

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Lesson 19

Scripture – Part Three

When I was a junior in High School, I came across a devotional book entitled, “God is No Fool” by Lois A. Cheney. The book was a collection of 99 meditations that offered insight in some carefully worded passages that always seem to have some unusual turn or slant to them. I enjoyed reading them over and over and even took to committing some to memory. The book is now 35 years old, but still available for purchase, and I heartily recommend it!

One of the meditations that stuck with me over the years was called “Bits and Pieces.” The piece went as follows:

Bits and pieces

Bits and pieces

People. People important to you, people unimportant to you cross your life, touch it with love and carelessness and move on. There are people who leave you and you breathe a sigh of relief and wonder why you ever came into contact with them. There are people who leave you and you breathe a sigh of remorse and wonder why they had to go away and leave such a gaping hole. Children leave parents; friends leave friends. Acquaintances move on. People change homes. People grow apart. Enemies hate and move on. Friends love and move on. You think on the many who have moved into your hazy memory. You look on those present and wonder.

I believe in God's master plan in lives. He moves people in and out of each other's lives, and each leaves his mark on the other. You find you are made up of bits and pieces of all who ever touched your life, and you are more because of it, and you would be less if they had not touched you.

Pray God that you accept the bits and pieces in humility and wonder, and never question, and never regret.

Bits and pieces

Bits and pieces¹

I like that piece still today. Typing it brings forth a flood of memories of people that fit each category. I use it in introduction to this week's lesson because I believe it is true, not only today, but also in the time of Paul. Paul was made up of bits and pieces of those he had come into contact with (most notably, the chunk of who he was by meeting the Lord on the road to Damascus!).

God had worked in Paul's life to prepare him as the apostle sent to the Gentiles to spread the gospel message abroad throughout the Roman world. Paul's family, his education, his friends, all contributed to mold him into the man of Christ we know from the Scriptures.

As we continue our consideration of Paul's views of Scripture this week, we see in more detail how meeting the Lord Jesus affected not only Paul's life, but also his understanding of Scripture. Next week we will continue to see how Paul kept much of the rabbinical approach to Scripture he had learned as a student, but even there, the influence of Christ was dramatic.

TODAY'S ISSUES

Last week, we previewed some questions that needed addressing:

1. Why is it that sometimes Paul's quotations of the Old Testament do not match up word for word with the Old Testament passage that we read in our Bibles? (Also, is there any insight we can gain in how Paul strings together into one long passage quotations that seem to dance around a number of different places in the Old Testament?)
2. Why is there a problem finding in our Bibles all the verses Paul seems to cite as scripture?
3. What can we understand and learn from some surprising interpretations Paul puts onto scripture?

We made it through Question 1 in class, but failed to reach Question 2 or 3. Question 2 was in the written materials, but not the oral class.² We are expanding our answer to question 2 and making it the sole area of study in this class. Question 3 is our goal for next week.

¹ Cheney, Lois A., *God is No Fool* (United Writers Press 1969) at 85-86.

² Last week's lesson (as all of our lessons) is available for download in writing, audio, and video at www.Biblical-Literacy.com. (The video postings are behind schedule and begin with Paul's theology, not the earlier series we have taught.)

WHY IS THERE A PROBLEM FINDING ALL OF PAUL'S REFERENCES TO SCRIPTURE?

Perhaps, this question itself already puts an improper spin on the issue we are now discussing. Let us be more precise in setting out the question.

There are times where, at first appearance, Paul writes as if he is quoting an Old Testament passage even though no such passage can be found. Five of Paul's passages are most frequently pointed to in this regard. They are:

- 1 Corinthians 2:9 “But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.’”³
- Ephesians 4:8 “Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’”⁴
- Ephesians 5:14 “Therefore it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’”
- 1 Corinthians 15:45 “Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”⁵
- 1 Timothy 5:18 “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’”⁶

Some parts of these passages Paul referenced are found in the Old Testament, while others are not. (In case you are not a footnote reader, go back and check out the footnotes to these passages. They provide the limited references found in the Old Testament!) So, what do we make of these?

³ This is similar to Isaiah 64:4, but still quite different. Isaiah 64:4 reads, “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.”

⁴ This is similar to Psalm 68:18 (“You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men”), but Paul has God giving gifts while the Psalm has God receiving gifts.

