whom its care is entrusted, and in whom its hopes of fulfilling its original purpose – the pleasure of its creator (Rv.4:11) – can at last be realized. What a glorious prospect!
The New Creation has already begun “after the image” (Col.3:10) of its Creator – the image (W.S.#15) that had been so sadly defaced by the selfishness of its former heirs (Rom.1). Please also see chapter 3 of Citizens of the Kingdom.

The classic description is in II Cor.5:17. Interestingly, in the Greek text, there is no verb in the sentence. Kaine ktisis may, but need not, be a modifier for the pronoun tis – “anyone, someone”. The statement may with equal validity be taken to mean “that person is a new creature” (in the sense of a created being), or to intend that for such a person, “creation is new”!

Both are grammatically correct, and both are true.

Paul adds the observation in Eph.2:10 that we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works [with a purpose for good deeds]”, which God also “prepared” for his people to do. No, this is not the “salvation by works” which seems to frighten some folks so badly. It is “salvation for the purpose of accomplishing what the Creator (and Savior) intended all along! (W.S.#39). This is reinforced in Eph.4:24, where Paul asserts that we are “created according to God's design, in justice (W.S.#3) and devotion to the truth” (W.S.#26).

James (1:18) calls the Lord's people “the first-fruits of his creation” – the beginning of the harvest for which he started everything in the first place! We have kept him waiting a long time!
Some minor manuscripts of Mark even quote Jesus' commission (Mk.16:15) as instructions to proclaim his “gospel” (#67) to “every creature” – every created thing (pase te kitsei)! This may even be a renewal of God's original charge to his people to tend and care for all that he had created. (Gen.1:28). Paul may have understood it that way (Col.1:23).

It is also significant that, as Paul reminded Timothy (I Tim.4:4), “Everything that God created is good!”, and is to be received with thanksgiving (v.3). This despite the equally far-reaching affirmation in Heb.4:13, that no created thing is hidden from the eyes of God. There is absolutely NO New Testament justification for the common assumption that a person, or the physical creation, or the physical body, is inherently “evil”, “depraved”, or “sinful”! “Everything that God created is GOOD” – unless one chooses to use it wrongly, instead of as it was intended.

Finally, we should note Jesus' crowning act of creation – Eph.2:15, also noted in Gal.6:15. It is the Lord Jesus himself who has taken people who represent the most opposite extremes imaginable, in their own thinking, and “created the two, in himself, into one new person, thus making peace.” This is the true miracle of creation!

Thanks be to God!

**Word Study #136 – Submit, Subject**

Like a great many of the words for which folks have requested a study, this one probably will not make any of the opposing “camps” (either the “keep women DOWN” or the “do your own thing” folks) very happy. But by now, you should know that this blog does not exist to provide you with weapons with which to clobber each other!

Please bear in mind (and read the introduction to the King James Version if you don't believe it), that the beloved “traditional version” was prepared at the behest of, and to reinforce the authority of, an absolute monarch, who was emphatically declaring his supremacy over the English church, and its departure from the domination of Rome! This just might have had some bearing upon the choices of “subject” and “submit” to translate hupotasso, although they are not at all the only – or even the primary – meanings of the word.

The classical uses of hupotasso are quite varied, including (L/S) “to place or arrange, to post in the shelter of (for protection), to draw up behind (as military reinforcement), to subdue or make subject, to be obedient or timid, to underlie or imply, to be associated with, to follow an idea, a person, or a series of numbers, and to be a minor premise in an argument”! Take your pick! You can make a case for any of these.

Bauer adds, “to be attached or appended to a literary document”, and notes that any of these may be voluntary or involuntary when applied to people.

Thayer adds “to yield to admonition or advice.”

Before examining the varied occurrences of hupotasso, we will do well to consider the other words which were also translated “subject, subdue, submit”, and whose definitions are sufficiently specific, that we may safely assume that one of them would have been chosen, had that been the intention.

Doulagogeo, L/S “to enslave, (passive, to be enslaved), or to treat as a slave”, is used only once in the New Testament, in I Cor.9:27, where Paul speaks of forcibly subjecting his physical nature to his own will.

Enochos, L/S “legally liable, culpable, or held in bondage”, is treated in #128, since one of its more common translations is “guilty”. It is only once rendered “subject to bondage”, in Heb.2:15 – the result of the fear of death, on the part of those who have not yet realized that Jesus has eviscerated that threat.

Katagonizomai, L/S “to prevail against, to conquer, to contend against, to win by struggle” (and of course a passive form would convey being the victim of such struggle), also appears only once, in Heb.11:33, where some of the historical heroes of faithfulness are described as having “subdued kingdoms”.

Hupeiko, L/S “to withdraw, to depart, to retire from office in favor of another, to yield, give way, or concede”, likewise makes only a single appearance, in Heb.13:17, where the readers are admonished to “submit” to their civil rulers.

Commentators have interpreted hegoumenois as if it referenced “church officials” (of which there were none in the first century – but many at the time of translation!), but the word is universally used of governmental authorities. The error is probably attributable to a common misunderstanding of psuchon in the next phrase as “souls” instead of the more accurate “lives” (see W.S.#28).

All of these meanings may be ruled out for the uses of hupotasso, because those words were equally available to the writers, if that had been their intent.

Likewise, “obey/obedience” is better used for hupakouo or peitho (see #27, 39, 55, and 88) than for hupotasso.
The primary words suggested by L/S above, such ideas as orderly arrangement, protection, reinforcements, and association, are probably also primary among New Testament references concerning relationships among people. This is especially the case in the much (mis-)quoted passage in Eph. 5, which begins with v.21, not 22. “Be subject [submissive, subjected] to each other, in the respect that has its source in Christ.” (The verb does not even occur in v.22.) Paul then proceeds to use the care and protection offered by the Lord to his church as the example for family relationships. That certainly does not suggest a demeaning role for anybody!

Such an overt, detailed context is not repeated in the other, similar passages, (Col.3:18, I Pet.3:1,5), although both are mitigated with instructions (in Col.) for loving care, or reasoning (in Pet.) advocating a contribution to the conversion of husbands!, that communicate anything but abject servitude!

Considerably more attention is devoted to the “subjection” of all creation, whether to futility (Rom.8:20) or to the Lord Jesus (I Cor.15:27-28, Eph.1:22, Heb.2:5,8; I Pet.3:22).

Admonitions to “submit” to civil authorities (Rom.13:1-5, Tit.3:1, I Pet.2:13) are of course themselves “subject” to the example of the apostles, and indeed of Jesus himself, who drew a firm line where official “submission” conflicted with their prior submission to God.

Submission to God is also advocated, in Heb.12:9, I Cor.15:28, Jas.4:7, Rom.10:3.

Although readers are urged to pay attention (and deference) to their elders, both in the church (I Cor.16:16, II Cor.9:13, I Pet.5:5) – notice, please, that Peter repeats Paul's Eph.5 instructions that “All of you, be subject to one another” – and in the family (I Tim.3:4, Tit.2:5-9), as well as the Eph. and Col. passages already referenced, this is not absolute, as illustrated in the encounter between Paul and Peter reported in Gal.2:5.

Simple respect and responsibility are also included, as in the instructions for orderly participation in meetings of the brotherhood (I Cor.14:32, 34), and in Jesus’ childhood “submission” to his parents (Lk.2:54).

Even when the Lord gave his disciples unusual powers for a particular assignment, he warned (Lk.10:17,20) that this not be a cause for boasting or celebration, but reminded them instead to keep their focus on the Kingdom.

And this, in sum, is the optimum solution to all the disputes that arise concerning “submission” among the Lord's people. Please notice that in none of these passages is anyone thundering at anyone else, “YOU MUST SUBMIT [BE SUBJECT] TO ME!!!”

When Kingdom people, as a cooperative venture, primarily seek the welfare of the Kingdom, each of us will subordinate our own interests (or “status”) to those of the brotherhood. In that atmosphere, the specifics can readily and amicably be worked out.

All honor and authority belongs to our King, and it is he to whom, ultimately, we all owe submission, in love.

Word Study #137 – Mourn, Mourning

This investigation is the result of a statement which appeared, and was expounded at length, in materials for a study group: “Christ's call for us to mourn together in the face of sin and suffering is a humble declaration of our own brokenness.” Never having perceived such a “call”, I asked my usual question: “Did Jesus ever say that?”, and determined to find out. The answer is a resounding “NO!!!”

In fact, the English word “mourn” appears only ten times in the entire New Testament, and represents three different Greek words. (Contrast that with the seven words, and more than 70 appearances of “rejoice!” – W.S. #93)

Trench lists four words, only three of which are translated “mourn” in the NT.

Lupeomai, the most general, refers to any form of pain, grief or sorrow, and is the opposite of chaireo, “to rejoice.” Pentheo, a stronger word, (L/S) is primarily a mourning for the dead, often, but not always, as a public event.

It is often joined with klaiein, to cry. Threneo, often joined with oduresthai, is “to bewail or make a dirge over the dead.” It may take the form of wailing or lamentation, or a poetic composition or song. Koptein, derived from kopto, “to cut or smite”, referred to the dramatic beating of one's head or breast in sign of grief. At times, it even involved the cutting of one's body.

None of the gospel references to any of these words, or even related concepts, has anything whatever to do with one's “sinfulness”. They are uniformly related to death: the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem (Mt.2:18), children “playing
funeral” (Mt.11:17 and Lk 7:32); Jairus' daughter (Lk.8:52); Jesus' own impending death (Lk.23:27, Jn.16:20), or his disciples' grief after his burial (Mk.16:10), as well as the Ac.8:2 account of Stephen's death. The only exceptions are the occasion in Mt.24:30, where “the tribes of earth” are just plain terrified of the chaos that surrounds them, and Jesus' response to the question of fasting (Mt.9:15) referring to a wedding party as an example for his disciples celebrating his presence among them. These are a bit of an anomaly but certainly without any accusations of “sinfulness”! Consequently, the twisting of the reference to “mourning” in the “Beatitudes” to force any such implication is unwarranted, and wholly without precedent. Sadness at the loss – even temporarily – of a loved one is perfectly normal, not wrong or unfaithful. Even Jesus shared that (Jn.11:33).

There is another extremely crucial component here, which is almost always missed by readers of the English text, due to the inadequacy of our language (see the introduction to Pioneers New Testament). It is shared with all the rest of the Beatitudes, and indeed with most (not all) of the Sermon on the Mount: the subject of each statement is plural! “The poor”, “the mourners”, “the meek”, yes, all the way to “the persecuted”, are all treated in a group context! Not only these, but virtually all of even the normal but distressing vicissitudes of life are SO much more bearable when they are shared! In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that this may be why the “blessing” begins and ends with belonging to the Kingdom! This is the ultimate in sharing, and of life as it was intended to be lived!

In addition to the Gospel uses of “mourning”, there are four references in the epistles, quite different from one another, although they do deal more specifically with behavior than do those in the gospels.

In I Cor.5:2, Paul scolds that brotherhood for taking pride in their “acceptance / tolerance” of unacceptable behavior saying, in effect, that they should rather “mourn” (be ashamed) to have done so. In II Cor.2:21, he speaks of his own distress at the departure of some of their members from faithfulness, and in II Cor.7:7, he commends the repentance and reformation of those who realized their error and changed their ways. In Jas.4:9, we see a bit of a reprise of Lk.6:25. Both – Lk.6:24-26 and Jas.4:8-10 – are in a context of critiquing the arrogance of the wealthy and their disregard for the needy around them. These latter two, I suppose, are the only ones that could be imagined to focus on “sinfulness”, but both are quite specific, and not a general, undefined condition.

Of the remaining references, all are in the Revelation, and six of the seven occur in Rv.18:7, 8, 9, and 11. (The other, Rv.1:7, parallels Mt.24:30). The topic is the final fall of “Babylon”, the symbol of the economic system that has oppressed the “poor” and the “faithful” alike. The “mourners” are not those of Mt.5, who are proclaimed “blessed” or “privileged”, but rather those who had luxuriated in the excesses that Babylon's merchants had supplied! Don't waste any sympathy there! The instructions to the faithful are in v.20: “Celebrate [rejoice] over her, heaven, God's people, envoys [apostles], and prophets! God has passed judgment on her FOR YOU!” (Perhaps our response to such collapse reveals to which “camp” we belong!)

Rather than twisting Jesus' words to condemn his earnest followers, calling them “spiritually bankrupt” and “broken”, we should take – and offer – encouragement (a better word for parakaleo than “comfort” – stay tuned for that one!) from Jesus' recognition that mourning and sorrow will be a part of this life. He's “been there, done that”, and so he knows and understands.

But he – and consequently we – know that that “mourning” is not the last chapter! Together, we can look forward to his promise: “He will dry every tear from their eyes. Death will no longer exist: neither will grief nor crying nor pain exist any longer. The former things are gone!” The one sitting on the throne said, “Look! I am making everything new!” (Rv.21:4,5)

Until then, give thanks for the blessing that we wait – endure – yes, and even “mourn” – together.

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #138 – Comfort

“They shall be comforted!”

Although Jesus' statement in Mt.5:4 is a clear reference to mourning someone's death (see previous post), his total sharing of our human condition is indisputable (Heb.2:14-18 and elsewhere).

Nevertheless, it is NOT in the Holy Spirit's job description to wrap you in a warm fuzzy “blankie”, hand you a pacifier, and bestow a sympathetic pat on your head (“spiritual”, of course!) every time you stub your toe or get your feelings hurt!
Traditional translators have done us a great disservice by their choice to use “comfort / comforter” for the richly varied words, *parakaleo* (verb), *paraklesis* (corresponding noun), and *parakletos* (the person doing it). To be fair, the verb form is also rendered “beseech” and “exhort” – although unfortunately with no hint that these represent the same original word. The persistent notion of the “blankie” image, reinforced in traditional translations of the Beatitudes and Jesus’ final discourse in Jn.14, as well as several epistles, is neither accurate nor helpful. This, despite the fact that one of the worst aspects of any devastating loss is the despairing question, “What now???” When the future looks like it has disappeared into a black hole, you don't need a “blankie” – you need a direction! You need to “get a life”! And that is exactly what is promised in *parakaleo* – a life!

Even a cursory check of the lexicons reveals a much wider scope for *parakaleo*, and places the rendition of “comfort” near the bottom of the list. The primary intent, according to L/S, is “to call for or summon, especially summoning a friend for support at a trial.” This is followed by “to invite, to appeal, to exhort or encourage”, before (6th in the sequence) “to comfort or console.” “To demand or require, to beseech or entreat, and to relent, repent, or regret” finish out the list. I encourage you to try out some of these alternatives in places where you are accustomed to reading “comfort”, remembering that any one of them would be an equally valid choice for *parakaleo*.

It was this exercise, many years ago, that led one student in a word study class to the suggestion quoted in W.S.#53 – one that I still find more attractive than most: the work of an excellent “coach”, who, being well-versed in the techniques and requirements of a game, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of his players, is able to encourage each one's optimum performance for the sake of forming a winning team – sometimes with a hug, and sometimes with a kick in the pants! I think “coaching” stands a much better chance of bearing Kingdom fruit than does the pacifier and blankie approach!

It would be interesting to know how the traditional translators sorted *parakaleo* into their chosen categories. “Bessech” was chosen 43x. In the gospels (15x), it refers uniformly to requests for healing – with the intriguing exception of Mt.8:31,34 and its parallel in Mk.5:10,12, of demons trying to negotiate a “lighter sentence” from Jesus! In Paul's epistles (11x), it involves his instructions to various groups. Notice that he appeals to them, he does not give orders. Five times he makes requests of particular individuals. Only once does he refer to his own prayer (II Cor.12:8), although 6x the traditional translators chose to render the same word “pray” (Mt.26:53, Mk.5:17,18; Ac.16:9, 24:4, and 27:34). In Acts, “beseech” was primarily used for invitations, as was “desire” (13:42, 16:15, 8:31, 9:38, 28:14). It was also used in court cases (25:2, 19:31, 16:39). In Hebrews (13:19,22) it is a request for prayer, and in I Pet.2:11, an admonition to faithful living.

“Comfort” and “exhort” were chosen 23x each – although speakers of English would be unlikely to assume that those two could possibly represent the same idea! One would expect them rather to appear as opposites! But folks, both are presented to you as “translations” of *parakaleo*! The common thread could be a flavor of advocacy – maybe. If you can detect another, please suggest it! Here, too, the concept of “coaching” would often fit.

There is another, rarely used word, *paramutheomai*, that conveys something closer to our standard impression of “comfort” – it describes the folks who came to “console” Mary and Martha in the loss of their brother (Jn.11:19,31), and the treatment of the weak and despairing advocated in I Thes.5:14. L/S offers words like “attempt to reassure, assuage, console, soften, palliate”, but also includes “encourage or exhort.” (You could, however, more readily find a “blankie” in *paramutheomai* than in *parakaleo*.) It is not a bad thing, it is just not primary or predominant, appearing only 4x in verb form and 2x a noun, in the entire NT.

The “comfort” of *parakaleo* is much more robust. It is “encouragement” that may even lead to a solution – or at least growth, maturity, or strengthening. Paul's extended description of God's “comfort” in the first chapter of II Cor., is not a “poor baby” type of sympathy, but a dynamic move toward reconciliation, as evidenced in the follow-up in chapter 7. Clearly, the transgressor referenced in chapter 2 was corrected, not coddled.

Another clue can be gained from the words associated with *parakaleo*: conveying encouraging information (Eph.6:22, Col.4:8), extreme stress on the part of the one doing the “comforting” (Col.2:2), instructions for faithful living (I Thes.2:11 – where *paramutheomai* is also used), strengthening in faithfulness (I Thes.3:2), edifying (I Thes.5:11), and being established (II Thes.2:17) in good efforts.

It is also significant that this is a mutual task in the brotherhood (I Thes.4:18, 1 Cor.14:31). Remember: although the New Testament writings were set down long before the “church” morphed into a hierarchical institution, English translations were not! Could that have had some bearing on the choice of “exhort” when the same word was used of Peter, Paul, Timothy, or Titus, but rendered “comfort” in other contexts?

“Exhortation” (still *parakaleo*, remember), includes many subjects: Ac.2:40 – urging people to join the Kingdom; Ac.14:22
to continue in faithfulness; 1 Tim. 6:2 and 2:15 – teaching; Tit. 1:9 – convincing opponents, 2:6 – encouraging responsible living, and 2:15 – even occasional rebuke; and 1 Pet. 5:1 – urging elders to take responsibility for younger members.

So what about the promise with which we began, of “comfort” for people who “mourn”? In most cases, “encouragement” would be a much better word than either “exhortation” – which has acquired negative connotations – or “comfort” which has grown mushy. “Encouragement” holds out the possibility of support, or even of a solution! This applies even for the “ultimate” problem of death (1 Thes. 4:18), since Jesus has accomplished its definitive defeat!

Paul demonstrates that there is a difference between “comfort” and “encouragement” in 1 Cor. 14:3, where he defines New Testament prophecy as including

- oikodome – “edification” or building up – often instruction
- paraklesis – “exhortation, instruction, encouragement”
- paramuthian – “comfort, reassurance, consolation”

and assigns all three to the responsibility of the entire brotherhood (14:31).

He also uses the latter pair together in 1 Thes. 2:11, where he cites his own example of faithful “coaching”.

“Let’s don’t neglect getting together … but keep on coaching each other, more and more, as you see the Day getting nearer!” (Heb. 10:25)

The goal, as always, (v.12), is that the Lord's people be a credit to his Kingdom!

**Word Study #139 – Quiet, Silence**

This study was supposed to supplement #136, but the intervening subjects were more pressing. So please review that one as a prologue to this subject. For words that are so rarely used in the New Testament, these have received an inordinate amount of attention, primarily among those who want to demand the “subordination” of others. This study is neither an offensive nor a defensive weapon. I don't have a dog in that fight. My advocacy, as you should have seen by now, is for the mutuality of both attitudes and behavior in the Kingdom. As we have seen, the “submission” called for in the New Testament is first to Jesus and his Kingdom, and secondly to one another – an entirely mutual situation.

We are concerned here primarily with four different words which have sharply different connotations, but which are similarly translated in traditional versions. Three of them are used 11x each, and the fourth (and harshest) only 8x. Distinguishing among them is critically necessary for understanding.

*Hesuchazo*, with its counterpart, *hesuchia*, is the most gentle of the terms, and always voluntary. Trench connects it with *prautes* – great strength under strict control – which we have treated in #78, usually rendered “meekness”. L/S defines *hesuchazo/hesuchia* as “at rest, tranquil, calm”, as well as “being at rest from warfare.” Bauer adds “abstaining from work on the sabbath”. Thayer contributes “minding one's own business, not meddling in the affairs of others.” It describes the tranquility of life deeply desired by the beleaguered, persecuted disciples addressed in 1 Thes. 4:11, 11 Thes. 3:12, 1 Tim. 2:2, and the cessation of arguments (Ac. 22:2, Lk. 14:4, Ac. 11:18), including, (amusingly) Ac. 21:14, where his companions gave up on trying to change Paul's mind!

Remember these contexts when you encounter *hesuchia* in Peter's advice to sisters (1 Pet. 3:4) and when Paul, writing to Timothy, uses the *same word* both in admonition to the *whole group* (1 Tim. 2:2) and in describing women's participation (v.11,12). In v.11, it is paired with *hupotasso* – see #136 – and in v.12 it is contrasted to *authentein* – a word used only once, and referring to a violent coup d'etat. This would suggest that it is *orderly courtesy*, rather than any form of exclusion, that is in view.

Next along the spectrum is probably *sipao* – L/S “to keep silence at the behest of another, to keep a secret, to gesture rather than speaking.” Most of its New Testament uses involve stopping a protest or argument (Mk. 3:4), Mark's version (4:39) of Jesus commanding the wind and sea to “be still”; or insisting that another “calm down” (Mt. 20:31, Mk. 10:48, Lk. 18:39). It is also used of Jesus' refusal to reply to situations that were an obvious trap (Mt. 26:63, Mk. 14:61), and the disciples' being too embarrassed to reply (Mk. 9:34) to him about their dispute. In contrast, Jesus uses it to encourage Paul in a vision not to be intimidated into silence (Ac. 18:9), and retorts to his critics (Lk. 19:40) that if they succeed in silencing the children's praises, the very rocks will take up the cry. In no instance does *sipao* require, demand, or request the silence of any member of a faithful brotherhood. Gabriel's word to Zachariah in Lk. 1:20 is simply a statement of fact – not at all a “curse” as some imagine.
Sigao / sige, on the other hand – L/S “to whisper, to keep a secret, to be silent (as both a positive quality and as a fault!), to be mystical or unknown”, while used in some parallels with sipao, especially in the gospels (Lk.9:36, 29:26) and Acts (12:17, 15:12,13; 21:40), appears in several other contexts as well. Paul uses it in Romans 16:25 of the revelation of God's intention to include the Gentiles having been “kept secret (doesn't say by whom) since the world began”. John, in Rv.8:1, marvels that “there was silence in heaven for half an hour!” in contrast to all the rejoicing that had been going on.

Of particular interest, in view of frequent controversy among some church groups, are the three occurrences of sigao in I Cor.14. It has been common for a “leader” to choose one of these as a flag to wave or a cause upon which to take a stand – the choice depending whether he prefers to forbid (1) the use of prayer in tongues (v.28), (2)the exercise of prophetic gifts on the part of everyone in a congregation (v.30), or (3) the participation of women (v.34), and ignore any of which he approves. But sigao is not about prohibitions!!! The same word is used in all three situations. Paul's concern is an orderly meeting, where “all may learn, and all be encouraged”(v.31), and where an outsider may see the Kingdom in action (v.25). This requires that each of the mentioned contributions be carefully and considerably controlled, but not summarily forbidden. This becomes abundantly clear if you read the whole chapter, rather than selected, isolated “verses”. The instructions are to facilitate and regulate, not to prevent, participation. Please refer to the treatment of I Cor.14 in the Translation Notes, for a more detailed discussion.

Finally, less frequently used, and much more abrupt, phimao can be a peremptory demand that someone “Shut up!!”. L/S points out that the derivation of the word is the use of a muzzle or any device to keep the mouth of an animal shut! This is borne out in I Cor.9:9, and I Tim.5:18.

Phimao was Jesus' command in exorcising demons (Mk.1:25, Lk.4:35), and used together with sipao in quieting the storm (Mk.4:39). Matthew conveys a sense of satisfaction (22:12) when Jesus bested the Sadducees at their own game of intricate arguments (he “shut them up!”). And Peter (I Pet.2:15) advocates achieving a similar victory over critics by exhibiting indisputably excellent behavior. Matthew (22:12) also uses it to represent the stunned speechlessness of an intruder upon being discovered unprepared, at a feast.

So there you have it. Four discrete words: each has its own “flavor”, and each has its usage confined to a rather narrow range of situations and relationships. We need to take care not to confuse them, or to assume any coercive tone among fellow disciples seeking for faithfulness. The mutuality described in both these studies (136 and 139), and the coaching/encouragement described in #138, can occupy our attention much more productively than can exclusionary efforts. Only together can we become a credit to the Kingdom.

Word Study #140 – Angels, Messengers

When it comes to people's overactive imaginations being passed off as “Christian teaching”, it would be difficult to find a more blatant example than the purported “study” of “angels”.

From the superstitious Pharisees protesting to their Sadducee opponents at Paul's trial (Ac.23:9) “But what if a spirit or angel spoke to him?”, through the Renaissance paintings of fearsome, robed apparitions, or later depictions of kindly, protective, effeminate-looking beings in shining garments and halos, or assorted 13th to 20th century amalgamations of Dante and Milton with oddly distorted and combined snippets of Old Testament references, or ubiquitous fat pink cherubs, to modern supernatural speculation and cheap (or expensive) jewelry, one can find some sort of “angel” to suit nearly any predilection or decor! Most of these bear little if any resemblance to either accurate semantics or New Testament reality.

Now, please take a deep breath between your shouts of “Heresy! Heresy!”, and let's ask our perennial question: “But what does the (New Testament) TEXT say?” We will not even try to cover it all.

The answer, as usual, starts with the vocabulary. Like many of the nouns we have considered, aggelos probably started life as the participial form of a verb: in this case, aggelo, “to carry or deliver a message,” and its derivatives aggelia and aggelion, both translated “message” or “news.” In turn, the aggelos was the carrier of a message – any message – from anyone, to anyone. Oddly, the occasional often facetious request, “Be an angel and ...(do something)!” may be closer to the actual meaning of the word than most of the “teaching” you have heard! Put most simply, a verb describes action; its participle or noun counterpart refers either to the doer of that action, or at times, its result. The word says nothing whatever about the character, pedigree, or DNA of the message-bearer, let alone his/her/its appearance, origin, or ultimate destiny. Classically, one of the most common tasks of a messenger/aggelos was to report on the progress of a battle (remember Marathon?). It was even used of birds or other artifacts of augury! The focus was uniformly on the delivery of necessary information – not the means or agent of that delivery – the report, not the reporter.

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That this continued to be the case in the first century is obvious in the use of *aggelos* not only for supernatural apparitions, although there certainly were such (Mt.1 and 2, Lk.1 and 2, and elsewhere), but also of prophets (Mt.11:10, Mk.1:2, Lk.7:27), the messengers sent by John the Baptist to Jesus (Lk.7:24), the disciples commissioned and sent out by Jesus (Lk.9:52), and even the spies hidden by Rahab in Jericho (Jas.2:25), who were all clearly human. In such cases, traditional translators usually fell back on the *correct* word, “messenger”, after having used the transliteration, “angel” in places where they had decided (although the writers had used the *same word*) that a message was delivered by some sort of supernatural being. (Twice, they translated *apostolos* as “messenger”, presumably because they were unwilling to confer the “title” (their own creation) of “apostle” upon the individuals involved. (See W.S.#41, and remember that Jesus had forbidden the use of titles!)

Reference is also made to the agents of Satan as “messengers/aggeloi” (II Cor.12:7), but NOT, as some insist, to Satan himself. Jesus also makes a particular point that *aggeloi* are not omniscient (Mt.24:36).

The folks on the ground at the time were not always as certain about the identifications as were those traditional translators. Notice Peter's confusion when he was delivered from prison (Ac.12), and the gathered prayer group's response to Rhoda's announcement of his arrival. They thought she was seeing ghosts! Notice also that Luke's initial resurrection account (24:4) speaks of “two men”, although later (v.23), the traveling disciples referred to “a vision of angels [messengers]”.

The confusion of modern readers is probably largely due to their perverse preoccupation with assigning titles and/or job descriptions to individuals, rather than focusing on the more necessary (and scriptural) concern that a message be delivered! Again, the status vs. function orientation rears its ugly head. Please see chapter 8 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*, as well as the end of chapter 13.

Notice, please, that the messenger is never the originator or the author of a message, but merely its transportation. In fact, it probably doesn't matter who the messenger is: only that he faithfully delivers the word entrusted to him, or performs his assigned task. This is the case whether the originator of the message is God (Lk.1 and 2, Ac.10), another person (Lk.7:24, Jas.2:25), or even Satan (I Cor.12:7, Mt.5:21). The latter, incidentally, is said to have messengers/angels, but never to be one – “fallen” or otherwise!

The tasks of messengers are greatly varied. An *aggelos* may be assigned to reap a field (Mt.13:39), to gather the Lord's people (Mt.24:31, Mk.13:27), to prepare the way for Jesus (Mt.11:10, Mk.1:2, Lk.7:27), to care for him in the desert (Mt.4:11, Mk.1:13) or in the garden (Lk.22:43), to precede his arrival at a preaching destination (Lk.7:52), to stir the healing waters in a pool (Jn.5:4), to carry questions to Jesus from his cousin John (Lk.7:24), to deliver the joyous news of his resurrection (Mt.28:2, Lk.24:23, Jn.20:12), or to accompany his return in glory (Mt.16:27, Mk.8:38, Mt.25:31, Lk.9:26)!

And that is only in the gospels!

I have deliberately chosen not to differentiate between the translations of “angel” and “messenger”, because they represent the same word. To the writers, there was only one idea. Consequently, in the PNT, you will find only “messenger”. The writers did not seem to care whether the “messenger” was natural or supernatural – why, then, should we?

Do you think the apostles cared, or asked for some sort of heavenly credential, when the prison doors opened and they were directed to go back and continue preaching in the temple (Ac.5:19)? Peter (Ac.12) thought he was dreaming, but followed the messenger who released him the second time. And Stephen's account of Moses' experience (Ac.7:30-38) refers directed to go back and continue preaching in the temple (Ac.5:19)? Peter (Ac.12) thought he was dreaming, but followed the messenger who released him the second time. And Stephen's account of Moses' experience (Ac.7:30-38) refers to the correct word, “messenger”, after having used the transliteration, “angel” in places where they had decided (although the writers had used the same word) that a message was delivered by some sort of supernatural being. (Twice, they translated *apostolos* as “messenger”, presumably because they were unwilling to confer the “title” (their own creation) of “apostle” upon the individuals involved. (See W.S.#41, and remember that Jesus had forbidden the use of titles!)

Reference is also made to the agents of Satan as “messengers/aggeloi” (II Cor.12:7), but NOT, as some insist, to Satan himself. Jesus also makes a particular point that *aggeloi* are not omniscient (Mt.24:36).

The folks on the ground at the time were not always as certain about the identifications as were those traditional translators. Notice Peter's confusion when he was delivered from prison (Ac.12), and the gathered prayer group's response to Rhoda's announcement of his arrival. They thought she was seeing ghosts! Notice also that Luke's initial resurrection account (24:4) speaks of “two men”, although later (v.23), the traveling disciples referred to “a vision of angels [messengers]”.

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The epistles add insight. The first two chapters of Hebrews are quite explicit in repeatedly asserting the superiority of Jesus over any sort of messenger/aggelos. Indeed, in 1:6, “all God's messengers” (natural and supernatural?) are instructed to “worship him!” and in chapter 2, it is clear that Jesus voluntarily and temporarily assumed a lower position, only for the purpose of destroying death, and breaking its power. Does it matter, whether the roll-call of the celebrants in his eventual glory includes different categories of the faithful, or simply synonyms (12:22)? I don't think so!

Both Peter (I Pet.3:22) and Paul (Rom.8:38) also assert Jesus' superiority over messengers; the latter even declaring that “we” (his people) “shall judge angels/messengers” (I Cor.6:3)!

Paul's admonition to the Colossian church (Col.2:15-19, but especially v.18), is extremely relevant today, to folks who are as inclined as their earlier brethren to become fascinated with all sorts of mythological beings, thinking to enhance their “knowledge” or status, and prone to give them more credence than the Lord himself! Paul repeatedly warned both Timothy and Titus (I Tim.1:4, 4:7; II Tim.4:4, Tit.1:14), to avoid such myths – both Jewish and pagan. The healthy growth of the
Body depends upon Jesus alone!

The “messengers” who are the primary actors in the Revelation, following instructions from “voices”, “the throne”, or “the altar”, emptying jars, blowing trumpets, and relaying information to John, are most likely supernatural beings; it is not always clear to John – or his readers – whether he is hearing from the messengers or from Jesus himself. But here, too, he is strictly advised that the messenger is not to be worshiped (22:8).

So – who / what is an *aggelos*?

Perhaps the writer to the Hebrews said it best: “Aren't they all just officiating spirits, sent to take care of those who are inheriting God's deliverance?” (Heb.1:14)

It seems as if, when the Lord has one of his human servants available, and something needs to be communicated or done, he sends that available person as a “messenger.”

But if there is no one handy – no problem – he also has an ample supply of supernatural servants.

And if his message gets through, or the job is done, it really doesn't matter who does it!

This realization can delightfully enhance our perception of our brothers and sisters, as well as any other *aggelos* that is sent our way – as well as our own sense of responsibility.

Have you seen or heard from an *aggelos* lately?

Have you *been* one?

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**Word Study #141 – The “Sin” Question**

“Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage!” (Gal.5:1, KJV). There! I did it! A quote from the “traditional translation”! And what's more, I feel like shouting it at top volume, every time someone in a “church service” – contemporary, liturgical, or anything in between, starts expounding on how “we all sin, every day”, and need to “confess” stuff that we can't even imagine, let alone “remember”! If that isn't bondage, I don't know what is!

This subject has been addressed in chapter 3 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*, and in word studies # 3, 5, 7, 23, 27, 34, 88, 120, 121, and 128, where you will find more detail on some aspects of the question, but I've been asked to do a “stand-alone” treatment of the topic, so here goes.

By now, you all surely know that my first question is “What did JESUS say?” But before we turn to that, it is necessary to sort out the vocabulary. The confusion in “Christian” circles surrounding the idea of “sin” results from the perverse decision of most translators to use that designation for three nouns, two verbs, and one adjective for all of which they actually use the single word “sin” in the text, and the even more perverse choice of interpreters and doctrine-writers to add to the mix six more concepts which were never even translated “sin”, but which they include in their definitions. And that doesn't even count the completely spurious decision of the NIV translators to render “flesh” (#85) as “sinful nature.”

Remember, please, as we have noted before, that English (and most other) translations were made many centuries after “doctrines” were codified, and were highly influenced by the positions of their sponsors!

In the exercise of sorting terminology, Trench's *Synonyms of the New Testament* is more helpful than the classical lexicons, since classical writers did not express any “theological” orientation with these words, but simply referred to failed purpose, errors of various kinds, character faults, or neglected responsibility. Trench has arranged the words in a sort of “order of seriousness”, that may contribute to understanding.

*Hamartia* and *hamartema*, the most commonly used in the New Testament, are the most benign of the group. Classically, they referred to missing a mark, or failure to grasp a concept. Homer used it when one of his heroes hurled his spear and missed. Thucydides used the verb form *hamartano* of getting lost on a journey, and Aristotle used it of trying for results beyond one's capability. None of these had any ethical baggage. There may have been a very serious mistake, even one with dire consequences, but it was an honest mistake or failure.

Classical writers used *asebeia* (ungodliness) or *adikia* (injustice) if they intended ethical implications. Strangely, though both of these appear in the New Testament, neither was ever rendered “sin”.

*Agnoema*, “ignorance of what one should have known”, appears only three times: Lk.23:24, I Tim.1:13, and Heb.9:7.

*Hettema*, “neglecting a duty, failing to render what is owed” appears only twice, Rom.11:12 and I Cor.6:7. None of these four are ever translated “sin” – by anyone except preachers!

*Anomia* (15x) and *paranomia* (1x), on the other hand, referred specifically to lawbreaking. These were usually rendered
“iniquity” or “unrighteousness”, and consistently involved a deliberate (not inadvertent) offense. *Parakoe*, “disobedience” (see #27 and 88), was also deliberate, and only occurs three times (Rom.5:19, II Cor.10:6, Heb.2:12).

*Parabasis*, “overstepping a line”, appearing only 7x, also referred to lawbreaking, and is usually rendered “transgression”. *Paraptoma*, “falling when one should have stood upright, a false step, slip, or blunder; defeat, transgression, trespass”, is rendered in the NT “trespass” 8x, “offense” 6x, “fall” 2x, “fault” 2x, and “sins” 4x. It seems usually to have a sense of a deliberate act, although there is a possibility of a “bad choice” in Gal.6:1 and Jas.5:16. The reference in James, please note, is the only place where it is connected with “confession” to a group, and that is for the purpose of mutual prayer for healing, not a ceremonial incantation. The consequences of *paraptoma* are clear – death! – Eph.2:1, 2:5; Col.2:13, as well as 5x in Romans 5. Please also remember that “consequences” does not necessarily imply “punishment.”

Translators using the same label for all the *hamartia* related words as well as *paraptoma*, which is an entirely different concept, and the inclusion of all the other words in the same indictment (by assorted individuals whose employment and reputation depends upon the acceptance of their harsh verdict by their hearers/readers), have herded that hapless audience into precisely the “yoke of bondage” that our brother Paul warned against in the opening quotation! *There is no reference in either gospels or epistles that demands continual, repetitious, corporate or individual “confession of sins”* – whether accidental or deliberate, real or imagined! The single admonition in I Jn.1:9 is in the midst of his encouragement to keep on working at faithful living – acknowledging errors and moving on -- by the power of the Lord Jesus!

John the Baptist had “repentance” and “confession of sins” as a major part of his message (Mt.3:6, Mk.1:4-5, Lk.3:3), prior to baptism. Remember that Paul had to correct major flaws in the dissemination of John's message in Ephesus (Ac.19:1-7). The writer to the Hebrews (6:1-3), while acknowledging these as foundational, urges the readers no longer to dwell on the “elementary” parts of the Christian message, but to go on to maturity – to “grow up”!

Notice also that in response to the Pharisees' challenge that “only God can take away sins” (the lexical meaning of *aphiemi*, usually erroneously rendered “forgive” – see #7), Jesus did not argue that point, but simply declared that such authority is his – present tense – and related it to his identity: not to his death, not to the cross, and not even to his resurrection (Mt.9:2-6, Mk.2:5-10, Lk.5:20-24). And they got the point: they charged him with “making himself equal to God” – which of course, he was/is.

John the Baptist also referred to “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (Jn.1:28) – also a present tense. Continuing to wallow in one's supposed “sinfulness” is a direct insult to the One who has taken it away!!!

Jesus did indeed warn those who refused to acknowledge him (Jn.8:21,24,34) that in doing so, they were rejecting the only remedy. But this was not addressed to his followers! In fact, when Peter referred to himself as a “sinful man” (Lk.5:8), Jesus ignored that designation completely, and simply invited him to join the Kingdom’s work. Others were critical of the folks that Jesus “hung out” with, who were on their list of “sinners” – publicans (Mt.9:10-11, 11:19, 21:32; Mk.2:15-16; Lk.5:27-30, 7:34, 18:10-13), a woman of shady reputation (Lk.7:37), and others. Later accounts add Gentiles (Gal.2:15), and people ignorant of God (Rom.5); James includes a brother who has turned away (5:20), a person who refuses to do the good that he knows (4:17), or rich folks whose selfishness trumps brotherly sharing (4:8). So yes, the term can be applied to a brother's wrongdoing – but these are clearly the exception, not automatic expectation. And *Jesus never used hamartolos* to label ANY of his own people! Why, then, do we?

Even Paul, whose letter to the Romans is so frequently sliced and diced to “prove” doctrines of “sinfulness”, (1) applies the term to those who choose to oppose Jesus' message, and (2) uses it only in the past tense of himself and his brethren. He takes particular pains in the first three chapters to point out that people chose to ignore what God had revealed to them. It was not their “original condition” at birth! And in Rom.6:17, Eph.2:1-5, Col.1:13-14 and elsewhere, he vividly contrasts the “death” (which characterizes life before commitment to Jesus' Kingdom, and is attributed to both hamartia and paraptoma) with the resurrection life shared by the believer with his new Master!

Of course, “new life” does not mean instant or automatic maturity (See #13). Hence all the admonitions to get about the business of “growing up”!

Deciding to learn a musical instrument does not make you an instant virtuoso. Devotion to a sport does not make you an automatic star.

And commitment to the Lord and his Kingdom never did confer instant “perfection”.

All involve identical requirements to come to fruition.

Focus – a single-minded, even fanatical, determination to bend every effort toward that goal.

Guidance – from teachers, coaches, and more experienced “players”, as well as fellow aspirants.

Practice – diligent, consistent, and conscientious.
But none of these are enhanced by self-flagellation over every blunder. Errors need to be corrected, not merely “confessed” or “mourned.” One’s course may need frequent adjustments, or even at times reversals. Here is the beauty of the provision alluded to previously in Jas.5:16 and Gal.6:1.

But, “He (God) has rescued us from the power [authority] of darkness, and transported us into the kingdom of the Son of his love! It's in him that we have the redemption – the taking away of failures [sins]” (Col.1:13-14).

Thanks be to God!

**Word Study #142 – You, You-all, or Each of You?**

This is really more of a grammar lesson than an actual word study, but the word “you” is so badly misunderstood in what passes for New Testament teaching, that I think “you all” will soon see why it is needed. The problem in this case is not teachers with an axe to grind, or deliberate distortion of the text. The culprit in this error is the English language itself. This subject is one where Elizabethan English, if rightly understood, does a better job of translating than “modern” versions. The reason is that, unlike any other language I have encountered, modern literary English makes no distinction between singular and plural in the second person pronoun, “you.” Speakers of other languages do not have this problem to the same extent.

In older English, it was easier: “ye, your, and you” indicated plurals, while “thou, thine, and thee” were singular in reference. They were not, as some suppose, an indicator of status or reverence, but simply of how many people were being addressed.

Since modern linguistic convention makes no such distinction, however, native speakers of English tend to read most occurrences of “you” as if they were individually addressed, whereas in the vast majority – more than twice as many – of the New Testament references, the word is in fact plural – addressed to a group, not an individual.

In the PNT translation, (available for free download on this site), I have attempted to remedy this problem by using “you all” for the plural, substituting an italicized ‘you’ where multiple “you all’s” would seem too much for non-southern readers.

The Greek language, like most others, makes very clear distinctions. In English translations, however, the word “you” has been used for both singular (su, sou, soi, se) and plural (humeis, humon, humin, humas) pronouns. A plural “you” addressed a group of people, as a group, a unit. If the individual members of a group were intended, hekastos humon, “each / every one of you”, was used. This is seen in 12 of the 77 uses of hekastos (each, every) in the New Testament. Consequently, there was no confusion on the part of the original readers or writers, as to the intention of a speaker or reporter.

In addition to the over 1000 uses of the singular pronoun, and nearly 2200 of the plural (I really don't think you wanted me to list them all!), a subject is also clearly expressed in every verb form. So one must also distinguish between “you” and “you all” when there is no pronominal subject in evidence. Here too, plurals predominate.

By this time, those of you who, like my dear husband of 50 years, “hated grammar” in grade-school, will be asking, “SO WHAT??? Who cares???”

As pointed out repeatedly in Citizens of the Kingdom, it makes a huge difference in one's understanding of function and responsibility in the Christian brotherhood!

Our being designated as “the light of the world” (Mt.5:14), “the salt of the earth” (Mt.5:14), “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (I Cor.3:16,17; 6:19), and “the Body of Christ” (I Cor.12:27), are all plural. NONE of this is talking to or about individuals. “This little light of mine” is NOT a Scriptural idea! If the Kingdom doesn't happen together, as a corporate entity, it doesn't happen at all!

Likewise, most instructions are given in the plural. There are, of course, some things that have to be relegated to individual effort. Interpersonal activity mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount, for example (Mt.5:22-37) – relating to a brother, to one's wife, to an abuser, to a court of law – is, and must be, one's own responsibility, and is addressed in the singular.

But notice how Jesus shifts back to the plural, when turning to the treatment of “enemies”. If, all alone and isolated, I were expected to figure out how to offer genuine love to a person who has considered me an enemy, and do good to those who hate, or have abused me, I would often give up in despair. But this monumental assignment is addressed in the plural! It is a group project!

So are all the “blessings” in the Beatitudes, and the vast majority of Paul's instructions to the churches. What is totally impossible for an individual, while it may still be difficult, becomes possible in a mutually supportive brotherhood! That is
Kingdom living! Together, we can do and be far more than any of us could ever do or be alone.

Now, this is not to disparage individual accountability. That’s where the twelve occurrences of *hekastos humon*, “each one of you”, come in. One’s initial commitment to Jesus and his Kingdom is clearly an individual matter. However much we might wish it to be otherwise, no one can make that momentous decision for another. From Peter’s first sermons (Ac.2:38, 3:26) all the way to Jesus’ warning to the compromising folks in Thyatira (Rv.2:23) about the results of their behavior, **individual responsibility is not negated.**

Every person is also responsible for making his own contribution to the worshiping group (I Cor.14:26), as well as to the relief of suffering brethren (I Cor.16:2), and earlier in the same letter (1:12) “every one” is scolded for their divisive following of strong personalities instead of the Lord Jesus.

“Each of you” is responsible for marital love and care (Eph.5:33), for remembering, observing and propagating Paul’s teaching regarding faithfulness (I Thes.2:11, 4:4) and for loving each other (II Thes.1:3).

“Each of you” is admonished (Heb.6:11) to demonstrate the “same eagerness, in confidence, hope,” and (v.10) generosity, “until the end.”

However, if you sift carefully through the gospels, you will also find some surprises. I will simply list a few, without comment. You can work on them with a group of brethren. (Please share your observations!)

- Mt.7:7 – all 6 verbs are second person plural in form. Those in v.8 are third person singular.
- Mt.21:22 – both verbs are second person plural.
- Jn.3:7 – the first “you” is singular, but the second is plural!
- Jn.14:13,14; 15:7, 16; 16:23,24,26 – The pronouns and second person verbs are all plural.

Even these few examples show that there is intended to be a lot more corporate, mutual involvement than we are accustomed to assuming. There are similar surprises in the epistles. You can easily sort out more of these, using either the PNT mentioned before, or better yet, get yourself a Greek interlinear New Testament, where each word is identified for you. They are easy to recognize: if a word identified as “you” has 2 or 3 letters, it is singular; if it has 4 or 5, it is plural. I have included more grammatical information in the appendix to Translation Notes.

And remember that except for the “pastoral epistles” (Timothy, Titus, Philemon), all of Paul’s epistles, Hebrews, and the letters of Peter, James, Jude, and the first letter of John, are uniformly addressed to congregations, or perhaps clusters of congregations, not to individuals, although some include personal notes.

Paul describes the desirable balance in I Cor.12:27: “You all (pl) are the Body of Christ, and individually, parts of it.” This is elaborated in chapter 7 of Citizens of the Kingdom.

May “each of us” , and “you/we all”, faithfully do our part – together!

**Word Study #143 – Possessions**

This subject of considerable controversy, liberally seasoned with both boasting (“prosperity” cults) and guilt-trips (“simple-living” advocates), like many other hotly disputed topics, finds its most “Christian” analysis (surprise, surprise!!) in the words of the Lord Jesus. In fact, the very first listing in Young’s Analytical Concordance is Lk.12:15, where he cautions, “Be on guard against all greed: because life does not consist of abundance of possessions”! (See also W.S.#72) “Stuff” is not what it’s about!

Notice, please, that the Lord did not categorically disparage “possessions” – *huparchonta*. In fact, Luke had earlier noted (8:3) the service of a group of women who looked after the needs of the disciple group (KJV - “ministered to them”), “out of their own substance” – another translation of *huparchonta* – the very same word. (If you’re worried about the term “minister”, it is explored in W.S.#40).

*Huparchonta*, the most commonly used of six words, appears only 14x in the New Testament. It is translated “possessions” 2x, “goods” 7x, “substance” 1x, and “(things) that one hath” 4x. Classical uses include “existing circumstances, present advantages, possessions, present or future resources,” and “according to one’s means”.

InMt.24:47, 25:14; Lk.16:1, 12:44, the reference is to a person entrusted with stewardship over the possessions of another; the rest are dealing with one’s own. And although the expectation in the former group is uniform – faithful administration of the assignment – the latter category is not. Jesus’ assessment of faithfulness with respect to possessions is tailored to the person with whom he is interacting.

For example, Zacchaeus (Lk.19:8) is commended for his commitment to “give half his goods” to the poor. Both Mt.19:21
and Lk.12:33 record Jesus' instruction to a rich young man, “Sell **what you have**” – note that neither writer includes the frequently quoted “all” to the statement, although in Lk.14:33, Jesus does speak of the necessity for a person to set aside “**all** that he has” in favor of discipleship. Even so, much later, Paul (I Cor.13:3) remarks upon the uselessness of even giving **all** of one's possessions, if it is not a gesture of love.

This is the beauty of the scene in Ac.4:32: it reveals **no required divestment of all property**, but rather, “The multitude of those who had become faithful was of one heart, and one life: and **none of them said that any of his possessions was his own**, but for them, everything was shared.” – one might say, held in trust for the benefit of the brethren.

**Ktema**, used 4x, and only translated “possession” (Mt.19:22, Mk.10:22, Ac.2:45, 5:1), **ktetor**, “possessor” (only in Ac.4:34), and their corresponding verb, **ktaomai**, 3x “possess”, 1x “obtain”, 1x “provide”, and 2x “purchase”, usually referred (classically) to real estate, but also in the New Testament to Roman citizenship (Ac.22:28), provisions for a journey (Mt.10:9), behavior (Lk.21:9, I Thes.4:4), and “purchase” (Ac.1:18, 8:20).

