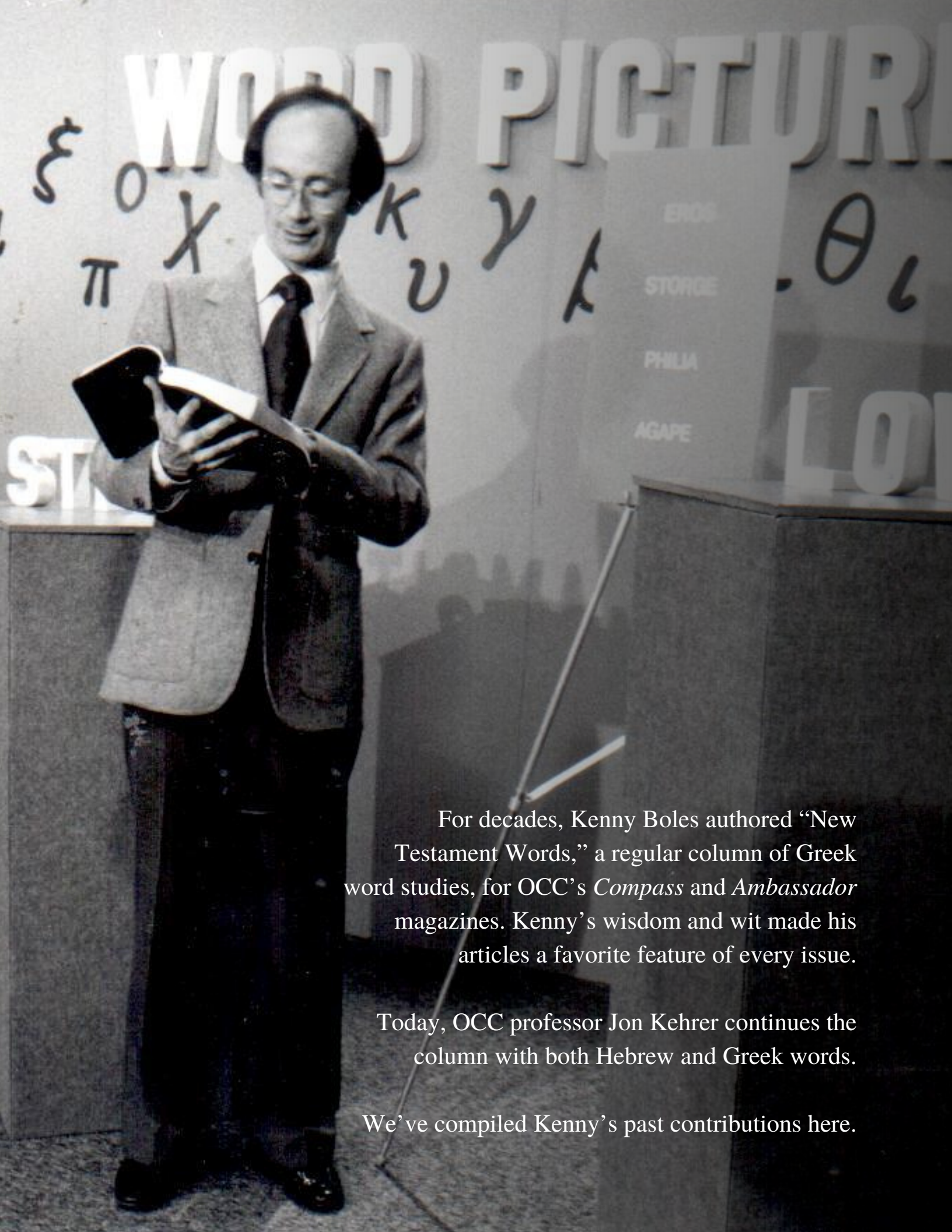


# **NEW TESTAMENT WORDS**

**By Kenny Boles**





For decades, Kenny Boles authored “New Testament Words,” a regular column of Greek word studies, for OCC’s *Compass* and *Ambassador* magazines. Kenny’s wisdom and wit made his articles a favorite feature of every issue.

Today, OCC professor Jon Kehrer continues the column with both Hebrew and Greek words.

We’ve compiled Kenny’s past contributions here.

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# ABBA

In the darkness of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed alone. Despite the coolness of the evening there were sweat-drops on his brow. Despite the apparent calmness of the hour there was agony in his heart. With loud crying and tears he lifted up his voice to God, saying, “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36). This was the first time in Jewish history anyone had ever addressed God this way.

*Abba* is an Aramaic word which came out of the intimacy of the family circle. (Aramaic is closely related to the Hebrew language, and was the everyday language of Jews in the first century.) When a baby was learning to talk, one of the first words he could say was Abba (“Daddy”). The term later lost its childishness, but always kept its intimate and loving character. It was much too personal a word for any man to use in addressing Almighty God. So Jesus was the first.

It was shocking and surprising that Jesus should address God in such an intimate way, but the greater surprise is this: we also have the privilege of crying, “Abba Father” (Rom 8:15 and Gal 4:6). We do not approach our Maker with fear, but with confidence! We are welcomed not as slaves, but as sons!

We have the right to call God our Abba and to claim his attention in a close and intimate way. While we must never be casual or flippant in our attitude (as the English word “Daddy” might imply), we certainly can exercise our privilege of sonship. God has adopted us as his own children and even allows us to call him Abba, also translated “My dear father.”

The picture for Abba is a loving father, holding his little son on his lap, eager to listen to his words.

# ADMONITION

Felix carried a real grudge against Jonathan the high priest. He was bitter about the priest's frequent admonitions to be a better governor. And as Josephus recorded this story he commented that "incessant rebukes are annoying to those who choose to do wrong." So Felix paid a great sum to certain evil men to get Jonathan killed. These thugs went into the temple grounds as if to worship, but carried daggers beneath their cloaks. They mingled with the people around Jonathan, then murdered him in broad daylight. Delivering admonitions, warnings, or rebukes can get you into real trouble!

The Greek word for this kind of admonition or warning is *nouthesia* (noo theh SEE ah). In the New Testament the same word is often translated instruction. The Kittel article on this word says, "It presupposes an opposition which has to be overcome. It seeks to correct the mind, to put right what is wrong, to improve the spiritual attitude." That can be a big job—and it is best begun when the person on the receiving end is still young.

Paul told fathers to bring up their children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). (Many versions translate this "discipline and admonition.") However we choose to translate the word, the command in this verse is not about teaching little ones to count or to read. It is mainly about correction.

Teaching has its primary effect on the intellect; instruction has its effect on the will and the disposition. Teaching is about adding information and skill; instruction is about correcting wrongheadedness. Teaching is about watering the garden; instruction is about weeding.

It is often observed that kids don't have to be taught to be bad; they have to be taught to be good. That's why they need instruction.



# AGREEMENT

How should a man live? By the law of the jungle? Should the stronger rule the weaker? Is it right for the powerful to plunder the powerless? These were the questions at stake in a discussion between Socrates and his friend Callicles. Since Socrates held that a man should live by his beliefs, he urged his friend to show him if his life was inconsistent in any area. If his actions did not match his philosophy, he promised he would change them.

And if he did not change? Socrates put it this way: “If you find me in agreement with you now, and afterwards failing to do what I agreed to, regard me as a regular dunce and never trouble any more to admonish me again—a mere good-for-nothing.”

The Greek word Socrates used for “in agreement” and “what I agreed to” is *homologeō* (ho mo lo GEH oh). It means literally “to say” (logeō) “the same” (homo). It was used in a variety of contexts, such as the following: to “agree” with testimony in court, to “speak the same language,” to “confess” guilt in an accusation, to “agree to a treaty” with a person or a god. (Go back over these and consider how “speak the same” applies in each case.)

A key element in each usage, as seen in the example from Socrates, is that a person must act on what he “confesses.” A person says, in effect, “I agree that this fact is true and therefore I’m going to do something about it.”

So what does it mean to “confess Christ”? It means to “agree” with God that Jesus is Lord and Christ—and plan to live accordingly. It means to “confess” our own sinful weakness in contrast with his purity—and plan to change. It means to “enter a treaty relationship” with Jesus, acknowledging him as our God and Savior.

It is no mere theoretical agreement; it is our consent to a Person and a proposition that is followed by commitment and action. This is how we confess Christ before men (Matt 10:32; Rom 10:9-10).

# AMBASSADOR

Mutiny! With Caesar Augustus dead and Tiberius Caesar not yet in full control, the Roman legions were in revolt. They were encamped in Germany, far from home, and old resentments were boiling. Why were their centurions so cruel? Why were their wages so small? Why weren't they allowed to retire after serving honorably in twenty campaigns?

Ambassadors from the Roman Senate were sent to try to reason with the angry troops. The soldiers seized them, however, and threatened them with death. At this point their great general, Germanicus, tried to shame his troops into submission. "What have you not dared," he asked, "what have you not profaned during these days? You have outraged the privileges due even to an enemy, the sanctity of ambassador, the law of nations." Nowhere else in the empire were "centurion murdered, tribunes driven away, ambassadors imprisoned, camps and rivers stained with blood."

These events, recorded in the Annals of Tacitus, took place when Saul of Tarsus was a teenager in a Roman colony. He surely had such events in mind when he later called himself "an ambassador in chains" (Eph 6:20). An ambassador might be rejected or expelled, but never put in chains! That would be more than merely an injustice to the man; that would be an outrage against his king.

The Greek word *presbyteuo* (press bit CHOO oh) means "I serve as ambassador." All those who proclaim the gospel can share this title. "God has committed to us the message of reconciliation," Paul wrote. "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).

Like Paul, we who present the appeal of our King may face rejection, persecution and even imprisonment. But it is not about us. It is about our King and the gospel of the kingdom. May we therefore find the ways to get our hearers to see beyond us and to recognize our words as the message of our King!

# AMBITION

There was trouble in old Arcadia. No sooner had the new concept of “democracy” begun to spread through the area, than along came its by-product: corrupt politicians. Such men would shamelessly canvass to get votes, even hiring partisans to promote their cause.

Their real concern was not to uphold noble principles; they just wanted to get elected. The politicians became so corrupt that elections finally had to be canceled, and winners were chosen by lot. Aristotle called that kind of politics *eritheia* (eh rih THAY ah).

And there was trouble in ancient Egypt. Two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, were acting like harlots. Chasing after a succession of rich and powerful lovers, they shamelessly gave up their honor to promote their own selfish ends. When Symmachus told their story in his version of Ezekiel 23, he also used the word *eritheia*.

Now, what do such politicians and prostitutes have to do with our study of New Testament words? Their shared vice—conniving to do whatever it takes to promote their own selfish cause—is Paul’s word for “selfish ambition.” It is listed as a work of the flesh in Gal 5:20. People driven by this sin “insist on getting their own way,” and in their “mean-spirited ambition” they try to “get the better of others” (Rom 2:8 and James 3:14, 16 in *The Message*).

The really scary thing is that *eritheia* can sometimes be a person’s motive for preaching Christ! When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, there were some who thought they could stir up trouble for him by proclaiming Christ. In their twisted, devilish, conniving way of thinking, this was just the opportunity to get ahead of Paul! They preached out of “selfish ambition” (Phil 1:17, NIV) and were “merely greedy, hoping to get something out of it for themselves” (*The Message*). May we who preach take heed!

# ANGER

I've been noticing lately that my sins are not as bad as other people's sins. Oh, I know we all have sins and that is wrong, but I mean that my sins are more understandable. Do you know what I mean? Some people do things I would not even think of doing—why, I'm not even tempted by such things! And the things that do tempt me—well, they're understandable. Let me show you what I mean.

Some people have really nasty tempers. They explode in wrath and dump their animosities on anyone around them. (The Greek word for this kind of wrath is *thumos*—thoo MOSS.) They try to justify their sin by saying, "Maybe I lose my temper a lot, but at least I get it all out of my system and don't carry a grudge." The Scriptures warn us that *thumos* must be put away from the Christian life (Eph 4:31).

I, on the other hand, rarely lose my cool. If I am provoked by someone, I grit my teeth and hold back my temper. Sometimes my anger doesn't even show! This pent-up anger produces long-lasting resentment, of course, but it is my natural temperament. (The Greek word for this pent-up anger is *orge*—or GAY.) It certainly seems justifiable to me to sustain this kind of anger, because at least I don't explode all over everyone. For some reason, however, the Scriptures also forbid *orge* in the very same verse as above (Eph 4:31).

I suppose I really should work on my *orge* problem, but at least I don't have a *thumos* problem like some people I know. I'm just glad my sins are not as bad as other people's sins!

# ANOINT

Some of you may be too young to remember those good old days, when a barber would top off every haircut with a generous splash of oil. He would pour the oil on your head and rub it in with enthusiasm. It was a wonderful thing, this anointing of the hair and scalp!

In ancient times anointing the head often had special significance. For instance, Samuel poured out a vial of oil on young David's head to signify that the Lord was anointing him to be ruler over Israel (1 Sam 10:1). Aaron and his sons were similarly anointed to serve before God and the people as priests (Ex 28:41). To some extent, even the prophets were appointed and installed into their office by anointing (1 Ki 19:16; Is 61:1).

The Hebrew word for "anoint" is *mashah* (maw SHAKH). From this word came the name "Messiah," the one anointed by God to deliver His people. In the New Testament the Greek word for "anoint" is *chrío* (CHREE oh) and the word for "Messiah" is *christos* (chris TOSS). Thus, the Christ of the N.T. is the Anointed One, the Messiah sent from God. He will reign forever over God's people as Prophet (Luke 4:18), Priest (Heb 5:5-6), and King (Luke 19:38).

And so it was, after all the centuries of pouring oil on countless heads, that the angel broke into the stillness of the Judean night with these words: "I bring you good news of great joy! A deliverer was born today in the city of David! He is the Christ—the Messiah—the Lord!"

# ATONEMENT

The gods of old were a cantankerous bunch! Since they were the inventions of man's imagination, they had the same flaws as men have. They were irritable, selfish, and capricious. They were so unpredictable that men always feared them. Men called upon the gods as one might rouse a sleeping giant—very cautiously!

When the Greeks approached their gods, they thought it prudent to bring an offering to appease them. The word for this offering was *hilasmos* (hill ahs MOSS). If the gods were angry, the *hilasmos* would placate their bad temper. If the gods weren't listening, the *hilasmos* would attract their attention. If the gods resented the intrusion, perhaps the *hilasmos* would allow the worshipper a quiet escape. With the right *hilasmos*, one could purchase the favor of the gods.

The use of *hilasmos* in the New Testament is dramatically different from its pagan background. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation (*hilasmos*) for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Please, note these three things: The true God is not an ill-tempered rascal to be handled with kid gloves. God is love!

The change effected by the *hilasmos* is not in God but in us! The atoning blood of Christ does not change God's wrath toward sin. It changes us, so that we are cleansed of sin and our debt is paid.

Most incredible of all—God provided the *hilasmos* himself! "Jesus Christ the righteous...is the *hilasmos* for our sins" (1 John 2:1, 2).

# AUTHORITY

In keeping with the theme of politics and government in this issue, it seemed like a good idea to research the word “authority.” Used 108 times in the N.T., the Greek word for “authority” is *exousia* (ex ou SEE ah). When we unscrew the lid and look inside this word, we come across some interesting observations.

The word *exousia* originally came from a simple verb which meant “it is permitted; it is lawful; free action is allowed.” People knew the restraints of law and custom; they knew what they were allowed to do. In the ancient story of Tobit, for instance, Raguel told the son of Tobit, “I do not have authority to give my daughter to any man other than yourself” (Tobit 7:10). To have authority meant to have permission—to have freedom to act.

In considering the N.T. uses of “authority,” I was struck by the number of times the term is combined with the words “was given.” Unlike the English word “authority,” which automatically belongs to the “author,” the Greek word *exousia* is usually given by a higher power. Apostles, governors, chief priests, servants, centurions—all kinds of people are delegated the permission or authority to carry out their responsibilities. (Curiously, this word for authority is not found in connection with elders.)

Government officials are specifically stated to have received their permission to govern from God (Rom 13:1; John 19:10). Their “authority” is neither absolute nor permanent, since Jesus will one day take it back from them (1 Cor 15:24; Rev 17:12). And since they are permitted to exercise authority on such a temporary, delegated basis, one would think they would have had a sense of their own limitation. With government, it is too rarely so! Instead, as Jesus observed, the “great men” of government often “use authority down on” their subjects (Mark 10:42).

But final authority is in the hands of Jesus (Matt 28:18). It is in obedience to him that we submit to delegated authority. It is in honor of him that we hold delegated authority responsible for doing his will.

# BABBLER

It was not enough for Caligula to be emperor of the whole Roman Empire. He also wanted to be worshipped as a god. While some of the provinces were willing to add him to their list of gods, Judea refused to worship any but the one true God. To push the matter along, Caligula got the idea of erecting a huge gold-covered statue in the temple in Jerusalem. (What was he thinking? Was the man crazy?)

Actually, the idea was not his own. Caligula was following the advice of Helicon, his Egyptian courtier and bootlicker. The Jewish writer Philo says Helicon was “a scorpion in the form of a slave, a scrap retailer, a piece of riffraff.” These were not flattering terms!

The word Philo used for “scrap retailer” was *spermologos* (sper mo LOG ass). It literally meant a “seed picker,” like the gutter-sparrows that picked up spilled seed in the market place. Then it came to apply to men who were lowly scavengers, collecting and selling scraps. Finally, it was an insulting term for men who had no ideas of their own, but picked up and parroted scraps from others.

When the philosophers of Athens heard Paul preaching they belittled him: “What is this babbler trying to say?” (Acts 17:18). With this word they accused Paul of being a “seed picker”—a scrap peddler, a mindless babbler with only discarded bits of ideas. In this accusation they were totally wrong.

But every preacher should ask himself, “Would they be wrong about me?” Am I a mere plagiarist? Do I do my own thinking? Am I feeding the flock with discarded scraps? Surely one of the greatest possible insults for any preacher of God’s Word is this: “He’s just a seed picker.”



# BAPTIZE

Baptize is a violent word! It comes from a rough, tough background and has an aroma of death about it. When people of the first century heard the Greek word *baptizo* (bahp TEEDZ oh), they not only thought of immersion—they also thought of death!

Josephus, the famous Jewish historian of the first century, provides a vivid illustration of this point. The word baptize is found thirteen times in his writings, nearly every time in a context of destruction and death. His uses of the word include: to “sink” a ship; to “drown” an enemy; to “punge” a sword into; and to “bring down” a city to destruction. Josephus also tells about Herod the Great, who was jealous of the growing popularity of his handsome young brother-in-law, Aristobulus. Herod lured him into a swimming pool in Jericho, and had his servants hold Aristobulus down and drown him. The word used by Josephus was baptizo (Wars 1, 437 and Antiquities 15, 55).

It was no accident, then, that the Scriptures connect Christian baptism with our death to the former life and our burial in Christ (Col 2:12; Rom 6:3-11). When we were baptized, we were sunk; we were drowned; we were killed. The former life was brought down to destruction so that God could give us new life in Christ.

Conclusion: While we go about explaining the proper form of baptism and the actual results of baptism, let us also impress on people the real meaning of baptism. The picture for baptizo is the watery demise of a sinner...sinking...drowning...dead.

# BEAR THE LOAD

There are burdens, and then there are burdens. But not all burdens are the same. Some burdens are so heavy they cannot be borne alone. Our brothers must help—and so we “bear one another’s burdens” in Galatians 6:2. (The word for this kind of burden is *baros*—BAR oss, and means “heavy.”) Other burdens are laid upon us that we are fully expected to carry on our own. Thus “each one will bear his own load” in Galatians 6:5. (The word for the burden this time is *phortion*—for TEE on, and means “a load to be carried.”)

It is every man’s duty to put his shoulder to his own load. It is every man’s responsibility to do his own part and carry his own share. And is it only a coincidence that Paul’s very next sentence (Gal 6:6) names a load that each Christian must bear? “He who is taught must share (*koinoneo*—koin oh NEH oh) with him who teaches.” This sharing is a partnership involving money (see Phil 4:15). This is the Lord’s program for supporting the teaching ministry of his kingdom.

So workers in the Lord’s kingdom should not be ashamed to ask for help in bearing a heavy “burden,” while at the same time reminding everyone to bear his own “load.”

# BEAUTIFUL

Do you have beautiful feet? I mean beautiful in the biblical sense of the word: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who proclaim good news” (Rom 10:15). The Greek word for beautiful in this passage is *horaios* (ho RYE oss). It comes from the word *hora* which meant an hour, a time, a fitting season. In classical Greek this word *horaios* meant more than just pretty to look at—it was also used in these ways: (a) crops harvested at the right season, (b) ripe fruit, (c) a man in the prime of life, (d) a woman in the bloom of youth, (e) a maiden ready for marriage. Notice how the word includes these ideas: the right time...beautiful...ripe...productive.

In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament this same word was used to describe: (a) every tree in Eden which was pleasing to the sight, Gen 2:9, (b) the beautiful Rebekah, Gen 26:7, (c) Rachel, who was beautiful of form and face, Gen 29:17, (d) handsome young Joseph, Gen 39:6, etc. Our Lord is said to be more *horaios* (fairer) than the sons of men in Psalm 45:2. Both the groom and the bride of Ecclesiastes are called *horaios* (1:16, 6:4). The beauty in this word lies in two main points: it is the right time and it is ready to produce.

The New Testament focuses all this meaning onto Romans 10:15. “How beautiful...are the feet of those who proclaim good news!” The proclaimer of God’s good news has the beauty of one who brings a fruit-producing message delivered at just the right time. May all the couriers of the Gospel read these words and run with a spring in their step—knowing they are as lovely as the trees of Eden: beautiful, timely, ready to produce!

# BEG OFF

On a certain occasion in ancient times there was to be a great wrestling match. The preparations were made and a crowd gathered. On one side stood Tiberius Claudius Marcianus; on the other side stood several challengers. As Tiberius stripped for action his opponents gasped at his powerful physique. They each cast a dubious glance at themselves and quickly asked to be excused. To put it more bluntly in our modern vernacular, they threw in the towel and quit!

The Greek word involved here was *paraiteomai* (par i TEH oh my). In addition to the meanings suggested above, it also meant to beg off. This definition serves well in the first of several uses of *paraiteomai* in the New Testament. In Luke 14:18 a great banquet was ready, but those who were invited began to make excuse. They began to beg off, refuse, and ask to be excused. In the more courageous context of Acts 25:11, Paul said if he had done anything for which he deserved to die, then he did not seek to escape death.

Sometimes the word also carries the connotation of aversion and repugnance. (This may be part of the reason the host of the banquet back in Luke 14 was so angry. His guests had not merely declined; they had spurned his invitation!) In this light we should look at the three times word is used in Hebrews 12. Verse 19 tells how the Israelites at Mt. Sinai begged off from listening to the voice of God. (See Ex 20:18ff.) Verse 25 twice warns Christians against doing the same thing. When God speaks we must not ask to be excused! We must not refuse his commands or spurn his commission.

Let's not beg off!

# BLESS

Sometimes words change in their meanings. If we go back too far in history we might find a meaning that is not right for a given N.T. passage. Or, if we use a more recent meaning, we may not be going back far enough. Let me show you what I mean with the word “bless.”

In its earliest use the Greek word “I bless” (*eulogeo*—you loh GEH oh) meant to speak well of (as in our English word “eulogy”). We still use it in this sense when we “bless” the Lord. We speak well of him and praise his name. But this is not what happens when the Lord “blesses” us.

The latest use of this word, on the other hand, is to give benefits to someone. That is almost exclusively what we have in mind when we think of God “blessing” us. We get money, health, family, fame—and we say we are “blessed.”

Neither of these two meanings, however, fit several N.T. passages. When Jesus “blessed” the bread of the Last Supper, he neither bragged on it (“You sure are a fine loaf of bread!”) nor gave it benefits (“Let me give you a box to live in, Mr. Bread, and a fine new wrapper to wear”). What Jesus did was to consecrate that bread to a noble purpose. What Jesus did to or for the bread was also true for the fish that he blessed to feed the 4000 (Mark 8:7).

And was it not also “consecrating to a noble purpose” when Jesus “blessed” the little children (Mark 10:16), and when Peter said Jesus was sent to “bless” all of us (Acts 3:26)?

We who are “blessed by the Father” (Matt 25:34) are given many benefits, it is true. But the more important aspect of our blessings is that they consecrate us to God’s service. God gives us much, and he expects much from us (Luke 12:48).

So when we consider our “blessings” from God, we should not only think of *what* they are, but also of *why* they are. Every blessing we recognize from the hand of God is part of his way of consecrating us to his work!

May this thought be a “blessing” to you!

# BLESSED

“Happy are those who mourn,” says one popular translation of the Beatitude in Matthew 5:4. It seems an impossibility, a contradiction of terms. Maybe we had better go back to the old familiar, “Blessed are they...” even if we’re not quite sure what that means, either!

The Greek word behind the translation is *makarios* (mah KAR ee oss). Long before the New Testament was written, *makarios* was used by the pagan Greeks as a description of the gods, not men. It meant to be happy—blissful—free from cares and worries. Before long the word was sometimes applied to men, especially if they were fortunate and wealthy. In these early years, to call someone blessed was the same as saying, “Congratulations!” Parents were congratulated on their children, wise men on their knowledge, and rich men on their wealth. Such people, thought the Greeks, were blessed.

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, dating two hundred years before Christ, uses *makarios* similarly. When Leah had a second son through her handmaid Zilpah, she said, “Happy am I! For the women will congratulate me” (Gen 30:13). At the same time, the Old Testament sometimes displays a more serious side of the word, as in Job 5:17, “Happy is the man whom God reproves.”

Then comes Jesus with his shocking appraisal of the human condition: “You who are spiritually bankrupt—congratulations! You who mourn—good for you! You meek and lowly—how fortunate you really are!” What was so good about feeling so bad? It was this: only those who recognize their souls’ poverty will apply to God for a grant of grace. Only those who mourn their sorry state will be willing to relinquish the old life to death and experience the new birth. Only those who approach God on their knees will be allowed to stand in his presence.

You who are abandoning this world for a citizenship in heaven: Congratulations!

# BLOOM

“Bloom and grow” is a lovely thought for the flowers of springtime, whether the alpine edelweiss of Austria or the dandelions in my front yard. The ancient Greek word for “bloom and grow” was *thallo* (THAH low). They used it to describe the way trees bud out, bloom, and bear fruit when the winter season is past. The young shoots were a symbol of new life and fertility, and were often used to weave a wreath to wear as a crown.

In wider usage the word was used when dew was “copious,” when a feast was “sumptuous,” when meat was “rich” with fat. It was usually a positive, happy word, that meant to “be abundant,” to “thrive and flourish.”

Now let’s look at the word in two places in Scripture. In the Greek version of Ezekiel 17:24, *thallo* is used as the LORD says, “All the trees of the forest will know that I the LORD...dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish.” Then in the New Testament Paul used the word with a prefix on the front, making it mean, “bloom again” (Phil 4:10). His supporters in Philippi had gone a while without sending him anything, and now after some time, they had “renewed” their concern for him.

Perhaps we have all gone through cold, dry periods of life when we intended to support a ministry, but for some reason did not. What a good thing when the concern blooms into fruit again!

And then, just so we can end on a sad note, consider this: By the second century A.D. the word had also come to mean “a small gift given as an after-thought,” “a small tip,” or “a once-a-year gift.” When our own hearts are “renewed” in concern for God’s work, may our fruitfulness be more!

# BLOT OUT

There's a New Year ahead! You get a clean slate—freshly erased and wiped clean. Or do you? Is the slate really wiped clean by a new calendar? Can the past be erased?

The Greek word for “erase” or “blot out” is *exaleipho* (ex ah LAFE oh). In the Greek translation of the Old Testament *exaleipho* is usually found in a negative context. God “blotted out” every living creature from the face of the earth in Noah’s day (Gen 7:23) and he promised in the time of Moses to “blot out” all remembrance of the Amalekites (Ex 17:14). God promised to “blot out” the name of idolaters (Deut 29:20) and the name of “whoever has sinned” against him (Ex 32:33).

Furthermore, this “blotting out” was a thorough one. For instance, the name of a father is “wiped out” when he has no sons (Num 27:4). Words are “wiped off” a scroll (Num 5:23) and leprosy is scraped from a wall and the wall is “plastered over” with other plaster (Lev 14:42). After this kind of “erasing” and “blotting out,” no trace of the former state remains.

Despite the generally negative context, two O.T. passages offer rays of hope. King David begged God to “blot out” his transgressions and his iniquities (Ps 51:1, 9). Isaiah went further and gave God’s promise: “I am the one who ‘wipes out’ your transgressions” (Is 43:25).

This promise leads us to the New Testament, where God in Christ “wipes away” our sin (Acts 3:19) and “cancels” the certificate of debt which stood against us (Col 2:14). Since our sins are so completely erased, we can look forward to heaven, where all our tears will be “wiped away” (Rev 21:4) and God will NOT “erase” our names from his book (Rev 3:5).

Happy New Year? No...this will be a Happy New ETERNITY!



# BOLDNESS

Democracy was born in ancient Greece. When the citizens of a Greek city gathered in their public assembly (ekklesia) they had the right of free speech. They felt free to speak their minds with complete boldness. Their word for this “freedom to say all” was *parrhesia* (par ray SEE ah) and this is the important word which is translated “boldness” in the New Testament.

The early church proclaimed God’s word with boldness. Peter and John were “uneducated and untrained,” but they stood before the Sanhedrin and preached the gospel in such a way that the Jewish leaders could not fail to observe their boldness (Acts 4:13). Unshaken by the experience, Peter and John returned to the brethren and they all asked God to grant them to speak his word with boldness (Acts 4:29).

The early church also prayed with boldness. They had confidence of access into God’s presence (Eph 3:12) because Jesus had opened the way. They drew near with boldness to the throne of grace, with a blessed assurance of receiving mercy and finding grace (Rev 4:16). John put it this way: “This is the boldness which we have before him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14).

