

The Accuracy of the Authorised Version

Malcolm H. Watts

Chairman of the General Committee

The Trinitarian Bible Society does not believe the Authorised Version to be a perfect translation, only that it is the best available translation in the English language. There is therefore no need for us to answer every criticism of this version. However, some criticisms are ill-founded and unjustified and we believe such do require a detailed response.

■ Romans 5.11 –

Critics maintain that ‘atonement’ is a mis-translation. The Greek word is καταλλαγήν (*katallagen*). While it could have been rendered ‘reconciliation’, the Authorised Version rendering is not summarily to be rejected. Professor W.G.T. Shedd comments: ‘This important word is rendered “atonement”, in the English version. At the time when the version was made, atonement = at-one-ment, or reconciliation’.¹ Furthermore, Shedd argues, with reference to Athenaeus, that the true meaning of the Greek word is ‘satisfaction’; and he concludes: ‘Through Christ, the believer “receives the atonement”’: namely, that expiation for sin which settles the difference between God and

man. The result is reconciliation and harmony between the two parties’.²

Professor Moses Stuart of Andover confirms Shedd’s first point, writing, ‘The word means reconciliation; and such is the sense in which our English translators here used the word atonement (quasi at-one-ment)’.³

■ 2 Thessalonians 3.5 –

It is maintained that ‘patient waiting for Christ’ is a misrendering of the original. The Greek literally means ‘the patience of Christ’, and could mean ‘the patience which Christ exercised’ or, as in the Authorised Version, ‘the patient waiting for Christ’. C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine acknowledge that the latter *is* a possible interpretation.⁴ Calvin endorses that interpretation, although he does concede the expression might be otherwise understood. He says, ‘I prefer to understand it as referring to the hope of ultimate redemption. For this is the only thing that sustains us in the warfare of the present life, that we wait for the Redeemer; and farther, this waiting requires faithful endurance amidst

the continual exercises of the cross'.⁵ Certainly, this supports the rendering of the Authorised Version and is in accord with the emphasis in the two epistles (1 Thessalonians 1.10; 2.19; 3.13; 4.16,17; 5.23; 2 Thessalonians 1.10; 2.8).

■ Romans 1.3 –

The phrase 'Jesus Christ our Lord' is said to be misplaced. In Scrivener's Greek Text it does indeed appear at the end of verse 4—'...resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ our Lord'. The words between 'his Son' and 'the dead' were therefore regarded by the translators as a parenthesis. And surely the point is that the words *are* properly translated, although included *slightly earlier* for the sake of the sense and the right understanding of the two verses.

■ 1 Peter 1.2 –

The objection here is taken to the position of 'elect'. It is true that, in the Greek, this word appears in the first verse—'elect strangers'—and the epistle then proceeds 'Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...'. The point is, however, that the word 'elect' *begins Peter's description of his readers*. The translators obviously believed (and rightly so, in our opinion) that the verbal adjective 'elect' governs the words which follow in the second verse ('according to the foreknowledge of God the Father'). If it doesn't, then what does? Dr. E.H. Plumptre concludes, 'The word "elect" or "chosen" belongs, as already stated, to verse 1, but the English sufficiently represents the meaning of the Greek'.⁶

■ Matthew 27.44 –

Exception is taken to the words 'cast the same in his teeth'. The word used here is *ὠνειδίζον* (*oneidizon*) which means to 'reproach' or 'to heap insults upon'. If we look at the original, it literally reads, 'And with the same thing also the thieves who were crucified together with him reproached him'. The Authorised Version (which follows Tyndale, Coverdale and the Geneva) understands 'reproached', quite correctly, as 'cast on him reproaches'. The Greek words *το αὐτο* (*to auto*), translated 'the same', indicate that 'something' was actually thrown—and the concluding word *αὐτω* (*auto*) indicates that it was thrown 'at him' (this being the indirect object of the verb). This is why the Authorised Version chooses to translate the verb—in this somewhat surprisingly accurate manner, although it is not widely used in English today—'cast the same in his teeth'.

