

Articles and Sermons :: Tozer & others on the Bible

Tozer & others on the Bible - posted by crsschk (), on: 2007/1/20 19:27

It is a dangerous and costly practice to consult men every time we reach a dark spot in the Scriptures. We do not overlook the importance of the gift of teaching to the Church, but we do warn against the habit of taking by blind faith the opinions of men - even good men. A few minutes of earnest prayer will often give more light than hours of reading the commentaries. The best rule is: Go to God first about the meaning of any text. Then consult the teachers. They may have found a grain of wheat you had overlooked.

Confessions of a New Version Addict.

by A.W.Tozer

Since shortly after my conversion to Christ as a teen-ager I have been addicted to the habit of acquiring and being disappointed with new versions of the Scriptures, both revisions and new translations.

It is a habit I cannot shake off. In spite of a long record of frustrated hopes and cruel disappointments, to this day I have but to hear a new version of the Scriptures has come out and I am off to the book-seller to pick up a copy. As Ponce de Leon, otherwise a sensible enough fellow, knocked about the world looking for a nonexistent fountain of youth, so I continue to look for the new version that will make any other new versions unnecessary by bringing out the meanings of the Holy Scriptures as sharply as the developer brings out the details of the picture on a photographic plate.

But it never works out that way. After poring over the new book for a few days or weeks and finding that it is just one more version, I put it aside and return to my first love, the familiar King James Bible. I know its mistakes very well, its mistranslations and confused tenses; I should, for the Bible teachers are forever correcting it in public and the introductions to the new versions never tire of pointing out these flaws in the grand old English Bible.

It has been my experience that the new versions make at least one mistake for every one they correct, so by the time the trusting reader has reached the last chapter of the Book of Revelation he is back where he started and just goes out by that same door where in he went. And in the meanwhile he has lost the incalculable benefit of constant and intimate mental association with the clearest, richest and most beautiful English to be found anywhere among the libraries of the World, the Authorized Version.

I believe that my error has been that I have nursed the hope, perhaps subconsciously, that my dullness of spirit and coldness of heart are the result of not hearing the truth expressed clearly enough in the common language of the street; that if I could hear a promise or a commandment couched in different words it would be easier to believe and obey.

But this is a gross fallacy. Words are only arbitrary symbols to convey meanings, and the meaning is all that matters. God would impart an idea to mankind, so He employs a verbal symbol which the reader can understand. That is what language is for, and that is all it is for, unless, as I have suggested above, the language becomes a thing of beauty in itself and so exerts a cultural influence upon those who read it and hear it spoken. But that is secondary; the primary purpose of language is to express truth, and it is before the bar of truth that we must all stand at last.

Mark Twain, when asked what he did about the passages of Scripture he could not understand, is supposed to have replied that these did not bother him. "But the ones I can understand," he said, "often make me sweat."

I believe that there is serious danger that we ignore the plain truth (which, incidentally, is about the same in all versions) while we search for novel meanings and more modern expressions of old truths which we know well enough but make no effort to obey. The chief purpose of the Word of God is to reveal saving truth, to bring men to Christ, to make them holy, to draw them into loving communion with God and to teach them how to do good to all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith. Let a man study prayerfully any of the generally recognized versions, done by proficient and responsible scholars, and the Spirit will quicken the truth to his heart and lead him toward the ends God has in view for him. Almost everything depends upon his response to the Spirit's workings.

While it is important that the translations be accurate and faithful, yet better versions do not make better men. And this brings us to consider those translators who think to do God service by packing into the English text every possible shade of meaning the word will bear in the original. The synonyms are put in brackets and the reader, apparently, just takes his choice. This would never do anywhere else. Imagine reading to a child.

