

Do you understand what you are reading?

A study of the Greek words adikia and anomia.

2 Timothy 2

It seems that much disorder among us stems from a misunderstanding of certain Scriptures. First and foremost is the question: How does God use the word “iniquity”? Many so-called assembly actions are prompted by what is perceived to be *iniquity*. But do we really know what God covers under that word? So let us take a look at the significance of the Greek words used for *unrighteousness* or *iniquity*. I suggest we approach this question like a child approaches the question of: What does a particular word Mom or Dad uses mean? It learns it from the context, right? So when we want to know what our heavenly Father means by the words used in Greek for iniquity, we use the same method by looking at every verse that uses these words; thereby we will find out what *God* means by them. We have been taught that this is the only way to assure ourselves of the significance of words used by God in His Word, for Spiritual things are to be communicated by spiritual means (1 Cor. 12-13).

Many, however, approach this question differently. They go to Greek scholars and use their material, but these man-made helps are often contaminated by the notions of mankind, which are darkened by sin. From these helps they learn how the world uses these words. Then they approach God’s Word with this knowledge to determine the bearing of the relevant verses containing these words. This way a serious misuse has been made of the word *iniquity*.

We must, however, turn to God’s Word alone for help. We therefore will look at every use of *iniquity* in the New Testament. We are of course hindered by the fact that our language is not the language in which Scripture was written; as a result three words in the Greek (*adikia* G93 and *anomia* G458 and G3913) have been translated by the English word *iniquity*, and sometimes other words than *iniquity* are used to render these words in English.

First we will look at the occurrences of G93

αδικία adikia ad-ee-kee'-ah

From [G94](#); (legal) *injustice* (properly the quality, by implication the act); moral *wrongfulness* (of character, life or act): - iniquity, unjust, unrighteousness, wrong.

(Luke 13:27 KJV) But He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity. G93

A serious verse, but one that does not indicate what iniquity actually is, other than this, that those workers of iniquity are all those who do not belong to Christ, for the Lord, speaking after the Rapture, condemns all who worked iniquity.

(Acts 1:18 KJV) Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. G93

Here is verse that helps us a good deal. We know the character of the evil perpetrated by Judas. After having been blessed like few others for over three years, and having received the ability to cast out demons and heal the sick, he nevertheless betrayed his Lord and Master for financial gain. From this we learn that this verse speaks of the activity and attitude of one not born again.

(Acts 8:23 KJV) For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. G93

These words spoken by Peter to Simon the magician were also related to greed. This man thought he could combine financial gain through the gifts the Holy Spirit bestows on those who are the Lord's. Like the verse above his attitude betrayed him as one not born again, whose deeds therefore flowed from his bondage to sin, from which he was not set free.

(1 Cor. 13:6 KJV) Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. G93

Here is once more a verse that does not help us to ascertain the significance of the word iniquity. It is part of the description of love, which is of God. Those who

rejoice in iniquity do not have the love of God in their heart.

(2 Tim. 2:19-21 KJV) Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour. G93

To understand this verse we have to take the context into account. It speaks of those among the believers who corrupt the Word of God to the extent that they deny such things as a coming resurrection. The result of their ministry was that the faith of some was overthrown; a most serious offence. Since the outcome of the work of these babblers was disastrous to the Church, the saints needed instruction how to deal with such persons, who may indeed have *appeared* to be born again. Consequently it became a question of discerning who belonged to the Lord and who did not; a matter that in the final analysis is only known to the Lord. They are therefore reminded of the fact that only the Lord knows who are really His, and that, therefore, they themselves may have been mistaken in their assessment of the genuineness of such persons. Since the work of those corruptors of the Word was clearly destructive, and therefore iniquitous, all were admonished to withdraw from iniquity, a thing they might have been reluctant to do.

We too, when we see such results, we need to withdraw from those whose words and actions tend to overthrow the faith of the simple. In 3 John we have prophetically the promise that the Lord will deal with those who, while “babbling,” refuse to receive brethren, and cast out those who would receive them.

As to a clear understanding of 2 Timothy 2:21-22, we need to realize that all who are born again are vessels to honour. Among them may be vessels to dishonour like those two persons mentioned in verse 17, unregenerated men who pretend by fair speeches to be true Christians, but who are not; from these workers of iniquity we ought to separate ourselves. Now about “the vessels to honour” the Lord gives an additional word. If they are to be **useful for every good work** they must purge themselves from such vessels to dishonour. A vessel to honour will, to some extent, always be useful in the Lord’s hands, but only those who have purged themselves are useful for **every** good work; it is therefore imperative that we do depart from all iniquity.

(James 3:6 KJV) And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. G93

By nature our tongue is not under the guidance of the Spirit, it is an instrument of iniquity which leads men to hell, the portion of the unregenerated.

