

Let The Buyer Beware

by

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Perhaps the above appears a little strange to some. After all, this is a Christ-oriented article, is it not? Then, what are you writing about, J D?

Well, a few years ago I wrote an article concerning the various translations of God's Word in which I pointed out the difficulties which we incur when insisting on the exclusive use of the "Authorized Translation", commonly referred to as the "King James Version".

I pointed out that the old "Elizabethan" English in which the King James Version is written is, in some passages, difficult of understanding and, in a few instances, misleading. However, I believe further clarification is in order.

It is not necessarily true that these difficulties are the result of mis-translation. Most commonly, they are the result of the evolution of the English language. Our language is an accumulation of several languages and is constantly in a state of flux. An expression used one way today is next week, month, year, used in a different way. Not only is it USED differently, but in a short space of time BECOMES accepted as the "norm".

Not a wonder, then, after 400+ years we encounter difficulties. This is all true, but let us put this on the back burner for the time being, and get to the "rest of the story".

Beware

In my years of gainful employment, I was a retailer, manager, salesman etc. One thing we were taught, and which I learned early on, was the meaning of the Latin expression, "Caveat emptor", which, of course, means "Let the buyer beware".

Now I was dealing in tangible goods and services. It was imperative that I, as a buyer of merchandise, should be critical in my appraisal.

I soon learned that I must ignore the sellers' "pitches" and make an honest, objective evaluation of the goods at hand, and act accordingly. Was it truly good, or did it merely look good? In short, (in the language of the carpenter: "measure twice, cut once") be careful what you buy!

One final observation: If one does not see the importance of this, a visit to the local used-car lot and a conversation with the salesman will clearly illustrate my point. "Let the buyer beware!!"

Sometimes in our zeal to learn more of God's Word, we insist on the use of a more "modern" text of the Bible (there are literally hundreds).

We read a “revised” text that sounds good, so we push the King James off the desk and let it accumulate dust and use the “better” text. But first, “let the buyer beware!!” If we are to abandon an “old friend”, we first seek out a better friend.

The African people have a saying, “My son, if you sell your birthright, make sure you receive something of value in return.” AMEN!!

It seems everyone has his or her favorite translation. Which is the “right one”? The Revised Standard (American or English), The Living Bible, Today’s English Version, New International, New English Bible, Jerusalem Bible (Catholic)?

The above are examples of scholarly works by panels of renowned scholars, thoroughly capable of doing a credible job. The point is, DO THEY?

Notable among others are Goodspeed’s, William’s, Moffat’s, Wilson’s Diaglott, Phillip’s and Beck. These “one-man” translations have some virtues to recommend them. Are they worthy of use? Safe? “Let the buyer beware!!”

One thing I have learned over the years is that there is no PERFECT translation. By definition, they are the works of men who, in spite of good intentions, are fallible, who can, and do, make mistakes.

More importantly (especially in the case of “one-man” translations), there is a tendency to write one’s own bias into his text. “Let the buyer beware!!”

Some Irregularities

Genesis 6:2

- [K.J.V.] “...the sons of God saw the daughters of men...”
- [New Eng.] “...the sons of the gods saw ... the daughters of men...”

Which would you choose as correct? A brief examination of the original would reveal the Hebrew “Elohiym” to mean “the Supreme God”. It is singular in number and cannot refer to anything (or anyone) other than the God of the Bible.

Why, then, would these translators render such a glaring error? It totally escapes me; especially, when the same “Elohiym” is rendered “God” only seven verses later! (Gen. 6:9). What made the difference?

If one were to be consistent with such a translation of Gen. 6:2, he would be forced to read verse 9 as, “...he walked with the gods...” I for one

will not accept this; it is “prima facie”, false! Again, “Let the buyer beware!!”

In this case the K.J.V. is more reliable than the “New English Bible”.

Acts 20:7

To illustrate my point, note the above scripture. Herein is set forth in clear detail the will of the Holy Spirit in the work and worship of the primitive church of Christ which is our example.

