

Fresh Start

By Jerry Bader

A Dog's Life

November 25, 2018

I have a friend, a lifetime Christ-follower, who in recent years seems to be looking for reasons to doubt the Bible. This began shortly after I was saved. I suspect God is using my friend to strengthen both my confidence and my competence in the Word. My friend reads the Bible often and has taken to challenging me with verses.

Here is an example from awhile back,...He presented me with the exchange between Jesus and a Canaanite woman from Matthew 15. The woman came to Jesus asking Him to help her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus initially ignores the woman's urgings and His disciples, who've become annoyed by her begging, ask Jesus to send her away. Instead, in verse 24, Jesus answers the woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

The exchange goes on. *The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Yes it is Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus said to her, "Woman you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment. Matthew 15:25-28*

My friend challenged me – "doesn't this belie everything we hear about Jesus being compassionate? He called her a dog!" At that moment, in a restaurant at dinner, I didn't have an answer. I do now – context, context, context. From the *Life Application Study Bible*:

"Dog was a term the Jews commonly applied to Gentiles because the Jews considered these pagan people no more likely than dogs to receive God's blessing. Jesus was not degrading the woman by using the term, He was reflecting the Jews' attitude so as to contrast it with His own. The woman did not argue. Instead, using Jesus' choice of words, she agreed to be considered a dog as long as she could receive God's blessing for her daughter. Ironically, many Jews would lose God's blessing and salvation because they rejected Jesus, and many Gentiles would find salvation because they recognized and accepted Him."

Irony indeed. That's what Jesus is referring to when he tells the woman early in the exchange that He was sent "only to the lost sheep of Israel." Others have pointed to this line to challenge the truth, found at various points in the Old and New Testaments, that God's message is for all people. It does no such thing. What He was telling the woman was that Jews were to have the first opportunity to accept Him as the Messiah because God wanted them to spread the message to the rest of the world. Jesus rewarded the woman's faith and humility by healing her daughter.

God's Word itself is the greatest weapon we can deploy against attacks on the Word or our beliefs in general (Ephesians 6:17). But like any powerful weapon, it is most effective in the hands of a skilled user. In this case that means knowing Jesus' audience and circumstances when He spoke, and the context of words relative to the time in which He spoke them. It can't mean to us what it didn't mean to them. Context, context, context.

Here are three more words – study, study, study. The greater your mastery of the Word, the greater the weapon you possess. And give thanks to God when He gives you the skill to wield "the sword of the Spirit,

which is the Word of God," when you need it. I know He will the next time I discuss Jesus and the Canaanite woman with my friend.