"Twinkle, twinkle (blink, wink, shine intermittently, sparkle), little (diminutive, small, wee, tiny) star (heavenly body, luminary, orb, sphere),
How I wonder (question, puzzle over, dubitate) what you are (be, have identify with, belong under the description of),
Up above (atop, opposite to down, contrary to direction of gravity) the world (the earth, the abode of human-kind) so high (elevated),
Like a diamond (gem, precious stone, crystallized carbon) in the sky (the heavens, the firmament, the empyrean)"

Yet this is the latest religious word game in evangelical circles and we are all urged to play at it. For myself, I cannot keep serious while reading such a version, so I just pass up these uncertain translators and turn to one who can make up his mind. I have a secret love for decisiveness. It is quite natural for us humans to ignore the high moral intent of the Holy Scriptures and get lost in verbiage. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," says the old version, and multitudes over the centuries have knelt in penitence and tearfully sought to know true poverty of spirit; lately the fad seems to be to try to find shades of meaning for the words and to express them in more colloquial language. I wonder if anyone benefits by having the same thing said several different ways for him.

A few hundred years ago it was considered very much the thing for ministers preaching in English to interlard their sermons with frequent Greek and Latin words and phrases, always left untranslated by the speaker. His hearers were no doubt duly impressed with his learning but they had not the faintest notion what he was talking about. He has now been displaced by the preacher who knows enough Greek to make him uncomfortable and can never resist the temptation to turn every sermon into a classroom lecture. I have sometimes thought (and I trust not uncharitably) that the knowledge of a little Greek is a great convenience to such a man, for the Greek being a remarkably accommodating language enables him to preach anything he wants to without being challenged.

All this is not to cry down true scholarship nor to discourage honest attempts to put the Bible into modern speech. It is rather to confess that I have not become a holier man nor a better preacher by my incurable addiction to new versions of the Scriptures. I find that if I am failing to live in accordance with the will of God, I get no relief by reading about that will in a new translation. As soon as God shows a man the way, it is his duty and happy privilege to walk in it. If he refuses or neglects to walk in it he may seek some temporary consolation by looking about for some version that will say the same thing to him in a different way. While he is jockeying about for new shades of meaning his conscience may get a bit of rest, but I am sure that a faithful God will not let him escape.

Sometime he'll have to face up to the meaning of things, no matter in what version they are expressed. As I write I can see fifteen versions before me without turning my head and there are many more stashed about here and there. And they all say the same thing to me; namely, that I must trust Christ Jesus the Lord as my Saviour, love God with all my heart, soul and mind, and my neighbour as myself. They all say that I must be holy, humble, obedient, prayerful, pure, kindly, courageous and faithful. They all say that God is my Father and the Holy Spirit the inhabitant of my nature through the mystery of the new birth. And they all end with the cry for Christ's returning. I really don't need any more new versions, but I'll probably buy the next one that comes out.

Maybe someday I'll find something sufficiently different to justify the expense. But I haven't up to now.

Re: Tozer & others on the Bible - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2007/1/20 19:36

Quote:
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Amen to Dr. Tozer. This summarizes perfectly all I've been saying. It's not so much the version as it is the *immersion*.

Brother Paul

Re: Tozer & others on the Bible - posted by crsschk (), on: 2007/1/20 19:41

Quote:

-----This summarizes perfectly all I've been saying. It's not so much the version as it is the *immersion*.

Well said brother. Here's a bit more;

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FAITH IS OF TWO KINDS: NOMINAL AND REAL. The nominal faith is faith that accepts what it is told and can quote text after text to prove it. It's amazing how nominal faith and nominal belief can weave these texts into garments, cloaks and curtains for the Church.

But there is another kind of faith: it is faith that depends upon the character of God. You will remember that the Scripture does not say, "Abraham believed the text, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." It says, "Abraham believed God" (Romans 4:3). It was not what Abraham believed, it was who Abraham believed that counted. Abraham believed God, and the man of true faith believes God and his faith rests on the character of God. The man who has real faith rather than nominal faith has found a right answer to the question, "What is God like?" There is no question more important. The man of true faith has found an answer to that question by revelation and illumination.

The difficulty with the Church now—even the Bible-believing Church—is that we stop with revelation. But revelation is not enough. Revelation is God's given Word. It's an objective thing, not subjective; it's external, not internal. It is God's revelation of truth. A man may believe that and believe it soundly and hold it to be truth. And yet he will have only a subjective revelation of truth that has been objectively revealed.

