

Parting Thoughts: “Tapeinosis”

by TJ Smith

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HOWDY KIDS! WELCOME TO another action packed installment of Parting Thoughts!” In the last issue, I inserted the word “universalism” as a doctrine that should be rejected by believers. This did not go unnoticed, as gauged by the emails I received. There weren’t many replies, but those who shared their opinions, very politely I will add, reflected a growing viewpoint. I will refer to Ultimate Reconciliation Believers, as “URBs” (I’ve always wanted to be trendy and create an acronym). I have studied UR on my journey to where I am today, and I know that URBs opine that we just haven’t studied enough to “see” it, while we non-URBs maintain that they have studied themselves right past it and need to hit the turn signal and perform a U-turn. Defending against UR is more involved than stating: “Many are called but few are chosen—now put your hand down and shut up!” That’s not going to win a theological debate. I’m not sure it’s a winnable debate anyway, nor that it should divide us as “family.” I have a few family members who keep voting for the “wrong” political party, and that’s not a conversation in which any of us want to engage. They had their POTUS, I have mine, but we are still trying to maintain relationships.

It is my conviction that the Universal Reconciliation view is not one I can align with. Thanks to those who replied to me sharing their views. I made a friend or two as well.

Now for my article!

If you are somewhat new to studying Scripture, one of the helpful habits to cultivate is looking at how Greek words are used in verses other than the particular verse you’re studying. This is typically referred to as “Word Usage.” We theologians (check the definition) love to use the word definition that supports our own (biased) position. We are all guilty of this, but, to be honest, we have to start somewhere and be willing to move ourselves off-center as needed. One of the problems with the new “Israel Only” crowd is that they don’t do this: they fail to follow Paul’s lead by understanding that the definition of a Jew, Israel, and Jerusalem changed 2,000 years ago. Or maybe I should say the “definitions” were finally fulfilled. The Black Hebrew movement is suffering the same blindness.

The word I chose this issue is one of the most interesting examples I have come across. The word is “*tapeinosis*” (Strong’s 5014). Using the KJV, let’s look at the verses containing this word, to gain a broader, more complete understanding of its meaning:

“For he hath regarded the **low estate** of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” (Luke 1:48)

“In his **humiliation** his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.” (Acts 8:33)

“Who shall change our **vile** body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” (Phil 3:21)

“But the rich, in that he is made **low**: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” (James 1:10)

Let's use James 1:10 as an example of the "cross-pollinating" of the definitions of *tapeinosis*: the KJV uses "low," MLV uses "humbleness" (which has morphed into "humility"), and the ALT uses "humble state." Most versions use one of these words. But all of them avoided "vile," as found in Philippians 3:21 as a definition.

When we examine Philippians 3:21, which the KJV translated as "vile," we see that the MLV continued to use "humbleness," ABP uses "humiliation," and the BSB uses "lowly." The Jubilee Bible, agreeing with the KJV, uses "vile," while the Lamsa translated it "poor," and on and on.

Only a few translations used "vile," the majority of versions used "softer" definitions. Was this the bias of the translator coming through, trying to strengthen what they perceived Paul to be communicating? Did this bias add to the doctrine that the flesh was evil? How should we process this? Do we avoid KJV and Lamsa versions? That might be a problem. Personally, I use KJV about as often as I volunteer for root canals, but I have seen KJV get it right where the ESV did not (even a blind squirrel finds a nut every once in a while).

From Mary referring to herself as "*tapeinosis*," to Paul's question of who will change our "*tapeinosis*" body, to the Ethiopians' question to Philip about Isaiah's "*tapeinosis*," it seems translators chose the definitions to fit the context, along with their own bias and theological presuppositions—good or bad.

Do we go with the "law of first mention" and apply all further word usages to the first one? I wouldn't think that wise, as we would use Isaiah, whom the Ethiopian was quoting in Acts. Do we allow each definition to stand as is, trusting that the translators used enough external Greek textual evidence to gain a full understanding in context with each different verse? Acceptable. But then, which translator? Do we take all the definitive possibilities and "plug them into" each verse to see if a different definition yields a clearer understanding of the passage?

These are tough questions. Just as the Greek word "*pneuma*" has about eight different meanings, from *breath* to *spirit*, *demon* to *vital principle*, many Greek words can have an isolated meaning in specific settings. There are more difficult words that come to mind which only Paul used, and are found only once in the New Testament. How can you possibly get a clear understanding of a word used only one time?

In my study of 1 John 4, I believe "*test every spirit*" would be better understood "*test every prophecy*," as the context is clearly false prophets. As students of Scripture, it is incumbent on us to take the time to substitute definitions of a given word and see if one leaves us with a unified doctrinal construct.

Translators attempt to find the English words that best translate the Greek words they encounter, but aren't always successful. Sometimes they add words not found in the manuscripts, while at other times they choose to not translate words that are in the manuscripts. Through the ages translators have been limited by not only the quantity and quality of Greek manuscripts available (along with the writings of Socrates, Plato, Philo, etc.), but also by their own vocabulary. If they weren't well educated, they didn't have a "deep well" to draw from.

We must not assume that translators always got the correct understanding; but, on the other hand, neither should we always assume they "*hamartia*" (missed the mark). Somewhere between those extremes, our "vile" minds of "low estate," will be "made low" with "humiliation."

Moving on, there are those early church preterists (no, not like in the 2nd century, more like the 1960's) who have been studying fulfilled covenant theology longer than most of us have been alive. Men like Jerry Bernard, David Chilton, Sam Dawson, John Anderson, Ed Stevens, Don Preston, Charles Hallford. And

Ron McRay. I became acquainted with Ron through the Texas Preterist gathering we had in Fort Worth during the Spring of 2018. Though Ron previously lived in Texas, he had already moved, but not before I had contacted him about attending—seems that I found the only glitch in Tony Denton’s preterist network! Ron had moved out of the Lone Star state, but that initial contact began a friendship between us. I’m sure many of you have known Ron far longer than I have. He always ends his emails with “Love, Ron” (that is so “Glenn Hill,” ha).

I have read at least six of Ron’s books. Some are very enlightening, some are entertaining. I don’t always agree with everything Ron believes, but Ron has probably forgotten more theology than I have learned in my lifetime. He definitely has his own style! Not that he doesn’t want to be sharpened or challenged, but I find it refreshing and inspiring that at his age, the man still has a LOT to say! He’s like the BB King of preterism. He just finished an 803 page book! Really? I can stack my 6 little books up and not have that many pages. Thank you Ron for inspiring me to keep plugging away. Ron should be an inspiration to us all to keep living and writing, and believing, and worshiping, and serving until we are called home. Consider purchasing some of Ron’s books. He has plenty to choose from on a variety of Christian topics. You may find one that adds a piece to the puzzle to your studies; you may find one that makes you mad. I once heard that a good song should make you mad, sad, or glad. Books can have the same effect. But at least they make you think, and hopefully crack open your Bible to study. Support a fellow believer who has invested decades studying God’s word and trying to make it easier to digest. Until next time,

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