This is even more the case with **kataschesin**, which is used only twice, of the Old Testament concept of “possessing” the land (Ac.7:5, 45), and **chorion**: “possession”1x (Ac.28:7), “field” 2x (Ac.1:18, 19), “parcel of ground” 1x (Jn.4:5), “a place”2x (Mt.26:38, Mk.4:32), and “land” 3x (Ac.4:37, 5:3, 5:8).

The large group of references that involve the radical sharing in the new church right after Pentecost (Ac.2:45, 4:32, 4:34, 4:37) and the consequent episode with Ananias and Sapphira (Ac.5:1-10), deserves closer examination. It is essential to note that this unusual expression of shared life was **never recorded to be a requirement**. It grew out of the common life and devotion, both to the Lord and to one another, that was growing among them. The descriptions in Ac.2:42-47 and Ac.4:32-37 are of people whose highest – or perhaps only – priority was to learn more about the new life upon which they had embarked. They couldn't get enough of being together! They were sharing in so many wonderful things – healing, deliverance from prison, learning from those who had walked and talked with Jesus, and absorbing hundreds of new arrivals – that the logistics must have been horrendous! So as needs arose, those who had property were able – and motivated – to provide for them. Barnabas earned his nickname, “Son of encouragement” from the generosity of his gift – so that most likely was not the norm. It's not accidental, though, that this is mentioned immediately before Ananias and Sapphira's scheme. Apparently that couple perceived that a large gift was the way to be admired! Please note that Ananias and Sapphira were NOT judged for the amount they contributed, or failed to contribute, but for their **deception**. Peter did not challenge their ownership of the land – only their prevarication (v.4, 8). It had already been amply demonstrated that the brotherhood could weather the storms of persecution. But **dishonesty** would be fatal. Only with total transparency and honesty can the Kingdom thrive. It is, after all, the domain of the One who proclaimed, “I AM the truth.”

There are four other words that are occasionally translated “goods” **agathos** – most frequently appears as an adjective, “good” (63x), but also as “good things” 14x (only two of which, Lk.16:25 and Gal.6:6, can be construed as being material), and “goods” 2x (Lk.12:18,19) **ousia** – only used twice, once as “goods” (Lk.15:12) and once as “substance” (Lk.15:13) **skeuos** – rendered 19x as “vessel”, and only twice translated “goods” (Mt.12:29 and Mk.3:7, in the parable where Luke uses **huparchonta** of a strong man guarding his possessions) **huparxis** – only used twice: Ac.2:45 with **ktema** of the things sold to enable sharing in the brotherhood, and Heb.10:34 with **huparchonta**, referring to property confiscated in persecution, in comparison to “more enduring possessions” in the heavens.

So, where does this leave the sincere aspirant to Kingdom living?

As in so many other situations, the key is found in one's **focus**. There is absolutely **no** endorsement in the New Testament of the notion of the **accumulation** of possessions as a sign of “blessing” – quite the opposite (Lk.12:18,19, 16:25)! 

But **neither** is there any endorsement of ostentatiously **renouncing** possessions and living off of the largesse of one's wealthier (or worse, poorer) associates while loudly criticizing their more comfortable situation!

Finding a responsible balance is a dilemma where careful discernment by a **group** of folks seeking to be faithful is of the utmost value. If **whatever** one “possesses”, whether much or little, material or otherwise, is simply “held in trust” for Kingdom use, subject to mutual counsel with fellow Kingdom-seekers, it is unlikely that we will go far astray – and those possessions may do a lot of good.

May we be led, together , to such an end.
Word Study #144 – “The Poor”

This is an even more difficult study than the ones dealing with “riches/wealth” (#72) and “possessions” (#143). I strongly suspect that none of us in “developed” areas, even those at the lowest economic levels, have any real understanding of the depth of material poverty in much of the rest of the world – or, for that matter, the wealth, either, that exists in other than material realms! Comparing our own situations with those of folks only a few rungs higher or lower on a perceived “ladder”, whether of income, education, or other circumstance, obscures our view of genuine, desperate need. Picture being reduced to “dumpster-diving” in a place where there are no dumpsters, because nothing is ever thrown away; or sheltering under recycled metal or cardboard, where neither exists, for the same reason, and you may be beginning to approach understanding.

There is little doubt about the meaning of “poverty” in the New Testament. I suspect that the references to the term may have been less precise than the language would lead one to expect, because of the lexical information available regarding the words, but the picture is stark, nevertheless, and most of the appearances of any such vocabulary implies an economic condition lower than we can readily imagine. Penes, classically “a day-laborer”, one who toils at heavy manual labor for his daily sustenance – the lexical opposite of plousios, “rich” – appears only a single time in the New Testament. In II Cor.9:9, Paul, quoting the LXX, speaks of one who has “given to the poor” as a just person. The lack of any other reference caused me to ask, “What about the day-laborers hired to work in the vineyard in Jesus’ parable (Mt.20:1-16)”? But these are ergates, skilled workers, tradesmen, or those who work the soil. They are a cut above those called “penes”. (And even these skilled men were only paid the subsistence wage of a denarius a day!)

Luke used a related word, penichros, (lexically, “poor, needy”) of the poor widow making her contribution in the temple (21:2). This is the only New Testament use of that word. Both he (21:3) and Mark (12:42,43) use the more common word, ptochos, describing the same incident.

Trench contrasts the words, observing that while penes and ptochos are usually used together in the LXX, and translated “poor and needy”, the former, applied by Xenophon and Sophocles to serfs or cultivators of the soil (and also to themselves), refers to one who “has nothing superfluous”, while the latter to one who “has nothing at all.” L/S says “a beggar, a person poorly provided-for,” and Bauer “a person dependent upon others for support.” Thayer suggests the picture of “one whose living depends upon alms” and also includes “destitute of power, wealth, influence, or position” and “to be so frightened as to cower or hide” as well as “to be reduced to begging.” The noun form, ptocheia, referred to “extreme poverty”. The picture is of a person wholly without resources.

These are the folks that we are encouraged to “remember” (Gal.2:10), to whom “good news” is preached in/by the Lord Jesus (Mt.11:5, Lk.4:18, 7:22), and who are to be invited to a party (Lk.14:13,21). It is these that Jesus describes as “blessed” (see #89) in Mt.5:3 and Lk.6:20, and asserts that the Kingdom “belongs” (present tense – NOT “pie in the sky bye and bye!”) to them.

Already the poor were identified as the intended recipients of required almsgiving under Jewish law; similar responsibility on the part of Kingdom people was clearly stated by Jesus on several occasions, notably the rich young man who asked about “inheriting life” (Mt.19:21, Mk.10:21, Lk.18:22), in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk.16:20,22) where the same word is translated “beggar”, and at the conclusion of the scene where Jesus rejected the criticism of the gift of perfume, reminding the disciples that “the poor” would always be in need of their compassionate care (Mt.26:9,11; Mk.14:5,7; Jn.12:5,6,8). Jesus commended Zacchaeus’ charity (Lk.19:8), and must have frequently set an example of that behavior, since John notes (13:29) that the others assumed he was instructing Judas to “give something to the poor” – a Passover custom – when the latter was dismissed from the group.

These are the brethren for whom James advocates (2:2,3,5,6), roundly scolding those who would disparage or insult them, and the “poor saints” in Jerusalem (Rom.15:26) suffering from famine (Ac.11:28).

It is abundantly clear, therefore, that folks at the bottom of the economic system are to be honored, cared-for, and generously supported by followers of the Lord Jesus.

At the same time, there are a few other appearances of ptochos that do not fit this picture. It is used in Gal.4:9 as a depreciatory adjective describing the inferiority of the elements of people's life and thought before their commitment to the Kingdom, and in Rv.13:6, “rich and poor, bond and free,” simply serves to include all levels of society. In II Cor.8:9, Paul uses it of Jesus himself, who laid aside the “riches” that were rightly his as Creator and Sustainer of all that exists, “becoming poor for your sake” – living among men “with no place to lay his head” – in order to elevate his people to his own estate!
Paul describes a similar attitude among the brethren in Macedonia (II Cor.8:2) who, “despite their deep poverty”, eagerly and generously participated in the famine relief. Extraordinary generosity on the part of people of meager means is not rare – and may be a factor in the “blessedness” of which Jesus spoke. In the Revelation to John, Jesus himself re-defines the concept of “poverty” in his messages to the churches at Smyrna (Rv.2:9) and Laodicea (3:17). To the former, who are being robbed, abused, and battered by persecutors, Jesus acknowledges, “I know … your poverty … but you are rich!” He warns of still greater trials ahead, but limits their duration. To the latter, who carelessly boast about their prosperity and independence, his reprimand is stern: “you don't realize that you are miserable, and in need of mercy, and poor, and blind, and naked!”

So perhaps, rather than the “cop-out” which I initially suspected in Bauer's and Thayer's additions to the classical definitions of penes, ptochos and related words, their insight regarding “dependence upon others for support”, “destitute of wealth, influence, or position”, and abject fear, may actually expand, rather than diminish, our responsibility, to extend – to any sort of people in any kind of need – even if, as in Laodicea, they are unaware of their “poverty”, the same care and compassion. The one we call Master and Lord addressed – and alleviated – need wherever he found it. Can his followers do less?

**Word Study #145 – Of Neighbors and Enemies**

Does this seem to you like a strange pairing of words? Quite aside from the sad reality that some “neighbors” can certainly be a serious test of one's commitment to Kingdom attitudes and behavior, the ancient admonition (which, remember, Jesus flatly contradicted) to “love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (Mt.5:43) makes a lot of sense to a tragically astonishing number of people who claim to follow him. But Jesus insists that both are to be loved (Mt.5:44) – not just tolerated, but actively loved. The verb is agapao (see #87), and if it needs greater clarification, the Lord has amply provided it: the neighbor is to be loved equally with one's “self” (Mt.19:19, 22:29; Mk.12:31,33; Lk.10:27, Rom.13:9, Gal.5:14, Jas.2:8), and love for one's enemy is to be expressed in actively doing good (Lk.6:27,35) to those who hate you, “blessing / speaking well of” those who curse you (Lk.6:28), and praying for one's abusers.

The vocabulary is not the problem here. The words are quite without a trace of ambiguity. Although there are three different terms translated “neighbor”, geiton (4x), perioikos (1x as a noun, 1x as a verb), and plesion (16x), none of the lexicons offer any distinctions. Uniformly, they refer to “someone living in one's vicinity”, although plesion, the most common, is also rendered “one's fellow man” (Bauer) and “friend, countryman, or companion” (Thayer).

No, the problem for most folks lies not in semantics, but in Jesus' explicit instructions. It's not just that, as noted above, fully half of the uses of plesion – 8 out of 16 – insist that the neighbor is to be loved “as yourself”. This admonition has been twisted by advocates of a brand of pop-psychology to justify a narcissistic focus upon one's “self” as a positive thing – but such an attitude is diametrically opposed both to Jesus' own life and to his message. Jesus' focus is consistently outward, and his concept of “neighborhood” is expansive.

Although in parables, he refers to “friends (philoi) and neighbors” (geiton) (Lk.15:6,9), Luke also refers to “relatives (suggeneis) and neighbors” (Lk.14:12. 1:58), and in Ac.3:37, seems to define the word as “a fellow-Hebrew” as does the prophet Jeremiah (31:34) quoted in Heb.8:11. Paul may be using it some of the same ways, calling for doing no wrong to a neighbor (Rom.13:10), “pleasing” him for his up-building (Rom.15:2), and interacting with absolute truthfulness (Eph.4:28), or he may be referring to fellow-disciples, although he usually calls the latter “brethren.” Of course such instructions would be equally applicable to any associates, which would fit well with Jesus' own departure from a narrow definition of “neighbor.”

The classic example, of course, is the parable (Lk.10:27-36) of the “Good Samaritan” where we see a stark contrast between the comfortable “neighbor / countryman” image and the “enemy”. The “good guys” (neighbors) were too busy or too preoccupied to care for the unfortunate traveler. It is the perceived “enemy” who acts in a loving manner in Jesus' story. And when the Lord pinned down the “legal expert” with the blunt question as to which of the men was “neighborly”, the lawyer couldn't even bring himself to utter the word “Samaritan”, so thoroughly schooled was he in the assumption that Samaritans were, if not outright enemies, at least unacceptable creatures. He simply stammered, “the one who showed mercy” and let it go at that. One wonders how he later reflected upon that encounter.
Although “enemy” is the only translation of the 29 uses of echthrous (except for two places where “foe” was substituted), its application covers a much wider scope than does “neighbor”, ranging from describing personal animosity (Mt.5:43,44; 10:36; Lk.6:27,35; Gal.4:16), or deliberate efforts to destroy a person’s enterprises – a rival or competitor? (Mt.13:25, 28, and possibly Rv.11:5,12) – to political opposition (Lk.1:71,74; 19:27,43), active opposition to the Gospel message and its promoters (Rom.5:10, 11,28; Phil.3:18, Col.1:21, Jas.4:4), and even to the devil himself (Mt.13:39, Lk.10:19, Ac.13:10). Seven of the references (Mt.22:44, Mk.12:36, Lk.20:43, Ac.2:35, 1 Cor.15:25, Heb.1:13,10:13) deal with the opponents of Jesus being made his “footstool” – a quote from Ps.110:1, numbered 109 in the LXX – denoting their total subjugation.

Paul also notes (I Cor.15:26), “The last enemy to be destroyed is death!” But please note, that even in the cases where an “enemy” is eventually put down or destroyed, that destruction is an act of God! It is NOT an assignment delegated to any fellow-human!

The admonition in Rom.12:20 to provide food and water for an “enemy” is part of more detailed instructions (17-21), “Never give back wrong for wrong, but pay attention to what is right before everyone. If possible, in whatever has its source from you, (be) at peace with all people. Don't avenge yourselves, dear ones, but give place for God's wrath ….don't be conquered (passive voice) by what is wrong, but overcome wrong (active voice) by doing good!”

Similarly, when a brother stands in need of correction (II Thes.3:15), the reminder is repeated, “don't consider him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother!”

Review these references, and you cannot miss the observation that the only proactive behavior toward either a “neighbor” or an “enemy” asked – or even permitted – for a Kingdom citizen, consists of love: love in “shoe-leather”, actively doing good, providing food and water, blessing, and praying.

Perhaps it is at best a waste of time and effort, and at worst deliberate avoidance or delay tactics, to devote ourselves to the task of “defining” either a “neighbor” or an “enemy”, or to accept such a definition from anyone else, be it an individual, a group, or a civil government.

For the people of God, there is a single assignment:

With respect to a neighbor: actively to love and serve him.

With respect to an enemy: actively to love and serve him.

He may, as in Col.1:21, or Rom.5:10, become a brother!

The Lord has reserved for himself the task of seeing that things and people are properly and finally sorted out.

Thanks be to God.

Word Study #146 – The Sabbath – Part 2

(Please refer to #110 for an historical approach.)

Observance of the Jewish “Sabbath” was, if such is possible, even more controversial in the first century than the term has become among some Christian groups today. It got Jesus into a lot of trouble, so I guess it should be no surprise if it does the same for others who are serious about faithfulness.

Although sabbath observance was only one among many requirements enshrined in the Jewish Law (W.S.#37 and 38), by the time of Jesus, it may have been considered the most important. Issues of civic consequence, for example, were no longer open to the discretion of either individuals or their ruling hierarchy, but were dictated by the Roman occupiers. “Religious” requirements were all they had left, with which to define and / or maintain their group identity. So please remember, they meant well. The leaders who became Jesus' opponents, critics, and eventual executioners, honestly believed that they were acting as “defenders of the faith”, and consequently they had carefully developed extensive commentaries – and commentaries on those commentaries – to assure that their revered Law would be correctly observed in every detail, especially its hallmark, the Sabbath, which was defined and re-defined with more than a thousand detailed instructions and regulations.

Lexical references to to sabbaton, or its plural form, ta sabbata, which are used interchangeably, are almost totally confined to LXX and NT sources, except for the occasional reference to seven days as a “week” – a concept which appears historically in ancient Sumerian, Babylonian, and Persian cultures, prior to any contact with Jewish or Christian thought. In the New Testament, 14 of the uses of sabbaton / sabbata are simply fixing the date when something happened. Four are when Jesus showed up at a synagogue, and four when Paul did likewise (except that one of those was a gathering on a river bank, not a synagogue). Quite simply, that's where people were – so it was a sensible place to teach or preach. “Showing up” was not controversial.
The trouble started when it came to specifics. Jesus' announcement of his mission (Lk.4:16) during the course of his visit to the synagogue at Nazareth nearly got him thrown off a cliff! His healings on similar occasions caused an uproar. The "authorities" (Lk.13:14) scolded the beneficiaries of his ministrations, "Come on other days to be healed, not on the Sabbath!" Their objections frequently precipitated discussions about what was and was not appropriate Sabbath behavior (Mt.12:10-12, Lk.6:5-9, 13:14; Mk.3:2-4). Jesus' reply is classic: "should I treat people with less concern that you have for your animals?" (Lk.13:15, 14:5; Mt.12:10-12), but even more telling is his question, recorded only by Mark (3:4), "Is it permissible on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil? To save a life, or to kill?" Here is summarized one of the most significantly different aspects of Jesus' teaching, in contrast to the Law which his critics so staunchly defended. It's no longer a question of prohibitions, but of positive actions for another's welfare. In Jesus' universe, to fail (or refuse) to do good IS to do evil, and to refuse to save a life IS to kill. And the day of the week on which it happens is quite irrelevant!

John (5:1-18) describes an incident of healing – also on a Sabbath – at the pool of Bethzatha, and its aftermath in the temple. First, the Jewish rulers berated the healed man for carrying his no-longer-needed cot (probably calling it “work”), and then they turned on Jesus, who was their real target anyway. He mildly observed, “My Father is still working, and so am I!” (v.17). John then explains, “Because of this, therefore, the Jews were seeking to kill him, because he not only was 'breaking' the Sabbath, but was saying that his own Father was God, equating himself with God!” (v.18) The Synoptics all record (Mt.12:8, Mk.2:28, Lk.6:5) Jesus' claim that “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” They place that statement at the time when the disciples were criticized for snacking in a grain field. “Harvesting” was “work”, and therefore forbidden on the Sabbath, although the Law had specified that grain be deliberately left at the edges of a field for the benefit of strangers (Lv.19:9,10).

Mark includes a second statement which Matthew and Luke missed: “The Sabbath came to be, for the benefit of people, not people for the Sabbath.” (v.27) Indeed, a day of rest and worship among the Lord's people is a wonderful, life-giving gift. How sad, that the desires of men to rule over others should make it a day of restrictions and prohibitions, rather than one of the celebration of the kindness and goodness of God!

In Heb.3 and 4, the writer details the “sabbath rest” (sabbatismos – used only here) provided for faithful followers of the Lord Jesus (See “Rest” #77). This is offered, not once-a-week, but permanently, in union with him, although it certainly requires continuous attention and effort (4:11).

By Jesus' own testimony, besides being himself the Lord of the Sabbath as noted above – as well as Lord of everything else! – he has already fulfilled everything that was formerly written truly “about him” in the Law and the Prophets, and is himself the provider of rest (Mt.11:28). He issued no regulations about a particular day or observance – except, as noted, “to do good” and “to save life” – every day!

There are eight places in the New Testament where the word sabbaton / sabbata is not translated “sabbath”, but is part of the phrase, “the first day of the week”. Six of these refer to the day of Jesus' resurrection, and of the joyful discovery by his followers that HE IS ALIVE!!! The other two are I Cor.16:2, where the readers are encouraged to set aside what they have committed for the relief offering “on the first day of the week”, and Ac.20:7, the meeting where Paul preached young Eutychus to sleep. Some folks insist that these two meetings indicate that the “first day” had been declared the “new Sabbath” – but there is no such statement to be found. Others are just as adamant that the “original” Jewish Sabbath be required. One also searches in vain for any admonition to that effect. Some folks have extensive lists of activities that must be avoided – or performed – on whichever day they have chosen, and eagerly try to force them, legally, upon the general population.

By contrast, Paul warns in Col.2:16 against being deceived by those who “pass judgment on you all, about food or drink, or observance of feasts, or new moons, or sabbaths.” At the Jerusalem Conference (Ac.15), which dealt with the inclusion of Gentile converts, there was no mention of a Sabbath requirement being imposed upon the newcomers – only the avoidance of things connected to idol worship. Paul notes in Eph.2:15, that Jesus “eliminated the law of commands and decrees, in order that he might create the two, in himself, into one new person [humanity], thus making peace.” As for “meetings”, we have the testimony of Ac.2:46,47 that the brethren met daily to learn, to share, and to worship. Later, it seems as if they assembled whenever Paul or another of the teachers was in the vicinity, as well as “from house to house”.

Heb.10:25 reminds us not to neglect getting together. But when and where seems to be flexible.

So – Celebrate the gift of Sabbath rest! If you choose to do it on the day honored by Jewish tradition, do it giving thanks to the Lord of the Sabbath!

If you prefer to commemorate the resurrection of our Lord and his present life among us on the day when he definitively defeated evil and death, celebrate his triumph, giving thanks! Celebrate becoming loving siblings in his family!
Celebrate by actively “doing good” and “saving life” – the only two “Sabbath” activities that Jesus specifically commended to our observance.

More is better, when it involves folks who love the Lord and each other!

Word Study #147 – The Land, the Earth

I recently encountered an author, during what was called “a study of the Beatitudes”, who made a statement that I could only describe as not just unfounded, but as totally bizarre. He confidently asserted that when the Greek word ge appeared in the New Testament, it referred not to the “earth” (as it is correctly translated in Mt.5:5), but to the “promised land” of Israel! His claim was shakily based upon a single phrase quoted from Psalm 37:11, “the meek shall inherit the land.”

This is an excellent illustration of the error of piecing together bits of disconnected “verses” to “prove” a point. If you slice and dice the pieces small enough, you can scramble the results to make any piece of literature say virtually anything. Careful perusal of the Gospel accounts reveals not a single instance where Jesus spoke of restoring ancient boundaries, but several (Mt.24, Mk.13, Lk.21) where he warned of even greater destruction than his hearers had ever seen! The Son of Man who “had no place to lay his head” was (and is) NOT INTO REAL ESTATE!!!

Nevertheless, we owe it to this well-meaning but sadly misguided author to explore the ways that the concept of “land” is used in the New Testament. It represents five different Greek words, which are only minimally differentiated in the lexicons. We’ll start, this time, with the least frequent.

Xeros, the adjective meaning “dry”, is used as a noun only once (Mt.23:15), where Jesus is describing the Pharisees’ “exploring land and sea” to make proselytes. Clearly, it is the universal extent of their efforts that is being emphasized. L/S calls xeros “terra firma”, or “the mainland.”

Chorion, translated 2x “field”, 3x “land”, 1x “parcel of ground”, 2x “place”, and 1x “possession”, refers specifically to the ownership or sale of real estate (Ac.4:34, 5:3, 5, 8; 1:18-19, 28:7), or, in the case of Mt.26:36 and Mk.14:32, simply “a place”. L/S also suggests “a place of business or office, a space enclosed by lines – as in geometry – or other boundaries,” and Bauer adds “a city or other economic or political region or district.”

Chora – “land” 3x, “country”14x, “field”2x, “ground” 1x, “region” 5x – L/S “land, country, or territory; one's position or proper place”, and Bauer “open country as opposed to a city or town”, is most frequently simply a geographical location: “the land of Judah (Mk.1:5), “the land of the Jews” (Ac.10:39), the Magi returning to their own country (Mt.2:12), the country of the Gadarenes (Mk.5:1), journeying to a far country (Lk.15:13), and “the country of Galatia” (Ac.18:23), among others.

Agros, “land”4x, “farm” 1x, “field” 22x, is a fairly easy one (think agriculture). It's where seeds are planted (Mt.13:24, 13:31, 38; Lk.15:15,25), where wild flowers grow (Mt.6:28,30) or a potter digs clay (Mt.27:7). Additionally, it was translated “country” (as opposed to a city) 8x (Mt.5:14; 6:36,56; 15:21, 16:12, Lk.8:34, 9:12, 23:26). L/S calls it “tilled land” (as opposed to “fallow”), “the country – not town”, or even “the fruits of the land.”

All of these together, though, seem few, next to the uses of ge. It was traditionally translated “land” 42x, and “earth” 188x, as well as “ground” 18x, “country” 2x, and “world” 1x. This was the word (think geology) used to differentiate the normal abode of people and animals from “the heavens” (#118), and “the underworld”, both classically and in New Testament usages such as Mt.5:18, 35; 6:19, 11:25, 14:42, 18:18 and parallels; Jn.3:31, Ac.1:8, 4:24, 7:49; Rom.11:18, Eph.1:10. It, along with xeros, is also used as the opposite of “the sea” (Lk.5:11, 21:8,9; Ac.27:39,43,44).

Like chorion, it's where seed is planted (Mk.4:5 and parallels), but ge is more likely to refer to the ground (soil) than to a specific field or location.

It's where you land if you fall down (Ac.9:4), or where the people set for a picnic (Mt.15:35).

Classically, ge was also one of the four “elements” that were thought to make up all created things – earth, air, fire, and water. This aspect does not occur in NT writings, but was prominent in others.

Apparently, traditional translators chose to change the word from “earth” to “land” when they thought it referred to a particular geographical entity – which is ok, IF you remember that it is not a different word in the text. Matthew mentions “the land of Judah (2:6), the land of Israel (2:20,21), the land of Zebulon and Naphtali (4:15), the land of Sodom (10:15, 11:24), the land of Gennesaret (14:34). Mark (4:1, 6:47) and Luke (5:3, 11; 8:27) and John (6:21, 21:8,9 11) mention ships either arriving or departing from “land.”

Stephen's sermon (Ac.7) lists comings and goings from many “lands” (3, 4, 6, 11, 29, 36, 40) throughout Jewish history,
and Paul's historical review in the synagogue at Antioch mentions the “land of Egypt” and the “land of Canaan” (Ac.13:17, 19). The only New Testament reference to the “land of promise” is in Heb.11:9, of Abraham's wandering there. Check it out. There is no other place where those two words are used together!

Lk.24:49 – *epaggelia* – “I send the promise of my Father upon you” (the Holy Spirit)
Mt.14:7 – *homologeo* – Herod's promise (oath) to Salome!
Lk.22:16 – *exomologeomai* – Judas' promise to the priests, to betray Jesus
Mk.14:11 – *epaggellomai* – parallel to Lk.22.

For a more complete treatment of the concept of “promise”, see #83.

Whether you choose to call ge “land” or “earth”, however, it is in every instance a finite concept. According to Jesus, “Heaven (#118) and earth will pass away” (Mt.24:35, Mk.13:31, Lk.21:33), but his words will not! Years later, Peter took up the same theme regarding the destruction of both heaven and earth (II Pet.3:10-13), and John ends the account of the Revelation with the advent of “a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and the first earth were gone!” (Rv.21:1)

Paul's admonition to those who share in the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus, is as apt today as it was when first written (Col.3:2): “Keep paying attention to what's above, not what's on the earth!”

It was the former covenant (See #79 and 80) – now declared in Hebrews to be obsolete (7:18, 8:7-13) – which proclaimed a promise of land. And even then, (a matter that is usually forgotten), it was contingent upon obedience to the directives of God (Dt.11:26-28 and all of chapter 28).

The New Covenant, established by the Lord Jesus, proclaims, not a “land”, but a Kingdom (see #19,20,21), which is also contingent upon following the instructions of its King – ON EARTH!!!!

**Word Study #148 – The Scripture**

Although “scripture” is an old English translation of one of the most ordinary of words, few such translations have engendered more controversy, among both “scholars” and “ordinary” adherents to varied theological perspectives. The Greek words, *graphe, gramma* (nouns) and *grapho, graphomai* (active and passive verbs, respectively), carry no defined “perspectives” at all. The two nouns, which lexicons do not differentiate, may refer to any sort of drawing, painting, mathematical diagram, or legal records, as well as any written document, letter, or inscription, whether intended for public or private use. The term “holy scripture” appears in an extensive L/S list that also includes musical notes, medical prescriptions, criminal records, catalogs, and various other sorts of lists! The verbs are just as diverse, including “to draw a map, to describe a mathematical figure, to brand or mark, to invoke a curse upon, to propose a law, to write a letter, to enroll oneself or another, to take notes, or to petition for a hearing before a council!” Consequently, there is clearly no theological case to be made by etymology!

Nevertheless, even if one (correctly) interprets these common Greek words simply as “writings, documents, or records”, it is clear that in the minds of the readers and writers of the New Testament documents, some “writings” carried greater authority than others.

While “the Law” (#37, 38), among its most devoted adherents, was honored almost (if not altogether) to the point of worship, and “It is written” (more than 40x in the Gospels alone) seems to have been expected to end all speculation or argument with a “proof-text” from the law, the psalms, or a prophet, please note that Jesus did not hesitate to make corrections (Mt.5,6,7 and elsewhere) to its precepts, and even to refer to it as “your law” (Jn.8:17, 10:24) rather than “God's”. He exhibited careful selectivity, also, in his view of the “authoritative” quality of the prophets. His statement in Lk.18:31, “Everything that has been written by the prophets about the son of man will be completed”, is modified in Lk.22:37 to “all this that has been written about me,” indicating the distinct possibility that not “everything” assumed to refer to his person or his mission was necessarily accurate or relevant!

Both Jesus and the apostles quoted “the law and the prophets” – sometimes in support of their message (Jn.2:22, 7:38, Ac.8:32, 35) and sometimes in contrast to it (Mt.22:29, Rom.7:6, 2:29; II Cor.3:6).

Some things only made sense to the disciples after the fact (Jn.20:9, Lk.24:27,32,45), and it is not unreasonable to assume that faithful followers may still find that to be the case.

But for committed followers of Jesus, it is Jesus himself who must be the definitive arbiter as to what is or is not reliable “scripture.” He challenged the Pharisees' minute attention to the details of their “scriptures [writings]” (Jn.5:39), with the
observation that, had they paid proper attention to those very scriptures, they would have seen that all which had
legitimately gone before, bore testimony to him!
But how do we discern what actually does apply to him?

At a distance of more than 2000 years, it must be acknowledged that evaluating and sorting bits of recorded information and
observations is problematic at best. Scholars correctly point out that the presently recognized “canon of scripture”
represents only a portion of the “writings” of the New Testament era. The official councils that ruled upon the inclusion or
exclusion of specific documents were no more composed of unbiased scholars than are subsequent translation committees!
Nevertheless, anyone who reads many of the rejected accounts – some of which bear closer resemblance to Greek
mythology, philosophical polemics, or simple flights of fancy than to responsible reporting or thoughtful teaching – can
readily discern a sharp difference in the quality of writing. Documentary study, when responsibly done, is a separate and
respectable discipline, but it is beyond the scope of this brief paper.
For the purpose of this discussion, I have chosen to assume that we have, in the New Testament text, a reasonably accurate
account of the life and teachings of Jesus and the practices and understandings of his earliest followers.

The integrity of the existing account is additionally evidenced by the “warts and all” presentation of both individuals
(including those recognized as “leaders”) and group interactions. There is no credible evidence of whitewashing.
That is not to say, however, that “every word” was divinely dictated! No such claim is made anywhere in the text. In
fact, Paul overtly notes (I Cor.7:12, 25) when he is expressing his own opinion, “not the Lord”!
His statement to Timothy (II Tim.3:16) has been seriously misinterpreted. The problem derives from the textual absence of
any verb from the sentence. An English translation needs a verb. But where does it belong? Most translators, conforming
their prior teaching, have rendered it “All Scripture [writing] (is) inspired [breathed] by God, and (is) useful ...”, but the
grammar would equally support, “All God-breathed [inspired] writing (is) useful ...”. There is no grammatical clue as to
where the “is” belongs – or to how many there are! It’s hard to imagine anyone trying to maintain that “all writing” – of
whatever provenance – is either “inspired by God” OR “useful”! Clearly, Paul’s point is that inspired writing is useful –
for teaching, correction, and discipline. Remember, “scripture” in the text, is NOT a “different word” from “writing”! This
is the only use of the word theopneustos in the entire text of the New Testament. And “inspired” does not mean “dictated.”
The same caveat applies to Peter’s complaint (II Pet.3:16) about Paul’s writings, and the much-quoted reference to the “other
scriptures”. Peter calls for discernment, on the part of both teachers and hearers. This is still a serious need among God’s
people.

I believe that the lack of such discernment is the key to a very large percentage of “theological” disagreement among well-
meaning disciples yet today. Quoting the passages mentioned above, a large contingent of teachers / writers subscribes to
the “flat book” theory of “inspiration”, claiming that “every word” was divinely dictated by God (in KJV English, no less), and is equally authoritative. As we have seen, Jesus did not subscribe to that theory, nor did he
ask it of his followers. In fact, his frequent use of “BUT I SAY ...” (Mt.5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44) or “because of the hardness
of your hearts, Moses wrote that for you” (Mt.19:8, Mk.10:5), grows out of his understanding that he needed to correct the
errors of the old ways of thinking, behaving, and interpreting the plans and instructions of the Father. The entire letter to the
Hebrews is devoted to that same subject: The old ways did not work! That’s why Jesus had to come, personally, and
straighten things out!
Jesus explained (Mt.11:13, Lk.16:16) that the law and the prophets were (in effect) until John (the Baptist), and “Since
then, the Kingdom of God is being proclaimed!”
Paul understood this (II Cor.3:12-14), “In Christ it has come to an end!” and Eph.2:15, “He eliminated the law of
commands and decrees!”
The folks who quote Jesus' statement in Mt.5:17-18 regarding the permanence of the law and the prophets, neglect the last
phrase: until it all happens [is fulfilled]” Jesus himself IS that fulfillment! (Lk.18:31, Jn.19:28). Luke's version of the “great commission” (Lk.24:44-48) is the proclamation of that fulfillment!
So – how does an earnest disciple identify “authoritative Scripture”? Basically, it is a choice.
Personally, I have chosen the New Testament as my standard. I impose that choice upon no one else, but I identify the most
closely with folks who have chosen similarly. If there seems to be some sort of conflict in the text, Jesus' own words make
the call.
Luke described his quest in the prologue to his gospel (1:1-4) – he carefully researched the available information, and
checked it out with folks who had “been there, done that.” The other writers may have combined their own experience with
the accounts of others – they don't say. But Jesus had the final word. There are few discrepancies in direct quotes.
Pre-Christian writings can be helpful – indeed, the apostles referred to them frequently, when their audiences were
familiar with the ancient texts. The Jews at Berea used them to confirm Paul's message. But they were not imposed

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upon Gentile groups (Ac.15).
The judgment of others who are well-acquainted with the Lord is also helpful. It's fairly easy to discern whether a statement, idea, or action is consistent with the personality of someone you know very well.
The Biblical writers and teachers challenged each other (Gal.2) and corrected one another (Ac.18:24-28).

Paul summarized it well in Rom.15:4-6:
“For whatever was written before, was written for our instruction, in order that by means of the endurance and the 'coaching' of the Scriptures [writings] we might have hope [confidence].
May God, (the source) of endurance and encouragement, give you all concern (about) the same things, among each other, with Christ Jesus as the standard, in order that unitedly, with one mouth [voice] you all may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”
Amen!

Word Study #149 – Citizenship

Throughout history, as well as today, one outstanding indicator of the difference between observable, practical Christianity – a mutual effort at faithfulness – and the theoretical, doctrine-driven, “pie-in-the-sky” version – concerned primarily with sorting who is “in” and who is “out” – is the understanding that a group promulgates of the Kingdom of God. You can easily tell, by whether they speak of it as a present reality or a future dream. The Biblical balance is skewed heavily in the direction of the present reality.

It started at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. Actually, it started at Creation, but immediately after his baptism by John, Mark tells us that “Jesus came into Galilee preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God, saying, “The time HAS BEEN fulfilled; the Kingdom of God HAS ARRIVED!” (1:14,15)

He explained it further in his “inaugural address” (Lk.4:18-21), as providing “good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to those broken by oppression”. He announced (the word is the same as what is translated “herald” – the task of a news anchor!) “TODAY this HAS BEEN FULFILLED in your hearing!” It only takes third or fourth grade English to realize that “has been” refers to something that is already present.

Later, he outlined the “constitution of the Kingdom” in Mt.5, 6, 7 and Lk.6.

More than half of his recorded parables refer to the Kingdom, many of them introduced with “The Kingdom of God IS like...” (NOT “will be”). And Acts 1:3 informs us that it was also the content of the “graduate course” that Jesus conducted for his disciples in the period between his resurrection and his ascension: “He presented himself ALIVE to them during 40 days, talking about the Kingdom of God.”

He had put it very plainly before, in Lk.16 and Mt.11, “The Law and the Prophets were in effect UNTIL JOHN, and since then, the Kingdom of God is being proclaimed!”

THE KING HAS ARRIVED! THE KINGDOM EXISTS wherever the authority of the King is recognized.

A powerful example is seen in the Lord's prayer – which I'm quite sure was never intended to be a rote memorization to be recited, but to encourage our participation, together with the Lord Jesus, in the basic ingredients of the Kingdom. The Kingdom exists and flourishes where and when God's name (his entire personality) is recognized as holy – belonging uniquely and exclusively to him – and where presently doing his will is the deliberate choice of his people. This is already the case in heaven – his people are called to model it as well as to pray for it on earth: in other words, we are called to incarnate the Kingdom.

Jesus corrected the eschatological expectations of the disciples, who were still hung-up on the restoration of Israel, explaining that the Kingdom will be established and grow as the Holy Spirit enables his people to spread its influence.

The whole rest of the NT describes that Kingdom in action. There are no cut-and-dried definitions. Its forms vary with the situation. Only two things are certain and inviolable: THE KING IS IN CHARGE, and a radical difference in lifestyle is expected. The people of God are not merely asked to adopt a slightly sanitized substitute for the sordid situation of their surrounding society. The change is enormous – variously described as the change from death to life, from foreigners to citizens, from captive slaves to a ransomed, free people.

This is a Kingdom different from anything the world has ever seen. Sadly, through the ages, most folks who say they “believe” in Jesus have preferred to defer any observable difference to a future heavenly paradise, and not be bothered with
it now. But please consider: Is it not possible that, had the Lord Jesus confined his remarks to ethereal, theoretical talk of heaven and hell, he would very probably never have so incurred the wrath of the authorities, both religious and political? They felt their authority threatened in the present, not the future. His opponents understood far better than we, that in the Kingdom of which he spoke, nothing is familiar and manageable. Nothing is under the control of those who are used to exercising control. There is only one King – and his authority is absolute. IN THIS LIFE – not just the next.

Furthermore, Jesus was not talking about a revolution, as some have suggested, all through the centuries. Revolutions never solve – or even address – any real problems. A revolution only changes the cast of characters in an oppressive power system, reversing the role of oppressor and oppressed. Jesus is out to rearrange the entire structure of things so that there exists no oppressive power structure. His citizens function together as his Body, of which he is the only Head! What, exactly, is involved in becoming a part of the Body of Christ?

The idea of citizenship was well understood by first century folks. Rome conferred citizenship upon select allied cities (among which were Philippi, Tarsus, and other major centers) and their inhabitants, as well as to people who had served the state. Even a slave could gain citizenship, if his freedom was attested by his master before a magistrate. Citizens had legal rights not afforded to others and Paul asserted those rights on occasion – in Philippi, Jerusalem, and Caesarea.

But the New Testament proclaims a citizenship far beyond that offered by Rome. There is a wonderful description in Eph.2:11-22. Right in the middle, v.19, is the key: “Now, therefore, you all are no longer strangers and temporary residents, but you are fellow-citizens with God's people, and members of God's household.”

The citizenship conferred by our King, although vastly surpassing anything the nations of the world can offer, nevertheless bears some similarities to other forms of citizenship.

Even on a worldly plane, it is a weighty decision to change one's citizenship, one that should not be taken lightly nor made impulsively. One is wise, if not legally bound, to live in a country for a while, to become familiar with its customs and laws, before taking such a step. Likewise, no one should ever be rushed into the Kingdom!!! A citizen needs to be fully apprised of what he is getting into! People recruited in campaigns more closely resembling “scalp-collecting” than Kingdom advocacy, rarely become active, productive citizens.

There is nothing wrong with living in a country as a visitor or foreigner. People go to another country for a variety of reasons.

There are tourists – and turistas. We learned the distinction from a friend in Mexico, years ago. When Jose remarked, “Ustedes no me parecen turistas”, (“You all don't seem like tourists to me!”) we recognized it as a compliment. “Turistas” are the overbearing, complaining, arrogant folks who loudly criticize everything unfamiliar.

Tourists go to learn, appreciate varied friendships, and even may adopt some of the ways of their host country. However, even these, with their much healthier attitude, do not usually make the commitment of citizenship. They retain sovereignty over their own way of life. They are free to choose where they will and won't conform. That is not wrong. But full citizenship demands a renunciation of that autonomy.

Some folks go into a country as entrepreneurs – for what they can get out of it. They will adapt only to what contributes to their own perceived profit, and don't much care about their effect on the local citizens. There are entrepreneurs in the Kingdom as well.

Some enter a country deceitfully, with a goal of its detriment, or even its destruction. John, Paul and Peter all warned of these in the Kingdom.

Then there are those who enter as refugees. They really didn't want to leave home, and did so only to escape war or disaster of some sort. They have no desire to become productive, contributing citizens – they only want a place to hide. Sadly, many have “entered” the Kingdom also only because they were threatened with destruction. Unfortunately, some folks call such threats “evangelism.” It's NOT “good news!” It was not Jesus' approach!

Jesus never threatened anyone! To the tax-collcting cheat, Zacchaeus, he simply said, “I'm coming over for lunch!” and the man's life was radically changed. When Peter, who would have been a fine target for today's so-called “evangelists”, called himself a “sinner” and asked the Lord to go away, his response was simply, “Come on, Peter, I have a job for you!” If only those who are called his followers would follow that example!

Our King, in recruiting citizens for his Kingdom, called folks to become participants in a new and wonderful life, in company with the King, and others he had called. They were not turistas, tourists, entrepreneurs, or refugees, but
members of his citizenship class!

The responsibility of a foreigner in a country is minimal. He has no obligation to other citizens, nor they to him. But the true content of Jesus' offer is full citizenship. No one is a citizen alone. He shares both privilege and responsibility with every other citizen.

He pledges support and allegiance, renouncing every other loyalty, and receives the protection of his Sovereign.

Acknowledging Jesus Christ as “Lord and Savior” (#4), for first century followers, was a far cry from the required password or the creidal recitation it has become in subsequent generations. It was a powerful declaration of absolute allegiance to Jesus' Kingdom – a declaration that could, and frequently did, cost the life of the person involved! These were titles that the Roman emperors, drunk with power, reserved for themselves, as symbols of their overtly-claimed deity! Applying either of those terms to anyone but the emperor was treason – punishable by assorted forms of gruesome death. One could only persist in that declaration of loyalty by the power of the Holy Spirit, as Paul noted in I Cor.12:3.

Remember: The Kingdom is not a democracy, in which one can participate minimally, enthusiastically, or not at all, at his own discretion.

A King is an absolute ruler. What he says, goes.

Kingdom citizens have no concern for “equality.” Their goal is much higher. They are to become ONE, just as Jesus and his Father are. (Jn.17)

The Kingdom is not a place to “find yourself”. That search belongs to the old creation, where self-centeredness quickly became the original sin. The New Creation was engineered by the One who spoke of “losing, denying, disowning” the tyranny of “self” in favor of being built into the body of the King.

The Kingdom is not an institution, with hierarchy and flow-charts. There is ONLY ONE SUPERIOR.

All the citizens are members of his family – of his own Body! (see #84)

Consider very carefully, then, as you contemplate the King's offer of full citizenship. The Kingdom has been a long time in the building, and it is not finished yet. Study the blueprints carefully, and only then decide. The blueprints of the Kingdom were drawn by the Supreme Architect of the Universe – the same Architect who also set the standards for the building code. His specifications are not subject to revision.

As Paul reminded the folks at Corinth, “The Kingdom of God does not consist of talk, but of power” – the present-tense experience of the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Kingdom is not an idea to be argued, but a life to be lived!

We also have the assurance (Heb.12:28) that when everything else is shaken apart, this Kingdom WILL STAND.

Clearly, there is “more in store” for those who choose ways of faithfulness. The future is not irrelevant. It simply is not the only, or even the main consideration. It holds indescribable promise – the culmination of the citizenship class. BUT UNTIL THEN – we already have a King to honor and obey, and fellow-citizens of his Kingdom with whom to learn to reflect his very being!

There are only two requirements:

to acknowledge the King as our only sovereign,

and to follow his instructions TOGETHER.

The citizenship class always has room for more. There are no restrictive quotas. The King is still recruiting citizens for his Kingdom.

Word Study #150 – Incarnation: Part 2

This study was undertaken during the Christmas season, with its focus on the Incarnation. The seasonal nature of that celebration tends to obscure the impact of such a momentous event. It is easy to be sentimental about a baby in a manger; and pick it up later at Easter time with a lot of talk, most of it not supported by scripture, about Jesus' death. But that ignores what is probably among the most amazing – and most crucial – parts of the story, the statement in John 1:14: “The Word became flesh, and lived for a while among us!”

“Flesh”: a real, live person! Somewhere along the line, I think probably in the middle ages, “flesh” came to be considered “evil” or “sinful”. The NIV even translates it that way. That can not possibly be true, or Jesus would not have adopted it, or emphasized it to his disciples after the resurrection, when they were frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost – “A spirit has no flesh and bones, as you see I do!” Please refer to W.S. #85.
In the early church, the acid test of faithfulness (I Jn.4:1-3) was the acknowledgment that “Jesus Christ was come in the flesh!” that he was REAL. Hebrews 2 goes into considerable detail about why that was necessary, in order for him to definitively DESTROY death; but basically, it was because he knew that “show” was superior to “tell” when it came to forming a faithful Kingdom. “Tell” had been tried for a long time – the whole Old Testament period. The letter to the Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that “tell” did not work. That’s why Jesus decided he needed to “show.”

Even that, though, is only half of the story. The concept of Incarnation has TWO branches: Jesus becoming a genuine, human person for our benefit, and his people becoming a manifestation of his own Body (#84), for the benefit of the rest of the world! Incarnation has become OUR JOB! Fortunately, the Creator of the universe has graciously undertaken the task of creating that Body – which is a good thing, since we ourselves can be pretty clueless, and often mess things up royally!

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah referred to God as a potter, and his people as clay, although that analogy appears only once in the New Testament. Notice that God told Jeremiah, “Go down to the potter's house, and there, my word will come to you!” Since beginning to work with clay, I have learned many things about how the Lord chooses to work – starting long before a potter begins to form any vessel. I prepare my clay from scratch – digging and mixing it, to achieve a “clay body” which I can use. There are many ways in which this illustrates the effort the Lord expends, also, to create a Body he can use.

While in some places, usable clay can be found in a single deposit, in our area, successful pottery requires a mixture of four different kinds of clay, none of which is useful alone! This is also true of the Lord's clay body. The red clay is strong – but good for nothing but bricks. It cracks when shaped, bent, or rolled thin. The yellow is smooth and pliable, but not strong enough to stand up by itself. The gray is grainy. It doesn't stain like the other two, but will not polish to a nice surface. However, I always add it if the pot is intended for cookware, as the grit helps it to resist thermal shock. The white is sticky, and while it can be used alone if one works very slowly, it does not polish well, but it can be used to remedy the problems of some of the other types.

Before any of these can be used, they need to be powdered, soaked, and strained to remove gravel, sticks, roots, and assorted junk. This pounding and straining process does not change the “being” of any of the clays. They still have their created attributes to contribute to the mix, but they are no longer individually recognizable, and have become a part of something entirely new.

The clay cannot have the “junk” strained out without being wet. The proper amount of water at any time is essential. You are familiar with the references to “water” as the Holy Spirit. There are just a few attributes that are relevant here. It is not for nothing that Jesus told his disciples to WAIT for the Spirit to empower their assignment. At many points in the process of clay preparation, YOU HAVE TO WAIT. To get the mix properly strained, I soak it for a week or two, in order that the particles be completely absorbed and soak up as much water as possible.

Then, after straining, you have to WAIT again – while it settles, and excess water is poured off. After it is dried to a consistency you can handle, if the proportions are not right, one or more ingredients can be added to improve the texture. At each point, the clay has to be thoroughly mixed. When you are satisfied with the mix, it then has to WAIT again – to sit – for several weeks – to “mature”, to avoid separation. There is a difference between mixing and combining. I once tried combining two clays, because I thought it might “look nice”. But they cracked in the firing. Their shrinkage was not alike. Thorough MIXING is necessary for a successful product. A lot of talk is bounced around today about “diversity.” And that can be a good thing – but only if the diverse elements are MIXED, and not just “combined.” Otherwise, heat will ruin the product.

The forming of a pot, its finishing and firing, also require extensive experience on the part of a potter. They must be regulated by both the characteristics and content of the clay body, and the final result that is desired. (Jeremiah and Paul were not potters! The clay does NOT always perform as the potter may have in mind!) But as Jeremiah observed, if a pot is “spoiled”, the potter can readily use the clay for something else. Unfired clay is completely recyclable.

Perhaps the potter will adjust the mix, or even modify his earlier plan. Perhaps he will need to work more slowly, allowing the clay to become partly firm before adding more. Perhaps he will need thicker walls, to be scraped later to the shape and thickness he intended. Perhaps it will be necessary to do preliminary smoothing and polishing before the piece is finished. Even after it is mostly dry, an even, polished surface may require the addition of a thin coating of finer clay, known as “slip”, to correct imperfections. Many hours of rubbing with a smooth stone are needed to create a good shine. The firing, too, requires that the pottery be very familiar with his clay, and know how much heat it can endure. Earthenware, with its high iron content, cannot endure high-fire temperatures. It melts. But other clays, like fine porcelains, would crumble if only fired to low temperatures.
Our focus today, however, is simply upon the preparation of the clay body, and the Body into which the Lord intends to form his people, in order that we may actually become a credible part of the miracle of the Incarnation. I was not able to find a Gospel reference to the quotation attributed to Jesus in Heb.10:5, but I believe it is hugely relevant to correct many of the common misperceptions that have persisted in what is labeled “Christian doctrine”. Jesus says very plainly, (presumably to his Father), “You didn't want sacrifices and offerings, but you fashioned a Body for me!” And after detailing some of the failings of the old system, he declares, “Look, I have come to do your will!”

