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Brief Studies

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BRIEF STUDIES

THE PASTOR AND HIS GREEK

In spite of many fine Bible translations the pastor will constantly turn to his Greek New Testament, for no translation can reproduce fully the many fine shades of meaning in the original. A careful study of the original will frequently bring the exact meaning of a text or a word into sharper focus, change wholly or in part the meaning conveyed in the translation, or may even correct a misleading and inadequate translation. A few samples chosen at random will illustrate this.

John 11:20

In the Authorized Version the text reads: "Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him; but Mary sat *still* in the house." The last sentence is apt to produce an erroneous impression, namely, that while Martha eagerly went forth to meet Jesus, Mary quietly remained at home. While that is true, it is apparent that the word "still" is not in the original. It may be retained in the English translation to bring out the meaning of the descriptive imperfect ἐκαθίζετο, but then it should be transposed and rendered thus: "but Mary still sat in the house."

Acts 2:3

The expression "cloven tongues" from the Pentecost story has almost become a household word. According to the Authorized Version "there appeared unto them *cloven tongues* like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." There is no trace of this in the original that these fiery tongues seen on each of the Apostles were cloven. "Cloven" is a wrong translation of διαμεριζόμενα. It is true, this Greek word does mean "cleave asunder," but here the meaning is clearly "to distribute." In order to express the symbolical meaning of the miraculous appearance, we must translate: "There appeared unto them tongues *distributing themselves*." From the central apparition or place of sound they saw issuing forth many tongues looking like small flames of fire, and one such tongue sat upon each of the disciples. The second part explains the first. Moffatt translates: "They saw tongues like flames distributing themselves."

Rom. 3:25

The Authorized Version translation of this verse is: "Whom (Christ) God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to

declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." "To declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past" is not easily intelligible and is an utterly impossible version of the Greek, εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων. The meaning of this is: God set forth Christ Jesus to be a propitiation through faith by His blood to demonstrate His righteousness, because up to that time he had passed over the sins previously committed. There were manifestations of God's righteousness in the pre-Christian era, but the real demonstration came in the death of His Son. Before that time the forbearance of God held sway, God did not punish sins adequately; He 'winked at them,' to borrow a phrase from Paul's sermon on Mars' Hill. The Revised Standard Version of this passage is well done: "They are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by His blood to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins."

1 Cor. 4:1-5

In the Epistle for the Third Sunday in Advent (1 Cor. 4:1-5) Paul speaks of himself and his co-workers as "ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." In verse 3 he goes on to say of himself: "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment, yea, I judge not mine own self. For *I know nothing by myself*; yet am I not hereby justified."

Verse 4 thus translated is bound to be misunderstood. To think that Paul in writing "I know nothing by myself" means to state that he was dependent for all the knowledge he had on the favor of God is a total misapprehension of the words and foreign to the context. A look at the Greek reveals the true meaning: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἑμαυτῷ σύννοια, literally, "I know nothing *with* myself." The Revised Version translates: "I know nothing *against* myself." Luther: "*Ich bin mir nichts bewusst*," *naemlich keines Unrechtes*. The Apostle obviously means to say that, though he was not conscious of having done any wrong in reference to the Corinthians, yet after all it was only God who could truly judge and thoroughly justify him. — In passing, it might be said that the use of "by" in 1 Cor. 4:3 is a good Old English idiom. Cranmer says to Henry VIII: "I am exceedingly sorry that such faults can be proved *by* (i. e., *against*) the queen."

Eph. 4:29

Here we have the familiar: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying,"

εἴ τις ἀγαθὸς πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν τῆς χρείας. The import of the last words seems to be: "If you have a good word to say, speak to edify according to the needs of the occasion. Say something worth while, say it to meet the specific needs of the hearers." Field in his *Notes on the Translation of the New Testament* suggests this free rendering: "That which is good for the improvement of the occasion."

1 Tim. 6:5

Paul speaks of "perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness." The last three words, "gain is godliness," are an absurd translation resulting from servile literalness. As the original clearly indicates, "godliness" is the subject and "gain" the predicate, so that the correct rendering should be: "Supposing that godliness is gain," or "a way of gain."

Reading a little farther, the Authorized Version makes Paul declare that "the love of money is the root of all evil," something which he does not say. What he does say is that the love of money is *a* root of all that is evil, a sad truth which universal experience has confirmed. Love of money is not the only root of evil, but one of the many roots. Avarice is *one* of the evil thoughts proceeding from the depraved human heart.