Regarding Matthew 27.44, we may note Dr. James Morison's comment: 'An exceedingly graphic translation'.⁷

■ Mark 2.3 –

'Paralytic' is reckoned to be a better translation than 'sick of the palsy'. The problem is that the term 'paralytic' is the modern definition of a person with palsy. Dr. J.A. Alexander says of it, 'a word now in common use, but not at the date of our translation'.⁸ But leaving aside that fact, if 'palsy' means 'paralysis' (which it does), then we can surely assume that one 'sick of the palsy' is actually a 'paralytic'. Given that there was no such word

in common use in the 17th century, the Authorised Version has an excellent rendering of the Greek word.

■ **Romans 3.4** –

The exclamation ‘God forbid’ is considered far too free a translation. The Greek literally means, ‘May it not be!’ but since it is an exclamation of abhorrence, some scholars, like Professor John Murray, have defended the AV rendering. Murray writes, ‘It really needs the force of the expression given in our version “God forbid”’. In a footnote, Murray says, ‘*me genoito* corresponds to a Hebrew expression and actually occurs in the LXX of Gen 44:7,17; Josh 22:29; 24:16; 1 Kgs 21:3. The Hebrew expression is sometimes used with names for God (1 Sam 24:6—“The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master”. See also: 26:11; 1 Kgs 21:3; 1 Chron 11:19; Job 34:10)’. He concludes: ‘Hence our English expression “God forbid” has biblical precedent. The Greek *me genoito*, indicating the recoil of abhorrence, needs the strength of this English rendering derived from the Hebrew’.⁹

■ **Matthew 8.31** –

Here, and elsewhere, the word for ‘demons’ is said to be mistranslated ‘devils’. In the New Testament, ‘devil’ appears some thirty-five times, and literally means ‘slanderer’ or ‘one who trips us’. The Greek word, which could be translated ‘demon’, and which denotes ‘an evil spiritual being’, also occurs a number of times in the original—and it occurs in its verbal form, ‘demonised’ or

‘possessed of devils’. It is often maintained that there is one ‘devil’, but many demons, or inferior spirits, subject to him. Hence the devil is called ‘the prince of the devils’ (literally, ‘demons’) (Matthew 12.24). But this very title suggests that ‘demons’ are ‘*the same in nature with one another, also the same with their prince*’.¹⁰ Conceivably, then, it is quite acceptable to speak of ‘the Devil’ and also of ‘(lesser) devils’—which is what the Authorised Version appears to do. In fact, it is perhaps worth noting that the word ‘demon’ does not appear anywhere in that version.

■ **Revelation 4.6ff.** –

‘Beasts’ is considered to be a most unsuitable translation for ‘living beings’ or ‘living creatures’ (Revelation 4.6ff). In the Authorised Version, ‘beast’ appears as a general word for *creatures other than man*. The Greek word translated ‘beasts’ in the book of Revelation could certainly have been translated ‘living beings’—and perhaps it would have been better so translated (in keeping with Ezekiel chapters 1, 3 and 10); but it should be noticed that the term ‘beast’ is used in reference to forms resembling ‘a lion’, ‘a (bull) calf’, etc.: creatures that have mighty power (as the protectors of the throne of God), and that are meant to strike all observers—and readers—with real and deep fear.

■ **Matthew 3.11; Mark 1.8** –

It is argued that ‘with water’, in reference to baptism, is a mistake and inconsistent with ‘in Jordan’ mentioned elsewhere.