If we are rightly to fulfill the mandate to participate in the Incarnation, it behooves us to find out what Jesus considers that it involves. Please refer to W.S.#23 as a starting place, and refer also to #84 and 85.

May we be properly strained, mixed, and blended into the Body that our Master Potter can use for his purposes!

Word Study #151 – Atonement

As noted previously, I make an earnest effort to respond to requests for word studies. This becomes difficult, however, when the suggested words occur seldom, or not at all, in the New Testament text. And, hard as it may be for those who promote “doctrines” to believe, this is the case with one of their favorite “passwords”, “atonement.”

Even in their traditionally beloved KJV, the term “atonement” appears only one single time – Rom.5:11 – where it represents katallage, which is more commonly rendered “reconciliation” (#69). Katallage also appears only once in the LXX – Is.9:5 – where it speaks of restitution for “things acquired by deceit”.

Another word family, hilaskomai (v.), hilasmos (n.), and hilasterion (combined with “place”), appearing in the New Testament only twice in each form, was used frequently in pagan writings of attempts to appease offended deities, but was never used by Jesus, or by any of the gospel writers about either his purpose or his accomplishment.. The verb appears in the publican's plea for mercy (Lk.18:13), and the Heb.2:17 description of the duty of the high priest under the old (failed) system. The noun is seen only in 1 Jn.2:2 and 4:10, where it is traditionally translated “propitiation,” and the compound form in Rom.3:25 and Heb.9:5, referring to the “place of mercy” described among the tabernacle/temple furnishings in the LXX (Ex.25:16-21, 31:17, 35:11, 38:5-8) and the institution – and subsequent re-institution – of the ceremonial Day of Atonement (Lv.16:2-15, Ezek.43:14-20). The LXX uses the noun (7x) and verb (10x) forms primarily in reference to mercy or forgiveness begged of God – more in line with the pagan usage. Even so, only twice (Num.5:8 and Ezk.44:27) is there an accompanying reference to the killing of an animal sacrifice – once a ram, and once a goat, but never a lamb.

So how did this come to be such a central theme in what passes for “Christian teaching”, when Jesus never made any reference to it?

How did it become identified with Jesus' death, which took place at the time of Passover – a festival of freedom and deliverance from bondage – and NOT on the Day of Atonement, with its focus on the problem of “sins”?

How can “theologians” cherry-pick a few “verses” from Hebrews describing the old ways, with which to embroider their theories, and ignore the over-arching message of that entire epistle, that the old system was a complete failure?

The Day of Atonement does appear once (Lv.25:9) prescribed as the introduction to the Year of Jubilee, which Jesus announced as the permanent condition in his Kingdom (Lk.4:18-19). Notice that this announcement was at the beginning, not the end, of his ministry.

I have never heard that connection addressed. I wonder if perhaps that “introduction to the Jubilee” idea was behind the content of the “repentance” (#6) message of John the Baptist, as Jesus' fore-runner? It would fit his messages better than those of Jesus, and would blend well with Jesus' statement (Lk.16:16) that “the law and the prophets (were in effect) until John. Since then, the Kingdom of God is being proclaimed!”

In the absence of any evidence that Jesus himself ever viewed his purpose (#23) or activity as being connected with “atonement” – whether the pagan concept of appeasement of an angry deity, attempted restitution for offenses, or punishment for unnamed “sins” – I can only conclude that this is another case where “doctrines” were invented – and their acceptance mandated – to enhance the power of an emerging hierarchy over unwitting subordinates.

I prefer to follow King Jesus into the Kingdom he has prepared for all of us who answer his call!
Word Study #152 – Singing and Dancing

This study arose when someone posed a question regarding the lexical inclusion of the idea of “dance” in the words translated “rejoice” (#93). I am not a student of Hebrew, so I will not presume to comment on that language. However, I was able to find no such reference in any of the Greek lexicons, so I can say with confidence that it is not the case in any of the New Testament writings.

In fact, orcheomai, “to dance”, appears only four times in the entirety of the New Testament text: two of which describe Salome’s (probably lewd) performance before Herod (Mt.14:6; Mk.6:22), and the other two in the complaint of the children playing in the marketplace (Mt.11:7 and Lk.7:22).

Choros, (English cognate, “chorus”), a noun referring to either a company of singers and dancers, or to the dance itself, occurs only once (Lk.15:25), at the party celebrating the return of the prodigal son. Both words are more common in the LXX, used multiple times in the celebrations at the return of the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, the worship of foreign gods (including the golden calf), or celebrating the destruction of the Pharaoh’s army, among others. Clearly a cultural expression, it is not clear whether dancing was indigenous to the Hebrew people, or adopted from neighbors. Historians represent it as an integral part of pagan religious rites, especially fertility rituals. There is nothing inherently “wrong” in the use of cultural expressions in worship, as long as they follow the Acts 15 injunction to avoid anything connected with idolatry. Dancing, per se, is neither advocated nor forbidden in the Biblical text, and probably must be evaluated in context.

Singing, on the other hand, is advocated in both the LXX and New Testament texts, represented by four different words, which are not always easily distinguishable.

Ado, the most “generic”, applies to all vocal sounds, whether human, animal, or avian, or even the sound of the wind. It may refer to a song or chant, usually in praise or celebration of either a deity or a person. In the LXX, especially in Ezra and Nehemiah, it seems to have denoted a class or order of functionaries in the tabernacle/temple, along with priests and Levites, which included both men and women who were assigned to the duty of singing praises to God. Ado was also used of songs or chants designed to celebrate or to teach about historic events. Frequently used in combination with ado was psallo, which usually referred to instrumental music, either alone or as an accompaniment to a song of praise or history.

Humneo / humnos, classically, would have described epic recitations, repeated through many generations, honoring a specific hero, deity, or historic occasion. It is also used as a title for many of the psalms that have a historical theme. All of these words carry over into the New Testament, although their use is not frequent. Jesus and his disciples “sang a hymn” at the conclusion of their Passover supper together (Mt.26:30, Mk,14:26), as did Paul and Silas (Ac.16:25) in the prison at Philippi. These, and the Old Testament quote from Ps.22:12, use humneo.

The singing of “new songs” around the throne in Rev.5:19, 14:3, 15:3, uses ado, as huge crowds proclaim the praises of the Lamb, whereas psallo describes praises to God in Rom.15:9 (quoted from II Sam.22:50). Paul speaks of singing both “with the spirit” (probably a reference to the use of unlearned tongues) and “with the understanding” in the company of the Christian brotherhood (1 Cor.14:15), and James (5:13) considers this an appropriate expression of joyfulness.

Most instructive of all, however, is Paul's advice in Eph.5:19 and Col.3:16, where all three terms are used together, as he urges the brethren to “talk to each other in psalmoi̇s (psalms) and humnoi̇s (hymns) and odai̇s pneumatikai̇s (spiritual songs), adontes and psallontes (singing with and without instrumental accompaniment), TO THE LORD” (Eph.5) and in Colossians, of teaching and admonishing each other with the same categories of musical expression.

Both of these instructions are significant, and should have a much greater effect than is common, upon the music used in a gathering of the Lord's people. Remember that the vocabulary comes out of a context of songs of praise honoring either human heroes or pagan gods. Both the Ephesian and Colossian churches were of Gentile background. Consequently, the admonition that singing be directed to the Lord is crucial. All honor and praise belongs to him!

Note also that there is no mention of anything like the self-centered “I, me, my” or one's personal ecstasy or despair, that has come to dominate so much of so-called “Christian” or “gospel” music. Sometimes this is cast as a groveling “confession”, and others as triumphant boasting. And if you can't discern whether the singer is focused on the Lord or on his/her girl/boyfriend, there is a serious problem. Look again at the songs of praise around the throne! They are totally occupied with the glory of the King!

Secondly, music in the brotherhood (Col.3:16) is for the purpose of teaching (#47) and admonishing (#116) each other, and as such needs to be carefully vetted for compatibility with what Jesus actually said, advocated, and taught! There is an
incredible collection of both new and old “hymns” and “praise songs” that promote “teaching” that is lamentably foreign to the true gospel (#67) message. It is not at all rare that I find it necessary to refrain from singing all or part of a “hymn” for that reason.

It is the “word / message of Christ” (#66) that must be the absolute standard for our musical choices! Brother Paul's conclusion (Col.3:17) is probably the safest guide, whether for “song and dance” or for all of life: “And everything – whatever you do – in word or deed, (do) everything in the name (#24) of the Lord Jesus, (continually) giving thanks to God the Father through him!”

Evaluate every activity by this yardstick, and we won't go far wrong.

**Word Study #153 – The “Unconditional” Fantasy**

One of the least substantiated statements of modern “teaching” or “preaching”, whether the perpetrators represent themselves as “evangelical”/“fundamental”/“conservative”, or as “welcoming”/“accepting”/“liberal”, is their frequent reference to God's “unconditional love” or “unconditional grace”. Neither of these phrases, nor the word “unconditional” itself, appears anywhere in the New Testament text. A careful search of Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament, for even just the genesis of the idea, reveals that there is no such thing.

Now, it is certainly true that nowhere are we told that it is necessary for a person to attain some exalted level of “holiness”, moral or ethical perfection, or anything else, in order to be eligible to answer Jesus' call. But that realization must never obscure the **condition** that the call must be answered – the invitation “Follow me” does come with required “RSVP” attached – in order for that gracious offer to take effect! And this has always been the case.

The idea of “conditional statements” is not theological nor philosophical. A conditional statement is neither more nor less than a grammatical construction, most easily recognized as two clauses, one of which is introduced by “if” (ei, ean), and the other – at least implicitly: it is sometimes omitted in English translations – by “then” (an). The mood and tense of the verbs in the statements give an indication of the expected likelihood (or not) of the “condition” being fulfilled. (For a more complete discussion, please see a Greek grammar. Robertson and Marshall are both good.)

For example, contrast Jesus' two statements in John 8. To the Pharisees (Jn.8:42), he retorts, “IF God were your father, (then) you would love me”. Both clauses are in the imperfect tense, implying that neither is the case. To his followers (Jn.8:31), he asserts, “IF you continue (present tense) in my word, (then) you will be (future) my disciples.” Here, both are considered plausible.

If the consequence is negative, the particle me is used rather than the more common ou, in which case, in translation, the conditional clause would be introduced by “unless” (Mt.13:20) “Unless the Lord had shortened the time ….”

The principle that must be understood is that a conditional statement has **nothing whatever** to do with the reliability of the individual making it, or with arbitrary orders issued to underlings (“Shape up or else!”). A conditional sentence or clause is **neither** an immutable promise nor a dire threat. It is simply a statement of the way things are: cause and effect, evidence or action and results. It described the circumstances under which something will be true, or realized – or not.

As noted before, I cannot speak to Hebrew grammar, but the idea seems similar under the old covenant as well. Deuteronomy 29 and 30, along with many other Pentateuch passages, outline very carefully that a choice must be made. See especially Dt.30:15-20. The frequently repeated admonition to “choose life!” is strong evidence that choices have consequences, for good or ill.

Jesus also required a choice – a choice evidenced by both attitude and behavior. Although this idea is present in the synoptics, it is most vividly evident in the gospel of John. A few examples follow:

- Mt.6:14,15 – “IF you take away [forgive] their transgressions for people, your heavenly father will also take them away from you all.” (followed by, IF you don't, he won't.)
- Jn.7:17 – “IF anyone wants to do his will, he will know ---”
- Jn.8:51 – “IF anyone keeps my word, he will not see death forever.”
- Jn.11:40 – “IF you are faithful, you will see the glory of God.”
- Jn.14:23 – “IF anyone loves me, he will keep my word.”
- Jn.15:14 – “You are my friends IF you continue doing as I am instructing you.”

Please note that although all these statements are **conditional** in form and intent, there is no hint of compulsion! The tone is, “IF this is what you want, here is the way to realize it.”
Stephen's sermon in Ac.7 delineated the history of people's refusal to observe the condition that obedience was an integral and necessary element of their being "chosen". Later, a false condition was imposed by the group who were insisting upon a prior conversion to Judaism (Ac.15:1), which condition was promptly repudiated by the Jerusalem Council in their letter (v.29), "If you keep yourselves from these things (the accouterments of idolatry), you will do well." That this sort of statement is not confined to "religious" settings is evident in the words of the town clerk to the mob in Ephesus, (Ac.19:39), "If you all have some other dispute, let it be settled in a legal assembly!"

The epistles are also peppered with conditional statements:
Rom.6:8 – "If then we died with Christ, we are trusting that we will also live together with him."
Rom.6:16 – "If you present yourselves to someone as slaves, for obedience, you are slaves to whomever you obey!"
I Cor.15: 12-19 – the whole paragraph about the resurrection.
Gal.5:18 – "If you are being led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."
Col.3:1 – "If you all were resurrected with Christ, keep seeking what is above ..."

All of the messages to the churches quoted in Rv. 2 and 3, likewise, make use of "unless", or something similar, indicating the conditional nature of the admonitions, the observance of which will definitely influence the outcome of each situation.

There are also many clauses introduced by "so that", "in order that", "because", and other particles that imply purpose. Purpose is completely different from a conditional situation. Purpose indicates God's (or anyone else's) intention, while a conditional statement asserts that if the condition is not met, the main premise will not take effect.

As I have consistently done elsewhere in these studies, I seriously invite any of you to correct any errors here. But please remember to do so by referencing specific, coherent New Testament passages, and not by simply waving "doctrinal" flags. May we all exert our efforts, accurately to represent the gracious welcome offered by the Lord Jesus, to all who choose to respond in faithfulness!

May we, in the process, avoid cheapening his offer by pretending that there are no conditions involved. Let us rather acknowledge and observe his conditions, gratefully and faithfully loving, serving, and following his instructions!

Word Study #154 – “It is Finished!”

For far too long, these words, quoted by John as Jesus' final statement from the cross, have been represented as if they were a pathetic whimper of abject submission to the unmitigated evil which sincere, but misguided, interpreters insist that God inflicted upon his Son in vicarious (one could just as well say "vicious") punishment for the offenses of mankind. Woven skillfully into closely reasoned doctrinal positions, most of which bear no resemblance whatever to anything that Jesus himself said or taught, the resulting package has been accepted without question, despite its absurdly circular reasoning, as authoritative "proof" of those systems, and consequently has escaped serious examination.

The two words traditionally translated “finish”, teleioo and teleo – treated briefly in the studies on “perfection / maturity” (#13) and “fulfillment” (#108), both of which make more frequent use of pleroo – have a distinctly different flavor. Lexically, teleioo generally carries the freight of completion, (hence its frequent parallel with pleroo, referring to maturity and commonly translated “perfect”), while teleo leans more toward the idea of accomplishment, although the lines between those two are not easily defined.

Although he makes no reference to the spectacular splitting of the temple veil (#127 and Chapter 8 of Citizens of the Kingdom) mentioned by all the synoptic writers, John nevertheless displays a unique understanding of what is “finished.” Not only is he the only writer to quote this statement from the cross, but earlier, he had also noted Jesus' telling the disciples (4:34), "My food is that I may do the will of the one that sent me, and that I may finish / complete his work!", and replying to the Pharisees' challenge (5:36) "The work that the Father gave me to finish: these deeds testify about me, that the Father has sent me." Both of these are purpose clauses, employing aorist subjunctive forms. As Jesus prayed (17:4), "I glorified you on earth (by) finishing the work that you gave me to do," the verb is aorist indicative, indicating past, completed action.

But notice that at the time of that statement, Jesus had not yet died or arisen! What, then, was “finished”? (Jn.19:28-30)

For a partial answer, please refer back to #23, where we explored Jesus own version of his purpose, which is quite different from the condensed and distorted version usually promulgated. Additional light can be gleaned from Luke's use of teleo,
where it was traditionally translated “accomplished” (12:50, 18:31, 22:37), describing respectively an unexplained reference to an impending “baptism” (usually assumed to involve his suffering), to the fulfillment of prophecy “about the Son of Man”; and to “all that has been written about me”. Each of these is related in some way to a prophetic message: however, the second, with its parallels in Mt.20:17-19 and Mk.10:32-34, requires particular attention. While the Matthew and Mark accounts specifically refer to Jesus’ betrayal and execution, Luke's account does not. Instead, he records Jesus’ forecast that when they get to Jerusalem, “everything that has been written about me will be completed / fulfilled / finished”! If Jesus is correct – and I believe he always is – then there remains no “unfulfilled prophecy” from the ancient writings! And the folks who confidently construct future scenarios out of Old Testament prophecies, are seriously out-of-line. This observation is corroborated by Jesus' own words mentioned above in John's gospel, as well as by his earlier statements (Mt.11:13, Lk.16:16) that “the law and the prophets were (in effect) until John” (the Baptist).

Please note this in no way discredits genuine New Testament prophecy, whether articulated by Jesus himself (Mt.24, 25; Mk.13, Lk.21, and elsewhere), or by various ones of his followers (parts of the Revelation and epistles) – although as Brother Paul reminds us (I Cor.14), we do need to be careful to evaluate what is represented to be prophetic. (See #45).

And it does raise questions about folks who, ignorant of history, label many of the earlier writings as “yet to be fulfilled”. I venture to contend that the Lord Jesus represents authority and understanding far greater than theirs!

So – what was “finished”, when he proclaimed it so, and deliberately dismissed his “spirit / breath” (pneuma) (Jn.19:30)? Exactly what he had declared in his prayer the previous evening: “I finished the work you gave me to do!” He had introduced the Kingdom designed by his Father to “the people you gave me out of the world” (Jn.17:6), and equipped them to carry on that Kingdom's work. He had inaugurated a “demonstration project” to make his Kingdom accessible to the world. He had thereby finished / fulfilled the purpose of his Incarnation, and set the stage for its next installment (#150). He had set the ultimate example of selfless obedience (Phil.2:6-8), so that the only “unfinished” thing remaining was (Phil.2:9-11) in the hands of the Father, who would shortly validate the whole affair by effecting his Son's triumphant resurrection, and with it the definitive defeat of death and despair.

It is for this reason that I urge you to take another look at this “last word”, and at least entertain the possibility that, far from a “last gasp” of surrender or defeat, it is rather a shout of triumph! The synoptics are unanimous in characterizing the departure of Jesus' spirit as energetic, and not as a feeble expiration due to his terrible suffering. Mt.27:50 records “shouting with a loud voice”. Mk.15:37, “letting out a great shout”, and Lk.23:46, “shouting in a loud voice”, even though only John recorded the actual words of that climactic shout.

Jn.19:28 :  “Jesus knew that everything had already been completed, in order for the Scripture to be fulfilled ...” and announced in glorious victory, “It is finished!” (19:30) Having successfully crossed that “finish line”, he sat down at the right hand of God, (Heb.10:13) – you sit down when the work is all done! – , where “all he has to do now is wait until his enemies are placed as a stool for his feet!”

“IT is finished!”
Praise the Lord!!

**Word Study #155 – Anointed, Anointing**

It has become common, in some circles, to enthuse effusively about an “anointed meeting”, “anointed” preaching or singing, or some other type of flamboyant performance. The speaker / writer is usually describing some sort of emotional high, the achievement of which is interpreted as being Spirit- induced, and therefore assumed to be desirable. Others credit (or blame) a “strong anointing” or “heavy anointing” for an irresistible impulse to speak or act in an unusual manner, implying that they are following the Lord's direction. This is yet another popular concept that is completely absent from the New Testament text. While it is true that there are occasions described in the Old Testament in which bizarre behavior is attributed to “the spirit of the Lord” (Jdg.14:6,19; 15:14; 1 Sam.10:10-11, 19:24), the term “anointing” is not used.

“Anointing” was used, under the old covenant, for the selection and coronation of kings, the dedication of artifacts (tabernacle, temple, or their furnishings), and the appointment of priests. Except for the few instances where it refers simply to personal hygiene (Ruth 3:3, Mic.6:15), it was the act of a prophet or other leader. Only rarely (Ps.45:7, Is.61:1) is God himself the actor. There are no such incidents described in the New Testament at all. Bizarre or uncontrolled behavior is never attributed to the Holy Spirit. In fact, the only references to out-of-control behavior are recognized overtly as an attack
by an evil spirit (Mt.17:14-18 and parallels; Mt.8:28-29 and parallels, Ac.19:13-16). Paul's sensible instructions for public meetings include admonitions to the careful exercise of control (I Cor.14).

The word “anoint” does appear several times, however, so it behooves us to examine what is intended by its use. Please notice that the direct object of “anoint” is almost exclusively the Lord Jesus himself, unless he is the subject.

New Testament occurrences represent five different Greek verbs: aleipho, egchrio, epichrio, murizo, and chrio, and only one single noun, chrisma. (This is NOT the same word as charisma, with which some people confuse it.)

Historically, aleipho, the most commonly used of the words, was an athletics-derived practice: the rubbing of one's body with oil in preparation for gymnastic training or competition. In New Testament usage, it referred to simple personal hygiene (Mt.6:17), to honoring a guest with extra attention after the normal courtesy of washing his feet (Lk.7:38,46; Jn.11:2, 12:3), or the preparation of a body for burial (Mk.16:1). Mark (14:8) also uses murizo in this latter sense – its only New Testament appearance.

Alepico, egchrio, and epichrio all describe the therapeutic application of any substance in connection with physical healing, whether by disciples (Mk.6:13), or elders (Jas.5:14), or by Jesus himself (Jn.9:6,11), as well as in Jesus' instructions to the (willfully) blind church of Laodicea (Rv.3:18).

Only the un-prefixed form of chrio is used in what might be called a “spiritual” sense. Lexically, this word was also used of the cosmetic and hygienic application of oil, but additionally includes the symbolic expression of “anointing in token of consecration.” I think it is significant that four of its five appearances refer overtly and specifically to Jesus having been “anointed” by God.

Jesus himself made that claim, in quoting Isaiah's prophecy upon the inauguration of his ministry (Lk.4:18). The folks at the prayer meeting (Ac.4:27) when Peter was delivered from prison bore testimony to the same fact, as did Peter in his sermon at Cornelius' home (Ac.10:38), and the writer to the Hebrews (1:9). Only Paul (II Cor.1:21) extends the term to “us” – the faithful – and it is clearly considered a part of our incorporation into the Body of Christ (perhaps the means of that incorporation). Read vv.20-22 as a unit. Notice that in no instance is either privilege or responsibility conferred upon any individual except Jesus!

The adjective, christos, universally rendered “Christ”, of course, is related etymologically, and is never used of anyone but the Lord Jesus, except in the occasional claim of an impostor (Mt.24:5 and parallels).

There remain for consideration only the three occurrences of the noun, chrisma – all of which occur in John's first letter (I Jn.2:20, 27) – twice traditionally translated “anointing” and once “unction”. Yes, that is the ONLY New Testament use of the word.

From 2:18 through the end of the chapter, John is addressing the issue of deserters, deceivers, and deceptive teaching. He reminds his readers that they (together – it is plural!) are already equipped to sort out questions of faithfulness. He had quoted Jesus in his gospel account, explaining that the Holy Spirit / “Spirit of Truth” would be coming for the purpose of guiding his people (Jn.16:13) “IN (not “into”) all truthfulness.” Here is another of many places where prepositions matter! Faithful disciples do not need to be led INTO truth: that is the sphere they already inhabit, by virtue of their commitment to Jesus and his Kingdom. But they / we will always need to be led properly to function IN the truth, as different challenges / situations will require differing responses.

Enabling this discernment is a major function of the Holy Spirit, who, I believe, personifies the “anointing” to which John refers here. Notice how the “job description” in v.27 matches the Jn.16 passage.

Notice also the results of the anointing, when applied to the people of God: occasional physical healing (Jas.5), incorporation into the Body of Christ (II Cor.1), and the discernment necessary to function appropriately in that Body (I Jn.2).

As we have seen so frequently elsewhere, in every case, the mortal recipients of the “anointing” are addressed in the plural. It is neither a gold medal awarded, nor a position of power or status granted, to any individual, but rather the gracious enabling provided to the gathered citizens of the Kingdom, in their mutual quest for faithfulness to their anointed King!

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #156 – “Brokenness”

I have been trying without success to track down the provenance of a relatively recent arrival among the “buzz-words” in some popular “Christian” literature and teaching: the characterization of the world, and the lives of both the committed and
the uncommitted, as “broken”. I have found no such reference anywhere in the New Testament. Can you help me?

By a huge majority, the primary reference in the New Testament to anything being “broken” is (are you ready for this?) to BREAD! Either as Jesus broke bread to feed the crowds that were following him (Mt.14:19, 15:36; Mk.6:41, 8:6, 8:19; Lk.9:15, etc.), or the pieces that were gathered up afterwards (Mt.14:20, Mk.6:43, 8:9; Lk.9:17) “so that nothing be wasted” (Jn.6:12), or in descriptions of the last supper (Mt.26:26, Mk.14:22, Lk.22:19), and later similar observances by gathered disciples (Lk.24:30, Ac.2:46, 20:7, 20:11, 27:35; 1 Cor.10:16, 11:24), it is bread that is “broken.”

There are a few other things that are described as “broken” – or not – a fishing net (Lk.5:6, Jn.21:11), improperly prepared wineskins (Mt.9:17), an alabaster container (Mk.14:3), branches from an olive tree (Rom.11:17,19,20), a house invaded by thieves (Mt.24:43, Lk.12:39), and a bone of the Passover lamb (Jn.19:36.) The Law of Moses (Jn.7:23), the Sabbath (Jn.5:18), and the Scripture (Jn.10:35) use a different word, luo, which has many other uses, most frequently with the sense of being released, set free, or made of no effect. But the term “broken”, is never applied to “the world”, and very rarely to people. The only references involving people are Mt.21:44 and its parallel in Lk.20:18, warning of the results of an unfriendly encounter with “the stone the builders rejected”, and Jesus' announcement (Lk.4:18) that “healing the broken-hearted” was integral to his mission. (Is it, to ours?)

This brief survey covers all five “word families” traditionally rendered “broken” – klao / klaomai / klasma; suntribo / suntribomai; sunthlaomai; diorusso; and schizo (for this last, please also see #127). Only klao appears more than twice with this translation. Suntribo is also rendered “bruised” in Mt.12:20 (Jesus won't break a bruised reed); Lk.9:39 (the injury of a child by an evil spirit), and Rom.16:20 (the promise of Satan's ultimate defeat!) So the word “break/broken” does occur – but there is simply no New Testament reference to either a “broken world” or “broken lives.”

The fervor with which this subject is usually addressed, however, leads me to wonder whether it is not just the plain, old-fashioned Calvinist “original sin” story, re-cast in language deemed more acceptable to contemporary thought. That story is not derived from the New Testament, either, as we saw in word studies 3,5,7, 23, 27, 34, 88, 120, 121, 128, and 141. And may I remind you that even using the very latest of proposed estimates of the dating of New Testament manuscripts, our present New Testament pre-dates Mr. Calvin by more than a thousand years, and consequently is bound to be closer to the “real” story!

Just as surely as our Lord Jesus came to TAKE AWAY old-fashioned “sins” (#7), he certainly has also TAKEN AWAY whatever more euphemistic “brokenness” exists. To use the term “broken” without any regard for who “broke” what, constitutes avoidance (whether deliberate or not is not mine to say) of personal responsibility. The first three chapters of Romans make abundantly clear that the futility to which all creation – including people – is presently subject, is the result, NOT of some inherent, inborn defect, but of willful ignorance, deliberate rejection, of the ways and intentions of the Creator. We do not live in a world that has been “broken” by some invasive, external force, but in a world whose people have selfishly and deliberately chosen (Rom.1,2,3) to flaunt the gracious plans of their Creator, and to submit rather to the power of darkness.

But this is the very power – the very futility – from which the Lord Jesus rescued us, when he installed us as citizens of his Kingdom! The glorious announcements are all cast in past tenses (Gal.1:4, Col.1:13, 1 Pet.1:18, and many others)! It is also this same rescue for which the rest of the creation waits with eager anticipation (Rom.8:20).

“Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage!” (Gal.5:1, KJV).

I refer you specifically to the conclusions proposed in #141, as relevant here as well. In order properly to function in the Kingdom, the Lord's people must quit digging themselves into a hole, whether they call it “sinfulness” or “humility” or “brokenness”, and work at moving on toward maturity!

We must learn to distinguish between the errors of deliberate disobedience, the “former life” which was put to death and buried in our baptism (Rom.6:4), and errors of simple immaturity, which will be superseded (“taken away”) as we learn to “walk in newness of life”.

Ironically, the folks who make the most noise about being “born again” seem blissfully unaware that new life – of whatever kind – is never “born” as a fully mature individual! Admonitions to “grow up!” (I Pet.2:2, II Pet.3:18, Eph.4:15), and to “put off” old behavior and “put on” new (I Cor.13:11, 15:53; Gal.3:27, Eph.4:20-25, Col.3:8, 10-12; I Thes.5:8) abound throughout the New Testament text.

We have a choice, folks! We are not victims of a “broken” status quo. Where will you expend your efforts? Forget the lamentations over what is/was “broken”. Let's choose to “grow up” into life!
Word Study #157 – Healing

The subject of “healing” has probably generated as much discussion among earnest followers of the Lord Jesus, ranging from desperate hope to equally desperate discouragement, and from loving, encouraging ministrations to bitter blaming and recriminations, as any other topic. This study does not pretend to settle all questions, nor to present the elusive, infallible formula which so many have sought – or arrogantly claimed to have discovered. It merely seeks to offer, by means of examination of the vocabulary used in the New Testament, a bit of insight that may be helpful as we try to learn, to discern, and to follow our Lord's instructions. Please also see #194.

He did, after all, empower and instruct his disciples, when he sent them around the nearby countryside, to “heal the weak [sick], raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons” (Mt.10:8 and parallels), as they announced the arrival of his Kingdom. Similar instructions are included in Mark's version (16:17,18) of the Great Commission, and in the experience of the early church as recorded in Acts. Healing had been a significant part of Jesus' own ministry, with at least 40 instances recorded in the gospels. Although some of these refer to the same events, the count would be even higher if we were to include cleansing lepers, giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and mobility to the lame and paralyzed, that don't specifically use the word “heal.” Some of the lesser manuscripts include “to heal those with broken [crushed] hearts” in Jesus' announcement of his mission in Lk.4:18.

There can be no question, then, that healing is intended to have a significant place in the ministry of Jesus' followers. An examination of the vocabulary expands that responsibility tremendously.

Of the words denoting healing, *therapeuo* (v.), with 38 translations as “heal”, 5 as “cure”, and one as “worship”, and its noun equivalent *therapeia*, 2x “healing” and 2x “household”, are by far the most common. Historically, these words were much more versatile, including “to do service (to gods or men), to honor parents or wait on a master, to care for a person, to treat medically, to mend garments, to train animals, to cultivate land, to prepare food or drugs”! It would be an interesting exercise to consider some of these as alternative translations! Perhaps there is more involved than we realize in Jesus' instructions. The other word, more exclusively referring to medical healing, *iaomai* (v) “heal” 26x and “make whole” 2x, and *iasis* (n) “healing” 1x and “cure”1x, was also more restricted historically, listed as “to heal, cure, or attempt to do so, to treat disease, to repair or remedy, to be healed, to recover.” Ten times, the verb *sozo* is used. This is treated in #5, being more often traditionally rendered “save”.

The conditions from which people are “healed” are likewise varied. *Arrostos* (5x) is used of any sickness, or bad state of health. In the plural, it referred to epidemics. Only rarely does it describe moral weakness. *Astheneo* (20x), *asthenes* (22x), *astheneia* (22x), *asthenema* (2x), is by far the most frequently used, and the most ambiguous. In traditional translations, the noun and the adjective are more frequently rendered “weak, weakness” and the verb more often “be sick”, but lexically, they all carry both meanings, as well as “to be needy, to be unable to do something, to be without power (opposite of *dunamis*) or influence, poverty, want of strength, feeble, sickly, or morally weak.” That pretty well covers most “needs”!

*Kamno*, used only 3x (Jas.5:15, Rv.2:3, Heb.12:3) can refer to physical illness, but its primary lexical meaning is “to be weary or fatigued from work or exertion”, as well as “to win by toil” and “to meet with disaster”!

*Malakia*, used only of disease, is seen only in Matthew 4:23, 9:35, and 10:1, each time in tandem with *nosos* (12 occurrences), which is a broader term, including “sickness, disease, distress, anguish, disease of the mind” (L/S), and (Bauer) “vice or character defect”. These latter two words appear exclusively in the synoptics, except for a single case in Ac.19:12.

With this semantic background, we can see that James' choice of vocabulary in 5:13-16 may be more significant than we commonly realize. Only once does he employ the most common (and most ambiguous) of the words, when he addresses *asthenetis* “whoever is sick / needy / weak /unable to function properly”. This is about as broad a category as you can imagine. Such a person is encouraged to call upon the elders for prayer (#91) and anointing (#155) in the name (#24) of the Lord – as his representatives and on his behalf. The prayer of the *faithful* (#1) is represented as the agent of “saving / rescuing” (#5) the supplicant, who is described as kamnonta, for which “worn-out” or “exhausted” is at least as valid a rendition as “sick”, thus greatly expanding the “eligible clientele” for such merciful service. IF he has somehow brought it on himself (note, that is NOT assumed), by either deliberate or immature behavior (v.15), that condition will also be remedied. This is the context for James' admonition to the mutual confession and prayer, whose goal is revealed to be perhaps beyond our idea of merely physical healing, by the use of *iaomato*, rather than a form of *therapeuo*, which includes deliverance from all sorts of ills or suffering, as well as the cure of disease. How beautifully are the Lord's people utterly dependent upon one another!
Other than that one instance, we have no record of a pre-condition being imposed upon any person in need of healing. It is true that Jesus remarked upon the faithfulness of the friends who carried a paralytic to him for healing (Lk.5:20), rebuked the disciples who had been unable to heal a child (Lk.9:41), and challenged the child's father to trust him (Mk.9:22-24), but he made no such demand upon any person in need! In at least one case (Jn.5:13), the person didn't even know who had healed him!

I suspect there are very good reasons for which the specific illnesses or disabilities are usually not clearly identified. The preponderance of references are to “all manner of” or “divers diseases”, “infirmities”, or simply “all who had need of healing.” It is also true that while amazing healings bore testimony to the power of Jesus in the New Testament church (Ac.3 and 4, 8:7, 9:17-18, 14:9, 19:11-12, 20:10, 28:8), there were also occasions when healing did not take place (Gal.4:13, I Tim.5:23, I Cor.2:3, Phil.2:26-27, II Tim.4:20). We still face similar dilemmas.

There is no prescribed formula offered to “guarantee” healing. Jesus often accomplished it with a touch, and at other times simply with a word. On occasion, the disciples were instructed to apply oil (Mk.6:13, Jas.5:13-16), but this was not “standard procedure”.

Someone once suggested that the plague of “denominations” began when three blind men whom Jesus had healed, met each other at a “healing meeting.” One boasted that all it had required was a single touch of the Master's hand (Mt.20:30). Another argued that wasn't sufficient (Mk.8:25), but that a second touch was necessary in order to see clearly. The third maintained adamantly that unless Jesus put mud on your eyes, you had not experienced “the real thing” (Jn.9:6). So instead of rejoicing together at the mercy they had been shown, each went off to start his own church, criticizing the others for “teaching false doctrine”!

We are also not provided with any easy explanation of why, although many of us today can also point to times when the Lord has graciously intervened with his gift of healing, we have to acknowledge that, as we saw in the New Testament accounts as well, this does not always happen. Blaming the victim, as we have seen above, is unwarranted – and also cruel. Notice, also, that neither Jesus nor his disciples ever urged anyone to “claim” or “believe” a healing in the absence of any observable evidence.

When unsuccessful disciples asked Jesus why they had been unable to help a child (Mk.9:29), his reply was a need for prayer (some manuscripts add “fasting”). We all have a lot to learn about that! (See #91) There may be another key, in I Cor.11:30, where Paul suggests that simply going through the motions of some ritual without “discerning the Lord's Body” (#84) may account for the weakness, sickness, or even death, of some members of the group. Healing is listed among the functions described in a healthy Body, in the following chapter (12).

Might we become a more successful demonstration of our Lord's Kingdom, if we allowed ourselves to be built more completely into a united, interactive Body? (Please see chapter 7 of Citizens of the Kingdom).

This concept needs a lot more attention than it receives.

In addition to “healing”, the Lord's people are urged to “support the weak” (I Thes.5:14), to exercise patience with those whose conscience is weak (I Cor.8:7-10), and to recognize the value of members who “seem” to be more weak (“feeble”) (I Cor.12:22). Although a person “weak in faithfulness” (Rom.14:1,2, 21) is not to be included in discussions requiring mature discernment, the “strong” are admonished to “bear with” their weakness, for their benefit (Rom.15:1). These are all necessary functions of a Body, although they would be merely a nuisance to an institution, which simply eliminates those who are perceived not to “fit”. The Lord never told his people to form – or to become – an institution.

It is deliberate, that this study does not end with a summary, or a coherent conclusion.
I have none to offer.
I merely present these observations in the hope of their being augmented and corrected by yours.

May we help each other toward both faithfulness and wholeness.

Word Study #158 – “Inspiration”

Here is another requested word that appears only once in the entire New Testament. (Please refer also to #148)
I find it interesting that in all the arguing and pontificating that goes on regarding the many versions of “inspiration” ascribed to the Biblical writings, virtually no attention is given to internal evidence – statements by the writers themselves – of the reasons or motivations for their writing. These statements are plentiful, and should certainly be viewed with a seriousness at least equal to the stature accorded to the documents in which they are contained!

Does it surprise you that only one of those writers – John, in the Revelation – makes any claim to having been told what to
write, by the Lord or a messenger of his? John reports that he was instructed to write specific messages to particular churches (2:1,8,12,18, 3:1,7,14). Other instructions are (1:19) to “write what you have seen”, and not to write the message of the “thunders” (10:4). And John makes no similar claim about either his letters or the gospel that bears his name.

Neither Matthew nor Mark includes any explanation in his narrative. Luke, though (1:1-4), not only states his purpose very clearly, but also describes his careful research and organization efforts, in order that Theophilos may “be assured of the accuracy of the teaching (he) had received.” And John, as he concludes his account, notes (20:30-31) that although he left out a lot of things, he wrote what he did in order to enable his readers “to trust that Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of God,” and, having become faithful, to “have life in his name”. John thus declares the purpose of his work to be deliberately evangelistic, whereas Luke’s is to give additional evidence to someone who has already been taught.

Although the history recounted in Acts is addressed to the same individual as Luke's gospel, the introduction is simpler: after all, here, in a considerable portion of the narrative (the “we” passages), Luke is a participant, and no longer just a researcher.

There are two records of “writing” by believers contained within that history. First is the letter written by the folks at the Jerusalem Conference (Ac.15:23-29) to the Gentile believers. It was written, reporting the consensus of the gathered group, to reassure them that they were not required to adopt Jewish customs, but merely to avoid (15:20) “the pollution of idols, sexual perversions, strangled things, and blood”, all of which were components of idol worship.

The other letter (Ac.18:28) was written by brethren in Ephesus to counterparts in Achaia (Corinth), urging them to welcome Apollos into their fellowship.

There were also letters written by the Roman officials.

Paul's letters frequently included a note about his purpose in writing: Rom.15:15 – to remind them about what he had taught; I Cor.4:14 – not to scold, but to warn them about false teaching; I Cor.7:1 – to reply to questions they had sent him; II Cor.7:12 – to settle a dispute; 9:1 – to urge the collection of a relief offering; and 13:2, 10 – to correct errors. His purpose stated in Gal.1:20 was to recount his own personal history, in Eph.3:3 to share a revelation; in Phil.3:1 to keep them safe from error; and in Philemon, to encourage his acceptance of Onesimus. He says he wrote I Thes.4:9, 5:1, to commend their love, and to reassure them about Jesus' return, and I Tim.3:14 to communicate his plans to visit.

Several times, notably in I Cor.7, he says, “I have no instructions from the Lord – this is my best judgment”. Only once (I Cor.14), after a lengthy outline for orderly sharing in a meeting, does he claim to be wielding the Lord's own authority.

Peter writes (I Pet.5:12) to encourage the faithfulness of his readers, and (II Pet.3:1) to remind them of his message. John (I Jn.1:4) says that his goal is to make their mutual joy complete, (2:1), to prevent error, and (2:12) because they are faithful and growing!

Jude (3) also writes to encourage faithfulness.

Nobody claims to be writing a definitive statement of “doctrine” to which all are required to subscribe, or an inviolable code of conduct which all must observe – except for the one requirement imposed by Jesus himself and repeatedly appearing in all John's works – mutual love in the brotherhood.

So – who – or what – is “inspired”?

The word, theopneustos, appears only one single time in the entire New Testament, and not at all in the LXX. It likewise does not appear at all in ancient classical literature, although Plutarch (2nd.century AD) used it occasionally. It may have been an “invented” word, since no etymology is given in any lexicons, other than its component parts: theo – God, and pneustos, from pneo, to breathe or to blow. The sound linguistic approach of examining other usages of a word, is not possible for a word with only a single occurrence. The use of theo- indicates clearly that the reference is to inspiration by/from God – people can also be “inspired” by other people, by a cause, by an idea, etc. – but as noted in Word Study #148, the rest of the sentence is problematic, due to its lack of any verb. Please see that treatment.

There is another valid consideration, suggested in a conversation with my son, Dan, who pointed out that help could be found in the broader context of this quotation, specifically in the reference to Timothy's knowledge of the holy Scriptures/writings” since childhood, and the beneficial results of that knowledge (v.15). Later, I realized that this would also solve the problem of what to do with the kai in v.16, before ophelimos (useful), by enabling the reading, “all writings inspired by God are also useful...”, which may be the best solution of all. I intend to incorporate it in the next edition of PNT. (If you have downloaded it please add it to your copy!)

In any case, for anyone who takes the New Testament seriously, it is unwise, if not downright impossible, to make a dogmatic, definitive statement regarding its “divine” or “human” origin.

Far more productive would be redoubling our most earnest efforts to understand and to follow its precepts, and to honor the One by whose gracious Kingdom its narrative is “inspired”!
Word Study #159 – Study, Learn

“Study” is another requested word, which appears only twice in traditional English New Testaments – and not at all in some of them – although the idea is quite prevalent, in references to disciples (“students” or “learners”) #51, teachers #46 and 47, and “following instructions” #55. Please include these studies as you consider the present topic.

Two Greek words are involved. Philotimeomai, translated once “study” (I Thes.4:11), once “strive” (Rom.15:20), and once “labor” (II Cor.5:9), was used classically of ambition, earnest endeavor, or aspiration, in addition to the meaning of its component parts, which indicate “to love or seek after honor”. It's not hard to see that translators must have puzzled over that one!

The more common word, spoudazo, also only once rendered “study”, in Paul's familiar admonition to Timothy (II Tim.2:15), appears a total of 11 times, with 7 different translations! Its noun equivalent, spoude, is also represented by seven different translations in twelve appearances. Classical usage of both of these includes a sense of urgency, of serious attentiveness, strenuous effort, engagement, or pursuit, and sometimes hurry, eagerness, or ardent zeal, although in the middle of these, lexicographers Liddell and Scott include “to study, lecture or teach”.

Paul uses the same word in urging Timothy (II Tim.4:9, 21) and Titus (3:12), to try really hard to meet him at a particular place and time; in encouraging the Corinthian church to get their act together regarding the relief offering (II Cor.8:7,8:10) and to straighten out their problems (II Cor 7:11,12); and in expressing his concern and that of others for the welfare of the brethren in Thessalonica (I Thes.2:17) and Corinth (II Cor.8:16).

Peter, also using the same word, urges his readers to make faithfulness their top priority (II Pet.1:5,10; 3:14), as well as expressing his own eagerness (1:15) to provide them with helpful reminders of his teaching. “Diligence” is the traditional translation here, but the word is still spoudazo.

Both Paul (Eph.4:3) and the writer to the Hebrews (4:11) advocate similar determined effort, translated “endeavor” in Ephesians and “labor” in Hebrews, still making use of spoudazo.

None of these really fit into a modern English idea of “study”, and for this reason, the II Tim.2:15 passage would probably also be better understood in the sense of “make a strenuous effort”.

Nevertheless, any folks who are committed to such an effort most definitely have a lot to “learn”. In addition to the frequent admonition to discipleship already treated in #51, manthano, a related verb, appears 25 times, 24 of which rendered “learn” and one as “understand”. Manthano was classically used of “learning from a teacher” or “learning by study”, ever since Homer! It also referred to forming a habit, or “learning by heart” (memorizing). This is the word with which Jesus challenged the Pharisees to “learn” Gods desire for mercy as opposed to sacrifice (Mt.9:13), and invited his disciples to “learn” by sharing his yoke (Mt.11:29). Both Matthew (24:32) and Mark (13:28) include his instruction to “learn the parable of the fig tree.” Jesus’ opponents used the same word to critique his failure to seek apprenticeship under their approved teachers (Jn.7:15), which was the only culturally acceptable way to become recognized as a legitimate “teacher”.

Paul is quite specific about the “course syllabus” for the Kingdom's “citizenship class”, including Rom.16:17 – the original teaching they had “learned”, I Cor.4:6 – “learning” not to go beyond what has been written and start elevating particular individuals, I Cor.14:31 – that all may “learn” from wisdom given to / through other members of the Body, Eph.4:20 – “learning” to sort out what is or is not compatible with what they had already “learned”, Col.1:5-7 – the word of the genuine Gospel which they had “learned”, I Tim.5:4 – “learning” to show one's devotion to the Lord by his life in his/her own family, and Titus 3:14 – “learning” how to maintain good works.

He also speaks of his own having learned (Phil.4:11) to be content under all circumstances, adapting equally well to adverse or pleasant conditions, and warns against “learning to be idle” (I Tim.5:13), or making such a fetish of “learning” as never to settle in upon the truth (II Tim.3:7).

Hebrews even speaks of Jesus himself needing to “learn obedience from the things that he suffered” (5:8), in order to be merciful to his people, as well as to serve as their example.

The other primary word associated with learning is paideuo, traditionally translated “learn” only once out of 13 appearances. Here, traditional translators have seriously skewed our understanding of a vital concept. The word itself, lexically related to pais, “child”, is classically defined as “to teach or educate, to rear a child” (or, in the passive voice, to be so taught), and only marginally “to correct or discipline”. (The word “discipline” does not occur anywhere in traditional translations of the New Testament.) Unfortunately, traditional translators chose this secondary sense as their primary rendering of paideuo, and then compounded the error by using “chasten” six times (I Cor.11:32, II Cor.6:9, Heb.12:6,7,10; Rv.3:19), and “chastise” twice (Lk.23:16,22). This error has prompted most interpreters to promulgate the notion of “punishment”, a concept which does not exist at all in the lexical meaning of the word! These translators (who should
really be called editors or revisionists!) used “teach”, the primary meaning, only twice (Ac.22:3 and Tit.2:12), and “instruct” once (II Tim.2:25). This is an egregious distortion of the idea of “educating” or “rearing” a child of the Kingdom!
The perversity – ubiquity – and tragic results – of this error will be explored in a later study.

Two other words translated “learning” are treated in other studies. In Romans 15:4, where Paul asserts that the purpose of former writings is “for our learning”, the word is didaskalia, teaching – see #47; and in Ac.26:24, using gramma (a derivative of grapho, to write) – see #148 – the frustrated and uncomprehending Governor Festus shouts at Paul, “Your much learning/study/writing has driven you crazy!”

You may also find the words translated “understanding” helpful. They are explored under their more common translations, akouo – listen, hear, #27; ginosko – know – along with eido, oida, and epistamai, #29; and nous – mind – #96.

Suniemi, mentioned briefly in #130 – wise – is usually (25x) rendered “understand”, in the sense of figuring something out, or comprehending a point of teaching (or being unable to do so). Two of these, Lk.24:45 and Eph.5:17, involve specific enabling granted to people earnestly committed to following the Lord to understand his ways, and one, Rom.15:21, refers to people who have yet to make such a commitment.

Neither “study”, “learning”, nor “understanding” is ever represented as a purely intellectual exercise, except possibly the situation described in II Tim.3:7. Practical results are always expected!

Toward this end, all of these efforts are of value, but only as they enable faithfulness to the Lord Jesus and service to his people. As such, they deserve our most “strenuous effort”!

Word Study #160 – Revenge, Avenge, Vengeance

We saw in the previous posting how a flagrant error in the translation of paideuo has resulted in an incorrect focus on punishment, where the actual intent of several passages is actually education or training. A similar error has caused similar results, when one considers the common rendering of ekdikeo, ekdikesis, and ekdikos as “avenge, revenge, or vengeance” in spite of the fact that three out of the four lexical definitions deal with the vindication of a wronged person (or God himself) by an act of legal justice or remedy; the formulation of a verdict (either positive or negative) by a court of law; and the noun form's application to any legal advocate, whether of defense or prosecution.

None of these words appear frequently in the New Testament. Ekdikesis (6x) is traditionally translated “revenge” once (II Cor.:11), “punishment” once (I Pet.2:14), and “vengeance” 4x (Lk.21:22, Rom.12:19, II Thes.1:8, Heb.10:30). Ekdikeo (also used 6x) appears once as “revenge” (II Cor.10:6) and 5x “avenge” (Lk.18:3,5; Rom.12:19, Rv.6:10, 19:2). Ekdikos occurs only twice: once as “avenger” (I Thes.4:6) and once as “revenger” (Rom.13:4).

Revisit each of these passages, deliberately avoiding your normal assumption of vindictiveness, and imagine how you would read them if you assumed only the administration of justice, rather than retaliation. This is especially noteworthy if you consider the context – for example, II Thes.1:5-10, where the real burden of the message is one of justice for the faithful who have been mightily abused.

You might also find it useful to refer to the studies on justice (#3) and judgment (#9,10), where we also found it necessary to challenge the automatic presumption of a negative tone. Try to realize that one's assessment of the nature of any of these situations will depend entirely upon his choice of with which side he has decided to identify!

