# Theology  

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## Bamboo

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In Asian countries bamboo is a very useful plant, second in utility only to the palm tree. Some Cambodian farmers call bamboo and palm husband and wife-they need one another to produce sugar. Farmers use the bamboo as a ladder to climb the palm tree, and use it as a container to collect juice from the palm.

The bamboo is useful from root to leaves. People cook its shoots as a special food. They use it to build houses, huts, thatched roofs, baskets, fishing rods and equipment, sleeping beds, water containers (for tribal people), chopsticks, toothpicks, etc.

On top of that bamboo is used to symbolize the young generation. An old Cambodian saying states, Tom paing snong reusey-"Bamboo shoots take the place of the old bamboo." "Bamboo Shoot" is the name of a World Vision project that works with street children near Psar Thmey.

The Vietnamese use the bamboo as a symbol to teach their school students. In China bamboo is very popular. Because they use it to make chopsticks, they bite on it every day during their meals! Their artists often portray the plant in all kinds of paintings. Chinese Christians have used bamboo as a symbol for their faith in the film, Bamboo in the Winter.

As a Cambodian Christian I want to use the bamboo to introduce to you some of our Christian principles. In doing so I am trying to follow in our Master's footsteps. To the Jews our Lord Jesus quoted from the Mosaic Law, to fishermen He talked about catching men, to farmers He spoke a parable about seeds, to an intellectual like Nicodemus He employed a philosophical approach, and to the woman at the well He used a simple object with which she was already familiar. That is what I will do. Because you are all familiar with the bamboo, I will use it to tell you (I dare not use the word "teach" you) how to deliver God's message in an appropriate and culturally acceptable manner.

Don't try to exactly copy Western teachers or missionaries. Their approach might work in their context, but not so well in ours. When I say this I don't mean to water down the gospel or weaken the message of God. Look at our Lord Jesus-while He was on earth He used different approaches for different audiences. "Be strong with the Gospel. Be understandable to people."

I know Cambodians like poems, so I will give you one to read:

## Shoots Take the Place of the Old Bamboo

An old adage affirms what I say, so please listen carefully.
It says that young shoots take the place of the old bamboo.
This is something youth should know.
Old bamboo is eventually cut, and some dies away.
So you must strengthen yourselves.
You must try hard to grow up.
Some bamboo has fallen down.
Some has been blown up into the air by strong, swirling winds.
Some has been burned by fire because it has blossomed.
Please hear this, both men and women!
If the bamboo blossoms, it can no longer be used by the farmer.
He must cut it down and destroy it.
Bamboo that has blossomed is useless-it is fit only for the flames.
This kind of bamboo can be compared to some Christians.

A handful of them have grown narrow minded.
They minister only so that they may puff themselves up.
This kind of bamboo resembles the proud who want their names to be famous.
They seek personal profit, lofty status, excessive property.
This kind of desire is a snare set by Satan;
It leads people to quarrel among themselves.
Because of overweening pride friend betrays friend.
They dare to act fearlessly, for they seek to feed their greed.
The result is great disunity.
The book of Timothy says that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil
Such as pride ... quarreling ... and wickedness in the heart.
Children don't obey their parents and their hearts are filled with dishonesty.
Youth are like bamboo shoots growing up continuously.
May you become good bamboo of the highest quality!
I tell you that good bamboo is united closely with each other And loves each another and cares for its young.
They carefully protect their shoots from being cut away.
Bamboo grows in tight clusters to protect their young from being cut.

Normally bamboo can stand firmly despite rain and storm Because it grows closely united together.
Therefore it stands unbroken by the storm.
We must learn from the example of the bamboo.
When the winds howl loud the bamboo bows down nearly to the ground.
They do not try to stand proud at all.
They rise to stand tall only when the storm passes.
They do not disparage their nature, as if bowing down were weak!
This sets a good example for us.

