

It Is Written

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English Translations of the Scriptures

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There is a rather vocal group of people who believe and teach that the King James Version is the only acceptable translation of the English Bible. They also believe the KJV was preserved by the providence of God.

A couple of questions are in order for those people: (1) Where does the KJV teach that it is the only acceptable English translation (2) If the KJV of the Bible was preserved by the providence of God, are the errors that are in the KJV also preserved by the providence of God?

Do you deny that there are "doctrinal" errors in the KJV (cf. Acts 2:47; 3:19; Heb. 6:6)? The truth is that many of the people who espouse the "KJV only" philosophy actually are not equipped to give legitimate bases for their belief. Many of the objections they make against modern translations are not sound. Some of the complaints against modern versions are valid, but many are not! The same people often object to readings in the ASV, NASB, RSV, NIV, NRSV, and the ESV in the following manner, "Well, it doesn't read like my King James." So what? That doesn't mean the modern readings are wrong. A comparison of other versions to the KJV is not the basis by which we determine accuracy in Bible translations. The KJV is not the final authority; we should appeal to the original manuscripts (Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek). A version is not wrong just because it differs from the KJV, nor is a version right just because it agrees with the KJV. A translation is wrong if it does not reflect what is in the original manuscripts.

A translation, any translation, is accurate if it accurately reflects what is in the original texts. I believe that a person may use any translation in any place where it is accurate. If not, why not? The person who objects to a reading in a particular translation should be qualified to give legitimate reasons for his objection. If he can't, his ground of objection is immediately suspect.

Translators of the Scriptures are not guided by the Holy Spirit in their work. Do you think otherwise? Most translators of the English versions are denominationalists. Do you believe they are guided by the Holy Spirit in their work? Of course not. Much of their work reflects some aspect of their theology. It is unavoidable. This is what accounts for the imbalance that we see in most versions. One portion of the text done by a segment of the translating committee may be done quite well, while other portions may be quite shabbily done. The translators of the KJV were to some extent influenced by Calvinism.

Can a person learn the truth of the gospel from the KJV? Yes. Is the KJV perfect? No.

A person would do well to use more than one translation of the Scriptures. Study from and compare as many as you can. When you lock yourself in to using only one version, you also lock yourself in to the weaknesses of that one version. Learn to note the differences between the various versions and attempt to discover the reason for the variations.

Actually, the very first sectarian preachers I ever heard promulgating the tenets of Calvinism used the KJV and only the KJV! There definitely are verses in the King James that were influenced by the Calvinistic beliefs of the translators. "Such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). That isn't what the Greek text says. It says "the ones being saved." In Acts 3:19 the KJV says "be converted." The original text says, "turn" or some equivalent that conveys the active quality of the verb *epistrepsate*. The KJV treats it as if it were passive. In Hebrews 6:6 the King James says, "If they shall fall away." The Greek says, "having fallen away" (*parapesontas*). The writer doesn't employ a hypothetical or conditional clause, but he uses an aorist active participle which in my judgment depicts actual cases of apostasy. There are other cases of sectarian bias in the great old King James. The King James only extremists can't see the forest for the trees. It makes you wonder why not?

Others object to the NIV because it says, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). One brother said, "See, there you have it, Calvinistic to the core." Has the brother ever

stopped to consider the fact that the KJV's rendering of the passage "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" is not literally true! Neither the NIV nor the KJV rendering is stating a literal truth. David's statement is a poetic Hebrew hyperbole. He is exaggerating his condition because of the emotion he feels due to his adultery with Bathsheba. It is as if David is saying, "I have never been any good. I have always been a sinner!"

If one or more mistranslated texts disqualifies an entire translation from being worthy of use, there isn't a single translation that could stand the test. The same measuring stick that KJV only folks apply to "modern" versions should be applied to the biblical text they use. But, they are not going to apply their own set of rules to the KJV. If they did so, they would abandon it post haste. Every translation I know of has some verses that need to be corrected, but the corrections need to be done in comparison to the original texts, not as the result of being compared to the KJV. The KJV is itself a translation — a translation that was done by denominational scholars in the 17th century. It is not the last word in Bible translation, the extremists notwithstanding.

It is so sad that some are so extreme that they are willing to point out the inaccuracies (as they see it) in every Bible except the one they use. They turn a blind eye to their text, but they diligently point out the "corrupt" verses in other peoples' texts. Serious students of the Bible want all incorrectly translated texts expunged from every translation. We all must strive for accuracy in teaching and practice, so we necessarily want the text we are using to be as accurate as possible. If texts in our version need revision or other forms of improvement, we should welcome constructive criticism rather than rail against men who point out the needed corrections that will make good translations better.

For example, the NRSV is generally an excellent translation. It has many of the same idiosyncrasies of the RSV-1971, but in many places it is among the best English translations available. One of the main problems of the NRSV is its tendency to "strike" male oriented language from the text. The translators were often correct in doing so, for there are places where the words "man," "he," and "him" are used generically or inclusively in the older translations of the original manuscripts, and are subject to misunderstanding by the modern reader. Acts 17:30 in the NRSV is an accurate rendering of the Greek text ... now he commands all people everywhere to repent ... (Acts 17:30, NRSV). The Greek word *anthropos* can mean "man, male." It can also mean "person, human being" as it does in the aforementioned passage. But, when we turn to John 3:1, the NRSV reads, "Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus ..." The Greek text says, "Now there was a man (*anthropos*) of the Pharisees ..." The NRSV leaves *anthropos* untranslated. In this passage the word means "male or man." Could it be that in their attempts to remove unnecessarily male oriented language from the Scriptures that the translators went too far? Yes, I believe so.

In John 1:14, the NASB refers to Jesus as "the only begotten from the Father." The translators used the words "only begotten" to render the word *monogenes* into English. The problem is *monogenes* doesn't mean "only begotten." It means "only, unique, only one of its kind." The NASB gives this as an optional translation in its margin. The optional rendering ought to be in the text.

The NIV translates the Greek word *sarx* by the words "sinful nature" in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. It may be that the men who did the work on those texts were influenced by Calvinism. I say "may be" because they did not render *sarx* by the words "inherited" sinful nature. Nevertheless, there are other, and more accurate, options that are available than the "sinful nature" reading. One thing is certain, the Holy Spirit through Paul's pen is not speaking of the flesh in the sense of the literal, material covering of the body. *Sarx* is used figuratively by the Spirit to indicate the condition of people who are not governed by the Holy Spirit's influence through the gospel. Hence, it describes the carnal state. It is the condition or state of human existence that is in opposition to God and God's law.

In 1 Timothy 3:1 the KJV speaks of "the office of a bishop." Two things are immediately apparent in the Greek text: (1) There is no corresponding word for "office." (2) The word *episkopos* doesn't mean "bishop," it means "overseer." Why does the KJV have the word "bishop"? It reflects the religious of those seventeenth century Church of England translators. This is one of the places where the NIV accurately reflects the sense of the original very nicely, "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer. . ."

Are we to discard the above-mentioned translations just because they have some inaccuracies? Absolutely not. These same versions have many places that are clear, idiomatic, modified-literal, and accurate. We must avoid extremism in regard to Bible translations.