

Translations of the Bible

Part Two
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In the April 21, 1996 issue of *The Preacher* we observed some of the facts about translations of the Bible. We continue this study by inquiring what a translation really is. Literally the word "translation" is a combination of two words: "trans" which means across, and "lation" which means "to carry." The word means "to carry across." In regards to the scriptures it means to take the meaning of each word in the original tongue and carry it across into another language. There are two views regarding translations:

- 1) To carry across the *meaning* of the original language; and
- 2) To carry across the *exact words* of the original language.

The first becomes a commentary of what the translator thinks the original language means; the second is a carry across of the exact equivalent of the words of the original language. The first is not a translation; the second is a reliable translation if it is accurate to the original.

Words are means of conveying thoughts from one mind to another. In the case of the inspired writings it is the mind of God being conveyed to man. Each word spoken by the Holy Spirit was intended to carry a certain part of a general train of thought. If another word in another language is found that conveys exactly the same thought, no more and no less, it is an accurate translation. But if a word is selected that carries only a vague meaning of the original, or a different idea, it is not a translation. The true sense is not "carried across" and, therefore it is not an accurate translation. It is not enough to get a general idea of the original in the translation; each and every word must carry across exactly the thought in the original tongue. We are dealing with the Mind of God, which cannot be changed. The gospel cannot be changed: added to or taken from (Gal. 1: 6-12)

We hear some speak of a "revision" of a certain translation. Just what is the difference between a "translation" and a "revision?" That is a good question. A translation is that which carries across from the original tongue into another tongue the thoughts expressed by the Holy Spirit. A revision differs from this in that it is a second edition patterned after the first but containing such changes as are necessary to correct errors in the first. A revision is the same tongue as the translation which it revises.

How Translations Are Made

It is important to know how translations are made in order to determine whether they are accurate and reliable or not. There are definite ways of translating that keep the text accurate, and other ways tend to corrupt the translated text.

Rules for Translating

First, there are some rules that must be adopted to make the translation an accurate one. To be accurate in translating into any language these rules must be diligently followed to obtain the desired results. There are three main rules to be followed:

One, determine the exact meaning of each original word as it was used at the time of the writing. Living languages undergo changes. It is not enough to know what a word in the Greek language today means; we must know what the *Koine Greek*--the New Testament Greek, which is now a dead language like the Latin--words meant. The correct way of stating this rule is: *the exact meaning of the inspired text, as that text expressed it to those who understood the original scriptures at the time they were first written.*

Words by any given writer have only one meaning in each text at the time they were written. We are not interested in what the words may mean now. Exactly what did they mean when they were used by the apostles? When an inspired man used a single word in a given text, he had one meaning and only one. An example is the use of the word "dead" by the apostle Paul in several places in the New Testament.

Sometimes it is obvious he did not mean physical death, while at other times he could have meant nothing else. The job of the translators is know exactly what that word meant then in that text, otherwise how could they select the word that carried the same meaning into another language? They do this by using all available sources to establish the true text. To select a word in one language that means the same in the *classical Greek* now is not true translating. The apostles may not have meant by the use of a Greek term then what the Greeks now mean. The translator must determine the exact meaning of every word when the apostles used it, then select a word that is the exact equivalent.

Two, the original must be expressed in corresponding terms of language into which the scriptures are being translated. It cannot be more or less. It is true that different languages do not have the same style of expressions. The order of the words in the original language may have to be changed to make sense in the translation. For example: in 1 Timothy 3:2 Paul said the bishops must be "the husband of one wife." That is a true translation of the original. However, the order of the words by the apostle, if translated without following the order of the English, would be: "of one wife, husband." That gives the exact word translation of the Greek, but it does not give the sense in the English. Translators must give the exact meaning of the original words, but they must also "carry across" the true sense of the words, arranging them in the proper order to make sense in the language into which the original is being translated.

Three, various words have different tenses, cases, persons, etc. The tense of a verb, the case and person of a noun in the original must be carried over into the tongue into which translation is being made. Sometimes divine truth is upon some tense, number or case of a word. Every word must be carried across in exactly the same number, person, case or tense as the original, otherwise it is not a true translation.