The early church clung to their boldness even in the face of persecution because they had hope of heaven (Heb 3:6). They knew they were citizens of a greater kingdom (Phil 3:20) where they would one day join their King. They looked forward to that final day with boldness, knowing they would have no reason to shrink away in fear from the presence of their King (1 John 2:28).

The exhortation for the early church—and for the church today—was this: “Do not throw away your boldness! (Heb 10:35)

# BORN OF WATER

“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

There is a popular idea that “born of water” may refer to physical birth, and thus have nothing to do with baptism. The idea goes like this: before birth the embryo is surrounded by fluid in the mother’s womb. At the time of birth this “water” breaks and soon the baby is delivered. In this light, to be “born of water” is nothing more than to be born.

Faith-only folks are eager to take this view and throw out baptism. But are they right? Can this “water” of John 3:5 be the amniotic fluid associated with physical birth? The answer is an emphatic NO.

Nowhere in the dictionaries of classical Greek can you find the word for water (*hydor*—HOO dor) used in the sense of amniotic fluid. Nowhere in the various lexicons of N.T. Greek does *hydor* mean amniotic fluid. They are quite clear—and quite unanimous—in their denial of this possibility. In fact, I cannot find a single reputable commentator who supports this idea!

In point of actual fact, Jesus said that a person must be baptized and must have the spiritual rebirth from the Holy Spirit to be saved. As Plummer put it, “An unbiased mind can scarcely avoid seeing this plain fact.”

And in closing, you will enjoy this quotation from none other than John Calvin, in his commentary on John 3:5. “It is true indeed that we are excluded from salvation if we neglect baptism; and in this sense I confess it is necessary.”

(The Greek word for amniotic fluid is *prophoros* and is pronounced “PROH for oss.”)

# BOXING

Iatrocles was a man who drew a crowd. He was tall and muscular; he was “a beautiful young man.” He probably could have said with Mohammed Ali, another boxer who became famous, “Ain’t I pretty!”

On one occasion in the gymnasium at ancient Naples, Iatrocles had stripped down for exercising. Although many other athletes were there that day, it was Iatrocles who attracted the most admirers. Men swarmed around to watch, as he lifted his arms high and went through the motions of a boxer. As he shadow boxed against an imaginary opponent, he gave “a most brilliant performance, in so spirited a way that he seemed more like a man in an actual contest.”

But it was really just for show.

The Greek word for boxing is *pukteuo* (pook TYOU oh). It is closely related to the Latin word from which we get pugilism. It is the word Paul used in 1 Cor 9:26, when he said, “I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.”

Paul used athletic allusions a number of times and he understood quite well the demands put on an athlete. It is one thing to go jogging; it is another thing to be in an actual race with someone. It is one thing to prance around swinging at the air and showing off your muscles; it is a far different thing to box with an opponent who wants to knock you out.

Mere jogging has no competition, no finish line, no prize. Mere shadow boxing involves no opponent, no danger, and no championship at stake. Paul knew that to be serious about serving Jesus he had to discipline himself like a real athlete. Only then could he finally say, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown...” (2 Tim 4:7-8).

# BREATHE ON

Let's start with the basic word *physao* (fu SAH oh), which meant in ancient Greek to “puff, snort, or blow.” It referred to letting out a blast of air, as from a bellows in a blacksmith's shop. It was the word to be used when someone blew up a bladder or a balloon.

Now let's add the prefix *em-* which means “in, on, or into.” Our compound word *emphysao* will mean to take a big breath and blow into or toward something.

When we have this idea clearly in mind, we are ready to look at the only time *emphysao* is ever used in the New Testament. In John 20:22 Jesus appeared to his disciples on the evening of his resurrection. As a part of sending them out with the gospel, “He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” Jesus was clearly preparing these men for their special reception of the Spirit and power which would come at Pentecost (Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4). But why did Jesus puff at them? Is there more here than meets the eye?

The first century readers of John's gospel would probably have caught the fact that his use of the word *emphysao* was a reminder of at least three key passages in the Old Testament. It was the same word used in Genesis 2:7 when the LORD God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” Likewise, the word was later found in scripture when Elijah stretched himself over the lifeless son of the widow and resuscitated him (1 Ki 17:21). Finally, a similar image was found in Ezekiel 37:9, where the prophet told God's Spirit to breathe upon the valley of dead bones and bring them back to life.

So what can we conclude? Jesus was preparing the disciples for a mighty infusion of life—spiritual life. Inflated by the breath of God himself, these men received new life which they then imparted to all the world. A new creation had begun!

# BUILD UP

“For everything there is a time, and a season for every matter under heaven.” Such is the wisdom of Ecclesiastes. Included in the list is this: “a time to tear down, and a time to build up” (Ecc 3:3).

Since the tornado in 2011, Joplin has seen a great deal of tearing down and building up. Thousands of homes and businesses, as well as the schools and a hospital, were left in total ruin but still partly standing. Thousands of volunteers came to help tear down and carry away the debris. Then it became “time to build up.”

The Greek word for “build up” is *oikodomeo* (oi koh doh MEH oh). The first part means “house” and the last part means “I erect a domicile.” It is the word for the wise man building a house on the rock, for Jesus building the church on a solid foundation, and even for “building” the temple of his body in three days. In addition, the word goes beyond the literal sense of building houses to a deeper sense of building up people. In this sense we call it “edification.”

But in the New Testament this “building up” or edification can be either good or bad. It is bad when it is individual and selfish. Paul speaks harshly of the man who only seeks to edify himself instead of edifying the whole church (see 1 Cor 14, especially vs. 4 & 12). He urges, “Let all things be done for edification.”

Interestingly, when “building up” is used in a positive sense, it is always in the context of community. When the world has destroyed people’s lives, it is the church’s job to help clear away the wreckage and to build them up. When bad choices have left guilt and sorrow, it is the church’s job to bring forgiveness and restoration in Christ. As Paul summed it up in another letter, “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up” (1 Thess 5:11).

# CALL UPON

The rulers of ancient Athens had an uprising on their hands. Rebel forces were amassing an army; war was eminent. Quickly the leaders “sent to ask help from Thessaly, with whom they had an alliance.” The word in Greek history which meant “to summon help from one’s ally” was *epikaleo* (eh pee kah LEH oh). This word came to have some interesting uses in the New Testament.

When Paul was on trial before Festus in Acts 25, Festus was about to send Paul back to Jerusalem to be tried by the Jews. Knowing that this would mean immediate death, and knowing his rights as a Roman citizen, Paul quickly declared, “I appeal to Caesar.”

We can make two observations, so far, about this work *epikaleo*, which means to call for help. First, people call for help when they know they’re in such big trouble that they cannot handle it alone. Second, the cry for help is directed toward someone who has both the power and the willingness to help. Your best ally is someone who has the resources to help you and has made a pledge to come to your rescue when necessary.

Both Old and New Testaments promise that a heavenly Ally is available to us. “Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Rom 13:13). This divine Ally is both the Father (1 Peter 1:17) and the Son (1 Cor 1:2), for either is properly called “the Lord.”

When Stephen was stoned all earthly hope was gone, so he called upon the Lord and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” (Acts 7:49). Likewise, when the sinner finally realizes that all is lost, he is baptized into Christ, “calling upon the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). The Lord hears the cry for help from the baptismal waters and rushes to the rescue.

# CARE

“What is there in the lives of men that the so-called ‘men-loving’ gods care about?” For one ancient Cynic quoted in Eusebius, the answer was clear: “The gods have no love at all for mankind.” And since the gods didn’t care about men, why should men care about God? In fact, why should men care—about anything?

The Greek word for “care” was *melei* (MEL aye). It meant to weigh on the mind, to call for some kind of responsibility, to be a concern. It meant that someone was paying attention; someone cared!

In the New Testament, the word is often found in a negative sense. (Perhaps the Cynic would feel vindicated in his negative view of men and gods!) The hired hand, for instance, cares nothing for the sheep and abandons them in the face of danger (John 10:13). Judas Iscariot cared nothing for the poor, and just wanted to steal money from the disciples’ shared moneybag. Gallio the proconsul showed no concern whatsoever when Sosthenes was beaten up in his presence (Acts 18:17).

Sometimes the charge of not caring was even leveled against Jesus. In the middle of a terrifying storm on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples cried out, “Don’t you care if we drown?” (Mark 4:38) In a quieter setting, Martha said, “Master, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?” (Luke 10:40) In an odd and insincere compliment, the Pharisees told Jesus, “You care for no man, for you do not look upon the face” (Matt 22:16).

Doesn’t anybody care? The wonderful answer is yes. Peter encourages all of us, “Cast all your anxiety on God, because he cares for you” (1 Pet 5:7). The ancient Greeks—especially the Cynics—would have thought this to be very ungodlike, but God’s great heart is tender. He cares!

# CHARACTER

The making of coins is an ancient art. First, a skilled craftsman with a good engraving tool would carve out a die. Then this die would be used to stamp a piece of precious metal with the official insignia. A coin produced in this way would have precisely the same image as the original die. Any coin without this exact image stamped on it was a counterfeit.

In early Greek the word for the engraver was *character* (car ack TARE). Later the same word was used for his engraving tool, then for the die he made, and finally for the image that was stamped on the coin. By the time of the New Testament, it was this last use—the exact image on the coin—that was the common meaning of the word.

The book of Hebrews says that Jesus is the character of God's being. Just what does this mean? It means that Jesus is the "exact representation" of who and what God is. It means that just as a coin bears exactly the image of the original die, so Jesus shows us exactly what God is like. The underlying reality of God's nature has been precisely reproduced in his Son.

No one, perhaps, could appreciate this truth better than the Apostle Philip. In the Upper Room he was the one who asked Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father." Jesus replied with these bold words: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father" (John 14:8-9).

In modern English we could say that Jesus was "the spit 'n image" of his Father. (This has nothing to do with spit. It comes from an Old English expression, "the spirit and image," as the exact inside and outside copy of someone.) Although no one has ever seen God, Jesus shows us exactly what God is.



# CHOSEN

We are God's chosen few;  
All others will be damned.  
There is no room for you;  
We can't have heaven crammed!

This arrogant piece of sarcasm from Jonathan Swift accurately reflects the attitude of God's people at various points in history. Leading up to the coming of Jesus, for instance, the Jews took increasing pride in calling themselves "the chosen." What a shock it was to be to learn what Jesus said about "the chosen" people of God!

The Greek word for "chosen" is the plural form *electoi* (ek lek TOY). Thucydides used it in the fifth century B.C. to describe 300 "select" or "elite" soldiers who could run faster and fight harder, and who were chosen to lead the attack on a Syracuse stronghold. A generation later, Plato used the word to depict the "select" panel of judges who should try and convict crooked lawyers. (Plato said this was any lawyer who, for the love of money, would get a guilty person off the hook!)

By Jesus' time, the Jews had decided that in God's eyes they were the "select," the "choice," the "top quality." But in Matthew 21 and 22 Jesus told three parables which exposed the low standing of Jewish leaders in the eyes of God. The climaxing parable was about a king who invited guests to the wedding banquet of his son. Though previously invited, when it was time for the banquet some guests refused to come. And then one man who did come refused to wear wedding clothing. The lesson of all this comes in 22:15, "For many are invited, but few are chosen (*electoi*)."

What does it mean to be chosen? According to Jesus, it means that (1) God wants you, (2) you respond to his invitation, and (3) you come dressed however God demands. Such are the people who will be with the Lamb in heaven, "his called, chosen, and faithful" followers (Rev 17:14).

# CLING TO

Thetis was a devoted mother. As a seagoddess of ancient myth, she took a human lover and gave birth to Achilles. She held the infant by the heel and dipped him in the River Styx, thus giving him almost total invincibility. (The “Achilles heel” is named in his honor.)

Even when Achilles was a grown warrior, his mother was still looking out for him. As the Trojan War approached, Thetis went up Mt. Olympus to seek favors for her boy. She “clasped Zeus’s knees and held to him, clinging close,” as she begged him to manipulate the war and bring honor to her son.

The Greek word Homer used for “clasped” was *haptomai* (HOP toh my). This word is variously translated “cling to,” “attach oneself to,” “get involved with” and “touch.” A famous translation of *haptomai* in John 20:17 (KJV and ASV 1901) has Jesus saying to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection, “Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.”

The New American Standard Bible more correctly puts it, “Stop clinging to me.” There are two reasons for this improved translation.

First, the word has always meant more than a mere touch. (See for example Mark 10:13-16 and 1 Cor 7:1. And in “Handle not, taste not, touch not” in Col 2:21, it is the word “handle.”)

Second, it is a grammatical construction (a negative used with the present imperative) that normally means “Stop what you are doing.” As Seth Wilson liked to put it, Jesus was saying, “Unhand me, woman!” The correct picture here is Mary clinging to Jesus’ feet, just as a whole group of women would do moments later in Matthew 28:9.

The whole story of Jesus’ life, in fact, is one of meaningful touching. He put his hands on a leper, a feverish woman, and a dead man; on eyes, ears, tongues, and babies. Various people sought out Jesus to “touch” him: the sick, the crowds, a woman subject to bleeding, a sinful woman of the street. So here’s the encouragement for today:

Reach out and touch him. He’s reaching out for you!

# COMMITMENT

That's what we need—commitment. Let's rally the troops and read them some Scriptures on this fine word! Let's go to our concordance and find all the passages where “commitment” is found in the Bible. OK? But surprisingly, “commitment” is not in your Bible.

Perhaps we should look for another form of the word, such as “commit.” I notice that a person can commit adultery, commit a breach of contract, commit fornication, commit sin, and commit apostasy. But this isn't really the kind of “commitment” I had in mind.

So what's the deal? Didn't they have the concept of commitment back then? (They certainly did.) If so, what was their word for it? (The word in secular Greek was *pistis*—PIH stiss.) Doesn't the word ever appear in the Greek New Testament? (Yes, 243 times.) Then how is it translated in my Bible? (Sorry, you have to wait until the end of this article.)

Outside the New Testament, the Greek word *pistis* is often translated “obedience,” “commitment,” or “the keeping of a pledge.” It means “loyalty,” “fidelity,” “trustworthiness.” It means to have such confidence in someone that you will do what he says even if you don't understand why he says to do it. It means sticking with that person through thick and thin. *Pistis* means what we mean by “commitment.”

So where do we find this word for “commitment”? In our English Bibles *pistis* is translated “faith.” That's why being “faithful” didn't just mean to keep on believing, but to stay loyal. Likewise, to be “unfaithful” didn't mean that you stopped believing, but that you broke your commitment.

So, good friends, keep the faith!

# COMPASSION

“Bowels and mercies”? How did that phrase get into the Bible? (See Phil 2:1, KJV.) The story behind the word is more logical than you might think.

The King James translators chose “bowels” as the best translation for the Greek word *splangchna* (SPLAHNK nah), meaning the “inward parts.” Specifically, the Greeks had in mind the nobler viscera, such as the stomach, liver, lungs, etc. But what does this have to do with tender emotions such as mercy? Why does the Bible use this word?

Let’s look at it this way: Imagine that you just received a tragic phone call. Or imagine that you happen to come suddenly upon some pathetic soul who is suffering horribly from an injury. You feel pity and compassion, of course. But where do you feel it? In your brain? In your hands? Or in the pit of your *splangchna*? For this reason the Greeks identified tender mercy and deep emotional longing with the area of the human anatomy called *splangchna*.

Thus, Paul could yearn for his Philippian friends “in the *splangchna* of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:8). To have Philemon receive Onesimus kindly would “refresh the *splangchna*” of Paul (Philemon 20). And John warns that if we “shut our *splangchna*” from our brother in need, we do not really have God’s love in us (1 John 3:17).

The verb form of this same word is used 12 times in the N.T.—once with the Good Samaritan, once with the father of the Prodigal Son, once with the forgiving master of Matthew 18:27, and all the other times with Jesus, who had the most tender *splangchna* of all.

# CONSCIENCE

*“To sit alone with my conscience, will be judgment enough for me.” -C. W. Stubbs (1876)*

What is this thing called “conscience”? And what did I ever do to it, that would make it want to torment me so?

Let’s begin our investigation with the Greek verb *synoida* (sue NOI dah), which means “to know with,” especially in the sense of “sharing guilty knowledge.” If you know something bad and I know it with you, we have fulfilled the original sense of the word. This was the use of the word when greedy Ananias withheld that money from God, and his wife Sapphira “knew it with him” (Acts 5:2).

Now let’s carry this a step further. I can “share guilty knowledge” all by myself! God has made me a thinking, knowing creature—something unlike any of the animals—in that I have self-awareness. I can argue with myself; I am conscious of myself. I can even think about myself thinking about myself!

For the early Greeks this “knowing with yourself” was a painful thing. The conscience was nearly always seen in a negative light, since its purpose was to “stab, jab, and torment” (Philo). When the conscience was once awakened, it came forth “as accuser; it indicts, charges and shames.” (Maybe this is more a sad commentary on human nature, than on the nature of this live-in judge!)

But in the New Testament the concept of conscience takes a giant leap forward. Through baptism we can appeal to God for a clear conscience (1 Pet 3:21) and be sure that Jesus’ blood will cleanse our conscience from the deadness of our former ways (Heb 9:14).

Furthermore, this marvelous clean conscience is not just for a few sinless saints--every deacon in the church is expected to have one! (1 Tim 3:9) God’s grace has made a whole new ballgame out of the conscience situation!

So let love spring forth from your clean heart and good conscience (1 Tim 1:5). Remember the sacrifice of Christ and say confidently with Hebrews 13:18, “We know that our conscience is clear.” And then—dare I say it?—defy the fear of the Victorian poet, and be glad to “sit alone with your conscience.”

# CONTEND AS ATHLETES

Odysseus was in no mood for games. Even though his hosts provided food and entertainment, he was weary from the shipwreck and eager to resume his journey. As he watched the runners, jumpers, wrestlers, and archers compete, his patience was wearing thin.

Then his host insulted him. “There is no greater glory than what a man achieves with his hands and his feet,” the host said, “but you do not look like a man that is skilled in the contests. You do not look like an athlete.” That did it. That made Odysseus mad.

He grabbed a heavy discus stone—bigger than the rest—and hurled it over their heads. The stone sailed far beyond any of the other marks. “I am not unskilled in your contests,” Odysseus said. “If any man has the heart, let him make contest of me, whether in boxing or wrestling, yes, or even running.” Odysseus could beat them all, because he was indeed an athlete.

The Greek word for “contend as an athlete” was *athleo* (ath LEH oh). It was used to describe athletes in games and also soldiers in military contests. As well as skill, it implied great effort and struggle.

Paul used a form of this word (*synathleo*) twice in Philippians. The prefix he added made the word mean “contend as athletes together,” that is, to struggle together as a team. In 1:27 the whole church was to contend as a team in the face of persecution. In 4:3 two faithful women were said by Paul to have “contended at my side in the cause of the gospel.” Whatever their role was in the work of spreading the gospel, they were valued teammates in Paul’s ministry.

Helpmates in the home, teammates in the church—this is what women look like in the Bible.

# CORRUPT

The modern issues of euthanasia (“mercy killing”) and abortion are not new. Centuries before Christ, Greek physicians were taking the Hippocratic Oath, which included these lines: “I will not give a death-producing medicine to anyone when I am asked to do so...similarly I will not give to a woman the means of producing an abortion.”

Of interest to us in New Testament study is the Greek word for “abortion.” It comes from a common verb *phtheiro* (FTHAY row), which meant to introduce a corrupting element which would result in destruction. Note this idea of corruption and ultimate destruction in the following New Testament passages. “Evil companions will corrupt/destroy good morals” (1 Cor 15:33). Just as Eve was deceived, a sincere and devout mind can be corrupted/led astray by a false teacher (2 Cor 11:3). Because our old nature is “being corrupted/destroyed by deceitful lusts” (Eph 4:22), God has provided us a way to “escape from the corruption/destruction that is in the world...and become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). Carnal men who defile the flesh and revile what is spiritual “corrupt/destroy themselves” in their error. The great harlot of John’s vision “corrupted/ defiled the earth with her fornication” (Rev 19:2). In all these passages the pattern is the same: corruption is introduced, and destruction ultimately follows.

But—praise God!—some things cannot be corrupted, defiled, or destroyed! Above all else, God Himself is incorruptible and undying (Rom 1:23). We Christians are born anew by the imperishable seed of his word (1 Pet 1:4) and have immortality through the gospel (2 Tim 1:10). We who love Jesus with an undying love (Eph 6:24) can look forward to an immortal resurrection body (1 Cor 15:42), an incorruptible crown (1 Cor 9:25), and an imperishable inheritance (1 Pet 1:4). Therefore, “To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever” (1 Tim 1:17).

# COVENANT

What is a covenant? In English the word usually means an “agreement” or “a written contract.” But what did the word mean in Greek—specifically in the original Greek New Testament?

When Paul and others wrote about God’s covenant with man, there were two Greek words from which to choose: *syntheke* (soon THAY kay) and *diatheke* (dee ah THAY kay). As you can see, both words are built on the same stem. The first word meant “something that is arranged jointly.” It was the word used when two equal parties hammered out an agreement. Both parties expected to get their fair share from the deal. The second word meant “something arranged according to one’s own wishes.” It was the word used when one party set the terms for disposing of his property when he gave it to another.

This second word, *diatheke*, was always the word they used for making a legal will. The one who makes the will has complete authority over the disposition of his property. He can give it to whomever he pleases; he can establish whatever terms he wants. The one who makes the “arrangement” has total power; the one who receives the “arrangement” may accept it or reject it, but he cannot alter it.

Luke 22 provides a good example of each word. The verb form of *syntheke* is used when Judas and the priests discussed how he might betray Jesus and they “agreed” to give him money (v. 6). They were delighted, Judas consented, and they had a deal. Later in the chapter the verb form of *diatheke* appears, translated as the word “confer.” To the apostles whom he had chosen, Jesus said, “I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me” (v. 29).

One word is a reciprocal agreement: “Let’s make a deal!” The other word is a one-way grant: “This is the way it is—take it or leave it!” Every time God’s covenant with man is mentioned in the New Testament it is this second word. In his own authority the Father made the *diatheke* possible and set the terms. In humble gratitude we submit and accept.



# CREATE

The Greeks had a certain word they used to describe how someone would “found” a city, or “plant” a grove of trees, or “initiate” a sacred feast, or “establish” a great athletic contest. The same word was used of the man who was clever enough to “invent” the first bridle for a horse.

Their word was *ktizo* (KTID zo) and we usually translate it “create.” The ancient painters would create beautiful art; the ancient poets would create poetry. The Greeks did not well understand the God who created the universe from nothing, but they did appreciate people who could build and invent.

Furthermore, it was not just the ancient Greeks who were so creative. People in every culture of the world and in every century of time have had the instinct to create, to build, to invent. Even little children love to do it!

Here is how it all began. When God created Adam, he said, “Let us make man in our own image.” The Creator made the creature—both male and female—to be a bit like himself. When you think about it, it is only natural that we should reflect something of who God is— by being creative. When we exercise our creativity, we are simply doing part of what God created us to do. Throughout Scripture there are people who glorify God by making music, building temples, composing poetry, crafting vessels, etc.

And here is how it all ends. The same Creator who gave us our creativity has invited us to serve him and to reign with him in eternity (see Rev 22:3-5). With infinite resources and endless time, just imagine what God will have us doing!

# CROSS

Amid the bloodshed of the French Revolution, a gentle physician persuaded the national Assembly to carry out their numerous executions in a more humane way, allowing the condemned to have the most rapid and painless death possible. Dr. Guillotin's suggestion was adopted and the resulting machine of death came to be known by his name. Today we are even more diligent in our attempts to make execution swift and painless, but in ancient times the opposite was true. In the centuries before Christ, the Persians and then the Romans were contriving a means of death which would be as cruel, degrading, and painful as possible. What they invented was the cross (Greek: *stauros*—stau ROSS).

In ancient Persia the *stauros* was simply an upright stake. The already lifeless corpse of an executed man would be impaled on that stake, or suspended from it, as a gesture of ultimate contempt. When the *stauros* made its way west to ancient Carthage and then Rome, two changes took place. First, a crossbeam was added, changing the form of the *stauros*. Second, the victim was affixed to that *stauros* while still alive.

The victim was first stripped naked and scourged. (Men often died from the scourging alone.) Then he was nailed or tied to the crossbeam and lifted up for public display. As the hours passed, the body suffered from blood loss, exposure, and traumatic shock. Savage thirst and pain racked the victim. The body weight was thrown forward against the pectoral muscles, making breathing more and more difficult. Finally, when exhaustion made the effort of breathing impossible, the person suffocated.

(The bones of one such victim were dug up in 1968. Though his legs had been broken, the spike pinning his feet together was still in place. At his wrist, between the two bones of the forearm, a groove had been worn into the bones by the constant writhing against the nail.)

The Roman statesman Cicero called crucifixion the supreme capital penalty—the most painful, dreadful, and ugly. Such a hideous death could be inflicted only on the worst of slaves and foreigners. And such was Jesus, who “took the form of a slave and became obedient unto death—even death on a *stauros*.”

# CROWN

In the late summer of 480 B.C. the Persian king Xerxes defeated the Greeks at a place called Thermopylae. When the king began to interrogate his captives he chanced upon a curious piece of information about the character of his enemy. In the Olympic Games going on that same summer, Greek athletes were not competing for a prize of gold. Instead, the cherished prize was a wreath of olive branches to wear upon the head. “What manner of men are these we fight?” cried one of the king’s men. “Tis not for money they contend, but for the glory of achievement!” (Herodotus, VIII, 26).

Their simple wreath was called a *stephanos* (STEFF ah noss), or what we translate a “crown.” Sometimes also made of ivy, oak leaves, laurel, or parsley, the *stephanos* was awarded to victorious athletes, triumphant soldiers, and important leaders in government. Their crown proclaimed their achievement. It was a symbol of their victory.

In the New Testament we find the *stephanos* in two contexts for the victorious Christian. The more obvious crown for us, perhaps, is the crown of life awaiting us in heaven (Rev 2:10). But we have a foretaste of heaven in another crown we wear. Paul told his beloved Philippians they were his crown—his source of pride, his symbol of achievement (Phil 4:1; see also 1 Thess 2:19).

For the veteran missionary or preacher, the *stephanos* is a faithful convert. For the weary professor at the end of the college year, the *stephanos* is a talented graduate. A prize to be proud of, an object to be loved, a foretaste of heaven—this is our hope, our joy, our *stephanos*!

# DAWN

The goddess of Dawn (Eos) in Greek mythology was beautiful and loving. Dawn was perpetually beginning, always new, eternally young. One day Dawn went to Zeus to ask for immortality for her beloved Tithonus, but she forgot to ask that he could also keep his youth. When the request was granted, Tithonus lived on and on, but grew evermore aged. In his pathetic state, feeble and decrepit, he became a tragic figure of Greek literature. Though he lived in the presence of Dawn, life and happiness had passed him by. The Greeks made up this myth to express what seemed to them an unalterable fate: with each new dawn we ourselves just grow another day older. Dawn can be new; we cannot.

But the Greeks did not know Jesus!

They did not know that a day was coming when “on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned” (Is 9:2, as fulfilled in Matt 4:16). They did not know that all human history would be forever changed in a garden early one morning as dawn began to break and the sun’s rays illuminated an empty tomb. They did not know that Jesus’ power could enable his followers to make every day a fresh new day, by putting off the decrepit old man of sin (Eph 4:22-24). They did know the joy of having the day dawn and the morning star arise in their hearts (2 Pet 1:19).

Most of all they did not know that one day there will be a glorious Dawn in heaven! God will be the light and the Lamb will be the lamp for that ultimate land of new beginnings. In a place where God will make all things new, where Jesus is our Morning Star (Rev 22:16), we shall always embrace the Dawn.

# DECISIVE MOMENT

Pittacus was one of the famed Seven Sages of ancient Greece. One of his bits of wisdom was this: “Know the kairos.” But what is a kairos? A *kairos* (pronounced ky ROSS) is the critical point in time, the decisive moment, when a man must recognize and seize the opportunity. The fateful moment may be dangerous—especially when ignored. Aristotle described it as the moment when a man recognizes that the only way to save his ship is to throw everything overboard. Euripides said that when the fateful moment comes, a man must use it boldly. Believing that such a moment came from the gods, the writers of the time said that a man must “take the moment,” “use the moment,” “seize the moment.”

This “divine moment” or “fateful opportunity” shows up many times in the New Testament, with strong emphasis on the fact that it is ordained by God. Mark’s Gospel opens with Jesus proclaiming, “The kairos has come; the kingdom of God is near” (Mark 1:15). But the people did not know how to interpret “this present kairos” (Luke 12:57). The time would come when Jerusalem would be destroyed around them, because they “did not recognize the kairos of God’s coming” to them (Luke 19:44).

In Jesus Christ, we have at least three divine moments. The first is the moment of salvation. At “just the right time (kairos), Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6), and at “the appointed time (kairos)” God brought His word to light through the preaching of the gospel (Titus 1:3). In the words of Paul, “I tell you, now is the kairos of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). But some will ignore God’s invitation, saying with Felix, “Go away for now, and when I find time (kairos) I will summon you” (Acts 24:25).

The second is the moment of opportunity, our chance to work for the kingdom. Paul said that Christians should “make the most of every kairos, because the days are evil” (Eph 5:16). Our third and final kairos is the moment of judgment. John foresaw that day, saying, “The kairos has come for judging the dead and rewarding your servants” (Rev 11:18); “the kairos is near” (Rev 22:10). Old Pittacus was more right than he realized when he said, “Know the kairos.”

# DELIVER

Odysseus, on his famed journey in Greek mythology, was preparing to sail through a dangerous strait. On one side was a man-eating monster; on the other side was a great whirlpool.

“May you not be there when it sucks down,” he was warned, “for no one could deliver you from ruin.”