⁵ The first part of this verse is found in Genesis 2:7 “the man became a living creature.” The latter part does not have an Old Testament source. The ESV explains the difference by stopping the quotation after the first part of the 1 Corinthians verse.

⁶ Deuteronomy 25:4 has the first part of Paul's reference (“You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain”) but there is no Old Testament source for the remaining quotation of Paul's

Scholars have offered all sorts of views on these passages. Some believe the passages reflect other sources that Paul must have considered scriptural. Others believe Paul was “free lancing” more than usual with Old Testament passages. Some think we must be missing important parts of our scriptures that Paul had in his.

Let me offer a few observations, as we consider these passages more carefully.

1. Paul himself never shied away from his speaking out as God’s voice on a matter.

In 1 Corinthians, as Paul writes on marriage in chapter seven, he readily charges the Corinthians both as Paul and in the words of Christ. Paul writes at one moment, “To the married I give this charge (not I but the Lord)...” and in the next few verses writes, “To the rest I say (I, not the Lord)...” (1 Cor. 7:10-12). Later in the same chapter, Paul gives clear instructions on the unmarried and the widowed beginning with the words,

Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy (1 Cor. 7:25).

There are many approaches to what Paul means in these passages in 1 Corinthians 7, but amidst the many ideas, one constant remains – Paul would often speak/write understanding that he was speaking/writing with the voice or command of God. It is not beyond Paul, then, to give an Old Testament reference and then add his own perception of it like we might see in the 1 Corinthians 2:9 passage above.

Compare 1 Corinthians 2:9 to its most similar Old Testament passage, Isaiah 64:4:

1 Corinthians 2:9

“But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.’”

Isaiah 64:4

“From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.”

Both the Corinthian passage and Isaiah mention the eye not seeing and the ear not hearing, but Paul adds “nor the heart of man imagined,” while Isaiah 64 is silent

on the heart.⁷ Further, Paul speaks of “what God has prepared for those who love him” while Isaiah writes of God, “who acts for those who wait for him.”

We would suggest that this is a classic example of Paul going to an Old Testament passage (signified by his introductory phrase “it is written”) and using part of the passage while finishing the sentence with his own point. To try and find the full passage in the Old Testament is looking for something that Paul never considered. Isaiah made the point that God is unique. Unlike the idols and the thoughts of those who follow idols, God actually intervenes and acts for those who have faith and await his deeds.

Paul wants to make a similar point, but place it squarely within the framework of God’s actions in Christ. So, Paul cites the Isaiah 64 language of eyes and ears, but goes even further adding that the heart/mind has not even conceived or imagined what God has prepared. God did this, Paul adds, for those who love him and are faithfully waiting for the Lord. For Paul, the now revealed mystery of God’s actions in Christ is an intervention beyond the wildest imaginations of any man. It takes Isaiah 64 to a whole new level!

We agree with Lenski that Paul has quoted freely from Isaiah,

To stress certain expressions that are found in the passages...while the rest, about which he is unconcerned, is formulated to fit the general connection in which he writes.⁸

2. Paul and the early Christian community understood certain writings of others and the sayings of Christ as scripture.

Peter, for example, wrote of Paul’s writings:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, *as they do the other Scriptures*. (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Similarly, Paul wrote, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of

⁷ Some see the “heart” line as one Paul has used from Isaiah 65:17 where the ESV translates “the former things shall not be remembered or *come into mind*” recognizing that “mind” and “heart” are the same as the source of thinking. Again, however, this hardly solves the problem of Paul’s reference for it is removed from context and still leaves a gap of the rest of 1 Cor. 2:9.

⁸ Lenski, R. C. H., *Commentary on the New Testament, First and Second Corinthians*, (Hendrickson 1998) at 102.

Christ” (Gal. 6:2) recognizing that Jesus’ teachings were as authoritative as the Old Testament Law.

It is appropriate to think that Paul might be quoting some apostolic source or other similar authority recognizing the Spirit and voice of God in the references we now have before us. In this sense, consider the 1 Timothy 5:18 passage. Compare it to the closest passage from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 25:4):

1 Timothy 5:18

Deuteronomy 25:4

“For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’”

“You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain”

We have the first part of Paul’s writing, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain” in the Deuteronomy passage, but the part about a laborer deserving his wages is missing. Deuteronomy moves on to begin discussing the law of marriage among the Levites. The rest of Paul’s passage is not found in the Old Testament Scriptures at all, but it is a quotation from Christ himself!

