

Distorting the Word

Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. (*Proverbs 30:5-6*)

. . .There is no fear of God before their eyes. (*Romans 3:18*)

Of the more common things assumed by people concerning the Scriptures, there are a couple that really don't sit well with me. It's not that I get angry or anything, it's just distressing to consider that people do not understand certain, very important items with regard to Scripture.

First, not all Bibles are the same. For as long as the word of God has been around, men have been perverting it. This is done mainly to justify themselves and their strange, ungodly doctrines and arcane religion. Most folks, even in solid fundamental churches, do not know that the King James Bible comes from the line of Scripture that never saw Roman Catholic influence, and is of the same source text as the Bibles used by the independent, autonomous churches that were persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church, the Muslims, and various other pagan religions ever since the first church at Jerusalem. Fundamentally, the underlying text is different, and in the case of the King James Bible, the method of translation is different as well. These things cannot help but bear strongly on the doctrine contained in the Bible one chooses to read.

Second, that the Scripture belongs to the LORD God and Him alone. It is His word. It is really puzzling to me that people will scream bloody murder over plagiarism and the unauthorized alteration of someone else's work, but don't seem to grasp the enormity of altering the word of God, and the condemnation that brings upon them. No, it is as if they believe there is no consequence to their action. It is interesting that the translators of the King James Bible held a very strong belief

that they were not free to change anything in the Scripture. Unlike a lot of folks, they believed the Scripture to be sacred and not be touched without consequence. In short, they believed the truth of the following statement:

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (II Peter 1:19-21)

It is the understanding that the Holy Ghost caused the men who penned the Scriptures to put the words on parchment, vellum, and whatever else they used as a medium for their writing, that caused the translators to hold the Scriptures as sacred. Moreover, that the words written were not really the words of the prophets who penned them, but are the words of Almighty God, given to the prophets to write. Thus, the words are not to be tampered with, as one king in Judah found out:

And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, *that* this word came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. (*Jeremiah 36:1-4*)

When Jeremiah was done speaking everything the LORD had given him, Baruch took the roll and read it in the temple, in the

hearing of all the people. In the events that followed, the roll was taken and read before the king. The king's response was the same disrespect for the word of God that we see so much of today:

So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king. Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and *there was a fire* on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words. (Jeremiah 36:21-24)

Though Jehoiakim, king of Judah thought that burning the roll would be the end of the matter, he found out that the LORD God does not take kindly to someone utterly disregarding, and then destroying His word. Not only would the words be written again, but judgement was pronounced upon Jehoiakim for his insolence.

Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. (Jeremiah 36:27-30)

Now, all the above is necessary to understand what a blessing it is that we, as English speakers have in possessing the word of God in the form of the King James Bible. English history is intertwined with the Bible and fundamental Christianity. This desire for the word of God is most visible during the time of Wycliff and Tyndale, but has existed since 63 AD when the gospel reached the British Isles. However, the pinnacle of the desire for the pure word of God culminated with King James the VI & I of Scotland and England, and the translation of the King James version of the Bible.

I call attention to all this because there is a third assumption made by the vast majority of individuals concerning the word of God. It seems that we implicitly assume that every language has a right Bible like we do. Nothing could be further from the truth. Sadly, most of the languages in the world do not have a Bible with the proper underlying Greek and Hebrew text, and are not properly translated either.

The reason for this lies in the way the Scripture has been handled in those languages from the time they first received the word of God. One of those languages is German. There is no right German Bible. Either the underlying text is wrong, or the translation suffers from the doctrinal/cultural bias of the translator. One of the reasons for this is found in a German religious poem tracing back to about 830 AD. The poem is supposed to be about Jesus, the Redeemer. But this Jesus is nowhere near the Lord Jesus Christ of the Scripture:

Der Heliand

Of the other religious poems, Der Heliand (Heiland – the Redeemer) is still mentioned. A showpiece of the Germanic Stave rhyme poetry of about 6000 long lines. The epic poem was written during the Carolingian times (around 830 A.D.) in the language of old Saxony. It is assumed that Kaiser Ludwig the Pious, the son of Karls des Großen, ordered a Saxon poet

to poetically germanise the Gospel. The Redeemer is a gospel harmony, or a portrayal of the life of Jesus, which the poet put together from all four of the gospels.

In this epic Christ becomes, fully corresponding to the German feeling, a German king, his disciples, followers. The setting of the plot is not the Jewish Palestine, rather the German Saxony. The German traits of loyalty, honor, courage, masculinity, and heroism are brought forth strongly. Because the Germans were unfamiliar with loving your enemies, self sacrifice, humility, loving your neighbor, and the idea of peace, Christ is portrayed, not as a poor, humble man, but rather as a courageous, powerful king of the people, a man of the sword, who dies in the battle for his people and for God's Kingdom. The shepherds in the field, don't tend sheep, rather brave horses, Joseph is a loyal vassal, the holy three kings are noblemen, who come to swear loyalty to their feudal lord, the marriage in Cana is a German celebration, and in the Sermon on the Mount he promulgates his teaching to his followers. A few lines in modern translation should convey to us the spirit of this wonderful cultural document:

"Then was the quick sword-warrior Peter infuriated. His wrath boiled wildly, he could not speak, for it troubled him so deeply, that they wanted to seize the Lord. Wrathfully he stepped forward, the bold warrior, to stand up for his leader. Quickly he pulled the sword from his side and hit the nearest enemy with full force, so that Malchus was reddened with the sword's cut, on the right side, his ear cut off, his cheek split. Blood shot out, seething from the wound. As the cheek of the nearest enemy was split, the people moved back out of fear of the sword's bite." ((Deutsche Kulturgeschichte, 3rd Edition, 2002, Hans-Wilhelm Kelling, McGraw-Hill, ISBN 0-07-287027-3, pp 55-56. (Translated by SuAnne Drodgy)))