- [K.J.V.] “...upon the first day of the week...”
- [Phillips] “...on the Saturday...”
- [Today’s Eng. Vers.] “...on Saturday evening...”
- [New Eng. Bible] “...on the Saturday night...”

Of the eleven translations I have before me, three render the day upon which the disciples met as “Saturday”. Eight (and many more) render it as the “first day”

Further, Thayer (pg. 187) says the “first day of the week”. Vine says (pg. 240) concerning Mark 13:9 (a parallel passage), “the first (day) of [i.e. after] the Sabbath, in which phrase the ‘of’ is objective, not including the Sabbath, but following it.”

Note further, Vine on Mark 16:9, “Early...at dawn, by impl. The day-break watch; early (in the morning).” This was the first day, Sunday, not Saturday! I use this to determine that the day was the first day and that that day began early, at dawn.

Why, then, do these three translations read as they do? It is beyond me, but it is obvious that one could be misled if guided by either of these alone. Again, “Let the buyer beware!!”

Remainder

The second half of Acts 20:7 reads as follows:

- [K.J.V.] “...when the disciples came together to break bread...”
- [Beck] “...on Sunday, when we met for a meal...”

Many, today, diminish the importance of communion on the first day of the week. Some contend that this occasion was merely a meal such as dinner, etc. with no special significance. However, Luke, the writer of Acts, indicates this was the reason they came together.

Paul preached to the congregation on this occasion (a very lengthy sermon). In I Cor. 11:22, he instructs the church at Corinth that we have houses to eat and drink in. The disciples did not need to “assemble” to eat breakfast!

We are told (Acts 2:42) “...they continued stedfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.” These were acts of worship, not everyday mundane affairs. “Praising God and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47) indicates these things were public occurrences seen by “all the people”; in short, public worship.

Just so, in Acts 20:7. This was no ordinary meal, it was why they came together. It was communion!!

Why did Beck so translate this verse? I have no insight in this matter. I know it leads one to a wrong conclusion. The K.J.V. is correct! Beck is wrong! “Let the buyer beware!!”

I have cited these (mis)translations to illustrate a point. We should be careful when we attempt to compel others to use a specific translation, or to abandon a specific one. There is some good to be found in most translations, whether modern or archaic. There are also some errors to be avoided. What, then, can we do in view of these problems?

Compare, Compare, Compare

Comparing many translations on any verse is a good help always. A good help in my studies is the Eight Translation New Testament by Tyndale House Publishers. This can be purchased in many Bible Bookstores.

Also, many good reference lexicons are available which are very readable. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words is a very easily understood reference work, arranged in dictionary form.

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance is very useful. It includes many features, including a Hebrew and Greek dictionary written in English, and referenced with a numerical system that is easily learned.

Omissions

Several of the “modern” translations show the scholar’s disrespect for the revealed Word of God.

A comparison of several translations will reveal complete omissions of various verses. Sometimes, the editor will footnote these omissions, explaining that this or that verse does not belong in the text or that it was the addition of some scribe or editor.

I wish someone would explain to me how someone sitting alone some 2000 years afterward can determine that one verse is correct and another is false and must be omitted. It seems to me to be the height of arrogance to become a judge of God's Word. I pray to be delivered from such arrogance! "Let the buyer beware!!"

Computers

Many helpful Bible computer programs are available. Comparative translations are available and are good.

One thing to remember, however, is that the "commentaries" so much in evidence on computer software are no more than the opinions of the authors. They may contain helpful comments, or they may reflect the bias of the commentator. Again, I say, "Let the buyer beware!!"

Summary

We might summarize by saying that we would be well advised to utilize every tool available in our studies of the Scriptures. But, use them with caution!! Before we cast off any work of scholarship for whatever reason, we should be doubly certain that which we accept in its stead is a better one. "Let the buyer beware!!"

For a better understanding of the truth,
J D Logan