Paul’s frequent travelling companion, the physician turned historian Luke, noted the relevant story in his gospel. Jesus sent out seventy-two of his disciples into the towns to preach, noting, “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Lk 10:2). Jesus sent them without a moneybag and without a knapsack. Jesus said that as the disciples were welcomed into homes, they should eat and drink what was provided “for the laborer deserves his wages” (Lk 10:7).

We should not be surprised to see that for Paul, the words of Christ were no less Scripture than the words found in the Old Testament. Paul naturally combines the two proving his point by both the writings of Moses and the mouth of the Lord Jesus.

We likely have a similar occurrence in Ephesians 5:14, not because it quotes Christ, but because it seems to quote another Christian source beyond the Old Testament. Paul writes,

Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

This must have had as its source something post-Christ, and therefore post-Old Testament, for Christ is the named subject. Yet, Paul introduces the passage as he does when citing Scripture. As scholars have scoured the Old Testament trying to find a source for Paul’s reference, the closest they come is in Isaiah 60:1, which says:

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

The Isaiah passage does use the words, “arise” and “shine” but outside of that does not match up well. Most scholars see this as Paul quoting something familiar to the Ephesians, giving it an authoritative place in the process. If we read the passage in the Greek, then we would see it is a “tristich.” A tristich is a passage that is written in three lines as a poem or song. If we translate this structural aspect of the verse, then we might set it out as follows:

Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.

In fact, the ESV and a number of other versions do this. It demonstrates that Paul is not simply quoting a passage, but is quoting one that came in stanzas. Lenski and others believe that Paul was quoting a hymn sung by the Ephesians.⁹ F. F. Bruce considered this passage a quotation from an early baptismal song where the congregation would greet the baptized as newly emerging “from the sleep of spiritual death into the light of life.”¹⁰

The song was certainly known in the church through the century after Paul. The Church Father Clement of Alexandria (150 – c.216) quotes the same hymn as Paul, but adds a second verse! The first verse is the same tristich (three stanzas) as Paul’s word for word, letter for letter. Clement’s added verse is italicized below:

Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.

*The Lord, the sun of the resurrection,
He that is begotten before the morning star
He that dispenses life by His own rays.*¹¹

Thus, we see that as Paul referenced Scripture, Paul included not only the words of Christ, but also certain other passages in use in the church.

⁹ Lenski, R. C. H., *Commentary on the New Testament, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, (Hendrickson 1998) at 611.

¹⁰ Bruce, F. F., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, the Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, (Eerdmans 1984) at 376.

¹¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, Ch. 9 (Loeb Classical Library – 92, 1919) translation, G. W. Butterworth.

3. Some of Paul’s references have roots in Old Testament passages, with Paul making some rather dramatic changes for teaching purposes.

The Ephesians 4:8 passage is a great example of how Paul reads (and borrows the language of) Old Testament Scripture in light of Jesus. Paul does not necessarily suggest that the Old Testament meant what Paul is saying, but Paul uses Old Testament wording to make a Christ-based point.

Consider this comparing the passage in Ephesians 4:8 to its “source,” Psalm 68:18:

Ephesians 4:8

“Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’”

Psalm 68:18

“You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men.”

In the Old Testament passage, the Psalmist envisions a victorious king taking spoils of war. Paul changes the picture to the victorious Jesus sharing the goodies with his people!

A similar place where Paul changed the wording of the Old Testament to show the truth and beauty of Christ and his work is found in Romans 10:5ff. Moses had said that righteousness based on law commanded doing all that the law required (Rom. 10:5, quoting Lev. 18:5). In Deuteronomy 30:11-14, Moses also told the Jews of his day that God had made his law totally accessible to them. They did not have to go up to heaven to get God's commands, or cross some ocean to find them. His law was in their mouth and in their heart -- we would say "right in front of them!" All they had to do was keep those commandments.