Now, Greek prepositions are notoriously difficult, because often they can be translated in many different ways. The Greek preposition ἐν (*en*) properly signifies ‘in’, and that is how it could have been rendered (which rendering would have no doubt pleased some); but, in all fairness, it must be said that, in Greek, this preposition (*en*) followed by the dative case (ὑδατι, *hudati*) can signify the instrument. Here are just two examples: ‘almost all things are by the law purged with blood’ (ἐν αἵματι, *en haimati*) (Hebrews 9.22); and ‘the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood’ (ἐν αἵματι, *en haimati*) (Hebrews 9.25). Given this indisputable fact, no-one can say that the Authorised Version’s rendering (in Matthew 3.11 and Mark 1.8) is a mistranslation, although some might have preferred the other rendering.

■ Matthew 6.10 –

The point made is that this verse should read ‘thy will be done on earth’, rather than ‘in earth’. The Greek preposition here is ἐπι (*epi*), literally ‘upon’; but, again, it is a preposition which can be variously translated, and when followed by the genitive, it can often mean ‘in’, as the following examples show: ‘Archelaus did reign in [*epi*] Judæa’ (Matthew 2.22); ‘in [*epi*] their hands they shall bear thee up’ (Matthew 4.6); ‘from whence can a man satisfy these *men* with bread here in [*epi*] the wilderness?’ (Mark 8.4); ‘there shall be two *men* in [*epi*] one bed’ (Luke 17.34); and ‘by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in [*epi*] earth’ (Colossians 1.16).

■ 1 Thessalonians 4.14 –

‘Sleep in Jesus’, some say, should properly be translated ‘sleep through Jesus’. Here the preposition is δια [*dia*], usually ‘through’, but consider the following: ‘build it in [*dia*] three days’ (Matthew 26.61); ‘a vision appeared to Paul in [*dia*] the night’ (Acts 16.9); ‘I have written a letter unto you in [*dia*] few words’ (Hebrews 13.22). If this is allowed, it will express the same truth as in 1 Corinthians 15.18 (although there it is with a different preposition)—‘they also which are fallen asleep in Christ’. However, if ‘through’ is still preferred, it will simply mean, as Dr. Barnes observes, that ‘his death and resurrection are the cause of the quiet and calm repose’.¹¹

■ 2 Peter 1.1 –

It is maintained that this phrase should read ‘in’ and not ‘through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ’. The preposition is indeed ἐν (*en*—literally, in), and if so translated (as by Wycliffe and Tyndale) it will be similar to ‘faith in his blood’ (Romans 3.25). But if ‘through’ be maintained—as in ‘sanctify them through [*en*] thy truth’ (John 17.17); ‘preached through [*en*] Jesus the resurrection’ (Acts 4.2); ‘consolation and good hope through [*en*] grace’ (2 Thessalonians 2.16); and ‘grace and peace be multiplied unto you through [*en*] the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord’ (2 Peter 1.2)—then, as Alexander Nisbet rightly remarks, ‘Faith... comes...through Christ’s righteousness, which is, His doing and suffering to pur-

chase it, and other saving graces for us'.¹² A slightly different understanding is supplied by Dr. John Lillie, who says, 'it may indeed be said that faith is "through" this righteousness, inasmuch as, had there been no such righteousness, there could have been no revelation of it, and consequently no faith'.¹³

■ Luke 9.58 –

Fault is found on account of the omission of the definite articles in the expression 'foxes and birds'. The omission of the definite article in these two cases is a very small matter, especially as particular 'foxes' or 'birds' are not intended. A stronger case could be made for an improvement in **Luke 18.13** – 'God be merciful to me a sinner' (literally, 'the sinner'), as the publican *may* have thought of himself as the sinner above all others (cf. 1 Timothy 1.15). But this is *not at all certain*. Dean Alford says, 'There may be a stress on *to* (the Greek article) before *hamartolo*, "me the sinner". But see re ff., where, as probably here, the art. is generic. It seems to me that any emphatic comparison here would somewhat detract from the solemnity and simplicity of the prayer... The *to* (the article) rather implies, not comparison with others, but self-abasement: "sinner that I am"'.¹⁴ As for **John 3.10**, in the Greek it does indeed read, 'Art thou **the** master of Israel, and knowest not these things?' It is suggested that there is a contrast with verse 2, 'a teacher come from God', but this is not a view generally endorsed. Indeed, I cannot find it mentioned by any Commentator. **The** master of Israel' just may suggest that Nicodemus held some