### Illumination

There is another way to find an answer to the question, "What is God like?" and that is by illumination. The man of real faith believes the Word, but it has been illuminated so that he knows what the Word means. That doesn't mean that he's a better Bible teacher. But it means that he has had what the Quakers call "an opening." His heart has been opened to the Word. The given revelation is a means toward an end, and God is the end, not the text itself.

That's why I never fight over a translation and get all worked up and steamed up over it. A text is a means to an end. Now, since there's plenty of money and the printers will print anything, we're making the mistake of thinking that if we get the Word said in a different way there'll be some magic effect in that Word. We think that if it is read in the King James Version that's OK, but if we get a new version, varying just a little, we have automatically received something new. It doesn't follow!

The illumination is what matters and the Word of God is a means toward an end, just as roads are means toward destinations. A road is nothing in itself. Nobody ever built a road and fenced it in at both ends and planted posies along it and beautified it and said, "This is a road." They said, "This is a way, a means toward somewhere." The Bible is a whole series of highways, all leading toward God. And when the text has been illuminated and the believer of the text knows that God is the end toward which he is moving, then that man has real faith.

AWT

**Re: Tozer & others on the Bible - posted by crsschk (), on: 2007/1/20 20:45**

### **Why People Find the Bible Difficult**

*by A. W. Tozer*

#### Chapter 6 from Man: The Dwelling Place of God

That many persons find the Bible hard to understand will not be denied by those acquainted with the facts. Testimony to the difficulties encountered in Bible reading is too full and too widespread to be dismissed lightly.

In human experience there is usually a complex of causes rather than but one cause for everything, and so it is with the difficulty we run into with the Bible. To the question, Why is the Bible hard to understand? no snap answer can be given; the pert answer is sure to be the wrong one. The problem is multiple instead of singular, and for this reason the effort to find a single solution to it will be disappointing.

In spite of this I venture to give a short answer to the question, and while it is not the whole answer it is a major one and probably contains within itself most of the answers to what must be an involved and highly complex question. I believe that we find the Bible difficult because we try to read it as we would read any other book, and it is not the same as any other book.

The Bible is not addressed to just anybody. Its message is directed to a chosen few. Whether these few are chosen by God in a sovereign act of election or are chosen because they meet certain qualifying conditions I leave to each one to decide as he may, knowing full well that his decision will be determined by his basic beliefs about such matters as predestination, free will, the eternal decrees and other related doctrines. But whatever may have taken place in eternity, it is obvious what happens in time: Some believe and some do not; some are morally receptive and some are not; some have spiritual capacity and some have not. It is to those who do and are and have that the Bible is addressed. Those who do not and are not and have not will read it in vain.

Right here I expect some readers to enter strenuous objections, and for reasons not hard to find. Christianity today is man-centered, not God-centered. God is made to wait patiently, even respectfully, on the whims of men. The image of God currently popular is that of a distracted Father, struggling in heartbroken desperation to get people to accept a Saviour of whom they feel no need and in whom they have very little interest. To persuade these self-sufficient souls to respond to His generous offers God will do almost anything, even using salesmanship methods and talking down to them in the clumsiest way imaginable. This view of things is, of course, a kind of religious romanticism which, while it often uses flattering and sometimes embarrassing terms in praise of God, manages nevertheless to make man the star of the show.

The notion that the Bible is addressed to everybody has wrought confusion within and without the church. The effort to apply the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount to the unregenerate nations of the world is one example of this. Courts of law and the military powers of the earth are urged to follow the teachings of Christ, an obviously impossible thing for them to do. To quote the words of Christ as guides for policemen, judges and generals is to misunderstand those words completely and to reveal a total lack of understanding of the purposes of divine revelation. The gracious words of Christ are for the sons and daughters of grace, not for the Gentile nations whose chosen symbols are the lion, the eagle, the dragon and the bear.

