



WOW: Word Of the Week

Kainos

August 24, 2022

Perhaps you have heard someone mention that English-speakers struggle to understand what the Bible says about love—because four different Greek words are translated by the one English word, “love.” A reverse problem exists because two English words, justice and righteousness, are used to translate one Greek word. Today’s WOW—there are two Greek words, kainos and neos, that are translated in the New Testament by the English word, “new.” Let’s briefly unpack why this makes a difference!

Our word today means new in contrast to something that previously existed, often in the sense of replacing it. Kainos describes something that has never been before. The meaning is not time-oriented. Our word describes the quality or unique characteristics of something. Jesus’ body was placed in a new tomb—not new in the sense of having recently been hewn, but a tomb that had never been used. Not time but quality. In Hebrews 8, the new covenant is totally different (kainos), thus replacing the first covenant. In the years immediately after Jesus established the new covenant, it was also recent (neos), but kainos is the word used in Hebrews 8. The new covenant of Jesus is still new today in contrast to the previous covenant—it is still the New Covenant.

In Col. 3:10, the new Christian puts on a new (neos) person—that is, a person who only recently became a Christian has a new life that only recently began. But then, a constant renewal begins (a different word, a word with the same root as our WOW), a renewal in character and spirit, according to the image of God. This renewal continually refreshes, constantly replacing the oldness of the previous life.

Application time! I hope that what I share is interesting, but these studies must also have purpose, application.

Paul instructs Timothy that no one should despise his “newness”—his “recentness.” The usual translation is “his youth.” This is the word neos, not kainos. This is timing. Timothy’s newness is Timothy’s youth.

Paul reminds the Romans that they arose from their baptism to live in “newness” of life—an entirely different kind of life that would replace their previous life. Paul echoes this in his reference to the death of the old person. In Romans 6, the word is kainos, our WOW, not neos. Resurrection life in Christ is new in character or quality. Some of the Christians at Rome had been Christians for a number of years.

Paul uses our WOW with a suffix in Titus 3:5. Our salvation is not due to our righteous works but comes through the washing (baptism) of regeneration and renewal—that’s our word! — of the Holy Spirit. Something more—both interesting and useful! When we talk about what the Holy Spirit does in our lives, our conversation is incomplete if we do not mention that the Spirit makes it possible for us to be new and renewed in Christ every day.

Perhaps we can say also that God has this quality—in an Old Testament text that is known to many people, from Lamentations 3. God’s steadfast love is unceasing, his mercies are unending, they are new (renewed) every morning. God is faithful—that is God’s nature, his character, one of his qualities.

May our lives in Christ be new—because that’s our changed nature, our character, the quality of our life in Christ.