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Bible Translations

“Are not so many Bible translations confusing?” In view of the varied backgrounds from which we come, and our varying degrees of spiritual growth, it is remarkable that so great a unity of thought is found among true believers in Christ. This is an evidence that they are indwelt by the same Holy Spirit who is the Author of the Book.

“Has the Bible changed—what about revisions, marginal readings, etc.?” It is not the divinely inspired text which is revised, but translations from the copies which are available. None of the original writings are in existence. In ancient times, all copying was done by hand, which has resulted in some variations in the copies. Sometimes marginal notes were made, and later copied into the text. Sometimes copyists inadvertently altered the text or omitted something. This is not surprising. It is rather amazing that the text is fully authenticated (so that for the most part) scholars and researchers are agreed as to it.

“Capitalization and italicized words” Deity is worthy of more than we can give. Capitalization denotes respect. Yet various translators held to their own little rules, which are difficult to outline. Some would think in terms of capitalization of every personal reference to Deity. In translation, it is often difficult to express fullness of thought. Often translators “fill in” (to carry along in depth) meanings of words—hence the italics to so indicate.

“How can we know the Biblical report is true or accurate, in view of translation difficulties?” Much of what is contained in the Bible can be tested for accuracy, and probably no other book has been subjected such close and repeated scrutiny as the Bible. Its historical statements have often been questioned, only to be confirmed by further research. Though written at a time when man’s scientific knowledge was very limited, it does not contain any of the gross fallacies which were commonly held in those days. The Bible is not a treatise on scientific subjects, but it does not make statements contrary to any established facts of science. However, what the Bible says may be contrary to some theories held by certain scientists.

In the time when some of our earlier translations were made, less material was available from which to make a translation than in later years when other manuscripts were discovered. Much research was done to obtain as accurately as possible the text of the original writing. Most of the discrepancies in the various copies are of minor importance, and we know of no major doctrine of Scripture which rests upon a disputed text.

Apart from the question of the text to be translated, there is another reason for revisions. Our usage of words changes with the passage of time. In any “living” language changes are constantly taking place, so that a word which properly translated the original a hundred years ago might not be a good translation today. An example is the use of the old English word *Let*, which used to convey the meaning of hindering. Today it means the opposite. Also, the old English word *charity* meant *love*—today it conveys the thought of *welfare*. Revisions of translations enable us to have the Word of God expressed in the language used today.

Another problem is one which is involved in all use of language. Words often have an

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ambiguous meaning, so that it is possible to take them in either of two or more meanings. One translator may have taken an expression in one sense, while another may see it in another light. We are often helped in understanding ambiguous expressions, by considering the context in which the word is found. The passage may require a particular translation to convey the thought of the paragraph. Also, in cases where there is question, we may sometimes find guidance from the use of the word elsewhere in Scripture. This does not always follow, since it may be used elsewhere in a different context.

We find help in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, since He who inspired the writers of Scripture indwells every believer. In cases where the correct interpretation requires spiritual discernment, he is best fitted to make the translation who not only has the mental training in the languages but who is also indwelt by the Holy Spirit. To be divinely guided, the translator should be a deeply spiritual man.

The problem is not one of revision of the original writings, but of the translation which convey the text of those writings in the languages used today.

Concerning the basic truths of salvation, virtually all evangelical groups are in agreement. Obviously, a deeper knowledge of the Bible requires various forms of study, although it is amazing how persons with little learning can gain a deep insight into spiritual truth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:12-15). If we approach the Bible in humility with a teachable spirit, using the helps available to us, we may be confident of “growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pt 3:18).

Commentaries by godly individuals are very helpful to Bible study. We recommend and find profitable, the new Scofield reference Bible with its footnotes. “Exploring the Scriptures” by John Phillips (Moody Press, 820 North LaSalle Street, Chicago, IL) gives an excellent panoramic view of each book of the Bible. Two other commentaries which are worth mentioning are: “The Believers’s Bible Commentary” by William MacDonald (Thomas Nelson Publishers Inc. Nashville, TN), and “The Bible Knowledge Commentary An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty” (Chariotvictor Publishers, Colorado Springs, CO 80918).