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GOOD GERMS

Step away from the dishwasher. The news story said that families are healthier when they wash dishes by hand. The reason was that automatic dishwashers with their extreme temperatures get the dishes too clean. When they are washed by hand, dishes retain some of the bacteria and germs. When children are exposed to those few germs they build up a resistance, and so they are better able to fight off infections and even allergies. Some parents have long argued against those who would never let the baby play on the floor other than on a carefully cleaned blanket. Exposure to dirt on the floor, and later in life to mud and dirt outside, helps build up immunities to local pathogens. This idea even has biblical applications.

A few germs may actually be healthy for the physical body, because we are so made that we build up an immunity. For the same reason, sin is not good for our spirits. The difference is that we can become immune to diseases; after all, that is the theory behind vaccinations. However, when exposed to sin we do not become immune to it, but rather immune to the consciousness of it. Paul says the theory of spiritual vaccination does not work.

Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:1-4)

He tells the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:33) that evil companionships have a corrupting rather than curing influence. Our righteousness may, at times, have a beneficial effect on others; more often they have a negative effect on us. He warns Timothy (1 Tim 4:1-2) that some believers will be corrupted to the point that their conscience is "seared with a hot iron" (cauterized). The danger is that sin becomes a gangrene that results in the surgical removal of conscience, or at least sealing it off from contact with the body.

Some have said that the first few chapters of the Proverbs are a handbook about avoiding gangs. While this may be true in one sense, Solomon is warning of the

dangers of sin and sinners in general. "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Do not put in your lot with sinners and prostitutes because the end of that path is death. Solomon knew; he had walked that path and nearly lost his kingdom by doing so. His son, to whom these chapters may have been specifically written, would subsequently lose most of his kingdom and his spiritual life by believing proximity to sin would vaccinate him against further harm. Paul elaborated on this to the Romans. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom 6:23)

The good news is that, spiritually, we do not have to step away from the dishwasher. We have the means to get the water hot enough to remove all the dirt and germs. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7) The blood of Jesus is effective to cleanse *all* sin. Nothing is left. The dishes are truly clean. Of course, a dishwasher does no good if the dishes are not placed in it. Correspondingly, one cannot receive the cleansing without being put into Christ's blood. "By which figure immersion indeed now saves us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the seeking unto God of a good conscience) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet 3:21) Peter and Paul both point to immersion in water as the point at which the dishwasher cleans people of sin (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16)

While it may be healthier for the physical body to be exposed to a certain amount of germs, the spiritual part of us needs the full cleansing. It may be best to wash dishes by hand, but it is essential to wash the spirit in the dishwasher of the blood of Jesus.

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LOST IN TRANSLATION

Some say you don't really know a foreign language until you can do two things in it: do math calculations without translating back into your heart language, and tell a joke. Perhaps that is why people have debated for centuries about whether Jesus used humor or not. When he talked about a camel going through the eye of a needle, was that needle some gateway that the camel had to kneel to get through, or was he hyperbolically talking about the eye of a sewing needle. Somehow, the humor, or lack thereof, gets lost in translation. The prophet Micah used a number of puns, but unless you have a good knowledge of Hebrew or know a good commentator who does, you will miss them. Humor is one thing. But sometimes we lose more serious thoughts in translation.

Most people are at least familiar with the argument that English translations since the one ordered by King James I have transliterated the Greek word *baptize*, rather than translating it properly as "to immerse." The earliest English translations used "immerse" and "immersion," but some who did not want to offend those who had gotten away from that practice used the neutral (that is, unintelligible) word. Notice that every major, accepted translation in English since then has followed the same practice. Those that choose to refer to immersion,

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such as Alexander Campbell, may expect their translation to disappear in obscurity.

Church

Stanley Morris, translator of the International English Bible, has chosen to translate, rather than bring the Greek words into English. In an interview in *The Christian Chronicle* (Vol. 72, No.2, February 2015) he points out another such word. "King James I commanded the KJV translators to replace Tyndale's "congregation" with the word "church."" Again, that has caused much misunderstanding. Today when you use the word "church" you are likely to call up several images in people's minds, most of them inaccurate in relation to the original

language. Many know the old rhyme that goes, "Here's the church and here's the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people." That is the common view of church. It is a building used for worship. It often has a room (essentially an auditorium) that is called "the sanctuary." People can talk loudly and joke or even take refreshments in the lobby, but are expected to speak quietly in the sanctuary. The "church" is worthy of a certain amount of respect, but the sanctuary is where you come into the presence of the King.

