

A Camping Trip
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May 21, 2019

2 Tim 2:6

(NA 28th ed.)

(DLNT)

τὸν κοπιῶντα

The laboring

γεωργὸν δεῖ πρῶτον

farmer must be first

τῶν καρπῶν μεταλαμβάνειν.

to receive-a-share of the fruits.

Okay, the main thing to notice here is that the Greek word for farmer is *georgos*. In other words, “George.” A “farmer” is a *gaia*-worker—combining the word for earth with the word for energy. I like the Disciple’s Literal New Testament here, since it says basically that George (meaning, I assume, ME), must be first. Hurray! A biblical warrant to promote myself.

Mine is the sort of interpretation you get when you pick and choose what you want to see in Scripture and ignore the larger context. Like: I was trying to decide whether to ask my girlfriend to marry me, and I came across Matt 1:20, “do not fear to take Mary as your wife.” I went and did likewise.

The Bible doesn’t have, “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” It never says there were three wise men. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit—therefore you shouldn’t use it to sin, like joining it with a prostitute (1 Cor 6:15). Unless you can show clearly in Scripture that smoking is a sin, you simply can’t cite Corinthians against the practice. Paul says don’t *sin* with your body.

And while we are in Corinthians—look at 2 Cor 9:7. The meaning of the Greek word there is “cheerful.” Just because the English word “hilarity” is based on it, does not mean that Paul meant a “hilarious” giver. And just because Paul used *idios* for “your own” does not mean you should translate, “submit to your idiot husbands.”

Some [claim](#) that names of modern leaders and events are embedded in the Hebrew text—and are statistically “[not due to chance](#).” But even if this were true it would have no bearing on how to preach the text, or what the text is even about. If we attempt to extract meaning from a text in any way but that which the human authors intended or which sheds light on the gospel, then we will be engaged in generating our own arbitrary meaning and fancifully reading it into the text, rather than authentically listening to the text. We will simply be making stuff up. Eisegesis rather than exegesis. George must be first.

Perhaps the most foolish and tragic example of this in recent years is the utter nonsense taught by Harold Camping, when he predicted that the Lord would return on May 21, 2011—exactly eight years ago today. [Billboards](#) were posted coast to coast around America announcing this.

If you looked at his website (they took it down very quickly), his “infallible proofs” were outside any normal practice of interpretation. It was so eccentric that it would have made any medieval allegorist blush. For example ...

The number 17 signifies “heaven,” 23 represents “destruction,” 5 means “atonement.” Multiply them to get 1,955—which is the number of years from Pentecost until the end of the church age. After AD 1988, there were no more true conversions. (Sorry, millennials, you are out of luck.) So said Harold.

10 is “completeness.” Atonement x Completeness x Heaven, squared, equals the number of days from Christ’s death until the rapture: May 21, 2011.

God told Noah the world would end in 7 days. With God 1 day is 1000 years, so that means the universe would end 7000 years after the flood: in 2011. QED.

And the result was atheist groups making a [mockery](#) of the Christian doctrine of the rapture, tying helium balloons to dolls and setting them loose to pour contempt on our cherished beliefs. When a teacher becomes a hermeneutical law unto himself like Harold, this is what you get.

One way to guard against that sort of self-deception is to stick to the disciplined practice of exegesis. The actual intention of the author—subservient to the gospel of Jesus as set forth in the whole canon—should always be what you are trying to elucidate in your preaching and teaching. *Beware of those finding cryptic messages hidden to everyone else.*

This is what Paul really teaches in the paragraph of 2 Tim 2:6. He says: take heed to his message. Entrust his words to faithful teachers. And make sure you do it “by the rules” (v. 5). If you are disciplined to authentically understand the Bible texts, you won’t go wrong. Don’t let the clever distract you from the true.

Something to think about, on this the eighth anniversary of the end of the world.