The same situation is true of the un-prefixed form, dike, which appears only three times. Especially instructive is the description of Paul's experience with the snake bite at the bonfire (Ac.28:4), where the local folks first assumed that dike (“vengeance” or “justice”) had caught up with an evil person, and then changed their minds and decided that he must be a god! So quickly does people's perception change!

The same word in Jude 7, applied to Sodom, can be interpreted more in line with prevailing stereotypes, but in Ac.25:15, it is simply a demand for a legal verdict.

In virtually every case, “to do or accomplish justice” would be a much clearer expression of the lexical meaning of the words. How, then, did both translators and interpreters become so obsessed with vindictiveness, and (often cruel) vengeance? I think the answer has at least two components.

One clue may be found in the vocabulary of the LXX – the Greek translation of the Old Testament. This would make it one
of the many errors which have at least a partial source in the reluctance on the part of many well-meaning people to realize that since Jesus came, THINGS HAVE CHANGED!!! Consequently, they treat both Testaments as if they were equivalent – which they are not. (See #148). But even so, it should be clear that most of the references, especially to the defeat of enemies, are recorded from the perspective of the Israelite kings and heroes. Only Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and a few of the minor prophets attribute destruction to the act of God – and for them, it is usually his judgment on their own nation, much more frequently than upon others. This, however, could be a partial source of the threats levied by members of ecclesiastical hierarchies to keep their (perceived) underlings subservient to their pronouncements.

Secondly, please remember that English translations were made more than a thousand years after the writing of the texts – well after the codification of “doctrines” and the rise of the hierarchical structures – and they were made, for the most part, at the behest of the powerful, to reinforce their dominance. (Have you ever read the introduction to the King James Version? I was shocked, when challenged to do so!) Threats, both “temporal” and “eternal” are a great way to do this.

To be fair, we must acknowledge that the concept of “punishment” does exist, although rarely, in the presence of two word groups which are correctly translated in that way. *Timoreo,* used only twice (Ac.22:5 and 26:11), refers to the persecution inflicted upon believers by Paul, before his conversion. Its noun counterpart, *timoria,* occurs only in Heb.10:9, a warning against overtly disparaging the Lord Jesus. A prefixed form, *epitimia,* also occurring only a single time, refers to the discipline of an erring brother (II Cor.2:6).

Of the other group, *kolazo* (Ac.4:21) refers to the Sanhedrin trying to figure out what to do with the apostles (how to “punish” them), but only once (II Pet.2:9) is it attributed to God. Its noun equivalent, *kolasis,* is used of the lot of those who had exercised no compassion (Mt.25:46). This is the only place where it appears with *aionion* (“eternal” – an uncertain translation – see #28) besides the Jude 7 use with *dike.*

Much of the threatening “evangelical” (gross misnomer) rhetoric makes lurid use of Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk.16:19-31), in which not one of these words appears! I will not attempt here to exegete that whole story, but will simply note its parallel to the Matthew 25 passage. In *neither paragraph* is any reference made either to what anyone “believed” or to any flagrant wickedness. All are judged simply for their lack of compassionate action.

There remains one admonition, however, that is worthy of note. *Regardless* of whether *ekdikesis* is interpreted as “vengeance” or as simple justice. It is the quote from Dt.32:35 in both Rom.12:19 and Heb.10:30, and addressed, in theme, in Jesus’ parable in Lk.18:7,8: that “vengeance / justice” is the responsibility of *God,* and not of the wronged individual. Although the Old Testament refers frequently to kings, warriors, or others, wreaking “vengeance” upon their enemies, there is no such reference in the New Testament!

All three reports in the Revelation – *ekdikeo* in 6:10 and 19:2, and *krino* in 18:20 – are the proprietary action of God, as are the assurances given by both Peter and Paul, noted above, of the eventual triumph of Jesus’ Kingdom.

Please note that this is NOT to excuse his people from their obligation to act in justice, and to seek it for others (see #3); but neither is it a license to usurp God’s sovereign prerogative to judge and to act.

For the citizens of his Kingdom, these words, like so many others that have been incorrectly used, are intended not as a threat, but as loving encouragement, as reassurance that under the sovereignty of our King, the eventual outcome will be consummately just and fair. We just need to leave it in his hands.

Thanks be to God!

**Word Study #161 – Lost, Lose, Loss**

There are groups with whom one cannot associate for very long without hearing a tear-jerking (or gleeful!) lament about the condition (and/or future prospects!) of “the lost” – by which they usually mean anyone who differs with their chosen theological perspective. As is usually the case with many artificial boundaries drawn around carefully proof-texted points of “doctrine”, this one requires exceedingly skillful verbal gymnastics to relate it even remotely to the New Testament text.

Only two Greek words are used here. One, the verb, *zemioo* (noun form, *zemia*), classically defined simply as “to cause loss, to do damage, to assess a penalty or fine”, appears only four times as a verb (Mt.16:26, Mk.8:36, I Cor.3:15, Phil.3:8) and twice (Ac.27:21 and Phil.3:7) as a noun. All but the first two, which we will treat with the more common word, refer primarily to material or financial losses.

The other word, *apollumi,* which Liddell / Scott characterizes as a stronger form of *ollumi,* an earlier word which does not appear in the New Testament, is a bit more problematic. It is listed as “to destroy utterly (usually referring to a death in battle), to demolish or lay waste, to ruin”, and in the middle or passive voice, “to lose one’s life or possessions, to cease to exist, to die, to be undone.”
Traditional translators have stretched the usage even farther, rendering the same word as “lost” 11x, “lose” 15x, “destroy” 28x, and “perish” 33x. Please remember that any choice in translation, when several options may be lexically valid, reflects the opinion of the translator, and as such, must always be subject to challenge. Who can say without question, for example, without additional information, whether a coin, a sheep, a child (Lk.15) is simply missing (“lost”), has died (“perished”), or has been deliberately “destroyed”? Even more germane to all the rhetoric about “the lost” is that in 92 appearances in the New Testament, no form of apollumi EVER appears with the adjective aionion (eternal)! The reference to “eternal destruction” in II Thes.1:9 employs a different (and much stronger) word for “destruction” – olethron.

In the much-quoted Jn.3:15-16, aionion is the modifier of zoen (see “Life”, #28), and NOT apollumi; and the phrasing in Jn.10:28 is identical with that in Jn.11:26 (with a different verb); the prepositional phrase eis ton aiona, literally “into/toward the ages”, which is usually translated “forever.” This is the reason for my choice in the PNT to correct the misleading “shall never die” to read “will not die forever” – neither Jesus’ “sheep” nor Lazarus had died “forever” – it was not a permanent condition! Paul picked up the same theme in I Cor.15:18, reassuring his readers of the promised resurrection of those who had already died.

With this background in mind, let us turn to a few specifics. Of the several different translations of apollumi, “lost” is the least frequent. In the gospels, it is applied to sheep (Mt.10:6, 15:24; Lk.15:4,6), a coin (Lk.15:8,9), scraps of bread (Jn.6:12), and only 5x to people: Judas (Jn.17:12, 18:9; a son/brother (Lk.15:24,32), and the folks for whom Jesus came seeking (Lk.19:10). Mt.18:11 is not found in the most reliable manuscripts. Paul, whose writings have been sliced and diced to “prove” so many “doctrines”, only uses the word once (II Cor.4:3) regarding people who have rejected the message of Jesus! (Twice more if you include the “perish” translations in II Cor.2:15, II Thes.2:10)

Traditional translators used “destroy” for the same word, apollumi, 28x. It’s what Herod (Mt.2:13) and the Pharisees (Mt.12:14, Mk.3:26, Mt.27:20, Mk.11:18, Lk.19:47) wanted to do with Jesus; and what demons / evil spirits tried to do with their victims (Mk.9:22, Mt.10:28) and feared that Jesus would do to them (Mt.1:24, Lk.4:34). Jesus contrasted this with his own intent to rescue (“save” – see #5) people (Lk.9:56,Jn.10:10), and challenged his critics that to refuse such rescue was the same as destroying them (Lk.6:9). In parables (Mt.21:41, 22:7, Mk.12:9) and historical references (Lk.17:27-29), he spoke of the destruction of those who had been deliberately unfaithful.

Paul (Rom.14:15) warned folks to be careful lest their perceived superior “knowledge” “destroy” others of tender conscience. “Damage” might have been better here. This theme recurs where the translators chose to render the same word “perish” in I Cor.8:11.

“Perish” is the most common of the translators' choices, and most frequently refers to the temporary, transitory quality of mortal life or material goods. Only in I Cor.1:18, II Cor.2:15, II Thes.2:10, and I Pet.3:9 is there any hint of a connection to having overtly rejected the message of the Lord Jesus, and it is presented there as a simple result, rather than an imposed penalty, for that situation. There is no reference to anyone who is ignorant of that message.

Finally, it is necessary to examine Jesus' statement, recorded six times in four different contexts, regarding the “saving” or “loss” of one's life. In every case, it is psuche that is referenced (please see the study on “life” in #28), and NOT apollumi; and the phrase is referenced (please see the study on “life” in #28), and NOT apollumi; and the phrase in Jn.10:28 is identical with that in Jn.11:26 (with a different verb); the prepositional phrase eis ton aiona, literally “into/toward the ages”, which is usually translated “forever.” This is the reason for my choice in the PNT to correct the misleading “shall never die” to read “will not die forever” – neither Jesus’ “sheep” nor Lazarus had died “forever” – it was not a permanent condition! Paul picked up the same theme in I Cor.15:18, reassuring his readers of the promised resurrection of those who had already died.

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The use of the same word for “loss”, however, is the same throughout. The final appearance of this theme is in Jn.12:25, in the prelude to the last week of Jesus' life on earth. Philip and Andrew had just brought word that some Greek sightseers, in town for the passover, wanted to meet Jesus, who was preoccupied with his imminent departure. Both participles are changed. Here, Jesus speaks of the one who “loves” (philon) his psuche (life / self / individuality) “losing” it, in contrast to the one who “hates” (mison) his psuche in this world guarding/keeping (phulaxei) it, into (eis) eternal life (zoen aionion). Notice the unique transition to the use of zoen in this passage, instead of psuchen, and refer again to the study of “life.”

If, therefore, one chooses to follow Jesus’ instructions and example, his focus will be on the work and welfare of the Kingdom, and not his own (or anyone else's) self-centered psuche “life” (or “soul!”)

Loss is certainly acknowledged (Phil.3:7,8), but not lamented – Paul calls it mere garbage – in comparison with its replacement: the glorious life – the zoen aionion – of the Kingdom!

**Word Study #162 – Find, Found**

“Find” is another word that has acquired a unique usage – which has little to do with its lexical properties – among people of “evangelical” persuasions, who love to talk about the magical-seeming effects when an errant individual “finds God” or “finds Jesus” – neither of whom, in case you wondered, has ever been “lost”!

“Find / found” is a very simple study, involving only one single Greek word, heurisko, for which the classical lexicography includes “to discover or find out; to devise or invent; to be able; to get, gain, or procure; to acquire or obtain;” or even “the price obtained at an auction!” Heurisko appears 174 times in the New Testament. Its grammatical object may be information, a creature or object, or a person.

For example, Mt.1:18 reports the discovery of Mary's pregnancy; Mt.26:60 and Mk.24:55 speak of the inability of Jesus' opponents to “find” adequate false witnesses against him; Lk.4:17 notes that Jesus “found” Isaiah's prophecy in the synagogue's scroll; and later, (8:18) Jesus' rather plaintive wondering if, at his coming, he would “find” any faithfulness on the earth.

There are indeed instances of people “finding” Jesus – but all refer simply to his physical location: the shepherds (Lk.2:12) after their angelic visitation; the Magi (Mt.2:8); Mary and Joseph when he stayed behind in the temple (Lk.2:45,46); the disciples who were hunting for him when he had gone off to pray (Mt.1:37); the crowds who were following him (Jn.6:25); and Andrew's excited report to Peter (Jn.1:41), “We have found the Messiah!” After Jesus' resurrection, the women “found” the stone rolled away from the tomb, and failed to “find” his body (Lk.24:2,3,23,24).

More frequently, it is reported that it was Jesus who “found” someone: Philip (Jn.1:43), a man from whom he had cast out demons (Lk.8:35); others whom he had healed (Jn.5:4, 9:35); merchants in the temple (Jn.2:14); the disciples sleeping in Gethsemane (Mt.26:40, 43; Mk.14:37,40; Lk.22:45).

In parables, he told of a master “finding” servants acting faithfully or unfaithfully (Mt.24:45-50, Mk.13:36, Lk.12:37-38,43); of one servant “finding” another (Mt.18:28); or a landowner “finding” workers to hire. Other parables deal with people “finding” mundane things like a treasure (Mt.13:44), a pearl (Mt.13:46), a coin (Lk.15:8,9); a sheep (Lk.15:4,5; Mt.8:13); a colt (Mt.21:2 and parallels), figs on a tree (or not) (Mk.11:13,21; Lk.13:6,7); or fish in the sea (Jn.21:6).

More significantly, Jesus also spoke of “finding” less tangible things. One of the most frequently quoted statements, Mt.7:7-10, and its parallel in Lk.11:9-12, contain no clear statement of what is to be “sought” or “found”. The word “find” has no direct object. Matthew refers simply to the Father “giving good things”, and Luke to his provision of the Holy Spirit. Jesus remarked that those who “find” the “road that leads into life” (zoen) (Mt.7:14) are few, but then seems to make a blanket offer of “rest for yourselves” – psuchen – (Mt.11:29) in companionship with him and in sharing in his work. Absorption into partnership in the work of the Kingdom provides welcome rest from the often desperate efforts at self-aggrandizement that occupy so many.

Here, we circle back to the discussion in the previous post, where we noticed that it is in the loss of one's psuche – the self-centered, self-focused life – that one “finds” or “enters into” the zoen aionion – the “eternal life” of the Kingdom. Please refer again to #28. The change of vocabulary regarding “life” is vital to proper understanding.

The 34 references in Acts are exclusively to locating people or acquiring information, except for a single mention in Ac.17:27 of the possibility of Gentiles earnestly seeking and “finding” God. Paul reiterates this hope in Rom.10:21, but in
most of his other writings, his concern is more for “finding” evidence of faithfulness on the part of his readers (Rom.4:1, 7:10, 7:18, 7:21, I Cor.4:2, II Cor.5:3, 9:4, 11:12, 12:20; Phil.3:9). Peter (I Pet.1:7, II Pet.3:14) and John (II Jn.4, Rv.2:2, 3:2, 5:4, 9:6, 12:8, 14:5) share the same concern.

At other times, “finding” is simply an acknowledgment of “the way things are”: Gal.2:17 – one's own need of the Lord's intervention, Phil.2:8 – recognition of Jesus' humanity, I Cor.15:15 – Paul's admission that he would be “found” a false witness if there were no resurrection. Pilate's testimony of having “found no fault” in Jesus (Lk.23:4,14,22 and Jn.18:38, 19:4, 19:6), and Jesus' group “finding” that Lazarus had already been buried (Jn.11:7) are similar simple statements of fact. The delightful discovery of a gracious healing (Mk.7:30, Lk.7:10,17:18) likewise is announced with the use of heurisko.

With deepest gratitude, then, may we together bend every effort to provide an affirmative answer to our Lord's question (Lk.18:8) “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faithfulness on the earth?”.

May he “find” us faithful servants, carefully following his instructions (Mt.24:46) #55, and (Lk.12:37-38) eagerly watching (#125) for his arrival!

**Word Study #163 – Sheep – their characteristics and care**

This is not really a linguistic study, but I think it is needed, due to many misunderstandings. In few cases is it more obvious that Bible translators and/or “scholars” are city people and academics with no real experience of rural life than when they turn to sheep. Some well-meaning folks through the years have undertaken to try to enlighten them – but even these cite only their experience with large commercial operations. Although wealthy individuals (like Abraham) in Biblical times, did own very large flocks and herds which were tended by others, this was not the norm in first century Palestine, especially among the “ordinary” folks who gathered to listen to Jesus. Most of them could have identified more readily with the poor man in Nathan's parable (II Sam.12:3) who had made a pet of his only ewe lamb. Common people lived very close to their few animals, not infrequently even sharing a section of their dwellings. Consequently, I think that my years of caring for a small flock (2-5 ewes and their lambs) can provide helpful, and even perhaps useful insight on these teachings.

My sheep were all pets – to the great amusement of the neighbors, many of whom were “real” farmers. It is not possible to become “personally acquainted” with individual animals in a large operation, where they are more likely to be numbered than named – so they were amazed when my sheep came running in response to being called by name (Jn.10:3). And they gradually stopped laughing when, due to close attention and careful observation, I began to experience more successful lambing and survival rates.

Sheep, whether wild or domestic, are flocking creatures. They seldom go off on their own. But as Jesus noted in parables, they can and do get lost (Mt.12:11-12, Lk.15:4-6). Interestingly, in neither case does Jesus say how it happened. Unlike many who claim to represent him, Jesus does not blame the victim! Perhaps the “lost sheep” was fleeing in panic from a predator (real or perceived). Maybe it was injured or weak, and simply could not keep up with the rest. Or it could have lingered too long in an especially tasty section of the pasture, and been inadvertently left behind. If it was a lamb, it might have been rejected by its mother ewe, or pushed aside by a stronger sibling. A lamb's exuberant bouncing and climbing could have taken it too close to the edge of a precipitous path. I saw most of these things among my own sheep – as well as seeing (or experiencing) them in churches!

For these, and many other reasons, sheep really need the care of a skilled and loving shepherd! I have had to physically restrain a reluctant ewe to get her to allow her lambs to nurse. It was not unusual that one needed help with a difficult delivery. Occasionally, my ignorance or inexperience was the unfortunate cause of the loss of a lamb, or even a mother. I had to learn by sad experience to identify and remove poisonous plants from the pasture, to take proper care of an injury to avoid infection, to keep their feet in good condition, and to separate the boy lambs from their sire before he attacked them as rivals!

It is also easy for me to identify with the shepherds (Lk.2) who were watching their flocks overnight! Normally, the flocks would have been herded into a sort of open courtyard at night, where a few men could guard them all (Jn.10:1-10). But that
would not be done in lambing season (which is good evidence that Jesus must have been born in early spring!) A crowded sheepfold could cause a newborn lamb to be stepped-on, a distressed ewe to be overlooked, or make it very difficult to sort out which lambs belonged to which mothers! Careful shepherds always spend the night with sheep who are near to delivery. The lives of both mother and babies depend on it!

Jesus remarked with great insight upon the plight of “sheep without a shepherd” (Mt.9:36,26:31; Mk.6:34, 14:27), and of “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt.10:6, 15:24) who had yet to recognize (or had refused to follow) the true Shepherd of the flock. Sheep depend on the shepherd constantly – for safety, for pasture, for shelter, for care. Most people who preach thundering warnings about the shepherd's “rod” are unaware that it is an instrument for the protection and defense of the sheep, not their punishment! With his rod, the shepherd held wild animals at bay, often at the risk of his own life (Jn.10:15). He could also use it to lift an injured animal to safety. The rod was used FOR – NOT ON – the sheep!

The translations of the associated verb, poimaino, also reveal the ignorance of the translators, who 7x call it simply “feed” (Lk.17:7, Jn.21:16, Ac.20:28, I Cor.9:7, I Pet.5:2, Jude 12, Rv.7:17), or 4x – wholly without linguistic justification – “rule” (Mt.2:6, Rv.2:27, 12:5, 19:15), despite the lexical definitions (L/S) “to tend and cherish, to guide and govern, to soothe or beguile”! Classical writers understood that sheep can only successfully be “tended/shepherded” with loving care! Nobody “rules over” them!

And folks who complain about not being “fed” in churches – or who advertise how well they are “fed” – are likewise missing the point. There are three different words that refer to “feeding” (providing nourishment). Bosko, “to feed, nourish, or graze”, appears 8x: six of them referring to pigs (Mt.8:30, Mk.5:11, 14; Lk.8:32,24 and 15:15), and only twice to people (Jn.21:15,17). 
Trepho, “to bring up or rear, to cause to grow, breed, or produce”, refers twice to birds (Mt.6:26, Lk.12:24), once to the woman in the desert (Rv.12:6), and once to the needy (Mt.25:37).
Psomizo, “to feed by hand” (implying very personal involvement) is used in Rom.12:20 of caring for one's enemy, and in I Cor.13:3 of caring for the poor.

The job of “shepherding” is much more comprehensive than that. The shepherd must be a vet, a midwife, a guide, a companion, and even a referee or mediator! Mopsy was our first sheep, and considered herself to be the absolute monarch of the barnyard. For years, a new sheep, or even the calf who arrived later, and the family puppy, had to be introduced to Mopsy and to pass her inspection before any of the others would accept their presence. If she lowered her head or stomped her foot, only prompt intervention would prevent the others from harassing the newcomer. Peacemaking could be a real challenge! But eventually, she apparently came to feel more secure, and showed less hostility to new arrivals. Even if successful at peacemaking, though, a good shepherd can guide his flock to good, healthful pasture, and drive off the predators, but the sheep must then do the grazing! Poimaino is a cooperative, not a passive, operation!

“The flock” is only referenced ten times – 3x referring to (4-legged) sheep (Lk.2:8, I Cor.9:7, 20), and the rest to a group of the faithful. Five of these latter use the diminutive form of poimne “flock”, poimnion. The use of the diminutive may simply indicate the small size of the group, but it is also frequently a term of endearment like the Spanish suffix -ito, -ita, or the German -chen. This is significant in Jesus' use of the term in Lk.12:32: “Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the Kingdom!” After a discourse about the trials they will face, this is intended to be an encouragement to those for whose welfare he cares deeply.

The safety – indeed, the very survival – of the flock depends upon their being kept together, where the shepherd can defend them, and see to their care. Perhaps these multiple responsibilities are part of the reason why Paul addresses the elders of Ephesus (Ac.20:28) and Peter writes to fellow-elders (I Pet.5:2) as a plural charge – Note (#42) that elders are always plural, and addressed together as a group. They are charged with the care and protection of their congregations, urged to “watch over the little flock” and be an example to them of godly living. Peter also specifically warns against any domineering or profit-making on their part.

Although Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is clearly capable of handling all these challenges and more, Jn.10:16 is illustrative that even he may find it a daunting task to build all of his sheep/followers into a single flock! He paid a high price for that accomplishment!

I think Peter may have glimpsed that reality when he addressed the elders at the end of his first letter. Review that entire chapter (I Pet.5) in the light of shepherds defending a flock both from predators and from their own ignorance or stubbornness (of which both 4-legged and 2-legged “sheep” have an abundant supply!), remembering that Jesus himself is the only “Chief Shepherd”!

The goal is a single flock, together, waiting to greet their Chief Shepherd with joy – both his and theirs!
Word Study #164 – “Coming”: Approach, Arrival, Presence

Just as many earnest followers of the Lord Jesus have been misled into the assumption that any real manifestation of his Kingdom is reserved for some dreamy never-never-land in the distant (or imminent) future (please refer to studies 19,20,21), they have likewise been duped by a similar distortion of references to his “coming”, and consequently missed out on both the intended enjoyment and the comfort of his present Presence among them! A few simple adjustments of vocabulary and grammar can correct this, and open amazing vistas for those of us whose faithfulness grows weary with waiting. Anticipation of the Lord’s return and participation in the reality of his presence need not be mutually exclusive!

Although there are many words in the New Testament which have sometimes been translated “come” or “coming”, only three – eggizo, erchomai, and parousia – refer with any frequency to either of the events commonly called “the Lord’s coming”, whether intending his first arrival or the eventual consummation. Most of the eleven prefixed versions of erchomai, and forms of baino, ginomai, eimi, histemi, lambano, poreuomai, and strepho, with or without prefixes, as well as heko, kataluo, kukloo, phero, phthano, choreo, and others – the total reaches more than 40 – are simply describing the movement of persons from one locality to another, either physically or intellectually. The nuances of these terms are interesting, and I commend their exploration to any of you who are my fellow “language-junkies”, but they are not germane to the subject at hand.

Perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the most revelatory of the biases of translators, is their treatment of eggizo. Historically and lexically, it is quite simple. L/S lists “to bring near, to approach, to be imminent,” or, with an infinitive, “to be at the point of doing something.” But it gets more complicated when one pays close attention to the tenses of that ordinary little verb. Only once does it occur in the future tense (James 4:8), and there, it immediately follows the same word used as an aorist (decisive) imperative! (Please consult a good grammar, or the very brief treatment in the appendix to my Translation Notes, for a discussion of verb tenses.)

All the rest are either present (in the process of happening) – eggizei – Mt.15:8 (footnote), Mk.11:1, Lk.12:33, 15:1, 18:35, 19:37, 21:28; Ac.9:3, 10:9, 22:6; Heb 7:19, 10:25; aorist (a single event that has already happened) – Eggisen – (the capital E indicates the Greek eta, a long “e”, to distinguish it from epsilon) – Lk.18:40, 19:29,41; 24:15; Ac.21:33, 22:15; Phil.2:30; or, most significantly, perfect (a past event or condition which continues, at least in effect, into the present and perhaps beyond) – Eggiken – Mt.3:2, 4:17, 10:7, 26:45,46; Mk.1:15, 14:42; Lk.10:9,11, 21:8,20, 22:1,47; 24:28; Ac.7:17; Rom.13:12, Jas.5:8, I Pet.4:7.

When the notion of “approach” is expressed in either of these “past” tenses, the meaning of the word is skewed toward the idea of “arrival.” Picture an airport notice-board: an “approaching” plane is marked “arrived” when it touches down, even though it takes a while longer until you can greet the “arrival” of passengers. But it is all one event. This has huge implications for Jesus’ announcements of the arrival of his Kingdom! Nearly all of those are expressed in perfect tenses! But far too many translators and commentators treat them as if they were future – or at least very tentatively present “approaches”! Very few take the pains to treat verb tenses in a uniform manner. Check it out!

Erichomai – “to come” – presents similar issues with tenses. When Jesus speaks of “having come” for a specific task or purpose, he almost always uses either aorist (Eltion) – Mt.5:17, 9:13, 10:34, 18:11, 20:28 and parallels; Mk.2:17, 10:35; Lk.5:32, 19:10; Jn.1:11, 9:39, 12:47; and referenced in I Tim.1:15 – or perfect (elElutha) tenses – Lk.5:32, Mk.9:1, Jn.3:19, 5:43; 12:46; Jn.4:2. Both of these are “past” tenses, in that they have already begun to affect the people or situations referenced. The primary exception is in expressions of time, which require the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive form, elthE, is grammatically characterized as a “vivid condition”, which is similar in structure to a purpose clause. Although there may be a future “flavor” to the statement, its imminence and certainty is not in question. The subjunctive verb is therefore cast in the aorist (past) tense, and usually rendered “when” or “until” an expected event has taken place. Examples are found in Mt.10:23, 25:31; Mk.8:8; Lk.9:26, 18:8, 22:18; Jn.15:26; Ac.2:20, 3:20; I Cor.4:5, 11:26, 13:10; I Thes.1:10.

Present (erchomai) and future (eleusetai) tenses seem to appear almost interchangeably. Prophecy frequently employed a present tense to communicate the certainty of its fulfillment (Mt.21:5 and parallels in Mk.11:9,10 and Lk.13:35, Mt.24:3, 42,44; Lk.12:40, Mt.26:64, Mk.13:26, 24:62; Lk.21:27). John, using the present tense, quotes Jesus in announcing that the prophesied time “now is” (Jn.4:21,23), as well as in reference to his return (Jn.14:3,28). Interestingly, though, he uses future forms (16:7-13) regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit after Jesus’ departure, and his promise (14:23) that he and the Father will both take up residence with his loving and faithful followers. I doubt that he intended that these statements should become “ammunition” for theological war games or trinitarian battles. I think it much more likely that his point is to assure his people of his continual present.

And “presence” is the primary lexical meaning of our final word, parousia, although unfortunately, it is not the primary translation (probably also due to theological bias). Parousia is derived from pareimi, a combination of the prepositional
prefix *para* (beside) and the verb *eimi* (to be), in participial form. L/S lists the lexical usage as “the presence of persons, the arrival or visit of a state official, or secondarily, one's belongings.” Traditional translators used this primary meaning only twice (II Cor.10:10, Phil.2:12), and 22x preferred “coming”, which is not listed at all in the classical lexicon. It is from this deviation, however, that intricate theories and diagrams have been spawned from the fertile imaginations of commentators. I have no interest in taking sides in their battles.

I will simply provide you with a list of all the appearances of *parousia*, and suggest that you spend some time examining each one for yourself, bearing in mind that the actual meaning of the word is “presence”. It only occurs 4x in the Gospels – all in Matthew – 24:3, 27, 37, 39. I wonder why: if it is as central a concept as some folks seem to assume? Other references are: I Cor.15:23, 16:17; II Cor.7:6, 7; Phil.1:26; I Thes.2:19, 3:13, 4:15, 5:23; II Thes.2:1, 8, 9; Jas.5:7, 8; II Pet.1:16, 3:4, 3:12; I Jn.2:28.

*Parousia* does not occur at all in the Revelation! Wouldn't you think it should, if the folks who tie the word, and the Revelation itself, exclusively to a final consummation, were correct?

Given the four instances (I Cor.16:17, II Cor.7:6, 7, Phil.1:26) where Paul uses *parousia* in simply referring to the comfort and encouragement derived from the presence of a beloved brother, might not similar encouragement be intended regarding the promised presence of the Lord?

Look, for example, at Jas.5:8, where both *eggizo* (in the perfect tense) and *parousia* are used. That “verse” is commonly quoted as a statement of anticipation (at best) or threat (at worst) of Jesus’ return. But what if brother James intended something more like “the presence of the Lord has arrived” (perfect tense)? Suddenly, we can hear him saying that the resources needed for the patience he is advocating, are available for us!

And what if Paul's statement (II Thes.2:8) of the annihilation of the “lawless one” is intended, not for some distant future, but as the triumph of light over darkness that John declared (3:19) at the very beginning, using a perfect tense of *erchomai*? The presence of light has ALWAYS destroyed darkness – and always will!

You can take it from there, exploring many of the other references. We would all be enriched, if you would share your observations as comments.

I believe it is the gracious intention of the Lord that his people live in the light of his presence – NOW – in order that we may give thanks with even greater enthusiasm at his final “coming”!

Thanks be to God!

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**Word Study #165 – Vision, Sight**

This is another fascinating investigation prompted by a reference at church to one of the incidents where Jesus restored the sight of a blind man, that segued into a question of what actually constitutes “vision” or “sight.” Although the common English usage tends to equate those two words, it is interesting that while classically, all three Greek nouns, *optasia*, *horama*, and *horasis*, could also refer to anything visible, or to the act of sight, in the New Testament, they uniformly refer specifically to supernatural revelations: and these are surprisingly few. If you can discern any pattern or reason for this, please add your insight!

With the exception of Jesus’ instructions to the disciples regarding their experience of his Transfiguration (Mt.17:19), and Paul's generic reference in II Cor.12:1, every incidence of any of these words involved an individual being provided with divine instructions or information that would have been accessible to him in no other way: from Zachariah in the temple (Lk.1:22) receiving a “heads-up” about John's birth, to news (Lk.24:23) of Jesus' resurrection! How else could Ananias (Ac.9:10,12) have connected with Saul, the persecutor, or Peter, still an observant Jew, (Ac.10:3, 17,19, 11:5) with Cornelius, the Roman centurion? It's no wonder that shortly thereafter, Peter was uncertain of the physical reality of his release from prison (Ac.12:19)! Macedonia had not been on Paul's agenda until his vision (Ac.16:9, 10). Notice that each of these experiences was sufficiently recognizable as being from the Lord, that it resulted in prompt obedience, as Paul noted later at his trial (Ac.26:19).

The verbs, on the other hand, present more of a challenge. In the New Testament, “ordinary” seeing is virtually always noted with verbs or participles. However, it is not always clear whether the “seeing” is natural or supernatural. There are five primary words translated “see” or “look”, and lexicographers seem to have found them as difficult to differentiate as we do. (The “other side” of this concept, when something or someone “appeared” to a person or group, will be considered later). Here, we are concerned with the observer's perspective.

Probably the easiest is *blepo* – L/S: “to have the power of sight, to perceive or be aware, to look or expect, to behold or see.”
The only times it refers to anything less physical is when combined with one of the other terms: notably the charge of “looking, but not seeing” (Mt.13:13-17, Mk.4:12, Lk.10:24, Ac.28:26), where there is a shift to a form of *eidon*; and accounts of healing where the result, *anablepo*, is used (Mt.11:5, 20:34; Mk.10:51,52; Lk.18:41-43; A.9:12-18).

*Anablepo*, L/S: “to look up, to recover one’s sight, to revive”, also describes Jesus’ gesture in prayer (Mt.14:19, Mk.6:41, Mk.7:34, Lk.9:16); his calling Zacchaeus out of the tree (Lk.19:5); and watching the rich folks at the temple treasury (Lk.21:1).  

*Horao*, L/S: “to look or see, to have sight, to pay attention, to behold, discern, or perceive; to observe, to look out or provide for”, and also “to see in a vision, to appear in a vision”, is also the etymological source of two of the nouns, *horama* and *horasis*.  Clearly, more than physical perception is indicated in references to “seeing God” (Mt.5:8, 24:30,64; Jn.1:18), “the Son” (Mk.13:26, 14:62; Lk.17:32, 21:27), or “the Father” (Jn.6:46, 14:7, 16:17) and to Zachariah's“vision” in the temple (Lk.1:22). Jesus’ post-Resurrection appearances may fall into both categories (I Cor.9:1, 15:5-8). Jesus reports his own experience, (Jn.8:38,57), and John refers in I Jn.3:6 4:20, and III Jn.11, to evidence that a person has not seen the Lord.  There is, however, no New Testament reference to purely physical blindness that employs *horao*, but it is this word with which, after listing things of which we cannot be certain in this life, John concludes (I Jn.3:2), “We do know that when he is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is!” Increased “exposure” to the Lord himself enables closer resemblance to his example!  

*Theoreo*, likewise, L/S: “to watch, look at, behold; to be a spectator at games, to contemplate or consider, to speculate”, although occasionally used in these rather mundane contexts, has clearly supernatural reference in the reaction of unclean spirits to Jesus’ presence (Mk.3:31, 5:15); Jesus’ statements in Jn.14:7, 19; 16:10,16, 17, 19, that “the world” cannot “see” him, in the vision granted to Stephen at his death (Ac.7:56), and Peter’s experience (Ac.10:11) noted earlier.  Jesus also used *theoreo* in Jn.6:40, 62 and 12:45, of disciples “seeing” either himself or the Father, and his promise that if a person “keeps his word” they will “never see death” (Jn.8:51) – a statement as enigmatic now as it was when he said it!  

The most difficult to sort out of all the words for “seeing” is *eidon*, which is the irregular aorist tense of both *horao* (to see) and *oida* (to know)!  It has no present tense form. Only the context can give a clue to whether it is “seeing” or “knowing” that is intended, so one must bear in mind that there is a sense in which they may be synonymous. Any choice is, of necessity, arbitrary, and open to challenge.  L/S lists “to mark or observe, to meet a person, to experience, to perceive, examine, or investigate, to appear or seem to be, to be acquainted with facts, situations, or individuals.”  Bauer adds “to become aware, consider, take note; to perceive what happened, to see with one's own eyes.”  A form of *eidon* commonly refers to a person “seeing” a supernatural vision (Mk.1:11, Jn.1:33, Lk.1:12,29; 9:32; Ac.7:55, 9:12, 10:3,17; 11:5,6,13; 16:10, and 48x in the Revelation).  It also describes situations which we might label as “insight”, understanding or perception, as in Jesus calling out his disciples or responding to crowds (too numerous to list), the Magi “seeing” (and recognizing the import of) a star (Mt.2:2,9,10); people flocking to John the Baptist (Mt.11:8,9 and parallels), or the Pharisees demanding to “see” a sign (Mt.12:38).  

The idea of evidence or experience is present in several post-Resurrection situations (Lk.24:39, Mt.28:6,17; Mk.16:5, Jn.20:20,29), as well as the statements about “seeing” or “not seeing” corruption/decay (Ac.2:27,31; 13:35-37) or death (Heb.11:5), the Kingdom of God (Jn.3:3, Mk.9:1), and miracles, signs, and wonders (Jn.4:48, 6:26).  

One aspect that may be unique to the New Testament is the combination of “seeing” with responding to a perceived need, both in the judgment scene of Mt.25:37-39 and the parable of the “good Samaritan” (Lk.10:31-38), an example that Jesus had set consistently throughout his ministry (Mt.5:1, 8:18, 9:36, 14:14, Mk.6:34, 9:14, and many others).  John, in his first epistle, uses *theoreo* for the same idea (3:17), and he and Paul (Ac.26:19) both clearly imply that genuine “vision” or “seeing” requires obedient response.  

Although a “vision” may be granted to the Lord's people in times of extreme stress for comfort or encouragement, as it was to Stephen (Ac.7:55) and Paul (II Tim.4:17, Ac.27:23, 18:9), its ultimate purpose is neither to serve as a warm cuddly blankie nor to create private, other-worldly ecstasy.  It is simply one of the many ways that the Lord makes assignments and supplies instructions, strength, and encouragement to his faithful people.  

It is also significant, from the opposite perspective, that the same word, *tuphlos*, is used for both physical (Mt.12:22, 21:14) and spiritual (Mt.15:14, 23:16-19, 24:46; Jn.9:39-41) blindness.  Even though the latter category is usually a matter of choice rather than misfortune, the remedy for both is also the same: accepting the gift – or restoration – of sight at the gracious hand of Jesus, and following him.  

Lord, open our eyes that we may truly see – and having “received our sight” (Mt.20:34, Mk.10:52, Lk.18:43), immediately get up and follow Jesus along the road!
Word Study #166 – Appear, Appearance

I thought this was going to be an easy one – a mere footnote to the previous study. Wrong again! In fact, it may even need a footnote of its own! The concept of “appear / appearance” in the New Testament is much more complicated than it – – well, than it “appears”!

References include four nouns and six verbs. The nouns can be rather easily sorted, and two of them are connected to study #165: eidos, connected to eidon, and opsis to optasia.

**Eidos**, L/S: “that which is seen, outward pattern or beauty, class, kind, or species; a situation or state of things, “form” - as in Plato – opposed to “substance”, (Bauer adds “outward appearance”) – occurs 5x in the New Testament, with four different translations: “appearance” in I Thess.5:22, “fashion” in Lk.9:29, “sight” in II Cor.:7, and “shape” in Lk.3:22 and Jn.5:37, although all of these bear the general idea of something readily visible.

**Opsis**, L/S: “the aspect, face, or appearance of a person or thing, visual impression or image, anything seen,” occurs only three times, each also translated differently: Jn.7:24, “judge not according to appearance”, Jn.11:44, Lazarus’ face had been covered for burial, and Rv.1:16 describes Jesus’ countenance. Here, too, even in the case of the heavenly vision, the reference is simply to what was seen by observer(s).

**Prosopon**, the common word for someone’s “face” (55x) or occasionally their “presence” (7x) – see #164 – is translated “appearance” twice: II Cor.5:12 and 10:7, both in contrast to what is actually true. Its rendering as “person” (Mt.22:16, Mk.12:14, Lk.20:21, Gal.2:16) has a similar flavor.

**Epiphaneia** (English cognate – “epiphany”), for which L/S includes “the manifestation of a deity to worshipers” in addition to the more mundane “appearance, aspect, coming into light or view, sudden appearance, dawn, the accession of an emperor to the throne, outward show, fame, or distinction” makes specific reference to an actual event, as opposed to something merely observed. It is used in the New Testament exclusively of the return of the Lord Jesus (I Tim.6:14, II Tim.4:1, 4:8, Tit.2:13, and II Thes.2:8 – where the traditional translators inexplicably substituted “brightness”), except for II Tim.1:10, which refers to the accomplishments of his first coming.

It is the verbs that present more of a challenge. The prefixed verbs are nearly evenly divided between natural and supernatural references.

**Anaphainomai**, occurring only twice, in Lk.19:11 speaks of the (mistaken) assumption that “the Kingdom should immediately appear”, but also simply of a boat having sighted Cyprus on its journey (Ac.21:3). Both forms are passive, although the translations are active. (More of this later.)

**Emphanizo**, “to show forth, exhibit, become or make visible, to exhibit in court, to declare or explain”, is most frequently courtroom vocabulary (Ac.23:15, 23:22,24:1,25:2,25:15) – and this is also one possible interpretation of Heb.9:24. However, it is also used of Jesus’ promise to “show himself” to his followers (Jn.14:21,22), and the appearance of other resurrected individuals after Jesus’ resurrection (Mt.27:53). All these verbs are active forms, except Mt.27 and Heb.9.

**Epiphainoo**, with only four occurrences, is also equally divided, using passive structures in Tit.2:11, 3:4, and active in Ac.27:20, and Lk.1:79. Its lexical information is similar, but also includes the phenomenon of dreams, visions, or divine manifestations (L/S) which, oddly, were not included in the classical information for emphanizo.

**Erchomai**, “to come”, is treated in #164, and was only once rendered “appear” (Ac,22:30), so we will not revisit that at this point.

Things become more complicated when we turn to the fifteen references listed for optomai. Lexicographers differ as to whether to treat this as a separate word, or in conjunction with horao, an irregular verb which we encountered in study #165 as simply “to look at, or to see.” Bauer calls it “a new present, formed from the aorist passive, ophthen, to let oneself be seen”, and notes that it is primarily used of the risen Christ. This is usually true, but not always. It is also used of heavenly messengers (Lk.1:11, 22:43), the Spirit's fire at Pentecost (Ac.2:3), Abraham (Lk.13:28), “life” (Jn.3:36), and even fellow-believers (Heb.13:23).

L/S considers optomai “a corruption of the middle voice opsomai, which only occurs in a future active form”, but the grammatical form is middle, not active. ALL of the 15 New Testament occurrences, however, are identified as aorist passive forms. Grammatically, one would have to translate such a form as “…..was seen by …” (a passive structure) rather than “…..appeared to …. ” (active). The accompanying dative case would allow either expression – the only difference being whether the focus was on the thing or
person seen, or the viewer.

Traditional translators used “see” (37x) for the same word, when it was found in the active voice – 21x in the future active tense, and also the 5x where the form is future middle. (The rest are aorist passive). None of these, however, refer to “ordinary seeing”. Except for the aberrant “you see to that” in Mt.27:4, 24 and Ac.18:15, all seem to be supernaturally enabled. This being the case, it probably matters little, if at all, whether it is the “appearance” or the “seeing” that is so enabled.

Similar anomalies occur with phaino / phainomai, where active, middle, and passive forms are also mixed. L/S lists active uses as “to bring light, to cause to appear, to show or make clear, to set forth or expound, to inform”; and passive, “to appear, to shine brightly, to become, to be manifest or revealed.” Actual New Testament instances, however, seem to interpret more active forms as “shine” (Jn.1:15, 5:35, II Pet.1:19, I Jn.2:8, etc.), and to reserve “appear” for passive and middle forms. These, however, are not all supernaturally occurrences. Although they are used of “the angel/messenger of the Lord” (Mt.1:20, 2:13, 2:19), “the son of man” (Mt.24:30), or “Jesus” (Mk.16:19), they are also used of weeds in a field (Mt.13:26), sin (Rom.7:13), mere outward appearance (Mt.23:27, 6:16-18), “the ungodly” (I Pet.4:18), and “ a vapor” (Jas.4:14).

This needs to be balanced with another word, phaneroo, only 12 times translated “appear”, but 28x “manifest” or “make manifest”. L/S lists “make manifest, reveal, make clear, disclose, make or become visible, make known or famous”. Thayer adds “to reveal something that was formerly hidden, to be plainly recognized.” The difference between these last two may be that there is an element of information or explanation in phaneroo, in addition to what is “seen.” Here too there are more passive than active forms, especially in the “manifest” translations. Active forms are used only in Jn.17:6, I Cor.4:5, II Cor.2:14, 11:6; Col.4:4, Tit.1:3, often in the sense of explaining things. The passive forms frequently (but not always) refer to Jesus’ first coming (Jn.17:6, I Tim.3.; 16, Tit.1:3, I Pet.1:20, I Jn.1:2, 3:5, 3:8-4:9, Jn.1:31, 9:3) and its results presently among his people (I Cor.2:14, 4:10, 5:11, 11:6; Eph.5:13, Col.1:26, 4:4; II Tim.1-10, Heb.9:8, I Jn.2:19), as well as his return (II Tim.1:10, I Pet.5:4, I Jn.2:28, 3:2, Rv.3:18, 15:4).

If, like me, you are inclined to wonder why it has to be so complicated, try out the “view” from another perspective, and marvel at the multiplicity of ways our gracious Lord has used, in his efforts to show himself, and demonstrate his ways, to his clueless people – US!

Some of these ideas may become clearer when we turn to the more accessible concept of reveal/ revelation. For now, I’ll just repeat my request that any of you who can add insight here, please do! Just hit the “comment” button, and join in!

**Word Study #167 – Reveal, Revelation**

Here, we will consider the last word group in this series (beginning with #165), and try to pull the topic together into a coherent picture.

Actually, there are two more words, but chrematizo, which usually applies to business dealings (L/S) and only rarely to divine directives (either Christian or pagan), is translated “reveal” only once, of Simeon in the temple (Lk.2:26), although the “warnings” of Mt.2:12, 2:22; Ac.10:22, and Heb.11:7 would certainly fall into that category, as would the instructions given to Moses (Heb.8:5), since they are overtly attributed to God.

We are primarily concerned with apokalupto, and its related noun, apokalupsis. Comprised of the prefix / preposition apo (away from), and the verb kalupto (to hide or conceal), it applies to the “uncovering” of information that was previously hidden – regardless of whether it had been deliberately concealed or was simply not obvious. L/S lists “to uncover, disclose, or reveal; to unmask”, and for the noun, “uncovering, unmasking, revelation”. Trench refutes Jerome's claim that the word “only exists in 'sacred Greek'”, by noting its use by both Plato and Demosthenes. He suggests that apokalupsis goes beyond merely “seeing” as described in earlier studies (especially horama and optasia), to include explanation, understanding, and instructions, as well. We saw a bit of this sense in phaneroo (#166) also.

In the New Testament, there is not a single instance where this “revealing” is done by anyone but God, unlike some of the previous words considered, nor is the content of the information, or the direction, sourced anywhere else. It may be delivered through another agency – “the Son” (Mt.11:27, Lk.10:22), “fire” (I Cor.3:13), “apostles and prophets” (Eph.3:5) or anyone else in the brotherhood (I Cor.14:6, 26, 30), but the source is unquestionably beyond any of those vehicles. This is probably most overtly stated in John's introduction to his account of the Revelation, where he declares, “(This is) Jesus Christ's revelation, which God gave him to show to his slaves [servants] …. ” (Rv.1:1). He then describes the “chain reaction” by which the message is to be disseminated.
Except for Paul's discussion in II Thes.2:3-12, where he is reminding his readers of the malevolent powers that deceive those who have refused (v.10) the truth, reassuring the beleaguered faithful that falsehood will not ultimately triumph (see also a similar phrase in Rom.1:18), the occurrences of apokalupto and apokalupsis are all concerned with instruction in faithfulness and/or encouragement regarding its final outcome.

There are directions given for specific situations – needed correction (Rom.2:5, I Cor.3:13, Phil.3:15, and the messages to the churches in Rv.2 and 3), personal assignments (Lk.2:32, Gal.1:12, 2:2; Eph.3:3), and the accurate understanding and communication of the message (Mt.16:17, Rom.1:17, Gal.3:23, Eph.3:5). But best of all, there are multiple assurances of “the glory to be revealed” at Jesus' promised coming, (Lk.17:30, Rom.8:18,19; 16:26; II Thes.1:7, I Pet.1:5,7,13; 4:13, 5:1), and the promised provision of all that is necessary to maintain faithfulness until that eagerly anticipated consummation (Mt.10:26, 11:25-27; Lk.10:22, 12:2; II Cor.12:1,7; Eph.1:17). Please notice that the few references to the destructive aspect of “revealed judgment” (Rom.1:18, II Thes.2:3-8) are addressed, not to “outsiders” who have been identified as “targets” for “conversion”, but to the faithful, as encouragement, that it is not the “bad guys” who ultimately win!

The over-arching purpose of “revelation” is preparing the faithful to share in the triumph of their King!

Whether that is accomplished through “vision” (natural or supernatural) that transcends our blindness (or myopia), or “revelation” in some other form – the mention of both optasias and apokalupseis in II Cor.12:1 implies that there must be a difference), or instructions or encouragement delivered by a “messenger” (natural or supernatural – see #140), the goal, and the end result for faithful disciples, is the same.

Like Moses (Heb.11:27), may we “hang in there” in faithfulness, regardless of adverse circumstances, “as one who is seeing (horon) the invisible”, and “pursue peace with everyone, and total devotion to God, without which nobody will see (opsetai) the Lord” (Heb.12:14), because “No one knows … who the Father is, except the Son, and the one(s) to whom the Son plans to reveal (apokalupsai) him” (Lk.10:22).

As our brother John, in his old age, wrote to the folks he had loved, taught, and served for many years, “Dear people, now we are God's children, and it hasn't yet been revealed (ephanothe) what we will be. We do know that when he is revealed, (phanerothe), we will be like him, because we will see him (opsometha) as he is!” (I Jn.3:2).

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #168 – Signs

Any discussion of the topics in the previous three studies, sooner or later, comes around, as did many of Jesus' first audiences, to the subject of “signs.” His opponents demanded a “sign” to authenticate Jesus' claims about his identity and his mission, but faithful disciples also pressed for “signs of his coming”, which they, (not Jesus), equated with “the end of the age”. These requests uniformly use “age” – aion – and not “world” – kosmos, although translators have often ignored this. Frequently, especially in John's writing, “sign” – semeion – is used to describe what other writers termed “miracles” (see #113), “mighty deeds” (see #31), or “wonders” (also treated in #113).

