



"And this is the commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also." 1 John 4: 21

Sunday – July 13, 2008

Heart to Heart...

I would like to teach us a few words about words. Word studies in the Bible can lead to great help and insight in our personal growth. However, we need to be careful of where we get our definitions in our word studies. English dictionaries can mislead us in the meaning of a word because words can change meaning over time. That's why they update our dictionaries. Let me give you a few illustrations.

Take the word "asylum". It came to us through the Latin from the Greek "asulon" and it meant "a place of refuge." No more! People began using the word as a place of the "mentally ill." The idea of refuge was lost. In some dictionaries, it is making a comeback in its original intended language, but it still holds in our minds and some dictionaries to mean a place of the mentally ill.

Our word "intoxicate" comes from the Greek word "toxikon" which means "to poison." From here it came to the Latin 'intoxicare' meaning to impregnate or steep in poison. In our English, for many years it meant to introduce poison, to kill or die by poison. In the passing of time, though the word toxic or toxin remains, it was used for people who had been made drunk with alcohol. The majority still holds that today as it has retained that meaning.

Take the word "drunk". Today we know "drunk" as one inebriated with alcohol. But that is not what it meant in the original Greek. It originally meant to 'imbibe a liquid' or simply to drink! It had nothing to do with alcohol. Then as people often drank alcoholic beverages in abundance, they were 'inebriated', it took on the idea of intoxication with alcohol. (Some Greek texts use it to mean that. Just keep reading below.) The Hebrew word 'rwh', which some versions translate "drunk" literally means "to satiate, water abundantly, to soak or drench." In I Corinthians 11:21, the word "drunk" holds to the meaning of satiated or completely filled rather than drunk with alcohol.

With the few illustrations, I am trying to teach and make a point. To understand what a word means in Scripture, we must understand the meaning and use that meaning as it was intended in the context of the Scripture where it is found. To take a word and say that word means the same in every place is not a proper way to understanding Scripture. Let me help us a little further. The Hebrew word "barak" is used numerous times in the Old Testament. It means "to bless, to praise, to speak prosperity on someone." But there are at least 4 occasions where this word is translated to mean "to curse." Here is an example: In Job 2:9, Job's wife tells him to "curse" ("barak") God and die! In Job 1:21, Job "blessed" ("barak") the name of God. To say the word "barak" means "to bless, to praise" and so forth in all its uses is not using the proper meaning of the word. Context always determines the usage of a word. That is where so many make their mistakes in taking the meaning of a word but ignoring the context of how it is used. We are speaking of accurately handling the word of truth.

If a word occurs 50 times and is used 47 times one way but 3 times another, people will say that the "true" meaning of the word is how it is used most often. If I may say, that is misleading people. In a given text a word means what the writer (inspired by God) intends it to mean. Keep that in mind. In I Corinthians 7:15, Paul uses the word "bondage". When you look it up in its Greek meaning, it has to do with slavery. Paul is not using the word in context to speak of slavery but is speaking of marriage. You have to let the word remain in context of how the inspired writer is using it. The "bondage" is speaking of marriage and nothing else.

I pray this helps a little. I know I am not the smartest man, but I do know that context always determines how words are used and meant. Be a good student of the word. Find a good Bible dictionary that will give you meanings and you will see that sometimes there are several different words for one English word and it will open your eyes. Allow the Scripture context to determine the word usage. May God bless you in your study of His word. Think about it!!!

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