

The Dictionary Says . . .

Joe Slater

Nearly thirty years ago a Christian friend, now deceased, gave me his Webster's unabridged dictionary (1930 edition). It has upwards of 3000 giant pages, and weighs about a ton. I treasure it to this day.

When I use it, though, I must remember that a dictionary defines words according to the way they are popularly used. For example, "rats" might be defined as any of several species of rodents, but it also means tangled places in one's hair or an expression of disappointment.

In studies of Bible words, definitions from an English dictionary may or may not reflect the meaning intended by the Lord. Consider Jesus' simple statement, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*" (Mark 16:16a). Any standard English dictionary will have several meanings for the word believe, including putting one's trust in someone based on evidence; but another dictionary definitions is to have an opinion, as in "I believe Pete is a better singer than Bob." Then there is the word baptize, defined in most dictionaries as to apply water in a religious ceremony by such means as immersion, pouring, or sprinkling. Finally, the word saved may mean rescued from physical peril, rescued from sin and its consequences, or preserved from decay (as one would save a cucumber by pickling it).

First and foremost, context determines word meaning! Dictionary definitions take a distant second place. Would anyone who respects God and the Bible affirm that Jesus taught, "He who has an opinion and is sprinkled shall be pickled"?

Apply this principle every time you read and study God's word. Dictionary definitions are fine as far as they go; but the immediate context as well as the overall teaching of Scripture will provide the meaning God intended.

THE ART OF SELF-DENIAL

One of the most difficult things for Christian people to practice is self-denial. Yet that is exactly what God expects of His people. If we allow ourselves every pleasure of our heart's desire, we'll become spoiled to the point where we will believe that we "deserve" all these things in order to be happy and content.

But the truth is, when we obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine (Rom. 6:17), we made a commitment to God to deny ourselves many of the pleasures in life in order to serve Him, the church, and other people. Jesus told His disciples, "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me*" (Luke 9:23). In the parallel passage in Matthew, Jesus asked, "*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*" (Matthew 16:26).

To put it in our own terms, Jesus is asking, "What good will it do you if you have the grandest house, the best recreational vehicles, go on the best vacations, send your kids to the finest schools, attend the best parties, go to weekend sporting events, or get the big promotion at work, if it means you'll wind up on the wrong side of judgement. Will you exchange these temporary pleasures and then spend eternity in hell?"

Wow! That's pretty heavy stuff there, Jesus. But it's exactly what He means. To make it even more difficult, our friends and neighbors are going to think we're crazy because we don't take part in every social event that's happening (1 Peter 4:4). When we are totally committed to Christ, we'll make these sacrifices in order to serve our heavenly Father and in the end, it will be worth it all. Jesus also said, "*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it*" (Matthew 16:25).

--Jay Launius (Maud, TX)

GOD'S NAME IS JEALOUS

"---for you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God---" (Exodus 34:14)

The scriptures speak, on a number of occasions, about the jealousy of God. The ten commandments of Exodus 20 note that He is jealous when anyone leaves Him to worship those things of His creation or the vanity of man's imagination. The idols of mankind, no matter the time period, are the product of a vivid imagination. God wants, from His creation, a whole-hearted allegiance and anything short of that will provoke God to jealousy.

The minor prophet Hosea wrote of a jealous God when he noted his own unfaithful wife. Hosea's wife Gomer, in her life of harlotry, was likened to unfaithful Israel who was in the process of leaving her husband (God) for the idols of the nations around about her. This very activity, on the part of Israel, brought shame upon God's name.

The name of God is to be respected, honored, and revered. There is constant reference to things being done by God's people in order that the name of God might be honored. In Romans 1:5 the apostle Paul notes concerning Jesus Christ "*through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake.*" The brethren, in the first century, went throughout the world preaching the gospel for the "*sake of the Name.*" This notation is provided by the apostle John in his third letter when he writes to Gaius (in the seventh verse) about those early missionaries. He notes, "*for they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.*"

We, today, need to honor the Name. To do any less is to provoke the jealousy of God.

--Dave Chamberlin (Denver, CO)