But nowadays “deliver” has become such a tame word. It’s what mailmen and pizza boys do. And so to pray for God to “deliver us from the evil one” (Matt 6:13), seems but a small favor. How much more exciting to call for “God to the rescue”!

Throughout the pages of Scripture, the Greek word *rhyomai* (HROO o my) is always found in the middle of excitement and peril. A sampling of the 141 uses of this word in the Greek O.T. shows people being saved—in the nick of time—from murder, enemies, blood, sword, captivity, snares, and destruction. While the term “deliver” was often used in older translations, the better choice is “rescue.” God’s people were not merely moved or delivered out of the hands of the Egyptians, they were rescued!

In the N.T. the KJV translated all 17 uses of *rhyomai* as “deliver.” Recognizing the urgency of the circumstances where the word is used, the NIV has changed 10 of these to “rescue.” (We are “rescued” from wrath, from the dominion of darkness, from this body of death, etc.) I would urge you to consider using “rescue” in the other seven passages as well:

“Father, rescue us from the evil one” (Matt 6:13), just as you “rescued” Paul “from the mouth of the lion” (2 Tim 4:17). “Send the Rescuer from Zion” (Rom 11:26) so “that we may be rescued from wicked and evil men” (2 Thess 3:23). As with Paul, “you have rescued and will rescue us; may you continue to rescue us always” (2 Cor 1:10).”

Lord, don’t just make deliveries—rescue us!

# DESTRUCTION

“Broad is the road that leads to destruction,” said Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:13). There are “foolish and harmful desires,” said Paul, “that plunge men into ruin and destruction” (1 Tim 6:9). “The day of judgment,” said Peter, will bring the “destruction of ungodly men” (2 Pet 3:7). In evangelical circles there is a growing debate about what this final “destruction” will look like. Is it final annihilation or is it being perpetually destroyed? We need to talk about this unhappy little word “destruction.”

The Greek word in these passages is *apoleia* (ah PO lay ah). In ancient Greek literature this relatively rare word usually meant “loss,” “waste,” or “ruin.” In the Greek translation of the Old Testament that became the standard text for God’s people, the word was used rather often (75 times). What would they have understood *apoleia* to mean?

A few times the word meant “oblivion” (Ps 88:12) or “destroy completely” (Deut 12:2). In this sense Ezekiel said that Nebuchadnezzar would come upon Tyre and the city would “come to a horrible end and would be no more” (Ez 27:36). Even in this destruction, however, Tyre did not cease to exist. It relocated offshore, only to be conquered again 250 years later by Alexander the Great.

More often readers of the Septuagint saw the word used to describe a wide range of destruction and loss (but not total annihilation). For instance, it was used for a piece of property that was lost and then found (Ex 22:9; Lev 6:3-4). More typically, it was a day of disaster (Deut 32:35), a time of plague (1 Chr 21:17), a time of dismay (Job 41:22), a day of calamity (Job 21:30), an unforeseen catastrophe (Is 47:11). It is the violence (Prov 10:11) and ruin (Job 31:3) that overcome the wicked; it is the havoc that will be wrought on God’s enemies (Is 54:16). God’s people themselves would be an object of horror when they were punished for their idolatry (Jer 44:12).

Ancient readers of the Bible, therefore, would rarely have understood destruction as annihilation. It would have made perfect sense to them that such calamity and ruin would be occurring in the place of “eternal fire” (Matt 25:41; Jude 1:7), “eternal punishment” (Matt 25:46), and “everlasting destruction” (2 Thess 1:9), where the “smoke of their torment rises forever and ever” (Rev 14:11).

# DON'T CARE

The stonemason's sons were thieves. When one of them was caught in the king's trap, his headless body was hung on the town wall. The brother, his partner in crime, went into hiding. But their mother could not bear the sight of that body hung on the wall and sought out the living son. "If you don't care about this," she said, "I will turn you over to the king myself. Now rescue your brother's body!"

The historian Herodotus's word for "don't care" (*ameleo*, ah meh LEH oh) is also found in the New Testament. It begins with a negative prefix "a-" attached to the stem meaning "I care." Let's start by looking at the positive uses of the word stem, before the negative prefix is added. It describes the kind of care we have come to expect from God. "Teacher, we're going to drown—don't you care?" (Mark 4:38). "Master, my sister has left me to do all the work—don't you care?" (Luke 10:40) "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you" (1 Pet 5:7).

But then, sometimes people don't care. Hirelings don't care about their sheep (John 11:13); Judas didn't care about the poor (John 12:6). When a king invited people to a wedding banquet for his son, they didn't come because they "didn't care" (Matt 22:5).

The really scary use of this word is in Hebrews 8:9. God had taken his people by the hand to lead them out of Egypt and had made a covenant with them, only to see them rebel and refuse to keep his covenant. So what did God do? He stopped caring! (See the CEV, NASB, or NRSV; the NIV is weak here.) When the people abandoned God, they were doomed to die in the desert. How could God let that happen? Believe it or not, they were no longer his concern. God just stopped caring.



# DREAD

“Is there something missing from this recipe? Is it just me, or does this taste a little flat?” My dear wife sometimes asks me this, figuring that two tongues are better than one. Maybe too much sweetness needs to be balanced by a bit of tart lemon. Or maybe some spice, unpalatable by itself, is needed to put the total recipe in balance.

This brings me to say something similar about our love for God. One necessary ingredient, believe it or not, is a dash of fear and dread. The Greek word for “dread” (also translated “trembling”) is *tromos* (TRAW moss).

Let us follow this word’s tracks.

Wearing armor made by Ares, the god of war, Ereuthalion was the tallest and strongest man that men had ever seen. When he issued a challenge to fight, “they trembled sore and were afraid, nor had any man courage” to face him (Iliad, 7.151). To quiver with fear is to feel great dread.

In the Greek version of the Old Testament, all the animals had fear and dread of Noah (Gen 9:2). After the Exodus, terror and dread fell on the people of Canaan when the Lord delivered his people (Ex 15:16). When Habakkuk thought of the power of God the warrior, he said, “My heart pounded, my lips quivered...and trembling crept into my bones” (Hab 3:16).

In the New Testament a woman trembled to touch Jesus (Mark 5:33). Slaves obeyed their masters with “fear and tromos” (Eph 6:5). Paul preached to the Corinthians “in weakness and in fear and in tromos” (1 Cor 2:3).

Now we have the flavor of tromos (a trembling dread, a quivering fear). It is a taste that would be overpowering by itself. But let us consider how it flavors these verses: “Work out your salvation with fear and tromos” (Phil 2:12) and “Serve the LORD with fear; rejoice with trembling” (Ps 2:11).

# DWELL

Will start with two closely related words: *skene* (skay NAY) and *skenoo* (skay NAW oh). The *skene* was the ancient Greek word for a tent, and *skenoo* meant “I pitch a tent.” We will watch as these words develop meanings in two specialized areas, then consider what those two areas have in common.

First, the word *skene* came to be used in classical Greek for the scenery set up for a drama. (In fact, our own word “scene” is just the Greek work spelled with English letters.) Demosthenes once spoke of the legendary Heroes that were portrayed in epic drama as “those of the *skene*.” Thus, one meaning for “pitching a tent” was preparing the stage for a drama.

Now let’s move away from the Greeks and watch the word develop a specialized meaning for the Jews. In early Jewish history there was a “tent” that had utmost importance. It was the tabernacle set up by Moses and Aaron, the tent inhabited by the very presence of God. Thus, a second meaning for “pitching one’s tent” was to dwell or take up residence.

When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, the translators chose to use *skene*, the word so often used for drama, as the word for God’s tent. (Centuries later the “drama” element of this word was still found in the writings of the Church Fathers.) I wonder then, if a Greek-speaking person wouldn’t combine these ideas and understand the tabernacle as the place that God stepped into human history to enact a great drama.

When we bring all this into the New Testament, we will do well to ponder John’s statement: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). In a Greek way of looking at it, now the stage is set for a great drama to begin. In a Jewish way of seeing it, now the God of heaven has come down to take up residence among his people.

When Jesus stepped onto the stage of human history, a great drama was about to unfold. He was God in human flesh, taking up residence in a very personal way. If it’s true that “all the world’s a stage,” then the greatest role of all history belonged to Jesus.

# EARNEST

We were about to buy our very first house. It was a nice house, well worth the \$12,000 purchase price, but I had to swallow hard to force out the words, “We’ll take it.”

“Fine,” said the real estate lady. “Would you like to give me your check now?”

“Check?” I thought to myself. “What does she think I’m going to do—just pay for the whole thing?” I wasn’t even sure how we were going to make the \$79 mortgage payments! My face must have shown my bewilderment, so she patiently explained about “earnest money,” and I sheepishly wrote out the check.

In the world of the first century the word for earnest money was *arrabon* (ar rah BONE). The purchaser put down his deposit money to seal a contract. It guaranteed that he would not back out on the contract, for he would then forfeit his *arrabon*. When the seller accepted this deposit, legal ownership of the property was transferred to the purchaser.

In the New Testament we find that God has given to us the *arrabon* of the Spirit (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14) as a down payment on our inheritance in heaven. This means:

- God has guaranteed to us that he will follow through with all he has promised to do.
- The first installment is of like kind to the remaining payments. Our fellowship with the Holy Spirit is an exact foretaste of heaven.
- By our acceptance of the down payment, we have transferred ownership of our lives to God.

There is an interesting footnote to our word *arrabon*. In modern Greek it has become the word for an engagement ring! What an interesting parallel to the church—the Bride of Christ—which is even now anticipating the great Wedding Feast of the Lamb! (Cf. Eph 5:25-27 and Rev 19:7-9.)

# EMPTY

An ancient papyrus tells of a certain rich man who was stripped of all his sordid possessions. In a similar vein Josephus wrote of a protest by Herod the Great that Jerusalem must not be pillaged or totally emptied of all its men and money. In both these places the Greek word for empty (*kenoo*—keh NOH oh) was used. Before we look at an important use of this word in the New Testament, we should look also at the way the word was used in the Old Testament. Jeremiah described how the gates of Jerusalem would be laid waste (Jer 14:2) and a mother would be disgraced and humiliated when her sons were killed (Jer 15:9). In the Greek translation of Jeremiah the word used both times was *kenoo*—emptied.

With this background in mind, what are we to make of the statement in Philippians 2:7 that Jesus emptied himself? Prior to this emptying he existed in the very nature of his Father and was equal to him. But then Jesus emptied himself. Did he strip himself of his divine privileges? Was there a voluntary but violent pillaging of his powers? Perhaps we have accepted too lightly the kind of sacrifice made by the one who was rich, but became poor for our sakes (2 Cor 8:9). While Jesus still existed in the form of God he was all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present. But when he came to experience manhood he was limited in his physical body, and had access to a limited store of knowledge (Matt 24:36). He could do nothing of himself (John 5:30) and sought only to do his Father's will. In obedience to the divine mission he now tasted humanity. He could experience hunger and fatigue, he could suffer injuries, and he could die.

But though he was disgraced and humiliated in his death, he was exalted in his resurrection! Restored to his former glory, the one who emptied himself is Lord of all!

# ENDURE

Hector leaped down from his chariot. Grabbing a spear in each hand, he bravely plunged into the battle. His courage inspired the Trojan Army to make a renewed effort to defeat the invading Greeks. He called for the troops to get in formation and prepare to make a charge. With Hector's leadership they hoped to repel the invaders and deliver the city of Troy.

But wait! There was also courage among the Greeks. As Homer retold the ancient story in the *Iliad*, the Greek army stood shoulder to shoulder and "endured" the attack. Not a single man lost heart and fled. They dug in, stood their ground and endured.

The Greek word for "endure" is *hypomeno* (hoo poh MEN oh). It means literally, "remain under." When the load is heavy, you "remain under" and carry it. When the battle is furious, you "remain under" and stand your ground. When persecution is fierce, you "remain under" and endure.

This verb is used 17 times in the New Testament. Let us put on our warrior's armor, stand shoulder to shoulder, and consider these verses: "He who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Mark 13:13). "If we endure, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim 2:12). "You stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering" (Heb 10:32). "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life" (James 1:12). "Love...always perseveres" (1 Cor 13:7). Most of all let us fix our eyes on Jesus, our victorious leader, "who, for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:2).

# ENTICE

*(Editor's Note: This article was written by Mike Armstrong, a student in Kenny Boles' Greek 2 class some years ago.)*

The skilled trappers of last century's wild frontier knew where and how to place and bait their traps in order to trap animals. In the same way, fishermen of today know how to bait and place their hooks in order to get the largest and most fish. Satan possesses this same knowledge concerning us and uses it for our destruction.

The words used in James 1:14 for "carried away" and "enticed" are *exelko* (ex EL ko) and *anddeleazo* (del eh AHDZ 0). These are early Greek words used as hunting terms. Exelko was used of luring a beast from a safe place into a place full of traps. It is the same as enticing a high-flying duck with a duck call into the range of waiting hunters. Deleazo was a word used of putting something on a hook as bait. That is what we do when we fish, as we cover over a hook in order to lure an unsuspecting fish.

The use of these words in James reveals much to us concerning Satan's tactics and the temptations in our lives:

- Satan uses what is appealing to us. Just as the fish is attracted to the worm, Satan uses what we like to hook us.
- Although sin may seem attractive, there is really a hook inside. Although there may not be an evident danger, it is always designed for destructive purposes.
- Satan cannot force us to sin. He just cleverly places the trap where we are weakest and when we are most susceptible.
- The choice is up to us. The fish can either swim on or bite the hook. The duck can keep on flying or come down within firing range. We can indulge in the temptation and pay the price (and every sin has a price) or we can overcome it. There is always a way out (1 Cor 10:13).

So the next time you are tempted to sin, picture Satan with fishing pole in hand, enticing and luring you to bite his deadly bait. And then swim on.

# ENTRUST

There are times in life when you have to part with something you would rather keep in your own possession. But you entrust that item to someone you can depend on, and go your way. Sometimes, as in the case of a man named Glaucus in ancient Sparta, the person turns out to be untrustworthy. By the time Herodotus tells his story in the fifth century B.C., the entire house of Glaucus had been wiped out. This was seen as fit punishment for someone who was not dependable when something was entrusted to him.

The Greek word for entrust was *paratithemi* (par ah TIH thay me). It was used when something valuable was being passed on, or committed to someone else. Note the vivid, vital importance of this word to Jesus when he said, “Father, into your hands I entrust/commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Note the personal weight of the word as Paul and Barnabas entrusted the new elders to the Lord and went on with their journey (Acts 14:23). Note the kingdom significance as Paul entrusted his charge to Timothy (1 Tim 1:18).

But most of all, consider how we all share the eternal consequences of what Paul entrusted to Timothy at his life’s end: “What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust/commit to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well” (2 Tim 2:2). At Ozark Christian College, we have for decades accepted this trust as our own.

But as we carry this trust into the future, and look at the students and facilities with which we have been blessed, we must consider one more sobering use of this word. “From the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48). May we be found worthy of this trust!

# ENVY

A person I know just bought a brand new, loaded-with-options, absurdly luxurious gas-hog. Why, I wouldn't have one of those things if you gave it to me! But somehow it really irritates me to think that this person has one! The word for this attitude is envy.

The Greek word for envy was *phthonos* (FTHON oss) and was used nine times in the N.T. It was the motivation of those who had Jesus crucified (Matt 27:18) and it was the reason some people were trying to stir up trouble against Paul (Phil 1:15). It is strictly a work of the flesh (Gal 5:21).

Envy is somewhat like jealousy, only worse. Jealousy is wanting to have what the other guy has; envy is just not wanting him to have it! Jealousy might prompt me to do something positive, such as trying to achieve an equal accomplishment. But envy would be satisfied only by seeing the other guy fail. Envy would also enjoy just tearing the guy down.

Envy is such an ugly thing that even pagan philosophers condemn it. Aristotle said, "Envy is a bad feeling felt by bad persons. Emulation (jealousy) makes us take steps to secure the good things in question, envy makes us take steps to stop our neighbor from having them." Diogenes called it "pain at someone else's good fortune."

Finally, allow me to offer this quick test to see if you have envy. How do you react toward the attention given to "big-name" preachers? How do you feel when your non-Christian neighbor gets a raise? What do you think about someone who is praised for being a really good parent? Do you ever smirk (inwardly, of course) when you hear of someone's failure or bad fortune?

"Put away all malice...and envy" (1 Pet 2:1).



# EQUIP

Question: What do a surgeon, a fisherman, and a drill sergeant have in common?

Answer: A single Greek word, *katartizo* (kah tar TIDZ oh) describes at least part of the work of each profession. The word means “to set a broken bone,” “to mend nets,” and “to train and equip soldiers.” It means to set in working order and prepare for service.

This word is one of the most important words in the New Testament to describe the work of church leaders. In Ephesians 4:12 we are told that the Lord gave the church certain leaders, especially pastors and teachers, for the “equipping” of the saints for works of service (NASV). The church is a hospital for broken lives and a boot camp for drilling recruits. Every person in the church should be helped to get his life together and to get ready to serve.

There are many facets to “equipping.” A summary of the uses of this word in the New Testament will show us the kind of things church leaders should be trying to do for their people:

1. To teach (Luke 6:40)
2. To equip with everything good (Heb 13:21)
3. To supply what is lacking (1 Thess 3:10)
4. To prepare for use (Heb 10:5)
5. To form, mold, and shape (Heb 11:3)
6. To mend and repair (Matt 4:21)
7. To correct faults (2 Cor 13:11)
8. To restore a fallen brother (Gal 6:1)
9. To bring into functioning harmony (1 Cor 1:10)

Jesus said, “When a disciple is fully taught (“equipped”) he will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

# EXAMPLE

He left no estate. He left no possessions. He had built no monuments to be remembered by. One thing He did leave, however, was an example.

“Christ suffered for your sake, leaving behind an example for you, that you might follow in His footsteps” (1 Pet 2:21).

The Greek word for example is *hypogrammos* (hoo poh grah MOS). It is used only in this place in all the Bible, but its use outside the Bible sheds real light on this verse.

When Greek schoolboys were taught to write they did not practice on parchment or papyrus, for these were far too expensive. Instead, they each had a wax tablet. This was a shallow wooden tray filled with soft wax. The writing was done with a pointed stylus, and when one assignment was done, the whole thing could be smoothed over and used again.

The teacher would carefully write letter forms across the top and draw a straight line across the bottom for the pupil to write on. Sometimes the pupil would be encouraged to put his stylus in the grooves made by the teacher and trace his well formed letter. The teacher gave the student an example and the student did his best to copy it.

The example Jesus left behind is the pattern of suffering. Reviled, he did not revile in return. Suffering, he did not threaten. He had done no crime, but he accepted punishment. He established the pattern of doing good and accepting suffering when necessary, showing this to be pleasing to God. The teacher has given an example; will his disciples dare to copy it?

# EXHORT

Dorimachus was a young man with a violent and aggressive spirit. Around 220 B.C. he led a force of Greek warriors against a little city on the peninsula south of Corinth. He sent a few of his men to sneak into the city by way of the aqueduct. Once inside, they killed the guards and opened the gates to the marauders.

Startled awake by the invasion, many of the townspeople fled into the night in utter terror. Some, however, ran to the citadel, where they gradually increased in numbers and courage. When Dorimachus attacked the citadel, the citizens fought back.

Cheering each other on, they resisted and met the attack gallantly. The hand-to-hand combat was fierce. One side was fighting only to gain plunder, but the other side was fighting for their homes, their children, and their honor. Finally the invaders were put to flight and the city was saved.

The Greek word for “cheering each other on” in this history by Polybius was *parakaleo* (par ah kah LEH oh). In the New Testament the word is often translated “plead, encourage, urge.” In the context of preaching *parakaleo* is also translated “exhort.” It is not a scolding word; it is a word of encouragement to rally the troops.

This is the word used by Paul to young Timothy in the familiar words, “Preach the word... reprove, rebuke, and exhort” (2 Tim 4:2, KJV), or in the NIV, “correct, rebuke and encourage.” It is the word for John the Baptist in Luke 3:18, “And with many other words he exhorted the people.” It is the word for Peter in Acts 2:40, “And he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’” It is the word for Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:22, “encouraging them to remain true to the faith.”

It’s a little hard to put just the right flavor on *parakaleo*. “Exhort” is too formal; “encourage” is too soft, like a mere pat on the back. Somehow I like the flavor in the story about the brave defenders of that ancient city, “cheering each other on” to victory!

# FACTIONS

The city-states of Greece were choosing up sides. With the Persians driven off, now the Greeks were fighting among themselves. All the lesser powers were becoming allies with one or the other of the two super powers—Athens and Thebes. Thus, it was with some bitterness that the men of Thebes said to one of the smaller cities, “Willingly and not under compulsion you chose the Athenian cause.” From the viewpoint of Thebes, this was both “dishonorable” and “wicked.” Athens, of course, thought their choice was fine.

The Greek word for “choosing up sides” was *hairesis* (HI reh sis). In addition to its use in political situations it was often used in the context of choosing to join a particular school of philosophy. In this sense a *hairesis* was a “selection” or “choice.” When Josephus chose which sect of the Jews he would join (the Essenes, the Sadducees, or the Pharisees) his “choice” was the “sect” (*hairesis*) of the Pharisees.

It is natural to want to choose up sides—natural, but wrong. When Paul listed the works of the flesh (NIV “acts of the sinful nature”) in Galatians 5:19-21, he included the plural form of the word *hairesis* (NIV “factions,” or choosing up sides). For those who are led by the Spirit in the community of Christ, there is no room for choosing up sides—forming sects around favorite leaders or pet doctrines.

By the time *hairesis* came into the English language a thousand years later it had come to mean “heresy,” choosing the wrong doctrine. Folks who see the word in the KJV often misunderstand, thinking that the sinful act lies in choosing the wrong leader or the wrong doctrine. But the sin is in the very act of choosing. Carnal men choose up sides; Christians stand together.

# FAITHFUL

In the epic battle to conquer the city of Troy, the names of great heroes are still remembered: men like Achilles, Ajax, and Hector. Less known, but just as important, were the faithful comrades who fought side by side with them. These fellow soldiers were called *pistos* (pih STOSS).

In classical Greek the word *pistos* meant things like trustworthy, reliable, faithful. Homer used it to mean one thing more: loyal to the point of death. Men like Patroclus (with Achilles), Lycophron (with Ajax), and Podes (with Hector) were earlier called friend, companion, brave soldier, etc. But it was only after they had died in battle that they were called “*pistos* comrade.”

In addition to the overtone of death, the word *pistos* had another important element. *Pistos* always meant personal loyalty. That is, it was loyalty to a person, not just to a cause. Thus, for Homer, *pistos* could be defined as “complete personal loyalty, even to the point of death.”

Now, we will look at three passages in the New Testament that are illuminated by this word’s background. The first is 1 Corinthians 4:2. A person who serves God, a steward in whom God has put his trust, must be found *pistos*. He does not have to be successful, just faithful. He is loyal to God beyond question.

The second verse to consider is from a parable Jesus told about himself in Matthew 25:23. A master gave talents to his servants and then came back for an accounting. To some he said, “Well done, good and *pistos* servant! Enter into the joy of your master.” But to another he said, “Depart from me.” It was not merely that the bad servant had failed to make a profit. It was that he was disloyal to his master—calling him a hard, dishonest man who reaped where he had not sown.

The final text to consider is Revelation 2:10. The church in Smyrna was told, “Be *pistos* to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” So what does it mean to be “faithful”? It means to be totally loyal to God, serving even to the point of death, knowing that we will enter his joy in heaven.

# FALL INTO

When a person fell into poverty or ruin in ancient times, the word was *empipto* (em PIP to). Similarly, the same word was used for the unsuspecting victim who fell into an ambush or fell into barbarian swords. Whether prison, sickness, fire, or poison arrows, there usually seemed to be some kind of ultimate calamity connected with this word. It thrived in an environment of violence and hostility.

Thus, when we come to the seven times *empipto* is used in the Greek New Testament we will expect it to be a word of undesirable outcomes. Matthew describes the plight of the sheep which falls into a pit (12:11), which is also where blind men will wind up when they try to lead each other (Luke 6:39).

Then the Good Samaritan finds a wounded man who has fallen among thieves (Luke 10:36).

Paul used *empipto* to warn Timothy about improperly selected elders: they may become puffed up and fall into the condemnation of the devil, or they may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (1 Tim 3:6-7). Likewise, those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many hurtful cravings that plunge men into ruin and destruction (1 Tim 6:9).

Whew! Pretty heavy stuff! But everything said thus far pales into insignificance in contrast with the stark terror of the last usage of *empipto* in Hebrews 10:31. The careless apostate who gives up his faith and turns his back on his Lord should think soberly about life's ultimate calamity: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

# FEEL

“I know just how you must feel,” we often say to someone who is hurting. In actual truth we may have no idea how the person feels because we have never experienced the same suffering. On the other hand, when we really have known the same pain or loss, then we can share with the person meaningfully. A group of related words in the Greek New Testament deals with this idea.

Let's start with the word *pathos* (PAH thoss). This meant generally any kind of suffering, calamity, passion, or intense emotional situation which befell someone. Now let's add the prefix which will make the word mean to share together in such emotion: *sympatheo* (soom pah THEH oh). Our English word sympathy comes directly from this. *Sympatheo* does not, however, mean to have a weepy feeling which pities and condones everything. Rather, it is a deep appreciation for the seriousness of the situation, which comes when one knows the problem firsthand. This is the wonderful capacity of Jesus, our great high priest, in Hebrews 4:15.

Now let's add a different prefix and make a word which means to hold one's emotions under control, to moderate one's passions: *metriopatheo* (meh tree oh pah THEH on). According to Hebrews 5:2 God always intended his high priests to be men who could carefully measure and moderate the intensity of their passion. Realization of their own weakness was to make them moderate their (justifiable) displeasure and anger at the sins of the people. As Neil Lightfoot has noted, however, “In point of fact, it was found in the life of no Levitical high priest and never existed until the Perfect Priest appeared. How wonderful that Christ possesses this *metriopatheia*!”

# FELLOWSHIP

Quick! Think of any use of “fellowship” in the Old Testament.

Hard, isn't it? While “fellowship” with God and with one another is a major theme of the New Testament, it is strangely lacking in the Old. Why would this be so? Why was the word “fellowship” inappropriate in those days to describe man's relationship with God?

To answer this question, let us consider what “fellowship” really meant. The Greek word for fellowship was *koinonia* (koi no NEE ah). It was used to describe the following relationships:

1. A business partnership, where two people are legally joined in their enterprise.
2. A close friendship, where intimate companionship is enjoyed.
3. A communal society, where “what is mine is also yours.”
4. A marriage, the closest of all relationships, was called the *koinonia* (sharing) of life.

To consider sharing such a close relationship with God was unthinkable—even blasphemous!

This makes it all the more remarkable that the New Testament assures us of fellowship with God. “Our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). We also have fellowship with the Holy Spirit (Phil 2:1). We are thus intimately sharing with our Creator. He has made us participants in his divine enterprise, partakers of his divine nature, and companions in communion with his divine friendship. He has opened the treasures of heaven so we can share in all his wealth.

God is our partner!



# FESTIVE GATHERING

In the sacred city of Bubastis on the delta of the Nile River, hundreds of thousands of ancient Egyptians gathered once a year to celebrate their cat-head goddess. The Greek historian Herodotus describes their festive gathering in these words: “They go by river, men and women together, a great number of each in every boat. Some of the women make a noise with rattles, others play flutes all the way, while the rest of the women and the men sing and clap their hands....But when they have reached Bubastis, they make a festival with great sacrifices, and more wine is drunk at this feast than in the whole year beside.” Those folks knew how to party!

The word for “festive gathering” in Herodotus was *panegyris* (pan A guh riss). It was also used to describe the national Greek festival at Olympia, where they had athletic contests, feasting, dancing, drama, and glorious oratory. In broader usage, the word meant “a place where people go and enjoy themselves.”

God is not opposed to festive occasions, but there was a time in Israel when he said he would put a stop to their religious celebrations because the people had corrupted them with idolatry (Hos 5:21; Amos 9:5). Then fifty years later God made a happy announcement through Isaiah. In the coming messianic age, he planned for people to “rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her” (Is 66:10). Another hundred years passed and God promised through another prophet that in the New Jerusalem people would celebrate “the festivals and the appointed feasts” (Ez 46:11). In these four passages the Greek translation of the O.T. used forms of the world *panegyris*.

In the New Testament *panegyris* is found only once. It is the “joyful assembly” of Hebrews 12:22. (Let the Egyptians or the Greeks try to match this *panegyris*!) Christians have come “to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God...to thousands of angels in *panegyris*.” Now these are the folks who really know how to party!

# FLEETING

Maybe I just haven't been paying close enough attention. Somehow when I wasn't watching, somebody just ran a whole decade right past me! Where did the 90s go? Time sure is fleeting!

And that's the focus of our word today, *proskairos* (pros ky ROSS). Jesus said that when hard times come, faith without deep roots is fleeting (Matt 13:21). Fortunately, the reverse is also true—when faith does have roots, we realize that this world with all its hardships and false pleasures is temporary (2 Cor 4:16-18). Therefore, like Moses, we have to make a choice. Which will it be: enduring faith or fickle, fleeting pleasures (Heb 11:25)?

This word fleeting was little used in writers before the New Testament, and was not used at all in the Septuagint. But based on the key verses mentioned above, the word fairly exploded onto the pages of the writers of the early church. By the time the church had gone through two or three centuries of persecution, her people had learned very well what was fleeting and what was eternal.

In the Epistle to Diognetus an early Christian writer contrasts the transient fires of persecution with the eternal fire of hell. In this same way Chrysostom admits there is temporary grief, but promises eternal joy. Irenaeus sets the fleeting existence of earthly life in opposition with the blessings of eternity. In the crucible of suffering the church was learning that the things that are seen are short-lived, but the things that are unseen are eternal!