Classically, semeion is even more versatile than those few examples. L/S lists “a sign of the future (Herodotus), the trace or tracks of an animal (Hippocrates), a sign from the gods (Antiphones), a wonder or portent (Plato), a sign or signal to do something – usually indicated by flags – such as to put to sea, to begin or end a battle, or to commence work; a landmark, boundary, or limit; a signet on a ring, a watchword or war cry, a birthmark or other distinguishing feature, a logical or mathematical proof, evidence or example, a medical symptom, or a unit of time in music.” Bauer adds “marks in the landscape showing direction, a signal previously agreed upon, a warning, a mark of genuineness or authenticity.” Both Bauer and Thayer note “an unusual occurrence, transcending the usual course of nature,” the origin of which can be either divine or demonic.

So how is a responsible translator or interpreter to sort through all these possibilities? Very carefully, tentatively, and humbly. Try out some of these ideas wherever you are accustomed to reading “signs”.

It is interesting that in the synoptic gospels, the majority of the uses of semeion are in conversations with the Pharisees or scribes, who are disputing Jesus' authority. And this is after he has just given evidence, by his merciful use of power, of his godly provenance! (Mt.12:38-39, 16:1-4; Mk.8:11-12, Lk.11:16, 29-30). His retort (Mt.16:3), “Can't you see?” bears witness that the evidence they are demanding has already been supplied.
It is also significant that when his disciples asked about indications of his return (Mt.24:3, Mk.13:4, Lk.21:7), his response began with “Watch out lest anyone lead you astray!” (Mt.24:4, Mk.13:22). That is still excellent advice! Jesus attributes some “signs and wonders” to “false Christs and false prophets” (Mt.24:24). One may well wonder, then, if the “sign of the Son of Man” appearing in the heavens (v.30) may not refer simply to his actual arrival (#164) there described, which would be possible, considering the L/S reference to the “standard” of a commanding officer. Mark's parallel passage does not refer to a “sign”, but simply to Jesus’ appearance (13:26), although Luke 21:10, 25 are closer to Matthew's version. But notice, please, that none of these are intended to cause fear to the faithful! Trial, prison, even death, all end in triumph! Notice also, however, that nowhere are the Lord's people promised escape – whether by “rapture” (another word which does not exist in the New Testament) or in any other form – but rather endurance.

Inexplicably, in John's gospel, traditional translators almost exclusively substituted the word “miracles” for “signs”, although the word is uniformly “sēmeion” in Jn.2:11, 23; 3:2, 4:54, 6:2,14,26; 7:31, 9:16, 10:41, 11:47, 12:18,37. They did use “sign” in 2:18,4:48, 6:30, and 20:30 for the same word. It is hard to imagine that such translators would, like the Pharisees, refuse to see all of those events as “signs” – evidence – of Jesus' true identity! Evidence is also clearly the intent, in Jesus’ own prediction (Mk.16:17, 20) about “signs” as authentication of his representatives' connection with him, and accounts of its fulfillment in Ac.2:22,43; 4:16, 22,30; 5:12, 6:8, 7:36, 8:6,13; 14:3, 15:12, where sēmeion is used consistently, although here, too, the traditional translations are not uniform. Frequently paired with dunamis or terata (see #113), there is no question that these “signs” were miraculous demonstrations of the power of God, intended to authenticate both the message and its bearers. The critical point that needs to be understood, is that the purpose of any and all signs was/is to point beyond the event itself, or its effect upon the individuals concerned, to the King and the Kingdom that they represent.

I heard someone point out, in reference to both Jesus' promise mentioned above (Mk.16) and the account in Ac.8 of Philip's encounter with Simon, the Samaritan magician, (that he tried to buy into the program), that he had simply misread the grammar. Jesus spoke of signs “following” or accompanying the faithful – it is impostors who “follow” signs. Subject and object do make a difference! It is precisely such error against which Paul warns in II Thes.2:9 (also noted in Rv.13:14, 16:14, 19:20). A flamboyant demonstration of power may not be from the Lord. It is only a sign of his involvement when the accompanying message is clearly his (Mt.24:3, Mk.13:22).

Do you notice anything missing here? There are NO New Testament parallels to the Old Testament stories of individual heroes like Moses, Gideon, Saul, and others, asking God for a “sign” regarding action to be taken or information to be believed. In Jesus' Kingdom, there are no individual heroes! Jesus himself is the only superior, and he expects his people to be guided by his Holy Spirit and the discernment of the brotherhood (see “Following Instructions” #55). In the New Testament, any “signs” are provided at God's initiative and discretion – Lk.2:12, Jn.20:30, Ac.4:16, 15:12 – not on the demand of any individual.

Perhaps Paul summarized it best, in his observation recorded in I Cor.1:22

“Although the Jews demand a sign, and the Greeks are seeking wisdom, we are preaching [announcing, heralding] CHRIST!”

May we as his followers learn to do likewise!

Word Study #169 – Deceive, Deceivers, Deception

In view of the many warnings, in the previous studies and elsewhere, to be on guard against deceptive messages and people, it seems prudent to examine the subject.

One extremely important observation that should be kept in mind throughout, is that the vast majority of these warnings and admonitions are addressed in the plural. The counsel of a committed brotherhood is essential to responsible discernment, because an individual, however faithful or insightful, can much more easily be misled than can a mutually seeking, trusting group.

Secondly, it is crucial to note that “deception” represents at least four separate categories of threats. (These references are only a few examples. They are not exhaustive). Most obvious, of course, are the overt schemes of those individuals, natural or supernatural, who actively and deliberately oppose the Kingdom, its King, and its loyal citizens (Eph.4:14, 5:6; I Tim.4:1, II Jn.7). Harder to detect, and therefore perhaps a greater danger, are errors that emerge from within the disciple group itself (II Cor.11:13, II Pet.2:14, I Jn.2:26). Even more dependent upon the discernment of the brotherhood are the
errors of self-deception (I Cor.3:18, Eph.4:22, Jas.1:22,26; I Jn.1:8), or “wandering” caused by simple ignorance (Mt.22:29, Tit.3:3, Jas.5:20).

Sorting out the five nouns and nine verbs traditionally translated “deceit, deceive, deception, deceiver” gives some clue to the different ideas they represent, but they do not all fall into neat categories. Sometimes, the reference is primarily to self-deception: phrenapatao, deleazo, apatao, exapatao, paralogizomai, and planao are occasionally – but not always – used this way. But dolos, doliao, doloo, dolios, and katabrabeuo always describe external influences, and are never self-inflicted. Any of these, however, may be sourced either within or outside the disciple group: another reason for careful discernment in any faithful brotherhood.

Only once is any sort of deception said to have its immediate source in an act of God (II Thes.2:11), and that is the result of people's overt, deliberate rejection of his ways.

The lexicons are helpful, but no more precise in distinguishing among the various words. Apate / apatao, for example, (n) “trick, fraud, deceit; deception, seduction, wasting time, guile, treachery”, and (v) “to cheat or deceive, to seduce”, appears in Col.2:8 (intellectual), Eph.4:22, II Pet.2:13 (physical / psychological), Mt.13:22 (financial), II Thes.2:10 (judicial), as well as “spiritual” (Heb.3:13) contexts. Its source may be human (Eph.5:6), the serpent, or Satan himself (I Tim.2:14), or ones own self (Jas.1:26). Only twice is self-deception the focus: II Pet.2:13 implies that it is deliberate, while Jas.1:26 may simply refer to an error in judgment.

The prefixed form exapatao is merely an intensified form of the verb, and is found in Rom.7:11, 16:18; I Cor.3:18, II Cor.11:3, II Thes.2:3.

Dolos and its related words, doloo, dolios, doliao, on the other hand, are always deliberate, and never self-inflicted. L/S lists for dolos “bait for fish, any cunning contrivance for deception” (this was used of the Trojan horse, as well as the Pharisees and Judas scheming for Jesus' betrayal – Mt.26:4). Additional classical definitions include “a trick, trap, or stratagem; treachery – often implying an expectation of gain for the perpetrator.” This is the only word of this group that is used more than once in the New Testament. All indicate an active effort to mislead or destroy, whether the scene involves his enemies' efforts to do away with Jesus (Mt.14:1, 26:4); generally unsavory behavior (Mk.7:22, Rom.1:29); misrepresentation of facts to influence choices (II Cor.2:16, I Thes.2:3, I Pet.2:22 where the traditional translation uses “guile”); hypocritical action and attitudes (Jn.1:47, I Pet.2:1, 3:10; Rv.14:5); or overt opposition to the truth of the gospel (Ac.13:10).

The other words each appear only a single time.

Doloo (L/S – “to disguise, to alter, adulterate, or falsify a substance”) is used in II Cor.4:2 of the distortion of true teaching. Doliao (v) and dolios (n), L/S – “to deceive” and “treachery” respectively, appear in Rom.3:13 and II Cor.11:13. Paralogizomai – L/S – “to defraud, to reason falsely, to disguise, to mislead by false reasoning”, (Bauer – “to deceive or delude, defraud, or distort”, and Thayer “to cheat by false reckoning”) appears only twice: Col.2:4 as an external threat, and Jas. 1:22 as self-deception – perhaps both by assuming rational arguments. Phrenapatao (v) and phrenapates (n), (Bauer – to deceive or mislead oneself or another), each with a single appearance, may likewise be either internal (Gal.6:3) or external (Tit.1:10) in origin.

This is also true of deleazo, traditionally translated once “beguile” (II Pet.2:14), once “allure” (II Pet.2:18), both external, and once “enticed” (Jas.1:14) of one's own inappropriate behavior. L/S defines this as “to catch with bait, and Bauer treats it in tandem with dolos.

Katabrabeuo. L/S “to deprive of one's rights, or of a deserved prize”; and Thayer, “to bribe a judge to condemn someone”, appears only in Col.2:18, where Paul is seeking to counteract the influence of philosophical syncretism in the church.

By far the most frequently used of all the terms are planao, plane, planos. This group is also the most diverse in usage. L/S lists for the verb, planao “to lead astray, mislead, or deceive; to cause to wander”, or in the passive voice, “to digress, wander or stray, to be in doubt or at a loss.” Bauer adds “to be mistaken in judgment”. For the noun, plane, L/S has “wandering, roaming, going astray, illusion, deceit, imposture” and Bauer adds “error, delusion, deceit, any false concept”. For the noun planos L/S reads “error, deceit, wandering, or, if a person, a vagabond or impostor.”

This is the only one of the plethora of terms that may also refer to innocent ignorance, where the parable in Mt.12:12,13 refers to a wandering sheep, and Peter uses it metaphorically (I Pet.2:25, and II Pet.2:15) of people who are equally confused. These errors can be consciously avoided, since one of the primary causes is “ignorance of the Scriptures and the power of God”!

If you need incentive to study, there it is! But study carefully and selectively, bearing in mind that there are some who “handle deceitfully” (II Cor.4:2) even “the word of God”. These are described in more detail in II Cor.11:5-15. (An easy test: is the “teacher” making a profit from his “teaching”?)

Those being “taught” can – and should – simply refuse such enticements, confident that they do not come from the Lord!

Sorting them out is not always easy: but we have been provided a resource of inestimable value, if we have the counsel of an interactive brotherhood, informed by mutual seeking after faithfulness, and empowered by the Spirit sent for the purpose
by our risen Lord. Peter emphasized the need for transparent honesty patterned after Jesus himself (I Pet.2:1, 2:22, 3:10), and John (I Jn.4:1-6) provided detailed instructions for the needed discernment. James (5:19,20) chimes in with his admonition to watch out for one another’s welfare.

May we do so faithfully!

Word Study #170 – Whose Prisoner are you?

I owe this study to our brother Solomon, who, during the course of his recent message, commented, “We have a choice: it’s up to us, whether we are the victims of men, or prisoners of Christ.” He noted that Paul had made exactly that choice when writing from a Roman prison to the brethren in Ephesus (Eph.3:1, 4:1).

Bonds (literally being chained or tied up) and imprisonment were no foreign concept to first-century disciples. It was a fact of life. Not only the Roman occupiers, but also the Jewish hierarchy constantly threatened both – and even summary execution – in their efforts to thwart “the glorious liberty of the sons of God.” And hundreds, then thousands of the faithful made the same choice. Nothing infuriates an oppressor more than “victims” who refuse to be intimidated!

Most of us today do not face such dire circumstances, although we should constantly remember those who do. Oppression takes many forms, and it is not always the result of either faithful or unfaithful behavior. Remember the geopolitical situation in which the New Testament accounts were sited. Although some people were imprisoned for actual crimes (Barabbas, or the thief next to Jesus on the cross), the vast majority had simply run afoul of powerful people (John the Baptist, Paul, and even Jesus himself), or simply succumbed to debt (several parables) due to their abject poverty.

The four words translated “prison” have little ambiguity. Although oikema – used only once in the New Testament – in addition to “prison” may also refer to a room, a dwelling, a cage or stall, a storeroom, a workshop, a room in a temple, or even a brothel (L/S), its use in Ac.12:7 is clear from the context. Likewise, teresis, translated once “prison” (Ac.5:19), once “hold” (Ac.4:3), and once “keeping” (I Cor.7:19) the commands of God, although its classical usages extended to “watching, safekeeping, guarding, preservation, observance, vigilance” (L/S) as well as “custody”, has fairly obvious reference in each case. The verb form, tereo, is common with respect to “commandments.”

Desmoterion, appearing only four times, and defined simply as “prison or jail” in all three lexicons, etymologically is composed of desmos (“bonds”) and terion (“place”). It is used of the confinement of John the Baptist (Mt.11:2), Peter and John (Ac.5:21, 23), and Paul and Silas (Ac.16:26).

Phulake, on the other hand, besides being more frequently used (39x), covers considerably more territory. L/S lists “watching or guarding, a station or post, a watch of the night (see #125), a prison, guarding, keeping, or preserving – whether for security or custody, precaution, or safeguard.” The references in Mt.5:25, 18:30, and Lk.12:58, clearly relate to imprisonment for debt. Mt.14:3,10; parallels in Mk.6:17, 27; and the briefer references in Lk.3:20 and Jn.3:24 concern John the Baptist. The reason for the incarceration mentioned in Mt.25:36, 39,43, 44 is not given. Barabbas (Lk.23:19, 25) was in prison for sedition and murder. Although Peter, having boasted of his willingness to follow Jesus to prison (Lk.22:33), soon backed off from that bravado, he later defied the authorities and took the consequences (Ac.5:19, 22, 25 and 12:4, 5, 6, 10, 17), both times experiencing miraculous deliverance. Neither he nor anyone else seems to have expected such rescue to be the norm, however, as attested in Heb.11:36, and evidenced by his own reaction to the second such incident (Ac.12:11).

Paul never tried to deny his former role in dragging the brethren off to prison (Ac.8:3, 22:4, 26:10), but balanced it with accounts of his own “jail time” (II Cor.6:5, 11:23), which Luke augments in Ac.16:23, 24, 27, 37, 40.

One may well wish that Peter (I Pet.3:19) and John (Rv.18:2, 20:7) had been more specific about the “prisons” to which they refer – but then, I guess folks who love to speculate about such things could not spin such fantastic theories, and they would be disappointed! I do not choose to play their games.

Notice, please, however, that God does not imprison anyone! The devil does (Rv.2:10), and so do the agents of civil and religious hierarchies, as noted above. It is never represented as “God’s will!” Jesus announced his mission (Lk.4:18,19) as bringing release to captives!

So who are these captives/prisoners?
Here, we encounter two groups of words.
Aichmalotos (the person) and aichmalosia (his condition), with their verb forms aichmaloteuo and aichmalotizo, refer
specifically to “captives” and “captivity” strongly connected to prisoners of war. These unfortunates were usually forced into slavery, rather than being thrown into prison – though neither was a happy lot. (Please see #100 for a treatment of slavery.) These terms are rarely used: Jesus' "inaugural address" in Lk.4:18,19, and its fulfillment described in Eph.4:8 – note that this happened at his resurrection/ascension – the tenses are past, not future!; Jesus' warning (Lk.21:24) of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem; Paul's description of his former enslavement to “sin”/failure (Rom.7:23), and the same brother's later admonition to “bring every thought into captivity to Christ (II Cor.10:5). Three times, he made reference to those who were his “fellow-prisoners” – suanaichmalotos – Andronicus and Junia (Rom.16:7), Aristarchus (Col.4:10), and Epaphras (Phm.23).

Desmios (L/S) “bound, captive”, (Bauer) “anyone in prison”, appears 15x. It refers to Barabbas (Mt.27:15, 16; Mk.15:6), the others who were in the Philippian jail (Ac.16:25, 27), and Paul (Ac.23:18; 25:14, 27; 28:17). Heb.13:3 expresses concern for all of the faithful who suffer imprisonment.

But most significant are Paul's statements in Eph.3:1, 4:1; II Tim.1:8, and Phm.1,9, where, although confined by the civil authorities at the behest of the Jewish hierarchy, he calls himself “the prisoner of Jesus Christ!” The grammatical form is a simple possessive. Neither civil nor religious oppressors can claim final ownership of one who belongs – by his own deliberate choice – to the King of Kings! Years earlier, Paul had explained, (Rom.6:16) “You are slaves / servants to whomever you (choose to) obey!” And he had made that choice.

Desmos also refers to imprisonment, either literal or figurative. L/S adds “anything for tying or fastening, a door latch, mooring cable, bonds, a spell, or a chain.” Bauer notes “the bond that prevents a mute or crippled person from normal function”, Physical restraints are indicated in Lk.8:29, Ac.16:26, 22:30, 26:29, 31; healing in Lk.13:16; and imprisonment in Ac.20:23, Phil.1:7, 13, 14, 16; Col.4:18, II Tim.2:9; Phm.10, 13; Heb.10:34, 11:36. When the English word “bonds” applies to slavery, it is usually taken from doulos (see #100).

Here, as with suanaichmalotos, a prefixed form, sundesmos, is significant. In both cases, the prefix “sun-” which is also the preposition “with”, thereby conveying the sense of “together”, alters the root word. L/S lists “a union, anything that binds together, sinews or ligaments, civil or political union (to form a state), a conspiracy, the fastening of garments, the connection of heavenly bodies.” It appears in Ac.8:23, where Peter diagnoses Simon's “bondage to iniquity”, but in Paul's letters the tone is much more positive. In Eph.4:3, he urges the maintenance of “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”, in Col.2:19, he emphasizes the need for coordination of the Body of Christ – the faithful – by the proper working of its “joints and ligaments”, and in Col.3:14, describes love as “the bond of maturity [perfection] (see #13.) Paul also reassures Timothy (II Tim.2:9) that despite his own imprisonment, “the word of God is not imprisoned!”

So brother Solomon's suggestion was not only insightful, but absolutely correct. Regardless of circumstances – personal, religious, or political – we do have a choice. Not necessarily of the circumstance, but definitely of its interpretation, its effect, and our response.

Whose prisoner are you?

Word Study #171 – Epiphany

When I was asked to prepare a Jan.6 message for our congregation, my initial reaction (born of childhood memories of little boys in bathrobes and tinfoil-and-construction paper “crowns” stumbling through inane recitations about the esoteric implications of gold, frankincense and myrrh!) was a distressed “OH, NO!!!!” But I have learned, over many years, that accepting a challenging assignment just may result in actually learning something – and this was no exception.

The label of this “Feast Day”, designated by liturgical traditions as “Epiphany”, is the English cognate derived from the Greek word, epiphaneia, (treated briefly in #166, “Appear”), which is used only six times in the New Testament, but quite frequently in classical writings. L/S lists “appearance (as opposed to reality), coming into light or view, daybreak, dawn, a manifestation of divine power, the accession to the throne of an emperor, the manifestation or appearance of a deity to a worshiper, outward show or fame.” The New Testament references pertain exclusively to Jesus' eventual return in glory, but strangely, that event is not included in any of the historical or liturgical references to “Epiphany”. And the word does not appear in any of the scriptures assigned to its celebration!

The western church usually celebrates Epiphany as the time of the arrival of the “wise men” or Magi, which some of them then expand to refer to the inclusion of Gentiles among the people of God.

Some Eastern Orthodox groups observe Jan.6 as the “correct” date of Jesus' birth – the discrepancy with Dec.25 involving the Julian vs. the Gregorian calendars – although it is unlikely that either represents Jesus' actual “birthday”. Others link it to Jesus' baptism by John, and subsequently to their own baptism.
Coptic and Syrian communions connect it to recognizing Jesus as “the Light of the World”, and are thought to have adopted the timing of the celebration to counteract the solstice / sun-worship of surrounding cultures.

All three of these perspectives are worth celebrating, whether or not their calendars are technically correct. I would like to suggest a few observations, usually neglected, from the Biblical accounts concerning each one of them, and recommend them all as worthy of further study.

First: the Magi, the “wise men”. Notice in Mt.2:1-12, the only place they are mentioned, that we do NOT know who they were, where they came from, how many there were, or when they arrived. Through the centuries, elaborate traditions have turned them into “kings”, concluded that there were three (probably because of the mention of three gifts), named them, assigned them racial and cultural identities and biographies – none of which are derived from the gospel account. So – What DO we know?

Matthew calls them “magi” – the source of the English word “magic”, and the same word used to describe Simon the sorcerer in Ac.8:9! – and says simply that they were “from the east.” This, and their following of a star, strongly suggests that they were astrologers – a practice sternly condemned in Old Testament law (Dt.18:9-14), and often punishable by death! An overland journey from Babylon or Persia – both east of Palestine – where such studies were common, would have taken months, if not years. (Certainly more than 12 days!) Notice that after finding out when they had sighted the star, Herod ordered the massacre of all the babies under the age of two!

Much has been made – also totally devoid of Scriptural evidence – of the so-called “spiritual” implications of the gifts. But one obvious element is consistently overlooked: Not only were/are gold, frankincense, and myrrh extremely valuable, but they are also very portable! A small quantity represents great value. The little family was soon to undertake a long and perilous journey, and to spend several years as refugees in a foreign country. Might this not have been God's very practical provision to finance their exile (whether the donors knew it or not)?

Matthew's brief conclusion, too, is often overlooked: After the visitors offered their gifts and worshiped, “they went home by another road.” Has anyone truly worshiped, who does not thereafter, wherever he goes, take “another road”?

It took many years, and many more deliberate interventions by the Lord – Jesus' welcome and healing of foreigners, Peter's encounter with Cornelius, the brotherhood at Antioch, the Jerusalem Conference – before Jesus' disciples finally caught on to the message that Paul called “the mystery hidden from the foundation of the world, but now revealed ...” that Jesus came to include all sorts of people in his Kingdom. But even though the idea can be found in some older prophetic writings, it is possible that this was indeed the first tangible demonstration of overt inclusion – and as such, it is certainly worth celebrating!

The Orthodox celebration of Christmas on Jan.6 is a subject that requires historical rather than Biblical study. But the link with Jesus’ baptism by John (Mt.3:13-17), has also become rather convoluted. It is sometimes scrambled with his presentation in the temple, in order to justify the practice of infant baptism, but the fact is (Lk.3:23) that Jesus was 30 years old when he was baptized, and embarking on his public ministry.

A more serious scrambling occurs in the failure to distinguish between John's baptism, and the baptism of Christian commitment. This failure dates at least all the way back to Paul's visit to Ephesus (Ac.19:1-7), where he found a group of disciples who had been taught an incomplete message that had included only “John's baptism” – which Paul immediately undertook to correct. He explained that John had preached “a baptism of repentance” in preparation for Jesus' arrival. “Clean things up! The King is coming!” John called for confession and repentance – a radical change of life and behavior. Clearly, both he and Jesus realized that Jesus had no such need, and neither is mentioned in the description of his baptism. The significant points in this scene are three:

First is Jesus' interaction with John, who had rightly recognized Jesus' superiority. Without abandoning that true identity, Jesus nevertheless refused to avail himself of the privileged status he deserved – a pattern he followed throughout his life, and one urged upon his followers on many occasions (Phil.2).

Secondly, Jesus set an example of recognizing and supporting the calling of others. John had not been certified, “ordained”, or otherwise endorsed by any existing hierarchical or ecclesiastical organization. His only credential was his obedience to the call of God. By his action, Jesus made a powerful assertion that he supported such obedience.

Third, it is after the baptism that the Holy Spirit gives testimony to Jesus' identity as God's obedient and dearly loved Son. This marks a sharp transition in the content of the practice and teaching of baptism.

The baptism of disciples “into the Name [identity – see #24] of Jesus” is a totally different affair from John's version. One of the best summaries is offered by Paul in Rom.6:4: “We were buried together with him through baptism, into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might live a completely new life!” Nothing is said here about “confession” or “repentance”! Christian baptism represents the definitive end of one
life and the **beginning** of another! (I have devoted a whole chapter – ch.10 – to this in *Citizens of the Kingdom.*) The “fuel” for Kingdom living is not continual mournful repetitions of “confessions” and “repentance”, but rather the power of **resurrection life**, in union with Jesus and his people!

As we celebrate in Epiphany both Jesus' baptism and our own, perhaps we would do well to pay greater attention to the difference between John's and Jesus' versions of baptism, and to renew our own commitment to a life of resurrection with him!

And finally, with our Syrian and Coptic brethren, we celebrate the coming of Light into the world. Not only has “the One who said, 'Light will shine out of darkness' shined in our hearts” (II Cor.4:6), but he has personally commissioned his people (Mt.5:14) to mediate that light to the world! This, incidentally, is another place where the admonition is addressed in the **plural**. It can only happen in the gathered group of his people! “Shining the Light” was never an individual assignment! As John noted (3:19-21), some folks will welcome that light, and celebrate the glory of God; others will seek to hide in the darkness, lest their nefarious schemes be discovered. Some will even try to extinguish it. But the **Light has come**! Darkness can ultimately neither understand nor defeat it. As Paul affirmed bluntly, “Once, you all were darkness; but now you are light in the Lord! **Behave as children of light!**” (Eph.5:8) There is additional treatment of Light in #75.

So, let's do celebrate Epiphany: the dawn, the coming of Light, the accession of our King to his rightful throne!

Give thanks for the revelation of the Light to the world, and the privilege to participate in its shining!

Reflect on your own Resurrection Life, that began when you chose to be baptized into the Kingdom, and continues as we all learn to walk together among his people!

And with the Magi – whoever they are, wherever they came from, and whenever they arrived – let us worship together, and go forward by a different road!

**Word Study #172 – Escape vs. Enlistment**

It seems as though every announcement of yet another “world crisis” – of which there has never been a scarcity – invariably gives birth, among the very vocal advocates of a particularly aggressive “evangelical” orientation, to an increasingly urgent campaign which represents “accepting Christ” – which is NOT a New Testament concept – see #133 – as the exclusive route of “escape”, not only from the immediately perceived threat, but from some “eternal” manifestation thereof.

Never having noticed such a theme in the New Testament, I decided to undertake a deliberate search, only part of which could involve actual “word study” (the word “escape” does appear, but in very different contexts), and the rest requiring a careful perusal of the Gospels to discover Jesus' own methods of “recruiting” or enlisting followers.

“Escape” was traditionally used to translate seven different Greek words, but was used only twice by Jesus himself. Once, Lk.21:36, using *ekpheugo*, he is encouraging single-minded faithfulness on the part of his disciples, in order to “stand before the Son of Man” after either the destruction of Jerusalem or perhaps his final coming. The distinctions between those events are clear only to people who are trying to “prove” their own pet theories. The other, using *pheugo*, which is Jesus' **only** recorded threat of “the judgment of hell”, occurs in his stern critique of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who were **actively opposing** his ministry (Mt.23:33). It is **never** used of the ignorant.

It is quite enlightening, however, to examine the other uses of the various words.

By far the majority are related to the common word, *pheugo*, and its prefixed variants. According to L/S, the primary use of *pheugo* is “to flee or take flight, to take refuge, to purpose or endeavor to get away”. In fact, 26 of its 29 occurrences are traditionally translated “flee”. Of these, 18 (Mt.2:13, 8:33, 10:23, 24:16, 26:56; Mk.5:14, 13:14, 14:50, 14:52, 16:8; Lk.8:34, 21:21; Jn.10:5,12,13; Ac.7:29, 27:30; Rv.12:6) refer simply to running away for one's own physical safety, as does one of the “escape” translations (Heb.11:34).

John the Baptist spoke of “fleeing from the coming wrath” (Mt.3:7, Lk.3:7), but **Jesus did not**! Of greater significance are Paul's admonitions regarding what his readers **should** “flee from”: I Cor.6:18 – perversions, I Cor.10:14 – idolatry, I Tim.6:11 – “these things” (he has been talking about the pursuit of wealth), and II Tim.2:22 – “youthful passions”.

James (4:7) assures us that even the devil will “flee” from those who resist him. Peter, in his second letter, uses the prefixed form, *apopheugo*, (L/S – “to avoid, flee from, escape) in similar advice regarding “the corrupt passions of the world” (1:4), “depraved human passions (2:18), and “the world's contamination” (2:20).

*Diapheugo* (L/S – “to escape, get away, survive”) appears only once, regarding prisoners escaping during the shipwreck
Ekphuego (L/S – “to flee or escape, to be legally acquitted, to escape death, to omit”) refers to Paul's escape from Damascus (II Cor.11:33), as well as warnings to the faithful not to neglect or be careless about their commitment to following instructions (I Thes.5:3, Heb.2:3), and to exercise caution in judging others (Rom.2:3). In the Revelation, “fleeing away” concerns, not people at all, but “every island” (16:20) and even “heaven/the sky” itself (20:11)!

Diasozo (L/S – “to preserve through danger, to come safely through, to recover from an illness, to preserve, maintain, or keep”) describes safety in a shipwreck (Ac.28:1,4; 27:43,44) or flood (I Pet.3:20), healing (Mt.14:6, Lk.7:3), and the safe transport of a prisoner (Ac.23:24).

Out of a couple hundred uses of exerchomai (literally, “to come out”) traditional translators chose “escape” only in Jn.10:39, of Jesus avoiding arrest.

There are only two uses of a noun form, ekbasis (L/S – “a way out, termination, completion, accomplishment”). I Cor.10:15 promises divine provision in times of stress (traditionally “a way of escape”), although extra-Biblical uses of the word tend more toward successful endurance than avoidance. In Heb.13:7, the same word was traditionally rendered “the end”, where “result” would have been more accurate.

Significantly, except for John the Baptist and the single instance of Jesus with the Pharisees noted above, the use of any of the “escape” words is almost entirely mundane and practical, and neither “spiritual” nor a matter of “destiny”. And Jesus himself never offered any form of “escape”, either immediate or future, as an incentive for enlistment in his Kingdom. Quite the opposite! He repeatedly emphasized the high cost of faithfulness!

I was interested, and somewhat surprised, to discover that the gospels record very few instances of Jesus actually taking the initiative to invite someone to join his group. The synoptics describe the “calling” of Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew (Levi) with a simple “Follow me!” and the offer to “teach you to fish for people” (with no further explanation – although that lack does not inhibit expansive elaboration by many self-styled “teachers”!) Interestingly, Luke (5:10) records Peter’s profession of his purported “sinfulness” – which would have surely been pounced-on by modern “evangelists” – being summarily dismissed without comment by the Lord himself, and followed by an invitation to get involved in the work of the Kingdom!

John includes several general invitations: “Come and see!” to Andrew and his companion (1:39), later repeated by Philip to Nathanael (1:46), an offer of water to the thirsty (4:10, 7:37-39), life itself (5:21-29, 40), and true freedom (8:30-36). There are many more instances recorded of Jesus teaching those who were already following to some degree, than overtly recruiting.

Even more interesting is Jesus' response to people who, on their own initiative, volunteered to follow him. Mt.8:18-22, Lk.9:57-62, 10:17; Mt.16:21-28 and parallels, and 19:16-22 all focus, not on escape to safety from worldly or other-worldly perils, but on the expectation of homelessness, abuse, persecution, and the necessity of making loyalty to Jesus and his Kingdom one's absolute priority (Mt.22:1-7, Mk.9:43-48, Lk.9:23), even in the event of the loss of life itself, after the pattern of Jesus own personal expectation.

Jesus never offered anyone a “free one-way ticket to glory”, or a promise of “going to heaven when they die” (see #118 and #119). If you can find any such references, please contribute them.

Notice in the much-quoted interview with Nicodemus (Jn.3) that the discussion is about entering – or seeing – the Kingdom, not “heaven”! Those two are never equated.

To the young man who inquired about “eternal life” (see #28), the instruction was to use his wealth to look after the poor, and personally to follow Jesus. (Mk.10:17-22)

When a man who had been healed begged to follow him (Mk.5:18), he was gently told to go tell the folks at home what Jesus had done.

Jesus did offer on-the-job training (Mt.11:28), peace amid fierce opposition (Jn.14:27-31, 15:18 through most of chapter 16), and both the ability and the authority to represent him (Mt.10:1, Mk.3:14-15), as well as constant companionship (Jn.13-17) and eventual resurrection (Jn.6:40), but these were addressed to folks already committed to him and his Kingdom.

When the Kingdom is accurately described and demonstrated, no recruiting is necessary! Neither are made-up promises of escape or prosperity either needed or appropriate. Enlistment in the Kingdom of Jesus must be completely voluntary, with full understanding of the risks as well as the benefits.

Anything less does violence to the Kingdom, the King, and his committed disciples!
Word Study #173 – “Sanctuary”

Here is another word that is frequently used in contemporary Christian circles in ways that bear no resemblance whatever to its New Testament antecedents. This study should be undertaken in tandem with a review of #32, “Holy”, because the Greek word for which “sanctuary” is the traditional translation, is simply the neuter form, hagion, of the adjective hagios, upon which that essay was based. The masculine and feminine forms refer to people, and the neuter to places or things. However, hagion is never used of the gathering place of the faithful – or of anyone else. That designation belongs to the word “synagogue”.

Hagion, translated four times as “sanctuary” and three times as “holy place”, appears only in the letter to the Hebrews (8:2, 9:1, 9:2, 9:12, 9:24, 9:25, 13:11), and refers exclusively to that portion of the Old Covenant's tabernacle or temple area which could only be entered once a year, and then only by the high priest! There is absolutely no precedent for applying such a “reverential” designation to the principal assembly room of any “house of worship.”

Neither is there any New Testament application of the word to any person or group, regardless of its appearance in a number of saccharine choruses commonly designated “praise songs”. I am sure the folks who created them, and who repeat them interminably, all mean well – but they simply have never put forth the effort to understand what they are saying! Waxing sentimental about a few statements of God's promises to “dwell” in / with / among his people” (Rom.8:11, II Cor.6:16, II Tim.1:14) – an entirely different word and concept (See #82) – they substitute the idea of a place where only a high priest was allowed to go???. Come on, folks! That just doesn't fit!!

More commendable, but still linguistically in error, is the occasionally popular idea of a place of worship as a “sanctuary” or a location of safety and refuge for society’s “victims du jour” – whether the conscientious objector of the Vietnam era or the undocumented immigrant of the early 21st century. Patterned, I suppose, after the “cities of refuge” provided by the Old Testament law (Num.35), the concept is an excellent one, and fully in harmony with New Testament principles of providing shelter for those in need. In fact, I suspect that the primary reason for the absence of such instructions in the New Testament was that the faithful were more likely to need that sort of protection than to be in a position to offer it, (“Refuge” is nowhere to be found in the New Testament text). The idea is good – but “sanctuary” it is not.

By all means, celebrate the living presence of the Lord in and among his people!

Word Study #174 – Baptism: “of John” or “into Jesus”

This is an outgrowth of the discovery, while working on the Epiphany study (#171), that the marked difference between the baptism preached and administered by John “the Baptist”, and the later practice of baptism as a symbol of commitment to Jesus and his Kingdom, has seldom been addressed. It is this latter category on which the study in chapter 10 of Citizens of the Kingdom is focused (to which you may wish to refer). Here, we will attempt to explore the contrast between the two approaches.

John himself took great care to point out the difference: all four gospels (Mt.3:11-16, Mk.1:4-9, Lk.3:7-21, Jn.1:25-33) record his identification of his own role as “preparing the way”, in conformity with Isaiah's prophecy, for the coming of the Lord. His messages did contain elements that were later incorporated in Kingdom teaching: the choosing of a completely re-directed life (see “repent” #6) which has clearly observable results (Lk.3:10-14); the announcement of the arrival of the Kingdom (note the perfect tense of ekkiken – #164 – it is NOT future!); the irrelevance of the prevailing hierarchy (Mt.3:7-10 and Lk.7:29); and the absolute superiority of both Jesus and the Spirit-baptism that he would administer (Mt.3:11, Mk.1:8, Lk.3:16, Jn.1:26 – footnote).

John correctly described his function as a fore-runner (Jn.3:28), accepting the assignment announced to his father before his
birth (Lk.1:17) “to get a prepared people ready for the Lord!” This is a concept that has been obscured much too frequently by the serious misunderstanding of “repentance” (#6) and “forgiveness” (#7), which too commonly are cast (incorrectly) in the guise of a legal “pardon” issued in spite of guilt, instead of the more linguistically correct message of the taking away [removal] of shortcomings, failures, and transgressions.”

(Are you aware that even in the traditional KJV, the word “pardon” does not exist anywhere in the New Testament? It is included in neither John's nor Jesus' messages, baptisms, nor anywhere else!)

The intent of John's baptism is further attested by the use of the preposition eis in a purpose construction – eis metanoian – “into [for the purpose of] a changed life [repentance]” (Mt.3:11), and Luke's record of his response to those who asked what shall we DO?” (Lk.3:10-14).

John also bore testimony to his own purpose being “that he (Jesus) be revealed to Israel” (Jn.1:31) as the Son of God.

There appears to have been a brief period during which both men were “baptizing disciples” (Jn.3:22-4:2), during which John quickly disabused his followers of the notion that they were competing (3:26-28). It seems that the practice of baptism implied identification with one's teacher, an idea also referenced by Paul in 1 Cor.1. But John (whether the preacher or the author is not clear) also associated it with a more far-reaching acceptance of Jesus' sovereignty (3:31-36). This may be the first New Testament evidence of the concept of a personal commitment. He also notes that Jesus himself was not the one doing the baptizing (4:1-2) at that time.

Luke notes (7:29) that Jesus overtly connected people's attitudes toward John's baptism to their perception and acceptance of God's purposes, so it should certainly never be disparaged.

Jesus himself actually said very little about baptism. He made reference to “the baptism of John” (Mt.21:25, Mk.11:30, Lk.20:4) when he put the Pharisees on the defensive after they questioned his own authority. He used the term in reference to his own approaching suffering and death (Mt.20:22,23; Mk.10:38-39) when responding to James and John's attempted “status-grab” as well as simply describing his own prospective demise (Lk.12:50). It is not clear whether or not this is the same incident. The only other mention of baptism by Jesus is in his final instructions to the disciples after his resurrection (Mt.28:19, Mk.16:16, Ac.1:5). Here, it is associated with (1) making disciples, (2) teaching new recruits the principles of Kingdom living, and (3) the results of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which John had predicted at the beginning.

After Pentecost, there is a marked shift in the accounts of baptism. They vary in the order ascribed to the various elements. Although Peter's first sermon (Ac.2:38-41) still connects it with “repentance” and “the taking away of shortcomings” (in this case, their ignorance of who Jesus really was/is), he immediately included the gift of the Holy Spirit. Even more significantly, the following account (Ac.2:42-47) describes the vibrant community thereby created – the first such description – clearly a part of the “new creation” now in process.

Philip's sojourn in Samaria included the baptism of those who chose to identify with his “preaching the Kingdom of God (Ac.8:12) and the name of Jesus”. Nothing is said about “repentance” there, and the gift of the Holy Spirit came later, mediated by other apostles.

In Philip's subsequent encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch (vv.26-40), that brother was baptized at his own request, upon learning of Jesus, with again, no mention of repentance. Some manuscripts include a note that “the Holy Spirit fell upon him” and others omit that phrase.

The two events are overtly connected in the account of Ananias and Saul (Ac.9:17-18) and also Peter and Cornelius (Ac.10:44-47), although the order is reversed in the latter case, since it took the intervention of the Holy Spirit to convince Peter that it was even OK to offer baptism to believing Gentiles (11:16).

In Philippi, neither the account of Lydia's family (16:15) nor of the jailer's household (16:33) mentions either “repentance” or “the Holy Spirit”, nor does that of Crispus' household in Corinth (18:8).

However, the saga of Apollos (Ac.18:24-19:7) and the folks at Ephesus whom he had recruited while “knowing only the baptism of John” makes it clear that both Priscilla and Aquila and later Paul, recognized that John's “baptism of repentance” was insufficient alone. Far too many people and groups even today are “parked” with those partially-taught folks in Ephesus! Remedy that lack, their identification with Jesus, and baptism “into (eis) the name [identity: see #24] of Jesus” were followed (v.5-6) by the manifestations of the Holy Spirit so necessary to the propagation of his Kingdom.

Clearly, as the message spread and the Kingdom continued to grow, people's understanding of the implications of baptism also matured. Twice (Rom.6:3-11 and Col.2:12) Paul represents it as symbolic of one's sharing in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, emphasizing a total break from his prior existence and a complete transformation of life.

To the Galatians, he spoke of being “clothed with Christ.” (Gal.3:27)

In I Cor.12 and Eph.4:5, he relates it to being joined with other disciples by baptism into the mutuality of one Body. The theme of loyalty and identification also appears in Paul's protest against factionalism (I Cor.1), even to the point of
thankfulness that he did little baptizing among them, lest their loyalty be to him rather than to Jesus.
The identification of ancient Israel with Moses (I Cor.10:2) and Peter's parallel with the folks rescued on Noah's ark (I Pet.3:21) are clarified by Peter's assertion that the act of baptism itself conveys no particular power, but simply expresses one's chosen adherence to God.

Perhaps the most useful summary is facilitated by observing the objects of that little (but powerful) preposition “eis”. John preached a baptism eis metanoian – “into a changed life [repentance]” and eis ton erchomenon pisteusin – “toward becoming faithful to the coming one.”
Baptism eis to onoma iesou – “into the name [identity] of Jesus,” eis ton thanaton – “into his death (and resurrection!), and eis hen soma – “into one Body”, on the other hand, provides the entrance into the very life of Jesus, of which the Spirit (#52 and 53) is the essential breath.

There IS a difference!

Word Study #175 – John as the Turning Point of History

Lest I leave you with the impression that the previous study intends a dismissal of the significance of John the Baptist's contribution to the Kingdom, let me hasten to append to that essay a quick survey of Jesus' own evaluation of his cousin's ministry. Please refer to the treatment of their relationship in #171 as well as #174, as supplements to the present document.

It may well be that, rather than diminishing his contribution, Jesus has suggested that John actually occupies a (if not "the") significant turning-point of history!

Consider, for example, Jesus' statement, recorded in both Matt.11:12-13 and Lk.16:6, that the Law and the Prophets were (in effect) “until John”, to which Luke added the contrasting “since then, the Kingdom of God is (present tense) being proclaimed!”

This meshes seamlessly with Mark's statement (1:14) that after John's arrest, Jesus appeared publicly announcing, “The time has been fulfilled : the Kingdom of God has arrived!” (both perfect tenses.)

If that time-line causes a problem for “flat-book” advocates who tirelessly trumpet only the first part of Jesus' statement in Mt.5:17-18 that he did not come to destroy the law or the prophets, and that no part of either would “pass away”, please remind them not to forget his last phrase: “until it all happens [is fulfilled]! (See Mk.1:14 above, and also #154.)

In his inaugural address (Lk.4:21), Jesus used the same theme: “Today the scripture has been fulfilled”, and as he headed for Jerusalem for the final time with his disciple group, it was with the blunt statement (Lk.18:31), “Look: we are going up into Jerusalem, and everything that has been written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be completed [fulfilled]!”

While it is certainly true that Jesus himself spoke of events that have yet to occur, he could not have been clearer in his declaration that he had personally fulfilled all that had been written before, and so long and so eagerly anticipated! The failure of those to whom he had been promised to welcome him as that fulfillment cannot negate its reality. And it was to those who did welcome him (Jn.1:12) that he gave the right “to become the children of God”. Notice, please, that Jesus did NOT apply that designation to “all people”, as is common in some modern circles.

John records several other discussions where Jesus used similar themes:
Jn.5:46-47: the matter-of-fact statement, “IF you were faithful to Moses, you would be faithful to me.”
Jn.6:30-35: making both a parallel and a distinction between the provision of manna in the desert and himself as the Bread of Life
Jn.7:19-24: critiquing advocates of the law who refuse to observe or obey it
Jn.8:37-45: emphasizing that behavior trumps pedigree in establishing one's status before God.

A fuller examination of Matthew 11 yields interesting insight regarding Jesus and John. We are not told by any of the gospel writers how long John's ministry had lasted before his "speaking truth to power" landed him in Herod's dungeon. However, we can hardly blame him for his questions: that was rather shabby treatment for the "herald" of the long-awaited Messiah, and most likely NOT what John had expected as a result of his faithfulness! So he sent messengers to Jesus: “Is this for real? Or have I missed something?”

Jesus' answer is a catalog of evidence, which was apparently convincing to the messengers.

And then Jesus addressed the crowd about John's work. No, this was not just a weirdo staging a demonstration in the desert. He was “more than a prophet” – he was indeed the promised “preparer of the road”. In fact, there was never anyone greater
“born of women”! (v.11). The rest of that statement is puzzling, though. Despite his faithfulness, does John’s questioning under duress disqualify him from the Kingdom? I think, rather, that Jesus is again emphasizing the transition to whole new reality – a new creation!

Notice that John himself is not criticized: his fickle audiences are (v.12). Violent people are assailing the Kingdom – perhaps trying to tailor it to their own expectations? – ever “since John.” This is the context of the aforementioned statement (v.13) that “the law and prophets were until John. Those who should know better are acting like squabbling children (16-18).

Cities who should have welcomed their King are compared unfavorably with ancient bastions of debauchery (20-24). The latter part of the chapter (25-30), although it seems at first glance to be disconnected, actually provides a succinct summary of the new reality: there has been a massive paradigm shift! “The wise and clever” (25), although they have spent generations studying the old ways, simply have it all wrong. In establishing his promised Kingdom, Jesus has done a new thing! This “new thing” is only accessible by revelation (25-27), and by careful training (29) in the yoke with the only One who knows the Father, understands the situation, and knows how it is supposed to operate! (Please see #77)

Our brother Jim suggested the perfect illustration, in a recent message, pointing out the significance of the sequence of events on the Mount of Transfiguration. The awe-struck disciples listen in on the conversation as Moses (representing the Law) and Elijah (representing the prophets) discuss with Jesus his coming departure, which he was about to “accomplish” (Lk.9:31) in Jerusalem. (see #191). Peter's suggestion would have had plenty of precedent under the old system: the Old Testament is replete with examples of memorials being built in response to divine encounters. But after the voice of God out of the cloud identifies his Son, and instructs the frightened disciples to “Listen to him!” they can see no one but Jesus! Having served their former purpose, the former spokesmen are gone!

“The Law and the prophets were (in effect) until John.
Since then, the Kingdom of God is being proclaimed!”

In the presence of the Son of God, the only appropriate response is to listen / obey.

**Word Study #176 – Offend, Offense**

It would be convenient if the words translated “offend” or “offense” could be neatly sorted into categories, as so many others can. In this case, unfortunately, only the context can give us a clue as to whether a particular verb reference is to causing offense, taking offense, or committing some sort of offense; or whether the noun form refers to actual deliberate transgression, ignorant error, or merely a petulant complaint. Consequently, pontificating on this subject is even less acceptable than usual!

The lexicons do not offer a lot of help. Please refer to studies #7 and #141 for the distinction between the two words usually ambiguously rendered “sin”, *hamartia* and *paraptoma*, which are both (rarely) translated “offense”.

As for the rest, *proskomma* (L/S: “offense, obstacle, hindrance; the result of stumbling – bruise or hurt”, to which Bauer and Thayer add “the opportunity to take offense” and “causing someone to act against his conscience”) appears only six times in the New Testament: Romans 14:20 regarding one's choice of diet, Rom.9:32-33 and I Pet.2:8 “a stumbling stone”, and warnings in Rom.14:13 and I Cor.8:9 about placing a “stumbling block” in the path of a brother.

*Proskope* (L/S – “offense taken, antipathy, cause of offense”, to which both other lexicographers agree) occurs only once – II Cor.6:3 – an admonition to “give no offense in anything.”

*Aproskopos*, a similar noun with a negative prefix, is not listed in any of the three lexicons. It is translated with some variant of “without offense” in its only three appearances: Ac.24:16, I Cor.10:32, and Phil.1:10.

*Skandalon*, appearing 13 times, is the most interesting etymologically. It is derived from a related word describing “a stick in a trap to which bait is attached, which acts as a trigger.” (L/S – a trap or snare laid for an enemy or a hunted animal; hence, metaphorically, a stumbling block, offense, or scandal.” Bauer picks up the same theme, offering “trap, temptation, enticement; that which gives offense, causes revulsion, arouses opposition or disapproval.” Thayer adds “any person or thing by which someone is entrapped or drawn into error.” Jesus (Mt.16:23,18:7; Lk.17:1), Paul (Rom.9:33, 14:13, 16:17), and John (I Jn.2:10, Rv.2:14) all warn against causing “offenses”. However, we also find recognition that some people will find truth itself, or actual facts, to be offensive (Rom.9:33, 11:9, I Cor.1:23, Gal.5:11).

The verbs are somewhat more easily sorted.

*Ptaio* – L/S – “to cause to stumble or fall, to trip, to make a false step or blunder”; Bauer – “to be ruined or lost” – only appears five times in the New Testament, used three times by James (2:10 and twice in 3:2) regarding struggles to keep the
law, and twice by Paul (Rom.11:11) regarding the failures of Israel. Interestingly, in the LXX, 12 of its 13 uses refer to defeat in battle. The other warns against idolatry.

Proskopto – L/S – “to strike one thing against another, to encounter friction, to offend or take offense” – occurs seven times: in the temptation account, as the devil quotes Psalm 91 (Mt.4:6 and Lk.4:11), twice (Jn.11:9-10) in a purely physical sense (you don't stumble if you can see where you are going!); and three times (Rom.9:32, 14:21; 1 Pet.2:8) metaphorically. The Rom.14 reference is to the causing of harm to a brother, but the other two describe the result of disobedience. In the LXX, it primarily describes the chaos of ungodly society.

