

Merits of the Authorized Version

Remarks by J. C. Philpot, M.A., 1802-1869
Strict Baptist Minister, England
and Editor of the "Gospel Standard Magazine," 1849-69

"The more a man's heart is alive unto God, the more will he read his Bible; nor can there be a surer sign of a sickly state of soul than distaste to the Word of God...But we made a remark also on the grace and wisdom bestowed upon our translators to give us such a faithful and noble, clear and beautiful, yet simple and plain version. The blessing which has rested upon our English Bible in the thousands of souls who by it have been quickened and fed, liberated, sanctified, and saved, eternity alone can unfold. But much of this, under the blessing of God, has been due to the plain, simple, yet strong and expressive language which our translators were led to adopt. They were deeply penetrated with a reverence for the Word of God, and therefore they felt themselves bound by a holy constraint to discharge their trust in the most faithful possible way. Under that divine constraint they were led to give us a translation unequalled for faithfulness to the original, and yet at the same time clothed in the purest and simplest English. How suitable is all this to the simplest understanding, and how in this way the most precious truths of God are brought down to the plainest and most uncultivated mind.

"No one can read, with an enlightened eye, the discourses of our blessed Lord without seeing what a divine simplicity ran through all His words; and our translators were favoured with heavenly wisdom to translate these words of the Lord into language as simple as that in which they first fell from His lips. What can exceed the simplicity and yet the beauty and blessedness of such declarations as these? – "I am the bread of life"; "I am the door"; "I am the way, the truth, and the life"; "I lay down my life for the sheep"; "I am the vine"; "God is love"; "By grace are ye saved". Even where the words are not monosyllabic, they are of the simplest kind, and as such are adapted to the capacity of every child of God, in whatever rank of life he may be.

"The blessedness of having not only such a Bible, but possessing such a translation of it can never be sufficiently valued. If the Scriptures had been written in a style of language which required a refined education and a cultivated mind to understand, how could they have been adapted to the poor of the flock? Or had our translators wrapped up the simple language of the original in high flown expressions, how it would have set the Word of truth beyond the grasp of the poor of the flock! But now, as soon as the Blessed Spirit is pleased to communicate light and life to the soul, the Bible is open to the simplest man to read and to understand; and as the Lord by His Spirit is pleased to raise up faith in his heart to believe His testimony, he can not only understand what he thus reads without the necessity of a worldly education, but, under the unction of His grace, can also feel its power and blessedness in his own soul.

"But apart from the blessing which it has been thus made to the family of God, our English Bible has been a national treasure. It has much interwoven itself with our national character, has set up a pure standard of religion and morality, and is daily influencing thousands of hearts to actions of goodness and benevolence, as well as exercising a widely spread power in upholding good and condemning evil. This natural effect of the Bible, as distinct from its spiritual effect, is sometimes too much overlooked or undervalued, but is not less real and substantial. It is

something akin to the effect produced on a congregation where truth is preached, or in a family where its heads are partakers of the grace of God. In a congregation many are influenced by the truth, who are not regenerated by it; in a family the children are often affected by the parents' example and admonitions, who are not reached by their grace. So, apart from its sanctifying influence upon the vessels of mercy, the Bible has exercised an amazing amount of good on society at large; and in this way it has been made a great national blessing.

"But it is because the language of our Bible is such pure, simple, unaffected, idiomatic, intelligible English, that it has become so thoroughly English a book, and has interwoven itself with our very laws and language..."

– *Selected from Volume II of "Reviews by the late J. C. Philpot, M.A."*

<pIn the following remarks, Mr. Philpot expresses his opinion upon the question of whether it would be desirable to have a new, or at least a revised translation of the Scriptures (Authorized Version).

"We fully admit that there are here and there passages, of which the translation might be improved; as for instance, "love" for "charity" all through I Cor. 13; but we deprecate any alteration as a measure that for the smallest sprinkling of good would deluge us with a flood of evil. The following are our reasons:

"1. Who are to undertake it? Into whose hands would the revision fall? What an opportunity for the enemies of truth to give us a mutilated false Bible! Of course, they must be learned men, great critics, scholars, and divines. But these are notoriously either Puseyites or Neologians; in other words, deeply tainted with either popery or infidelity. Where are there learned men sound in the truth, not to say alive unto God, who possess the necessary qualifications for so important a work? And can erroneous men, men dead in trespasses and sins, carnal, worldly, ungodly persons, spiritually translate a book written by the blessed Spirit? We have not the slightest ground for hope that they would be godly men, such as we have reason to believe translated the Scriptures into our present version.

"2. Again, it would unsettle the minds of thousands, as to which was the word of God, the old translation or the new. What a door it would open for the workings of infidelity, or the temptations of Satan! What a gloom too it would cast over the minds of many of God's saints, to have those passages which had been applied to their souls translated in a different way, and how it would seem to shake all their experience of the power and preciousness of God's word!

"3. But besides this, there would be two Bibles spread through the land, the old and the new, and what confusion would this create in almost every place! At present, all sects and denominations agree in acknowledging our present version as the standard of appeal. Nothing settles disputes so soon as when the contending parties have confidence in the same umpire, and are willing to abide by his decision. But this judge of all dispute, this umpire of all controversy, would cease to be the looser of strife if present acknowledged authority were put an end to by a rival.

"4. Again, if the revision and re-translation were once to begin, where would it end? It is good to

let well alone, as it is easier to mar than mend. The Socianising Neologian would blot out "God" in I Timothy 3:16, and stroke out I John 5:7-8 as an interpolation. The Puseyite would mend it to suit Tractarian views. He would read "priest" where we now read "elder," and put "penance" in the place of "repentance." Once set up a notice, "The old Bible to be mended," and there would be plenty of workmen, who, trying to mend the cover, would pull the pages to pieces. The Arminian would soften down the words "election" and "predestination" into some term less displeasing to Pharisaic ears. "Righteousness" would be turned into "justice," and "reprobate" into "undiscerning." All our good Bible terms would be so mutilated that they would cease to convey the Spirit's meaning, and instead of the noble simplicity, faithfulness, and truth of our present version, we should have a Bible that nobody would accept as the word of God, to which none could safely appeal, and on which none implicitly reply.

"5. Instead of our good old Saxon Bible, simple and solid, with few words really obsolete, and alike majestic and beautiful, we should have a modern English translation in pert and flippant language of the day. Besides its authority, as the word of God, our present version is the great English Classic – generally accepted as the standard of the English language. The great classics of a language cannot be modernised. What an outcry there would be against modernising Shakespere, or making Hooker, Bacon, or Milton, talk the English of the newspapers or of the House of Commons.

"6. The present English Bible has been blessed to thousands of the saints of God; and not only so, it has become part of our national inheritance which we have received unimpaired from our fathers, and are bound to hand down unimpaired to our children. It is, we believe, the grand bulwark of Protestantism; the safeguard of the Gospel, and the treasure of the Church; and we should be traitors in every sense of the word if we consented to give it up to be rifled by the sacrilegious hands of the Puseyites, concealed Papists, German Neologians, infidel divines, Arminians, Socinians and the whole tribe of enemies of God and godliness."

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