

Starting from Scratch

Sermon Prep (several years ago): 1 Corinthians 9.

- Paul wrote: "To the weak I became weak that I might win the weak."
- Curiosity: "Hmm. Is that word 'weak' also used in the difficult passage in James 5:14?"
- Chasing rabbits: "The word IS the same. So, it is clear that the Greek term for 'sick' can be used figuratively and can mean 'weak.'"

At that point of my study I began to wonder how I could work into my sermon a brief statement about James 5:14. It would support my long-held belief that James was referring to spiritual 'weakness' instead of physical 'sickness.' It was a controversial passage, but I was sure I was right. I wanted to assert my 'rightness.' After a few attempts it suddenly struck me that "I" had gotten in the way of Scripture. I had distracted myself with my own purpose. Even if I was correct, I was not treating the text of 1 Corinthians 9 with honesty and openness.

So, what is the point?

When studying the Bible it is so easy to become distracted with the baggage of life that we each carry. We have been taught certain truths by well respected individuals: parents, friends, trusted preachers, beloved authors, etc. Our perceptions can be tainted by the thinking of *our* society in *our* location at *our* time in history. It can be difficult to approach scriptures with a clear and open mind.

I vividly remember the first time I set out on a study of the biblical teaching of *baptism*. Before opening my Bible I prayed for insight and for the ability to be honest with scripture. I made a personal vow to God that I would follow the text of scripture and that I would change my views and my teachings where necessary. My prayer frightened me. An intimidating question washed over me: "What if...?"

What if I discovered that I had been wrong all these years? How could I face my parents and

close relatives? How could I go back to the same congregation...and teach classes? What would I say to my wife and children?

On one occasion Jesus said:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. (Matthew 10:34)

He was not talking about a literal sword and fighting, rather he spoke of the cost of discipleship. Just a few verses later we read Jesus' words:

³⁷He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (Matthew 10:37-38)

When reading and studying God's word we cannot merely rest on the understanding from parents, friends, preachers, authors, or anyone else. That may mean turning loose of teachings and assumptions from our past. It may mean clarifying teachings that do not fully make sense. We must open the Word of God with an open mind and an open heart and study it for ourselves. Whether it is a passage of text like *1 Corinthians 9*, a topic like *baptism*, or a question on a current social issue; Mom and Dad must not stand in the way of God's word. Trusted people and fine resources must not stand in the way of God's word. "I" must not stand in the way of God's word. In many respects, we must each *start from scratch* in our journey with the Lord.

Only when I have truly committed myself to Jesus with an open and honest heart will I be counted worthy to be His disciple.

Mark Stinnett