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Additional verses using G93 in which the word is translated by other English words (*unjust, unrighteousness, wrong*):

A. Those that relate to unconverted, i.e. unregenerated men, and their deeds:

Lk 16:8-9 *unjust* steward, mammon of *unrighteousness*

Lk 18:6 *unjust* judge

Rom. 1:18,29 *unrighteousness* of men, who hold the truth in *unrighteousness*; filled with all *unrighteousness*

Rom 2:8 but obey *unrighteousness*

Rom 3:5 if our *unrighteousness* commend the righteousness of God.

2 Th. 2:10,12 *unrighteousness* in them that perish...all might be damned who...had pleasure in *unrighteousness*.

Heb 8:12;10:17 I will be merciful to their *unrighteousness*; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

2 Pe 2:13,15 reward of *unrighteousness*...who loved the wages of *unrighteousness*.

1 Jn. 1:9 cleanse us from all *unrighteousness*.

1 Jn. 5:17 all *unrighteousness* is sin: and there is sin not unto death.

B. Those that are more general, but do not give any indication of the actual character of the sin in view:

Jn. 7:18 no *unrighteousness* is in Him.

Rom 6:13 neither yield your members as instruments of *unrighteousness*

Rom 9:14 is there *unrighteousness* with God?

2 Cor 12:13 forgive me this wrong (Paul uses a sarcastic exaggeration)

Now we will look at G458, *ἀνομία* anomia an-om-ee'-ah

From **G459**; *illegality*, that is, *violation of law* or (generally) *wickedness*: - iniquity, X transgress (-ion of) the law, *unrighteousness*.

(Mat 7:23 KJV) And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity. G458

This verse speaks of iniquity as the habitual character of the works of unregenerated men.

(Mat 13:41 KJV) The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. G458

From this verse we cannot determine the character of iniquity. We only know that here it refers to all the ungodly at the time when the Lord Jesus judges the quick and the dead. So its application to ourselves during the day of grace remains unclear from this verse. What does it mean? For example, is one who raises his voice unrighteously to be considered a worker of iniquity? We know his action is a sin, needing confession, but is it iniquity? I do not believe that we classify it as such; if we did, many a leading brother would have been removed from the Lord's table, for we certainly do not allow association with those who, having committed iniquity, fail to confess their sin. Yet, too often wrong language is heard from the lips of those who are truly the Lord's, occasionally even from those who lead us. Sad to say, it is seldom confessed by the speaker as sin before his or her brothers and sisters; rather it is often justified by calling it "righteous indignation," especially by some who seek to exert their vision of a matter on the weak and timid. Apparently we read the Epistle of Jude far too little!

(Mat 23:28 KJV) Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. G458

In this verse we see the association of iniquity with hypocrisy; with those who pretend to be godly but who are not. This helps us a little, and begins to give direction to the significance of the word. Here it speaks of the works of the ungodly.

(Mat 24:12 KJV) And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. G458

This verse and the following one just by themselves are far too general to be of help in our study. This one refers to the time of the tribulation. For us it raises a question: Does it mean that due to the fact that in the last days of the Church there will be many pretenders, unsaved people, among God's people, there will of necessity also iniquity found among them? Is this the reason why so little true love is found among those who are truly Christ's?

(Rom 6:19 KJV) I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. G458

This verse confirms what we concluded in the two previous verses. We all were once servants of uncleanness and iniquity, from which, through genuine faith, we have been set free through the deliverance we have in Christ. The iniquity it speaks of was that what characterized us in our natural state before we were born anew.

(2Th 2:7 KJV) For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only He who now letteth will let, until He be taken out of the way. G458

As we understand this verse, iniquity will have its full effect once the Church has been taken up, for it is characteristic of those without Christ. Then it will flourish, for the ungodly will have the overhand. Initially there will be few who will count with God. How the remnant of Israel will by and by come to know Him is not fully explained, other than that we know that this will come about under the pressures brought about by the Antichrist.

(Tit 2:14 KJV) Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. G458

Has Christ redeemed us from all iniquity or not? Has He purified us? Surely, we have to purify our walk and actions, but He has purified us positionally. This is a thing done! So it also flows from the context that He has redeemed us from all iniquity. This too is a thing done! It is because His is a finished work that we can look for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. In this verse therefore, just as in many of the previous verses, iniquity is what belongs to the old man which has been crucified with Christ. Therefore we should separate from all who practice iniquity so that we may also be free from iniquity in our practices.

(Heb 1:9 KJV) Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows. G458

Here is once more a verse that gives no indication of the significance of iniquity. Of course we know God hates all evil, even that which we as Christians so often still get involved in, for instance, attaching the name of Christ to unholy decisions, actions, and words.

