

2 *No Deliberate Ignorance*

You Cannot Read Without A Dictionary

The second major flaw in the common *how-to-read-the Bible* books is the notion we can deliberately ignore the fact that the Bible in English is a translation. This flaw is evident in Torrey's book *How To Study The Bible*.

He states unabashedly the following proposition:

The person who has no technical knowledge of Greek or Hebrew but has spiritual discernment is a far more competent critic of the Bible than one who has a rare, technical knowledge of Greek or Hebrew but no spiritual discernment.
Id., at 9.

In other words, Torrey will not accept any information and input from someone who specializes in Greek or Hebrew who Torrey is not convinced shares his viewpoint on what makes you regenerate and a Christian. Instead, Torrey will rely upon his intuitive 'spiritual' sense that the translation in English is correct, and that he can therefore reject what a specialist in Greek or Hebrew may tell him is what the passage actually says in the original tongue.

Torrey's ideas mean that whatever traditional English translation has been must continue to guide the church for ever more even if the original English translation is demonstrably in error as long as those exposing such error are not 'born again' from the now encrusted 'spiritually discerned' truths which rely upon erroneous translation.

This is not merely an academic point. There are many examples where scholars have learned that the original translation was defective. There were still many mysteries in the meaning of classical Greek when Tyndale first translated the New Testament in 1534. His work was an enormous influ-

ence on the King James Bible of 1611. Over 82 percent of its words, both in the New and Old Testament, are the exact words in the 1534 translation by William Tyndale. Even with the best Oxford education that Tyndale received, subsequent thorough extensive study of classical Greek texts have provided additional meanings which require revision of various passages in the New Testament.

For example, one of the most glaring new meanings involves the verb *pisteuo*. At the time that Tyndale translated the New Testament, he thought this word only meant *believe* or *trust*. However, we now know this word also meant *obey*. Ever since that realization, scholars have been trying to change the translation of John 3:16 to convey more than merely *believe* in the sense of mental assent. This is because the *pisteuo* is followed by *eis*, which would dictate *pisteuo* means *obey*. And this is underscored by the fact just twenty verses later — in John 3:36, *pisteuo eis* is used in direct antithesis to *apitheo*, which in Greek only meant *disobey*. The antithesis dictates that *pisteuo* means *obey* in that verse. And since the expression is identical in 3:16, *pisteuo* should be revised in 3:16 to mean *obey*.

If such change is acknowledged, then Jesus had a salvation doctrine directly contrary to the standard interpretation of what Paul teaches. A notion of regeneration which turns on obedience is contrary to what Torrey believes regenerates you. As a result, even though these scholars defend *obey* as the correct meaning of *pisteuo*, and were men who claimed they were evangelical Christians, Torrey would in essence reject their definition of *pisteuo* as present in John 3:16 because their view that *pisteuo* means *obey* makes them an unregenerated person.

The correct approach is actually stated by Torrey elsewhere. Instead, one must humble themselves and not superimpose their view on a passage. We must listen to experts who know Greek or Hebrew better than ourselves. Torrey correctly says:

Do not come to the Bible seeking confirmation for your own ideas. Come not to find a confirmation of your own but to be taught what God may be pleased to teach. If a man comes to the Bible just to find his notions taught there, he will find them. But if he comes, recognizing his own ignorance, just as a little child seeks to be taught, he will find something infinitely better than his own notions. *Id.*, at 16.

But if Torrey truly acknowledge these propositions in this just quoted text, he should never justify ignoring experts in Greek or Hebrew. To do so thereby opens the door to rely upon our presupposition about a doctrine to determine what a passage really means. We will wrongly reject the ‘spiritually’ blind scholar because ‘we know better.’

Unfortunately, Torrey is not consistent about keeping preconceptions behind. He tells us how insignificant knowledge of the Greek or Hebrew is when understanding the Bible — despite the fact it is a 100% translated text! He states:

It is unfortunate that more emphasis is often placed on a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew in training for the ministry and less placed on a spiritual life and its consequence in the sermon. *Id.* at 9.

But how can one have any spiritual discernment if one has the wrong translation? What if what you assume is a spiritually correct reading is based on an error? Thus, you cannot put spiritual discernment ahead of knowledge of the *authentic* text. You can never have discernment without an accurate text.

Poverty of Emphasis on Knowledge of Biblical Languages

In reality, there is very little emphasis in the Christian community on knowledge of the Greek or Hebrew languages. Torrey is encouraging tolerance for this ongoing modern phenomenon.

However only several generations ago, Christians did have familiarity with classical languages as a means of assisting themselves in translating the Bible. They thought the Bible's language was Latin. The Bible had been translated into Latin in 411 A.D., and Catholicism ingrained into everyone the assumption that this was the original language. With that assumption, all those who made serious study of the Bible were always anxious to know Latin so that they could read the Bible in what they thought was its most authentic form.

Now that we know better, and we realize the New Testament was written in Greek, we should put the same emphasis upon every Bible student to have an interlinear translation that shows the Greek and that they methodically use a reliable Greek dictionary.

Any other approach leaves the Bible student at the mercy of whatever politics may have influenced an English translation. It is indisputable that many passages are translated, even in the best English translations, with bias.

Presence of Bias Necessitates Studying Underlying Languages

It may be discouraging to learn some English translations suffer from bias. However, I trust anyone who has picked up this book about studying the Bible will not lose heart merely by learning human failings influence the translation. And if you are serious about studying the Bible, you have to know right now that bias has seriously corrupted several passages. The only way to escape such bias is to have your own resources to test the translation. Any the only way to do this is to have an interlinear translation and a good Greek dictionary

Examples of Bias

For example, the King James Bible deliberately corrupted the translation of Hebrews 6:4-6. The translators were dominated by the Puritan party. These gentlemen were strict

Calvinists. They were locked in a doctrinal dispute with the Arminian party over the issue of whether a Christian can lose their salvation. The Calvinists contended that once one was regenerated, it was impossible to fall away to damnation. God would cause predestination and complete success. The Arminian party contended principally based on Hebrews 6:4-6 that the contrary was true.

It is indisputable that the way Hebrews 6:4-6 reads in the Greek is that a group of people who already had been born of the spirit but who had fallen away by renouncing Christ will never repent again, and they are damned. Arminius was correct in how he read the passage. However, the Calvinist party tried winning the debate by using the influence of the King James Bible. They deliberately altered the translation so that it was now a hypothetical *if* they fell away. Also, instead of the Greek completed *aorist* tense (signifying a past tense) which said they had *fallen away*, the King James' translators made it a *iffy* subjunctive tense. It now read, "if they should fall away" instead of "those who fell away..."

These and many other examples could be shown.

The problem is that if you start with Torrey's approach, you easily could reject the correct translation of Hebrews 6:4-6 because this supports the Arminian doctrine of salvation. Calvinists and most modern evangelicals believe the Arminians are heretics and lost. Hence, if you use Torrey's approach and you are Calvinist or evangelical, you will not listen to Greek experts who point out that Hebrews 6:4-6 lacks the *if* and the subjunctive tense which is present in the King James Bible. For you will conclude that those experts are not regenerate by the very salvation doctrine which you form in reliance on the false translation. You will adhere to your 'spiritually discerned' truth by the strength of the incorrect translation you are reading in the King James!

As a result, you should not read the Bible without skepticism regarding the English translation. You must have a Greek interlinear available at all times, and access to a reliable Greek dictionary.

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