



THE BEREIA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Now On My Website

I recently uploaded a five-part lesson series on the parables in Matthew 13, first presented in the early 2000s in concert with an assignment in a graduate course on the parables. You’ll find it and other textual and topical sermon/class series [here](#).

Well Said

I suspect many are aware of the more precise translation of Matt 16.19/18.18 in the NASB (cf. NET, CSB) where Jesus told Peter and later all the apostles (18.18) that what they bound/loosed on earth “shall have been bound/loosed in heaven” (unlike “shall be bound/loosed” in KJV, ASV, NIV, NRSV, ESV). Perhaps, like me, you will appreciate seeing the phrasing of the point I recently noticed in the *New Linguistic & Exegetical Key* by Rogers & Rogers (see note ⁴, p. 2 for documentation), a citation from Albright & Mann’s Anchor Bible Commentary on Matthew: “This construction is the fut. perf. pass. . . trans.: ‘will have been bound,’ ‘will have been loosed.’ *It is the church on earth carrying out heaven’s decisions, not heaven ratifying the church’s decision*” (my italics). ~ For a study of the passage/point, see my article, “From Jesus’ Mind To Ours,” *Truth For Today*, Aug. 2004; available [here](#)—search “Authors”.

“Occupy the Premises!”

David Anguish

Based on what he was seeing in society, Peter Kreeft imagined a speech Satan might have given to the demons about the strategy they were to use in the culture war.

The Enemy’s people think they are safe from us because we cannot create or move matter, as the Enemy can, but all we can do is tempt and influence thought. Ha! “All we can do” is quite enough. For as one of their poets sagely said, “Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.” Their thoughts are their premises; their lives—and their eternal lives—are their conclusions. Get those premises! Occupy the premises! Conquer their philosophy. *That strategy works especially well in American society because they don’t pay much attention to philosophy, so they let their guard down there* (my emphasis).¹

Kreeft reminds us that behaviors, cultural shifts, and trends do not just happen. They come from ideas, the details of which some may not even be aware, which are successfully propagated and implemented. To competently respond to the trends, we must be aware of the premises that gave rise to the behaviors. People act according to how they think.

The New Testament writers knew this and taught accordingly. Following Jesus’ lead,² they connected preparation, renewal, and dedication of the *mind* to holiness (Col 3.1-4; 1 Pet 1.13-16) and Christ-like transformation (Rom 12.2; Phil 2.5). They warned against devilish schemes, human philosophy, and earthly wisdom and called for the disciples to live according to the wisdom that comes from God as embodied in and taught by Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1.30; 2.6-7; Eph 6.11-12; Col 1.9, 28; 2.3, 6-8; 3.2, 16; 4.5; Jas 3.13-18; etc.).³

In Romans 1, Paul directly tied “suppress[ing] the truth” that “can be known about God” to “futile thinking” and “foolish hearts that were darkened” (vv. 18-23). The futility and darkness led some who claimed they were “wise” to

On Seeking Relevance

“Any institution remains relevant as long as it has something distinctive to offer. Religious institutions are no exceptions. The religious institution that becomes indistinguishable from other institutions ... in very short order has great difficulties answering the question why it should exist as a separate institution at all; at this point it has become ‘irrelevant’ in the strictest sense of the word—the sense of redundancy and obsolescence.”

~ Peter Berger, *Religion & Society Report*, Jan. 1988; in “Obiter Dicta,” *Christian Studies* 13 (1993): 56

“... Rarely has the church seen so many of its leaders solemnly presenting the faith in public in so many weak, trite, foolish, disastrous, and even disloyal ways as today... Curiously, an embarrassing fact confronts those who inquire into the problem: This monumental and destructive carelessness has coincided exactly with a mania for relevance and reinvention that has gripped the church... How on earth have we Christians become so irrelevant when we have tried so hard to be relevant?” ~ Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness: A Challenge to the Idol of Relevance* (Baker Books, 2003), 11

“We fled sterile presentations of Bible facts to take refuge in relevance. What we have found is that all too often ‘relevant’ answers to life’s problems are not based on biblical theology... [but] on models taken from the world: the business models of success, psychological models of self-fulfillment, sociological models of interpersonal relationships, and countless others.” ~ Gary Holloway, “From Scripture to Sharing: Sunday Schools in Churches of Christ,” *Christian Studies* 12 (1992): 46; download: austingrad.edu, “Faith & Scholarship” tab

“become fools” and practice the sins named in verses 24-32.

He made the same connection in his preface to the ethical teaching in Ephesians 4.25-6.9. In 4.17-19, he called his readers to reject the sensual, greedy, and impure walk of the Gentiles that resulted from futile thinking and darkened understanding and led to hard-hearted alienation and ignorance.

Instead, they were to follow the way of ongoing renewal⁴ (4.21-24), replacing the old self (ἄνθρωπος; *anthrōpos*) with the new. Paul did not suggest the new way would just happen—any more than the old way had. It would result from their new thinking, specifically what they heard about and were taught in harmony with the truth—the reality—that was in Jesus.

The passage’s pivot point is verse 20 where Paul was emphatic that their old way was inconsistent with how they had “learn[ed] Christ.” His use of μανθάνω (*manthanō*), the verb from which μαθητής (*mathētēs*, “disciple”) derived, made “the readers’ instruction in [the] conduct” they were to pursue the main point in the contrast between vv. 17-19 and 21-24. Emphasis on learning Christ (more than knowing *about* Christ—see NIV 1984) is seen throughout the New Testament (cf. Matt 11.29) in continuity with the emphasis in the Old.⁵

The difference, as Andrew Lincoln notes, was in the content of the teaching that informed their behavior: “Just as the Jew learned Torah, so now a Christian can be said to learn Christ.”⁶

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Notes

¹ Peter Kreeft, *How To Win the Culture War: A Christian Battle Plan for a Society in Crisis* (InterVarsity Press, 2002), 71.

² In Matthew 15.10-20 = Mark 7.14-23, Jesus said defilement comes from the “heart,” biblically “the causative source of a person’s psychological life in its various aspects, but with special emphasis upon thoughts” (Louw & Nida, *Lexicon*). See Matthew’s repetition of “understanding” (συνίημι; *sunīēmi*; Matt 13.13-15, 19, 23, 51; 15.10; 16.12; 17.13) and Jesus’ characterization of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees as their “teaching” (διδασχί; *didachē*) (16.12).

³ “Philosophy” (φιλοσοφία, *philosophia*) is a compound word from “wisdom” (σοφία, *sophia*). The contrast in the New Testament, even in Col 2, is not between philosophy and no-philosophy (little p), but between divinely inspired, Christ-led (love of) wisdom and human (or demonic-Jas 3) wisdom.

⁴ “Renewed” (v. 23; ἀνανεώω; *ananeōō*) is a present participle, emphasizing “continuing renewing” (Cleon Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* [Zondervan, 1998], 442).

⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 42 (Word Books, Publisher, 1990), 279-280. The emphatic nature of Paul’s statement is seen in the way v. 20 begins, literally, “but you not . . .” See also Colossians 2.6-7 which uses παραλαμβάνω (*paralambanō*) with “teach” (διδάσκω; *didaskō*) to emphasize that they were to stay true to the tradition about Jesus.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 280.

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