1 Cor. 11:29

"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup; for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself." According to the Authorized Version these words can only mean that anyone who communes unworthily is *eo ipso* damned, and may have led communicants to most disquieting terrors of conscience and made them think that they have committed the unforgivable sin. A good look at the Greek clears up everything. The word translated "damnation" is κρίμα, which simply means judgment, *Strafurteil*, *Gericht*. To commune unworthily is to eat and drink a judgment on one's self, to incur the judgment and punishment of God. This is apparent from the next verse, where Paul continues: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged; but when we are judged, κρινόμενοι, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be *condemned*, κατακριθῶμεν, with the world." By communing unworthily the Corinthians sinned against the precious means of grace and the Dispenser of grace; they incurred His displeasure, and He saw fit to judge them by chastening them that they might repent and not be condemned. The chastening sent by God was the judgment (κρίμα) inflicted to preserve them from condemnation (κατάκριμα).

There are instances where the English word either fails to convey the exact original meaning or even creates an entirely false impression. A few samples may suffice to show the importance of the continuous study of the New Greek Testament.

Matt. 5:3

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," Matt. 5:3; *πτωχοί*, originally an adjective from the stem *πτώσσω*, to cringe, to cower, *sich ducken*, indicates more than mere poverty; it stresses not so much the idea of lack or poverty as the *attitude* of him who lacks and *knows* that he lacks. (Compare by way of contrast Rev. 3:17-18.) "*Πτωχός* describes the cringing, cowering beggar who has lost all self-sufficiency and abandoned all pride, the man who is acutely conscious of his own nothingness and need, and is quite ready to look to another, the only Other that can fill the need and supply the want." "Poor" describes the sinner who sings from his inmost heart: "Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy Cross I cling; Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless, look to Thee for grace; Foul, I to the Fountain fly— Wash me, Savior, or I die!" The only one of the modern translators who has succeeded in conveying the full intent of the original of the first beatitude is Goodspeed, who has rendered it thus: "Blessed are those who *feel* their spiritual need, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them."

John 14:1-2

"Let not your heart be troubled. . . . In My Father's house are many mansions," John 14:1-2. But there is no thought of "mansions" in the Greek word, no suggestion of magnificence or stateliness, which we associate with the word "mansions." It is just the plain, simple word for "home." Jesus said to His troubled disciples, whose heart was full of sorrow because of the impending departure of their Master: "In My Father's house are many *μοναί*, many *abiding*-places, a place where you can stay, where there will be no painful parting. I go to prepare a place for you there." *Μοναί* comes from *μένω*, to wait or remain. Weymouth has reproduced the reassuring and comforting warmth of Christ's words by translating: "In My Father's house are many resting-places." Moffatt correctly, though less aptly, renders them: "In My Father's house there are many abodes." Similarly Luther: "*In meines Vaters Hause sind viel Wohnungen.*"

Matt. 23:17. Luke 24:25

Or take the word "fool," which is the translation of different Greek words which are not wholly synonymous. In Matt. 23:17 Christ calls the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, who stressed the letter of the

Law and neglected the spirit, "fools and blind." Luke 24:25 Jesus addressed the disciples going to Emmaus as "fools and slow of heart to believe." In Matt. 23:17 *μωροί* is used, which has some of the connotation of the Hebrew *לָמָד*, an impious, godless fellow, and here implies extreme censure and condemnation. In Luke 24:25 the Savior employs the term *ἀνόητοι*, because the disciples lacked understanding. Weizsaecker uses *Toren* in the Matthew passage, but *Ihr Unverstaendige* in Luke 24, which correctly reproduces the meaning of the original.

1 Cor. 14:20

In 1 Cor. 14:20 Paul writes: "Brethren, be not children in understanding, howbeit in malice be children, but in understanding be *men*," *τέλειοι* = mature, *reif*. The climax of the thought is altogether lost in the Authorized Version, because it does not reproduce the difference between *παιδιά* and *νήπιος*. The former means "children," the latter "babes." What Paul means to say is: "Brethren, you must not be children in understanding; in evil be babies, but in understanding, mature men."

John 13:10

At the foot washing, when Peter asked Jesus to wash not only his feet, but also his hands and head, Jesus said unto him: "He that is *washed* needeth not save to *wash* his feet, but is clean every whit," John 13:10. The unintelligible harshness is at once removed when we know that there is a contrast in the original between the washing of the whole body and the washing of some small part. To bring out this contrast, we should translate: "He that is bathed, *λελουμένος*, needeth not save to wash, *νίψασθαι*, his feet."

1 Tim. 2:9

1 Tim. 2:9 Paul says of Christian women: "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety." The word "shame" suggests immediately the idea of something outward, modesty and decency in the expression of the *face*, but the Greek word goes far deeper. Trench aptly says: "To find no more here is to allow all the meaning and force of the word to run to surface and leave us ethically a far poorer word." What Paul means to say is that Christian women should adorn themselves "with modesty and self-control," *μετὰ αἰδοῦς καὶ σωφροσύνης*. In passing it might be said that the word "shamefacedness" is a corruption of *shamefastness*, a word formed like *steadfast*, *bedfast*, *footfast*. *Shamefast* is that which is established and made fast (*fest*) by honorable shame. — Cp. Trench on *αἰδοῦς*.

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