Eusebius relates the touching story of Biblis, a Christian lady who faced martyrdom in Gaul A.D. 177. Under the agony of intense torture she broke down and denied her Lord. Later her captors brought her back for more torture, so they could enjoy hearing her blaspheme her God. This time, however, the searing pain suddenly shocked her into a brave realization. "Being reminded through this transitory punishment of the eternal torments in hell...she confessed herself a Christian and was added to the ranks of the martyrs."

# FRIGHTENED

Hannibal and his war elephants had crossed the Alps into Italy. He was leading a force of 90,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry—not to mention the elephants! All of Italy was in peril. In Rome the senators debated what to do about the invasion. The wisest plan seemed to be to wait and let Hannibal wear himself out fighting his way down the peninsula.

Flaminius, however, was not persuaded. As co-ruler of the Roman republic, he was simply not going to let Hannibal and his elephants bring the war that close to the imperial city. So he commanded the tribunes to prepare the army of Rome to march, and he himself would courageously lead them forth. As he sprang upon his horse, however, “for no apparent reason, and unaccountably, the animal was seized with quivering fright” and poor Flaminius was thrown unceremoniously to the ground.

The Greek word for that horse being “seized with fright” was *pturo* (PTUR oh). Another way to translate it is that the horse got “spooked.” This same word is found in the New Testament, in Philippians 1:28. There the Philippian believers, facing the same kind of persecution Paul had endured, were told to stand firm, without “being frightened” (“spooked”) in any way by those who opposed them.

We can learn a lesson from skittish horses, which usually get frightened by things that can’t actually hurt them. Likewise, we get “spooked” too easy, and for no apparent reason. If God is for us, who can be against us? If we are empowered by the strength of his might, whom then should we fear? When we can face the enemy without fear, Paul said, it is proof that they are losing and we are being saved.

# GIVE UP

“Are we downhearted? No! No! No!”

So goes a little chorus I have often heard children sing at church. Adults should sing the same song, for God does not want any of his people to be downhearted and discouraged. He doesn't want us to wear out and give up. The word in New Testament Greek which covers all this weary territory is *eklyo* (ek LOO oh).

Here are the uses of the word in the New Testament. When 4,000 people had been without food for three days, Jesus would not send them away hungry because they might physically play out (Matt 15:32). When the Hebrew Christians began to grow spiritually weary and lose heart because of their afflictions, they were to remember all that Jesus endured (Heb 12:3, 5). When the new Christians of Galatia were tempted to throw in the towel, Paul reminded them that they would reap in due season if they did not grow weary and give up (Gal 6:9).

Now let's look at the background of the word *eklyo* and make connections with the N.T. passages just cited. Centuries earlier Herodotus used the word to describe how a bow is unstrung when a person is through using it. Philo said that people could become unstrung too: “If a manual laborer works hard and is not paid promptly, his nervous system is unstrung by his sorrow and it renders him incapable of meeting the routine of his task.” Josephus (Antiq. 5, 134) told how the Jews were once made soft by luxury, and how Hyrcanus (Antiq. 13, 233) once became slack in courage as he saw his mother tortured.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament *eklyo* describes how Saul's army grew weary for lack of food (1 Sam 1:28), how one's feet run and tire out (Jer 12:5), and how people faint from wounds or hunger (Lam 2:12, 19). Ezekiel tells how hands go limp and trees wilt at the Lord's punishment (7:17 and 31:15). Most vivid of all, Jeremiah describes a mother in birthpains, gasping for breath and crying, “Woe is me!” (4:31). Yet in every adversity God gives courage, just as He spoke to beleaguered King Asa in 2 Chronicles 15:7, “Be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward in your work!”

Are we downhearted? No! No! No!

# GLORY

The Greek word for “glory” is *doxa* (DOX ah). In classical times the *doxa* of a person meant merely the “opinion” others held of him, or his “reputation.” It was simply what a person “seemed” to be.

But the Bible gave *doxa* a whole new dimension of meaning. It now meant the expression of who or what someone really was. And more than that, the word began to be reserved for special application to God. His glory—his power, majesty, and splendor—was in a class by itself.

One important element of glory is often overlooked: glory is visible! In Old Testament times Moses said, “Show me your glory” (Ex 33:18), and from the cleft in the rock his face was illumined when God’s glory passed by. In New Testament times certain shepherds in the fields were terrified when “the glory of the Lord shone around them” (Luke 2:9). Likewise, the three apostles were frightened when the face of Jesus shone like the sun and “they saw his glory” (Matt 17:2; Luke 9:32). One of these apostles would later write, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only” (John 1:14); his partner would say they were eyewitnesses of his “majesty...honor and glory” on the sacred mountain (2 Pet 1:17).

Most of all, however, the glory of God will be visible to us in heaven. He who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16) makes unnecessary the light of the sun or the moon, “for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp” (Rev 21:23). Such is the glory—the *doxa*—of God. Remember this the next time you sing the Doxology!

Some years ago I was sitting at the National Missionary Convention—of all places—when I heard a main speaker say, “The Great Commission does not actually say, ‘Go and make disciples.’ What the Greek really says is, ‘As you go, make disciples.’”

Well. The Great Commission becomes the Great Suggestion. If any of you are planning on going anywhere, then “as you go” take the gospel along. And if you don’t go anywhere, that’s fine—just do a little witnessing where you are.

The speaker’s statement was not only inappropriate for a missionary convention, it was also hideously wrong. To make matters worse, I have heard or read the same thing on many other occasions. So, since this issue of *The Compass* is devoted to missions, I decided it would be a good idea to address this well-worn error.

To begin, we should look at every translation of Matthew 28:19 we have available. Do any of them say something different from “Go and...”? Does any major translation say, “As you go” or “While you are going”? Could there be a reason that every single translation committee chose the imperative command, “Go”?

To dig further, we should notice that the original Greek does use a participle (*poreuthentes*—por you THIN tess), which literally means “having gone.” So then, why do all English translations change it to the imperative, “Go”? The answer lies in the style of writing Koine Greek that was used especially by Matthew and Luke.

When an aorist participle precedes the main verb, as in Matt 28:19, it regularly expresses a necessary prerequisite to that main verb. In other words, the first action (“go”) must be carried out before the second action (“make disciples of all nations”) can be accomplished. Because the first action is just as imperative as the second action, it is best expressed in English as a command connected with the word “and.”

The same situation—a participle of *poreuomai* before the main verb—happens eleven other times in Matthew, and every single time the word is translated in the same mood as the main verb. (Those places in Matthew are 2:8; 9:13; 11:4; 17:27; 18:12; 21:6; 22:15; 25:16; 26:14; 27:66; 28:7. Interestingly enough, the Macedonian Call in Acts 16:9 also uses the same grammar when it says, “Come over...and help us.”)

The Lord’s command to GO and make disciples of all nations still stands.

# GOSPEL

The breathless runner comes to a stop inside the city walls. He raises his right hand and boldly shouts, “Rejoice! We have won!” As he repeats the message throughout the city, his head is crowned, his spear is decked with laurel, and his face radiates the exciting victory. Such was the day of “good news” in ancient Greece. (The original Greek word for “good news” was *euangelion*—you ahn GELL ee on).

During a birthday celebration of Caesar Augustus (September 23), this same word was used by an over-enthusiastic Greek citizen to praise him: “The day of Augustus’s birth was the beginning for the world of the ‘glad tidings’ that have come to men through him. Our proconsul has devised a way of honoring Augustus...that the reckoning of time for the course of human life should begin with his birth.” Little did that fellow dream that only four years after he wrote these words a baby would be born who would totally eclipse the glory of Augustus. His birth would be “good news” of great joy, and 2,000 years later our calendars would still be dated by his coming.

The “gospel” is the “good news” of Jesus. His coming marked the dawn of a new era. The gospel is a message of victory from the battlefield; it is the power of our salvation. Because he died for our sins and rose triumphantly from the tomb, we can boldly proclaim, “Rejoice! We have won!”

# GRACE (1)

Have you ever been afraid of a word? As a young man I was afraid of “grace,” defined as God’s “unmerited favor” for sinners. I wasn’t sure what that meant, but I knew better than to trust it. I could picture myself standing before the Judgment Bar waiting for my unmerited favor. God looks at me, groans, and says, “Ugh! How rotten! How unworthy! All right, since you accepted Jesus I’ll have to let you in—just stay out of my sight.”

Finally I learned, however, that grace is a happy word! The word in Greek is *charis*, pronounced KAR-iss. It is a delightful word, also being translated kindness, delight, beauty, and favor. It is closely related to *chara* (kah-RAH), the word for joy. It finally dawned on me that “grace” means that God not only loved me—he also likes me. He actually wants to share his heaven with me!

Paul wrote of *charis* more than any other New Testament writer, using the word 100 times. Every epistle signed by Paul both begins and ends with a note of grace. Perhaps Paul’s background as an enemy of the cross put him in a unique position to appreciate God’s grace. Paul tells us we are justified by God’s grace as a gift (Rom 3:24) and we are not under law but under grace (Rom 6:14). We are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8), to the praise of his glorious grace (Eph 1:6).

Grace is a friendly word, full of goodwill and graciousness. The picture of grace is Almighty God on the Throne of Judgment...smiling!



## GRACE (2)

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord—and why not? He was righteous, blameless, and he walked with God (Gen 6:8-9). Joseph found grace in the eyes of Potiphar—and why not? He was making Potiphar a wealthy man (Gen 39:2-5). Ruth found grace in the eyes of Boaz—and why not? She was a hard worker, and loyal to the old woman who was a relative of Boaz (Ruth 2:10-11).

Today we have found grace with God—and why not? Are we not more righteous and blameless than most? Do we not walk into church, present our tithes, and make God wealthy? Are we not hard-working and loyal? Of course we find grace in the eyes of the Lord!

I suspect, however, that the N.T. concept of grace (*charis*—KAR iss) is only partially explained by these O.T. uses. Grace is favor and approval, to be sure, but the grace we receive from God is not earned or deserved. God pronounces us fit for heaven by the gift of his grace, not by the works we have done (Rom 3:24). If God likes us (has grace toward us) because we deserve to be liked, it is not grace at all (Rom 11:6).

So let's go back to the O.T. once more to find an example of "finding grace" that comes closer to fitting the N.T. definition. In the time of the Exodus, God's people were slaves in Egypt, despised and feared by their masters (Ex 1:9-11). Added to that, they were the reason for a series of disastrous plagues that brought pain and poverty to Egypt. There was nothing about the Jews to like; there was every reason to hate them. But God said, "I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians"; so the Jews left Egypt loaded with gifts! Sometimes favor is totally undeserved!

As we prepare to leave this life, headed for our Promised Land, let us also remember that our deliverance is a matter of God's grace. In spite of ourselves, God has given us his favor in Christ Jesus. He likes us! By his grace we are saved through faith. It is not our doing—it is the gift of God (Eph 2:8).

# GREED

Socrates and Glaucon, the brothers of Plato, were arguing whether it was natural or unnatural for people to do the right thing. Glaucon took the position that even good men would act in their own selfish interest if they thought they could get away with it. To prove his case, he recalled the legend of a shepherd who found a golden ring that could make him invisible. When the shepherd was invisible, he seduced the king's wife and stole the king's wealth.

"Now what if there were two such rings?" suggested Glaucon. If a just man wore one ring and an unjust man wore the other, neither would be able to resist stealing in the public market. Every man, argued Glaucon, has a "desire for more" and only strict laws keep the just from behaving exactly like the unjust. It is only natural, he said, for men to be guided by their greed.

The Greek word that means "desire for more" or "greed" is *pleonexia* (pleh oh nex EE ah). It is made up of three parts: pleon ("more"), ex ("have"), and ia (ness). A super literal translation of the word would be "have-more-ness." In other words, whatever I have now, I want more. Whatever you have, I want more than that, too. And when I get all that, I still want more!

The New Testament twice warns that *pleonexia* is idolatry (Col 3:5; Eph 5:5). William Barclay says *pleonexia* was actually the reason the average person in ancient times practiced idolatry. "A man sets up an idol and worships it because he desires to get something out of God. To put it bluntly, he believes that by his sacrifices and his gifts and his worship, he can persuade, or even bribe God into giving him what he desires."

In our times *pleonexia* is the engine that drives modern materialism. It is the underlying sin of rampant consumerism. For many, it is the American way of life. But Jesus wisely warns us to resist falling into this kind of greediness: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of *pleonexia*; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

# GRUDGE

Let's start with a self-evident truth: Powerful men are possessive of their power. That's why Supreme Court justices step down so reluctantly and presidents have to be forced by the Constitution to retire. That's why Herod the Great had his sons put to death, being terrified that one of them would take over his throne.

The grandfather of Cyrus the Great had no sons to worry about, but he had a dream that his baby grandson would replace him. That's why he ordered baby Cyrus to be put to death. What a contemptible thing for a grandpa to do! In an ironic twist of fate, however, little Cyrus was spared and adopted by a peasant cowherd and his wife. When Grandpa found out, he was furious. And the old king really knew how to hold a grudge. He killed the son of the man who was supposed to kill little Cyrus, and fed pieces of the body to the unwitting father at a banquet.

The Greek expression for "hold a grudge" was literally "hold in the bile." Later this was shortened to just "hold in" (similar to our own expression, "have it in" for someone). In a couple of interesting places the New Testament uses this same Greek word for "hold in" (*enecho*—en EH ko).

In Mark 6:19 Herodius "nursed a grudge" against John the Baptist, because he had condemned her unlawful marriage to her uncle. John was a threat to her position, and she "had it in" for him. In a rather similar fashion, when Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees they began to "oppose him fiercely" (Luke 11:53). In various translations they "were furious" (NLT) and "were very hostile" (NASB and NRSV). More simply put, they saw Jesus as a threat to their power and they "had it in" for him.

Are you a parent? Do you sometimes hate to have to discipline your kids? Have you ever wished that kids could come pre-trained and pre-disciplined? If so, you can probably sympathize with the ancient Roman parents, who purchased Greek slaves to take care of the nasty chores of parenthood. The name for this kind of slave was *paidagogos* (pie dah go GOSS), and the same word is used in the New Testament in a fascinating way.

The *paidagogos* was much like a British “nanny” and had the following responsibilities: (1) He had to punish the children when they were being bad. (2) He had to stay with the children to keep them out of trouble and to protect them from possible dangers. (3) He was to teach them certain basic things, such as their alphabet, their numbers, and physical exercises. (4) When the children were finally old enough, he was to escort them to school, to see that they arrived safely. Then their real education began.

In Galatians 3:24 Paul says the Law was our *paidagogos* until Christ, our real teacher, came. Consider the implications. For fifteen hundred years that Law had punished and protected the children of Israel. It taught them some basic facts about God and His righteousness, and it prepared the people for Christ. The Law was not an end in itself, however, and was never meant to be permanent. Just as normal kids outgrow their need for a babysitter, so God’s children were finally ready for the Law to be taken away.

The Law served as *paidagogos*, and was a good one, but “now that faith has come, we are no longer under a *paidagogos*” (Gal 3:25).

# GUIDE

“Do you understand what you are reading?”

“How can I,” replied the eunuch, “unless someone guides me?”

The Greek word which means to guide is *hodegeo* (ho day GEH oh). Its literal meaning is “to lead in a journey, to show the way.” Through its 42 uses in the Greek Old Testament, it is used almost exclusively of God. It is he who leads Israel out of Egypt (Ex 13:17) and out of Babylonian captivity (Is 43:19). Repeatedly in the Psalms, God leads his people in paths of righteousness (Ps 23:3, etc). David could pray, “Teach me Thy way, O Lord” (Ps 86:11) and “guide me in the way everlasting!” (Ps 139:24).

When we come to the New Testament, however, the word begins to take on a sinister sound. This is especially true when men appoint themselves as guides, replacing and overruling the leading of God. All five uses of the noun form of this word (*hodegos*—ho day GOSS) in the New Testament are negative in character. The Pharisees are blind guides who lead other blind men to fall into the ditch (Matt 15:14). They are the kind of blind guides who strain out gnats, but swallow camels (Matt 23:16, 24). Their arrogant hypocrisy was typical of the Jew Paul described, “confident to be a guide for blind people” (Romans 2:19). With the word used in such a negative manner, it is not surprising to find Judas Iscariot called a guide for those who captured Jesus (Acts 1:16).

It is vitally important then, that we choose our guides carefully. Just as a blind man will fall into the ditch with his blind leader, a disciple will ultimately be like his teacher (Luke 6:39- 40). Woe to the person who is disciplined by an unworthy guide!

The Ethiopian eunuch was fortunate to have Philip to guide him (Acts 8:31), for Philip knew the doctrine of the apostles who were guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). We who are guided by their truth will someday enjoy the blessings of heaven, where the Lamb will guide us to springs of living water (Rev 7:17).

# GUILE

If you had to sum up a man's whole character in a single line, what words would you choose? Jesus summed up Nathanael in this way: "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile" (John 1:47). I find it fascinating that the sum total of what we know of this disciple is simply this—"no guile."

The Greek word for "guile" was *dolos* (DOH loss). It originally referred to bait for fish, and later included any cunning contrivance for deceiving or catching. In fact, the ancient Greek name for a mousetrap was "a wooden *dolos*." From this beginning the word *dolos* came to mean "guile"—using clever deceit to accomplish one's own purposes.

The Greeks seem to have approved *dolos*. The famed Trojan Horse was a *dolos* to gain entrance to the city of Troy and conquer it. One of their greatest heroes, Odysseus, used *dolos* to escape the giant Cyclops, while back home his sweet wife Penelope was using *dolos* to fend off her would-be suitors. All these stories were told with pride.

But in the Bible *dolos* is never approved. To the contrary, David said, "Blessed is the man in whose spirit there is no *dolos*" (Ps 32:2). Jesus warned against the evil which comes out of the heart—murder, adultery, guile (Mark 7:22). It was with guile that the Jewish leaders plotted to kill Jesus (Mark 14:1) and they finally succeeded, crucifying the One in whose mouth no guile was found (1 Pet 2:22). If we are to wear his name, we too must put away all malice, guile, and insincerity (1 Pet 2:1).

As always, there are two roads. The easy road was traveled by Elymas the sorcerer, that "son of the devil, full of all guile" (Acts 13:10). The nobler road was traveled by Jesus, and by his disciple in whom there was no guile.

# HAVE TO

“Aw, do I have to?” How common was the pitiful whine of my childhood! Bedtime, bath time, time to finish the vegetables—the response was predictable: “Do I have to?”

If only (I thought), if only I were older, bigger, richer, or more important. And then the ultimate one: if only I were God—then I wouldn’t have to do anything I didn’t want to do. Such is the typical understanding of God. Such is the teaching about God in the Old Testament. Words used of men are never used of God: must, have to, obligated, necessary.

Then we meet the Son of God, who was surprisingly well acquainted with the “have to” of life. (The Greek N.T. word is *dei*, which sounds like DAY, and means “it is necessary.”) Even at age twelve Jesus knew he “had to be” in his Father’s house (Luke 2:49). It was not an excuse; it was an obligation. Though he was Son, on this mission of salvation he learned always to obey the will of the Father.

As the messiah, Jesus knew that he “must” preach the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43). Repeatedly he warned his disciples that the Son of man “must” suffer many things and be killed and be raised again (Luke 9:22; 17:25; John 12:34; Matt 26:54). Though it would have been easier to whine and quit, Jesus said, “I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem” (Luke 13:33).

The Jews resisted this Messiah who yielded to the “have to,” for they expected a leader who would take over and run things. We, on the other hand, resist a Messiah who asks us to yield to the “have to,” for we expect to take over and run things for ourselves.

With the cross and the grave behind him, Jesus said with some exasperation to the two on the road to Emmaus, “Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” (Luke 24:26). Wasn’t it necessary? Wasn’t he obligated? Didn’t he have to?

# HEAD

Beware of Greeks bearing gifts—especially when those “gifts” are strange new definitions for old familiar words. It’s always a good idea to proceed with caution whenever you hear someone say, “What you’ve always heard about such and such is all wrong; what it really....”

A good case in point is what has happened in recent years with the Greek word which means “head” (*kephale*—keh fah LAY). Beginning with an article in a scholarly journal in 1954, it was asserted that in ancient times “head” did not normally mean “ruler,” but rather it meant “source” like the source of a river. This assertion was repeated without further investigation in various books and commentaries.

At this point the Christian feminists grabbed hold of this new definition and rushed to Ephesians 5:23 to show that a husband is not the “ruler” over woman, but is rather her “source” (in the sense that Eve was made from Adam’s rib). An article in *Christianity Today* in 1981 by a husband and wife team gave the idea wider currency. It has been frequently quoted in Restoration circles and even cropped up in 1988 in *The Christian Standard*.

But, wait! Hold the horses! A careful analysis of 2,336 times the word is used in 36 different ancient authors shows that not even once does *kephale* mean “source”! (Cf. Wayne Grudem in *Trinity Journal*, 1985.) Quite regularly the word means “ruler,” just as anyone would know who has read Ephesians 1:22. Conclusion? A husband (Eph 5) is to exercise the same kind of loving “headship” as Jesus did (Eph 1).

Further conclusion? Beware of Greeks bearing gifts.



# HEALTHY

“Do you want to be healed?”

What a dumb question! The man had been lame for thirty-eight years, and was now perched beside the pool called Bethesda. He was waiting for the stirring of the water, and hoping for someone—anyone—to throw him into the pool for a miraculous healing. Of course he wanted to be healed! (John 5:1-15).

Yet, it was not a dumb question, for the Great Physician dealt with many who were unaware of their afflictions, and had no desire for healing. As Jesus said to the proud, self-sufficient Pharisees, “Those who are healthy have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31-32).

The Greek word for healthy or healed is *hygies* (hoo ge ACE), from which the English word “hygiene” is derived. In the early centuries *hygies* meant to be whole, healthy, and undamaged. When great crowds came to Jesus in Matthew 15:30, they brought their friends who were maimed and deformed. Jesus made them whole. When Jesus met a man with a withered hand in Matthew 12:13, Jesus restored the hand and it was “whole like the other.”

Just like the hand that got all straightened out, Jesus told about a prodigal son who came home all straightened out (Luke 15:27). When the father welcomed his son home safe and sound, it was not just the boy’s body that was whole and healthy—it was his entire life.

To be whole and healthy in a spiritual sense brings us to our final application of *hygies* in the New Testament. People who want to be healthy in the faith (Titus 2:2) must be taught healthy doctrine (Titus 2:1). Error must be silenced (Titus 1:11) and rebuked (1:13) so people can be healthy. Paul warned that the time would come when people would not endure sound doctrine (2 Tim 4:3) and urged Timothy to retain the apostolic standard of sound words (2 Tim 1:13).

Do you want to be healed—healthy in your soul? Do you want your life straightened out? Then seek the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim 6:3).

# HELP

The library at Alexandria was already one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. But the king's librarian saw that there was an important gap in their holdings: they had no copy of the Jewish Bible. So the king sent his deputy, Aristeeas, to Jerusalem to convince the Jewish high priest to send 72 translators to Egypt to produce a Greek version of their scriptures.

Eleazar, the high priest in those years, agreed to recruit the men for the task, but was afraid they might be in personal danger in Alexandria. After all, the ink was scarcely dry on the edict that had freed Jews from their most recent slavery there. So Eleazar sent word to the king pleading for their safe return, and urged Aristeeas himself to do his best "to help" in the matter.

This brings us to the Greek word for "help" (*synantilambanomai*—soon ahn tee lahm BAHN o my) and the promise of Romans 8:26. Literally, the word means "together / on the other side / take hold." Eleazar had a plea so big and so vital, that he needed someone to help him carry it. If Aristeeas would take hold on his side and help, then the old high priest's petition to the king could be delivered effectively.

Like Eleazar, we often feel too weak and insignificant to petition our King. But there is good news! We have help! When we do not know how to pray effectively—or even how to pray at all—the Holy Spirit will "take hold with us on the other side" to carry the desire of our hearts to God.

(For further study, note that this same word is used when Martha wants Mary to pitch in and help, Luke 10:40; when Jethro advises Moses to select men to judge and bear the burden with him, Exodus 18:22; when 70 men stand with Moses to take heat from the angry people, Numbers 11:17; and when God promises to extend his hand to help and sustain David, Psalm 89:21.)

# HIPPOCRATIC OATH

I SWEAR by Apollo the physician, and Aesculapius, and Health, and All-heal, and all the gods and goddesses, that, according to my ability and judgment, I will keep this Oath and this stipulation—to reckon him who taught me this Art equally dear to me as my parents, to share my substance with him, and relieve his necessities if required; to look upon his offspring in the same footing as my own brothers, and to teach them this art, if they shall wish to learn it, without fee or stipulation; and that by precept, lecture, and every other mode of instruction, I will impart a knowledge of the Art to my own sons, and those of my teachers, and to disciples bound by a stipulation and oath according to the law of medicine, but to none others. I will follow that system of regimen which, according to my ability and judgment, I consider for the benefit of my patients, and abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous. I will give no deadly medicine to anyone if asked, nor suggest any such counsel, and in like manner I will not give to a woman a pessary to produce abortion. With purity and with holiness I will pass my life and practice my Art. I will not cut persons laboring under the stone, but will leave this to be done by men who are practitioners of this work. Into whatever houses I enter, I will go into them for the benefit of the sick, and will abstain from every voluntary act of mischief and corruption; and, further from the seduction of females or males, of freemen and slaves. Whatever, in connection with my professional practice or not, in connection with it, I see or hear, in the life of men, which might not to be spoken of abroad, I will not divulge, as reckoning that all such should be kept secret. While I continue to keep this Oath unviolated, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and the practice of the art, respected by all men, in all times! But should I trespass and violate this Oath, may the reverse be my lot!

Hippocrates, the “Father of Medicine,” lived from 460 B.C. to 375 B.C.

# HOSPITALITY

Despairing of life and limb, Odysseus threw off his robes and plunged into the raging sea. If this ancient hero had not finally reached the safety of a distant shore, Homer's story of the *Odyssey* would have been a whole lot shorter! Cold, naked, and exhausted, Odysseus crawled into the shelter of some bushes where a river emptied into the sea. He covered himself with leaves and fell into a deep sleep.

Meanwhile, lovely Nausicaa and her maidens came to the river to do their laundry. As they finished, their songs and laughter wakened Odysseus. Creeping out with a leafy branch as his only clothing, he determined to discover what kind of people lived in this land. "Are they cruel, and wild, and unjust," he asked himself, "or do they love strangers and fear the gods?"

In ancient Greece the "love of strangers" was considered a supreme virtue. The Greek word for this was *philoxenia* (phil ox seh NEE ah). (On the other hand, "fear of strangers" was xenophobia, a word still used in our own language.)

Philoxenia is usually translated "hospitality." It is a required virtue in elders (1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:8), and a practice urged upon all Christians (Rom 12:13). The root meaning of the word, however, reminds us that our hospitality should not be directed only toward our friends and family. Our "love of strangers" should reach out to include people we have not previously known.

Hebrews 13:2 warns us not to forget to "entertain strangers" (literally, "Do not forget philoxenia"). By practicing hospitality some people have even entertained angels without knowing it. Abraham, Lot, Gideon, and Manoah would be good examples of this.

Fortunately for ancient Odysseus, the people he encountered in that distant land believed in practicing philoxenia. They gave him food, clothing, and a golden flask of oil. On the other hand, how fortunate is it for needy strangers today when they encounter us?

# HUBRIS

Odysseus sailed from Crete with nine ships and a host of Greek soldiers. On the fifth day they reached Egypt, and anchored in the broad river. Odysseus told his comrades to remain with the ships, while he set up the lookouts. In an act of outrageous arrogance, however, they went ashore and launched a sneak attack. They killed the unarmed men of the field and carried off their women and children.

Word of their attack got out, and the next morning the whole plain was filled with angry Egyptians. Odysseus and his men not only had to face chariots and weapons of bronze, they also had to face the wrath of angry Zeus. They had committed an act of *hubris* (HYOO bris), which invited retribution from the gods. Zeus became their nemesis, punishing them for their unprovoked attack. Soon the Greeks were all dead or captured.

Hubris was the word for an act of overreaching arrogance. It was an insult—an outrage—to the gods. Lines from an ancient play, Oedipus the King, further illustrate the concept: “Hubris full blown...climbs the precipitous height and grasps the throne, then topples o’er and lies in ruin prone....Who when such deeds are done, can hope heaven’s bolts to shun?”

In 1 Timothy 1:13 Paul calls himself “a hubris man” (*hybristes*, hyoo bris TACE). The NIV translation “violent man” only catches half the picture. When Paul was persecuting Christians, he was an arrogant insult to God. His outrageous act demanded retribution.

But the story of God’s salvation is not just another Greek tragedy. Paul could well have expected the Lord to become his nemesis; instead, the Lord became his friend. “I was shown mercy,” Paul says. “The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly” (1 Tim 1:13-14). Paul’s hubris was great; God’s grace was greater.

# HUMBLE

Low-down...

Faint-hearted...

Weakly...

Degraded...

Abased...

This is how the Greeks usually thought of their word *tapeinos* (tah pie NOSS), which we translate “humble” or “lowly.” Since man was the supreme center of their world, any display of lowliness was considered shameful. Humility was not a virtue, but a vice.

Josephus, the Jewish general and historian, seems to have adopted the Greek outlook on *tapeinos*. He writes, for instance, of those who were utterly “beneath notice” (*tapeinos*) because of their lowly birth. He tells of Agrippa, who was so “humiliated” by the loss of all his money that he contemplated suicide. Only once does Josephus use this word to describe himself--and then the “humiliation” or “lowliness” was only a pretense, a clever strategy to draw his enemies out into the open.

