



Influence from the Dark Side: *Sōphroneō*: How to be Sane without Illusions through Thought Based on Divine Standards, Rom 12:3

- (7) The translation of the word *sōphroneō* is complex as is demonstrated by its etymology:

Friedrich, Gerhard (ed.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 7:1097-1098; 1104; 1102:

σώφρων, *sōphrōn*; σωφρονέω, *sōphroneō*; σωφρονισμός, *sōphronismos*; σωφροσύνη, *sōphrosunē*.

Sōphrōn from Homer means "of sound mind." It denotes (a) "the rational" in the sense of what is intellectually sound as opposed to *μανία* (*mania*: madness, passion, desire), Xenophon (*Memorabilia Socratis*), Plato (*Prōtagoras*, *Phaēdrus*, and *Respublica*). It then denotes (b) "rational" without illusion, Thucydides. It can also mean (c) "rational" in the sense of purposeful, Thucydides. Another sense is (d) "discretion" in the sense of moderation and self-control. Again it may mean (e) "discretion" as prudent reserve. Another sense is (f) "modesty" and decorum.

Then there is (g) "discretion" as discipline and order politically, also (h) as "wisdom" as opposed to, e.g., ἄβουλος, *aboulos* [taking no thought; inconsiderate; ill-advised; unfeeling (Liddell & Scott, 3)], Herodotus. (pp. 1097-1098)

σωφροσύνη, *sōphrosunē*. The difficulty of precise translation in many passages makes it imperative to try to grasp more accurately the basic meaning. The reference to *sōphrosunē* is to a basic attitude which alone makes possible certain concrete modes of conduct.

σωφρονισμός, *sōphronismos*: "making to understand," "making wise." Inasmuch as understanding is the basis of virtue and an upright life it also means "admonition to do better." (p. 1104)

σωφρονέω, *sōphroneō*. Paul uses *sōphroneō* in a play on words when he admonishes the Romans, Romans 12:3. To *hyperphroneō* ["stop thinking of self in terms of arrogance"] he opposes *sōphroneō*. He is using the term in its classical sense: "to observe the proper measure," "not to transgress the set laws." But Paul defined this measure as the μέτρον πίστεως (*metron pisteōs*: "a standard of thinking from doctrine") which God gives and which is exhibited in integration into the community and concrete service within it. (p. 1102)

Romans 12:3 - I say through the grace that has been given to me to everyone who is among you, stop thinking of self in terms of arrogance [*ὑπερφρονέω*, *hyperphroneō*] beyond what you ought to think, but think objectively [*φρονέω*, *phroneō*] in terms of sanity for the purpose of being rational without illusion [*σωφρονέω*, *sōphroneō*] as God has assigned to each one of us a standard of thinking from doctrine [*μερίζω μέτρον πίστις*, *merizō metron pistis*].

- (8) The final phrase *merizō metron pistis* informs us that God has assigned to us (*merizō*) a standard of thinking (*metron*) from doctrine (*pistis*).
- (9) There are three uses of *pistis* in the New Testament:
1. Faith is a non-meritorious system of perception based on confidence in the authority and the veracity of another, e.g., faith in Christ.
 2. Attributive, e.g., faithfulness or reliability.
 3. A system of doctrine or a creed perceived by faith; i.e., what is believed.
- (10) In this context what is emphasized is that which is believed, i.e., the doctrines of the Bible: standards that distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil.



- (11) The Bible is assigned to us by God as our source of objective thought by which we can classify sanity. It is rational thought without illusion. The Bible is our standard of thinking based on its doctrines.
- (12) Having a “sound mind” we are enabled to “think rationally” which means we are “sane” and thus “without illusions” about self or others.
- (13) This verse says that God has provided the Bible to believers as a standard of thought that once learned makes us sane, enables us to think rationally, and to identify the lie which is an illusion.