Additional verses using G458 in which the word is translated by other English words (*iniquities, unrighteousness, lawlessness*):

A. Those that relate to unconverted, i.e. unregenerated men, and their deeds:

Rom 4:7 whose *iniquities* are forgiven.

2Cor. 6:14 what fellowship has righteousness with *unrighteousness*?

Heb 10:17 and their sins and *iniquities* will I remember no more.

B. Those that are more general, but do not give any indication of the actual character of the unrighteousness:

1 Jn. 3:4 Every one that practises sin practises also *lawlessness*, sin is *lawlessness*.

Finally we look at G3913 παραφρονία paraphronia par-af-ron-ee'-ah

From [G3912](#); *insanity*, that is, *foolhardiness*: -madness.

(2Pe 2:16 KJV) *But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. G3913*

Here the word is referring to the actions of an ungodly man, who, though having knowledge of God and His character and thoughts, tried to use this knowledge to do the work of Satan and curse Israel. Clearly once more, iniquity is connected with the actions and deeds of the ungodly.

Conclusions:

Wherever Scripture shows us the character of the iniquity, unrighteousness, or lawlessness it always relates to the deeds and actions of that really belong to unregenerated men - i.e. such things like false doctrines and immoral deeds - consequently not to the failures of born again persons who do not perfectly understand the will of God in everything. Yet, as we will cover below, even those who are born again can at times practice iniquity.

The misunderstanding of *iniquity*, however, has led to a serious misuse of 2 Timothy 2:19. On the basis of this wrong understanding some consider faithful Christians who fail to understand God's thoughts about the Assembly to be involved with iniquity. As a result they declare not only individual believers but also whole assemblies to be unfit for fellowship at the breaking of bread. Their wrong explanation then leads to an activity found in 3 John 9-11, for not only do they declare some truly born again persons, whose Christian walk in every other aspect is beyond reproach, to be unacceptable; but then, secondly, they also remove those who, because they believe that 2 Timothy 2 is misapplied, continue to receive some from assemblies that were declared unacceptable. So we find that today many undefiled brothers and sisters are cast out of the assembly. We should not forget that Diotrephes must also have believed to have scriptural reasons for his actions?

This pattern of behaviour is not only based on a wrong understanding of 2 Timothy 2, but also based on an improper application of Matthew 18:20, which, so they say, shows that *the highest authority on earth is given to the assembly*. Therefore any who ignore the decisions of an assembly is rebelling against God. This, too, is a serious misuse of Scripture! First of all, Scripture tells us that *authority is given to the two or three gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus*. This is an all-important difference! Over the ages many an assembly has seemingly continued as an assembly, long after they were truly gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus (Rev. 3:14-22). Secondly, from the context

it is very clear that this authority is given to deal with matters of a local nature. Thirdly, the Lord's presence, and therefore the Lord's consent, is the essential criterion. From Acts 15 we receive adequate instruction how to deal with inter-assembly questions. Nowhere has an assembly been given authority beyond its own sphere.

An assembly that is subject to the Word of God can *on the basis of the Lord's presence in their midst* decide matters which will then not just be bound on earth but also in heaven. But what scriptural instruction is there to declare whole assemblies, i.e. all who attend there, as unfit for fellowship at the Lord's table? We know of none. The only instruction is to remove wicked *persons*. Do such unscriptural decisions testify to the presence of the Lord among those who make them? How does the Lord look upon people who say: "So says the Lord," when the Lord has not spoken? How should we look at them? These are serious questions that arise when we are confronted with unscriptural decisions. It is a grievous sin to connect the Lord's name to unscriptural decisions on the unscriptural basis that *"the highest authority on earth is given to the assembly."*

To avoid any misunderstanding, I personally all the more firmly believe in the gathering unto the name of the Lord Jesus alone whereby by we by our conduct give testimony to: the headship of Christ, the oneness of the body of Christ, the leading of the Holy Spirit, our obedience to the Word; and where the order in the house of God is maintained. I know of no alternative way of gathering that could be pleasing to the Lord and honouring to Him. At the same time I fully believe that such a testimony cannot be maintained by misuse of the Scriptures. We should never forget that we are not under law, but under grace. If we different thoughts about certain matters, it will be totally without value to the Lord if we force others to do what we believe to be the Lord's will. Forcing others to do things, rather than allowing them to do them out of conviction, will result only in hypocrisy (Jn. 9:22); we are supposed to be shepherds and teachers, not law enforcers. **The desire** of those taking such decisions may be **right**, their methods and understanding, like those of the Pharisees, frequently **lack the grace of God** that should mark those gathered to the name of the Lord. That makes it so utterly sad!

Another serious matter needs to be raised here. There are many who might agree with what is written above, but feel that decisions they consider to be unscriptural are not binding on all and can simply be ignored. Any such should be reminded of the Gibeonites and Joshua's wrong decision to make a covenant with them. None living in the days of Saul had personally been involved in that decision. Saul rightfully considered it to have been a wrong decision on Joshua's part and felt it better to undo it. Though none in David's day had really any part in Saul's action, yet in David's day God punished Israel as whole for the wrong done by Saul in correcting Joshua's error.