special, high position; but, interestingly, Alford, in his *Greek Testament*, defends the Authorised Version's rendering here—'a master'—and on the grounds that 'the article is inserted as required by *tou* before *Israel*, which is expressed as giving a solemnity to *Isr.* as the people of God'. As an alternative reason for this rendering, he asks this question: 'Is it possible that "the master" may merely be meant as "one of the masters"?' He then concludes by saying, 'I prefer either of these reasons for the presence of the article, to supposing it to have any emphatic meaning'.¹⁵ I quote Alford here, not to suggest that he is necessarily correct in his interpretation, but to show that some Greek scholars (and Alford was recognised as eminent in this discipline) *support* the omission of the article in the translation because its inclusion would give an emphasis not intended. The conclusion must be that criticism of the Authorised Version at this point is quite unjustified.

■ 2 Corinthians 5.14 –

'If one died for all, then all died' is regarded as more in accord with the original than the Authorised Version, 'if one died for all, then were all dead'. Dr. Charles Hodge states that the verse has been 'variously explained'. One view (Beza's and others') is that it means: 'if one died for all, then were all subject to death', while another view (favoured by Hodge, and supported by the use of the aorist) is that 'the death of one was the death of all... The death of Christ was legally and effectively the death of his people'.¹⁶ This is perhaps more a matter

of interpretation than translation. The rendering in the Authorised Version could conceivably support both of these views, the point being ‘if Christ died for all, then all those were dead for whom he died’ (Dr. John Gill).¹⁷

The criticisms made do not, in any way, constitute a general and sustainable indictment of the Authorised Version. Indeed, on examination, they do not appear to be significant or even valid. The New King James Version, on the other hand, is lamentably deficient, containing not only many departures from the Received Text, but also a great number of palpable translational errors. It is our firm belief that the Authorised Version retains its honourable place as the most noble, worthy and accurate translation of the Scriptures in the English language.

Endnotes:

1. William G. T. Shedd, D.D., *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (New York, NY, USA: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), pp. 118,119.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
3. Professor Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London, England: Thomas Tegg and Son, 1838), p. 198.
4. C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians* (Glasgow, Scotland: Pickering and Inglis, 1914), p. 285. Cited by W.E. Vine in *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (London, England: Oliphants Ltd., 1966), p. 168.
5. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols.: *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Book House, 1979), 21.351.
6. E.H. Plumtre, D.D., *The General Epistles of St. Peter & St. Jude* (Cambridge, England: The University Press, 1899), p. 92.
7. James Morison, D.D., *A Practical Commentary on the Gospel according to St Matthew* (London, England: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), p. 594.
8. J.A. Alexander, D.D., *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (New York, NY, USA: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1864), p. 34.
9. John Murray, D.D., *The Epistle to the Romans* (London, England: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1967), p. 94.
10. James Henderson, D.D., ‘Demons’, *The Imperial Bible Dictionary*, edited by Patrick Fairbairn, D.D. 2 vols. (London, England: Blackie and Son), 2.145.
11. Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Kregel Publications, 1966), p. 1098.
12. Alexander Nisbet, *An Exposition of 1 & 2 Peter* (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), p. 223.
13. John Lillie, D.D., *Lectures on the First and Second Epistles of Peter* (New York, NY, USA: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1869), p. 355.
14. Henry Alford, D.D., *The Greek Testament* (London, England: Rivingtons, 1874), p. 615.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 716.
16. Charles Hodge, D.D., *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London, England: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1963), p. 136.
17. John Gill, D.D., *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 3 vols. (London, England: Mathews & Leigh, 1809), 2.789.