It was quite a surprise, then, when lowliness became a virtue of the highest rank in Christianity. God—not man—is the center of the universe, so every man must realize his own low estate. Christians are exhorted to have “lowliness” (Col 3:12) and “humility” (Eph 4:2; Phil 2:3). Their leaders were not empire-minded egomaniacs or pampered prima donnas, but served among them with all “humility” (Acts 20:19). Paul did not hesitate to “abase” himself by working with his hands to make the gospel free of charge (2 Cor 11:7).

All this was made possible by the example of Jesus himself. He was meek and “lowly” (Matt 11:29) and did not hesitate to “humble” himself and become obedient to death on the cross (Phil 2:3). He also left us this warning and promise:

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matt 23:12)

# HYPOCRITE

In ancient Greece it was a fine thing to be called a *hypocrites* (hoo poh krih TACE). This was the term for various kinds of public speaker: an orator, an interpreter of dreams, a reciter of poetry or most of all, an actor. There was nothing bad about being a “hypocrite.”

But the very idea of the actor’s role—pretending to be in public what you are not in private—eventually degraded the word hypocrites. By New Testament times Jesus could use the word in scathing rebuke of the self-righteous phonies called Pharisees. They had the external, but not the internal. They had the talk, but not the walk. They just played a role.

That brings us to a very important word in the New Testament for parents: *anupocritos* (ahn ooh POH krih toss). The word reminds us that the role of parents and grandparents is more than just a role; it must be a reality. This is the word Paul used in 2 Timothy 1:5 to describe the “sincere” or “unfeigned” faith Timothy had learned from his mother and grandmother. Their faith in God was not just playing a role, even a good role. Their faith was more than just an act.

Other “un-hypocritical” traits in the New Testament include: sincere love (Rom 12:9), sincere wisdom (James 3:17), and sincere brotherly affection (1 Pet 1:22). As the word is sometimes translated in various translations, “Don’t fake it” (*The Message*) and “Don’t just pretend” (New Living Translation). If we parents and grandparents can uphold a model of faith, wisdom, and love that is honest and sincere, it will be the finest gift a child could ever receive.

# IMMANUEL

What's in a name? Sometimes a great deal! Take, for instance, the name IMMANUEL.

Joseph had taken Mary as his betrothed fiancée. Upon learning that she was pregnant with a child not his own, Joseph determined to divorce her. At this point the angel of the Lord stepped in to explain that the child was of the Holy Spirit. This was in fact a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, "A virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and his name shall be called IMMANUEL" (Is 7:14).

As Matt 1:23 goes on to explain, the name means "God with Us." Jesus came to earth to be "God with us." He took on human flesh and lived out the role of a servant (Phil 2:7).

Moreover, Jesus came to be "with us" so that we could be "with him"! This is beautifully shown in the long list of "with" phrases used by Paul. Each of the following hyphenated phrases is a single word in Greek, beginning with a prefix meaning "with":

1. We are "crucified-with" him (Rom 6:6).
2. We are "buried-with" him (Col 2:12).
3. We are "made-alive-with" him (Eph 2:5).
4. We are "raised-up-with" him (Col 2:12; 3:1).
5. We "live-with" him (Rom 6:8).
6. We "sit-with" him (Eph 2:6).
7. We "suffer-with" him (Rom 8:17).
8. We shall be "glorified-with" him (Rom 8:17).
9. We shall "inherit-with" him (Rom 8:17).
10. We shall "reign-with" him (2 Tim 2:12).

Jesus makes "God with us" also mean "us with God"!



# INDIGNANT

Plato called it the “soul in ferment,” an inner anguish like that of “a baby cutting teeth.” It described his grief and outrage at the death of Socrates, as well as his vexation at the thought of dying himself. The classical Greek word for this was *aganakteo* (ah gahn ahk TEH oh), which we usually translate as “to be indignant.”

Josephus had a special fondness for the word, using it 55 times in his writings. Whenever someone was “reluctantly” compelled to oppose the “outrageous” conduct of another, he was indignant. Much against his own desire, for instance, Pompey’s indignation at the behavior of Aristobulus forced him to lay siege to Jerusalem in 63 B.C. In the following century it was again indignation that forced the Romans to destroy Jerusalem and its temple—reluctantly, of course. The rebels were indignant at the Romans, the peaceful citizens were indignant at the rebels, and Josephus was indignant at everyone’s failure to follow his own sound advice.

Whenever you are unarguably in the right, and your opponent is inexcusably in the wrong, you have reason—nay, you have the duty—to be indignant!

What marvelous indignation the ruler of the synagogue felt when he opposed the upstart rabbi who dared to heal a woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13:14). How righteous were the indignant priests who protested the children’s hosannas (Mark 14:4). Likewise, behold the injured innocence of the disciples as they indignantly resented the secret attempt of James and John to get seats of power (Mark 10:41). And when Mary lavishly wasted all that perfume on Jesus, little wonder that the disciples—especially Judas—were consumed with righteous indignation (Matt 26:8).

Only once in the New Testament is the verb “be indignant” found in its proper place. When Jesus saw his own disciples turning away the little children, he was rightfully, unselfishly indignant (Mark 10:14).

Therefore, the next time you find your soul “in ferment” and grievously vexed over what someone has done, stop and check your motives. Righteous indignation isn’t always right!

# INVISIBLE

Is God invisible? According to 1 Timothy 1:17 he is “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God.” Colossians 1:15 also speaks of “the invisible God.” But what is the meaning of the word “invisible” as it applies to God?

When Josephus used the Greek word for “invisible” (*aoratos*—ah OR ah toss) it usually meant “unseen,” rather than “unseeable.” Since he was about the same age as the apostle Paul and wrote in the same time period, this seems to be significant.

For instance, Josephus tells about the Roman general Pompey, who conquered Palestine in 63 B.C. “Of all the calamities of that time,” he said, “none so deeply affected the nation as the exposure to alien eyes of the Holy Place, hitherto screened from view” (*Wars 1*, 152). The word for “screened from view” was *aoratos*. The Holy Place was not invisible to Roman eyes; it was just previously unseen.

Similarly, Josephus used this word to describe a city “hidden” in the mountains, the “unseen” base of the Masada fortress, the “invisible” joints in a finely crafted wooden table, and an “unseen” cavern where Josephus once hid from his enemies. The only time he actually used it to mean “invisible” was in describing the human soul, which is “invisible to human eyes.”

Now, back to the question of our “invisible” God. He has not been seen and cannot now be seen by mortal man (see 1 Tim 6:16). But that situation will not last forever. When Jesus congratulated the pure in heart, he promised that “they will see God” (Matt 5:8). In heaven God himself will live with his people and “they will see his face” (Rev 21:3; 22:4). The unseen God, so long hidden from our view, will be “invisible” no more!

# IT IS FINISHED

“It is finished!” The cry from the cross rings out across the years. In the Greek New Testament it is only one word (*tetelestai*—teh TEL es tie), but that word is packed with meaning. A brief look at the many ways the word was used in those days will greatly enlarge our appreciation for what Jesus meant in that earnest cry. Here is a collection of the ways in which various secular writers were using the word *tetelestai*.

1. One wrote of a task which was accomplished.
2. Another, of a dangerous feat that was performed.
3. A plan was put into effect.
4. Someone’s will was carried out.
5. A promise was fulfilled.
6. Orders to a soldier were executed.
7. An oath was made effective.
8. A legal document was formally executed.
9. A prayer was brought to pass (i.e., the request was granted).
10. A given time period came to an end.
11. A sickness reached its end.
12. A debt was paid. (In fact, as the papyrus scraps of ancient legal documents were found and studied, the word *tetelestai* was repeatedly found at the top of receipts or bills of sale. It was the everyday way of saying “PAID IN FULL”!)

Each of these uses can be applied to what Jesus did on the cross. He obediently carried out his Father’s will, putting into effect the plan of salvation. The time of the Old Testament reached its end, and the New Covenant became effective. Most of all, the legal debt we had incurred by our sins was paid—paid in full. Because of all this we can repeat the words of Jesus as a cry of victory: “It is finished!”

# ITCHING EARS

Clement of Alexandria was fed up with the Sophists—the self-proclaimed wise teachers of the second century. He said they were enslaved to pleasures and chose to disbelieve; they laughed at the truth which is worthy of all reverence. They were “babbling away in their own jargon...greater chatterers than turtle-doves; scratching and tickling...the ears of those who wish to be tickled.” He said they were like old shoes—when all the rest is worn and is falling to pieces, the tongue alone remains. Flapping tongues, itching ears—not a healthy combination!

The phrase “itching ears” is found only once in the New Testament. The Greek word for “itching” used by Paul in his warning to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:3 was *knetho* (KNAY tho). He had had his own encounters with people who had itching ears, especially when he spoke to the philosophers in Athens. Acts 17:21 says they “spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.” (Literally, the text says something new-er. What was new yesterday had to be new-er today. None of that “tell me the old, old story” for them!)

So it is today. Scholars love new ideas; they often have contempt for yesterday’s truths. An old, old book like the Bible may be treated with disdain, or even worse, with a condescending smile. The scholars who rush to be on camera when the cable channels deal with the Bible usually take pride in exposing it as a fallible human book.

I choose, however, to stand with Jesus. He is the one who said, “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). He is the one who said, “Thy word is true” (John 17:17). He is the one who used Adam and Eve, Noah’s flood, and Jonah’s great fish—all stories modern “experts” quickly reject—as cornerstones for his teaching on marriage, his second coming, and his resurrection.

Have a bad case of itching ears? Jesus can cure that.

# JOYFUL ASSEMBLY

Herod the Great knew how to throw a party. Every four years he held a great festival to honor Caesar in a lavish amphitheater outside Jerusalem. He invited all the important people of the nation to come and enjoy the spectacle of athletes, musicians and entertainers. He had lavish prizes for the competitors, including those who won the horseback and chariot races.

Herod also brought in a supply of lions and other wild beasts to fight each other in the great arena. To make the event even more interesting he often took condemned men from his prisons and made them fight to the death with the animals. When a king has the resources, he can really throw a wild party!

When Josephus wrote about Herod's great festival, the word he used was *panegyris* (paw-n A-jir-iss), a common Greek word for an important public celebration. This word occurs once in the New Testament, when another King decided to throw a party.

Hebrews 12:22 describes a great celebration in the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. There seem to be no wild beasts tearing men limb from limb, but there are thousands of angels in "joyful assembly." This is our King's festival for his invited people, the church of the firstborn. He will give out lavish prizes for the winners—those who have kept the faith. What a party that will be!

But a word of caution. We should remember Hosea 2:11 and what happened when Israel forgot God and tried to go on with her celebrations without him. God warned that he would put an end to it all: festivals, New Moons, Sabbath Days—all her "appointed feasts" (*panegyris*).

If we want to have a party, let's be sure to let the King be in charge.

# KIND

Let's go to the bee, you sluggards, and learn his ways. Aristotle, who strolled through the great outdoors and taught about what he observed, spent several pages describing the bee. He said the drones were a rather worthless kind of bee, which could not sting and would not work. The drones almost never left the hive.

In sharp contrast to the drones were "the good working bees." These bees gathered the nectar, built the honeycomb, and defended the hive. Aristotle had a clear preference for these useful little fellows, describing them in four different places as "good working."

The word Aristotle used for "good working" was *chrestos* (kray STOSS). It came from a verb that meant "to be useful and productive." A *chrestos* house was orderly and well-kept; a *chrestos* meal was healthy and tasty. *Chrestos* people were decent, honest, and upright.

In Scripture, however, the word *chrestos* is usually just translated "kind." If we think of "kind" as no more than mild and pleasant, we have lost an important element of the word. In the Old Testament, for example, we notice that when God is called "kind" he is actively doing something for our benefit. He gives what is *chrestos* and the land yields its harvest (Ps 85:12). In a *chrestos* way he teaches his ways (Ps 119:69). Because God is *chrestos* he helps the poor (Ps 67:10). David said he would praise God for what he has done, for God is *chrestos* (Ps 52:9).

This brings us to a New Testament passage where *chrestos* is used. In Matthew 11:30 Jesus invites the weary to come to him, because his yoke is *chrestos* and his burden is light. What is a *chrestos* yoke? It is a yoke that is kind to the shoulders, well-suited for the task. Like Aristotle's honey bee, it is "good working" and productive. The yoke may ride easy, but it's designed for work!

# KNOW

“Know thyself,” said the ancient inscription on the pagan temple at Delphi. This seemed to be the highest aim, the most noble sentiment, of the ancient world. Unfortunately, self-knowledge seems to be the primary aim of our age as well. To both worlds—ancient and modern—the urgent command from the Bible rings out: “Know the Lord!”

One Greek word for know is *ginosko* (gih NOS ko). Before we see how it is used in the New Testament, let's check the background of the word in the Old Testament. A survey of over 700 uses of the word there shows that the people were to “know that I am the LORD” (79 times), and to know what God has done (over 100 times). Rarely, however, do they directly know God himself. “Know the Lord” is a command (3 times), a prayer (once), and a promise (4 times), but it is a direct statement of fact only when people do not know the Lord (17 times). Notice that to know God is a far greater thing than just to know that he is God!

Before we leave the Old Testament we should note one more use of know, which appears at first to be a mere curiosity. In Genesis 4:1 we read that “Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived.” The same use of know in the marital relationship is found in a number of other places. We note from this that the word includes the sense of intimate involvement, culminating in the creation of new life. Let's keep this in mind as we move to the New Testament.

The idea of knowing God is especially prominent in John's writings, found a dozen times in just his first epistle. It is in John's gospel, though, where we learn that people come to know God through Christ. When Jesus came, the world did not know him (1:10), but finally the disciples came to know him as the Holy One of God (6:69). Just as Jesus said, he knew his sheep and was known by them (11:14). He said that to know him was to know God (14:7), and to know God was eternal life (17:3). To know God himself in this intimate, productive way is not just the path to eternal life, it is eternal life! Do you know the Lord?

# LAIID BARE

Socrates found himself sitting between two young fellows who were quite jealous of each other. One was a musician; the other was an athlete. When the athlete made a disparaging remark about the study of philosophy, the musician said to Socrates in contempt, “What do you expect? He has spent his whole life practicing choke holds, eating and sleeping.”

When a Greek wrestler applied a “choke hold,” twisting the neck of his opponent until he was helpless, the word was *trachelizo* (trah kay LIDS oh). It was also used to describe how an animal’s neck would be exposed when it was about to be skinned or sacrificed. Similarly, a defeated captive would have the sword held to his neck in public, forcing him to bear the full brunt of his dishonor.

Out of this vivid background came the word translated “laid bare” in Hebrews 4:13. “Nothing is all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” With our soul and spirit penetrated by the double-edged sword of God’s word (vs. 12), we are exposed and helpless before the Judge.

It is not surprising, then, to find Philo using this same word to describe the mythical Sisyphus, who was beset and “prostrated” by terrors. He lay helplessly collapsed on the ground, totally exposed and vulnerable. His doom was certain.

Without Jesus as our high priest, we are all likewise doomed. With necks twisted and exposed, we will lie prostrate and defenseless on Judgment Day. But with Jesus, we need not fear. We can approach the throne with confidence (vss. 14-16), knowing we will receive mercy and grace.



# LAST

So what should I write for my last article? Perhaps something outrageous? (After all, they can't fire me now, can they?) Or something profound? (Nope—that bucket's empty.) Or clever? Or witty? Maybe my last article should just be about the word “last.”

The Greek word for “last” is *eschatos* (ESS kah toss). It has become familiar to many of us in the word eschatology, the study of last things. Surprisingly, ancient Greek writers had little or no sense of eschatology. They did not see life directed toward a future goal. They seem to have given little thought to the end of the historical process.

The writers of the Old Testament changed all that. With God in control of history, and with a Messiah as the goal of history, the “last” days became very different. He who created the world “in the beginning” would finally bring things to a climax. “In the last days” God’s kingdom will be established (Mic 4:1), God’s people will come to him for blessings (Hos 3:5), and God’s enemies will be destroyed (Jer 23:20). The last days are not vague and meaningless; the last days bring salvation! (This was the faith of Martha, by the way, when her brother Lazarus died. She said, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day,” John 11:24.)

But the New Testament announces startling news: the last days have arrived! With the coming of Jesus—and his death and resurrection—the last days have already commenced. “In these last days” God has spoken to us by his Son (Heb 1:2). Christ “was revealed in these last times” for our sake (1 Pet 1:20). “In the last days,” God pours out his Spirit on all people (Acts 2:16-17). “Little children, this is the last hour” (1 John 2:18).

So fear not. God in Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Rev 1:8; 22:13). Therefore the last—and best—has already begun.

# LEADERS

A giant wave threw Odysseus overboard and shattered his homemade raft. Driven for two nights and days on the raging sea, he clung to a single piece of the wreckage. Finally he was tossed onto a rugged, unknown shore. Exhausted, he fell asleep.

The next morning a beautiful maiden finds him. She awakens him and promises to lead him into the city where he will find a safe haven at her father's house. When he arrives at the city another maiden (also beautiful, no doubt), helps lead him to the house of safety. What a fortunate thing for Odysseus to have people who will lead him!

The Greek word that means "I lead" is *hegeomai* (hay GEH o my). It is found four times in the New Testament in the participle form that is translated "leaders." When Paul and Barnabas went to the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15:22, for instance, the church chose two men who were "leaders among the brothers" to go with them.

The other three uses of this word as "leaders" are found in Hebrews 13. Leaders are described (v. 7) as those who "spoke the word of God to you" and have an "outcome of their way of life" that is worthy for the readers to imitate. Leaders are further described (v. 17) as those who "watch over you as men who must give an account." Leaders are to be greeted (v. 24) as part of—not separate from—all God's people.

The readers are told to "obey your leaders" and "submit to their authority." (As noted in an earlier column, this literally says "be persuaded by your leaders" and "be submissive.") Their only "authority," the word not actually stated in the Greek text, is the strength of influence the leaders have because they are identified with speaking the word of God and because they are seen as people who live a life worth imitating.

Leaders are put in place to watch over God's people (see Acts 20:28). Their job is lead, guide, and direct the people by teaching them God's word and showing them the godly life. Their job is to lead people from the shipwreck and despair of sin to the Father's house of safety. What a fortunate thing for God's people to have men who will lead them!

# LONG-SUFFERING

Two centuries before the birth of Christ, two great powers struggled for control of the ancient world. Rome would ultimately win, but only after defeating Hannibal—one of the greatest generals of all time. Ravaging city after city in Italy, for sixteen years Hannibal and his army were not defeated.

At the height of his strength Hannibal laid siege to Casilinum, a small city located southeast of Rome, where two main trade routes came together to cross a river. Hannibal laid siege to this strategic location, expecting the inhabitants to surrender quickly. In spite of their tiny force of only 540 soldiers, however, the little town continued to resist. One day, to Hannibal's astonishment, he saw them planting turnips near the wall. He marveled at their "long-suffering." They expected to hold out long enough to harvest them!

The Greek word for "long-suffering" is *makrothymia* (mah kro thoo ME ah). It is made from the word *makros* ("far, long") and *thumos* ("soul, heart"). In classical Greek the *thumos* was used especially as the seat of courage and strong emotions. By the time the word showed up in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to be "long-souled" was to have the courage and strength to keep one's anger under control. (This word should be compared to *hypomone*, the word study in the previous *Compass*. *Hypomone* meant patience with circumstances, *makrothymia* is patience with people.)

William Barclay says this word is:

1. The basis of forgiveness (Prov 19:11).
2. The basis of humility (Ecc 7:8).
3. The foundation of fellowship (Prov 15:18).
4. The basis of good relationships (Prov 25:15).
5. The basis of true wisdom (Prov 14:29).
6. The basis of true power (Prov 16:32).

Most important of all, *makrothymia* describes the character of God. He is so long-suffering that he gives sinners time to repent (2 Pet 3:9). It is not weakness that makes God hold back his wrath; it is great strength of heart. Furthermore, when God's Spirit is at work in our inner man, the kind of patience called *makrothymia* will also be found in us (Gal 5:22; 1 Cor 13:4; Eph 4:2). With *makrothymia* we will have strength to face opposition, courage to fulfill duty, and patience to forgive enemies.

# LORD

The full force of “Lord” (Greek: *kurios*—KUR ee oss) is not appreciated by English-speaking people. Perhaps if we trace the word through its history and development, it will help. This word came a long way before it was ready to serve as a fitting title for our Jesus. The *kurios* was originally the owner of a piece of property. Next, the *kurios* was the owner and master of a slave. Then, when the Greek mystery religions began to develop, *kurios* was used in reference to the deity they worshiped. By this point in history, then, the *kurios* was recognized as owner, obeyed as master, and honored as a god.

What happened next had tremendous impact on the word. When the translators of the Old Testament tried to translate the divine name YHWH (Jehovah or Yahweh) into Greek, they faced a problem. No one knew how to pronounce the sacred name, since the vowels were omitted. There was no way to transliterate the name from Hebrew into Greek, letter by letter. The solution was to translate YHWH as *kurios*! Thus, every time a Jew saw the title *kurios*, he thought of God himself.

In light of all this, just think what a momentous confession it is to declare, “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil 2:11)! We proclaim him our Owner and Master to obey; our God to worship. He is not just a good man to admire. He is King of kings! He is incarnate God—he is Lord!

# LOVE

*Agape* (ah GAH pay) is a foreign word. It is the Greek word for love in the New Testament, but it was foreign to the Greeks, too. Surprising as it may seem, *agape* has never been found in any of the classical Greek literature. A verb form was used a few times, but the noun was not used at all.

The Greeks had other words to say what they felt about love. They wrote much about *eros* (EH roce), the passionate sexual love. They wrote about *storge* (stor GAY), the loyal love for family, and about *philia* (fih LEE ah), the friendship love. All these loves were conditional. *Eros* said, "I will love you IF you gratify my desires." *Storge* said, "I will love you IF you are a loyal member of my family." *Philia* said, "I will love you IF you are attractive and lovable." All three of these loves were temporary, lasting only as long as the IF lasted. All these loves kept a tight circle of those who were loved, because spreading love too widely would dilute its intensity.

God's kind of love was foreign to most men. God does not love IF men are lovable enough, but in spite of the fact that they are not. God's love does not jealously guard its tight little circle, but grows stronger as it reaches out. God's love never counts the cost, nor calculates its own profit. God's love is a matter of choice and will, not just fleeting emotion. It is the only kind of love that can be commanded.

*Agape* was also foreign to the disciples, such as John. He was more at home with violent resentment (Luke 9:54-55) and selfish ambition (Mark 10:35-45). But *agape* came naturally to Jesus. He demonstrated what real love is all about, for his nature was the very same as that of his Father in heaven. And the ultimate picture of love—real *agape* love—is God himself.

# LOVE BAD

Sometimes love goes bad.

Now I know that love is always supposed to be good. It is unselfish, generous, and always caring first about the other guy. But sometimes the very same word that describes this kind of love becomes selfish and evil. Let me explain.

In the Greek New Testament the noun “love” (*agape*—ah GAH pay) is always used in a good and holy way, but the corresponding verb (*agapao*—ah gah PAH oh) does not have such a perfect record. This verb form of “love” is used 142 times in the N.T., and six of these uses are decidedly rotten! In these six places the otherwise pure kind of love becomes selfish, grasping, and evil.

- Luke 11:43 You love the chief seats.
- John 3:19 Men loved the darkness.
- John 12:43 They loved the praise of men.
- 2 Tim 4: 10 Having loved this present world.
- 2 Pet 2:15 Who loved gain from wrongdoing.
- 1 John 2:15 If any man love the world.

How can our lovely word *agapao* be used in such texts? A look at the context of these six verses will tell us. In Luke 11:43 the Pharisees had turned their love away from God to focus it on seats of honor. In John 3:19 the men had turned away from God’s love and light and pointed their love toward darkness. Demas, having once loved God, turned his love to embrace the world (2 Tim 4:10). In every one of these six verses there is a contrast between love for God and love for evil. The love which should have been directed toward God was misdirected toward something else. And whenever love is misdirected away from God, it goes bad.

# MANSION

“In my Father’s house are many mansions...I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). A mansion! Now you’re talking! Someday yonder—just over the hilltop—I’m going to have a mansion! I want a gold one, that’s silver lined.

The Greek word for “mansion” in this verse is *mone* (mo NAY). It is used only one other time in the New Testament, in a place which may surprise you. It is found in this same 14th chapter of John, in verse 23, where the Father and Son promise to come and make their “abode” (KJV) in us. I think it’s fascinating that we call our *mone* a “mansion,” but we call God’s *mone* an “abode.” What a contrast! Could it be that we expect God provide us a much better guest room in heaven that we have been providing him in our hearts?

Let’s dig deeper. The word Jesus used in both verses has very little to do with splendor and magnificence. (Revelation 21 tells us much about the riches of our home in heaven, but that is not the point here in John 1.) The word used by Jesus means an abiding place, a refuge, a rest. The primary focus is on the permanence of that dwelling, not its elegance. The greatest blessing of the heavenly home, after all, is that we will get to stay there forever. And maybe, after all, that is what God wants most of all in his “mansion” in our hearts: the right to consider himself at home—permanently!

# MARK

Just north of ancient Troy there is a narrow strip of water (the Hellespont) which separates Europe from Asia. In 480 B.C. the Persian king Xerxes (the same Xerxes in the book of Esther) marched his huge army across this strait on an ingenious floating bridge. In a famous battle at Thermopylae, near Athens, he soundly defeated the Greek forces. As the battle turned against the Greeks, a group of soldiers deserted to the Persian side. They thus saved their lives, but they were forced to have Xerxes' mark branded on their bodies. This sign of disgrace, regarded throughout antiquity as a mark of dishonor, was called a *stigma* (STIG ma).

The stigma marked a man as belonging to the very lowest, most despicable level of society. Robbers of temples, for instance, had their guilt inscribed with a stigma on their forehead and hands. Prisoners of war were likewise humiliated. Slaves who were untrustworthy and likely to run away were branded with the stigma of their master. The slave with a stigma became the butt of ancient jokes and was universally regarded as "good for nothing."

Caligula, the insane emperor of Rome, went so far as to take private citizens, brand his royal stigma on their foreheads and force them to work on public construction projects. (This was about 40 A.D.)

Scarcely a decade later, we find the apostle Paul telling the Galatians, "I bear on my body the marks (stigmata) of Jesus" (Gal 6:17). How could Paul say such a thing? Why did he regard the scars of beatings and stoning as the stigma of Jesus? Did he want to picture himself as no better than a slave? Did he mean to imply that he was not his own man, but was owned by another? Did he intend us to understand that he had been drafted by the King to serve on some royal project? Could he even have seen himself as "good for nothing"? Could he have borne the humiliation and public disgrace of being branded as a fool for Jesus?

Surely not.



# MEEK

If you were going to illustrate the word “meek” by using one of God’s animal creatures, which one would you choose? A mouse? A chicken? The lowly turtle? Perhaps you would choose the dodo bird—stupidly waiting to be clubbed into extinction!

It may surprise you to know that the Greeks used this word to describe the well-trained horse, the loyal watchdog, and the work elephant. None of these animals is weak. To the contrary, their very usefulness depends on their strength! Meekness is strength that is obedient to the reins and submissive to the trainer. Just as wild dogs are of no value to men, raw strength is useless until it is controlled.

Only two men were ever called meek in the scriptures—Moses and Jesus. They were strong, but their lives were yielded to God. Their strength was under control. When Moses faced the Pharaoh and when Jesus faced the Pharisees, they were still obedient to God’s reins. Even the seeming violence at the cleansing of the Temple might be understood as a loyal watchdog chasing intruders out of the yard.

Meekness is a virtue in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:5). It is part of Christlikeness that is produced in us by his Spirit (Gal 5:23). It should be our constant attitude as we represent God’s kingdom to outsiders (1 Pet 3:15).

Remember that meekness does not grow out of weakness, but from power held under control. Meek is not weak in the Greek!

# METEORIZED

“Ezekiel saw the wheel, way up in the middle of the air.” The old Negro spiritual, based on Ezekiel 16, found a fascination with the wheels which rose and were suspended in mid-air. The Greeks had a word for “mid-air,” *meteoros* (meh TEH oh ross). This is the same word from which we get our word meteor.

Aristotle once wrote a whole treatise on meteors. These “shooting stars were known to be in the upper reaches of earth’s atmosphere, not as high as actual stars, so they were called objects of “mid-air,” or meteors. The same word for “hanging in mid-air” was also applied to a lot of other things: wind, water vapor, and clouds. (This is why a trained weatherman is called a meteorologist. He studies the activity of clouds, wind currents, and all the “mid-air” phenomena.)

There was also a verb form of this word, which would be equivalent to English form meteorize (Greek: meh teh oh RIDZ oh). To be “meteorized” was to be suspended in mid-air, to be left hanging. Thucydides spoke of it as “hovering between hope and fear.” Josephus told how the Jewish people were politically unsettled and in suspense during the reign of Herod the Great, because he was giving conflicting signals about which of his sons might be designated to follow him on the throne. All the country was meteorized, caught in limbo between hope and fear.

All of this brings us to Luke 12:29, the only time this word is used in the New Testament. Knowing how “up in the air” people can be with all their anxieties, Jesus gave us this very good piece of advice: “Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and don’t be meteorized!”

# MINISTRY

We saints are supposed to be getting ready for “the work of the ministry” (Eph 4:12). What does that mean? Does God expect us all to preach? Are we supposed to quit our jobs and “go into the ministry,” as they say?

The Greek word for “ministry” was *diakonia* (dee ah kon NEE ah). It originally meant serving at someone’s table. It was a job for a slave or a woman, not a free man. As Plato put it, “How can a man be happy when he has to serve someone?”

In the New Testament ministry retains much of the original concept of simple servanthood. One important ingredient was added to the word, however—the element of love! When Martha was so busy getting the food ready, it was ministry (Luke 10:40). When Mark was summoned to give aid to Paul in the Roman prison, it was ministry (2 Tim 4:11). When the Corinthian gentiles gathered money for the starving Jewish Christians, it was ministry (2 Cor 9:1). To take care of the hungry, or thirsty, or naked, or sick was ministry in the eyes of Jesus (Matt 25:44). To carry the gospel to the lost and alienated world was also ministry (2 Cor 5:18).

