

## **Bible Class Department.**

The Verbal Accuracy of God's Word.

"Every word of God is pure – He is a shield to them that trust in Him – add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." Prov. 30:5,6.

Paul sharply criticised some ignorant persons who came into the church indulging in strifes of words, and we frequently find misunderstandings and divisions caused solely by a lack of knowledge of the meaning of important words and phrases. In fact there are sects in the Christian world to-day, as we all know, who are cut off and separated from other parts of the body simply by a difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of perhaps a single word. The Psalmist said: "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?" Surely we can also say: He that made the tongue, and who gave us his law clothed in human language did he not know what words to select? It is evident that the Holy Spirit inspired – not simply the broad ideas – but, in many cases at least, the exact phraseology.

So fully did the Jews believe this, that the penalty of death was imposed on the Scribe, who, in copying the law, dared to alter a single word. So fully did Paul rest on the verbal accuracy of the Scriptures, that, relying on a single letter, he, at one bold stroke, cut away the main stay – so to speak – of the proud hopes of the whole Jewish nation. A hope which had been cherished for ages; that they, and they alone, were the chosen seed of Abraham, and the heirs to all the promises. Said he: "Know you, certainly, that those of faith, these are the sons of Abraham.... Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, even for his SEED. He does not say 'And to the SEEDS,' as concerning many,

but as concerning one; 'and to thy SEED' – who is Christ. ...If ye are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise."\*

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\*American Bible Union" version.

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Only the knowledge of this fact, we think, could enable the Master to say so confidently, "Till Heaven and Earth pass away, one iota [smallest letter in Greek alphabet] or one fine point [of a letter] shall not pass from the law till all be fulfilled."

That God's Word is perfect, is above controversy; we have indeed the oft repeated and divinely inspired assurance of the fact. That our English translation is perfect, is by no means as certain; in fact, we have abundant proof to the contrary. The truth is, howsoever faithful or capable the scholar may be, it is still simply impossible to make of any extended portion of the Word a concise and perfect translation. For this reason: If each of the nations of earth possessed exactly the same sets of ideas, expressed in exactly the same manner, one word for each division of thought, the work of changing from one language to another would be comparatively easy. But, as we know, this is not the case. One Greek word may express a thought embodied in several English words, again, it may take a number of Greek words to cover all that is contained in a single English one. If words were made of India Rubber, they might be stretched as occasion required; and indeed, there are those who so use them; but they are really more like a piece of hardened steel; which, while it may have different shapes, as viewed from different sides, is still unyielding and unchanging.

It is sometimes expedient in composing to use synonymous words when no change of sense is intended, in order to avoid repetition; but if this be done in translating, it is likely to cause – if not

obscurity – at least doubt and uncertainty. But the translators of our version of the Bible did this very thing, and willingly acknowledge it. In the preface they say: "We have not tied ourselves to an uniformity of phrasing or to an identity of words.... That we should express the same notion in the same particular word, as for example, if we translate the Hebrew or Greek word by purpose, never to call it intent," &c.

It had been better many times that they had been more strictly literal, even to the charge of producing a monotonous repetition. Our modern taste, we know, prefers a change in the sound, but we sometimes lose in force and power in obtaining that object. Paul was peculiarly fond of repetition. He is sometimes, as Paley says: "off at a word." When he strikes an expression that pleases him, he – like a child with a sweet butternut – turns it over and over, picking out at each fresh position some dainty bit, and refusing apparently, to lay it down until the last rich morsel has been extracted. We have a specimen in 2 Cor. 1. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Here our translators tired of the repetition. Not so Paul. He had not yet extracted all the comfort out of the blessed word, and so he [R52 : page 8] goes on thus: "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our comfort also abounded through Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation... or whether we be comforted, it is for your comfort and salvation,... knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the comfort."\*

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\*American Bible Union" version.

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Some original words have been translated by so many English ones, and the rendition has been in certain cases so arbitrary, that there is blind confusion and an utter failure to perceive the true import of the Divine Word.

We are not fault finding. The translators of King James' version, so called, probably did the very best they could under the circumstances. We of 1879 are living more than a quarter of a Millennium nearer the perfect day. Indeed we fully believe that that perfect day is already dawning upon us. We have light, let us have truth. Truth at any price. Truth, if it overthrows long cherished errors. Truth, if it sweeps away musty cobwebs, once gossamer filaments of fancy, enshrined in our hearts. Truth, if the heavens fall: but they cannot fall, they rest on truth.

Let not a superstitious reverence for the old, take the place of a holy veneration for the pure, although it may seem to be new. Error may be old: TRUTH IS ETERNAL.

We purpose in succeeding numbers of THE WATCHTOWER to make use of the "Bible Class" department for short items of interest, both critical and explanatory, including the translations of words and phrases; and various readings from different scholars; earnestly seeking by the help of Him who is the Light, the Truth, the Way, to come to knowledge of the truth, all the truth, and only the truth. The Spirit was promised to guide us "into all the truth." Let us "follow on to know the Lord." Not, that we may "hold **[R53 : page 8]** the truth in unrighteousness," which is plainly possible; but, being "sanctified by the truth," "we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine...but holding the Truth, may in love grow up into Him in all things, who is the head – Christ.

W. I. M.

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