Skandalizo dominates the verbs as its equivalent does the nouns, used 29x. L/S offers simply “to cause to stumble, to give offense”; Bauer – “to cause to be caught or to fall, to give offense, anger, or shock”; Thayer – “to place an impediment, to cause one to judge unfavorably of another, to make indignant.” The verb does not appear in the LXX, where the noun is usually connected with idolatry. It appears in widely varying New Testament contexts, in which it also precipitates very different responses. For example, when the disciples asked Jesus, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended?” (Mt.15:12) at his pronouncement that one's dietary choices could not render a person “unclean”, he seems rather unconcerned, replying “Let them go! They are blind guides of the blind!” But a short time later, (17:27), when questioned about the payment of a tax, he instructed Peter to pay it, “in order that we not offend them.” Clearly, the choice of response to “offense” requires careful discernment.

Jesus also warned against “offending [causing the fall] of one of these little ones who trust me” (Mt.1:6, Mk.9:42, Lk.17:2), but recognized that many would be offended [turned away] in the face of danger or persecution (Mt.13:21, Mk.4:17; Mt.24:10, 26:31-33; Mk.14:27-29). This latter group appears to reference a departure from faithfulness, rather than just “being upset”. I assume that this is also the case with the rather startling (and drastic) instructions in Mt.5:29-30, 18:8-9, and Mk.4:43-47, although there is no way to establish that impression unequivocally. The concept of a trap or snare (noted above) however, tends toward the likelihood of such an implication.

Here, as well as in the epistles (Rom.14:21, I Cor.8:13, II Cor.11:29), it is not always clear whether the warning is against setting a trap or being caught in one. This may be deliberate. The danger of a trap is not dependent upon whether it intentionally or unintentionally set. Likewise, “giving” or “taking” offense are not always distinguished. In either case, both are to be avoided. We will give more careful attention to this dilemma in the next study.

In his directives to the culturally diverse churches in Rome and Corinth, Paul employs most of these terms, sometimes seemingly at random, so perhaps those letters provide the best summary.

In Rom.5:15-20, he uses paraptoma, and does not appear to distinguish between ignorance and deliberate transgression. He insists that the Law revealed, but did not create transgressions. Rom.11, on the other hand, may be a response to Gentile brethren who were getting a bit cocky about their perception of having replaced unbelieving Jews, with the assertion that the latter group’s “fall” was not necessarily permanent “IF they do not continue in unfaithfulness” (v.23). Do note, however, the conditional nature of that statement! Rom.14, dealing with brethren who have differing convictions about appropriate behavior, focuses on those who “have knowledge”. These are reminded neither to pass judgment on folks who have more scruples, nor to cause harm to their sensitive consciences. Notice, he does NOT say “Anything goes.” Similar advice is given in I Cor.8 and 10, which we will also examine in greater detail in the next study. A necessary observation here, however, is that while in the LXX, the preponderance of references to any of the “offense” words concern behavior deemed offensive to God (proskomma), idolatry and dishonor (skandalon), deliberate offenses (paraptoma), and defeats in battle (ptai), the New Testament, regardless of the word chosen, is primarily concerned with people's relationship to each other in the Kingdom, and their response to the uniqueness of Jesus and the life he advocated and exemplified. Which “testament” or “covenant” is the present church living in?

Brother Paul suggests the most relevant principle (I Cor.10:32):

“Do not become a hindrance for either Jews or Greeks, or for God's church!”

That's enough to keep us all busy!

Word Study #177 – Inclusiveness

Although this is another word that does not appear at all in the New Testament, its ubiquity in today's “Christian” discussions makes it a topic that needs attention. The early church was a case study in the inclusion of “Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female” in the Kingdom, and indeed, into the very family of the King. Interestingly, however, this was (laboriously) accomplished without either succumbing to the immoral excesses of first century Greek and Roman culture, or imposing rigid legal requirements upon participants, and certainly without robbing the language of all pronouns and making a meaningless muddle of its grammar!
We saw in #171 that some folks consider the Magi to have been the first “outsiders” to be included in the Kingdom. Subsequently, Jesus mentioned two others in his “inaugural address” (Lk.4:24-27), and personally visited, healed, and preached not only in “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Mt.4:16) – which was bad enough from an orthodox perspective (Jn.1:46) – but also in despised Samaria (Lk.9:52-56, 17:11-16; Jn.4) and he even made a Samaritan the hero of a major parable (Lk.10:30-37)! He frequently crossed the Sea of Galilee to the Decapolis (Mt.4:25, Mk.7:31), which was Gentile territory (Mk.5:1, Lk.8:26), and Perea (Mt.8:28), where the feeding of pigs clearly establishes a non-Jewish audience, and also traveled to the Idumean cities of Tyre and Sidon (Mk.3:8, Mt.15:21, Mk.7:24) and to Canaanite Caesarea Philippi, which Matthew cites as the location of Peter’s acknowledgment of Jesus as the Son of God, and his transfiguration. Mark lists “Simon the Cananaite” among the Twelve (other writers call him “the Zealot”), and also notes that the “Simon” who was drafted to carry Jesus’ cross was from Cyrene, a Libyan city in North Africa!

Most of the folks listed as visitors to Jerusalem at Pentecost were probably either Diaspora Jews or proselytes, but the geographical range they represented (Ac.2:8-11) was enormous – all the way from Rome, through the province of Asia – now Turkey – (Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia, Pamphylia), Parthia (Persia), Media, and Mesopotamia to Egypt, then across to Crete, Cyrene, and the Arabian peninsula! All of these marveled that they heard the word in their own native dialects! When Peter, in his first sermon, included “all who are far away” in his invitation (Ac.2:39), he had no clue just how far that might be!

There were Greeks in the group early on, and Greek names appear among the deacons (Ac.6). Philip had gone to Samaria to preach (Ac.8), and then welcomed an Ethiopian. Saul the persecutor was headed to Damascus (Syria), and was chasing – and later protected by – believers there (Ac.9). Peter encountered Aeneas (a Roman name) (Ac.9:33), and was staying with a tanner (9:42) – NO good Jew would associate with someone who handled dead animals! – when Cornelius' messengers found him (Ac.10). The congregation at Antioch was begun by brethren from Cyprus and Cyrene who (Ac.11:19-20) “spoke the word to Greeks also.” All this activity was bound to make waves among those who clung to the traditional ways of old covenant exclusivity. And it did.

The Jerusalem Conference (Ac.15) is a classic example of a faithfully managed confrontation on the issue of “inclusion”. Please refer to the end of chapter 8 of Citizens of the Kingdom for a discussion of this meeting. Notable for our purpose here is the procedure:

1. hearing the concerns of all sides (v.4)
2. evaluation by (v.6) both the plural leadership (elders) and (v.12) “the whole assembly.”
3. reference to Scriptural precedent (vv.15-18)
4. a conciliatory summary (vv.19-21) , leading to
5. consensus by “the apostles and elders and the whole church” (v.22).

Notice, please, that neither “side” won. Everybody won! The strictures of the Old Covenant were not imposed upon Gentile believers, but neither were they “affirmed” and encouraged to continue their former behavior! Everything related to their “cultural pattern” – idolatry – was to be left behind. All the behaviors listed – idolatry included perverted sexual practices, strangled sacrifices, and consumption of their blood – were flatly forbidden. BUT – the consequent letter was “received with great joy!” (15:31), as was intended.

Repeatedly, Paul and others refer to “turning from idols to serve the living and true God.” Behavior consistent with this “turning” is termed “these necessary things.” Changed behavior had been the core of the preaching of John the Baptist (see #6). Every description of the message proclaimed in the early church assumed a radically changed life, whether on the part of Jews or Gentiles. This is the theme that is missing from so much of the modern “inclusiveness” conversation.

The epistles, in contrast, are full of “before-and-after” descriptions. Paul characterized his own message (Ac.26:20) as advocating (1) a changed life, (2) turning to God, (3) practicing deeds worthy of a changed life. But he prescribed no new Law! Notice, for example, that the weeding out of sorcery at Ephesus (Ac.19:19) happened at the local people's own initiative – it was not externally commanded.
The “wall” between Jew and Gentile was demolished and enmity / hostility destroyed (Eph.2:11-22) “to create in him (Jesus) one new person (2:15)”, not by ecclesiastical decree, but by the power of the risen Lord!

Although the epistles were primarily written to churches with a significant Gentile component, the “before and after” descriptions of transformed lives apply to everyone. Paul describes “the habitual way of life when you lived according to the agenda of this world” (Eph.2:1) simply as having been “dead.” But he notes (v.3) “we all used to conduct our lives that way!” Notice the past tenses! This is also detailed in I Cor.5 and 6, Col.1:21 and most of chapter 3, where he urges that former behavior be put to death, and a new way of life be “put on” as a garment.

It is important to note that in the same passages, frequently (and correctly) quoted in opposition to various forms of sexual immorality, he also equates “greed” with idolatry! (Eph.5:5 and Col.3:5). Neither is a legitimate part of a transformed life! Nor are the other “respectable sins” also listed. Deliberate change in ALL the patterns of life is expected. See also I Pet.1:14 and Rom.12:2. The goal is maximum conformity to Christ, not the minimum required to “qualify”!

Paul takes care to establish that he is not out to establish a new law in place of the old one. Kingdom people are called to freedom (Gal.2, 4:5-7, 5:13; Col.2:13-23, I Pet.2:16), but not to “do their own thing”. We simply serve a new Master. Romans 3 makes abundantly clear the transformation that is required of everyone – regardless of background or pedigree. The unacceptability of following one’s “natural inclinations” is repeated in Rom.6:15-23, 7:5-6, 8:1-11, and 13:14. All of these are to be left behind, in favor of a new life. (Gal.5:15-26, Eph.4, I Thes.4:3-8, I Pet.1:18 and 4:3-4). Peter's list of “old ways” to be avoided hits us all!

Admittedly, this teaching is not uniform, either today or in the first century. Hence the multitude of warnings about false teachers and false prophets (I Jn.4:1, Jude 4, II Pet.2:1-3), who can be readily recognized by their behavior. It is interesting that Peter has “luxurious living” at the top of his list of depravity (vv.13-22)! BEHAVIOR MATTERS! Not as a new legalism, but as a demonstration that life has been transformed! It is the purpose, not the admission ticket or the cause, of our identification with the Kingdom (see #39) (Rom.1:5, Eph.2:9-10, Gal.6:8).

The old truism, “what you cultivate is what grows”, is appropriate here. Such cultivation can only happen in the context of a seeking, sharing brotherhood, where learning new ways of living is assumed. Mutuality is mandatory – not to make excuses, but to avoid them!

II Cor.6:14-18 is usually associated with marriage – and appropriately so – but needs also to apply to the building of the Body of Christ, and pretty much any relationships of serious members.

As our dear (late) brother Vernard Eller observed dryly, “We need to make everyone welcome in our home, to be loved, and to experience how we live – but you don't immediately let everyone rearrange the furniture and start throwing things out!” I have long considered that probably the best summary of Rom.14, I Cor.5,8,10; and I Thes.5:14-22.

“Let's concentrate on prodding each other with [toward] love and good deeds” (Heb.10:24), and welcome folks of any and every variety who want to join a mutual effort to become faithful representatives of the Kingdom!

Word Study #178 – Hunger and Thirst

I'm not sure what the folks who asked for a study of these terms were expecting. If they wanted something high-flown, mystical, or “super-spiritual”, they asked the wrong person: for these are very plain, down-to-earth words, and flights of fancy are not my specialty.

Although two of the three Greek words, peinao and dipsao, are occasionally used metaphorically of intense desire, craving or longing, the vast majority are purely physical references. The third, limos, without exception, describes scarcity of harvest, or famine related to drought – not a rare occurrence in the ancient (or modern) middle east – and the associated hardship and even starvation (Mt.24:7, Mk.13:8, Lk.4:25, 15:14, 17; 21:11; Ac.7:11, 11:28; Rom.8:35, II Cor.11:27, Rv.6:8, 18:8)

Of the 7 incidents (14 references) where “hunger” and “thirst” appear together, only one (II Cor.11:27) uses limos; and of the rest, only two (Mt.5:6 and Rv.7:16) admit the possibility of metaphorical interpretation.

Peinao, the more frequent word for “hunger”, usually refers to one's physical need for food. After a lengthy fast, Jesus was hungry (Mt.4:2, Lk.4:2). Pursued by Saul's army, David and his companions were hungry (Mt.12:3, Mk.2:25, Lk.6:3-11). However, the need described is not always urgent. Jesus and his disciples on the way to Jerusalem (they probably left before breakfast!) were looking for a snack (Mt.21:18, Mk.11:12). Walking through the grain field, the disciples got the “munchies” and helped themselves – which, according to Mosaic law, would have been perfectly ok on any other day.
Paul comments (I Cor.4:11, Phil.4:12) on his own experience of uncertain support during his travels, and reminds folks of their cultural obligation to provide necessities even for enemies (Rom.12:20). On a more domestic note, he criticizes selfish behavior at the “church potluck” (I Cor.11:21, 34).

Jesus’ judgment parable (Mt.25 and Lk.6) is a commendation of folks providing for the needs of others, and a critique of those who did not do so. Usually the issue of urgency is not addressed.

Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount (Lk.6:21,25) confines the “beatitude” comment to physical hunger, in contrast to Mt.5:6.

Matthew’s insertion of “for justice [righteousness]” provides a transition to the four instances where peinao may have been used in a more metaphorical sense. These include Lk.1:53, where Mary declares, “He has filled the hungry with good things” – which certainly would have included, but not been confined to food; Jesus’ own statement in Jn.6:35, “He that comes to me shall never hunger” – which in the light of Paul’s experience noted above, probably requires metaphorical interpretation; and his triumphant declaration in Rv.7:16 of the eventual vindication of the martyrs surely reaches beyond the physical realm.

I suspect that it is this latter group of references that Paul had in mind when he wrote his “thank-you note” to the Philippian church for their support. For an accurate understanding of his intent, it is necessary to begin with Phil.4:11, rather than glibly and arrogantly trumpeting the much-misquoted v.13. Expressing gratitude for their concern, Paul also testifies, “I have learned to get along in any condition. I know how to be hard-up and how to handle plenty. I’ve been fully initiated, to be well-fed and to be hungry, to have plenty or to be in need. I have strength for every situation, in the One who enables me.”

Passages involving “thirst” contain a bit more ambiguity. Actually, the only ones referencing purely physical need of water are Rom.12:20, I Cor.4:11, the Mt.25 discussions already cited, and John’s account of Jesus’ word from the cross (19:28). John does not elaborate on the latter statement, as mystically inclined individuals are wont to do. Extreme thirst would not seem strange under the circumstances.

Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (Jn.4:13-15) thoroughly blurs the line between literal and figurative reference, as do his comments in Jn.6:35, 7:37, and Rev.7:16, 21:6, and 22:17. Even the immediate audiences did not always understand, so it's small wonder if we don't.

The woman in Samaria initially grasped at the prospect of no longer needing to make her lonely mid-day trek for water (v.15), and only after more conversation realized that this was the promised “Anointed One” with whom she was speaking, even though Jesus had explained that his “water” was different: life-giving, and abundant enough to be shared (13,14).

The focus in Jn.6:32-35 places more emphasis on the provision of bread, and includes “never being thirsty” almost as an afterthought.

Jn.7:37-39 clearly connects the “living water” with the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is also intended to “flow out”, and not to be hoarded for one’s private benefit.

In order to appreciate the metaphorical uses of “hunger” and “thirst”, it is necessary to remember that the setting of all this activity and conversation is in a desert culture. “Thirst” in the desert does not simply imply discomfort. One's very survival is in question. Like “hunger” in a land where famine mercilessly stalks its victims, “thirst” is also a matter of dire necessity, and culturally, water, like shelter, is not to be denied, even to one's enemy.

It is this sense of urgency which, I believe, Jesus intends to convey in that first “beatitude” regarding one’s longing for justice/righteousness. Remember (W.S.#3) that this is the same word, and not two different ideas! Mt.5:6 is the only reference where any object of the “hunger” or “thirst” is overtly specified. There is probably a reason – do you have any idea what it might be? (I don’t!)

But there is no ambiguity whatever in the Lord's gracious offer.

In the desert, water is life. In this world and the next, both physically and figuratively, it is his gift to his people.

“They will no longer be hungry or thirsty; neither will the sun fall on them, nor any burning. The Lamb in the midst of the throne will shepherd them, and he will be their guide to wells of living water.” (Rv.7:16,17).

“I will give to the thirsty from the spring of living water [water of life].” (Rv.21:6) “The one who is thirsty must come – whoever wishes – he must take the living water as a gift!” (Rv.22:17).

Thanks be to God!
Word Study #179 – Seals, Sealed, Sealing

The use of a seal as a sign of ownership, approval, or authentication is very ancient, and is found across many cultures. The earliest archaeological reference I could find is Chinese, about 3000 years BC. Carved into wood or stone, proprietary symbols were impressed on wax, clay, or later, on paper with ink or dye.

In the Indus Valley, merchants used a seal to identify their trade goods. In the ancient Middle East, Mesopotamian peoples used an engraved cylinder, and Egyptians a signet ring to make these impressions.

The elite of conquering Greek and Roman forces amassed impressive collections of these seals, thought to be symbolic of their having assumed the power and authority of the former owners.

The understanding of a seal is unusual for its uniformity across such diverse cultures, and its similar employment in modern times, for legal documents, or certification of approval by recognized organizations or authorities.

Unlike many artifacts of culture, the use of a seal, as biblically referenced, is therefore not unique to first century Greek or Roman culture, nor to Hebrew tradition, where it is noticeably rare. In fact, many of the LXX references are to seals used for official edicts by foreign kings (in Esther and Daniel), to people exercising the authority of rulers (Zezebel in I Ki.20), and to specifications for the regalia of the Jewish high priest (Ex.28,35,36). Isaiah (29:11) and Daniel (8:26, 9:24, and 12:4,9) are told to “seal” (conceal) a word of prophecy until a designated time. Deut.32:34 and II Ki.22:4 refer to the securing of a treasury. In the Song of Solomon (4:12, 8:6) it appears to be a term of endearment – perhaps also in Hag.2:24?

A legal deed to land is “sealed” as well (Jer.39:10, 11, 25, 44).

For the verb, sphragizo, L/S lists “to close or enclose with a seal, to authenticate a document, to certify an object after examination, to seal (mark) an article to show that it is pledged, to accredit an envoy, to confirm or set a seal of approval on, to set an end or limit.” Bauer adds “to secure something so as not to be disturbed, to keep secret, to mark as a means of identification of ownership.”

The noun form, sphragis, refers to “a seal or signet, a gem or stone for a ring, a warrant, a mark of ownership, a wound or blow, a governmentally defined and numbered area of land” (L/S), “the certification of a last will and testament, a sign or stamp of approval, that which confirms” (Bauer), with the additional note that some second century writers used sphragis as a synonym for baptism.

Many of these ideas appear in the New Testament uses of the words. Clearly, the “seal/sealing” referenced in Rv.7:2,3,4, is a mark of identification, of God’s “ownership” of his people, in contrast to his opponents mentioned in 9:4. This identification also affords protected status to those who are so identified, as is apparent as well in II Cor.1:22, Eph.1:3, 4:30; and II Tim.2:19, despite the chaos and destruction that may also surround the people concerned.

The seal placed on Jesus' tomb (Mt.27:66), on the other hand, was intended to keep anyone from meddling with the body. (The authorities mistakenly thought that it would keep him IN – like the seal (Rv.20:3) on the pit where Satan and his minions are confined.)

The seals of the “little book” [scroll] in Rv.5, 6, and 8:1, however, which could only be opened by the eminently qualified Lamb, in addition to securing its wrapper, were obviously to restrict, but not to prohibit, access to its contents. This is reminiscent of the instructions to Isaiah and Daniel mentioned above, to “seal up” particular elements of prophecy until the proper time, which were repeated to John regarding what he had heard in the thunder (Rv.10:4). In contrast, the Revelation ends with the admonition NOT to “seal” [keep secret] the information he had been given, because “the time is near” and these were instructions that folks were going to need for their present circumstances.

The sense of certification of authenticity comes through in Paul's concern for the safe and responsible delivery of the relief offering to Judea (Rom.15:28), and his reference to the brethren in Corinth as “the seal of my apostleship” (I Cor.9:2) – they themselves constitute the evidence they are seeking that his work is genuine, and that he is the Lord's accredited envoy.

In a similar vein, John observes that a person who pays attention to Jesus has thereby contributed his own certification [seal] that God is real / true / genuine (Jn.3:33), and in 6:27, that God the Father has granted his personal credential [seal] to his Son, enabling him to bestow on his faithful followers “the food that remains [endures] for eternal life.”

And just as circumcision became for Abraham (Rom.4:11) God's “seal” [certification] of their relationship, so for faithful followers of Jesus (Eph.1:13 and 4:30), the promised Holy Spirit becomes the mark of God's ownership, as well as the “down-payment” on their inheritance as his sons.

After a series of warnings about the very real dangers posed by deceptive teachers, Paul reminds his young assistant, Timothy, (II Tim.2:19), “But God's foundation is still solid! It has this guarantee [seal] – “The Lord knows who belongs to
him! And everyone who claims the Lord's name must stay away from injustice!"

Here, then, in simple summary, is the evidence of God's "seal" of ownership, approval, and authority:

- the Lord himself knows who belongs to him
- he has identified and empowered them by the gift of his Holy Spirit
- they are recognizable, both within and from outside their company, by their practice of, and devotion to, his justice.

Beyond that, we need not – and dare not – make further claim or requirement.

**Word Study #180 – Is it Lawful?**

This is a question which, although it is asked many times in traditional translations of the New Testament, may actually have been invented by translators who had a Pharisaical obsession with lists of required or forbidden behaviors as a means of sorting others into categories of "in" and "out". The word which they have rendered "Is it lawful?" has no etymological connection whatever with "law", whether Jewish (religious) or Roman (civil). L/S offers for *exesti* simply "it is allowed" or "it is possible". Bauer explains that this is "an impersonal verb, which occurs only in the third person singular. Its verb of origin, *exeimi*, does not occur at all." The reference is to a thing or action that is culturally permissible or acceptable, and has nothing to do with legality. Concepts relating to civil or religious law use either *nomos*, or a compound word containing it, as in I Tim.1:8. The only two occurrences of *exesti* in the LXX, Ezra 4:14 and Esther 4:2, reference customs of foreign royal courts. It is never used of the Jewish Law, which is uniformly represented by *nomos*. Please also see studies #37 and 38 dealing with "the Law".

There is also a host of words used for asking or granting permission of some sort, of which only *epitrepo* has any overlap with *exesti*. Nevertheless, out of 31 New Testament appearances of *exesti*, all but three – Ac.2:29, 8:37, 21:37, referring only to permission – are traditionally rendered "Is it lawful?" or "It is lawful", whether the speakers are scribes and Pharisees trying to impose or strengthen restrictions, or Jesus and his followers rising above them.

The incidents about which Jesus' critics raise questions with *exesti* do not involve things specifically required or forbidden in the Old Testament Law. The plucking of grain (Mt.12:2, Mk.2:24, Lk.6:2), healing (Mt.12:10, Lk.14:3), the incident with David's army and the "sacred" temple bread (Mt.12:4, Mk.2:6, Lk.6:4), carrying one's bedroll (Jn.5:10), or putting "blood money" into the temple treasury (Mt.27:6) were among the thousands of "clarifying" regulations which had accumulated over the centuries, and which purists deemed equally binding. The question of divorce (Mk.10:2) was mentioned in the Law, but here, it is Jesus who advocates a higher standard. Similarly, John the Baptist, in his challenge of Herod's profligacy, does not quote the law, but appeals to human decency! Roman law is referenced in Jn.18:31, in that the Jewish authorities were not permitted to impose capital punishment, but the protest in Philippi (Ac.16:21) was not legal, but mercenary! Although Paul repeatedly used Roman law, and his Roman citizenship, to his advantage, he only employed *exesti* once, in Ac.22:25.

The issue of paying tribute to Caesar (Mt.22:17, Mk.12:14, Lk.20:22) created an interesting scene. Clearly, the conflict centered on the principle of tax resistance. The tax in question was the "tribute" which Rome required of all conquered nations. Please see the treatment of that encounter in #15. Jesus' reply indicates that they are asking the wrong question, and focusing on the wrong issue, making the point that "image", in this case, implies ownership. A similar message is intended in Jesus' parable of the man who hired vineyard workers. Jesus is all about re-defining what is appropriate / permissible.

*Exesti* appears in Paul's letters only five times (three references). In II Cor.12:4, he declines to describe (brag about) a supernatural revelation. The others, I Cor.6:12 and 10:23, where he uses the term twice in each, are nearly the same. In both cases, he is addressing the "lawful" dietary requirements advocated by those who were insisting upon the observance of traditional Jewish practice. But notice that he does NOT do this by throwing out either the observance or the people to whom it is important! In chapter 6, he includes it in a discussion of the deliberate renunciation of all forms of physical debauchery as an integral part of one's transformed life. The reference to food is secondary. It is necessary to include the whole passage (vv.9-19) for accurate understanding. The point is not to pick and choose from a list of forbidden activity, but to shun any behavior that degrades.

Chapter 10 is more specifically focused upon the problem of the availability, in a pagan culture, of any food that has not been a part of idolatrous sacrifice (vv.14-33). Planting, harvesting, and butchering would all have been accompanied by
pagan ritual. Here, Paul teaches that one need make an issue of the food's source only if it threatens or damages the welfare of a brother.

In both instances, the question is not whether behavior is permissible, but whether it is positively helpful (v.23). For far too long, earnest would-be “believers” have asked (and been encouraged to ask), “Do I have to …… to be a Christian?” or “will I be lost if I …..?” (fill in the blank with your choice of no-no’s.) Every group, whether it calls itself “conservative” or “liberal”, has had its own defining list, to which, either overtly or implicitly, it requires members to subscribe.

Far better is Jesus’ response in Mk.3:4 and Lk.6:9, when confronted with the ubiquitous “healing on the Sabbath” question. (The same event is less pointedly reported in Mt.12:10-12). He counters with an expanded version of the same question: “Is it permissible on the Sabbath to do good – or to do evil? To save a life, or to destroy [kill]?” This, in the final analysis, is the real question: because by Kingdom definitions, to neglect or refuse to do good IS to do evil, and to neglect or refuse to save life IS to destroy it.

“Is it lawful?” [acceptable in the ambient society] is no longer a pertinent question – on the Sabbath or any other day. Is it helpful? Is it life-giving? Is it pleasing to the King? If so, then in the Kingdom, exesti – it is appropriate.

**Word Study #181 – The Yoke: Bondage or Blessing?**

For a word that appears in the New Testament only eight times, despite being used for two different Greek words, the idea of a yoke receives a surprising amount of attention – most of which centers around a syrupy, less-than-practical interpretation of Jesus' gracious invitation in Mt.11:29-30. The word is found more commonly in the LXX, but in both cases, it is used in a much narrower sense than a classical understanding of either original term would suggest.

The words in the text are quite similar. Zeugos, (L/S: “a pair of anything; a team of animals; a carriage or chariot drawn by a “yoke” of beasts; or a married couple”), is used exclusively of animals – draft or sacrificial – in both the New Testament (Lk.2:24, 14:19) and the LXX (10x). Its corresponding verb, zeugnumi (L/S: “to harness, saddle or bridle; to fasten securely; to join together – as in setting a broken bone; to join in wedlock; to join opposite banks of a body of water with a bridge; to pair or match gladiators; to join an issue at law”), does not appear at all in the New Testament, and of its seven uses in the LXX, six refer simply to hitching up a chariot or wagon, and one to an assassin wearing a sword.

Two words, each appearing twice, prefixed with “sun” (together), are related to zeugos: suzeugnumi, a passive verb, in Ezk.1:11 and 23, describes the joining together of the wings of the creatures in the prophet's vision, and suzeugnuo, the active form, is the choice in Jesus' description of marriage, as "what God hath joined together" (Mt.19:6, Mk.10:9).

Differing by only a single letter, zugos (L/S: “the yoke of a plow or carriage; thwarts or benches joining opposite sides of a ship; the panels of a door; the beam of a balance [scales]; a pair of persons; a rank or line of soldiers; and metaphorically, the yoke of slavery”) appears in the New Testament as a reference to bondage or slavery three times (Ac.15:10, Gal.5:1, I Tim.6:1), and once to a balance [scale] (Rv.6:5), in addition to Jesus’ offer noted above in Mt.11. LXX uses are divided among references to bondage (12x), to deliverance from bondage – a “broken yoke” (13x), to just or unjust balances [weights] (14x), and to rebellious refusal to serve (2x).

The related verb, zugoo (L/S: “to yoke or join together, to bring under a yoke, to subdue”) is completely absent from the New Testament, although the idea is present in its noun form in the Ac.15 reference, where the folks at the Jerusalem Conference are admonished NOT to inflict the bondage of the Jewish Law upon Gentile converts, and Paul's similar urging of the brethren in Galatia NOT to return to the legalism from which Christ had set them free. The verb appears only twice in the LXX, in both instances referring to careful craftsmanship (1 Ki.7:43 and Ezk.41:26).

Zugos is also found in two compound words, each used only a single time in the New Testament: suzugos (the prefix is from the pronoun sun – “with” or “together”) may be Paul's style of addressing a fellow-servant of the Lord, or may be a proper name. Scholars do not seem to be sure. The request that the addressee help to make peace in a disagreement between two faithful sisters could fit either understanding of Phil.4:3. Here, too, L/S offers much more (classical) variety: “to draw together in a yoke; a syzygy of two stars (where one rises as the other sets), joining or uniting, one's comrade, wife, or brother; or a gladiator's adversary!”

Heterozugeo (L/S: “to draw unequally, to be in an unequal partnership, a yoke of animals of diverse kind”) is found only in
Paul's warning (II Cor.6:14) against being “unequally yoked with the unfaithful”. This has usually been interpreted as referring to marriage – which may be correct – although it is also good advice in business or other relationships. Note that the apostle is not advocating avoidance of the uncommitted: that would preclude introducing them to the Kingdom. But sharing a “yoke” implies mutuality of some depth, and requires unity of purpose.

The noun form, heterozugos, appears once in the LXX (Lv.19:19), where it prohibits the cross-breeding of cattle. (I wonder to what extent that is still observed?)

Have you noticed, in all these references, that Jesus himself never spoke of a “yoke” in a context of bondage? Or even a “broken” one, as symbolic of deliverance? Although the Old Covenant spoke repeatedly of a yoke as a synonym for slavery to a conqueror, and its “breaking” as a figure of deliverance from that bondage, the plain fact is, in a society that functions on animal-power, without a yoke, absolutely no work can be accomplished! A field is neither plowed, planted, nor harvested; a cart, wagon, or other conveyance does not move, without a yoke and team.

The beauty of Jesus' invitation to take on his own yoke, in order that we share in the work of his Kingdom, is that he chooses, personally, to share the yoke with the willing disciple!

Please refer to the treatment of this subject in the study of “rest” #77.

Word Study #182 – Of eis and en

Because it has had a profound influence on my choice to translate many New Testament passages in a manner distinctly different from most other versions – notably more practical (active) and less theoretical – I have often been asked to write a posting detailing some of the grammatical implications of these two common prepositions and the cases of their objects. I have frequently confessed to being a “language junkie”. I love the interplay of language and culture and the ways people have developed to express ideas and experiences that are important to them. So if you “hate grammar”, you can skip this one – but in doing so, you will sacrifice a very significant key to understanding the New Testament text.

As noted in the Appendix to my Translation Notes (available as another free download from the home page), many prepositions in the Greek language have multiple meanings or implications which vary according to the case of their object (See “Basic uses of Cases” and “Prepositions”, or any comprehensive lexicon). But there are some, eis and en among them, which always require the same form for their object: the former is accompanied only by an accusative object, and the latter a dative.

The dative case (with or without prepositions) may express location in time or place – historically it was treated as a separate case, called locative, but with the same forms – (the star – Mt.2:2 – was “in” the east, and the shepherds were “in” the field – Lk.2:8). It may describe prevailing circumstances, in which case it is called circumstantial (as in I Thes.5:18, “IN everything give thanks” – the more commonly quoted “FOR everything” would require eis and an accusative object!). The means or agency by which anything occurs, labeled instrumental (Phil.4:6, “in prayer”), and various states of feeling (Rom.12:12 expresses this as a dative with no preposition). A more detailed survey of these can be found in L/S. En is usually rendered “in” or “within” if the object is singular, but would be more accurately represented by “among” when the object is plural. Please see #142 regarding the singular and plural forms of “you”, which are seldom adequately distinguished. THIS IS VITAL to proper understanding.
But even in simple narrative, there is a difference. For example, the scheming of the scribes (Mt.3:9, 9:3, Mk.2:28, Lk.3:8) was not individual, “within themselves”, but corporate “among themselves.” But the unjust steward in the parable (Lk.16:3) hatched his nefarious idea “in” himself. A similar discrepancy appears in the failure to realize that Jesus’ promise is to dwell among his people (the “you” is plural), not “inside of” individuals.

The accusative case, on the other hand, always accompanies eis, which is uniformly active. It appears with verbs of motion, or in constructions of purpose or cause (L/S). This realization should affect the translation of any concepts with which it is associated. Unfortunately, the doctrinal presuppositions of most (hired) “official” translators have constrained them to ignore the obvious fact that Jesus calls people, NOT to a static (dative) “belief in” him – a purely private assent to some sort of idea or narrative – but to active faithfulness [loyalty] toward (eis) him!

Jesus directed his disciples to baptize their new recruits INTO (eis) the Name [identity – see #24] of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mt.28:19).

Paul reminded the Roman brethren (6:3) that baptism INTO (eis) Christ was also INTO his death, and ultimately, his resurrection.

Jesus himself consistently used eis, not en, in his conversation with Martha (Jn.11:25-26). Usually glibly (and incorrectly) quoted almost as if it were a charm by advocates of “doctrine” [“belief”] as a means of “salvation” – a concept totally absent from the New Testament – “he that believes in me”, a more accurate rendition would be “the one who is faithful [loyal] to [toward] me....” (Please see #1 for a proper understanding of pisteuo). “Faithfulness”, biblically, is NEVER a matter of intellectual assent, but rather of active loyalty. Forms of pisteuo almost exclusively are followed with a phrase introduced by eis. Likewise, the object is uniformly a person or a cause, never merely an idea or formula.

Eis is also frequently used in purpose constructions, where it may also be translated “for”, as in Mt.24:14, 26:13; Lk.2:34, 9:3; Jn.1:7; Ac.13:2, etc. An expression of purpose necessarily involves action, as does the idea of cause (Jn.12:27, Rom.1:5, 4:5, 8:28; Gal.3:6, 5:13, and many others.)

This is not by any means to suggest that the use of eis or en implies that one is superior or inferior to the other: simply that they are different, and that the distinction is important.

In Col.1:13, Paul speaks of our having been transported into (eis) the Kingdom of the Son of God, but in Phil.3:9, expresses his desire to “be found in (en) him...” In Rom.6:3, baptism is described as being into (eis) Christ Jesus, and its result is that we might henceforth “walk[live] in (en)” a completely new life.

“En Christo” – one of Paul’s apparent favorite phrases – (a quick count found it at least 89x) – describes the environment – the constant condition – in which faithful disciples live and function. It is the air we breathe, the universe we inhabit. “Eis”, besides representing our initial entrance into that universe, describes the purpose to which and for which we are called and given life.

For any serious student of the New Testament, even if he does not have the immediate opportunity to explore the Greek language academically (and not all academic courses delve deeply into the implications of grammatical structure), an interlinear New Testament (make sure it uses the latest manuscript research!), which will enable the identification of specific words, and an analytical Greek lexicon, which identifies the grammatical form of every word, would be a very worthwhile investment.

When encountering other prepositions, it is likewise important to be aware of the cases of their respective objects. Please refer to the chart in the Appendix, or to any comprehensive lexicon. For example, epi is translated “over, on top of, above” if its object is genitive, “by, beside, at, on” if it is dative, and “toward, against” if it is accusative. Pros with the genitive indicates “from”, with the dative “near, beside”, and with accusative “toward.”

There IS a difference, and it needs to be reflected responsibly, if one is to translate or to understand accurately.

To the folks who requested this explanation, I hope it helps. Please feel free to ask for clarification or to add any insight I may have missed.

May we all find our way, in (en) the service of our King, into (eis) greater faithfulness!
Word Study #183 – “The Blood”

There are few concepts that have generated as much heated rhetoric, from all sides of purported “Christian teaching”, as has the simple word haima, “blood.”

Classically (L/S), it referred to the blood circulating in the bodies of men and beasts, to anything resembling blood, such as dye, wine, or other red liquid; and to courage or spirit, as opposed to “spiritless or pale.” Secondarily, it became an euphemism for murder or other violence (as in “bloodshed”), a corpse, or revenge; and also frequently referred to kinship – “blood relationship” – or to simple humanity – “flesh and blood”. Bauer also notes its use as a synonym for “life”, and Thayer adds “one’s generation or origin” or “punishment for bloodshed.” Lexically, there is no justification, in any direction, for the multitude of theological constructs with which (presumably) well-meaning folks try to clobber each other!

Of the 99 appearances of haima in the New Testament, 14 are clearly references to the physical substance. Fourteen describe violence or murder, and 6 deal with responsibility for another’s violent death. Twelve, in the letter to the Hebrews, relate to the ancient ritual sacrifices of the Jewish Law (and their woeful inadequacy), and three (Ac.15:20, 29; 21:25) to the pagan equivalent. That is nearly half of the usage!

These ideas also account for most of the LXX uses: heavily weighted toward wars and vengeance (both personal and national) in all the historical books, and toward offerings and sacrifices in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. It is these latter two (Lev.7:27 and 17:10-14, and Dt.12:23) where a significant explanation is given: one which is absent in the classical lexicons, but crucial to accurate understanding. The writer (who says he is quoting God's directives) emphasizes the absolute prohibition of any consumption of blood (which was common in pagan rites – see Ac.15) on the grounds that the life of every creature is in its blood”. Many times, the “taking of life” and the “shedding of blood” are used synonymously. And since all life belongs exclusively to God who gave it, even the blood of legitimately hunted game is to be avoided. Therefore, it should be borne in mind continually that any occurrence of the word “blood” MAY be a reference to life, rather than, or in addition to, actual physical blood.

Exactly how this relates to Jesus' enigmatic statement quoted in Jn.6:53-56 is not clear, but I am sure that (1) there is a connection, and that (2) it is as obscure to us as it was to the original listeners (who were just more honest about their confusion!)

Although the gospel uses of haima also refer primarily either to violence (Mt.23:30, 32; Mt. 27:4:6,8, Lk.11:50, 51) or to responsibility for it (Mt.27:24,25; Lk.13:1), and they also include physical conditions (Mk.5:25,29; Lk.8:43,44; Lk.22:44; Jn.19:34), two entirely different ideas are also introduced. In Mt.16:17 and Jn.1:13, also picked up by Paul in I Cor.15:50, Gal.1:6, and Eph.6:2, (all but the John reference accompanied by “flesh”), the intent is simple humanity. The same phrase in Heb.2:14 emphasizes kinship – a critical element in Jesus' identification with our human condition.

The only place where Jesus speaks of his own blood (beside the John reference above) is Mt.26:28 and its parallels in Mk.14:24 and Luke 22:20, where he relates it to the establishment of the New Covenant. This connection is explained in greater detail in Heb.9:20, 10:20, and 13:20, where (especially in chapter 9) the writer connects the idea of “covenant” to a legal will (see #79,80), which takes effect only upon the death of the testator. Please note also that although Matthew added “for the removal of failures [trad.: forgiveness of sins]” to the concept of covenant, neither Mark nor Luke quotes Jesus as making any such connection to “debt”, “sin”, “guilt”, “forgiveness”, or any of the other popular buzz-words, nor does the expanded treatise in Hebrews.

The twelve references in Acts cover a considerable spectrum as well. Ac.5:28 and 18:6 reprise the idea of responsibility, as does 20:26 with a slightly different (probably not physical) slant. Ac.22:20 refers to the stoning of Stephen, which is definitely physical, as is the mention of the purchased field in 1:19, while 15:20, 29 and 21:25 deal with pagan sacrifice. Paul's sermon in Athens (17:26) highlights the kinship of common humanity. Only his message to the Ephesian elders (20:28) specifically mentions Jesus' blood [life? violent death? humanity?] as having periepoiesato – traditionally “purchased” – the church for himself. That translation has to have been a “doctrinal” choice, since the word is classically defined (L/S) as “kept safe, preserved; procure secure; acquire, gain possession of”. Could this erroneous translation be the source of the otherwise undocumented notion of Jesus having satisfied some sort of a “debt”?

I do not feel competent to exegete the references to Joel's prophecy (Ac.2:19,20), since my field of study is Greek, not Hebrew.

In contrast, with the exception of the few passages already noted referring to simple humanity (I Cor.15:50, Gal.1:6, Eph.6:1:12) and the Old Testament quote in Rom.3:15, Paul's epistles uniformly reference “the blood of Christ” or “his blood”, although not nearly as frequently as the purveyors of “doctrine” would like you to believe. I was able to find haima used only nine times in that way in his writing, and although one, Col.1:20, specifically makes reference to the cross, the
others are equally likely to intend the synonymous alternatives of life, kinship, or humanity explored above. Or perhaps (more likely) all of these figure into the picture, because the emphasis in each instance is not on the “substance” in question, but rather upon its effect.

Consider: (and please refer to the indicated studies)
Rom.3:25 – traditionally “propitiation” (see #69 and #151)
Rom.5:19 – we are “made just” (#3) by his blood (see also “transformation,” #97)
I Cor.10:16 – sharing (koinonia – #8) in the Body and Blood of Christ
I Cor.11:25 – Jesus' statement regarding the New Covenant (#80)
I Cor.11:27 – the danger of not perceiving the Body of Christ (#84)
Eph.1:7 – redemption (#16) also in Col.1:14, and I Pet.1:18-19, where it is translated “ransomed”
Eph.2:13 – previously alienated people are brought near,
Col.1:20 – making peace among former enemies (#70)
Every one of these is hugely more practical than most, if not all, of the common theological rhetoric about “the blood of Jesus” – as well as being more Scriptural!

Only the letter to the Hebrews relates the coming, life, and death of Jesus to the sacrificial system of the old covenant – and the burden of its entire narrative is to point out the abject failure of that system to produce the results for which it was designed, and to illustrate the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus! The detailed descriptions in Heb.9:7, 12,13,18,19, 21, 25; 10:4; 11:28; 12:24; 13:11 of the old ways, and their separation of “ordinary people” from the presence of God – an idea much more akin to pagan rituals – are in sharp contrast to the accomplishment of the Lord himself, who by offering his own “blood” [life? violent death? humanity?]
Heb.9:12 – secured eternal redemption (#61)
Heb.10:19 – allowed his people to enter the holiest place (#32)
Heb.13:12 – made all his people “holy” (#3,32)
Notice that it was “UNDER THE LAW” (the phrase that self-styled “evangelists” consistently omit) that “without pouring out blood, deliverance doesn't happen.” (Heb.9:22), and that the oft-repeated message of the entire letter is that the law has been superseded!

Peter (I Pet.1:2) and John (I Jn.1:7, Rv.1:5) are the only ones who specifically connect the idea of “cleansing” with haima, and only in those three settings. How, then, did that idea become so central in so-called “gospel” singing and preaching, in spite of the fact that Jesus never said it? And why is it assumed that none of the other senses of the word are equally appropriate here? As elsewhere, the life, kinship, and humanity of Jesus factor equally into that process.

In no instance does any New Testament writer represent “blood” – whether of Jesus or anyone/anything else – as some sort of magical potion to be dispensed, either naturally or supernaturally, for the correction of physical, moral, or spiritual ills. They speak consistently of the kinship, with the Lord and with one another, graciously provided for those who joyfully submit to his sovereignty.

Thanks be to God!

Word Study #184 – Wash, washed, washing

Here is yet another word, plentiful in song and sermon, but only quite rarely used in the New Testament of anything but ordinary physical cleanliness. An English reference to “washing” is used for no less than ten different Greek words, of which the most common are quite readily distinguishable, and only one (in three forms) has even limited direct reference to “spiritual” cleansing. Let’s look at the evidence.

One of them can be disposed of very quickly. Brecho, usually translated “rain” (Mt.5:45, Lk.17:29, Jas.5:17, Rv.11:6), is rendered “wash” only twice (Lk.7:38, 44), where it is used of tears.

The three primary root words, classically, occupied simple but specific domains. Louo, with its related noun loutron and its prefixed form apologluo, refers to bathing: washing one's entire body. Sometimes, but not always, there is an accompanying sense of ritual purification.

Nipto (historically nizo) and its prefixed form in the middle voice, aponiptomai, while it also occasionally implied purification, more frequently intended simply washing one's hands or feet. In both LXX and New Testament accounts, the offering of water for washing the feet of a guest was a normal expectation of hospitality (Gen.18:4, 19:2, 24:32; Lk.7:44, I
These divisions fit very well with the New Testament appearances of the words, although there are several marked deviations in the LXX.

Both *louo* and *nipto*, for example, are used in Jesus' conversation with Peter in John 13, where references to the washing of feet consistently employs *nipto*, but Jesus' word to Peter that a person who has had a bath (*louo*) only needs his feet washed (*nipto*) makes a clear distinction. Washing one's face (Mt.6:17 and probably Jn.9:7,11), hands (Mt.15:12, Mk.7:3) and feet (Jn.13:6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and I Tim.5:10) are all expressed with *nipto*, whereas bathing the body (*louo*) is obvious in Jn.13:10, Ac.9:37, 16:33, and Heb.10:22,23 (where it could also reference baptism). Interestingly, Peter (II Pet.2:22) even uses it of a pig!

Please note that none of these, except the Hebrews reference (to which we will return) refers to anything but a simple, physical act of cleansing. Different vocabulary is usually employed when more-than-ordinary cleansing is intended, for which please consult #65.

Of the three prefixed forms, *aponiptomai* describes Pilate's ostentatious “washing his hands” of the sordid affair of Jesus' lynching (Mt.27:24) – which Bauer attributes to Jewish, rather than Roman culture as a gesture of innocence. *Apolpluno* is used for the washing of fishing nets (Lk.5:2). Only *apolouo* carries any “spiritual” connotation (Ac.22:16 and I Cor.6:11), as does *loutron* in Eph.5:26 and Titus 3:5, and the Heb.10:22 use of *louo*.

This latter group is often connected with baptism. Interestingly, *baptizo* (*v*) and *baptismos* (*n*), although usually translated “baptize” or “baptism”, are also rarely rendered “wash” : the verb twice (Mk.7:4 and Lk.11:38) – against 74x “baptize” – and the noun three times (Mk.7:4, 8; Heb.9:10). In each of these, the reference clearly is *not* symbolic of commitment to Jesus' lordship.

The more common form for “baptism” is *baptisma* (22x). You can find a more detailed treatment of baptism in chapter 10 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*. (free download.) Also see #174.

Inexplicably, Bauer connects this word with Jewish ritual washings, despite the fact that it occurs only twice in the LXX: once of Naaman the Syrian in the Jordan (II Ki.5:14) and once where Isaiah (21:4) speaks of being “overwhelmed” by transgressions: neither of which makes any reference to Jewish ceremony. The above references to Mark and Luke may provide a tenuous connection, but certainly no strong evidence.

By way of contrast, Paul, in the Ac.22:16 passage cited above, quotes Ananias as directly connecting his baptism (*baptisai*) with the “washing away” (*apolousai*) of his shortcomings [*“sins”* (#141)] by “calling upon the name of Jesus”. All of the verbs here are *aorist tenses*, which indicate a single, definitive act. Likewise, in I Cor.6:11, “washed” (*apelousaste*), “made holy” (*hEgiasthEte*), and “made just” (*edikaiothEte*) are all *aorist passive* verbs. All of this, therefore, is assumed to have taken place upon the occasion of one's baptism!

In Eph.5:26, a similar transformation is described as having taken place for the church as a whole – but this time, the agent (dative case) is not only “washing with water” but also “the word” (see #66). The verbs, however, are still *aorist*. We are dealing with *accomplished fact* here, not a process, which we saw to be the case with “salvation” (#5). To Titus (3:5), Paul associates “washing” with “rebirth [regeneration]” – the *beginning* of one's life in Christ.

This is not, however, to contradict Jesus' statement already noted in Jn.13, that even those who have had a bath will still need to wash from their feet the residue from walking through a world that has not submitted to his cleansing. But that realization needs to be held in balance with Heb.10:22, as we “approach him with full confidence”! Here, the cleansing of having been “sprinkled” (*rherhantismoi*) and thereby *cleansed “from consciousness of evil”*, as well as “washed” (*leloumenoi*) are *perfect participles* – past events with present consequences! (Please see #6, 7, 14, and 128). *Rhantizo*, a very common word in the LXX describing purification rites, appears only in the letter to the Hebrews in summaries of those processes (9:13,19, 21 and 12:24) and a single reference in I Pet.1:2, where the reference is also to purification.

And here, with only three references (I Pet.1:2, Rv.1:5, and Rv.7:14), one can finally discover a source for all the noise about being “washed in blood”. (Peter only refers to a ceremonial “sprinkling”.) In Rv.1:5, the actor is Jesus (not people); and the “washing” appears fifth on a list of six descriptions of the accomplishments of the Lord Jesus. In Rv.7:14, the reference is in a highly allegorical description of a contingent of martyrs having “washed their robes.” (And by the way, a “fountain / well” – *pEgE* – same word – is simply a natural source of *water* in Jas.3:11,12; Rv.7:17, 8:10, 14:7, 16:4, 21:6; Jn.4:6, 14; II Pet.2:17. The only exception is the Mk.5:29 reference to the healing of the woman who had a hemorrhage – and nobody “washes” in *that*!) All the common rhetoric, verbal or musical, is *seriously* out of balance!
Where is the proclamation (also in Rv.1:5) of Jesus as “the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth, who loves us”? Where is the announcement that he has “made(of) us a kingdom of priests to God his Father”? All of these have multiple New Testament references, and should therefore have enormous influence upon the life of his people!

Please understand that this is not to ignore or disparage either the “shedding of his blood” (see previous post) or being “washed” with it as an operative factor in the process – whether that phrase is taken as a reference to physical blood, to Jesus’ life, his humanity, or any other part of his activity during or after his years on the earth. It is simply a plea that those who claim to represent our Lord and King pay proportionate attention to aspects of his life, teaching, example, and accomplishments that are much more frequently described and explained in Scripture, and therefore equally, if not more essential to the life and health of his Body.