When did we start talking about preaching as THE ministry? When did we first forget that all saints who serve in any capacity have a ministry? When will we learn that every act of service, lovingly rendered, is ministry? When will the day come that we all—in the pulpit or the pew—will simply be eager to be useful in the kingdom?

May the Lord hasten the day that we will be able to say with the Apostle Paul, “I thank Christ Jesus...because he counted me faithful and put me into service (*diakonia*)” (1 Tim 1:12).

# MURMUR

The workers at the copper mines near Philoteria were singing the old “Somebody done somebody wrong” song. They had worked for ten months without pay and they were tired of this! They were worth their wages! And well, they just weren’t going to take it anymore! So Hermogenes, the foreman, wrote to his boss, Theodorus the Architect, with the bad news: the work gang was murmuring and threatening to quit.

The Greek word for “murmur” was *gonguzo* (gong GOOZ oh). It meant to grumble and complain, especially when people felt that they had a legal claim that was being ignored. The word basically says, “Hey! I deserve better than this!”

The letter to Theodorus was written in 240 B.C., about the same time the Hebrew Old Testament was first being translated into Greek. It is striking that when the translators came to the story of the Israelites in the wilderness, they chose *gonguzo* to describe what was happening in Exodus 16:1-8. The freed slaves “murmured” about the lack of food; they “murmured” against their leaders; and they “murmured” against God. They thought they had a legal claim and God was somehow failing them. They deserved better than this!

A similar pattern can be traced in John 6. The crowd “murmurs” about what Jesus says (v. 41), he addresses their continual grumbling (v. 43, 61), and finally they leave him (v. 66). It appears that murmuring/grumbling is a significant first step in parting company with God.

The New Testament teaches us as Christians to “do all things without murmuring and complaining” (Phil 2:14). If we can avoid such behavior, we will stand out as God’s children—distinctly different from the depraved world. (And don’t tell anyone, but this warning against grumbling has been chosen on purpose for this issue of *The Ambassador*, which deals with contemporary worship!)

We seem to have come to a time in our country where we feel justified in our grumbling. Has the internet encouraged this? Has our sense of entitlement promoted it? Has everyone been appointed as critic-in-chief? Whatever the reason, let’s be careful. Let’s remember how Jude 16 describes ungodly sinners: “These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.”

# NEW

Happy New Year!

If you expect your new year to be just another year like the past ones, the Greek word for “new” would be *neos* (NEH oss). This word meant “new” only in the sense of being more recent. No real difference in the nature of the thing was implied.

But if you expect your new year to be totally new and unprecedented, the Greek word would be *kainos* (ky NOSS). This word stressed the marvelous new nature of whatever was genuinely novel and new.

It is interesting that the New Testament nearly always uses *kainos* (totally new and unprecedented) to describe what Jesus has made possible. From the very beginning those who heard Jesus recognized that he had a NEW teaching (Mark 1:27). By the shedding of his blood he made a NEW covenant (Luke 22:20) and opened the NEW and living way (Heb 10:20) to the Father. In Christ we are NEW creatures (2 Cor 5:17) who walk in NEWNESS of life (Rom 6:4). We put on the NEW man (Eph 4:24), keep the NEW commandment (John 13:34), and are continually RENEWED day by day (2 Cor 4:16). The oldness of the letter of the law is replaced by the NEWNESS of the Spirit (Rom 7:6).

What is more, we can now look forward to a NEW heaven. and a NEW earth (2 Pet 3:13) where we will live in the NEW Jerusalem (Rev 21:2). We will be told the NEW name (Rev 3:12) and we will sing a NEW song (Rev 14:3) to him who sits on the throne and says, “Behold, I make all things NEW”! (Rev 21:5)

# NOBLE

For Esther, it was now or never. She could try to hide from the impending doom facing the Jews, or she could dare to speak out to her husband the king. Perhaps she would save her people; perhaps she would die. After three days of fasting and praying she put on her royal robes and went to the throne room (Esther 5:1).

Josephus elaborates on the story with these details: “Although her face was covered with blushing,” Esther adorned herself “with a sweet and dignified beauty” and entered the royal court. The king not only looked on Esther with favor, he “leaped from his throne and raised her in his arms...embracing her and speaking to her endearingly” (*Antiquities*, XI, 234-237).

In the blushing nobility of Esther we encounter the word *semnos* (sem NOSS), which means “noble” or “dignified.” In classical Greek *semnos* was used by a variety of writers to describe such things as a “majestic” throne, a “heroic and noble” demeanor, “splendid” clothing, “stately” music, and eloquent” poetry. In an especially appropriate passage Plutarch advises young brides that a woman is not adorned because she wears gold or jewelry or scarlet, but because she carries herself with “dignity.”

In the New Testament we are told to think about whatever is true, whatever is “noble,” etc. (Phil 4:8). As we contemplate “noble” things of beauty such as fine music and poetry, and are inspired by thinking of the courage of “heroic and noble” men, let us not forget the blushing nobility of Esther—the woman who saved her people. The image of a young lady “of noble rank” can draw us closer to God and give us peace.

So, as we learn to fill our minds with thoughts of things admirable and excellent and praiseworthy, let’s also find ourselves something noble. Then, let’s think. And smile.

# OBEY

Araspas was a lady's man. At least, that's what Araspas thought. So it made perfect sense to Araspas that the beautiful Panthea would give up her husband and throw herself at Araspas's feet.

Panthea, however, was a devoted wife. Like loyal wives in many wars, she waited eagerly and faithfully for the day when her husband would return. When Araspas began making passes at her, she was repulsed. When Araspas threatened to use force if she would not submit willingly, she was outraged. Secretly she sent her servant to King Cyrus, telling him the whole story.

Cyrus immediately sent word to Araspas and warned him not to lay violent hands on the woman. Cyrus did concede this much, however: if Araspas could "win her consent," the King would have no objection. Araspas knew that without force he had no hope, so he apologized and gave up.

The Greek word for "win consent" in this story is *peitho* (PAY tho). When we read its everyday uses, we find people being "won over" or "persuaded" or "convinced." As a consequence, these people then "comply with" or "obey" what is said by those who have won them over with persuasive arguments. (See for instance Acts 5:40; 14:19; 19:8; and 26:28.)

All of this sheds considerable light on Hebrews 13:17, where the readers are told to "obey" their leaders (NIV). It is significant that this is not the same Greek word as when slaves are told to "obey" (*hypacouo*) their masters or children are told to "obey" their parents. In those two examples, obedience is unquestioning. In the situation of Christians and their leaders, however, they do not blindly "obey" unquestioned authority. Instead, they are to be open to persuasion, to compelling instruction from Scripture (see Heb 13:7). They should be ready to be "won over" by good men with good arguments.

# PANIC-STRICKEN

The Scythians were fierce warriors, but they were no match for the Persian army of Darius. They fled as he advanced into Scythia, managing to stay one day's march ahead of him. But Darius would not give up the chase. This created a real problem for the next country, toward which both armies were headed. When first the Scythians, and then the Persians, raced into their land, what were the local folks to do? The answer: they fled panic-stricken into the desert.

In this ancient history recorded by Herodotus, the Greek word for "panic-stricken" was *tarasso* (tah RAH so). To be "tarasso-ed" meant to be disturbed, thrown into disorder, confused, upset, agitated or alarmed. It was used of physical things like wind and water; it was used of military and political situations. In people it described a strong turmoil of emotions.

In the New Testament *tarasso* is used seventeen times, in places such as these: Zechariah is "startled" to meet an angel. King Herod is "disturbed" to hear a king was born. The disciples are "terrified" to see Jesus walking on the sea. The city of Thessalonica is "thrown into turmoil" when Paul preaches the gospel there.

Most famously, *tarasso* is used in John 14:1, "Let not your hearts be troubled." But Jesus is not chiding the disciples for being upset. He himself has known the same emotion in each of the three preceding chapters (11:33; 12:27; 13:21). Now Jesus speaks a word of loving encouragement, a word to quiet their feelings of panic. "Don't worry. Trust God, and trust me, too. In spite of everything, it's going to be all right."



# PARTIALITY

It's Greek to me! That's what we often say when a word has no meaning to us. In this article we will look at a real switch: a Greek word that was unintelligible to the Greeks!

The word is *prosopolempsia* (pros oh pol LAIMP see ah). To the average Greek without any Old Testament background, the word must have been a puzzle. He would have recognized the first seven letters as the word "face" and the last seven letters as the word "taking," but what is face-taking? Using this literal definition he would have read Romans 2:11 and would have given it this literal interpretation: "For there is no face-taking with God." What's that supposed to mean?

Actually, what Paul was saying in this verse was a Hebrew concept expressed in Greek words: a judge must not take the face of a person on trial and base his decision on who that person is. God doesn't do it (Deut 10:17) and he demands that his people not do it (Deut 1:17).

By now the average Greek would be having even more trouble. Not only is the word strange—so is the concept! While the Greeks admired this quality of fair impartiality in human judges, they did not dream that their gods would be bound by this virtue. After all, can't a god do anything he wants? It is well and good to idealize justice as blindfolded, holding a sword and a scales, but who's going to blindfold a god?

But such is the uniqueness of God. He not only establishes the standards of impartial justice—he also submits to them. This fact finally dawned on Peter (Acts 10:34), was proclaimed by Paul (Gal 2:6), and was put to work by James (James 2:1-9). God and his people don't take faces!

# PATTERN

The Spartan warrior watched with interest as the ancient blacksmith worked. Placing a red-hot rod of iron on his anvil, the smithy struck heavy blows with his hammer. His goal was to make the rod as flat on the anvil top, eventually producing a sword.

The Greek word for the anvil in this story was *typos* (TOO poss). The same word was used in a variety of ways, each having to do with shaping a material into a desired form. The hollow mold for making the image of an idol was called a *typos*. The mark left by a seal in hot wax was called a *typos*. The stamp for making a coin was also called a *typos*.

Recently I watched the ancient scene re-enacted at Silver Dollar City. The blacksmith took a metal object and carefully made its imprint (*typos*) in sand. Then he filled the imprinted sand with melted aluminum and produced an exact replica of his original. In this kind of work both the original object and the imprint it leaves in the sand are called a “pattern.”

It was in this way that the ancient word *typos* became a common word for “pattern.” (We retain something of this usage in our word “archetype,” the first pattern.) In the Old Testament, Moses was told, “Make them according to the pattern (*typos*) shown you on the mountain” (Ex 25:40). Similarly, when we find prophetic patterns (such as the table with bread in the tabernacle) we often call them “types.”

In the New Testament Paul was fond of the word *typos*, the pattern used to make identical replicas. He said in Romans 6:17 that we should all obey the “form (*typos*) of teaching we have received” (by allowing it to mold us into its own pattern). On his missionary journeys he was diligent to make himself “a model” (*typos*) for his converts to follow (2 Thess 3:9). When they were faithful he commended them for becoming “a model (*typos*) to all the believers” (1 Thess 1:7). He challenged Timothy to “set an example (*typos*)...in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). Likewise, he told Titus, “In everything set them an example (*typos*) by doing what is good” (Titus 2:7). The challenge for all of us is to “live according to the pattern (*typos*)” that he has given (Phil 3:17).

# PAY ATTENTION

When Tisamenus was a young man, he dreamed of competing in the Olympiad. So he trained hard and paid careful attention to physical exercises, hoping to win a prize in the Pentathlon. (The five events included running, jumping, wrestling, throwing the javelin, and the discus.) He did well, coming within a single wrestling match of winning the whole thing.

The Greek word for “pay careful attention” is *prosecho* (pross ECK oh). In the earliest years the word was used to describe how sailors would “bring a ship to port” or “land a ship” on a beach. From this background the word was extended to mean “to fix the eyes on” or “to fix the mind on.” Thus, to “pay attention” was something like carefully steering one’s mind to its proper destination. It meant to focus on a goal.

In the New Testament the word takes a surprising turn. Jesus said that sometimes we should be careful to focus our attention away. Translated literally, he said, “Pay attention away from false prophets” (Matt 7:15). He said, “Pay attention (focus, steer your ship) away from the yeast of the hypocritical Pharisees (Lk 12:1) and the proud scribes (Lk 20:46). He said, “Pay attention” not to do your righteousness before men (Matt 6:1). Paul added not to focus on myths and endless genealogies (1 Tim 1:4) or on much wine (1 Tim 3:8).

On the positive side, where should we focus (or aim our ship)? Elders are told to pay attention to themselves and to the flock (Acts 20:28). Timothy is told to pay attention to reading, to exhortation, to teaching (1 Tim 4:13). All of us should pay attention to what we have heard (Heb 2:1), especially to the confirmation of the messianic promises, fulfilled in Christ (2 Pet 1:19). We will do well in our Christian lives if we can just learn where to pay attention—where to focus—where to park the boat.

# PEACE

Several years ago Wallace Wartick called my attention to something wonderful in the O.T. background of the word “peace.” The Hebrew word *shalom* (shah LOAM) meant far more than the mere absence of war. Shalom meant the well-being that comes from God: security, health, freedom from care, contentment. It included everything given by God in all areas of life, everything that makes for a man’s highest good. Thus, in Egypt when Joseph asked his brothers about the well-being of their father, his words were, “Is it shalom with the aged father of you?” (Gen 43:27)

The Hebrew shalom, which occurs more than 250 times in the O.T., is almost invariably translated in the Greek Septuagint by the word *eirene* (ay RAY nay). While in classical Greek *eirene* normally meant “peace” as the mere cessation of war, the O.T. background brought it to the New Testament with a much richer, deeper meaning.

Peace is the spiritual well-being we have because we are justified by faith, not by depending on our own goodness (Rom 5:1). This “prosperity of the soul” was announced by the angels (Luke 2:14) and delivered by Jesus (John 14:27). The true nature of peace is seen in the company it keeps: “glory, honor, and peace”; “life and peace”; “peace and joy”; “grace and peace”; “love and peace shall be with you.”

No fewer than six times in the N.T. God is called “the God of peace.” When God’s Spirit brings his harvest in our hearts, love and joy is followed by peace. This peace is ours for the asking. Peace which replaces anxiety, peace which transcends understanding, is only a prayer away (Phil 4:6-7). May the peace of God—and the God of peace—be with you!

# PEDDLE

The wine merchant of ancient times had a reputation somewhere between that of a used- car salesman and a dope peddler. He eagerly hawked his merchandise in the marketplace, promising an ample measure of the finest quality wine. In truth, his product was usually watered down and adulterated, measured out in false measure to make a quick profit. The word for peddling merchandise in this manner was *kapeleuo* (kah pay LU oh). It was to become Paul's word in 2 Corinthians 2:17 to describe some sleazy dealers in the divine—holy hucksters.

The word *kapeleuo* spread from the dishonest wine merchant to describe others who were out to make a fast, but dishonorable, shekel. This word was used to describe prostitutes who peddled their own flesh, corrupt officials who trafficked in grants of citizenship, and pseudo-philosophers who sold their bits of “wisdom” to eager and unsuspecting students. Plato warned about “those who carry about items of knowledge, to sell and hawk them to anyone who is in want of them...though neither they nor their customers know their effect upon the soul.”

Paul warned the Corinthians about certain men who sought to turn a quick profit on the Jesus trade. These holy hucksters perverted the truth of the gospel and made some quick sales. Both their motives and their message were corrupt.

Holy hucksters can still make a fast buck on the religious market. Their watered-down gospel seems tasty enough and the cost they count sounds attractive. Their adulterated product may lack its saving power, but they either don't know or don't care about that. What they say sounds good and it sells in the marketplace. Their pulpit, radio microphone, or TV camera dispenses their pollution. As in ancient Jerusalem, “Thy hucksters mix their wine with water” (Is 1:22).

But Paul was no holy huckster. “We are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, as from God, we speak Christ in the sight of God” (2 Cor 2:17).

# PLANET

Did you ever lie back and watch the stars on a summer evening? As the earth rotates, the starry hosts of heaven march grandly across the sky in perfect formation. But wait—there's a star out of formation! It's not in the same place as before! What is this wandering star? The Greeks had a name for such a thing: *planetes* (plah NAY tace), from which we get our word "planet." (See Jude 13.) This Greek word came from a simple verb meaning "to wander off course, to go astray."

Jesus told about a sheep which "went astray" (Matt 18:12) and Peter said that we were all "like sheep wandering away" (1 Pet 2:25). But why do people wander off course? If we track down the uses of "go astray" in the New Testament, we get these answers:

1. People "get off the path" or "wander astray" when they do not know the scriptures (Matt 22:29).
2. People are "caused to go astray" or "led off course" (which is also translated "deceived") by Satan (Rev 12:9). He is the spirit of "error" or "wandering astray" (1 John 4:6).
3. People are sometimes "misled" or "deceived" or "caused to go astray" by false teachers (Matt 24:4; 2 Tim 3:13).
4. But it is also possible for men to "deceive" themselves! (1 John 1:8). They abandon the way of truth and "go astray" (2 Pet 2:15). They go from bad to worse, "deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim 3:13).

God's Word does two things about the danger of deception, or being led astray. First, it repeatedly warns us, "Be not deceived," giving us the Word of truth by which we may expose deception. Second, it provides a way of rescue: "If anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error ("wandering astray") of his way will save his soul from death" (James 5:19-20).

So let us resolve not to be numbered with those who "live in error" (2 Pet 2:18), but to take our positions among the heavenly hosts of God's kingdom. Don't be a planet—be a star!

# POOR

Are you poor? Do you live in poverty? What is this year's official "poverty level" anyway? The last I heard, it was around \$20,000 for a family of four. Most of the world would gladly accept that level of poverty! I guess poverty is a relative thing, depending on who is defining it.

How should we define "poor" in the Scriptures? What did Jesus have in mind when he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit..."? How poor is poor?

There were two words for poor in the Greek language of the original New Testament. The first word was *penes* (PEN ace). It referred to the man who could not live from his property, but had to work with his hands as a day-laborer. Because he lived from payday to payday with no reserve wealth to sustain him, he was poor.

The second word was *ptochos* (pto KOSS). This man was not only lacking reserve wealth, he also lacked the ability and opportunity to do even manual labor. Perhaps blind or crippled, he was utterly dependent upon society. His only option was to beg. This word for poor came from a verb meaning "to crouch in fear."

Which word did Jesus use in Matthew 5:3? Which kind of spiritual poverty did he recommend? Interestingly, it was the second word. Jesus desired men to recognize their spiritual helplessness and become utterly dependent upon God. We cannot labor for a ticket to heaven; we are like beggars—we can only ask.

# POWER

Danger comes in unlikely packages.

Alfred was a bright boy, fluent in five languages and a skilled chemist in his teenage years. Clouds covered his career, however, and by the age of thirty Alfred was known as “the mad scientist.” In 1864 one of his chemical experiments blew up his small factory, killing his younger brother and four others. Alfred survived. Forbidden by his government to rebuild the factory, Alfred secured an old barge where he went on experimenting with nitroglycerin. By chance he discovered that the dangerous liquid could be stabilized by absorption into dry material, and in 1867 he patented his explosive invention. Now great tasks of moving dirt and rock were made easy.

But what should his invention be called? Reaching back into the literature of the classics, Alfred seized a word that seemed to have all the necessary elements: incredible power, almost unlimited usefulness, and possible danger. The Greek word he chose was *dynamis* (DOON ah miss) and his invention was called dynamite. With the enormous fortune he gained, Alfred Nobel set up and funded the Nobel Prize.

Alfred was on target with his word choice: dynamis power is not something to trifle with. The Greek version of the O.T. says that God dried up the Red Sea “so that all the nations of the earth might know that the dynamis of the Lord is mighty, and that you might reverence the Lord your God forever” (Josh 4:24). The N.T. uses dynamis 118 times, especially in reference to the miracles of Jesus as an exhibition of divine power. (Just think of the arrogance of Simon the Sorcerer who thought that he himself should be called “the Great Power of God”!)

Most of all, I am excited by Paul’s use of this word in Ephesians. Paul prayed that we might know God’s incomparably great dynamis which is at work in us who believe (1:19). Through this dynamis working within us, God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. This is the power, the “dynamite,” of God!



# PRAISE

Hesiod gave an interesting piece of ancient advice: “Praise a small ship, but put your freight in a large one.” It was his way of saying, “Pay lip service, but decline courteously.” The Greek word for this kind of insincere praise was *aineo* (ai NEH oh).

But in the Bible the word *aineo* always means to praise God in a good sense. Typical is Psalm 63:5, “With singing lips I will praise you,” or Psalm 146:1-2, “Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life.” This kind of lip service is a good thing.

There was even a special kind of sacrifice at the temple associated with this word *aineo*. The thank offering of Leviticus 7 is literally a “sacrifice of praise” (v. 13) or a “sacrifice of praise for salvation” (v. 15).

God’s people understood that sincere praise was even more acceptable to the Lord than the animals they sacrificed. God himself said, “Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice thank offerings to God” (literally “sacrifice to God a sacrifice of praise” Ps 50:13-14).

Hosea called on his nation to give this sincere praise when he said, “That we may offer our lips as sacrifices of bulls” (see NIV textual note for this literal translation of Hosea 14:2). All of this was a prelude to the beautiful text of Hebrews 13:15. “Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.” With animal sacrifices forever gone, Christians still have this to offer God: a sacrifice of praise.

But let us never forget the danger lurking in the word *aineo*. If it should ever be insincere, mere lip service, then it is no more than looking God in the face...and politely declining.

# PRAY

Lo, these many years sweet Penelope has waited for the return of Odysseus. If he should be dead, she will have to yield to the claims of one of the many suitors gathered nearby. In desperation she prays to all the gods, vowing that she will offer 100 oxen as a sacrifice in the hope that Zeus might someday respond.

In classical Greek the word “pray” (*euchomai*—YOU ko my) included the elements: “ask,” “wish,” and “vow.” The prayers typically involved an attempt to bargain for an answer through sacrifices or promises, and were often vaguely addressed in the direction of “the gods.” (Socrates prayed “to Pan and as many other gods as might be in this place.”)

Interestingly, in the New Testament the word “pray” almost always comes in a revised form (*proseuchomai*—pross YOU ko my). The added prefix means “toward,” and gives the word “pray” a more focused direction. By contrast, the weaker word of classical authors (which they used 93% of the time) is used sparingly in the New Testament (only 8%). A remnant of the weaker classical usage is found in Acts 27:29, where the storm-tossed sailors “prayed” or “wished” for daylight.

The N.T. choice of *proseuchomai* for “pray” teaches us that Christian prayer is not the same as pagan prayer. Our prayers are not vaguely directed to whatever gods may be around; nor are they a part of a bargaining process. Unlike the pagans, we are taught to pray, “Our Father...” (Matt 6:9). We approach the throne with confidence, address the God we know personally, and pray with the certainty that our prayers are heard.

# PRE-EMINENT

Pisistratus would have made a great presidential candidate. He was “extremely smooth and engaging in his language” and “a great friend to the poor.” In fact, the great lawgiver Solon said if anyone could just banish the “passion for pre-eminence” from the mind of Pisistratus, no one would be a more virtuous man or more excellent citizen. He became tyrant of Athens in 561 B.C., but was driven from power five years later because of his one fatal flaw: the “passion for pre-eminence.”

In the next century Athens saw another political star shoot across the sky. Young Alcibiades, raised by Pericles and taught by Socrates, had one prevailing drive in his character: “passion for pre-eminence.” History records his important role in the conflict between Athens and Sparta, but though he was “outstandingly able as a politician,” his people twice rejected him because of his personal ambition.

Plutarch, who wrote at the end of the first century A.D., described both these men as having the same fatal flaw: “passion for pre-eminence.” It was at this very time that John used the same terminology to describe Diotrephes, a congregational leader who “loves to be first” (3 John 9). The Greek word for all three men is *philoproteuo* (fil oh prot YOU oh). It is made up of two simple elements: *philo* for love, and *proteuo* for being first. It describes the kind of self-aggrandizement that lives by the ancient (?) motto, “He that tooteth not his own horn, the same shall not be tooted.” Jesus said that in his kingdom those who promote their own cause and want to be first will instead be last. But not everyone listens to Jesus.

# PREACH

A hush fell over the marketplace. Every eye was fixed on the man with the crown on his head and the staff in his hand. The man spoke and his loud, clear voice carried a royal proclamation to every ear. He was the herald of the king.

The Greek word for being a herald is *kerusso* (kay RU so) and is the word translated “preach” in the New Testament. A brief look at the ancient heralds may help us better understand what it is to preach.

In those “pre-microphone” days, the chief qualification for being a herald was a loud and clear voice. They even held “herald contests” along with the athletic contests at their great national festivals. The herald’s job was to call soldiers to battle, to summon citizens to the public assembly (the *ekklesia*), and to proclaim official edicts. He always spoke under the authority of someone else—he was the spokesman for his superior. He had no right to negotiate with his hearers—he had only the responsibility to proclaim the message faithfully. The herald made an authoritative announcement. To ignore it was not just indifference; it was refusal!

The ancient Greeks held the herald in high honor. Unfortunately, however, they ultimately came to place more emphasis on the man than the message. This unnatural distortion of things led to the herald’s fall from his place of honor. Focus on the man, instead of the message, brought attention to the man’s inadequacies. Popular opinion later classed heralds with keepers of brothels and petty shopkeepers. Demosthenes said that only the poor and lazy aspired to be heralds, and their only motivation was the money!

The New Testament, on the contrary, turns our attention from the herald to his message. The word for the herald himself (*kerux*) is used only three times, but the word for his proclaiming of the message (*kerusso*) is used sixty-one times. God’s herald does not preach himself, but Christ Jesus (2 Cor 4:5). It is not the herald’s office, but the herald’s message that demands respect. And if the herald faithfully preaches the message which God has commissioned him to preach, he has fulfilled his ministry and has done his duty (2 Tim 4:2-5). Preach the word!

# RANSOM

The national debt is a staggering seven trillion dollars. The interest alone is costing us over a million dollars every minute! Our whole nation is enslaved by this debt. Only once in history was there ever a greater debt and it—thank God—has been paid.

This greatest of all debts was the debt of sinners who had broken divine law. Divine justice condemned them to lose not merely their earthly wealth but their very souls! Who could rescue sinners from their plight? Who could pay their debt for them?

The Greeks had a word for the price or payment it took to free someone from a huge debt or liability. That word was *lytron* (LOO tron). If a person were captured and forced into slavery, for instance, someone would have to pay a lytron to free him. If a person fell hopelessly into debt and sold himself to his creditors, it would take a very rich relative to pay the lytron for his deliverance. But who could pay the lytron for our sins?

Jesus announced it clearly in Mark 10:45 and Matthew 20:28. He had come to pay the ransom; he would give his life as the lytron payment. One sinless life to die the death of many sinners—this would pay the price demanded by divine justice.

So the greatest debt of all was paid—not with silver or gold or U.S. treasury notes. Jesus paid the lytron (1 Pet 1:18) with his blood.

# RAPTURE

We're going to talk about the "rapture" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, but we're going to take the long way to get there. The Greek word for "caught up" in this verse is *harpazo* (har PAHDZ oh). (The Latin translation uses the word *rapio*, from which our word "rapture" comes.)

In the word *harpazo* are stories of love and war, acts of violence and rescue. Homer tells how Paris "seized" lovely Helen from ancient Sparta and carried her off to Troy, starting the famous Trojan War. Herodotus tells how an Egyptian princess was "kidnapped" by merchant sailors. Elsewhere, a mountain lion "catches" a heifer in its powerful jaws; a storm "carries off" a ship and its crew. So often is the word associated with violent plunder that men who "carry off" are known as robbers (see Matt 12:29).

But by the time of the New Testament the word began to have softer overtones. Sinners can be "snatched" out of the fire in an act of rescue (Jude 23). When a dragon tries to devour a male child, the baby is "snatched up" to the throne of God (Rev 12:5). The word is even used by Paul to tell how a man he knew was "caught up" to the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2). This brings us very close to the idea of "rapture."

Before we return to the "rapture" passage, however, we should consider one more ancient use of *harpazo*. Hippocrates, known as the Father of Medicine, describes a magnet as "a stone which snatches up iron." What an interesting and beautiful picture it makes to think that when Jesus returns we will be irresistibly drawn to him, "caught up" to meet him in the clouds.

# RECKON

In honor of the April income tax deadline, let's talk about *logizomai* (log GIDZ oh my). This is the word used by Aristotle to describe the ancient equivalent of conducting an audit. It was a common accounting term with all kinds of applications.

To begin with, *logizomai* meant to count the value of something, or to calculate the interest on a loan. Then, it meant to make an entry of that amount into a ledger. A debt would be charged against a person, while an amount received would be credited to his account. If they had only had computers back then, we could just translate the term compute.

Now, where does all this tie in with the New Testament? First of all, we find out that God is willing not to count our transgressions and not to charge them against us. "Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin" (Rom 4:8). This was made possible because Jesus was willing to be charged with our guilt, and was then himself "reckoned with transgressors" (Luke 22:37). "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor 5:19).

The generosity of the heavenly bookkeeping system seems to surprise some people, but God's calculations are not some kind of "new math." In fact, the divine approach to accounting was demonstrated as far back as Abraham. Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:3).

Isn't it good news that "God reckons righteousness apart from works" (Rom 4:6)? It's even better than being audited by the I.R.S., and finding out they owe you money!

# RECONCILE

Suppose I had a son who was very, very bad. One day, after he beat his mother and broke all the windows and killed the cat, he stomped out of the house and swore never to return. I searched for the naughty boy until I found him.

“Son,” I said, “now you can come home: Your mother is mostly healed, the windows are repaired, and I bought a new cat. Yours sins are taken care of—your debt is paid.”

But is the problem really solved? Can the sinner just pop back into the family? Would he even want to? What of the hostility and alienation that was the problem from the beginning?

