

Terms of Humility

By Steven Harper

Throughout the New Testament, the inspired writers used different terms to describe the followers of Jesus Christ, all of which are terms of humility and meant to teach us our proper place in the whole system of faith. We would do well to consider some of those terms that we might better understand how we should see ourselves as compared to the one whom we serve, if for no other reason than this is how He sees us.

Earthen Vessels. (2Cor. 4:7) In the context, Paul used this term to describe himself and his fellow laborers in the spread of the gospel, but it could certainly be applied to any and all who do that work, and not just 'the preacher.' Anyone who goes about spreading the good news of salvation could be so described.

Consider Paul's words as he describes those who carry the gospel with them wherever they go: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." The point he makes is that those who carry the gospel to the world are carrying a precious and valuable treasure with them [the gospel], while they themselves are merely a simple container that, by our simplicity, only further shows the glory of the treasure we bring with us. The fact is, whatever part we play in bringing salvation to others is significant only for the fact we carried it to them; the real power is in the gospel (Rom. 1:16), not in us. If ever someone is converted because of us, rather than the message we bring, then we haven't converted them to Christ and they are not true disciples of Him. Let us never forget we are merely the ones who carry the treasure; we are not the treasure.

Planters and Waterers. (1Cor. 3:5-7) The very idea that men would improperly emphasize the teacher of the gospel instead of the One who is at the center of the gospel message [Christ] was part of the reason Paul wrote the brethren at Corinth; some there had divided themselves along the lines of who had either taught or baptized them (1Cor. 1:11-13). Paul sought to eliminate such thinking and to remind them of who really was worthy of glory when he wrote, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase." Basically, Paul is saying he and Apollos were nothing compared to the message itself, and certainly nothing worth exalting when it was God who gave the increase when they either 'planted' or 'watered.'

Let us be involved in the word of planting the seed of the gospel but, again, remember the glory is not ours; what we teach is to glorify God and Jesus Christ. We are merely the messengers and laborers but, like it is in the natural world, a farmer may till the soil, plant the seeds, and irrigate the plants regularly, but if it were not for the power of life God put in those seeds, the work would all be for naught. Give God the glory, and let us take none for self.

Sheep. Throughout the Bible, Old Testament and New, God considered His people as sheep. The psalmist would write, "So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever" (Psalm 79:13). Jesus described Himself as "the good shepherd" (John 10:11) and chastised the religious leaders for not heeding His words while noting, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:25-27). Peter instructed the elders of the first century to "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you" (1Peter 5:2). We, as God's people today, are the sheep and Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, with elders in each congregation serving as shepherds to those spiritual flocks.

Have you ever seen sheep? They are about the simplest [some might say dumbest] creatures alive! They are vulnerable, defenseless, and simple-minded creatures who are easily led about, and easily attacked and harmed. Let us never forget that in the realm of spiritual matters, we are very vulnerable creatures who are often easily led about and because we have

a spiritual enemy who “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1Peter 5:8), we need a Shepherd to protect us. Let us not be wise in our own opinion and begin to think we know a better way or a better place than where our Shepherd leads us. His guidance and protection and provision are for our good and when we stray from the way He leads, we put ourselves in great danger. Stay close to the Shepherd at all times; He cares for us.

Disciples. All throughout the New Testament, the followers of Jesus are called “disciples” (Acts 9:26), a term that teaches us an important aspect of who we are in the system of faith. The Greek word translated as disciple is “mathetes,” which means “a learner, or pupil” (Strongs). Simply put: Jesus is the teacher and we are the students!

This is an important term and relationship that should not be forgotten, but one which many men have seemingly ignored. Some believe they need no spiritual instruction and that whatever they already believe or ‘feel’ about spiritual matters must be true. [Imagine trying to hold to that way of thinking in the secular world on a subject such as engineering or physics!] Others, including many who claim to be followers of Jesus, arbitrarily pick and choose which instructions and/or commands of their professed Master Teacher they believe or obey. Such thinking is not only arrogant; it is foolish and dangerous!

God has revealed within the Bible His plan for our salvation and, through His Son now, has given us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2Peter 1:3), and it is those words that we must learn and follow if we want to be pleasing to God and if we truly want forgiveness of our sins and eternal life in heaven. If we think we can pick and choose which commands we want to learn and obey, can we really call Him Lord? And if we think we have the right to pick and choose which part or parts of His divine instruction we want to learn and obey, why would we think He would reward us in the end for having ignored or outright disobeyed the others?

Let us never forget Jesus is the Teacher and we are the students. Let us heed His words when He said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me” (Matt. 11:29). He knows what is for our spiritual good, so let us truly learn from Him!

Servants to All. (1Cor. 9:19) To be clear, this is a term Paul used to describe himself, but he said he had done so “that I might win the more.” Paul was not recognized as a servant by the civilized world, but Paul made himself a servant that he might win souls!

In a world that increasingly seeks personal freedom and the ‘right’ to do whatever we want, this last term is one that will not be welcomed by many if only for the fact it means we are subservient to another. But as followers of Jesus, we are already servants; it is just that we should be willing to go further, as did Paul, and make ourselves servants to all that we might win their souls to Christ! The sacrifice of a few of our freedoms and ‘rights’ is worth it, is it not?