**Tapeinosis/Meiosis**

Tapeinosis is a type of meiosis (also called litotes) which is the demeaning or lessening of something in order to elevate or increase its meaning. The two figures are distinguished by whether the same object that is lessened is also increased or intensified, or if there is another object besides it that is intended to be increased and intensified. The figure of speech meiosis (litotes) is used to belittle one thing in order to magnify something else. For an example of meiosis, Genesis 18:27 says, “And Abraham answered, “Behold now, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, though I am but dust and ashes.” In humbling himself by calling himself “dust and ashes,” Abraham gives greater contrast between himself and the high and holy God whom he is addressing so that God’s power and greatness are elevated even more. Tapeinosis occurs when the thing that is lessened is the same thing that is increased and intensified. Here are some examples.

1. Psalm 51:17 – “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”  
     
   Here is an example of a statement being made in the negative sense in order to magnify the positive sense. Not only will God not despise a contrite heart, but he will also gladly receive it!
2. Proverbs 16:18 – “Pride goes before disaster, and a puffed up spirit before stumbling.”  
     
   Here something is purposely made lesser in impact to catch our attention. The person does not just “stumble,” there will be a much greater calamity than just stumbling. A puffed-up spirit, an arrogant attitude, goes before disaster.
3. Acts 5:36 – “For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, *and* a number of men, about 400, joined him. He was killed, and all, as many as were persuaded by him, were dispersed and came to nothing.”  
     
   All people are “somebody.” This is lessening or understating the intended meaning that Theudas claimed to be someone great.
4. Romans 5:6 – “For while we were still weak, at the proper time Christ died in place of the ungodly.”  
     
   Understating the helplessness of fallen humanity before Christ actually magnifies the severity of it. We were more than weak—we were dead in sins, totally unable to help ourselves. God, in His grace and mercy, sent Christ, who died for us so that we would be strong in him.
5. Romans 13:10 – “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.”  
     
   The understatement is subtle, and therefore this tapeinosis is often not noticed, but love is much more than just not harming someone. Without the tapeinosis, a more literal description of love is that it does good to its neighbor.

To see more uses of and commentary about figures of speech used in the Bible, use the [REV search tool](http://revisedenglishversion.com/search), and articles on figures of speech can also be found at: [stfi.org/tag/figures/](https://stfi.org/tag/figures/).

[For meiosis and tapeinosis, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 155-164.]