When we look to Christ’s death on the cross, we must understand that he was doing more than just paying the bills for naughty, ungrateful rebels. He was also making the Father’s appeal to the fallen sinner: “Be reconciled!” (The Greek word for “reconcile” is *katallasso*— kah tah LAH so.)

Two important points are involved in the word reconcile. First, the word means to change enemies into friends. It means that hostility is changed to love. “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10). The magnificent appeal of Calvary was meant to draw men back to God (John 12:32).

Second, it is always man being reconciled to God; never God being reconciled to man. This is true because the problem was not with God, but with man. It was man’s debt; it was man’s hostility. The cross of Christ was God’s plan to solve both problems. “In Christ all God’s fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things...making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:21).



# REDEEMED

Marcus Licinius Crassus was the richest man in Roman history. Even though he spent enormous sums on his personal army and on the private citizens of Rome, he still had a fortune of 200 million *sestertii* (roughly equivalent to 50 million days' wages). That's why the expression is still sometimes heard, "rich as Crassus."

So how did the man make all his money? Some he took as the spoils of war; some he took from fellow Romans after he got them denounced; some he made buying and selling slaves and silver mines. But most famously, he made his fortune buying up real estate at fire sales. No—really—he bought houses when they were on fire.

If a house caught fire he bought it and all the adjoining houses from their terrified owners. Then he had his men put out the fire and added the properties to his growing fortune. He did this so many times that by the time of Julius Caesar, Crassus was said to own most of the city of Rome.

The Greek word for buying up valuable commodities is *exagorazo* (ex ah go RAHD zo). It originated in the agora, the Greek marketplace. With the prefix added, and a suffix to make it a verb, it meant "to buy up all you can of precious stuff."

Now let's follow the word into the New Testament. Paul used it in Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5 to encourage his readers to "make the most of every opportunity" (literally, "buy up time"). Since time is so valuable, we should seize it and use it every chance we get.

Paul also used the word twice in Galatians, but in a different context. He said that Christ redeemed us (bought us up) from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13). Christ seized the opportunity to buy up the fallen race of man, so that he might give us the full rights of sonship (Gal 4:5). With his own blood he bought up the commodity he loved the most—mankind.

# REPENT (1)

At the beginning of this New Year maybe it would be appropriate for us to look at some other beginnings. John the Baptist began his ministry saying, “Repent...” (Matt 3:2). Matthew records that Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent...” (Matt 4:17). And when Peter preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost, his very first command to his audience was “Repent...” (Acts 2:38). So, a good word for this year’s beginning is REPENT!

To begin, let us note that there were two Greek words sometimes translated repent. The weaker word was *metamelomai* (meh tah MEL oh my) and it meant to have a change of feeling, as when Judas “repented” of having betrayed his Lord (Matt 27:3). A better translation for this word is “to regret” or “to feel remorse.” But merely regretting a wrong action is less than real repentance. As Aristotle once noted, “Mean, good-for-nothing people are full of regret.”

The stronger word for repent was *metanoeo* (meh tah noh EH oh). This word meant to have a change of mind and action, as opposed to merely having a change of feeling. It meant to change your mind and do something about it! Plutarch, for instance, tells of “two murderers, who having spared a child, afterwards repented, and sought to slay it.” They changed their mind; they acted upon that change!

For Christians, however, repentance is always from bad to good. When Polycarp was about to be martyred, the Pro-Consul threatened him, “I have wild beasts, I will deliver you to them, unless you repent.” Polycarp replied, “Call for them, for repentance from better to worse is not allowed us.” Having once made the right “change of mind” in turning to God, Polycarp would not change back.

*(To be continued in Part Two)*

## REPENT (2)

Last month we looked at the meaning of the Greek word for repent—*metanoeo* (met tah noh EH oh). We found it to be a change of mind and action, not just a change of feeling.

But who will repent? A wise man? According to the ancient Stoic philosophers, wise men are above repentance, since repentance is an admission of being wrong. Epictetus said, “Not repenting is the mark of a wise man.”

A righteous man? According to Jesus, “righteous men have no need of repentance” (Luke 15:7). Naturally then, people who perceive themselves as wise and righteous will refuse to repent.

Who will repent? The lost man! Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). So a man must first see himself as lost before he can repent.

If a man repents, what comes next? According to the New Testament, repentance is preliminary to at least three things. First, repentance precedes faith. Every time these two words are linked in the New Testament, repentance comes first (cf. Mark 1:5; Acts 20:21; Heb 6:1). Before a man can really make the commitment of life (faith) to Jesus Christ, he must first give up on himself (repentance).

Second, repentance precedes worthy fruit. Early preachers insisted that those who repented had to show it in the way they lived (Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20). If there was no change in lifestyle, there was no repentance.

Third, repentance precedes forgiveness of sin. While forgiveness of sin is said to result from a number of things, scripturally, one thing stands out above the rest. More often than the blood, more often than baptism, more often than believing, it is repentance that is linked with forgiveness.

Remember the words of our Lord, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5).

# REPROVE

The defendant has offered his alibi. The skilled prosecutor rises to cross-examine. With probing questions and convincing arguments he relentlessly uncovers the truth. The evil wretch is exposed—proved wrong—shown the undeniable error of his way. He has been “reproved.” (Greek: *elengcho*—eh LENG ko). *Elengcho* was not merely to reply to an opponent, but to refute him. It was to rebuke him with such effectiveness as to bring him under conviction and to summon him to repentance.

It may not be pleasant to “reprove” a wrongdoer, but it is sometimes the necessary duty of God’s servant. Note the following instances—all of which use the same Greek word for “reprove”: John the Baptist “showed Herod how wrong he was” for taking his brother’s wife (Luke 3:19). Because the Cretans were lazy gluttons, Titus was to “take them to task” (Titus 1:13). Timothy was told to “expose in public” those who persisted in sin (1 Tim 5:20). Elders must be ready to “show the error of” those who contradict sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). Even a dumb ass was used to “rebuke” Balaam for his folly and transgression (2 Pet 2:16).

It is the task of the Holy Spirit to “bring conviction” and “prove the world wrong” (John 16:8). It is the task of the preacher to proclaim the Spirit’s message and thus “convince” or “convict” those who hear (2 Tim 4:2). It is the task of every Christian to “expose” the unfruitful works of darkness with the light of truth (Eph 5:11-13).

Let us follow the example of our Lord, who said, “As many as I love, I reprove” (Rev 3:19).

# RESTORATION

What can you do for a bad case of pleurisy? (That's a painful inflammation of the lining around the lungs.) According to Aretaeus of Cappadocia, a famous Greek physician of the second century A.D., there were two important steps.

First, the patient should be bled. A small cut on the inner bend of the left elbow works best. Second, a diet of raw eggs mixed with turpentine should be given, perhaps with pig brains on the side. (Do not try this treatment at home.)

Then the patient should be watched carefully. Usually, he will die. If matters take a favorable turn, there will be "a profuse hemorrhage" from the nostrils and a coughing up of phlegm. Then, if the patient sleeps, the convalescence is secure.

The Greek word used in the medical books of Aretaeus for "convalescence" was a long one: *apokatastasis* (ah paw kah TAH stah siss). It meant the "restoration" of a previous healthy state. In legal terms, it was the return of hostages to their own cities or the return of property to its rightful owners. In politics, it was the reconstitution of political order. In general, it was just making everything right again.

In the New Testament the word is used only once. In Acts 3:21 Peter preached at the Beautiful Gate of the temple that Jesus must remain in heaven until "the restoration of all things," as God promised long ago through his holy prophets. It appears that heaven has a "restoration movement" of its own!

One day the great Physician will make this sick old creation get well. One day the captives will be free in their heavenly home, the new Jerusalem. One day the political kingdoms of this world will fall, and there will be an everlasting kingdom with God and Jesus on the throne. That's an *apokatastasis* worth waiting for!

# REVELATION

It was a grim and grisly act, even for a barbarian. King Astyages (grandfather of Cyrus) was punishing his subject Harpagus for disobedience. He killed the man's son, boiled his flesh, and fed it to the unwitting man at a banquet. Then the king presented him with a basket. When Harpagus uncovered it, he found the head, hands, and feet of his son.

This word “uncover” (*apokalupto*—ah po kah LOOP toe) would later be the word “reveal” in the New Testament. Prior to the first century the word was rarely used in a religious or theological sense. It simply meant to take the cover off something. A second story from antiquity will add to our understanding.

One day Socrates was challenging Protagoras, another philosopher, to prove his belief that what is good and pleasant is the ultimate virtue. Annoyed by the man's reluctance to take a firm position, Socrates said, “Come, my good Protagoras, uncover your mind. Do you share the view of most people, or do you have another?”

With these two typical uses in mind, let us consider the New Testament meaning of “uncover” or “reveal.” What did Paul mean when he said he was not handed the gospel by any man, nor was he taught it; rather, that he received it by “revelation”? (Gal 1:12) Just what is meant by the word “revelation”? I wonder if it would not clarify our thinking to put it this way: “revelation” is uncovering the mind of God.

The focus of the word “revelation” is on what is being uncovered. Thus, the revelation of the gospel is not about the means by which it was communicated to Paul, nor the means by which Paul received it. The focus is on the source from which it came. Paul's gospel was truth—emanating from the uncovered mind of God.

# REVILE

Agamemnon, king of the Greeks, was discouraged. He had come with a powerful army to conquer Troy, but this day the battle had gone badly. His men were retreating in panic to their ships. Fearful of what the dawn might bring, with 50,000 Trojan warriors eager to press their attack against him, the Greek king was in despair. “Let us flee with our ships to our dear native land,” he said, “for no more is there hope.”

His captains sat silent in their grief for a good while. Finally, Diomedes stood to speak. “O king,” he said, “once you reviled my valor and said I was no man of war but a weakling. But even if you and your ships flee, I and those who stay will lay waste Troy.” Emboldened by his brave example, others also began to speak up. At length they all recovered their courage, and in the end they won the war.

Out of this ancient story our attention is drawn to the word “revile” or “heap insult on.” The Greek word is *oneidizo* (oh nay DID zo). It could also be translated “to cover with shame.” In the Mediterranean world, where shame and honor were so important to a man, this word packed quite a punch. It meant that in the eyes of the world, the man was disgraced.

But Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you” (Matt 5:11). He himself willingly accepted insults (Rom 15:3) and did not try to retaliate when they heaped insults on him at his crucifixion (Matt 27:44). The writer of Hebrews urges us to join Jesus “outside the camp” of personal security, “bearing the disgrace he bore” (Heb 13:13). In the Christian value system we should, like Moses, regard “disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than all the treasures of Egypt” (Heb 11:26).

# RIGHTEOUS (1)

“There is none righteous, not even one.”

Such was Paul’s paraphrase in Romans 3:11 of the ancient assertion of Ecclesiastes 7:20, “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.”

The Greek word for “righteous” is *dikaios* (DIH ky oss). For writers in classical Greek the righteous man was the man who “observed social rules; fulfilled his obligations; did his duty to the gods.” In that setting the word had to do with being decent and civilized.

For God’s people in the Old Testament, however, being merely civilized was not enough. They had the Torah, God’s law revealed in written form. Therefore, the word “righteous” came to focus almost entirely on keeping that law. Only when a man did his obligations to God could he be called “righteous” or “in the right.” Those who failed to keep their obligations were called “the wicked” or “the unfaithful.”

But the Old Testament did not always see being “righteous” as an impossible goal. Noah, for instance, “was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time” (Gen 6:9). When the Psalmist said, “Surely, O Lord, you bless the righteous” (Ps 5:12) and “The Lord loves the righteous” (Ps 146:8), he did not imagine a group to which no persons could belong.

Even so, no one was totally righteous; no one never sinned at all.

Except God. “The Lord is righteous in all his ways” (Ps 145:17). God is righteous in every sense: he keeps every promise and fulfills every covenant obligation. And just as the Father is completely in the right, so is Jesus Christ the Son. He fulfilled every obligation; he did his duty to the Father. He alone—Jesus Christ the Righteous—is able to atone for our sins and speak to the Father in our defense (1 John 2:1-2).



## RIGHTEOUS (2)

Ancient Athens periodically held public votes to decide which citizens should be banished. If a person's name was written on enough clay shards, he was "ostracized" and sent into exile for ten years. On one such occasion, a man handed a blank shard to Aristides, not knowing who he was. He urged him to banish the person named Aristides simply because, "I am tired of hearing him everywhere called 'the righteous.'"

In our previous study we determined that for the Jews, "the righteous" were the people who kept God's laws. While no one except God is completely righteous, they understood what it meant for a man to be righteous in a relative sense. Some, like the Pharisees, took great pride in achieving this kind of righteousness.

It was most upsetting, therefore, when Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20). What did "righteous" mean to Jesus?

Many people are called "righteous" in the Gospels: Joseph, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon, Abel, Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus himself and God. Jesus spoke often of "the righteous," using the term to refer to God's people who kept God's laws. God sends rain, for instance, on "the righteous and the unrighteous." Jesus said that many prophets and "righteous men" had longed for the Messiah. But Jesus condemned the Pharisees, who on the outside appeared to be righteous and decorated the tombs of the righteous, but on the inside were full of hypocrisy and wickedness. So righteous people did exist, but they weren't the Pharisees.

Jesus twice clearly indicated whom he considered to be "the righteous." In Luke 14 Jesus taught his followers to befriend the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. In doing so they could look forward to being "repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Similarly, in Matthew 25 Jesus described the scene at Judgment Day. The righteous—those who reached out to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the needy, the sick, and the imprisoned—will be welcomed into the eternal kingdom.

So, in partial answer to our original question, for Jesus the "righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees" is an actual goodness, not merely something superficial. For the rest of our answer, however, we must wait for Righteous: Part 3.

## RIGHTEOUS (3)

In Part 1 we established that originally to be “righteous” was to do one’s duty, to do the right thing. For God and for the Jew in the Old Testament, this meant to keep covenant obligations. In Part 2 we discussed what the Gospels mean by “righteous.” People who keep God’s laws from the heart and do good to their fellow man will be rewarded “at the resurrection of the righteous” (Lk 14:14; Mt 25:37).

Now we shall see what some of the rest of the New Testament means by “righteous.” As it turns out, our best efforts to keep the law of Moses and to do good are not enough to commend us to God as “righteous.” Paul spoke on his first missionary journey about the things that men “could not be justified from by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). Later he made it even more emphatic: “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law” (Rom 3:20).

So we must be “righteous” in a way that goes beyond the level of good people in the Old Testament and beyond the ritual religiosity of the Pharisees. We must be able to withstand the scrutiny of the One who “is righteous in all his ways” (Ps 145:17). How can a perfect God look at a less-than-perfect human and pronounce him “righteous”? (For if God were to call an unrighteous man “righteous,” this would put God himself in the wrong.)

But God had a plan, all along, by which he could save us. He could be both “righteous” and “the One who makes righteous” at the same time (Rom 3:26). Beginning with Abraham — long before the Law was given—God declared that faith would be reckoned (credited, computed, counted, calculated) as righteousness (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3).

This is the right-standing from God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:22). He is God’s chosen One, and “The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame” (Rom 9:33).

# SAVE

Behind our word “save” lies an interesting word in the original Greek (*sozo*—SODE zo). Besides the obvious meaning of “rescue,” this word *sozo* was also used of healing and making whole.

One day Jairus, the ruler of a synagogue, fell at Jesus’ feet. “My daughter is dying,” he cried. “Make her well again!” The word he used was *sozo* (Mark 5:23). Jesus and a great crowd set off for Jairus’ house. Among the crowd was a woman who had suffered a flow of blood for twelve years. “If I can touch even the garment of Jesus,” she thought, “I will be made whole” (Mark 5:28). The word she used was *sozo*.

When Jesus “saved” these two people he made them whole. They were rescued from affliction and restored to proper health. Similarly, salvation means being rescued from sin AND being restored to wholeness. Zaccheus is another case in point. After he met Jesus and also got his shady finances in order, Jesus said that salvation (wholeness) had come to his house (Luke 19:9).

Unfortunately, not everyone wants this kind of salvation. They want to be rescued, but that’s all. They want to be forgiven, but no more. They have no real interest in being “made whole” and getting their entire lifestyle made right. They want to pick up their ticket to heaven but stay as long as possible in the present kind of life, which they really prefer.

What if Jesus had saved Jairus’ daughter from dying, but left her just as sick as before? She would not die—but neither could she really live. She needed more than an escape from death; she needed to be made whole. And so do we.

# SCYTHIAN

Barbarian, Scythian, slave—all are united with us in Christ Jesus (Col. 3:11). Barbarians I know, and slaves I know, but what is a *Scythian*? (SITH ee un) If our brothers in Christ include some Scythians, maybe we should learn more about this branch of the heavenly family tree.

Several centuries before Christ, the Scythians swept westward out of southern Russia. They plundered and killed, driving out even the barbaric Cimmerians. Herodotus tells us that the Scythian soldier would drink the blood of the first man he killed in battle. He would cut off the heads of all those he killed and present them to his king. (If he brought no heads, he forfeited his share of the plunder.) Afterwards the Scythian would remove the scalp from each skull, scrape the scalp clean, and soften it for use as a napkin-cloth. They liked to adorn themselves and their horses with the scalps and human hides of their enemies. The skulls of their most hated enemies were turned over, sawed off, and used as drinking cups. A great warrior among the Scythians could really host a fine banquet, boasting of his exploits over each guest's goblet! It is little wonder that Josephus later wrote of them, "They delight in murdering people and differ very little from wild beasts."

So how did the early church handle the Scythian problem? Did they dare to be known as friends of the lowest of all the barbarians? An early statement from Justin Martyr gives us the answer: "Even if someone be a Scythian...if he has knowledge of God and Christ and keeps the eternal ordinances...he is God's friend."

Well, Scythians, welcome to the family!

# SEAL

In my office desk is a treasured souvenir from a trip to Taiwan a few years ago. It is my very own “chop,” a small square seal that makes my official stamp of identification. The use of a chop is widespread in East Asia; in China and Japan it is commonly used instead of a signature on legal documents.

In ancient Mesopotamia the use of a personal seal dates back to at least 2000 years before Christ. Important people in the Old Testament used a seal to give authority to their documents (see Gen 41:42; Esther 3:10). When they pressed their seal against warm wax or soft clay, it made an official imprint (see Job 38:14). Both the engraved device and the imprint or inked image it left were called a “seal.”

Herodotus, the ancient Greek writer known as the Father of History, assured his readers that in Babylon every man carried a seal and a staff. Soon the Greeks and the Romans—indeed, the entire Mediterranean world—were using some kind of seal. An owner used a seal to mark his personal possessions, his livestock, and his slaves. A seller put his seal on a bill of sale to mark it as authentic. A king placed his seal on every royal decree to give it imperial authority. A priest examined and approved an animal for sacrifice, then marked it with a seal.

The Greek verb that means “I seal” is *sphragizo* (sfrah GID zo). In the New Testament the Father “placed his seal of approval” on the Son, giving him divine authority (John 6:27). On all of us as believers, God has “set his seal of ownership” by putting the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13). This seal, the indwelling presence of the Spirit, means we are stamped as belonging to God. In the day of redemption our seal will mark us as heirs (Eph 4:30), while all those who do not have God’s seal will face punishment (see Rev 7:3 and 9:4). What a blessing and privilege to be stamped, sealed, and certified as the children of God!

# SEND (1)

At least a dozen different Greek words are translated “send” in the New Testament. The two most common words are both found in John 20:21, “As the Father has sent (*apostello*—ah po STELL oh) me, so send (*pempo*—PEM po) I you.” The word *apostello* is especially used in John’s gospel when the one sent has an official, authoritative capacity, or when the one sent is himself the object of faith and love. A later article will deal with this word.

The word *pempo*, as applied by Jesus to his disciples in this verse, focuses our attention more on the Sender than on those who are sent. A brief study of the use of *pempo* in John’s gospel clarifies what it really means to be sent to do God’s will. The following verses describe how Jesus himself was sent (*pempo*) and apply also to the way in which all of us are sent. When someone is sent, he is to:

- Bring honor to God (5:23)
- Produce belief in God (5:24)
- Work the works of God (9:4)
- More importantly, the one who is sent must realize, as Jesus did, that it is:
  - Not his own will (6:38)
  - Not his own teaching (12:49)
  - Not his own words (14:24)
  - Not his own glory (7:18)
- He that is sent, then, is:
  - Not greater than his master (13:16)
  - Not known by the world (15:21)
  - Not alone (8:29)

Jesus was a faithful servant who did the will of the Father who sent him. Perhaps these verses which describe Jesus’ faithful servanthood can teach us what Jesus had in mind when he said, “As the Father has sent me, so send I you.”

## SEND (2)

In our last article we looked at *pempo*, a word meaning, “I send.” This word was used to focus attention on the sender and the act of sending, while minimizing the personal importance of the one sent.

Now we are going to look at the other word for “send,” which is *apostello* (ah po STELL oh). This word was first used of a ship or naval expedition which was sent out. Later it described a band of colonists sent overseas. It came to be used generally of dispatching some mission or messengers. In all its early uses *apostello* included (a) an express commission and (b) being sent overseas.

By the time of the New Testament the overseas element had drained out of *apostello*, but the express commission was all the more central to the word. When the church in Antioch sent out the first Christian missionaries, the name for them was *apostolos*, the noun form of *apostello* (Acts 14:14). When the church in Philippi sent a man to serve Paul in Rome, the man was called their *apostolos* (Phil 2:25). He was a man on a mission.

Even more important in the New Testament is the special use of *apostello/apostolos* to describe the twelve men chosen by Jesus to be sent forth on his mission (Mark 3:14-19). As personal representatives of their Sender, they exercised unique authority in the early church. What they bound on earth was bound in heaven (Matt 16:19) and what they forgave, God forgave (John 20:23). They fulfilled an earlier saying of the Jewish Rabbis, “The one sent by a man is as the man himself.”

But the most important *apostolos* was Jesus Christ himself (Heb 3:1). He was sent forth from heaven with the commission to represent God to man. In John’s gospel, in particular, we repeatedly find the word *apostello* describing Jesus as sent to be the object of our faith and love. “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (John 6:29).

# SHEPHERD

“No occupation in the world is more disreputable than that of the shepherd.” Such was the surprising judgment of the Pharisaic Rabbi of Jesus’ day. Shepherds were listed in the rabbi’s official lists of thieving and cheating occupations, were assumed to be dishonest, and were generally despised by the religious leaders. A shepherd could not be a judge, nor was he allowed to be a witness in a court of law. Pious people were forbidden to buy wool, milk, or kids from them, since such would undoubtedly be stolen merchandise. One rabbi even asked with amazement how, since shepherds were so despicable, one could explain the fact that God is called “my shepherd” in Psalm 23.

But Jesus identified with the lowly shepherd (*poimen*—poi MANE). The first visitors to his humble nativity were shepherds. More than once the hero of his parables was a simple shepherd. But most of all Jesus portrayed himself as a shepherd—the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. Jesus was ready and willing to cast his lot with despised shepherds and sinners, for it was they whom he cared to save!

And one thing more. In his church, Jesus established an office of leadership and placed privilege and responsibility in the hands of those who held this office. These men of honor were called elders, overseers...and shepherds.



# SHRINK

Jeans shrink, sweaters shrink, and sometimes people shrink! The New Testament, as we will see, warns about a spiritual shrinkage that we must avoid at all costs.

The Greek word for “shrink” was *hypostello* (hoo poh STELL oh). In military language it meant to retreat. In everyday usage it meant to duck down and hide. Perhaps most vivid of all, it was used in Greek to describe how a dog tucks his tail between his legs and slinks away.

The New Testament gives us three clear-cut areas where we must not shrink. First, we must not shrink back in the full, frank preaching of the Gospel. Paul could say to the elders from Ephesus that he did not shrink from declaring anything profitable, nor shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 27). In a day of compromises, we need preachers who will not shrink!

Second, we must not shrink from fellowship with God’s people. We must learn the lesson Cephas (Simon Peter) learned when he shrank back and separated himself from the Gentile Christians in Antioch (Gal 2:12). Our fellowship must cross over the lines drawn by race or nationality. We must welcome all brothers on the same basis that they have been welcomed by Christ (Rom 15:7).

Third, we must not shrink in faith. Just before Hebrews gives us the Hall of Heroes in chapter eleven, we read these words: “My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no delight in him.” Then comes the stirring challenge: “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls” (Heb 10:38, 39).

May God make us shrink-proof!

# SLAVE

Why are we afraid of the word “slave”? The common Greek word for a slave (*doulos*, pronounced DOO loss) was used over 120 times in the New Testament, but many English translations never say “slave” even once. Instead, the more pleasant-sounding word “servant” is used. Perhaps we avoid the term “slave” because it brings up unpleasant memories in history—bondage, loss of freedom, inhumanity.

But if slaves in recent centuries were treated shamefully, how was it for slaves in the first century? Here’s the picture: Roman slavery was at its worst at the birth of Christ. Masters had the right to torture or kill their slaves. As Aristotle had put it, a slave was only a “tool that is alive.” Not until the second century did the emperor Hadrian require the masters to get permission from the court before killing a slave. Not until the fourth century did the emperor Constantine outlaw the practice completely. Even Constantine, however, said it was all right if a slave died accidentally as the result of a good flogging!

Personal freedom was the prized possession of the Greeks. They so valued the right to choose to live as they pleased that they felt only contempt and revulsion for the position of a slave. The slave was one who:

- a. Had lost his personal rights
- b. Was owned by someone else
- c. Was compelled to do the will of his master
- d. Was totally dependent on his master to supply his needs

Consider then, that God’s own Son emptied himself and took on the form of a “slave” (Phil 2:7). Consider that Paul was proud to call himself a “slave” of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:1). Consider that if Jesus is really your Lord, then you are really his “slave.” Our picture of a slave, then, is a servant bound in chains—the chains of love.

# SUBMIT

In the second century there is a satirical philosopher named Lucian who travels throughout Greece, amusing and enlightening his audiences. In one story he describes a scene where a soldier's fat assistant picks up a shield and finds a place on the front row of battle, while the soldier himself is "posted behind" him in the second row. The lucky man thus is protected "in the shelter of" his fat friend.

In this story the Greek word for "posted behind" or "protected in the shelter of" is *hypotasso* (hoo po TAH so). It is a combination of *hypo*, meaning "under," and *tasso*, meaning "I set in position." It was often used to describe how soldiers were "set under" the authority of their commanding officers. As seen in the opening paragraph, however, *hypotasso* can also include the idea of being set "under the protection of."

In the very next sentence of his story, Lucian says this is how Ajax shielded his half-brother Teucer in the famous battle for the city of Troy. As Lucian puts it, when the arrows are flying a man like Ajax "exposes himself to protect his friend; for he prefers to save his friend rather than himself."

In the New Testament *hypotasso* appears in two well-known passages. In Romans 13:1 the citizen is to be "hypotasso-ed" to the government; in Ephesians 5:22/Colossians 3:18 the wife is to be "hypotasso-ed" to her husband. In both situations the person is to "submit" to the higher authority; in both cases the person also comes "under the protection of" that authority.

That is why in the case of the wife and husband, for instance, the husband is not told to get his wife under control, but to love her and take care of her. The wife is to put herself under his leadership and protection; the husband is to sacrifice himself for her wellbeing. Like Christ, he would rather save his bride, the one who has put herself "under his protection," than to save himself.

# SUPPLY

Let's start with the word choreography. We'll work our way back into ancient Greek theatre, and from there we'll move forward to the New Testament.

Choreography comes from the "chorus" and the movements "written" for them as they walked across the stage and narrated parts of the story. The chorus—or choir—was an essential part of every play and festival. The expense of hiring the chorus was covered by a wealthy patron of the arts. Out of this came the Greek word *choreo* (kor REH oh), meaning to "provide the chorus."

As time passed, a prefix was added to strengthen the word, and it became *epichoreo* (eh pea kor REH oh). In this form it moved from theatre to the language of marriage contracts, where it meant "to provide an ample supply." Such contracts, which have been found among papyrus documents, have terminology like this: "The man who marries must supply to his wife the necessities of life, according to his ability." (In a divorce petition, one man complained that he had to supply his wife's needs beyond his ability!)

Now let's look at *epichoreo* in the New Testament, remembering its background with wealthy patrons of the arts and devoted husbands. Out of his infinite resources, God has become our patron and provider, generously giving us more than an ample supply. To start with, God supplies us with his Holy Spirit (Gal 3:5). Then, "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness" (2 Cor 9:10). Finally, God will see to it that we are supplied with a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom. From beginning to end, in every generation and millennium, it is God who supplies our needs.

# SURPASSING

Plato observed that every life has its share of pains and pleasures. His definition of a healthy life vs. a diseased life was simply this: “in health the pleasures exceed the pains, but in disease the pains exceed the pleasures.” With this in mind, Plato set about to create laws for a republic in which every man could live this more pleasant, healthy life. Unfortunately for Plato, his utopia never happened.

The Greek word Plato used for “exceed” was *hyperballo* (hoo per BALL oh). Originally, it meant “I throw over,” or “I throw above and beyond.” The noun form, *hyperbole* (hoo per bo LAY), eventually became our English word “hyperbole,” which now means an excessive overstatement.

In the New Testament, however, *hyperballo* and *hyperbole* were still being used as Plato used them: to describe something that is clearly “above and beyond” something else. For instance, Paul said the glory of the new covenant is “above and beyond” the glory of the old (2 Cor 3:10). That is why our light and momentary troubles are producing in us an eternal glory that “far outweighs” them all (2 Cor 4:17). (Paul’s words in this verse were literally, “produce a weight according to a hyperbole unto a hyperbole.”)

It is no “hyperbole” to say that the kingdom of God brings us many things that are clearly “above and beyond” what we could ever get on our own. We have God’s surpassing grace (2 Cor 9:14), incomparably great power (Eph 1:19), and the love that surpasses knowledge (Eph 3:19). Best of all, we can look forward to the coming ages when God will show us the incomparable riches of his grace through his kindness expressed through Christ Jesus (Eph 2:7).

