



Ignorance/Rejection of Doctrine: Paul's Quotes of Classical Writers: Evil Associates Corrupt Virtue, 1 Cor 15:33; Use of Theistic Logic, Romans 1:19-20

1 Corinthians 15:33 - Stop being led astray [**present passive imperative of πλανᾶω, *planaō***]! Evil associates corrupt good norms and standards.

“evil”: **κακός, *kakos***: Bad in one's conduct or character; evil in the sense of being immoral.

“associates”: **ὁμιλία, *homilia***: association, company; social relationships.

“corrupt”: **φθείρα, *phtheira***: To bring to a worse state; to corrupt, spoil, or vitiate (to debase one's moral status) in a moral or spiritual sense.

“good”: **χρηστός, *chrēstos***: In a moral sense: moral, useful, good, virtuous.

“norms and standards”: **ἦθος, *ēthos***: habit, custom, morals, character.

This verse has an interesting background that is worth noting. It is a quote by Paul from **Θαίς (*Theis*)**, a work by Menander, the third-century B.C. Athenian comedic playwright.

Paul was an educated man and it was not unusual for him to insert his knowledge of Grecian or Hellenistic culture into his epistles. This is elaborated upon by:

Longenecker, R. N. “Paul the Apostle.” In *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Merrill C. Tenney, general editor. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 4:627:

Without betraying any profound influence of Hellenistic philosophy on his thinking, Paul can still (1) employ its religious language to expound Christian truth (e.g., Col. 1:15-20):

Vaughn, Curtis. “Colossians.” In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Frank E. Gaebelein (gen. ed.). (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1978), 11:166-67:

An incipient form of Gnosticism lent itself to an air of exclusiveness, cultivating an “enlightened” elite for whom alone salvation was possible. Gnosticism was characterized by belief in the evil of matter, in mediating beings, and in salvation through knowledge.

Beginning with the assumption that all matter is evil, the Gnostics argued that God and matter were therefore antagonistic. Indeed, they contended that God didn't create this world and that he has absolutely no contact with it. (Gnostics) taught that God put forth from himself a series of “aeons” or emanations, each a little more distant from him and each having a little less deity. At the end of this chain of intermediate beings there is an emanation possessing enough of deity to make a world be removed far enough from God that his creative activities could not compromise the perfect purity of God. The world, they argued, was the creation of this lesser power, who being so far removed from God was both ignorant of and hostile to him. These “aeons” were thought to inhabit the stars and rule man's destiny. They therefore were to be placated and worshiped. Paul's references to “throne ... powers ... rulers ... authorities” are allusions to these supposed intermediate beings.

Belief in the inherent evil of matter made it impossible for the Gnostics to accept the real incarnation of God in Christ. Some of them explained it away by denying the actual humanity of Jesus, holding that he only seemed to be human. The body of Jesus, they taught, was an illusion, a phantom, only apparently real. In their view, Christ was only one of many intermediaries between God and the world, but he was sufficiently related to God to share his abhorrence of any direct contact with matter. Gnostics explained away the incarnation by denying the real deity of Jesus. That is, they stopped short of making a complete identification of the man Jesus with the aeon Christ. Both of these tendencies were perhaps present at Colosse in embryo form and both may be alluded to in the Epistle—for example, in the affirmation that “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (2:9);



quote its authors (Acts 17:28 [Aratus \a-rā' tus\, 3d-century B.C. Greek poet: "For we too are his offspring."]; 1 Cor. 15:33 [Menander \ma-nan' der\, 3d-century B.C. Athenian playwright: "Evil associates corrupt good norms and standards."]; Titus 1:12 [Epimenides \ep-i-men' a-dēz\, 6th-century B.C. Cretan poet: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."]; (3) argue theistically in similar fashion (Romans. 1:19, 20 [see below]; 2:14, 15); and (4) use its diatribal form of presentation (e.g., Romans. 2:1-3:20; 9:1-11:36. These are matters which could have been acquired in his rabbinic study at Jerusalem, where prospective rabbis were taught something of the thinking of the Gentile world. Or they might have been gained in personal contact at Tarsus, or on his later missionary journeys. But however accumulated, they were employed by Paul because they could convey *his* meaning, without necessary reference to what they actually signified in Grecian religious philosophy.

The principle stated by Menander in *Theis* is thus used by Paul to make a doctrinal point that recognizes the danger of associating with those who can drag you down. When a young person discovers that his associates are causing him to question his faith, submit to the temptations of his lust patterns, or find that his doctrines are being challenged, then it is his responsibility to separate from such people. This is not being judgmental. This is discernment which concludes that his choice of associates is causing him to compromise his beliefs and in turn negatively affect his thinking and behavior. If he was able to freely select his associates in the first place then he is just as free to reject them in the second place.

These associates may or may not be believers but, as noted above, Longenecker cites Paul's use of the Greek's method of argument for persuasion from the standpoint of logic and he is said to have done so on one occasion on the basis of theism:

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed., s.v.:

Theism: Belief in the existence of one God viewed as the creative source of the human race and the world, who transcends yet is immanent (i.e., knowable) in the world.

The verses that Longenecker cites for Paul's theistic argument are:

Romans 1:19 - What is known about God is manifest [**φανερός, *phaneros*: visible, plainly to be seen, evident; used in the writings of such Greeks as Pindar, Herodotus, Euripides, Aristotle, and Xenophon**]—made evident—in them [**God-consciousness**] for God has revealed Himself to them.

v. 20 - For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly perceived being perspicuous through the things He has created, namely, both His eternal power and His divine essence, so that they are without excuse.

Paul presents a theistic argument from logic that all mankind come to God-consciousness and are each personally responsible to orient and adjust to the salvation plan of God.