Not only does God address His words of truth to those who are able to receive them, He actually conceals their meaning from those who are not. The preacher uses stories to make truth clear; our Lord often used them to obscure it. The parables of Christ were the exact opposite of the modern "illustration," which is meant to give light; the parables were "dark sayings" and Christ asserted that He sometimes used them so that His disciples could understand and His enemies could not. (See Matthew 13:10-17.) As the pillar of fire gave light to Israel but was cloud and darkness to the Egyptians, so our Lord's words shine in the hearts of His people but leave the self-confident unbeliever in the obscurity of moral night.

The saving power of the Word is reserved for those for whom it is intended. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. The impenitent heart will find the Bible but a skeleton of facts without flesh or life or breath. Shakespeare may be enjoyed without penitence; we may understand Plato without believing a word he says; but penitence and humility along with faith and obedience are necessary to a right understanding of the Scriptures.

In natural matters faith follows evidence and is impossible without it, but in the realm of the spirit faith precedes understanding; it does not follow it. The natural man must know in order to believe; the spiritual man must believe in order to know. The faith that saves is not a conclusion drawn from evidence; it is a moral thing, a thing of the spirit, a supernatural inf

union of confidence in Jesus Christ, a very gift of God.

The faith that saves reposes in the Person of Christ; it leads at once to a committal of the total being to Christ, an act impossible to the natural man. To believe rightly is as much a miracle as was the coming forth of dead Lazarus at the command of Christ.

The Bible is a supernatural book and can be understood only by supernatural aid.

**Re: Tozer & others on the Bible - posted by crsschk (), on: 2007/1/21 9:59**

Our whole work must be carried on under a deep sense of our own insufficiency, and of our entire dependence on Christ. We must go for light, and life, and strength to him who sends us on the work. And when we feel our own faith weak, and our hearts dull, and unsuitable to so great a work as we have to do, we must have recourse to him, and say, "Lord, wilt thou send me with such an unbelieving heart to persuade others to believe? Must I daily plead with sinners about everlasting life and everlasting death, and have no more belief or feeling of these weighty things myself? Oh send me not naked and unprovided to the work; but, as thou commandest me to do it, furnish me with a spirit suitable thereto." Prayer must carry on our work as well as preaching; he preaches not heartily to his people, that prays not earnestly for them. If we prevail not with God to give them faith and repentance, we shall never prevail with them to believe and repent. When our own hearts are so far out of order, and theirs so far out of order, if we prevail not with God to mend and help them, we are like to make but unsuccessful work.

Having given you these concomitants of our ministerial work, as singly to be performed by every minister, let me conclude with one other, that is necessary to us as we are fellow-laborers in the same work; and that is this, we must be very studious of union and communion among ourselves, and of the unity and peace of the churches that we oversee. We must be sensible how needful this is to the prosperity of the whole, the strengthening of our common cause, the good of the particular members of our flock, and the further enlargement of the kingdom of Christ. And, therefore, ministers must smart when the Church is wounded, and be so far from being the leaders in divisions, that they should take it as a principal part of their work to prevent and heal them. Day and night should they bend their studies to find out means to close such breaches. They must not only hearken to motions for unity, but propound them and prosecute them; not only entertain an offered peace, but even follow it when it flies from them. They must, therefore, keep close to the ancient simplicity of the Christian faith, and the foundation and center of catholic unity. They must abhor the arrogance of them that frame new engines to rack and tear the Church of Christ under pretense of obviating errors and maintaining the truth. The Scripture sufficiency must be maintained, and nothing beyond it imposed on others; and if papists, or others, call to us for the standard and rule of our religion, it is the Bible that we must show them, rather than any confessions of churches, or writings of men. We must learn to distinguish between certainties and uncertainties, necessities and unnecessary, catholic verities and private opinions; and to lay the stress of the Church's peace upon the former, not upon the latter. We must avoid the common confusion of speaking of those who make no difference between verbal and real errors, and hate that "madness formerly among theologians," who tear their brethren as heretics, before they understand them. And we must learn to see the true state of controversies, and reduce them to the very point where the difference lies, and not make them seem greater than they are. Instead of quarreling with our brethren, we must combine against the common adversaries; and all ministers must associate and hold communion, and correspondence, and constant meetings to these ends; and smaller differences of judgment are not to interrupt them. They must do as much of the work of God, in unity and concord, as they can, which is the use of synods; not to rule over one another, and make laws, but to avoid misunderstandings, and consult for mutual edification, and maintain love and communion, and go on unanimously in the work that God has already commanded us. Had the ministers of the gospel been men of peace, and of catholic\*, rather than factious spirits, the Church of Christ had not been in the case it now is. The nations of Lutherans and Calvinists abroad, and the differing parties here at home, would not have been plotting the subversion of one another, nor remain at that distance, and in that uncharitable bitterness, nor strengthen the common enemy, and hinder the building and prosperity of the Church as they have done.