Plato may not have achieved his utopia, but we shall certainly be given ours!

# TAKE CAPTIVE

“To the victors belong the spoils” was the slogan of Andrew Jackson and his party after he won the presidency of the United States. As winner of the election, why shouldn't he use every opportunity to give political plums to his friends and benefactors? If the others objected, just let them remember: they were the losers.

The right of the victor to strip the spoils of war from the defeated enemy was certainly a standard practice in antiquity. Homer told how Odysseus saw a man coming to “strip the corpses” after a battle. Homer also told of the hero Hector who saw his cousin fall in battle and tried to prevent the enemy from “stripping him of his armor.”

In a similar fashion it was right and proper to plunder the ships of a defeated navy. For years after a war, it was also acceptable to plunder the merchant ships of the enemy. (The line between noble warfare and greedy piracy was often blurred.) A marauding captain could steal the goods, kidnap the crew, and sell his captives into slavery.

The word for this kind of plundering was *sule* (SOO lay). The thing that made *sule* different from outright theft was the pretext that it was justified. Those who practiced it would rationalize their deed, claiming it was the right thing to do. To kidnap a person as *sule* was called *sulagogeo* (soo lah go GEH oh), literally, “I bring away as plunder.”

This is the word Paul used when he warned his readers, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy” (Col 2:8). Such a false teacher was no better than a pirate. He was capturing people whom the truth had set free, only to sell them back into slavery to error. Every Christian needs to watch out such pirate/philosophers who strip, rob, kidnap and plunder. We are not spoils for the enemy; we are soldiers for the victorious Christ!

# TAKE HEART

Two million people were trapped between the sea and the approaching Egyptian army. Escape was humanly impossible. In that moment of supreme crisis, Moses cried out to the people, “Fear not! Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord!” (Ex 14:13).

The Greek word used there in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament was *tharsei* (THAR say), and it meant “to dare to be bold,” “to take courage,” “to replace fear with hope.” It was like a bugle call in a time of emergency. It was a cry of hope in a crisis: “Take heart!” Repeatedly through the Old Testament, God’s people were encouraged to take heart, based on who God is and what God would do. “Fear not, O Zion...the Lord your God is in your midst” (Zeph 3:16-17). “Take courage...I am with you...My Spirit is abiding in your midst; Do not fear!” (Hag 2:4-5).

Jesus’ disciples were well acquainted with *tharsei* in their Greek scriptures. They knew it meant something like, “Cheer up! Your Lord is here to help!” One night on the Sea of Galilee they were watching in terror as a figure approached in the darkness, walking on the water. Then they heard the figure speak, “Take courage, it is I” (Matt 14:27). Now *tharsei* is on the lips of Jesus.

Another day a helpless paralytic heard Jesus say, “Take courage, my son, your sins are forgiven” (Matt 9:2). A hopeless woman was told by Jesus, “Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well” (Matt 9:22). Blind Bartimaeus lived in utter despair until Jesus came to Jericho and they summoned the blind man, saying, “Take heart, arise! He is calling for you” (Mark 10:49).

So it’s okay now. God is indeed in our midst, and because of that it’s going to be all right. Whether we face the Red Sea with Moses or the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus there is hope. “Be of good cheer (*tharsei*), for I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

# TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

Phrynichus staged such a successful play that it almost ruined him. It was a drama called, “The Fall of Miletus,” and it was performed in ancient Athens. The people of Athens were very distraught over the recent fall of their sister city, and so Phrynichus thought they might be impressed by a tear-jerking production on that topic.

His play was so successful that the whole theatre broke into weeping. Then the city fathers fined Phrynichus a thousand drachmae “for bringing to mind a calamity” that touched everyone so deeply. They also forbade forever the acting of that play. And that is how Phrynichus was so successful it almost ruined him.

In ancient Greek theatre, the playwright had several jobs. He wrote the play, taught everyone their lines, and led the chorus as a main performer. The Greek word for teaching and leading the performance was *didasko* (dih DAH sko) and the person who did this was called *didaskalos* (dih DAH skah loss). By the time this word reached the first century, it had lost most of its theatrical flavor, but it still carried a key idea: the didaskalos showed his students how to do something by doing it himself.

In the New Testament the word didaskalos is translated “teacher” and is one of the most common titles of Jesus. When he arrived in Bethany in John 11, for example, Martha ran and told her sister simply, “The teacher is here.” When various leaders challenged Jesus with three hard questions in Matthew 22, each time they began by saying, “Teacher....”

In the finest tradition of the word, Jesus was a teacher who taught by showing and by living what he taught. In John 13 he washed his disciples’ feet in lowly servanthood. Then he said to his student/disciples, “You call me Teacher and Lord, and well you say, for I am. If then I, the Lord and Teacher washed your feet, you also ought to wash the feet of one another.” Jesus has taught us what it really means to be a teacher.



# TEMPLE

Two men went up to the “temple” (*hieron*—he eh RON) to pray. But did you know that the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:10) were not allowed in the actual temple building? They had to stand in the temple courtyard outside. This Greek word for “temple,” *hieron*, included all the holy courtyards and buildings, but never denoted the temple itself.

Two women were found in the “temple”: the prophetess Anna (Luke 2:37) and the widow with her two mites (Luke 12:41ff). These women were not only forbidden to enter the actual temple building; they could not even enter the courtyard of the men. Their praying and giving was confined to a courtyard farther out, but still called part of the *hieron*.

A few Gentiles went to the “temple” to pray, but they were kept in an outer courtyard even farther away. They were forbidden, on penalty of immediate death, to come any closer to the temple building itself. When Jesus twice cleansed the “temple,” it was actually this outer Gentile courtyard which the Jewish merchants had defiled, changing the “house of prayer for all nations” into a den of thieves.

The N.T. word for the temple building itself was *naos* (nah OSS). It derives from a word meaning “to dwell” and referred to God’s holy home, which only the priests could enter. It had special reference to the inner “Holy of Holies” where in O.T. times the glory of God dwelt above the Ark of the Covenant. This most sacred sanctuary was entered only once a year by the high priest alone. By N.T. times, however, this sanctuary was no longer the special dwelling place of God. The ark was gone; the glory was gone; the room was completely empty (Josephus, Wars 5, 5).

Yet God does have a dwelling place on earth. Our bodies are the temple of God’s Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19) and we Christians are collectively the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16). Moreover, we are God’s temple not just in a general sense (*hieron*), but as his very dwelling place, his sacred sanctuary (*naos*). We are the living stones (1 Pet 2:5) that are joined together into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph 2:21). We are the *naos* of the living God! (2 Cor 6:16)

# TEST

The priests of ancient Egypt had the task of examining every white bull offered as a sacrifice to Apis, the bull-god of Memphis. Is any hair black? Is the tongue normal? Do the hairs on the tail grow naturally? Only when the bull was thoroughly tested would they mark it “approved” for their god.

The Greek word for this kind of testing was *dokimazo* (dock ih MAHDZ oh). This same word was just right to describe what the assayer did, when he tested gold or silver in a crucible to see if it was genuine (as in 1 Pet 1:7). Likewise, when a man sought public office in Athens he was examined to see if he was fit for the job (as in 1 Tim 3:10). Even the oxen of Jesus parable need to be proved, to find out if they could pull a plow (Luke 14:19).

In the testing process, however, some things were found to be worthless. Then they were called *adokimos* (ah DOCK ih moss). Plato spoke thus of counterfeit coins and Aristotle described the Athenian way of branding the jaw of a horse found unfit for service. In the New Testament, things “tested and found worthless” include: the reprobate mind (Rom 1:28), the castaway preacher (1 Cor 9:27), the counterfeit faith of corrupt men (2 Tim 3:8), and the rejected land that produces only thorns and briers (Heb 6:8). Lest we ourselves should ever be found “detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed” (Titus 1:16), let us examine ourselves and hold more tightly to the faith (2 Cor 13:5-6; 1 Cor 11:28). Then in that day when our works are tested by fire (1 Cor 3:13), we will have nothing to fear.

# TOGETHER

Herod the Great had family problems. Maybe part of the trouble was that he had ten wives, and each of them wanted her own son to inherit the kingdom. Herod deposed one wife, killed another, and eventually had some sons executed as well. Oddly enough, that did not seem to solve his problems.

Around 14 B.C. Herod had a serious falling out with his son Alexander. The king of Cappadocia intervened, and achieved reconciliation—at least for a while—between father and son. Herod was happy to have matters patched up, and he was grateful to the king for helping. He gave that king rich gifts and they traveled together on a trip toward Rome.

The Greek word for together is actually a phrase, *epi to auto* (EH pea TAW au TOE). Literally, it means “upon the same.” In Luke 17:35 two women grind grain together. In 1 Cor 7:5 a husband and wife come together in sexual union. In Acts 4:26 evil rulers band together against the Lord and his people. In each of these passages the people are together in one place, and more importantly, are together in a shared purpose.

That brings us to the Book of Acts and the founding of the church. In Acts 1:15 a crowd of 120 people were “upon the same” when Judas was replaced. In Acts 2:1 the apostles were “upon the same” when the Spirit came on them at Pentecost. After the church was founded, all the believers were “upon the same”—in one place, with one purpose, sharing everything (Acts 2:44). And every day the Lord added “upon the same” those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).

This phrase, “upon the same,” became a catch-phrase for the deep unity experienced by the Christian community. It was Paul’s phrase to describe the church when it came together for the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:20) and together for worship (1 Cor 14:23).

So may every church—new or old—be “upon the same.” May believers come together in one place, heading the same direction, sharing the same task, intimately involved in one another’s lives, sharing sweet unity of purpose, lifting their hearts in worship—together.

# TOUCH

Thetis was a devoted mother. As a sea-goddess of ancient myth, she took a human lover and gave birth to Achilles. She held the infant by the heel and dipped him in the River Styx, thus giving him almost total invincibility. (The “Achilles heel” is named in his honor.)

Even when Achilles was a grown warrior, his mother was still looking out for him. As the Trojan War approached, Thetis went up Mt. Olympus to seek favors for her boy. She “clasped Zeus’s knees and held to him, clinging close,” as she begged him to manipulate the war and bring honor to her son.

The Greek word Homer used for “clasped” was *haptomai* (HOP toh my). This word is variously translated “cling to,” “attach oneself to,” “get involved with” and “touch.” A famous translation of *haptomai* in John 20:17 (KJV and ASV 1901) has Jesus saying to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection, “Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.”

The New American Standard Bible more correctly puts it, “Stop clinging to me.” There are two reasons for this improved translation. First, the word has always meant more than a mere touch. (See for example Mark 10:13-16 and 1 Cor 7:1. And in “Handle not, taste not, touch not” in Col 2:21, it is the word “handle.”) Second, it is a grammatical construction (a negative used with the present imperative) that normally means “Stop what you are doing.” As Seth Wilson liked to put it, Jesus was saying, “Unhand me, woman!” The correct picture here is Mary clinging to Jesus’ feet, just as a whole group of women would do moments later in Matthew 28:9.

The whole story of Jesus’ life, in fact, is one of meaningful touching. He put his hands on a leper, a feverish woman, and a dead man; on eyes, ears, tongues, and babies. Various people sought out Jesus to “touch” him: the sick, the crowds, a woman subject to bleeding, a sinful woman of the street.

So here’s the encouragement for today: Reach out and touch him—he’s reaching out for you!

# TRANSFORM

The view from Mt. Herman's 9,000-foot summit was spectacular, but it did not compare with the sight immediately before Peter's eyes. There stood Jesus, transfigured. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light (Matt 17:2). For this brief moment in time Jesus radiated his true glory.

The word for "transfigured" in the original Greek New Testament was *metamorphoo* (meh tah mor PHAW oh). It is from this same word that we get the word "metamorphosis," a complete change of form such as from a caterpillar to a butterfly.

Surprisingly, the two other times *metamorphoo* is used in the New Testament, it does not refer to Jesus but to us! By Jesus' power we too can be transformed—spiritually. Thus Paul charges us, "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed (*metamorphoo*) by the renewal of your minds" (Rom 12:2).

This transformation, however, does not take place all at once. 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 uses a reverse parallel to show that it is a gradual process. When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai the glory radiating from his face was a fading glory. A veil hid the gradual decline. But we, with unveiled face, behold the unfading glory of our Lord and are "being changed (*metamorphoo*) degree by degree into the same image of his glory. Finally, "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). Our transformation—our metamorphosis—will be complete!

# TRIBE

*Cleisthenes* (CLAYS thin eez) was “the father of Athenian democracy.” In 508 B.C. he revised the constitution and brought equal treatment under the law. The people of Athens loved him.

The Dorians did not. They were a collection of war-like tribes near ancient Corinth, and their time of dominating the Greek peninsula had come to an end. To put the Dorians in their place, Cleisthenes gave new names to the tribes of Greece. His own tribe he called the “Ruler-ites,” but the Dorian tribes became “the Swineites, the Ass-ites, and the Pork-ites.” Their identity in their tribes became their shame.

The Greek word for “tribe” is *phyle* (foo LAY). A phyle was a group of people that was united by location, ancestry, language, and local customs. To belong to a tribe gave people their identity, but it also made them separate from other tribes.

In the New Testament this separate identity of tribes is put to the test. In the church there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female—all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). In fact, Jesus has purchased people for God “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9) and has made them into a single kingdom.

It is to the Lord’s glory that such diversity becomes united under one Head. It is to his credit that different people have different gifts, but all for one great purpose. It is in his honor that all tribes become his tribe.

When all God’s people gather around the throne, we will be “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev 7:9). With a joyful voice we will praise God and the Lamb—as one.

# TRIUMPH

Hail the conquering hero! Titus, the son of Emperor Vespasian, had won a great victory. Jerusalem and all Palestine had fallen! When Titus returned to Rome the senate voted to honor him with a “triumph”—a special parade of high honor. Leading the procession were wagons of silver and gold, the spoils of war. Then came the captives, accompanied by huge tapestries that depicted how each battle had been won. At the end of this “triumph” parade came Titus and his father, riding together in a stately chariot. Domitian (the brother and ultimate successor of Titus) rode beside them on a magnificent steed.

The “triumph” wound its way through the city until it reached the temple of Jupiter. There, according to time-honored custom, the enemy’s general would be executed. In this case it was Simon, the son of Gioras. When the cry rang out that Simon was no more, Rome feasted through the night and celebrated Titus’s great conquest.

Little did they know that a far greater “triumph” had already taken place, following a far more important battle that was won in Jerusalem. Writing in Rome itself less than a decade earlier, Paul described how Jesus had defeated and disarmed the forces of evil at Calvary. “He made a public spectacle of them,” Paul said, “triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:15). The Greek word for having a victorious “triumph” parade was *thriambeuo* (three ahm BYOU oh).

What a spectacle, for the citizens of heaven to see the hosts of Satan stripped and defeated! What a celebration at the cry, “Satan and his power are destroyed!” (See Heb 2:14). What a triumph for the Son (and for his Father, and for the Spirit who would be his successor on earth)! How wonderful that we, too, are led in triumphal procession in Christ (2 Cor 2:14). Let heaven rejoice—the victory has been won!

# UNBREAKABLE

Demosthenes was an orator—one of the greatest orators of ancient Greece. On one occasion he thundered, “You do not need new laws; you have enough laws already! Instead, repeal the harmful ones.” In another oration, he demanded that the lawmakers rescind their vote on a new law, because they had been influenced by bribes.

The Greek word for repeal or rescind is a short one: *lyo* (LOO oh). It was also the word used by Herodotus when he recorded how on one occasion the soldiers of Sparta refused to fight, because they would not break their law against starting a war on a certain holiday. Other writers used the word in these ways: to revoke a will, to refute an argument, to violate a legal agreement, to dismantle a wall.

In the New Testament the word was used in these contexts: to break the Sabbath, to terminate the law and the prophets, to destroy the temple. And one more: it was the word used in the Greek text of John 10:35 when Jesus quoted an obscure Old Testament verse and then declared, “Scripture cannot be broken.” In Jesus’ mind, that settled it.

As we consider the power of the written word in this issue of *The Ambassador*, it is fitting to note the unmatched power and authority of God’s own written word. If the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be changed or repealed (Daniel 6:8, 15), how much more permanent and binding is the word of God? For Jesus, the best answer to every question and challenge of life was simply this: “It is written....”



# VIRTUE

What is virtue? In the earliest Greek writings virtue was most often expressed as the kind of manliness that makes a soldier brave in battle, which gives him courage to stand against the odds. A man demonstrated his virtue in his military valor.

For example, when Cyrus and the armies of Persia were fighting their way across Asia Minor, they met pockets of fierce resistance. In the plain of Xanthus the Lycians met him with virtue, as an ancient historian described it, with heroic deeds of valor. When driven back into their city, they gathered their wives, children, servants, and possessions into the citadel and set the citadel on fire. Then the men marched out to fight and die. Such was virtue in the days of old.

By the time of Socrates, however, the Greek word for virtue (*arete*—ar eh TAY) came to focus less on military courage and more on inward valor, on moral excellence. The virtue of a judge, said Socrates, is to be just; the virtue of an orator is to speak the truth. In a burst of philosophical optimism, Plato said that if only a man attains true insight into what is virtuous, he will do it.

But alas—virtue is not so easily and automatically attained! Men do not become morally pure just because they know what is virtuous. Men must come to admire and believe in the One who called them through his own glory and virtue (2 Pet 1:3) and then give diligence to add virtue to their faith in him (2 Pet 1:5). They must focus attention on whatever is virtuous (Phil 4:8) so they can show forth the virtues of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9).

So what is virtue? It is a beautiful composite of courage, valor, moral excellence, and truth. But note well this closing fact: it is one thing to be able to define it, but it is a better thing to do it!

# WAGES

“Be content with your wages,” said John the Baptist to the soldiers (Luke 3:14).

The Greek word for wages (*opsonia*—ops OH nee ah) meant literally “money to buy food.” It was a familiar military term and referred to the minimum subsistence pay which soldiers received. They had a legal right to these wages and could sue in court if not paid. After all, without this basic pay, the soldier could not live.

This word became common in the everyday writings (papyri) of the New Testament age. It was used for a policeman’s salary, money to keep a music student in school, provisions for an athlete, and the allowance given to a son living away from home. In every instance, the pay was necessary to support life.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that no soldier was expected to provide his own wages (1 Cor 9:7). Yet Paul did not demand his rightful wages from the Corinthians. Instead, he made tents (Acts 18:3) and accepted wages from other churches (2 Cor 11:8). While the pay was minimal, Paul was serving the Commander of his choice, and he was content.

The word for wages is used only one other time in the New Testament. In Romans 6:23 a commander of a different sort is in charge, but the soldier should still expect to receive his pay. (After all, how can a man live without his wages?) But the commander’s name is Sin and the deserved subsistence wage is...death!

So, soldier, make your choice! Choose your commander; expect your pay. But remember: “Be content with your wages.”

# WAILING

The king of Armenia looked across the valley at the small encampment of Roman soldiers. “If they are ambassadors, they are too many,” he said, “If they are soldiers, they are too few.” He and his men then had a good laugh at his witty little saying. The king donned his diadem, and prepared to lead his armies into what looked to be an entertaining battle. He would send the Romans home in short order!

Indeed, the Roman troops were only a small detachment, outnumbered by more than twenty to one. Early in the battle, however, the Roman cavalry managed to outflank the Armenians. With the Roman horsemen bearing down on them, the Armenians “with loud cries” of panic and terror fell into shameful retreat. The Romans carried the day, losing only five of their own men.

The Greek word for making “loud cries” of pain or panic is *alalazo* (ah lah LAHD zo). It was derived from the Middle Eastern sound of mourning, where the tongue moves back and forth rapidly across the roof of the mouth and makes a “la-la-la” sound. A similar word is *ololuzo* (oh loh LOOD zo), which is the “lo-lu-lo-lu” sound made by wailing women. As one modern writer notes, “Even yet in Palestine and Egypt the women wail both in joy and in lament, sending out through the larynx sharp wailing sounds.” Watch closely when the evening news reports the latest deaths in Gaza and you will see the women making this very sound.

In the New Testament *alalazo* is found in Mark 5:38, where the people were “wailing loudly” at the death of a little girl. It is also the word used in 1 Corinthians 13:1 for the shrill repetitive sound of a “clanging” cymbal. Significantly, the only use of *ololuzo* is in James 5:1, where the rich are told to weep and “wail” for the misery that is going to come on them. On judgment day all their wealth will do them no good. Instead, as they watch it taken away and see themselves thrown into hell, they will howl with yelps of pain and panic, wailing like women at a Palestinian funeral!

# WISDOM

“What makes a man free?” When the slave-philosopher Epictetus was asked this question, his answer was, “Knowing how to live.” Ah! But there is the problem. How shall a man know how to live?

For the ancient Greeks, the answer was wisdom (*sophia*—soh FEE ah). Wisdom was practical knowledge that comes with experience; it was knowing about life and how to do things.

They said, “The wise man is not the man who knows many things, but the man who knows what is useful.” Wisdom was the understanding of life and the understanding of self. But how shall a man get such wisdom? The “love of wisdom,” which they called *philosophia*, led the philosophers to make widely divergent pronouncements about what was truly wise. They all agreed that wisdom was essential to happiness, but who was really an authority on wisdom?

Down deep, most of them knew their inadequacy. Socrates even decided he was wiser than other men because, as he said, “I neither know nor think that I know.”

So is wisdom—and freedom and happiness—an impossible quest? Not at all. The LORD is the source of wisdom (Prov 8:23; James 3:17) and he will gladly share it with men (Prov 2:6; James 1:5). That is why people who are seeking for answers to life’s problems need Christian counselors to turn to. Scripture says, “Wisdom is found in those who take advice” (Prov 13:10), but the ones giving that advice had better be in touch with the all-wise God! The wisdom of the world is mere foolishness in God’s eyes (1 Cor 3:19). In the end, the world’s answers to life’s problems will only bring disappointment.

Are there people seeking true wisdom, and the happy freedom that comes from living life well? Let them learn to walk with Jesus, “in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden” (Col 2:3). Then they will be wise and free.

# WITNESS

This is a tale of two words. When they were young, these two Greek words grew up together in the vicinity of the courtroom. Both became important words in the first century church; both became common words in twentieth century English. The words began together, but they ended poles apart.

The first word was *martyreo* (mar tur REH oh), which meant to give testimony in court to confirm a truth. The witness who gave his testimony was called a martyr. Quite naturally, this was the word used by Jesus in Acts 1:8 when he appointed his apostles to be “witnesses” to the fact of his resurrection. Other men, such as Stephen in Acts 6 and 7, also became witnesses for Jesus. When Stephen gave his testimony before the court of the Sanhedrin, his witness cost him his life (Acts 22:20). Soon many others were to die as witnesses. Within sixty years John would write of “the blood of the witnesses (martyrs) of Jesus” (Rev 17:6). Thus, the simple word “witness” was baptized in blood and took on a wholly new aspect. For all time to come the word “martyr” would look beyond one’s testimony and see his waiting tomb.

The other word was *apologia* (ah pol oh GEE ah), which meant a formal defense spoken in court. It was a noble term, emphasizing the kind of clear statement of the truth which would lead to one’s vindication. The early defenders of the faith, like Justin Martyr and others, were known as Apologists. In this same way, 1 Peter 3:15 urges all of us to “always be ready to make a defense (apologia) to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you.”

But somewhere in the intervening centuries the word “apology” took a nasty fall. Today the word is commonly used to mean “an expression of regret for causing offense.” The most common apology is the abject admission: “I’m sorry.”

Now—which of the two words describes the development of your Christian witness? Are you ready to face fire or sword, apathy or scorn, when you witness for Jesus? Or do you make apologies for a faith of which you are ashamed? Check the statement that describes you:

I’m a Christian and I’m willing to witness and die.

I’m a Christian...and I’m sorry.

# WOMAN

“Women are greedy, inquisitive, lazy, vain, and frivolous.” At least that’s what the ancients said. The Mishnah, the book which preserves the oral traditions of the Jewish rabbis before A.D. 200, includes many such derogatory statements about women. The attitude of the Jews was typical, unfortunately, of most of the ancient world.

Other rabbinical wisdom that was preserved in the Mishnah includes the following: “Ten qab (measures) of empty-headedness have come upon the world, nine having been received by women, and one by the rest of the world.” “Happy is he whose children are males, and woe to him whose children are females.” “May the words of the Torah be burned, they should not be handed over to women.” While such statements may be quoting the worst of the rabbis, they still reflect a society in which leaders could make such statements.

So the word for this study is “woman.” The Greek word was *gyne* (guh NAY), which has come into our language in “gynecologist” (woman’s doctor) and “misogynist” (hater of women). The scripture worth contemplating is John 4:4-30. The disciples had just come back and were shocked to find Jesus talking to the Samaritan Woman. They were not surprised that he was talking to a Samaritan, nor that he was talking to a sinner. According to verse 27 they were surprised that he was talking to a woman.

Jesus did not come just to be a product of his times. He came to set things right. One of those things was to restore respect for women. Though slighted and ignored by society, women were welcomed into the church. The third chapter of Galatians shows that women come to faith (v. 26), baptism (v. 27), and salvation (v. 29) on the same terms as men. “Neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” (v. 28), means that women are equally acceptable to enter God’s family and are equally loved.

# WORSHIP

An ancient legend recorded by Herodotus (1.119) tells how the Persian subjects of King Xerxes adored him. When the king and many of his people were returning from war in Greece, a great storm at sea threatened to capsize their overcrowded ship. Learning that the ship was about to sink, a good number of the Persians bowed before their king and flung themselves into the sea to drown. By their sacrifice the king's life was saved.

When the Persians "bowed" before their king, they were following the ancient practice of putting the face to the ground (or ship's deck!) as an act of complete obeisance. The Greek word for this is *proskyneō* (pross ku NEH oh). It derives from the word *kyneo*, meaning "I kiss" and a prefix that means "toward." So *proskyneō*, in its classical usage, meant "I kiss the ground in the direction of the one I reverence."

The word for this act of reverence, humility, and adoration comes into the New Testament as the word "worship." In the literal sense many people bowed to "worship" Jesus; in Matthew alone we witness the wise men (2:11), a leper (8:2), the father of a dying girl (9:18), the mother of a demonized girl (15:25), a pleading mother (20:20), and women who clung to his feet after he arose (28:9). Typically, they "fell to the ground and worshiped him."

From these physical examples we can learn something about our worship of God. At the heart of worship is an inner spirit bowing in humble adoration before the Creator. It is the attitude of the psalmist, who said, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker" (95:6). Whatever else we may do or not do in our public worship services, the one thing that must happen is this eager bowing of our spirits before God. Even more than those ancient Persians, we have reason to say, "More than life itself, Lord, we worship you!"

# WORTHY

In ancient times money often took the form of tiny bits of gold or silver, which a man poured out and weighed in a simple scale. On one side of the scale he put a weight of known value, and on the other side he put enough gold or silver to bring the scales into balance. The amount necessary to achieve this balance was called *axios* (AHX ee oss). It meant “weighing as much; of like value; worth as much as.”

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, for instance, this word was used when Abraham bought Sarah a burial plot “for the full price” of 400 shekels of silver (Gen 23:9-16). The word was used again when David paid “the full price” of 600 shekels for a piece of ground where he built an altar to the Lord (1 Chron 21:22-24). In Proverbs 3:15 this word places wisdom on one side of the scales and declares that “nothing you desire can compare with her.”

Out of this idea of “a corresponding weight or worth” comes the New Testament word “worthy.” John the Baptist demanded fruit “worthy of repentance,” that is, a changed life that measures up to the changed mind (Matt 3:8). Jesus said that the laborer’s work is worth his pay (Matt 10:10), and that evil actions are worth their punishment (Luke 12:48). In each of these examples there is a sense of balance—things are in proportion.

But sometimes things do not balance. The prodigal son knew that he was not worthy to be called a son (Luke 15:19). The wedding guests who refused to attend were not worthy of their invitation (Matt 22:8). And deep down in our hearts we ourselves may suspect a terrible truth: we are not worthy of God’s kingdom.

The good news is that God will count us worthy anyway! (Can this be right? How can God consider us worthy when we know we are not?) Because we are cleansed by the blood of Christ and we persevere in our faith, God concludes that we belong in the kingdom. As Paul told the believers in Thessalonica, “God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God” (2 Thess 1:5).



# YOUTH

It was 86 B.C. when the famous military commander Gaius Marius, uncle of Julius Caesar, died. His son, Marius the Younger, stepped up to lead his father's faction, even though he was only twenty-three years old.

By 82 B.C. young Marius was doing rather well. He was elected as consul, and was eager to win a battle in what he thought would be an easy civil war. Soon, however, he found himself retreating with 7,000 troops to a fortress city. While he fought with the rear guard, the people in the city panicked and shut the gates. Then young Marius was ingloriously hauled up over the walls by ropes.

As the siege wore on, food ran out and people starved. Finally the city surrendered and Marius fled to an underground tunnel. Trapped and helpless, he did the only honorable thing a Roman could do—he killed himself. The winning army cut off his head and took it to Rome, where they exposed it to ridicule in the forum. As the triumphant general said of the dead leader's youthfulness, "First learn to row, before you try to steer."

The Greek word for "youthfulness" is *neotes* (neh OH tace). It was the word used by Paul when he told Timothy, "Let no one despise your youth" (1 Tim 4:12). The word does not mean a specific age, although Hippocrates put it roughly in the range of 21 to 28. The main thing was that a *neotes*, "a youth," had not yet become "a man."

Untried, untested, still "wet behind the ears," a young man is easily criticized by older folks. It is worse yet for the young man who runs around with even younger folks—the dreaded teenagers! That is why the young man who is a youth minister must "set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." Then the old folks will see his progress and everyone will be edified.