Ever wonder why the gospel and fundamental Christianity never

seemed to get anywhere in Germany? Perhaps it also has much to do with Luther as well, since Luther often translated the words “reprove,” “rebuke,” and “teach” as “beat and thrash” in the Bible he translated, which is fully consistent the German cultural understanding of Christ expressed in *Der Heliand*. Now, to be certain, Luther had the correct underlying text for his translation work. But Luther’s doctrine was also skewed, and he yielded far too much to German culture, as it is expressed in the poem above. In Luther’s mind the wonderful passage in Titus, chapter 2 concerning grace, becomes something to be avoided. When we read it in English, we equate teaching with instruction, since the word “teach” does mean exactly that – to instruct.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; . . . (*Titus 2:11-12*)

But in the Luther Bible it becomes:

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, beating and thrashing us . . . (*Titus 2:11-12*)

Now, the underlying word in Greek could be translated as “beating and thrashing.” But that would be terribly inconsistent with what “grace” is, and how grace works. No, the problem is that Luther was very much influenced by the culture he lived in, and translated the Scripture accordingly. This is apparent from the fact that the particular meaning Luther chose for “teach” is not the primary meaning of the word. Instead, Luther chose a meaning that was in minority usage, and out of step with how the rest of Scripture portrays the working of grace. Teaching and instruction do not require chastening unless the person being taught won’t learn any other way. Moreover, there is specific underlying Greek word for “chastisement.” The underlying Greek word for “teaching” is given below to demonstrate the error Luther perpetuated in

his translation of the Bible. Luther could have used any number of German words that mean specifically “teaching,” such as “lehren” or “unterrichten,” et al. However, Luther chose to use the word “züchtigen” which has the specific meaning “to beat or thrash,” thus not even broaching the idea of teaching, let alone any other method of teaching. Since the rest of Scripture does a very good job of defining the methods the LORD uses for teaching, Luther could have used any German word for teaching, and let the context derive the meaning. In the following definition, please note that the meaning which includes striking someone, is very much the minority usage of the word:

*3811 paideuo {pahee-dyoo'-o} from 3816; TDNT – 5:596,753; v
AV – chasten 6, chastise 2, learn 2, teach 2, instruct 1;
13 GK – 4084 { πρᾶξι?διδεύ?ω? }
1) to train children
1a) to be instructed or taught or learn
1b) to cause one to learn
2) to chastise
2a) to chastise or castigate with words, to correct
2a1) of those who are moulding the character of others by reproof and admonition
2b) of God
2b1) to chasten by the affliction of evils and calamities
2c) to chastise with blows, to scourge
2c1) of a father punishing his son
2c2) of a judge ordering one to be scourged ((Strong, James.
The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.))*

What this demonstrates is the error of allowing culture to influence the translation of the Scripture into the vernacular of the people of a particular language. The translation is supposed to be a formal equivalence translation that is independent of the culture of the people. This is necessary as the Scripture is supposed to reform the culture. If the

Scripture condemns a particular cultural ideal, then so be it. We all are, meaning everyone in this world, supposed to conform to the word of God, not the other way around. To do what Luther did (and so many others have done), is to pervert and distort the message the LORD God has in his word. To do that is certain to incur the displeasure of the LORD. Moreover, the people who are influenced by such distortion of the Scripture, will never truly understand what the LORD is doing and why He is doing it. Finally, there are some specific thoughts that we ought to keep firmly in mind concerning the situation we see with translations of the Scripture into different languages:

1. Since every word of God is pure, changing the words in the slightest is certain to make them impure, and distort the meaning, thus changing the message.

2. There is a reason the LORD gifts some men to be teachers of His word. Things that are not so clear in Scripture must be taught. Nowhere in the Scripture does it declare the Scripture to be a "do it yourself," self-teaching book. That is not the method the LORD chose to use. Instead, He expressly chose to use individuals to minister unto other individuals and teach them the things pertaining to the LORD, and what the LORD requires of man. This necessarily includes things that are obscured by the culture the man of God is sent to. Lest we forget, it is a glory to God that an individual voluntarily follows the LORD and willingly teaches His word unto others.

3. Tampering with the word of God does great harm and hinders the acceptance of the Scripture by the people to whom the Scripture is sent. Germany never has had a right Bible, and neither have the Spanish speaking people. The primary reason for this is the hearts of the people. The LORD God responds directly to the hearts of individuals, and when the

predominance of individuals in a culture will not receive the things of God, the LORD responds accordingly. For whatever reason, the people of the British Isles have loved the word of God, and the things of God. This love reached its zenith between 1500 and 1700 AD, but has been evident from time to time since 63 AD. Clearly it has much to do with how the Scripture was handled by those entrusted with it. The LORD God responded to this by giving the English speaking people a pure and right Bible. Sadly, we do not see the same desire for the true word of God in history of either the German or Spanish speaking peoples. What is worse is the fact that we do not see that desire in hardly any other culture in this world – much to their detriment.

Last of all, we must remember whose word it is that we have the privilege of looking into. The Scripture belongs to the LORD God, and he will give understanding of it to whosoever He will. Our attitude toward the word of the LORD dictates how much understanding of that word we will receive.

Thus saith the LORD, The heaven *is my throne, and the earth is my footstool*: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where *is the place of my rest?* For all those *things* hath mine hand made, and all those *things* have been, saith the LORD: but to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.* (*Isaiah 66:1-2*)