Another example-one I want to warn you against-is this:
Do not imitate those bamboo who unite with their enemies.
Once someone came to cut some bamboo.
But before he could cut even one his hand was bleeding.
He hacked away, growing breathless and tired.
He glanced at his knife and saw that it had been nicked.
His blade used to be shiny, but now one part was no longer there.
He felt sorry for his knife.
Along came another man, his axe in his hand.
He was so happy, and began to chop the bamboo.
He slashed away at the branches, but soon his hand too was bleeding.

The old bamboo said, "I was not worried at all About the cutting these two men did.
But I was extremely concerned about a third man.
He held a short blade,
But it was fixed to a long handle,
Because one of our own Family was attached to his blade.
This cutting tool was very dangerous for us.
This kind of enemy can destroy us easily
Because the long handle--one of our own!-can help the blade Reach through our defenses and strike us at the root."
This bamboo, by uniting with the enemy, helps destroy his own folk.
This provides a warning for $u s$. Don't follow that example!
When we are united, we are strong.
When we are divided, we are weak.
Please remember this, or there will be great remorse.
O Youth! You are the new bamboo!
Remember that!
Don't forget God's commandments!
We must love one another.
If we love one another we can truly be called
God's children-children of the Lord of lords and King of kings.

## Positive Lessons from the Bamboo

When a storm blows hard the bamboo bows down very low. After the storm passes, it stands up again as normal. We need to be humble like the bamboo. We Christians need that same kind of behavior. The worst $\sin$ Satan committed was pride; therefore we must totally avoid that pattern. On the other hand, the Bible tells us that Jesus "humbled himself and became obedient to death." Because He humbled Himself in that way "God exalted him to the highest place." Like the bamboo, Jesus bowed down, and was able to stand up tall again. Christians need to follow the example of Jesus (and the bamboo), not the example of Satan.

Bamboo plants are united closely with each other. That often makes it hard to chop down an individual bamboo plant. If they all grew far apart it would be much easier to destroy them. The same is true with Christians. If we would stand close to one another, support one another, and hold one another up, it would be more difficult for our enemy Satan to chop us down.

## Negative Lessons from the Bamboo

Bamboo is most useful before it blossoms. If it does blossom it will bear fruit and become useless. Normal bamboo is flexible and tough. You can bend it easily to make baskets and other items without breaking. But after it blossoms the bamboo turns brittle and fragile. You cannot use it. Further, it will produce spores that will affect neighboring stands of bamboo. So when bamboo blossoms, it must be cut down and burned.

Blossoming is like pride. Pride is a sin that God strongly hates. When we grow proud, the ministry that God has given us will not prosper at all. Pride never produced wisdom, but our natural tendencies urge us to be proud, don't they?

God hates pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech. Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. Most quarrels stem from pride, but wisdom is found in those who

[^2]take advice. ${ }^{2}$.As Christians we must hate pride and get rid of it, or else we will become caught up in quarrels and become foolish. We may refuse to take advice. Proverbs $16: 18-19$ reads, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud." Proverbs 29:23 says, "A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor." Isaiah 25:11 warns, "They will spread out their hands in it, as a swimmer spreads out his hands to swim. God will bring down their pride despite the cleverness of their hands."

This is similar to the farmer who sees the bamboo starting to blossom. He quickly cuts it down and burns it. Bamboo is not supposed to blossom. It cannot do the same as roses or other flowers that people give to singers and officials on their arrival at the airport. When bamboo blossoms it means that it has pride.

As Christians, we must know that pride leads to destruction or quarrelsomeness. So we must avoid such attitudes and behavior in our daily lives, and walk with God humbly. Amen!

## Conclusion

- To be useful for the farmer, bamboo must not blossom and try to be like other flower plants.
- To be useful in society Christian must not puff themselves up or try to be famous.
- When the bamboo blossoms it is useless. It has to be destroyed.
- When Christians grow proud God will not use or exalt them. They will be laid low.
- When pride exists there will be disunity among us!


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[^2]:    'Phil 2:8-9.