Compare to this the more accurate translations of "congregation" or "assembly." Neither of these words can reasonably conjure up bricks and mortar, gothic arches and gargoyles, altar and steeple. These are words for gatherings of people, whether in a building or not. The Greek word commonly translated "church" is pronounced *ekklesia*, from which we get Ecclesiastes or ecclesiastical. In ancient Greece, each city-state practiced a true form of democracy. A city-state was limited in size because if it grew too big each person could not have a direct say in the government. When a matter of government had to be decided the *ekklesia* (literally "called out") was called out. Every free citizen was called to the city center (the marketplace, or sometimes an amphitheatre) to learn, discuss, and vote. It was just this sort of gathering that was used to describe what is translated as "church." More properly, it is a congregation (meaning flock together) or an assembly. The church is not a building but a people. It may be the congregation of all believers, whether they can actually gather together or not, but more commonly it is the group of believers in one location. Its only membership, in this narrower sense, is whoever happens to be assembled together. Thus the answer to the question, "Do I have to go to church?" is that if you are not present, you are not part of that assembly/congregation/church at that time. And if you attend at another gathering, you are part of that congregation regardless of where you claim your "membership" may be.

I have heard, especially in congregations of the churches of Christ, the statement when a collection of money is taken up, "this is only for members; if you are not a member we do not expect you to give." Leaving aside the question of whether such a weekly collection is even scriptural, such a statement ignores the nature of the congregation. If a person is present, that person is a member of the congregation. If they are there, they are part of the assembly.

When we understand the nature of the congregation or assembly, we begin to understand the action of the group. While worship may be a part of the

gathering, the writer of Hebrews says it is “to provoke unto love and good works.” (Heb 10:24) In the previous verse, (s)he also says it is to draw near unto God. So the assembly has a two-pronged purpose. Some people object to a “visiting period” during the “worship.” Such a practice, though, meets one of the requirements of being a church: fellowship. How can we provoke one another if all we do is stare at the back of the person sitting in front of us?

Disciple

It is common today to hear someone claim to be a follower of Christ. Other than in the context of the Restoration Movement, it is rare to hear one claim to be a disciple of Christ. And yet, in most reliable English translations you will never find the term “follower,” but 268 times will find “disciple.” What is the difference?

One way of looking at is the difference between auditing a class and taking a class. Some colleges let students audit classes. They get to sit in on the class, do any labs, even do the homework. They may take the tests. They learn a lot, but they never get credit for it. The knowledge is great, and certainly of value, but it doesn't show up on a transcript or count toward graduation credits. One could audit every course required for a degree, but would never qualify for the degree. Yes, auditing is cheaper, but one never reaches the goal.

A follower of Christ listens, and may even do what Jesus says. He may or may not put his trust in Jesus. He may follow out of interest or because he believes in the subject matter but doesn't want to invest himself fully. He may follow for a while, but it does not really fall in line with his ultimate goals. He may even put great effort into following, and believe he is doing the right thing. And he may be *doing* the right thing. But Christianity is not about following Christ. It is about the fact that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again so that a person might have forgiveness of sins and a certainty of eternity with him. Doing the right thing is a natural consequence, not the goal.

A disciple, on the other hand, is defined as a student. It is one who participates in a discipline in order to be acknowledge as one who knows a subject or what a teacher imparts. At the end of the discipleship, one knows what the teacher knows; becomes the essence of the teacher. In Talmud, many comments are made by a rabbi “in the name of” a more famous teacher. They have the authority to do so because they are disciples, and know fully what the teacher taught. They completed the full course of study, and got the credit for taking the course. So it is with a true disciple of Christ. It is possible to be a follower and never get the diploma, to be a follower of Christ until death and never get the prize of eternal life with him. A follower may give mental consent to what Jesus taught and did, but never commit to taking the

course. He may even finish all the requirements of the course and yet get no credit because he did not pay the fee to take the course.