May we represent him faithfully!

Word Study #185 – Born, and “Born Again”

Most people would be rather thoroughly baffled if they were asked, “Have you been born?” How else would one have become a sentient being? The evidence is obvious. It should be deemed equally silly to raise the same question about having been “born again”, as if that designation were an earned – or honorary – degree, or some celestial merit-badge, which produced no observable evidence in one's life.

Those who demand such a “degree” would probably be amazed – perhaps even incredulous – to learn that their favorite “qualification” appears only four times in the entire New Testament, and that their most loudly trumpeted “proof-text”, Jn.3:3,7, is NOT among them! As is our custom, let's look at the evidence.

By far the majority of references to birth, in any form, refer simply to the physical event of the arrival of a baby. The same word is traditionally translated “beget” if it refers to a father, “conceive, bear, deliver, or bring forth” if it refers to a mother, and “born” if to a child.

The word appears in many variant forms – primarily the verb, gennao, but also nouns genesis (origin, source, descent), genEma (produce, or fruit), genos (stock, or kin), genna (offspring, race, family), gennEma (that which is born), and genetE (an adverb, “by, from, or since birth”). The lexicons make very little distinction, and the usage makes even less.

New Testament appearances relating to other than the physical process of birth include references to one's origin (Jn.1:13, 8:41, 9:2, Ac.2:8, 22:3, 28). Note especially Jn.9:34, where it was the Pharisees who spoke of being “born in sin”: JESUS NEVER SAID THAT ABOUT ANYBODY!!! Also included are kinship or nationality (usually using genos) (Ac.4:6, 4:36, 7:13, 7:19, 13:26, 18:2, 18:24; Mk.7:26, Gal.1:14, Phil 3:5, II Cor.11:26), and “fruit or harvest”, as in Jesus' reference to “the fruit of the vine” (Mt.26:29, Mk.14:25, Lk.22:18), and in the parable of the rich fool (Lk.12:18). Interestingly, gennEma, the form used on these latter occasions, is the same word used by both John the Baptist and Jesus in critiquing their opponents as a “generation [offspring] of vipers”, as well as Paul's description of a faithful life as “the fruit of justice [“righteousness”]” (II Cor.9:10).

The verb gennao also reaches beyond reference to physical birth or provenance. It appears in the statement from heaven, quoted from the coronation Psalm 2:7 in Heb.1:5 and 5:5, as well as Ac.13:33, although it was not used in either of the events to which those passages refer – Jesus' baptism by John or his transfiguration: an interesting discrepancy that could bear further study, except that any analysis would necessarily have to be entirely conjecture.

Paul also uses it of his having been the messenger who enabled both the Corinthian church (I Cor.4:15) and Philemon (Phm.10) to learn and choose faithfulness.

These latter uses of gennao serve as a transition to the understanding of birth as becoming a participant in a new and different life. Please also refer in this regard to #35, 96, 97, 134, 135, 174.

John's choice of words in describing a person who has chosen faithfulness is “born of [from] God.” He asserts that “Everyone who does justice [righteousness – see #3] is born from him” (I Jn.2:29), although it is unclear whether the grammatical reference of autou (him) is “Father” or “Son”.

In I Jn. 3:9, both instances represent having been “born of God” as enabling one to leave his life of shortcoming [failure, “sin”], and then John goes on to point out quite bluntly the need to discern between “God's children” and “the devil's children”. (You will not find in the New Testament the popular modern affirmation that “all people are the children of God”!)

John goes on to explain (4:7) “everyone who keeps on loving, has been born from God”, (5:1) “Everyone who keeps trusting that Jesus is the Anointed One has been born from God”, and (5:4) “Everyone that has been born from God is (in the process of) conquering the world!” He then concludes (5:18) “We know that anyone who has been born from God
does not keep on (living in) failure: but the one [One?] born from God continually keeps him [some MSS have “guards himself”], and the evil one does not touch him.” Clearly, John is referring to something far beyond physical birth.

These statements in his letter cast light on his Gospel account, and also receive light from it. Jesus’ much-quoted statement to Nicodemus in Jn.3:3,7 has been poorly translated. Please see the grammatical comments in Translation Notes (free download). Here, we are simply concerned with the vocabulary – specifically, the adverb anOthen, which appears in both places. The adverb, classically, was translated “from above, from on high, or from the gods” (L/S). It is a description of provenance, not time or counting. L/S notes that only in the New Testament was it translated “anew, afresh, over again”. This has to have been a theological, not a linguistic choice. It is clear from John's letter that he understood Jesus to be saying “born from God.”

Peter is the only one to use the word anagennao, literally “born / begotten again.” In I Pet.1:3, the subject is “God”, the object is “us”, the means by which it is effected is Jesus’ resurrection, and the result is our being included in his inheritance. In 1:23, he reminds his readers that this new life is from an “imperishable source”, and is characterized, as John also insisted, by genuine love of the brethren.

There is one other word, paliggenesia, also occurring only twice, and traditionally translated “regeneration”, that may be relevant to this conversation. As you can see by comparing the words, it is marginally related to the others, but with a different prefix. Trench makes an effort to distinguish it from the others, adding anakainOsis to the mix, although that word is exclusively translated “renewal.”

This is not much help, since he is making a complex theological and liturgical argument out of active and passive, progressive and accomplished ideas, which is a useful tool in understanding verbs – but these words are both nouns, and as such have neither tense nor voice. Although paliggenesia and anakainOsis may be similar, they could not possibly be synonyms, or they would not be used together in Tit.3:5. Trench is fond of referencing the “Church Fathers” as a tool of interpretation, forgetting that they wrote a century or more after the Biblical accounts, and in the context of early efforts to codify “doctrines” and define and fight “heresies.”

Paliggenesia is very common in classical literature. The Stoic philosophers made frequent reference to a cyclical renewal of the cosmos, after destruction by fire or flood. Some also included the notion of reincarnation or the transmigration of “souls” in this process. The word was also used of a nation or a person returning from exile or shame, or, medically, of either recovery from a disease or the recurrence of a tumor! It appears only twice in the New Testament – used once by Jesus, in reference to the consummation of his Kingdom (Mt.19:28), and once in Paul's letter to Titus (3:5), where (vv.4-6) he could be speaking of either baptism or the gift of the Holy Spirit – or both.

In connection with baptism, resurrection is a much more common figure than birth (see #35), with the act of baptism serving as a symbol of the disciple's deliberate identification with Jesus' own burial and resurrection, and that individual's consequent transformation of life. Romans 6:4 calls it “newness of life”. In other places, “a new creation” (II Cor.5:17, Gal.6:15), “the new man” (Eph.2:15, 4:24; Col.3:10) and other figures convey similar ideas.

Please refer again to the other previous studies listed above.

Whatever you choose to call it, we would all do well to follow the example of the whole New Testament, focusing less on demanding a “birth certificate”, and more on the development of a LIFE that rightly represents and honors its Giver!

Word Study #186 – Heresy and Division

I had a college friend – a brother deeply devoted to the Lord – who, some years ago, broke with the denomination for which he had been a “minister”, and affiliated with a “non-denominational” group that he considered “more Scriptural.” I was therefore startled to hear him say that he “needed to learn a whole new theology”, and when encountering an unfamiliar teaching, he needed to submit it to a person in authority to find out whether it was “heresy”! He then proceeded to warn me of the dangers of being “led astray”, when I wondered if it would not be more appropriate to check it out in the Scripture itself! And we had taken the same Greek class, with a professor who was a stickler for linguistic accuracy! That encounter has troubled me ever since.

I was reminded of that incident when our brother Jim, in an excellent message about the unity for which Jesus prayed, made reference to the account in I Corinthians of the dissension centering upon certain individuals in that group (I Cor.1:10 and 11:18-19), where Paul appears to connect divisions in the brotherhood with “heresies”. Although the association of those two concepts is not common in contemporary thought, it fits very well with the lexical meaning of hairesis, the word from
which our English term “heresy” is derived. Historically, *haireis* had nothing whatever to do with the truth or falsehood of a statement, “doctrine”, or claim. L/S lists “the taking of a town by a conqueror, acquisition of power, the election of magistrates, a purpose or course of action, any system of philosophical principles or those who profess it: a sect, school, or religious or political party.” The verb, *haireo*, likewise indicates “to take or seize, to assume power, to win or gain, to catch (as in hunting), to join a party or adopt an opinion.” The middle or passive *haireomai* (to be chosen or elected), and the related verb, *hairetizo* (to choose) also carry no indication whether the “choice” is for good or ill.

How does this bear out in New Testament usage? *Haireis* is actually translated “sect” in the majority of its appearances (Ac. 5:17, 15:5, 24:5, 26:5, 28:22), and has neither positive nor negative connotation: it simply identifies a defined group: Pharisees, Sadducees, (both of whom wielded both religious and political power, often in competition with one another), and even “Nazarenes” or “followers of the Way”. Traditional translators used “heresy” in the latter reference, but the word is the same. The verbs are consistently rendered “choose” (*hairetizo* in Mt.12:18, and *haireomai* in Phil.1:22, II Thes.2:13, Heb.11:25), and are uniformly positive in tone. The references with negative overtones are few, but significant. *None*, however, are overtly connected with what a person thinks or “believes” about any particular subject.

Paul's concern about the situation in Corinth is not “doctrinal”, but concerns divisions – rivalry – in the brotherhood. Please refer to the treatment of schisma, schismata in #127. Divisions can be a good thing – for example, when referring to a “division” in the crowds among those who paid attention to Jesus and his message, and those who rejected him (Jn.7:43, 9:16, 10:19; Ac.14:4, 23:7) – but within a brotherhood, it is completely unacceptable. I Cor.1:10-17 deals with different factions promoting and following different leaders / teachers. “Church politics,” anyone? Remember that *haireis* started out as a political concept – a conqueror and his deputies, or even “democratically elected”officials! I Cor.11:18—19 addresses an even more egregious violation of the brotherhood: status-tripping and abuse of the needy at an event intended to express and teach mutuality of love and care! This is reinforced in Paul's eloquent treatise on the Body of Christ in the next chapter – especially v.25. See also chapter 7 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*.

In this context, and in view of the lexical meaning of *haireis*, it becomes clear that Paul's reference traditionally translated “heresy” in 11:19 is a challenging question, not a statement encouraging the sorting of who is “in” or “out.”

The list of “deeds of the human nature [flesh]” in Gal.5:19-21, likewise, by including *haireis* in the company of *echthrai* (hostility), *eris* (strife), *zelos* (jealousy), *thumoi* (rage), *eritheiai* (factionalism), and *dichostasias* (divisions), and followed by *phthonoi* (murders), places it clearly in the realm of active jockeying for power, and not theoretical theological speculation!

The context is also the key to realizing that Peter (II Pet.2:1) is talking about the advocacy of licentious behavior. Read the whole paragraph, not just a couple phrases out of the first “verse”, for a description of what traditional translators labeled “damnable heresies”!

The only other appearance of any of these terms is in Paul's letter to Titus (3:10), where he is giving instructions for dealing with a trouble-maker in the congregation. Traditional translators call him “a man who is an heretic” – but again, attention to the whole paragraph requires consideration that the reference may be to a person who prefers “foolish arguments, genealogies, strife, and legal battles” (v.9) to “being careful to keep practicing good deeds [behavior]!” (v.8). Such a person is to be duly confronted – twice – but then avoided if he refuses correction.

So how did *haireis* morph from the idea of political strife and power-grabbing into obsession with theoretical details of “doctrine”? The first recorded use of the English word (according to Webster) is in the thirteenth century. I submit that this must have happened as the “church” itself morphed from a persecuted brotherhood of mutuality into a power structure with the ability to do its own persecuting of any who challenged the powerful. Jesus had forbidden titles of honor and positions of prestige (Mt.23:1-12), and Paul strongly opposed divisive leadership, as we have seen. Please also see chapters 6 and 8 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*.

But as powerful people emerged and began to define “correct doctrine” – having long since abandoned the idea of mutuality, and its focus on godly behavior in the brotherhood – the very patterns against which Paul had warned Titus became institutionalized. “Heresy” became anything that challenged the grip of the powerful, or their prerogative to include and exclude people from the ranks of the “chosen”, and to revise the “rules” in order to maintain their own dominance.

This – not a deviation from even the most cherished of theoretical “doctrines” codified by these same powerful people, but the very existence of a power structure at all, and its consequent divisions led by competitors with a heavy political agenda – is the ultimate heresy!
Word Study #187 – Pentecost

After finding that there was so much to be learned about Epiphany (#171), I wondered if the same would be true of another “event” in the “church year”. Pentecost is effusively celebrated by some groups, and virtually ignored by others. As before, there is very little direct information in the New Testament. The word appears only three times: the description of the initial “grand entrance” of the Holy Spirit fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection (Ac.2:1), Paul’s letter to the Corinthian brethren mentioning his intention to stay in Ephesus “until Pentecost” (I Cor.16:8), and his telling the Ephesian elders at their farewell meeting that he wanted to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost (Ac.20:16). Either of these latter two leaves one with the impression that some sort of observance may have been planned. Although reference is made to the event on other occasions (for example, Ac.11:15 and 19:1-5), the word itself is not used. There are no classical references: L/S notes that it was applied to the Jewish feast day because it was 50 days after Passover, but has no literary reference outside the NT except for its use as the date of a battle in II Maccabees 12:32.

It was equally difficult to find Biblical information about the Jewish feast for which the crowd “from every nation under heaven” (Ac.2:5) had assembled in Jerusalem. Most scholars assume that the event was the “Feast of Weeks”, also called Shavuot – the offering of the firstfruits of the grain harvest, which occurred 50 days after the Passover. Ex.34:22 describes that offering, but does not name it. It was one of three occasions where every adult male was expected to appear at the designated place (eventually Jerusalem), bearing the prescribed sacrifice, but the word pentekostes does not occur at all in the Old Testament portion of the LXX. Related words, simply referring to “fifty” of anything – people, animals, etc. – are fairly common. This firstfruits feast seems to be a somewhat plausible candidate. The celebration of the Passover related to the deliverance from bondage in Egypt, and the “firstfruits” somehow became connected to the celebration of the giving of the Law at Sinai. There is however no direct OT formula or command concerning this juxtaposition. I was interested to find one reference to a Talmudic assertion that the Law was given at Sinai in 70 languages! Apocryphal or not, that would be a curious precedent for the events at Pentecost.

The idea of “firstfruits” – aparche – shows up a few more times than does pentekostes. The word, classically, reached far beyond the concept of a grateful offering. L/S includes “a 2% tax on inheritance, an entrance fee to an event or organization, a board of officials, the birth certificate of a free person,” as well as “the beginning of an offering or sacrifice.” Bauer notes that it had to be offered before using any part of the harvest, and was considered a foretaste of the future. Traditionally, a harvest offering of firstfruits was an acknowledgment that all of the produce, and indeed all of life itself, belonged to God. In the New Testament, Jesus himself is called “firstfruits” (I Cor.15:20, 23) from the dead; converts are called the “firstfruits” of their region of origin (Rom.11:16, 16:5, I Cor.16:15, Jas.1:18); and Paul refers to the activity of the Spirit among his people (Rom.8:23) as the “firstfruits” of their adoption into God's family! So it is entirely proper that this image should go both ways: the gift of the Holy Spirit as what Paul also called the “down-payment” (II Cor.1:22) on our inheritance, and the worship, service and praise to God enabled by that gift as the firstfruits to God of the eventual triumph of his Kingdom. (Please see also #52 and 53.)

But what are we to make of the events of Pentecost itself? Historically, both Eastern and Western churches considered it the appropriate time for baptisms, ordinations, and confirmations, all of which are clearly assumed to be connected to the agency of the Holy Spirit. (Please refer to #76). Other groups focus on the wind, the fire, and the languages. This is where things can get messy. Wind can cool the heat of summer and bring refreshing rain – or it can wreak terrible destruction. Fire can provide light and warmth, enable the preparation of food, or destroy everything in its path. And language can encourage, heal, and build relationships of love and trust, or communicate anger and strife, provoking misunderstanding and wars.

Regarding the wind – this is the only New Testament use of the word pnoe (NOT pneuma) except for Ac.17:25. There are none in the LXX. It is used of storms, and never a synonym for “spirit”. I thought that might be the word used where Elijah discovered that “the Lord was NOT in the wind,” but it is not: that uses pneuma – I can't figure that one out! Can you? Here, though, in the Acts account, it may be that Luke simply needed it to distinguish it from his use of pneuma for the Spirit.

John the Baptist had spoken of fire (Mt.3:11, Lk.3:16) when distinguishing his baptism “for a changed life” from the baptism that Jesus would perform “in the Holy Spirit”. Other gospel references to fire are primarily negative – the fate of the “weeds.” Although fire is also symbolic of Godly power in many ancient cultures, the significant words here are diamerizomai (divided, distributed) and eph hena hekaston auton (upon each one of them). This picture is in sharp
contrast to the single “pillar of fire” that had led the Israelites through the desert. **This fire is divided,** and parcelled out to **every single person!** This is one of the rare instances where **individuals** are the focus, as opposed to the group as a unit. But notice that it is **not** a leader, **not** a group of leaders. **Everyone** is singled out!

Then there is the language phenomenon. People – apparently observant Jews – were assembled in Jerusalem from all over the (known) world. They would have had at least a passing knowledge of the languages of the most recent conquerors (Greek and Latin), and probably whatever iteration of ancient Hebrew was current in temple worship. But they all heard the message of the greatmess of God in their **own native dialects** (**ta idia dialektos**)! We are told that the speakers were using different **languages** (**glossais**) as the Spirit gave them things to say. Dialects are a sub-group of languages. Some folks make a big to-do about whether the miracle was in the speaking or the hearing – or both. Why would that matter? The point is, **people understood what was said!** They received the message about the “wonderful works of God” in the dialect they learned as children! That speaks to hearts!

Neither here nor elsewhere in Scripture is a totally unintelligible outburst of speech advocated. Our brother Paul has provided very helpful guidelines for the use of this very valuable gift in I Cor.14.

**The purpose of language is communication!** Natural or supernatural, with people or with God: no more and no less. Although speech in an unlearned language is several times (Ac.8:14-18, 10:46, 15:8) considered evidence of genuine faithfulness, nowhere is it demanded as either a qualification – or a disqualification! – for acceptance or service.

The most significant “accomplishment” of Pentecost is evidenced rather in its tangible **results** (Ac.2:42-47, 4:32-35). Having heard the word, three thousand new people sought baptism. They gathered **daily**, eager to learn more (#47). They shared their lives (#8). Whether the “breaking of bread” refers simply to shared meals, or to an observance of “communion” (**koininia**) #8, matters little. There was mutual prayer (#91). “Wonders and signs” (#168) were manifested through the apostles. They shared (#8 again) all they had, as anyone had need. In short, the loving mutuality created by the Spirit bestowed at Pentecost **created** a community to which the Lord **could** continually add the folks he was recruiting! This is the most convincing evidence of Pentecost!

I can’t imagine that such a brotherhood, contrasting with the individualistic self-focus of our present society, would not be as attractive today as it was in Imperial Rome. May this Pentecost become reality among us!

**Word Study #188 – Debt and Debtors**

Here is another subject, much celebrated in song and sermon, that has absolutely no basis in any New Testament writings. Neither Jesus, nor any of his disciples, nor the apostles who took up his cause after the Resurrection, ever made any reference to his life or his death as accomplishing the “payment” of any sort of “debt”. We have seen, in the study of the cross (#34), the extensive and wonderful list of its achievements – but none of these include any reference to “debt.” All the “paid my debt and set me free” rhetoric is totally without New Testament precedent. Jesus’ single statement of giving his life as a “ransom”, noted in Mt.20:28 and Mk.10:45, and quoted in I Tim.2:6, is treated in the study of “redemption” (#61). It was a release from slavery or captivity. No “debt” is ever mentioned.

Diet is a legal and financial concept, and has nothing to do with “naughty” behavior. The penalty for failure to pay a debt could be prison (Lk.12:51) or slavery (Mt.18:25-34), but was never execution. Nevertheless, there are important teachings regarding debt in both the gospels and the epistles, and these are usually overlooked, in favor of the more dramatic, made-up proclamation of payment that we hear more often.

We are here concerned with a single “family” of words: the **verb opheilo**, (L/S: financial debt, duty, or obligation), and the nouns **opheiletes** (debtor), **opheile», and **opheilema** (indebtedness, or that which is owed). There does not appear to be any obvious lexical distinction between legal liability (as for tax) and less formal financing. Neither is there any lexical distinction between finance and other sorts of obligations or duties. These must be discerned from the context. Bauer suggests that the implied connection to “sin” (see #7) is of Aramaic, rabbinical origin, where it may have developed as a corollary to the acquisition of obligation by oath, as in Mt.23:16, the “picky details” of which Jesus rejected as utterly irrelevant. The incident recorded in Lk.7:41 is an **illustration**, not an equation.

Already under the old covenant (LXX), there had been careful instructions for the protection of a poor borrower. Dt.24:12 stipulates that he may not be abused nor intruded upon, and if he pledges a garment as collateral, it must be returned to him at nightfall. Dt.15:2 places a seven-year limit, after which a debt must be forgiven, and the exacting of interest is prohibited in Ex.22:25.
Most manuscripts refer to forgiveness of indebtedness in the Lord's prayer (Mt.6 and Lk.11), although some substitute *hamartia* or *paraptoma*. Even when Peter specifically inquired about dealing with an offending brother (using *hamartia*), Jesus' reply changes the focus of the conversation with a parable about debt (Mt.18:21). He did the same thing with Simon the Pharisee, when he criticized a “sinful woman” (Lk.7:39-43), and made a strong point in another parable that generosity received needs to be “passed on” by the recipient (Mt.18:23-35). Paul must have understood this message, and observed it in his very practical offer to Philemon on Onesimus' behalf (Phm.18).

The epistles, however, seem primarily to turn from the sense of financial debt to that of obligation. There is no hint of having had all of one's responsibilities “forgiven” or “taken away”! And these are represented by exactly the same vocabulary.

Paul speaks of himself as “indebted” to both Jew and Gentile in Rom.1:14, and clearly connects it to his preaching of the gospel message.

In Rom.8:12, he uses the same word to “declare independence” from slavery to the disciple's former self-focused way of life, and in Rom.15:27 of the obligation of brethren to provide for the practical needs of their poor compatriots in Jerusalem. In his Corinthian letter, (I Cor.7:3,36) he applies the same word to marital responsibilities, in Rom.13:7 to the payment of taxes, and in Gal.5:3, as a warning that if one clings to any part of the Law, he incurs obligation to the whole thing. Far better to heed his advice in Rom.13:8, to owe no one anything but brotherly love, which “fulfills the Law” by doing no wrong (v.10) to anyone. Laws are about prohibitions. Kingdom living is positive, not negative.

The most frequent New Testament translation of *opheilo* is “ought” (15x) – not phrased as the commandments of a new or revised Law, but simply identifying some of the characteristics of a changed life. It is to be expected that:

Jn.13:14 – disciples will offer one another the service of washing feet (see ch.11 of *Citizens*).

Ac.17:29 – they will not attribute human characteristics or failings to God.

Rom.15:1 – they will bear the infirmities of the weak.

I Cor.11:7,10 – they will observe the right and duty of participation for all, symbolized by the use of head coverings (*Citizens*, ch.13).

II Cor.12:11 – parents will care and provide for children.

Eph.5:28 – husbands will love and care for their wives, as Christ does for the church.

Heb.5:12 – They will “grow up”, and be teachers of others.

I Jn.2:6 – they will “walk” [live] as Jesus did.

I Jn.3:16 – they will lay down their lives for one another.

II Jn.8 – they will welcome itinerant brethren.

This is not law: it is simply the culture of the Kingdom.

The primary principle to be derived from this survey is quite simple: ITS NOT ABOUT KEEPING SCORE!!! That was the obsession of people who were in bondage to the minutiae of the Law.

Faithful disciples of Jesus rather take their cues from the servant described in his parable recorded in Lk.17:7-10. The most meticulous obedience is “only what we ought to have done”.

“The one who keeps saying he's living in relationship with him ought (opheile) to walk [live, behave] as he did!” (I Jn.2:6) – not as a “debtor”, under the threat of prison or slavery, but in gratitude for being included in the Kingdom – in the very family of the King!

**Word Study #189 – Myth**

The term “myth” has been seriously misunderstood, and consequently misinterpreted, in Christian circles along the entire “conservative-liberal” spectrum. Some folks find its application to Biblical study highly offensive, assuming the word to be derogatory; others totally fail to see why there should be any problem with it, since they neither make that assumption nor are particularly bothered by it.

Historical scholars made a grave error when they labeled their research of both Old Testament and New Testament archeology as “de-mythologizing” the Biblical narratives without explaining their definition of the word. Giving these folks all possible benefit of any doubt, I suspect that at least some of them did not intend to cast aspersion upon the factual accuracy of those records, but rather to place them carefully in their historical context. I am equally certain that others,
some of whom I have encountered personally, did have much more destructive intent. The furor which arose as a result, however, probably was caused primarily by a failure to understand that the vocabulary of the disciplines of anthropology and archeology is descriptive, and not necessarily derogatory.

To the cultural anthropologist, “myth” simply denotes the narrative, either historical or fanciful or some combination thereof, upon which the members of a specific cultural group base their self-understanding, their mores, and their very existence as a people. Their use of the word “myth” itself, makes no judgment as to the historical veracity of the events to which the “myth” refers.

It is the function of the narrative that is in view: whether it describes the emergence of humankind from a hole in the ground, the world on the back of a giant sea turtle, the glorification (and sanitization of the behavior) of the “founding fathers” of the U.S., the antics of assorted pagan deities, or the treasured narratives of the Christian (or any other) faith tradition. ALL are “myths”, in the anthropological sense, since their function is to define the society in question, with total disregard to the opinions of scientists, pseudo-scientists, historians, or anyone else.

This is in harmony with the oldest definitions of muthos listed by L/S: Homer used it of “any public word or speech; a fact, threat, or command; counsel or advice; reasoning, saying, or rumor”. Only much later did muthos morph from the sense of “a tale, story, or narrative” into “fiction: the opposite of historic truth, which is represented by logos; legend, myth; the (literary) plot of a comedy or tragedy.” By the first century, the sense of “fiction” had become predominant.

The five uses of muthos in the New Testament clearly intend the latter sense. It appears in I Tim.1:4, 4:7; II Tim.4:4, Titus 1:14, and II Pet.1:16, always in a negative light. It does not occur at all in the LXX. Interestingly, in his letter to Titus, Paul warns specifically against “Jewish fables [myths],” connecting them with people's man-made regulations, and “turning away from the truth”. Folks who have been encouraged to supplement their understanding of New Testament teaching with the fanciful conjectures of earlier and contemporary Jewish writers would do well to heed this warning.

Peter is even more specific, as he emphasizes to his readers that the burden of his teaching about “the power and presence of the Lord Jesus” was NOT based upon “cleverly-devised myths”, but rather upon his own personal experience! Peter often did lean toward the practical, as he sought to understand and to follow the Lord. And the sharing of actual experience was always – and is still – the most valid “evangelism!”

Paul seems to have discerned that Timothy was facing similar dangers. In I Tim.1:4, he connects “myths [fables]” with “interminable genealogies”, the preoccupation with which threatened to distract people from simple obedience to the truth. There are still groups that want to check a person's “pedigree” before accepting the veracity of his commitment. (I have been their victim!)

In I Tim.4:7, “bebélous (L/S: irreligious, scornful, profane) and graodeis (a derogatory term for old women) muthous” most likely refers to any notions that would interfere with the immediately following advice: “Discipline yourself toward godliness!”

Paul's second letter to Timothy (4:4) describes people who simply avoid or ignore the truth, in favor of muthous ektpesontai – “turning aside to myths.” Might this apply to folks who feel a need to obsess over figuring out elaborate explanations for every un-answered question? Speculation can be so much easier and more entertaining than simple obedience!

So yes: it it absolutely clear that “myths” – in the literary sense – can present a grave danger to faithfulness. We need to take the apostles' warning quite seriously. But let us also avoid getting hung-up on the technical vocabulary of a scholarly discipline from which we could gain valuable historical insight. Evaluate the effects of their “discoveries”, rather than rejecting them out-of-hand because of the terminology they choose. (And if you are an historian, please find or invent a less-threatening word!)

To all the faithful, be sure to choose carefully which will be the “myths” (in the anthropological sense) that will inform and govern your life, behavior, and indeed, your very being!

Word Study #190 – “Bought” and “Sold”

Another concept that has been blown completely out of proportion in supposedly “Christian” teaching and hymnody is the often parroted but never examined phrase, “bought with Jesus' blood”. The phrase occurs only once in the entire New Testament (Ac.20:28). It refers to the church, and not to individuals, and is
That sort of "payment", referring exclusively to either borrowed money or taxes, is represented by underline. Please note that underline preserving, to keep or save for oneself, to procure, secure, achieve, or lay up."

Piprasko Mt.21:41 as rent for agricultural land. Lk.7:42, 12:51 of debt; in Mt.11:21, Mk.12:17, Lk.20:25, Rom.13:7 of taxes; in Lk. 10:35 for service rendered, and in underline.

Apodidomi, here, we are dealing with three words. By far the most frequently used is the simplest: agorazo, used 30 times and always translated “buy”, is obviously related to agora, the marketplace in every city or town. L/S has only very simple definitions to suggest: “to buy in a market” or “to frequent (hang-around in) the marketplace.” The New Testament appearances of agorazo are, for the most part, just as simple. People go out and buy food, or other items. It also applies to the activity of the merchants that Jesus drove out of the temple (Mt.21:12, Mk.11:15, Lk.19:45), to the temple rulers buying a field with Judas' money (Mt.27:7), and the lament of sellers of luxury goods in Rv.18:11 when the economy crashes and nobody buys their wares. There are only three anomalies, found in the epistles mentioned above, where the clear intent is to establish the Lord's ownership of his people, and their consequent obligation to honor, obey, and serve him. There are also three places in the Revelation where, inexplicably, traditional translators changed their rendering to “redeem” (#61) and one of which (Rv.5:19) is the only other mention of “blood”. These three are also treated entirely in the plural.

Emporeuomai, used only once (Jas.4:13) – although there are a few uses of related words – seems to be somewhat more business related. L/S lists “to travel on business, to trade, to be a merchant, to make gain”, but also “to over-reach, to cheat”! You may recognize the word “emporium” as an English cognate, through its Latin equivalent.

Exagorazo, more correctly translated (4x) as “redeem”, is treated in #61. The alternative “to buy from” is mentioned in L/S, but it is not used that way in the New Testament.

Ktaomai, rendered “obtain” once (Ac.22:28), “possess” 3x (Lk.18:12, 21:9, I Thes.4:4), “provide” once (Mt.10:9), and “purchase” twice (Ac.1:18, 8:20), relates more to property than to people in L/S summaries, and at least as much to the owning or holding of property as to its acquisition.

Pepoieomai, used only twice (Ac.20:28, I Tim.3:13) is, as noted above, poorly translated. L/S offers “to keep safe or preserve, to keep or save for oneself, to procure, secure, achieve, or lay up.”

Please note that none of these have anything whatever to do with the satisfaction of a debt or any other penalty (see #188). That sort of “payment”, referring exclusively to either borrowed money or taxes, is represented by apodidomi, which is only rarely used of purchase (Ac.5:8 – land; Ac.7:9 – Joseph, into slavery, and Heb.10:16 – Esau's birthright).

Another element usually overlooked in this discussion is that in order for anything to be bought, it has to be for sale! Who is the seller? And who or what is being sold?

Here, we are dealing with three words.

Apodidomi, as noted above, is usually connected with payments other than purchase. L/S includes “to render what is due, to pay a debt, bribe, or taxes, the yield of land, to concede, allow, exhibit, or display.” This is seen in its use in Mt.18:25-34, Lk.7:42, 12:51 of debt; in Mt.11:21, Mk.12:17, Lk.20:25, Rom.13:7 of taxes; in Lk. 10:35 for service rendered, and in Mt.21:41 as rent for agricultural land. None of these refer to anything that Jesus did.

Piprasko, and its earlier form pernemi, (L/S: the sale of slaves, to export captives for sale, to sell for a bribe; much later used also of merchandise; passive: to be betrayed or ruined), occurs only 9x. Once it describes the sale of a debtor (Mt.18:25), twice of real estate (Ac.4:34, 5:4), twice of other belongings (Mt. 13:46, Ac.2:45), 3x of perfume (Mt.26:9, Mk.14:5, Jn.12:5), and once (Rom.7:14) of Paul's lament of being “sold under sin (KJV)" – pempramenos hupo hamartian would be better translated “sold (into slavery) by sin [shortcomings, failures]”. Hupo is often used of agency. Otherwise, there is no hint of who or what did the selling; the participle is passive. Particularly in Romans, Paul tends to “personify” the idea of “sin / failure / shortcoming”.

Poleo, (L/S: to sell or offer for sale, to carry on business or trade, to give up or betray, to farm-out or let-out taxes, offices, or priesthoods) appears 21 times, and applies consistently to ordinary – or underhanded – commerce.

I believe, therefore, that this preponderance of evidence demands that a serious student reconsider the choice of words in the translation of the few isolated instances where, mis-using three different words, the inventors of “doctrine” have contrived “proofs” of Jesus having “bought” individuals as from a slave-market. (Do you really think he would have patronized a “store” run by his arch-enemy???)

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It is necessary to recognize instead that the citizens of his Kingdom have been set free to serve the Lord, not by some sort of contrived commercial transaction (worldly or other-worldly), but by the executive order of the King of Kings! Thanks be to God!

Word Study #191 – “Spiritual” but not “Religious”???

Whenever I hear someone make this very common claim, I feel a need for an extended conversation in order to figure out exactly what he intends to communicate. Unfortunately, the phrase is often intended as a conversation stopper, rather than a starter, which seems primarily to say “It’s none of your business”. I can understand that sentiment: I too reject the onslaught of doctrinaire eager-beavers with their carefully proof-texted checklists. But I recognize that that response does not address the need for sympathetic mutual understanding.

So, although I realize that such a speaker does not usually draw his definitions from this source, I have chosen to approach the issue by examining the New Testament uses of both words, each of which carries both positive and negative implications, depending on the context. As we saw in studies #52 and 53 on the word “spirit”, (which should form a significant part of the present investigation), the latitude of the meaning of “spiritual” is wide: ranging all the way from “things pertaining to or administered by the Holy Spirit” through “the innermost thoughts and purposes of a human being” to “the nefarious operation of evil spirits.” So it is entirely appropriate to inquire of those who claim “spirituality”, to “what kind” they are referring!

The adjective pneumatikos, with its related adverb pneumatikOs (replacing the omicron with omega), is the only source for the translation “spiritual, spiritually”. They appear respectively 25x and 2x in the New Testament writings.

Bauer lists five different aspects of “spiritual” in New Testament usage. (The list is his, the associated references are mine):
1. It may intend simply the “inner life” of a human being, in contrast to somatikos or psuchikos (I Cor. 15:44,46.) Note that here Paul specifically and intentionally excludes the pagan idea of a pre-existent “spiritual” state.
2. It may refer to events directly caused, or individuals led, gifted, or influenced by the Holy Spirit (Rom.1:11, I Cor.2:15, 3:1, 12:1, 14:1, 37; Gal.6:1, Eph.1:3, 5:19; Col.1:19, 3:16).
3. It may describe a supernatural state of being, such as resurrection (I Cor.15:46), or 4. things or matters that are in contrast to those of merely earthly origin (Rom.15:27, I Cor.12:13,14; 9:11).
5. It may refer to impersonal things that nevertheless serve more-than-ordinary purposes (Rom.7:14, I Cor.10:3,4; I Pet.2:5).

In addition to Bauer's list, there are also references to overtly evil beings or influences (Eph.6:12, Rv.11:8).

The supernatural or paranormal may include genuinely healthy “spirituality”, but may just as readily have less beneficent provenance. The serious need for careful discernment concerning spirits or spiritual influences is explored in the earlier studies mentioned above.

Although it is represented by more discrete words (3), “religion” is mentioned much more rarely in the New Testament. Threskeia (L/S: religious cult, worship or ritual; religious formalism, service of a god, superstition) refers primarily to ceremonies and rituals. It appears only 4x, three of which (Ac.26:5, Jas.1:26, Col.2:18) have a distinctly negative flavor. The adjective threskos (used only in Jas.1:26) is rather ambiguous, but then James uses the very same word (1:27) when he describes “pure religion”, which consists of merciful care for widows and orphans, and exemplary living. With this single exception, however, one could hardly be blamed for disassociating himself from threskeia.

Eusebes / eusebos, on the other hand, (L/S: loyalty, respect, reverence; living or acting piously toward one's parents, gods, or members of one's household) is hard to criticize. Usually translated “devout” or “godly”, its 6 appearances are all commendations (Ac.10:2, 10:7, 22:12; II Tim. 3:12, Tit.2:12, II Pet.2:9). The eu- prefix (“well” or “good”) simply adds weight to the stem derived from the verb
sebomai for which L/S lists “to revere or worship, pay honor or respect”; Bauer notes that “it was applied to pagans who accepted the monotheism of Judaism, and attended the synagogue, but did not obligate themselves to the whole Jewish Law.” It appears 5x translated “worship” (Mt.15:9, Ac.16:14, 18:7, 18:13, 19:27), 3x translated “devout” (Ac.13:50, 17:4, 17:7), and only once “religious” (Ac.13:43).

That is the sum total of New Testament references to “religion/religious”? One could even make a case that it is not a very “religious” book at all!

So where does this leave us? With the familiar caveat, “It depends entirely upon what you mean by what you say!” If by “spiritual” you intend a constant effort to be led by the Holy Spirit to understand, participate, and share in the life of Jesus’ Kingdom, you are my brother / sister, and we have much to share.

If, on the other hand, you intend by contrived physical or mental gymnastics trying to tap into some other type of “spiritual” knowledge or activity, thanks, but no thanks. John’s advice in Jn.4:1-6 is sound. If your avoidance of being “religious” involves recoiling from the trappings of (often empty) ceremony, the cut-and-dried “doctrines” upon which the guardians of self-aggrandizing institutions insist, and (often-abusive) hierarchies (which Jesus himself rejected), you join a millennia-long parade of earnest, loyal Christ-followers who have done likewise. Welcome to their ranks!

But do not forget that a vitally necessary component of genuine following (see #101) is identification with a Body of fellow-followers. Neither Jesus nor his disciples ever advocated the lonely, self-centered, mystical isolationism that has attracted sincere but misguided “seekers” periodically through the ages.

James’ definition of “true religion” is far more practical than either ceremonial or contemplative. It is clearly focused upon the needs of others, after the pattern set by the Lord Jesus himself, and completely different from either institutional or individualistic prescriptions.

It should therefore be incumbent upon anyone using this vocabulary, whether with positive or negative intent, both to clarify his own assumptions, and to proceed with caution before evaluating someone else’s choices!

As always, please remember that I welcome serious dialogue on this or any other subject.

Word Study #192 – Heart

I was surprised when it was brought to my attention that I had neglected to post a study of the New Testament uses of the word “heart”. I was even more surprised to discover that there is not a single instance among its 158 appearances where it is used with its primary meaning, “the organ in man or animal which is the center of the circulation of the blood”!

There is also no reference to “giving one's heart to the Lord”, and only one which speaks of his “dwelling” in the hearts of the faithful (Eph.3:17). There are only two referring to anyone's heart being “broken” – one in Lk.4:18, where it is a condition that Jesus said he was sent to heal, (and certainly not held up as the crowning achievement – like scalps on a belt – of a self-styled “evangelist”)! The statement in Ac.2:37, often used as an excuse for this attitude / effort, uses katenugesan, “to pierce with pain”, a word quite unrelated to suntetrimmenous, “broken or crushed”. The other is Paul's scolding (Ac.21:13) of his companions' attempt to dissuade him from going toward certain disaster in Jerusalem, complaining that they are “breaking his heart.”

So having thus disposed of a very large portion of popular (though almost totally imaginary) rhetoric, let's have a look at what is actually said.

Ever since the earliest classical writings, the heart (kardia) was considered the seat of one's feelings, passion, anger, fear, courage, sorrow, or joy as well as love (L/S). A somewhat parallel use of splagchna (inward parts, vital organs), 10x as a noun, an 12 as a verb, which some modern translators render as “heart” – probably because they think it more “proper” than “guts”! – the KJV said “bowels” – is more often confined to expressions of compassion or deep affection. Kardia was also assumed to function in one's mind, intention, inclination, desire or purpose. It also referred to the center of anything, animate or inanimate: as the heart wood of a tree, the depth of the sea, or Jesus' reference to “the heart of the earth” (Mt.12:40).

Bauer's list is similar, suggesting “the seat of physical, mental, or spiritual life, the source of one's volition, the faculty of thought or understanding, the organ of natural or spiritual enlightenment, moral or emotional decisions, wishes, or desires” to which he adds “the dwelling place of heavenly powers or beings”, whether good (Eph.3:17) or evil (Ac.5:3, Jn.13:2).
Most of these aspects can be found in New Testament writings. The heart may represent the repository of treasured memories (Lk.1:66, 2:19, 2:51), the source of motivation or purpose for both good and evil speech and action (Mt.5:28, 9:4, 12:34-45, 15:18-19, 24:48, Lk.6:45, Ac.5:4, 7:23, 39; Rom.1:24, 6:17), and the “location” of arguments or “reasoning” – dialogizomai – (Mk.2:6, 8, Lk.3:15, 5:22, 9:47, 24:38; Rom.10:6). Jesus and others spoke of “understanding with your hearts” (Mt.13:15, Jn. 12:40, Ac.28:27, Rom.1:21), and warnings against the hardening of hearts (lack of receptivity to truth or mercy) are not rare (Mt.19:8, Mk.3:5, 6:52, 8:17, 10:5, 16:14, Jn.12:40, Rom.2:5, Heb.3:8, 4:7).

The condition of one’s “heart” is revealed by his attitudes and behavior, whether commendable (Mt.11:29, 12:35, Lk.1:17, Lk.2:35, 8:15, Rom.6:17) or reprehensible (Mt.15:8, 19; Lk.1:51, 6:45, Ac.8:21, 22, Eph. 4:18, Heb.3:10,12; Jas.1:26, 3:14, 5:5; II Pet.2:14), as is his love for God (Mt.22:37, Mt.12:33, 22:37, Lk.10:27, Mk.12:30).

We are assured that God not only knows our hearts (Lk.16:15, Ac.1:24, 15:8; Rom.8:27, I Cor.4:5, I Thes.2:4, Heb.4:12, 8:10, 10:16; I Jn.3:20, Rv.2:23), but also guides and directs the hearts of those who seek his ways (Ac.14:17, 15:9, 16:14; Rom.10:8, I Cor.2:9, Phil.4:7, Col.3:15, I Thes.3:13, II Thes.3:5, II Pet.1:19) and even sometimes those who don't (Rv.17:17)!

That does not, however, absolve us from the responsibility to be selective regarding what we allow to influence our hearts! (Mt.6:21 and parallel Lk.12:34; Mt.13:19 and parallels Mk.4:15, Lk.8:12; Rom.16:8, Heb.10:22, Jas.4:8, 5:8; I Pet.3:4, 15; I Jn.3:19). Jesus urged his disciples to “settle it in your hearts” (Lk.21:14) not to worry about planning a defense when on trial for their faithfulness, but to trust in the leading that He would provide.

With the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit, the necessary vigilance and confidence is both enabled and assisted (Rom 5:5, II Cor.1:22, 4:6; Gal.4:6). This, of course, includes the several references in which traditional translators have inaccurately chosen to represent parakaleo by the word “comfort”, conjuring up the image of a teddy-bear or security “blankie”. Please see #138 for a correction of that image. Jesus – and Paul – are neither offering a “blankie” nor asking the faithful to provide such artificial “comfort” to one another. They rather have in view consistent and courageous encouragement, support, and “coaching” in faithfulness (Jn.14 and 16, Col.2:2 and 4:8; Eph.6:22, II Thes.2:17).

The hearts of the faithful are also expected to be deeply involved in their interaction on a purely human level. Paul conveys heartfelt concern for his readers, especially when there has been any misunderstanding (Rom.9:2, 10:1; II Cor.2:4, 3:2-3, 6:11, 7:3, 8:16; Phil.1:7, I Thes.2:17), and expects commensurate sincerity within their respective groups (II Cor.5:12), both in their worship (Eph.5:19, Col.3:16) and their more ordinary affairs (Eph.6:5, Col.3:22, I Thes.3:5, I Tim.1:5, Rom.2:15, I Cor.7:37, II Cor.9:7) as does Peter (I Pet.1:22).

Jesus had also recognized normal human emotions in his farewell (Jn.14 and 16), and did not condemn them, but gave instructions for dealing with them. This is seen also in Mt.18:35.

The heart is represented as the source of one's deliberate commitment to faithfulness (Mt.11:13-9:25, 2:28, Ac.8:37, 11:23, 13:22; Rom.2:29, 10:9-10; Eph.3:17, I Thes.3:13, Heb.10:22, 13:9, Jas.4:8, I Jn.3:19-21) as well as of the choice not to listen and obey (II Cor.3:15, 5:12, and the quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mt.13:15, Jn. 12:40, Ac.28:27).

Here are a few other random observations, in no particular order – some surprising, some just interesting – for you to explore and “reason [discuss] in your hearts”!

* James’ instructions to the folks teetering on the brink of unfaithfulness (4:8) to “wash their hands and purify their (own) hearts”! Haven't we always been told that was an almost magical act of God connected in some esoteric way to Jesus' death? Although Peter in Ac.15:9 did attribute it to God's act in response to faithfulness, the verbs in this instance are both active aorist imperatives!
* “Pure” hearts are evidenced by (I Tim.1:5) “charity” [love – agape] and (II Tim.2:22) “calling on the Lord” – which is the “fuel” for “fleeing youthful passions, and pursuing justice, faithfulness, love, and peace” and “avoiding useless arguments (v.23).
* The “umpire” (brabeueto) when one's heart must deal with an uncertain situation (Col.3:15) is the peace of God. How would that affect your choices or decisions?
* Does the “location” of our “treasure” (Mt.6:21, Lk.12:34) affect our reaction to situations like the one described in Rv.18, when the economy tanks and everything falls apart? Is Jesus' warning in Lk.21:34 connected to this?
* In Rom.1:21-32, Paul clearly describes the depraved condition of the “hearts” of the unfaithful as their choice, not their “original condition”. Why do people who are so fond of quoting Romans for their “doctrines” consistently ignore this?
* And finally, please review the beautiful effects of the unity resulting from the Holy Spirit's activity around Pentecost (#187). In Ac.2:46, Luke describes the general mood of joyful celebration as they shared their meals “with rejoicing and
simple hearts.” He goes into more detail in Ac.4:32-34, “the multitude of those who had become faithful was one heart and one life [identity; traditionally “soul”], and freely shared all that they had, until “there was no one needy among them.” He never pretends that there were no bumps in the road — see the very next chapter if you think that the account is whitewashed!

But the community that resulted was mightily attractive to observers. A Body was being formed — described later by Paul as having only one Head – the Lord Jesus – but here Luke concentrates on their one heart. That was / is just as essential to the interaction of many widely-varied members, and probably the most undeniable evidence of the hand of God. May we continue to serve him — and each other — with one heart!

Word Study #193 – Pure, Purity, Purify

We have touched on these words in previous posts: #65 includes the use of katharos in the concept of cleansing, and #32 explores the departure of New Testament teaching from general assumptions about “holiness”, as well as the references in #192 to the “purifying” of “hearts.” Nevertheless, the inclusion of three entirely separate word-families, which share areas of commonality, but also differ significantly, makes this an idea worthy of its own treatment.

The adjective hagnos, with its associated forms, the verb hagnizo, the nouns hagneia, hagnotes, and hagnismos, and also the adverb hagnOs (with omega), is the most frequently used. It can refer to ritual purity, innocence, chastity, or more general morality (L/S). Trench suggests that it might simply be an alternate form of hagios (#32), but that it probably is not, since he considers that hagios is most frequently used in relationship to God, and hagnos in reference to one's bodily life. However, the New Testament uses of the two words do not bear out that distinction. He does concede that hagnos was also used of pagan deities, especially the (rare!!) virgin goddesses, and sees overlap in a connection to the consecration of anyone or anything to the service of a deity.

New Testament appearances of hagnos and related words fall roughly into four categories: Jewish ritual purification rites 4x (Jn.11:55, Ac.21:24, 21:26, 24:18); general moral rectitude 5x (I Tim.5:22, I Jn.3:3, II Cor.6:6, 7:11; I Pet.1:22); another 5x where it is traditionally rendered “chastity” (II Cor.11:2, I Tim.4:12, 5:2; Tit.2:5, I Pet.3:2), and simple, straightforward honesty 4x (Phil.1:16, 4:8; Jas.3:17, 4:8).

Two observations are relevant here:

First, “chastity” is not, as it is sometimes represented, a synonym for “celibacy”, since the references in both Peter and Titus are addressed clearly to married couples. It refers rather to honesty, fidelity, and morality in marriage; and the admonition to Timothy requires similar moral behavior of the unmarried. Classically, if the reference was to virginity, they said so, as Paul did, figuratively, in the II Cor. passage.

Secondly, James' reference (3:17) to “wisdom from above”, and Peter's to “obeying the truth” (I Pet.1:22) as the means of “purifying yourselves”, both probably have the idea of honesty and simplicity in view, as well as morality. We will consider this in more detail in the next word-grouping.