Indeed, even in Israel, wrong decisions made on earth were recognized in heaven in so far that God held Israel (the then fellowship) as a whole responsible for that decision and He did not allow it to be simply ignored.

This raises other questions. Should such decisions then remain standing, and is there no recourse, especially for those who have become the victim of such decisions? Our recourse is *first and foremost* to acknowledge that **we** have failed (the body is one). **We** have to confess the wrong **we** have done in taking these wrong decisions, and not see them as *the wrong they have done*. The Lord Jesus made our sins His own, and so we have to make ourselves fully one with the wrong that we understand has been committed. Are there any who bow themselves thus today?

In Psalm 103:7 we read of the difference between God's ways and God's deeds. Moses by intimate relationship with God on the mountain got to understand God's ways, not just what God would do in the end. Unless we know God's ways, our efforts will result in a display of legality. So it is for us, we need to be on our knees before God in confession and humiliation, seeking from Him the *way* how to deal with the wrongs we bemoan.

A few additional words are needed. First, as we have shown above, having different thoughts about ecclesiastical matters, serious as this might be, is in itself not a matter of iniquity! Immorality or false doctrine about Christ and His work, just as attacks on the Scriptures, are! Where these are found, we are neither to eat with such nor greet those who are involved in these things (1 Cor. 5; 3 John). A good test for us is to ask ourselves: Do we indeed not eat and greet those we have removed from the breaking of bread? If we still feel free to do so, there is something drastically wrong with the fact that we have removed them!

Secondly, a little more on 2 Timothy 2 may be helpful. We have stated that all true believers are vessels to honour, and that the vessels to dishonour are those who pretend to be Christian and are not. Vessels to honour, true believers, may also for a time practice iniquity. David did, and so did the born again man in 1 Corinthians 5! The two in mentioned in 2 Timothy 2 also committed iniquity and should be separated from. Yet the saints had not to question whether or not these were born again individuals (many may have thought they were) for that is really only known to the Lord, who alone knows those that are His. Their task was to separate from all that is marked by iniquity. Born again persons can be defiled; there can be defiled golden and silver vessels. In agreement with 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 all those who are genuinely the Lord's are gold and silver vessels, the wooden and earthen are pretenders who have crept in unawares. There is consistency in the use of symbols in the Scriptures. The material a vessel is made of is its inherent quality. As an example:

perhaps we have in our own homes a vessel of honour, a golden dish which under normal circumstances we would use to put fruit or other dainties on the table when we have guests. The fact that, after the meal, we might perhaps have put some refuse on this dish, would for the time being render it defiled and not be *prepared for every good work*. It nevertheless remains inherently a vessel to honour.

But so it is with Christians. A true Christian, a vessel to honour, may through his or her own carelessness not be *prepared for every good work*, but that does not change its inherent quality as a vessel to honour. Don't we firmly believe that those who are saved are saved for eternity, and ready for heaven where no vessels to dishonour will appear? Yet if for a time such a vessel to honour is marked by iniquity, we need to separate from it, not making it a question whether or not he or she is a vessel to honour, which may have become doubtful to us, but not to the Lord. Always remember: **Separation from evil does not make vessels to honour, the washing by the blood of Christ has done this**. Therefore, never separate the words: "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, [in separating himself from them], he shall be a vessel to honour" from what follows: "sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work." The first part of the sentence describes the Christian's position, the second his condition. Our condition depends on our walk, our position is untouchable through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our walk can cause us to be unsanctified and unserviceable to the master even though we may be a vessel to honour.

A final word on a related matter may be helpful. Often we hear Ephesians 4:3 quoted in part. On that basis we are then told to be diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit. Here too we have to do with a serious, because it really is pretentious, error. The unity we have has been made by the Spirit on the day of Pentecost when we were all baptised by one Spirit we all have been baptised into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). Thereby the unity of which Ephesians 4 speaks has been created unalterably, a unity that cannot be undone by any. We cannot destroy it, we cannot keep it. Only the Holy Spirit can, and does, keep it. We are instructed to keep that unity "in the uniting bond of peace." We are responsible for the condition in which this unity is displayed on earth. The Lord prayed that we might "be perfected in one and that the world may know that" the Father has sent Him. Our testimonial oneness, which is so precious to God (Ps. 133) ought to give an undisputable display the truth of the Lord's coming to earth to this world. Since the peace we have to keep is far to be looked for, it is no wonder that so few in this world are attracted to our precious Lord and Saviour. Not a small part of the blame falls on those who confess to be gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus! Well may we bow in confessing humility!

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