Jesus spent three or four years teaching on earth. Teaching was not his principle purpose, but while he was able he was preparing his disciples to teach others about why the Christ must suffer and be raised again on the third day. He had many disciples. We pay particular attention to the twelve he designated apostles, but there were many others, both men and women. He had many disciples, but he had even more followers. These people went from city to city with him. They heard his sermons, they ate his food. Many of them slept on the road with him and endured weather and other hardships. But in the end they were just followers.

Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend

The difference between a follower of Christ and a disciple is the difference between auditing a class and taking a class.

you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. (Jn 6:60-66)

These people may at one time have truly been disciples, but they proved themselves mere followers. These are the people of whom he said in verse 26, “Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.” They did not come for the teaching. They did not come to be disciples, but rather to follow him for the prestige or for the food.

Disciple and congregation. These are merely two of many words that have a deeper meaning when properly translated. Sometimes learning these meanings takes being part of a congregation rather than spending time in a church. Sometimes it requires as decision to stop being a follower of Christ and to start being a disciple of Christ.

THE KIND MESSIAH

It is sometimes enlightening to look at similar words in a language and determine their relationship, if any, to one another. English, of course, is largely made up of words or forms borrowed from other languages, so there are bound to be similarities. For instance, comportment (behavior) and deportment (the manner in which one conducts himself in public) are very similar. The first comes from forms meaning “carry with” and the second meaning “carry from.” Thus they both relate to how one carries himself. Naturally, there is a danger in such an exercise; some words that look alike may have no common ancestry, and may even mean something quite dissimilar. That word “dissimilar” (not alike) has no relationship to the similar sounding “dissimulate” (to hide under a false appearance, to disguise).

There are two words in the Greek that sound very much alike; in fact they may even be from the same root word. The words (using our alphabet) are *chrestotes* and *christos*. We are familiar with the latter (Christ, Christian), but are generally unfamiliar with the former, in English.

Both words are related through a word (*chraomai*) that means “to use,” or sometimes “to lend.” From this relationship, though, the words seem to diverge. The *christos* is the anointed one. To be *chrestotes* is to be kind, or more commonly to be appropriate. It is similar to the word “meet” used in the King James Version, when a woman is called a helper meet (appropriate) for man. These meanings seem so different that it is hard to picture them as being related. Indeed, we may ask how they are related, and thereby learn a lesson about Jesus as the Christ.

How does a word meaning to use or lend become the anointed or chosen one. Some scholars speculate it comes through the idea of contact. The Christ is the one

who has received an anointment (also called chrism, from the same root). Anointing was a practice, commonly used to designate a prophet/priest/king, of pouring olive oil on the selected person’s head. Thus the idea of anointing is related to the idea of use or loan, because it was a lending of oil for the use of designating a person for a purpose. Jesus is designated as prophet, high priest, and king, and so deserving of the title Christ.

The other word, *chrestotes*, takes a slightly different path. It is often translated as goodness or kindness. It derives from the concept of being appropriate for a given use. Thus to be good or kind is to do that which is appropriate to the need of the recipient. If a person needs money, kindness is giving him money; if he needs transportation it is not kindness to give him food. James says that it is not appropriate (kind) to give a verbal greeting to someone who needs clothing or food. (Jas 2:14-17) It is easy to see how kindness relates to usefulness, which directly descends from *chraomai*.

Can every *christos* be described as *chrestotes*? Can we find a direct correlation between these words? Probably not, on the theoretical level in which linguists seem to reside. In one man, however, we do find a very practical correlation. In Jesus the messiah meets with kindness, the Christ with appropriateness. We have a need; it is called forgiveness. Sin is a poverty of spirit similar to the poverties described by James. The problem is that sin requires forgiveness, but justice requires punishment. None of us can pay the price so that we ourselves, much less others, can be forgiven. But Jesus did. He met our need, and that is the definition of kindness. He was the help meet for us. And in that way two related words that took divergent linguistic paths come back together. Just for us; just because.

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