Paul quotes these words from Moses, but he changes them to explain the way of "righteousness by faith." We do not have to go up to heaven (to get a Savior), or descend into the deep (to bring him back from death), for God already has sent his Son Jesus Christ to earth to live and die for sinners and God already has raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:6-8). Just as God placed his commands in Israel's mouths and hearts, he has now placed this gospel word "near" to us -- in our mouths and our hearts. Because Jesus has done the saving work, we cannot add anything to what he has accomplished already. All we can do is confess that reality with our mouths and believe it in our hearts. Because Jesus' work fully set his people right with God, whoever trusts in that and says so enjoys the benefits of all that Jesus accomplished (Rom. 10:9-10).

4. These observations are not exclusive categories of Paul’s approach.

Rather they overlap around the edges, they blend one into the other, and they are meant to convey a general understanding, not rigid lines of classification. When

we look at the remaining passage, 1 Corinthians 15:45, we see several ideas in play which we have already put forth. Let us begin our consideration of this passage by placing it next to its closest Old Testament counterpart:

1 Corinthians 15:45

Genesis 2:7

“Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”

“the man became a living creature.”

Paul inserts the words “first” and “Adam.” He also adds a second line “the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.” The insertions of “first” and “Adam” give sense to the quotation. If Paul were writing in twenty-first century English style, then he would have put those words in brackets! It would be as if we wrote it,

The [first] man [Adam] became a living creature.¹²

Of course, Paul did not write with brackets (or commas, or parentheses, or any other modern convention, as we discussed last week). The addition of those two words places Paul’s quote into Paul’s context. Paul then adds a final sentence not found in the Genesis passage. Some consider the second half of the passage a conglomeration of words and phrases Paul selected from Isaiah 42:1; 48:16; Joel 3:1; Ezek. 39:29, etc. These are wonderful messianic passages, but none call Christ the “last Adam.” We might suggest several alternate solutions.

One alternate solution is to end Paul’s reference with the direct Genesis quotation, understanding the addition of Christ to be Paul’s own words. The ESV does this, ending the quotation marks before “the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”

A second solution is to understand that Paul is capturing the Old Testament passage and altering its conclusion to point out the contrast of Christ, much like he did in the Ephesian passage on giving gifts discussed previously.

Paul’s point is that Adam illustrates, by contrast and comparison, an important aspect of Christ in the life of the believer. This way of understanding Old Testament passages (typology, analogy, and allegory) are the subjects of next week’s lesson as we conclude our section on Paul and Scripture.

In conclusion, these passages have rich ores of gold to be mined, and we commend them to you for further study! But, they should not be troublesome passages to anyone’s understanding of Scripture!

¹² The difference between “creature” and “being” is really no difference at all. The Hebrew “creature” meant “being” in the Greek sense of the word that Paul uses.

NEXT WEEK

We save for next week our last question, probing Paul's interpretation techniques of the Old Testament. It should be fun and useful! Come back!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *"No eye... nor ear... nor heart"* (1 Cor. 2:9).

Who could imagine that Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, would descend from on high, would humbly take on the form of a human, would humble himself to the worst of the human race, allowing abuse, ridicule and scorn be heaped upon him, suffering death and separation from the Father, all out of love and compassion to bring eternal life to those who love him? This is beyond any real concept of human thought. Yet God did this, the Spirit reveals it, and we experience it. Honest question: do we live this truth in our day-to-day lives? Do others see it? How do we fit into others' lives as bits and pieces?

2. *"When he ascended on high ... he gave gifts to men"* (Eph. 4:8).

We can all readily agree that there could be no greater gift than eternal life. Yet giving that to his children was not enough for God and Christ. The gifts keep coming. In Christ, Paul wrote, we were given "every spiritual blessing" (Eph. 1:3). Look simply at the fruit that comes from the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Even with those blessings, the gifts are not over! We have spiritual gifts, we have the blessings of the church, and we have promises and assurances of God's love and control. We have the greatest contrast of our conquering Messiah King and those of earthly realms. Our king does not march off with captives, requiring booty and spoils of war. Our King has conquered the evil dominions and powers, and leads us in procession giving us the gifts from his bounty! Another honest question: What are we doing with these blessings and gifts of God?

3. *"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you"* (Eph. 5:14).

Many have set this hymn to music, but we do not sing it in our church! We do affirm the truth of it though. Christ has risen and with his resurrection, he brings us from the grave! A final honest question (borrowing from another song!): Do we shine with the light of Christ, or do we "hide it under a bushel"?