



The Reflector

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Watch Those Verb Tenses

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Most of us are aware of that the tense of a verb can make a big difference. This is so true in the Scriptures. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, *Paul wrote: Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.* (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NKJV)

It is easy to see from this passage that some of the Corinthians had been “unrighteous” but they were no longer so, because he said “such **were** some of you.” One cannot be unrighteous and be Christian at the same time. Those things must be left behind with the “old man” that we have put off. The great thing is that God has seen to it that one can, by the power of the gospel, change from what he **was** (unrighteous) into what he **is** now – righteous. The past tense makes this crystal clear in this passage.

Most of the time the present tense is as easily discerned. However, there are cases where the present tense can become a little tricky. There is a thing called “historical present” that has been around in various languages from ancient times. It is occasionally used in the Bible. It is where, even though the present tense is used, it is to be understood as the past. The present is used to give the reader/listener a feeling of being there as an observer.

It is used today in both written and spoken narratives. When asked about a large fish mounted on one’s den wall, he might reply: “Let me tell you

about that. I **am** at Smith lake and I **tie** a spinner bait onto my line and **cast** it over a log **lying** near the bank. A bass **grabs** the bait and I **reel** him in.” Though the present tense is used six times, we have no trouble understanding that he is talking about a past event.

In the New Testament, it is used in several passages. The KJV and ASV pretty much retain the original present tense. However some of the later translations change it to past tense. The NASB changes it to past tense in the text, but marks it with an asterisk (*) to indicate the historical present was used in the original. Notice Matthew 4:8 in the KJV and then the NASB concerning the temptation of Jesus: “*Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;* (KJV); and “*Again, the devil *took Him to a very high mountain, and *showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory;* (NASB).” If you have a NASB you will notice quite a few asterisks in Mark and John.

There are a couple of passages from the Apostle Paul that seemingly, given their contexts, should be understood as being in the historical present even though the translators of the NASB did not mark them as such.

The first is in Romans 7:14 through the rest of the chapter. Earlier in the chapter, through verse 13, he discusses his past life while under the law of Moses – all in the past. Then he shifts to the present tense in describing his struggle under the law. In verse 24, he cries out, “*O wretched man that I AM! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Hardly a exclamation he would make after having been delivered by Christ). Then in the next verse he begins to answer his question and

extends it on to chapter 8 telling of his deliverance, from his past struggles and condemnation due to sin, by “the law of the Spirit of life” in Christ.

The second passage is 1 Tim. 1:15: *“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I **am** chief.”* (1 Timothy 1:15 KJV) Is Paul declaring his present condition as

chief of sinners or his past life as such? Again, look at the context. In verse 13, he is clearly speaking of his life before his conversion: *“Who **was before** a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious...”* The next sentence after his “I **am** chief” statement, he begins with “Howbeit for this cause I **obtained** mercy ...” (Verse 16). Again, obviously he is using the present “am” in the historical sense. ■

Those Who Have No Right to Speak God's Word

Andy Sochor

We sometimes hear celebrities, politicians, and other godless people quoting (or misquoting) the Bible. They often do so in an attempt to defend an unscriptural position (e.g. support for same-sex “marriage,” opposition to the death penalty, etc.). When we hear them, we might think, “What business do they have in speaking about the Bible?” God asked the same type of question in the following text.

“But to the wicked God says, ‘What right have you to tell of My statutes and to take My covenant in your mouth? For you hate discipline, and you cast My words behind you. When you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you associate with adulterers. You let your mouth loose in evil and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son. These things you have done and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes’” (Psalm 50:16-21).

There are certain ones who have no right to speak God’s word. Let us notice who was identified in the text.

Those Who Are Wicked

“The wicked” (Psalm 50:16) have no right to speak God’s word. This does not mean that God intended for His word to be taught only by those who are sinlessly perfect. Only Jesus would fit this qualification (1 Peter 2:22; Romans 3:23). In speaking of the knowledge revealed by God through the gospel, Paul said, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves” (2 Corinthians 4:7). The “earthen vessels” to which Paul referred are those who would proclaim the gospel. God’s design is for

fallible human beings to proclaim God’s infallible word.

However, there is a difference between one who occasionally sins and one who is given to sin. Some “walk in the darkness” while others “walk in the Light” (1 John 1:6-7). Those in the light should not think that they have not or could not sin (1 John 1:8, 10), but they are to make a diligent and consistent effort to keep from sin (1 John 2:1). This is important because the wickedness of a teacher can discredit the gospel message in the mind of the hearer. This is why Paul sought to give “no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited” (2 Corinthians 6:3). Those who are wicked should not be proclaiming the righteous standard of God’s word.

Those Who Hate Discipline

As we noted in the previous point, God’s word will be taught by fallible people. At times, any one of us may be guilty of sin or error and in need of correction. Apollos was “mighty in the Scriptures,” but Priscilla and Aquila needed to “[take] him aside and[explain] to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:24-26). Peter (Cephas) was an apostle; yet in Antioch, Paul “opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned” (Galatians 2:11). Solomon said, “A wise man in cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is arrogant and careless” (Proverbs 14:16). Arrogance is a trait of one who continues in sin, even after being shown the truth.

Hating discipline is an indication that one is arrogant – he cannot see or refuses to see his own sin. This is why those who “hate discipline” (Psalm 50:17) are unqualified to teach God’s word. God’s message is for the teacher just as much as it is for the hearer. This is why Paul wrote, “You, therefore,

who teach another, do you not teach yourself?" (Romans 2:21). One cannot reprove and rebuke (2 Timothy 4:2) if he is not willing to apply that same standard to himself.