Most frequently translated “sincere, sincerity” (4x out of 5), eilikrines and eilikrineia, in classical usage, also referred to a “pure” substance — without alloy or admixture — hence the rendering, when the reference was not a substance, of “pure, simple, absolute.” In II Cor.1:12, Paul pairs eilikrineia with haploteti (honesty). The modifier tou theou probably belongs with both nouns, not just one or the other. He uses a similar construction in 2:17. God is the source (expressed by the use of the genitive case) of all of these virtues. In Phil.1:10, that sincerity / simplicity is presented as “insurance” against being led into evil, and in II Pet.3:1 as a shield against distortions of the message. This constitutes a sharp contrast with the complicated theological structures concocted over the centuries, ostensibly to “prevent error”. The New Testament remedy for error is simplicity, not complexity. It is complicated documents, contracts, or explanations that are replete with “escape clauses”, contingencies, disclaimers, and assorted other vehicles creating “wiggle room” to avoid responsibility, or renege on the delivery of promised goods or services. It is simplicity and sincerity that characterize the honest and genuine gospel message!

Finally, katharizo (v.), katharos (adj), katharismos, katherotes (n), which were partially treated in #65 with reference to cleansing (10x), were used much more frequently with the idea of purifying – 17x in adjectival form, 6x as a verb, and 4x as a noun. Some of these correspond to the ritual uses of hagnos: (Lk.2:22, Jn.2:6, 3:25; Heb.9:13,23; and possibly Heb.10:22).
A sharp transition appears in Paul's message to Titus (1:15) when the latter was confronting people trying to re-impose legal requirements upon his charges: “It's not about ceremonies or regulations!” he insists. “It's pure [clean] PEOPLE that God desires!” Paul reiterates this idea in 2:14.

Katharos actually incorporates virtually all the shades of meaning present in the other two words. The L/S list is fairly comprehensive, including “physically clean (not dirty); clear of admixture; free of debt, pollution, or guilt; ceremonial purity; sound, without blemish; real, genuine, pure, clean, simple; moral purity.” The verb form katharizo also included the healing of diseases, and clearing ground of weeds. Motivation is referenced in the allusions to “pure hearts” in I Tim.1:5, 3:9; II Tim.1:3, 2:22; I Pet.1:22.

Ordinary cleanliness may be all that is intended in Rv.15:6, and an unmixed substance in Rv.21:8 and 22:1. Mt.5:8, Rom.14:20, and Jas.1:27 may be deliberate attempts to blur the line between ceremonial purity and the leading of a life of simple devotion to God. Heb.10:22, Tit.1:15, and Ac.15:9 may also fall into that category. In Ac.20:26, Paul simply bears testimony to his having faithfully delivered an accurate message, and thereby discharged his duty. The ball is now in their court.

How then shall we summarize this widely scattered collection of observations? I think that a singular focus upon faithfulness is the key.

Our dear (late) brother, Vernard Eller was fond of quoting a statement attributed to Kierkegaard: “Purity of heart is to will one thing.”

If that “one thing” is determined and exclusive loyalty to the King of Kings, I can enthusiastically endorse that definition. May we continually serve him – and each other – with “purity of heart”!

**Word Study #194 – Heal, Healing**

It is sad that a topic which was such a welcome and compassionate feature of the ministry of Jesus, his disciples, and the early church, should have become a focus of controversy for contemporary groups, even resulting in the overt abuse of many suffering people and their caregivers.

Clearly, we will not solve all the problems of two millennia in one brief study, but perhaps we can make a few suggestions to add some light and reduce the heat of the discussions. Please bear in mind that this is the earnest intention of this posting! Please view this in conjunction with #157.

The first surprise is in the lexical meanings of the three different word groups that have been rendered “heal.” The most common, *therapeuo* (v.), *therapeia* (n), is also the least specific. L/S lists “to do service (to gods or people), to honor parents, to wait upon a master, to pay attention, to treat medically, to train animals, to cultivate land, to prepare food or drugs, to mend garments”! It is only in juxtaposition with a diagnosis that one can be anywhere near certain that “healing” is the intention. Perhaps we should start by expanding our understanding of the extent of Jesus’ ministrations to folks with widely varied needs!

*Iaomai* (v.), *iama* and *iasis* (n), are more exclusively focused upon medical attention: “heal, cure, treat diseases; remedy or counteract” are primary, with “repair” also included, as well as “refine” (as in alchemy).

*Sozo*, more commonly rendered “save” with “eternal” consequences by modern evangelicals, seems primarily to be used in more desperate situations: its first listing is “to save from death, to keep alive”, but also includes “to recover from sickness, to keep safe or preserve, to remember or keep in mind, to rescue.” Its prefixed form, *diasozo*, is similar, but more emphatic.

The words referring to diagnoses are likewise extremely diverse. About half the time, the accounts specify the problem of the sufferer: blindness, deafness, crippling of legs, feet, or hands; paralysis, leprosy, hemorrhage, fever, or even a cut-off ear! Notice, please, that demonic conditions are treated as a separate malady (16x), and not, as some would have it, simply showing ignorance of the source of distress. Elsewhere, usually in a crowd setting, the record shows Jesus being presented with “all kinds of diseases” and “healing them ALL”. Descriptions of these “generic” afflictions also use widely varied vocabulary.

*Arrhotos*, *(arrhoteo, -ia)* (5x) may refer either to “sickness, especially epidemics, a lingering infirmity, or moral weakness.” *Asthenos* *(astheneo)* the most common, (35x) can include weakness, feebleness, sickness, disease”, but also “poverty” (Herodotus), “moral weakness” (Plato), or “any person who is needy, insignificant, or powerless”! Most of us fit somewhere in there!

*Malakia* (3x) may be “moral weakness, sickness, or cowardice.”
Nos, nosema (13x), the only one essentially confined to physical conditions, encompasses “sickness, plague, disease, distress, anguish, any disease of the mind, or any grievous affliction.”

These words usually occur in different combinations of two or three in the various gospel narratives, seemingly thereby to indicate that whatever the problem, Jesus, and by extension, his people, both care, and do something about it!

Regardless of the specific vocabulary, the vast majority of references to healing occur in the gospels (58x), and nearly all of those focus on Jesus' personal action, although there are 7 instances of authority being delegated to the disciples (in one of which their attempt failed – Lk.9:42). Healing definitely figured into the expectations and ministry of the early church, as evidenced in Ac.3 and 4, 5:16, 8:7, 9:34, 10:38, 14:9, 28:8,9; I Cor.12:9, 28, 30; Jas.5:16). Here, too, though, it was not always immediately successful (Ac.9:36).

Contrary to the claims of folks who propose to “teach” others to “heal”, the New Testament reveals no requirements, techniques, prescribed incantations, or ceremonies; and any healing that occurs is overtly and immediately attributed to the power of God in Jesus. There are no flamboyant professional healers, except the sons of the Jewish priest, Skeva, (Ac.19:13-17), who did not fare so well in Ephesus. Peter and John (Ac.3:12,16) and Paul and Barnabas (Ac.14:8-18) had clear opportunity to take credit to themselves for miraculous healings, but uniformly rejected personal acclaim, insisting repeatedly that it was the Lord's doing and not theirs.

“Gifts of healing” (I Cor.12:9, 28, 30) are indeed among the equipment provided by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of folks both within and outside the Body, but as noted in #25, “gifts” are not the possession of the person who employs them, but rather the Lord's provision for the individual who is in need. James (5:14-16) assigns this responsibility to the elders (#42) of the group.

It is just as fruitless to try to develop a prescribed “methodology” as it is to identify “qualified” individuals or “appropriate” occasions for healing. The occasion is appropriate wherever / whenever there is a need: healing consistently accompanied Jesus' own teaching. The Sabbath was no problem for him, as it was for the “official” types who opposed him (Lk.6:7, 13:14, 14:3), nor did it matter where it happened: on a public street (Lk.8:44), in someone's home (Lk.4:38,39 and others), or in a synagogue (Lk.4:33). His instructions to his disciples (Mt.10:1, 10:8, Mk.3:15, Lk.9:1,2; 10:9) and the subsequent ministries of Philip (Ac.8), Peter and John (Ac.3,4), Paul (Ac.16:18, 28:9) and others, likewise, had no restrictions or outlines to follow. Jesus' examples of “technique” are just as varied. He did not even need to be present for his “word” to accomplish a healing (Mt.8:7-13, Lk.7:7, Mk.7:26-30), but at other times, he gave explicit instructions to the patient (Mk.2:11, Jn.5:8, 9:7), or addressed commands to a demon (Mt.8:28-32). But most frequently of all, he reached out and touched the suffering person – whether or not that was officially sanctioned or socially acceptable. According to the Law, a leper (Mt.8:3), a dead person (Lk.7:11) or a woman (Mk.1:31) was not to be touched. We will revisit this graciousness in the next post. There were even occasions where the afflicted were restored by simply touching his clothing (Mt.9:20, 14:36, and parallels)!

The commissioned disciples seem to have added the practice of anointing with oil (Mk.6:13): there is no record of Jesus having done so, although he did use mud [clay] once (Jn.9:6). James (5:14) later advocated this practice. No one gives any explanation, although the purely secular example of the “good Samaritan” illustrates the common use of oil in treating wounds. Apostles also employed a simple command (Ac.3:6, 9:34, 14:9), or a touch (Ac.28:8, 3:7, 9:12, 9:41) even, again, of a garment (Ac.19:11). Their carrying on of the healing ministry often specifically includes prayer (Ac.4:30, 9:40, Jas.5:16), although this is not mentioned in Jesus' activity.

But what of that shibboleth of self-styled healers – the “magic word”, “faith”?

First of all, please refer back to study #1, exploring the word pistis, and remember that it is NOT an alternative term for autosuggestion! In most contexts, “trust”, “faithfulness”, or “loyalty” is a more accurate translation. Jesus only once scolded anyone for its lack: and that was in explaining to the disciples the reason for their failure to heal a demon-tormented child. He did ask the father in that scene to trust him – but that is the only record of his articulating any such condition. There are places where he credited a person's trust / loyalty for their healing (Mt.9:22, 29; 15:28 and parallels), but the vast majority of incidents include no such statement – and the man introduced in Jn.5:13 did not even know who had healed him! In Mk.2:5, it is the trust / loyalty of the men who carried their friend to Jesus that is commended. And in the many
crowd scenes, no sorting of any kind is recorded. We have only the simple statement that “he healed them ALL.”
(Mt.4:23,24; 8:16, 9:35, 12:15, 19:2, 21:14, and parallels)

**Completely absent** is any requirement that a person “claim” a healing of which there has been no evidence. Had the blind man in Mk.8:24 been urged to do so, Jesus would have had no occasion to offer the “second touch” that completed his restoration! And it was the irrefutable evidence of the lame man strolling around with Peter and John that so flummoxed the bigwigs at the temple (Ac.4:14). Repeatedly, observers are described as marveling at what they had SEEN.

**Also absent** is any suggestion of “blaming the victim” for his condition – a concept that Jesus plainly repudiated in Jn.9:1-4 – and which is the apex of the cruelty of the modern “healing business”!

So – with all this variety, is there anything of which we may be certain?

Most assuredly!

*Jesus not only announced his purpose “to heal the broken hearted” (Lk.4:18) in his inaugural address, but demonstrated the compassionate use of his power to restore people throughout his earthly career, whether the need was physical illness, lack of food, moral laxity, or even death!*

*In assigning responsibility to his disciples, these same concerns are dominant: both before and after his departure.*

*The provision by means of the Holy Spirit, for the continuation of Kingdom service on the part of its citizens included physical healing among the many assignments and enablements by which they are expected to represent their King to the world.*

May we help each other to learn to do so responsibly!

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**Word Study #195 – Hands, and Touch**

The most common use of the word *cheir* requires no research or explanation: the hand is the part of one's body with which he performs the most ordinary of daily tasks. Even in reference to God's messengers – natural or supernatural – (Mt.4:6), hands may simply be viewed as a tool or implement. However, the figurative uses of the term, referring to custodial care, power, or authority, and the employment of one's hands to convey blessing and healing, or judgment and arrest, can require discernment, and it is these upon which I propose to focus this study.

The ambiguity is not unique to New Testament usage. It occupies an entire (very large) page of very small print in L/S, the Oxford lexicon of Greek usage. In addition to “hand or paw”, they note that it may refer to position (“on which hand [side]?”), careful rearing (“by hand”) of a child or animal, and leading (by taking one's hand). It is used of prayer, voting, reaching out to help or protect, or in a hostile sense, to harm or destroy. “In hand” may denote “under control, in process, or at close quarters.” To place someone or something “in the hands” of another confers responsibility; giving or offering one's hand attests authenticity or trustworthiness. The hand is often used to describe the attributes of the person using it, and may even be represented as acting of itself (“what your hand finds to do”). Indeed, it may be used of any act or deed, a person's handiwork or handwriting, and even an anchor, axle, or pillar! And that is just a random sampling.

Forty-seven of the New Testament references to “hands” are purely physical. There are however a few significant points among them.

Pilate (Mt.27:24) clearly had in mind something deeper than simple cleanliness in his highly public “hand-washing” as he disclaimed responsibility for Jesus’ execution.

Paul's statements that “God is not worshiped [helped or assisted] by men's hands” (Ac.17:25) and “they are not gods which are made by hands” (Ac.19:2), define limits not only to physical hands, but to the domain of human effort.

His repeated (Ac.20:34, I Cor.4:12) reminder of his having personally earned the expenses of his labors and those of his associates reinforces his admonition that the faithful likewise should “work with their hands” (Eph.4:28, I Thes.4:11) **in order to have resources to share** with people in need.

“**The Hand of God**” or “**the hand of the Lord**” is credited with leading and protection (Lk.1:66, Jn.10:29, Ac.7:25, Heb.8:9) and creation (Ac.7:50, Heb.1:10, 2:7, I Pet.5:6), as well as judgment (Mt.3:12, Ac.13:11, Heb.10:31). It was “into the hands of the Father” (Lk.23:46) that Jesus released his spirit as he died.

Jesus' own hands seem to have been constantly busy! Offering loving blessing to children (Mt.19:13-15, Mk.10:16), and to
his bewildered disciples (Lk.24:50), identifying his disciples as family (Mt.12:49), rescuing Peter from the consequences of his impetuosity (Mt.14:31), many unspecified “mighty works” (Mk.6:2), and healing “all manner of weaknesses” (at least 20x, probably more) by “laying his hands upon them”.

The Lord Jesus, who personified the love of God, was always touching people! Especially those who were not “supposed “ to be touched! Nothing more effectively communicates love – especially to folks that others deem “untouchable” – than a compassionate touch, or a comforting (or celebratory!) hug! And no, the idea of a “hug” is not a silly modern notion, and not at all extraneous. The word which has been rendered “touch” is haptomai – L/S: “to take hold of, to hang on to, to grasp, cleave, cling to”, and only secondarily “engage, undertake, perceive,” and even “to attack or apprehend”. It appears 13x as Jesus’ initiative toward a person in need, and 17x as people crowded to grab hold of “even the edge of his robe.” The result of those touches was usually healing, except for Jesus’ reassuring his frightened disciples after his transfiguration (Mt.17:7), and blessing little children (Mk.10:13, Lk.18:15). (Could this last have been the origin of the “group hug”?)

Only once did he make a negative response to “touching”, gently telling Mary not to hang on to him (Jn.20:17), but to get busy and spread the wonderful news that he was alive. There were still parts of that glorious event yet to be completed.

The disciples, later apostles, and others in the early church, continued this practice of “laying their hands on” folks in need of healing, as Jesus had mentioned before his departure (Mk.16:18), but it seems also to have acquired additional significance among them. People were commissioned in this way for particular assignments (Ac.6:6, 13:3, I Tim.4:14, II Tim.1:6). Remember (#48) that this was simply a sign of brotherly approval and participation, and NOT the conferral of a lifetime title or position of status as it has become in modern rituals of “ordination”.

The gesture also accompanied prayer – not only for healing (Ac.3:7, 5:12, 9:12, 25:8), but also for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit (Ac.8:17,18; 9:12, 9:41, 19:6) and various unspecified “miracles” (Ac.5:12, 14:3, 19:11). It appears on the list of “basic” teachings in Heb.6:2.

Relief was sent to the sufferers in the Judean famine “by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Ac.11:30). Five times, Paul identifies the authenticity of a letter by his own handwriting (I Cor.16:21, Gal.6:11, Col.4:18, II Thes.3:17, Phlm.19). Some sort of spiritual empowerment seems to have been conferred on at least one occasion (II Tim.1:6).

Paul's advice to Timothy to use the act of official commissioning cautiously and judiciously (I Tim.5:22) could be better heeded today.

We should also be aware that neither being “in the hands” [power, authority] of someone, nor “laying hands on” a person is always a good thing. Jesus warned that he was about to be “betrayed into the hands” of his enemies, who had repeatedly tried to “lay hands upon him” (13x), and that his followers could face similar treatment (9 or 10 times) – which they did. But they did so with the full assurance of their Master's confidence, promised in Jn.3:34, 10:28,29; and demonstrated in Jn.13:34, that not only they, but “all things” had been “given into his hands” by the Father – and that no force in heaven or earth could snatch them away.

May we also rest in that certainty, as we offer our hands in his service!

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**Word Study #196 – The Head**

I am well aware that in approaching this subject, I am opening a proverbial “can of worms”. Few seemingly simple words have been used so viciously to abuse and suppress the very people that they were intended to empower and protect! And we will get to that; but first, a few interesting observations.

For those who get bent-out-of-shape about words that in nearly every European language except English have “gender” as a part of their grammatical form: I find it amusing that kephale, the only Greek word translated “head”, happens to be a feminine noun! Since grammatical “gender” is completely independent of actual fact, this observation is just as irrelevant to correct translation as is the masculine grammatical form of anthropos – usually rendered “man” (the species), but just as accurately “person” or “human”. I only mention it by way of illustration, and with this reminder: don't get hung up on grammatical gender! To do so only displays linguistic ignorance.

To those who consider the concept of “head” to denote the top of a hierarchy: there is a related Greek word for that, kephalaios, “principal or chief”, but it never occurs in the New Testament. Lexically, the idea of “head honcho” is completely absent from the extensive uses of kephale.

These include (L/S) the physical head of a person or animal, a way of counting people, philosophically the “noblest” part of a person, life (as in risking – see Lk.21:8, Ac.27:34), a term used in imprecations or oaths (as in Mt.5:36, Ac.18:6); of inanimate things: the inflorescence of a plant, the top or brim of a vessel, the capital of a column, the source of a river; of statuary: a bust; and metaphorically: crown, completion, consummation, sum, or total.
Of the 76 appearances of the word in the New Testament, 47 have merely anatomical reference. Most of these are in the gospels or the Revelation. Other than those, Ac.18:18 and 21:24 refer to the Jewish custom of shaving one's head in connection with a vow, and in Paul's insightful description of the functions of the parts of a body, he mentions the head in I Cor.12:21.

There are two other clusters of the use of kephale. In Mt.21:42, Mk.12:10, Lk.20:17, and Ac.4:11, reference is made to Ps.118:22, regarding “the stone that the builders rejected” having been made “the head of the corner” (KJV). Peter quotes the same passage (I Pet.2:6,7) and adds the comment from Is.28:16. In doing so, he agrees with Paul's statement in I Cor.3:11 where he speaks of Jesus as the “foundation,” but these are completely different from the former group. Clearly, the KJV translators did not understand the construction of the Roman arch, which was ubiquitous in the first century, and consequently, they totally missed the wry humor in the statement. The writers/speakers are calling attention to the utter cluelessness of those who considered themselves the “builders”, pointing out that they did not even know what the carefully but oddly shaped keystone of an arch is for! It bears no resemblance to a cornerstone – a ceremonial, decorative (but useless) component slipped into place at the dedication of a building – or even if it were a part of the foundation. The keystone, uniquely shaped for a perfect fit, is integral to the integrity of the entire structure! Without it, the whole building – arch or dome – would collapse! The point is that only Jesus is capable of holding the “building of God” (whether one applies that term to the church or to the entire universe) intact. These same translators likewise erred in the rendering of the alternate word, akroagnostos. Used only twice, it refers also to the top of the arch: The prefix akro-- is from the word “high” (think “acropolis”). It has no reference to their choice of “chief” (Eph.2:20, I Pet.2:6). There is no such thing as a “chief” cornerstone. An arch has only one keystone.

Finally, and arguably the most important, are the references, all in Paul's epistles, to Jesus himself as the “head”: not only of the church, which is represented as his Body (Eph.4:15, Col.1:18), but of “all things” (Eph.1:22), even of “all principality and power” (Col.2:10) – spiritual forces of all kinds! Although the word is not repeated there, the statement in Col.1:15-17 succinctly summarizes the realization that from the beginning of creation (perhaps even before that!) it is only in Jesus that “everything holds together” – precisely the function of a keystone (Col.2:19). He is the only way the Body can work together as intended. The reverse is also true: one may observe that while a Body is unable to function without its head – it simply dies – neither can a Head accomplish much unless it has a Body with which it can interact with its surroundings!

It is this glorious truth of Jesus as the Head of the Body that must be the context for any responsible interpretation of the remaining passages (I Cor. 11:1-10 and Eph. 5:32-33). Reinforced (or perhaps established) by Jesus' prayer in Jn.17, especially v.22, a New Testament understanding of the function of the “head” is, like so many other aspects of life, radically different from any patterns that exist outside Jesus' Kingdom. Whether the “list” is the I Cor. “God – Christ - husband – wife” or the Ephesians “Christ – church – husband – wife”, it does not describe a hierarchy as has been represented by the arrogant and oppressive “chain of command” teaching that has been prominent in some circles off and on for at least the last 50 years, but an equation!

Perhaps some of you learned as a school-child the expression of relationships in a math or science problem that looked like this: “ab::cd”, representing that the pair “a” and “b” are related to each other in the same way as “c” is to “d”. That is exactly what Paul is trying to say here. And all the components of both lists are encompassed in Jesus' prayer to the Father “that they may (continually) be one, just as we are one”!

In such a context, being designated as a “head” is not an assignment of status, but of responsibility! In his prayer, Jesus detailed the provision, protection, and empowerment that he had afforded to his followers while he was with them. Similar patterns of nurture and protection are noted in the Ephesians passage. Both are in the context of total self-giving love, and are to be emulated, in his present Body, by any who are designated “head”, in any capacity. Remember also that in the Corinthian letter, we are reminded that both men and women have been entrusted with heretofore unheard-of responsibility and privilege (Please see fuller discussion in chapter 13 of Citizens of the Kingdom). Whether on a physical or spiritual level, the “head” is responsible for the protection and the welfare, as well as the direction and enabling of the activity of the rest of the Body.

If you are tempted to react – either gleefully or resentfully – to the idea of a husband as a “head”, take a deep breath, get out your New Testament, and review the characteristics of Jesus' relationship to his Father, and to the Church, his beloved Bride! Because here, as in everything else concerning the Kingdom, it's all about Jesus! Make no mistake: Jesus was not a doormat – and neither was he a tyrant! He expects neither of his people! And where there is no husband to serve as enabler and protector, that role is assigned to the church (I Tim.5) as well as to whatever family is available. This would not have been an uncommon situation in a context of intense persecution.
After detailing the superiority of Jesus over all the ideas and beings, hypothetical or actual, to which the Colossian brethren had been introduced, Paul bluntly diagnosed their problem as “not holding on to the Head.” “It’s only from him that all the Body, supplied through its joints and ligaments, and knit together, keeps growing with the growth that comes from God.” (Col.2:19).

“The growth that comes from God”, for all of his people, is neither more nor less than the building together and functioning together of all of the members of the Body of Christ, learning, under the supremely loving and competent direction of its Head, to reflect all that he is, to a world so desperately in need of his loving touch.

Word Study #197 – Unity: Being / Becoming One

In view of all the attention given in the New Testament to the idea of the mutual dependence and community life of the citizens of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus, it would be reasonable to assume that “unity” would be a common subject of discussion. I expect that many of you will be as surprised as I to realize that the word “unity” itself occurs only twice in the entire New Testament. Maybe if you're busy “doing it” you don't spend as much time “talking about it”!

Henotes – (L/S) “union, unity”, a common word in the mathematical works of Aristotle and Pythagoras and the philosophical writings of Epicurus, is used only by Paul, and only in Eph.4:3 of “the unity of the Spirit” and Eph.4:13 of “the unity of the faith [faithfulness]”. These are indeed critical to the life and health of the brotherhood, whose members are urged to work at maintaining the unity that the Spirit is in the process of building. Note that people are not to do the “creating”. No one but the Lord can do that. We are charged only with the maintenance work.

The building process is described in the immediately following paragraphs, and “faithfulness” is presented as both its source and its goal in vv.13-16. Both “the Spirit” and “faithfulness” are cast in the genitive case, of which one of the primary uses is to identify the source or origin of the principal noun (“unity”, in this case). This use of the genitive is second only to possession, which would not make any sense here. These two, together, are essential to genuine unity.

For clarification of specifics, however, we must turn to other vocabulary. In contrast to henotes, the word “one” (heis, mia, hen), which is so prominent in Jesus' final recorded prayer for his followers in Jn.17, occurs in the New Testament (with varying implications) more than 300 times! The vast majority of these are simply counting (229x), or referring to “someone, a certain –, other, some, another, or simply a/an” (about 50x). It is the outliers with which we are concerned. Jesus had shocked people earlier, already (Jn.10:30), with the simple statement, “The Father and I are one.” It nearly got him stoned! (v.31). His opponents correctly discerned – but did not understand or accept – the import of his words. Some of the implications of that statement are explored in chapter 2 of Citizens of the Kingdom. The union of Father and Son was so complete that the words, actions, goals, and even personalities of Jesus and the Father were virtually inseparable. And this relationship is the pattern (Jn.17:11) for the object of Jesus' prayer “that they may be one, as we are”! The same phrase is repeated in Jn.17:21,22,23. Notice, please, that this is not a list of instructions to the disciples! Mere people could never possibly achieve it! It is a prayer for the sovereign action of God, which began to be answered with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, and has been in process ever since. Ac.4:32 describes the “multitude” being “of one heart and one life [identity, “soul”]”. Paul's later descriptions of the Body of Christ (see #84, and chapter 7 of Citizens) detail some of the ways this unity found expression. Consult Ac.2:42-47, 4:32-37; Rom.12:4,5; 1 Cor.10:17, 12 (whole chapter); Gal.3:28, Eph. 2 and 4; Col.3:15.

Second in frequency of New Testament usage is the figure, also initiated by Jesus, in Mt.19:5,6 and Mk.10:8,9, of the union of husband and wife. The idea is repeated in 1 Cor.6:16,17 and Eph.5:31. This, too, is represented as an act of God – not the whim, desire, custom, or law of people. Only God is able to “out of two create one”, since in the beginning it was he who created “out of one, two” (Gen.2).

Another outstanding aspect is seen in the “breaking down of walls” (Eph.2:14) – the bringing together of folks whose former alienation certainly equaled that of any modern foes, and forming them into a single unit, demonstrating the power and glory of their Lord (Rom.15:6-13, Gal.3:28, Eph.2:13-17, Col.3:12-15). A similar admonition to the folks at Philippi (1:27, 2:2), while not as specifically addressing opposing groups, advocates the same mutuality. (Refer again to #84).

Finally, there are clues to be found in the cases, many of which occur only in Christian writings, where the preposition sun- – “with, together, belonging to, with the help of, in company with” – is prefixed to other words. It is significant that Christian writers needed essentially to create a whole new vocabulary since their Greco-Roman culture was as
individualistic as ours, and the principles of mutuality were just as foreign in the first century as they are in the twenty-first! Here is a partial list, with relevant references and lexical information. (Note: the substitution of gamma (g), mu (m), or sigma (s) for the nu (n) in “sun-”, as well as its occasional omission, is due to the written accommodation to phonetic issues, a common practice in the Greek language. It does not change the meaning.)

**sugkleronomos** – “joint heir, neighbor, one having adjoining property” – Rom.8:7, Heb.11:9 with Christ, Eph.3:6, I Pet.3:7 with each other

**sugkoinoneo** – “to have a joint share, to take part in, to be in partnership, to have fellowship with” – I Cor.9:23, Phil.4:14, Eph.5:11, Rv.1:9, 18:4. Note that two of these warn *against* unwholesome partnerships

**suzeugnumi** – “yoked together, paired, closely united. Commonly refers to marriage.” Used only twice: Mt.19:6, Mk.10:9

**sumbibazo** – “to be knit together, brought together, reconciled, or taught”. Referring to people: Col.2:2, 19; Eph.4:16. Referring to instructions: Ac.16:10, I Cor.2:16, Ac.9:22

**summathetes** – “fellow disciple, schoolmate”. Only used in Jn.11:16

**sumphoneo** – “to fit in or agree with, to fit together, as cut stones in a building, to harmonize”. Mt.18:19, 20:2,13; Lk.5:36, Ac.5:9, 15:15

**supsuchos** – “of one mind, at unity”. Used only once: Phil.2:2

**sunagonizomai** – “to struggle together”. Used only once: Rom.15:30, of urgent prayer

**sunathleo** – “to struggle together, to fight side by side, to practice”. Phil.1:27, 4:3, of working together in the interest of the kingdom

**sunarmologeo** – “to be fitted together like the blocks of a pyramid”. Eph.2:21, 4:16

**sunoikodomeo** – “to be built up together”. Only use: Eph.2:22

**sussomos** – does not exist at all in pagan literature, and is used only once in the N.T. Eph.4:6, where Paul speaks of Jews and Gentiles being a part “of the same Body”. This concept would have been foreign to anyone who lacked understanding of the Body of Christ.

Take particular note of the preponderance of instances where the operative verb is *passive*. The unity described in the New Testament is *not and cannot be a do-it-yourself project*. Notice that none of these words suggests the “anything goes” or “I’m ok, you’re ok” attitudes which today are often confused with the idea of “unity.” Neither do they suggest the slavish uniformity demanded by folks of more rigid persuasions. The goal is neither a hodge-podge of individuals blithely “doing their own thing” without challenge, nor a collection of identical automatons marching in artificial unison. Quite the opposite: the New Testament concept of unity requires the *supernatural* transformation of committed individuals into a *supernatural* unity that can faithfully reflect the image of its Creator!

Faithful individuals need to cooperate with the Builder, but dare not try to usurp his authority. The carefully fitted blocks of the pyramids (see *sunarmologeo*, above) did not shape themselves! They were carefully cut and shaped, each to fit in its designated place, by master craftsmen. This is equally true of the building of “God's dwelling place”.

The remaining, lexically unrelated, word reveals the same need for outside intervention. *Katartizo*, rendered “framed” in Heb.11:3 and “joined” in I Cor.10 is also used of “mending nets” (Mt.4:21, Mk.1:19) and the “restoration” of a fallen brother (Gal.6:1). Lexically, it also includes “to adjust or put in order, to set a dislocated limb, to learn, to discipline.”

If the unlikely combination of folks representing vastly different cultural backgrounds and assumptions that makes up the mixed multitude who are called into the Kingdom are ever going to be built together as the dwelling place of God and the manifestation of his kingly rule, it will take a lot of fitting and adjustment! But it is beyond the bound of possibility that the prayer of his own Son, asking that his people be “perfectly one, as we are”, should not be answered!

For exactly that purpose, we have been lovingly placed into the hands of the supreme Architect of the universe – and he is certainly equal to the task!

Thanks be to God!

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**Word Study #198 – Whom – or What – do you “Seek”?**

The answer to this question reveals a lot about a person. Although it represents only one single Greek word in the New Testament, *zeteo* and three prefixed forms, its 98 appearances encompass quite a variety of intensity – from casually “looking for” a person or an object (Mk.1:37, 3:32), or, more urgently, parents looking for a lost child (Lk.2:45,48,49), to God “seeking” (Jn.4:22) for honest and earnest worshipers! There is an even greater variety of objects mentioned: a “home” sought by an evil spirit (Mt.12:43), material security (Lk.12:29), Judas’ efforts to betray Jesus (Mk.14:11), the
rulers' wish to kill him (Jn.5:16,18), the Lord himself (Ac.17:27), personal profit (I Cor.10:33), glory and honor and immortality (Rom.2:7), and many more. Clearly identifiable lexical clues would be helpful in discerning both the urgency of the "seeking" and its positive or negative connotations, but this is one of those aggravating situations where there are none, and we have only the contexts from which to make a call.

For example, on numerous occasions when great crowds were "seeking" for Jesus (Mk.1:37, Lk.4:32, Jn.1:38, 6:24,26; 7:11, 34,36; 8:21, 11:56, 13:33) most of them were probably just curious. However, exactly the same word is used of those who were eagerly "seeking" healing for themselves or others (Lk.5:18, 6:19), the scribes who were "seeking" to trap him in technicalities of disputes about their "law" (Mk.14:1, Lk.11:54), the mob "seeking" to arrest him (Mt.21:46, Mk.12:12, Lk.20:19, Jn.10:39), and the authorities "seeking" an excuse to kill him (Lk.22:2, Jn.5:16, 7:1, 25, 30; 1:37,40: 11:8), Judas' betrayal (Mt.26:16, Mk.14:11, Lk.22:6), and Pilate's half-hearted effort to release him (Jn.19:12)!

Much more significant – and amazing! – is Jesus' statement in Jn.4:23, noted above, that the Father himself is also "seeking", for people to worship him in spirit and in truth, and representing himself, in the Lk.15 parables, as determinedly "seeking" for lost or wandering individuals (also Lk.19:10, Mt.18:12). This is no casual curiosity! It is an effort so determined as to involve willingness to pay an incredibly high price for its realization!

A similar attitude is reflected in the parables of the merchant "seeking" fine pearls (Mt.13:45) and, although the word is not used there, the finder of buried treasure (v.44), which support Jesus' admonition to "seek the Kingdom of God and his justice" (Mt.6:33, Lk.12:31) above all else. Here, he introduces a scene of sharp contrast, as he describes the "seeking" of the "nations/Gentiles" [people outside the disciple group] for the necessities (or luxuries) of life (Lk.12:22-30, Mt.6:25-32), a contrast repeated in the several statements regarding the "saving" and "losing" of one's earthly life and possessions (Lk.17:33, Jn.5:30,44). We see the same idea with different vocabulary in Mt.16:25, 10:38, Jn.12:25. In each of these cases, the "seeking" appears to imply the primary focus of one's life and efforts.

Nevertheless, it is not appropriate to assume that every appearance of zeteo carries such weight. The listings in L/S also include "to inquire, investigate, or examine; to seek to do something; to require or demand; to conduct a judicial inquiry", none of which would automatically involve a strong degree of personal commitment. These senses also occur in the New Testament. When Andrew and his companion “followed” Jesus home from John the Baptist's meeting, they probably had nothing very monumental in mind (Jn.1:38), only asking “where are you staying?”. Jesus used zeteo regarding a discussion in which several disciples were trying to figure out what he meant (Jn.16:19). The Lord instructed Ananias to “inquire” for Paul in Damascus (Ac.9:11), and Cornelius’ emissaries to “inquire” for Peter in Joppa (Ac.10:19,21). The same word is used of Elymas' opposition to Paul (Ac.13:8), and his later search for a guide (13:11) after losing his sight, of the decision by Paul's party to sail for Macedonia (Ac.16:10), and the sailors' efforts to abandon ship during the storm (Ac.27:30). Zeteo carries the sense of "require or demand" in the Jews' repeated demands for a “sign” (Mt.16:4, Mk.8:11, Lk.11:16), in Jesus' statement that more will be required of those to whom much has been entrusted (Lk.12:48), and his warning that responsibility for all the unjust persecution of God's messengers (Lk.11:50-51) would be charged against those who opposed him.

Parallel uses of zeteo can be found in the epistles. Reinforcing his Areopagos sermon (Ac.17:27) comment that all people everywhere were expected to “seek the Lord”, Paul returns to that theme in Rom.10:20, supplementing it with the admonition to “seek for glory and honor and immortality” (Rom.2:7), “seek to excel for the edifying of the Body” (I Cor.14:12), and “seek those things that are above, where Christ is”(Col.3:1). Perhaps more significantly, he cautions against selfish “seeking” (I Cor.10:24, 13:5, Phil.2:21), and holds up his own behavior as an example (I Cor.10:33, II Cor.12:14, Gal.1:10, I Thes.2:6).

Peter, in his turn, urges his readers to “seek peace, and pursue it!” (I Pet.3:11), pairing zeteo with dioko, which is used of relentless pursuit or persecution – certainly not a casual affair! Earlier, Peter had used the prefixed (emphatic) forms, ekzeteo and epizeteo, to describe the urgent “seeking” of the ancient prophets to understand about Jesus' coming (I Pet.1:10,11). He returns to the unprefixed zeteo (5:8) to describe the devil “seeking” for people to “devour” – but that certainly does not represent a reduction in intensity!

The writer to the Hebrews also makes more use of the prefixed forms: ekzeteo in 11:6 and 12:17, and epizeteo in 11:14 and 13:14, all of which carry a flavor of urgent effort. Several of these are supplemented with a form of spoudazo (to be eager, in haste, or serious; to be earnest, to study, lecture or teach, to pursue zealously), with which we will deal in more detail in the next study.

There is certainly a tone of desperation present in Rv.9:6, which was somewhat prefigured in Jn.7:34,36; 8:21, 13:33.
Much harder to characterize are Jesus' enigmatic statements to his challengers in Jn.7:18, 19, 20, 25, 30 and 8:50. Those folks simply didn't "get it", and, I'm afraid, neither do we. This much is certain: his life on earth was not focused upon himself and his own "glory" (see #74). That seems to have been a concern that he willingly left in the Father's hands (Jn.17). Perhaps we should simply follow his example! Very likely, his earlier statement (5:30), "I seek not my own will", is closely connected, as is his critique of those who bask in the acclaim of their fellows, but "don't seek honor from God!" (5:44).

Finally, in every account of the resurrection, the same theme precedes the glorious news: either "I know you're looking for Jesus" (Mt.28:5) or “What/who are you looking for?” (Mk.16:6; Lk.24:5; Jn.20:15.) The faithful women were only “seeking”/expecting to pay their final respects to the body of one they had loved. Instead, they were entrusted with the most glorious message this poor world had ever received!

For the loving and faithful, what you “seek” is not always what you “find”! It's much better!

May all of our “seeking” be born of loving faithfulness, and yield that message of joy!

Word Study#199 – Search, Study, Read

In the course of the previous study three words that would seem to the reader of English somewhat synonymous with “seeking” were conspicuous by their absence! Perhaps they may be regarded as either the methodology or the direction of the “seeking”, or even its result, since earnest seeking after the Lord and his ways is never finished. In any case, they are worthy of our attention.

“Search” appears in the New Testament much more rarely than “seek”, although it encompasses four separate Greek words. In none of these do we find any implication of searching for an object, person, or condition of life, as was common with zeteo (“seek”), except for the single incident (Mt.2:8) where Herod commanded the Magi to "search" (exetazo) for the child Jesus, and report back to him. Even there, the primary concern was for information.

The predominant word, ereunao, (L/S: to inquire or search, to examine into a question, or to perform exploratory surgery) appears 6x, and is exclusively rendered “search”. Three of those involve careful perusal of the Scriptures (Jn.5:32, 7:52; 1 Pet.1:11), which at that time would of necessity have been the LXX; and three refer to God being fully apprised of the condition of people's “hearts” [motivations] (Rom.8:27, 1 Cor.2:10, Rv.2:23). Peter uses the intensified prefixed form, exereunao, in I Pet.1:10, of the urgency of the prophets' investigations – the only New Testament use of that word.

Exetazo, (L/S: to scrutinize, examine closely, to question a person intently, or approve by test), in addition to the Mt.2 reference above, appears with two other translations: Jn.21:12 when the disciples “did not dare to ask Jesus who he was”, and Mt.10:11 where they were instructed to inquire for a worthy person with whom to stay, on their journeys.

The fourth word, anakrino, is rendered “search” only once (Ac.17:11), of the Bereans' “searching the Scriptures” to authenticate Paul's message. L/S lists “examine closely, interrogate (legally), to examine one's qualifications for a position, to dispute or wrangle” as alternatives. Most of the New Testament uses refer to courtroom examinations (Lk.23:14, Ac.4:9, 12:19, 24:8, 28:18) or other sorts of evaluation (I Cor.2:15, 4:3,4; 9:3, 10:25,27; 14:24).

The idea of “searching the Scriptures”, quite common in the usage outlined above, leads logically to the idea of study. Oddly, that (English) word only appears twice in the New Testament, each time from a different Greek source. This seems strange, until one realizes that most “study” in ancient times was done as the “disciple” of a teacher (see #51), and not independently. Notice the comment of observers in Jn.7:15, when they wondered how Jesus came by his expertise, “never having [studied] been a disciple.” The words rendered “study” by traditional translators both incorporate a sense of diligent effort, not simply “book-learning”.

Spoudazo (L/S: to be busy, eager, in haste or hurry; to pay serious attention; to work hard, to study, lecture, or teach), is rendered “study” only in II Tim.2:15. All its other appearances simply imply serious, diligent effort (Gal.2:10, Eph.4:3; I Thes.2:17, II Tim.4:9,21; Tit.3:12, Heb.4:11, II Pet.1:15, 3:14).

Philotimomeai (L/S: to be ambitious, to aspire, to strive eagerly, – or literally, to seek after honor), appears only three times: II Cor.5:9 traditionally translated “labor", referring to Paul's aspiration to be pleasing to God; Rom.15:20, to his “striving” to preach in places where the gospel had not previously been carried; and I Thes.4:11 where it was rendered “study”, but where if one considers the entire thought in vv.11 and 12, it plainly advocated pursuing the goal of a peaceful life.
“Reading”, of course, for most of us, is an integral part of “study.” It represents only a single Greek word: the verb anaginosko (33x) and the noun anagnosis (3x). Early in its history, before Homer, it signified “to know for certain, to recognize, to persuade or convince”, but as literacy became more widespread, there was a shift to “recognizing written characters,” and thence to “read, or read aloud”

While “scribes” were customarily employed for legal issues or documents (rather like a modern notary), or, in the case of the Jewish culture, for sifting and interpreting the intricacies of their Law, basic literacy was not rare in the first century Roman world. Luke's notation that Jesus went into the synagogue and “stood up to read” (Lk.4:16) implies that this was customary behavior. There was no objection until he started to preach! It was his message that bothered them. See also the invitation extended to Paul and Barnabas (Ac.13:15) in Antioch.

Jesus' challenge to the scribes who opposed him, “Haven't you read …..?” (Mt.12:3, and parallels Mk.2:25 and Lk.6:3; Mt.12:5, 19:4, 21:16; Mt.21:43 and parallel Mk.12:10; Mt.22:31 and parallel Mk.12:26; Mt.24:15 and parallel Mk.13:14), and to the young lawyer (Lk.10:26) did not assume a negative reply. Of course they had read the accounts to which Jesus referred! They prided themselves on their “knowledge of the Law”, had only scorn for those with less expertise (Jn.7:49), and delighted in debating all of its many irrelevant details. I am sure you have encountered their contemporary “cousins” who can quote “Bible verses” by the yard – if not the mile! – and offer “proof-texts for the most intricate of “doctrines” (see #47), but remain not only blissfully unaware of Jesus' own standard of “judgment” (clearly outlined in Matt.25!), but scornful of folks who consider it vital to faithfulness! No, “having read” does not necessarily assume understanding!

With similar attitudes, passersby read the sign Pilate had attached to the cross, and complained about its wording! (Jn.19:20)

There is ample evidence of the custom of public reading from the Law and the prophets in a synagogue meeting (Ac.13:27, 15:21, and II Cor. 3:14,15). Paul asserts that, just as it was for the scribes who argued with Jesus, familiarity should have enabled them to recognize him: but something akin to Moses' use of a veil (see Citizens of the Kingdom, chapter 8) prevented their understanding.

Philip (Ac.8:28-32) “heard” the Ethiopian traveler reading from Isaiah's prophecy, and quickly recognized what he was reading. Many newly literate people find it easier, especially in a foreign language, to understand what they are reading if they read it aloud.

To Timothy, Paul sent instructions for “reading, exhortation, and teaching” to be emphasized among the brethren (I Tim.4:13).

He also directed that his own letters be read in the churches, and passed around to neighboring groups (II Cor.1:13, Eph.3:4, Col.4:16, I Thes.5:27).

John strikes a similar theme in Rv.1:3.

Perhaps these are adaptations from the Jewish synagogue practice.

The writing and reading of letters was the normal method of communication for many centuries, before our electronic age! See Ac.15:31. They provided a vital link, for instruction, for maintaining affectionate contact (II Cor.3:2) with scattered brethren, and even served as official communications (Ac.23:34).

So by all means, let those who “seek” for the Lord and his ways include “searching”, “study”, and “reading” in their “seeking”, as well as the concerted efforts described in the studies of discipleship (#51) and “following instructions” (#55).

Be aware of the context of all these admonitions, which are almost uniformly directed to a group of seekers after faithfulness. Be aware also that the shared discernment of a faithful brotherhood is vital to the faithful results of any search. May we help each other toward that end!

Word Study #200 – Of Stewards and Stewardship

It's the fall of the year as I am writing this: the time when “churches” of nearly every stripe gear up for their annual “stewardship campaigns.” The title, I am convinced, is chosen to give a slightly more “sanctified” flavor to plain-old, manipulative fund-raising: but nobody is really fooled. They all know it takes “big bucks” to run big institutions, and to pay hired staff to run big programs, so somehow the “country-club dues” need to masquerade as one’s “spiritual stewardship obligation.” Dust off the much-misinterpreted parables of “talents” and such, along with the tear-jerking “widow’s mite”, and here we go again!

Is that “laying it on too thick”? Maybe – but I don't think so. None of the three word-groups referring to “stewardship” in the New Testament carry any implication whatever of funding salaries, real estate, or programs.
The most common word group consists of *oikonomos* – a person – (L/S: one who manages a household, the steward of an estate, manager, administrator, the title of a state financial officer, housekeeper, housewife); *oikonomia* – the job – (L/S: the management of a household, thrift, direction, regulation, arrangement, government proceedings, transaction, legal contract; Thayer: management or oversight of another's property; Bauer: being entrusted with a commission); and *oikonomoeo* – the verb – (L/S: to order, regulate, manage, administer, dispense, or handle). These are all connected with *oikos* (L/S: house, dwelling, home; household goods or substance, members of a household or a ruling family; estate, inheritance). *Oikodomeo* (building, edification) is another word entirely (note the insertion of the “d”), and is not connected. Sorry, folks: a “building fund” doesn't qualify!

Only Luke, among the gospel writers, uses this term, once in a positive sense (12:42) and once in a negative (16:1-8 – a very puzzling parable which I will not attempt to exegete), both concerning individuals entrusted with the management of someone else’s property.

Most of the usage in the epistles concerns the faithful performance of **responsibility assigned by the Lord.** Paul speaks of “stewardship” of “the mystery of God” (see #57), which he defines as the inclusion of both Jew and Gentile into one Body (I Cor.4:1, and Eph.3:9, where it was incorrectly rendered “fellowship”); of “the grace of God” (#60) (Eph.3:2, incorrectly translated “dispensation”, and also used by Peter in I Pet.4:10); of “the gospel” (#67) (I Cor.9:17, also incorrectly rendered “dispensation”), and simply “of God” (Col.1:25, Tit.1:7).

Each of these references the careful, accurate and responsible handling of the message with which he / they/ we are entrusted, as well as its faithful embodiment.

Eph.1:10 looks forward to the final consummation when everything in heaven and earth finally acknowledges its rightful Owner and Lord.

In Rom.16:23, the same word is used as the title of Erastus, the city treasurer.

In Gal.4:2, it refers to the guardian of a minor child, in combination with the next word:

The second cluster of words comprises primarily references to **permission granted** by a superior authority, whether spiritual or secular. It includes *epitropos* – the person – (L/S: one to whom the charge of anything is entrusted; a steward, trustee or administrator; the executor of an estate; a governor, viceroy, guardian or protector); *epitrope* – the task – (L/S: an arbiter in a lawsuit; the office of a Roman procurator; guardianship, stewardship); and *epitrepo* – the verb – (L/S: to bequeath, commit, or entrust; to refer a legal issue; to permit, allow, or command). Although like the former group, they involve the management of people or property **not one’s own**, the most common New Testament usage is of simple permission. Traditional translators often used the old English “suffer” (10x) in the sense of “allow” (Mt.8:21,31; 19:8; Lk.8:32, 9:59; Mk.10:4; Ac.21:39; 1 Tim.2:12), as well as other expressions of the granting of a request (Mt.5:13, Jn.19:38; Ac.21:40, 26:1,12; 27:3, 28:16) or a hope for the Lord’s permission (Lk.9:61, I Cor.14:34, 16:7, Heb.6:3). Individuals are designated with specific assignments in Mt.20:8, Lk.8:3, and Gal.4:2. Only in the Matthew and Luke references just cited is the word “steward” traditionally used, but the original word is the same.

The **function** (performing an assigned task) is also present in the usage of *huperetes* (L/S: a servant or attendant, a helper in any work, an assistant, a petty officer). Trench calls this a military word, and connects it to *diakonos* in a civilian context (see #79), often rendered “minister”, which is an occasional translation of *huperetes* as well. In the New Testament, it is applied to low-level government officials such as guards (Mt.5:25, 26:58; Mk.14:54,65; Jn.7:32,45,46; 18:3,12,18, 22; 19:6, Ac.5:22,26); to other individuals commissioned to any sort of service (Lk.1:2, 4:20; Ac.13:5, 26:16) and in Jesus' statement (Jn.18:36) contrasting his “servants” with the forces of a military “king”.

In view of this, what, then, is the proper understanding of “stewardship” or “stewards”? In every case, the word refers to responsibility **conferred by a superior: delegated** authority over people or property **not one’s own.** That responsibility **can be revoked** (Lk.12,16), if abused or otherwise not faithfully handled. It definitely **requires an accounting**, as illustrated in parables that do not specifically use the word: Mt.21:33-41, Mk.12:2-9, Lk.20:9-16; Mt.25:2-25, Lk.19:12-25.

It is **entirely in order** that we should regularly help each other to examine the faithfulness of our handling (“stewardship”) of all that has been entrusted to us, taking meticulous care that it is administered according to the orders of the One to whom “everything / everyone in heaven and earth belongs”!

Whether or not that includes any particular fund-raising campaign, is a question that needs to be asked – and answered – frequently, very seriously, and with extreme caution. “Just as each one has received a spiritual gift [empowerment], serve each other with it, as good trustees [stewards] of the many-faceted grace of God!” (I Pet.4:10) remembering that (I Cor.4:2) “It is required [expected] of caretakers [stewards] that a person be found faithful!”

Amen!
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