

Let Us Reason Together

"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18).

This passage from Isaiah was directed toward Judah. Isaiah had been sent to Judah because of their wickedness. There is quite a bit of this wickedness discussed prior to verse eighteen. The wrath of God due to this wickedness is explained in very clear wording. After our text we see the love of God described for those who would repent of this wickedness and be forgiven. Isaiah 1:18 is actually a parenthesis between these two positions. It is the point where Judah will need to listen to what God says and determine that they are guilty of sin and make the necessary correction. This is done by reasoning together. Barnes says that this "denotes the kind of contention, or argumentation, which occurs in a court of justice, where the parties reciprocally state the grounds of their cause." Judah must listen to what God has to say on the subject. They have been operating on their own principles long enough and it has only brought them the promise of condemnation. They need to listen attentively and make a decision to repent. In like fashion, we often use this passage to encourage others to study God's word and make a decision to turn from sin to following the gospel of Christ.

There are several instances where we find the apostles employing the principle of reasoning. The word most often used is a word which has become our word "dialogue." The English word "dialogue" suggests, among other things, "an exchange of ideas and opinions" (Webster). This is an excellent concept when we think of reasoning together. Vine says this word in the original Greek means "to bring together different reasons and reckon them up, to reason." This particular word is used on a number of occasions in the New Testament. This is the word used when Paul was in the synagogue at Thessalonica and "for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2). He did the same thing in the synagogues of Athens (Acts 17:17), Corinth (Acts 18:4), and Ephesus (Acts 18:19; 19:8). Later, when Paul was before Felix, he "reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come?" (Acts 24:25). Acts 17:17 also mentions Paul reasoning in the marketplace. This was the agora, a place of much business in Corinth. This tells us that Paul followed the same practice no matter where he had the opportunity. If in the synagogue; if in the marketplace; if in Felix' hall, he reasoned with those he encountered.

Paul's purpose in all of this may best be seen in Acts 18:4, "And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks." Notice how the reasoning led to some being persuaded. Vine says this means "to apply persuasion, to prevail upon or win over, to persuade, bringing about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral considerations." Think of the unique setting of these two words. It paints a picture of a dialogue of ideas and opinions with the intent to change minds. This is how the apostle did it and it is how we should do it as well.

Please notice what is absent in these cases. There is no evidence that anyone was harangued or intimidated. There would also be the absence of dogmatism since it is an exchange of ideas. I am sure there was an earnest pressing of points. However, this is not the same as a pressing for position. There was not a trace that one must emerge from such occasions having vanquished all others encountered. Would to God that this might always be the case.

Why is it that we who claim to be followers of God's word so often experience failure in this regard? We will engage someone and become frustrated over a lack of interest in any kind of dialogue. "Their minds are set just like concrete" might be heard. Do we not sometimes do the same thing? I am sure we have encountered occasions in Bible study where someone in the class is not in agreement on some point and is obstinate from the beginning. The mind is made up and the case is closed. So much for reasoning and persuading. It is hard to reason with someone who has closed their ears. Sometimes we think such behavior is being steadfast or taking a stand for truth. We fail to realize that it may just be a sign of being stiff-necked and close-minded. Those who participate in such behavior reveal that they are the followers of God's word as they claim. If they were, they would practice some reasoning and persuading. Unfortunately, there is no reasoning and persuading when one party "burrs up" and refuses anything offered by anyone with a different point of view.

Two brothers disagree on some point. They make several attempts to discuss the matter. One is seeking to reason and persuade and will do so in any setting. The other lays down several rules which must be met. No dictionaries, lexicons or commentaries can be used. He even insists that only one version of the Bible may be consulted. Does this sound like fertile ground for reasoning to you? In truth, there seems to be only a slim chance for the two to get together at all.

Consider, for a moment, the case of Apollos (Acts 18:24-28). Apollos, "an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures" had come to Ephesus. He had been "instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John." These things he spoke "boldly in the synagogue." Aquila and Priscilla heard him and realized his deficiencies in knowing only the baptism of John. It says of these two disciples that "they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." Folks, what do you see here? Do you see a couple of brethren rounding Apollos up and "hammering" him? I know that you do not. I think you see Aquila and Priscilla using some reasoning and persuading. Why can't we do the same thing? Terry Sanders