Richard Baxter  
*The Reformed Pastor.*



**Re: Tozer & others on the Bible - posted by crsschk (), on: 2007/1/21 10:55**

Linked: ([https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic\\_id14349&forum34](https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id14349&forum34)) There is a Presumption

There is a Presumption  
in Favor of the Bible  
A.W. Pink

**Re: - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2007/1/21 11:08**

very good articles whit "tons" of wisdom, Dr Tozer have a way of putting words togheter that makes me go Ahhhh!!

good stuff for everyone who likes to discuss bibletranslations

**Re: - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2007/1/21 16:05**

Sometime he'll have to face up to the meaning of things, no matter in what version they are expressed. As I write I can see fifteen versions before me without turning my head and there are many more stashed about here and there. And they all say the same thing to me; namely, that I must trust Christ Jesus the Lord as my Saviour, love God with all my heart, soul and mind, and my neighbour as myself. They all say that I must be holy, humble, obedient, prayerful, pure, kindly, courageous and faithful. They all say that God is my Father and the Holy Spirit the inhabitant of my nature through the mystery of the new birth. And they all end with the cry for Christ's returning. I really don't need any more new versions, but I'll probably buy the next one that comes out.

**Re: Tozer & others on the Bible - posted by crsschk (), on: 2007/1/21 23:11**

Let us live up to the fullness of our Bible. Let us translate every word of it into our lives. Let each of us be a new edition and a new version of the Scriptures, translated into flesh and blood, words and acts, holiness and service.

God has spoken to the successive generations, expecting each age to correspond to the message given; but to our generation He has given the largest measure of His truth and the fullness of His revelation. He expects from us a deeper, fuller, larger life. Let us live out the whole Bible in this dispensation.

There is a day coming when we will have larger revelations of truth and an eternity in which to live them out. In this life let us measure up to the Word of God without abatement and, like the Master Himself, fulfill every word of Scripture before we will have run our course.

Have we lived out all the Bible? Have we proved its every promise? Have we illustrated its every command? Have we translated it into the living characters of our own record? God help us, not only to have a Bible, but each of us to be a Bible.

Finally, if this is God's inspired Word, it can be understood only by inspired men. There are two senses in which inspiration can be received and understood. The inspiration of the apostles and the prophets was to write the Bible, but we need an inspiration just as real to read it and to understand it. It was not written for the cold intelligence of natural man, but for the spiritual eyes of the heart. And so no man knows the things of God, save the Spirit of God which is in him. We must have "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16) and the Holy Spirit before we can rightly and fully understand the Holy Scriptures.

Will we receive His blessed Spirit to understand His blessed Word? Will we read the Bible, not as a book of history and biography, but as the love letter of a Friend, the personal message of our Bridegroom and our Lord? Then we will understand it, love it, and know its blessed meaning and heavenly power.

A poor blind girl was dying. Her cold fingers had ceased to feel. She called for her dear old Bible, and tried to read the raised letters once more but all sense having gone from her hands, she turned away with sorrow, and clasping it to her bosom and pressing it to her lips, she said, "My dear Bible, I cannot read you any longer, but I love you still." At that very moment she found that as her lips touched the characters they could still feel and read them. She gave a great cry of joy, and as she passed her lips from line to line the words still spoke to her intelligence and to her heart.

Let us take the Bible a little closer and we will understand it better, and it will speak from the heart of God to our inmost

heart as the living message of His love.

A.B. Simpson