Those Who Cast Aside God's Words

The responsibility of those who will "preach the word" is to do so "in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). To do this, one needs the attitude of David: "O how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). Those who speak God's word must do as Paul did – "declaring...the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27).

Sadly, many do not want to hear the gospel in its simplicity and entirety. Paul told Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). There will be teachers willing to teach what the people want to hear. But those who would "cast [God's] words behind [them]" (Psalm 50:17) in this way are not servants of Christ. Paul wrote, "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God" (1 Peter 4:11). Those who refuse to do this are unfit to claim to speak for God.

Those Who View Sin Favorably

Jesus was "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matthew 11:19), but that is not parallel to those who "associate with adulterers" in the context of this psalm (Psalm 50:18). Jesus ate with "tax collectors and sinners" in order to "call [them] to repentance" (Luke 5:29-32). Jesus did not condone their sin, but tried to lead them out of sin.

Those described in the psalm were not like Jesus. They were "pleased" with the sinful activity of the thieves and adulterers (Psalm 50:18). They condoned and supported sin, which is the opposite of what we should do. Paul wrote, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11, KJV). Those who view sin favorably have no right to speak God's word.

Those Who Do Not Control Their Speech

There are a few sins of the tongue mentioned in our text – lack of control, deceit, and slander

(Psalm 50:19-20). James wrote, "But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). When one's speech is corrupt, it is an indication that his heart is corrupt. Jesus said, "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man..." (Matthew 15:18-20). This is why those who do not control their speech are unfit to speak God's word – their heart is not right.

Those who teach "will incur a stricter judgment" (James 3:1). This is manifested in two ways. First, teachers will receive closer scrutiny by others. Those who oppose the truth will often look for any little thing they can criticize in the teaching that is done by brethren. This is why Paul told Titus, "In all things, show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us" (Titus 2:7-8). Second, those who teach "will incur a stricter judgment" because they have a divine obligation to represent the truth accurately. Peter wrote, "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God" (1 Peter 4:11). God will judge teachers for their teaching. For these reasons, those who are not careful with their speech can do more harm by teaching than they would by remaining silent.

Those Who Think That God Is Like Them

Finally, those who have no right to speak God's word are those who think that God is "just like" them (Psalm 50:21). Many presume to know the mind of God based upon what is in their own mind. If something "seems right" (cf. Proverbs 14:12) to them, they assume that God will also see it as right. But we can only know what will please God by what He has revealed in His word. Paul wrote, "Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:11-12). Apostasy comes when men put themselves in the place of God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4), equating their will with His will.

All of us need to recognize our place before God. Isaiah recorded, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9). Those who teach must trust God’s word over their opinions (or the opinions of anyone else). God is not like man (Numbers 23:19) – we should be thankful for this because it gives us hope (Malachi 3:6; 2 Peter 3:9). Those who do not recognize their place before God and cannot see the difference between His word and their word have no right “to tell of [His] statutes” (Psalm 50:16).

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is not simply to condemn celebrities, politicians, and other godless people for misquoting and misapplying Scripture. It is also a call for us to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5). “You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?” (Romans 2:21). All of us can (and should) teach in some capacity (1 Peter 3:15). Let us make sure we are qualified to do so. ■

This, That ‘n T’other ...

(Yes, “t’other” is in the dictionary)

News Good and Bad: It is unfortunate that bad news travels faster and farther than good news. It is the bad that makes the news. If one forms his view of the world almost exclusively from the daily flow of news reports he will indeed have a dim view of life. There a millions out there who are going about living productive lives and doing kind things to their fellow man whose names do not appear in the papers except perhaps in their obituaries.

As one who is not at all averse to often, openly and pointedly pointing out problems among Christians and exposing those whose work threatens the peace and purity of the church, I must say that if your evaluation of the condition of the church today is based nearly entirely on such bad news, you will have a warped view of the church.

For each one evoking just and necessary criticism for his open misbehavior and woeful lack of being a role model as a servant of Christ, either in his life or his preaching/teaching, there are

scores of good men scattered throughout our great brotherhood who are quietly going about their work of trying to bring souls to the Lord and edifying those who are in the Lord without drawing attention to themselves. They have real character and are not trying to draw attention to themselves by being a “character.”

Sitting on God’s Right Hand: Little Johnny was spending the weekend with his grandmother after a particularly trying week in kindergarten. His grandmother decided to take him to the park on Saturday morning. It had been snowing all night and everything was beautiful.

His grandmother remarked...“doesn't it look like an artist painted this scenery? Did you know God painted this just for you?”

Johnny said, “Yes, God did it and he did it left handed.”

This confused his grandmother a bit, and she asked him “What makes you say God did this with his left hand?” “Well,” said Johnny, “we learned in Bible class last week that Jesus sits on God's right hand so he **had** to use his left hand!” (Source unknown).

Gospel (Sales) Meetings: While a student at Freed Hardeman College in the mid 1950's, a joke going around the dorm was that the PR director returned from a meeting and was asked how the meeting went. His alleged reply, “A great and wonderful meeting, 5 baptisms, 3 restorations and 45 pledges to come to FHC.” This was just a joke made up by the boys in the dorm for a good laugh. But the moral of the story is no laughing matter.

When brethren use evangelism or stage evangelist events to sell their products and services it is serious business, whether it be to promote/sell the product or services of their schools, bookstores, publishing companies, youth camps, or Amway businesses. As legitimate and beneficial as all the private enterprises might be, they are just that – “private” businesses operating in the secular realm. There are many legitimate ways for the owners and workers to advertise and promote their companies’ products and services. But, it seems to me there is something amiss about using the preaching of the gospel of Christ as a tool to sell one’s wares. ■