

“THEREFORE” IS A BIG WORD

In the Bible the word, therefore, has a very important function. The frequent use of the term is related to what Bible scholars call the indicative - imperative dynamic.

The indicative is a statement of redemptive fact or divine truth (theory or concept). The imperative is the command or stipulation (application or implied response) that results. The former represents theological “why” or “what” thinking and the latter ethical or practical “how” and “when” thinking. “Therefore” functions as the logical-grammatical link between the fact (indicative) and the action (imperative) that should result. Here are four examples:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go *therefore* and make disciples of all nations. (Matt 28:18b-19)

I beseech you *therefore*, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Rom 12:1)

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death *therefore* what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (Col 3:3-5)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth... *Therefore* put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word.... (James 1:17-22)

Let's use Romans 12:1 as an example. “Therefore” in this context means that the command, “present your bodies a living sacrifice,” follows logically and theologically from what Paul said before in Romans 1-11. He is saying, “In light of what came before you *must* do the following.” The presentation of “your bodies” (ourselves) is the ethical application and divine expectation of Paul's teaching up to this point in his letter. The “living sacrifice” is the “reasonable service” that should result from God's reconciliation provided through Jesus Christ. Paul says to us: “Because of the extraordinary blessings we now have in Christ, can you possibly imagine *anything* less than the total and exclusive dedication of your whole life to God?” Not to do so is both illogical and irreverent.

But, how does the indicative - imperative dynamic apply to my life here and now?

For example, Christian friends tell me that they do not like an intellectual approach to the Bible. They much prefer practical teaching and application. In other words, they like “how” and “when” thinking, rather than “what” or “why” thinking. The problem is that the Bible does not share this perspective, as we have seen. In the Bible there is no separation of theory and practice, theology and application or thinking and action.

Let me give you two, brief, generic illustrations about the limitations of “how” and “when” thinking. Imagine if a surgeon tells you, “I will remove your appendix,” but he only knows surgical technique, but very little about anatomy. Or, imagine a pilot who says, “I will fly you to Miami,” but he only knows about takeoff and landing. He never studied aerodynamics. Would you entrust your lives to them?

Should anyone trust *us*, if we are misinformed or ignorant, that is, if we do not know the biblical “what” and “why”?

Think about this seriously. Consider the essential link between the indicative (theological fact) and the imperative (ethics and application) represented in these two passages (even though the word, therefore, does not appear):

Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...
(1 Chron 12:32a)

We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

In 1 Chronicles the men of Issachar had “understanding” (wisdom), so *that* they discerned what God wanted them to do. They took action *in light of* what they understood. They did not act without thinking or think without acting. On the other hand, how often do we act, sometimes rashly, without first understanding?

Likewise, in 1 John we see that it is impossible to know *how* to love effectively, if we do not first understand Christ’s prior love for us in the cross. In order to imitate Christ’s love for others (practice), it is necessary to first understand his love for us (theology). However, do we sometimes respond to need based on empathy without first knowing the context? Does our “help” actually hurt? Do we lack wisdom?

In the Bible there is no separation of theory and practice or theology and application. We must know both. In the Bible “what” and “why” are intimately linked to “how” and “when.” This is wisdom – the right application of divine Truth.

Therefore, we must discover why and how the “therefore” functions in every biblical text that applies to us.