

Articles and Sermons :: Modern Translations of the Bible**Modern Translations of the Bible - posted by Giggles (), on: 2010/2/6 0:56**

This was good insight for me, as I am usually not too fond of modern translations.

Modern Translations of the Bible
by C.S. Lewis

It is possible that the reader who opens this volume¹ on the counter of a bookshop may ask himself why we need a new translation of any part of the Bible, and, if of any, why of the Epistles. 'Do we not already possess', it may be said, 'in the Authorised Version the most beautiful rendering which any language can boast?' Some people whom I have met go further and feel that a modern translation is not only unnecessary but even offensive. They cannot bear to see the time-honoured words altered; it seems to them irreverent.

There are several answers to such people. In the first place the kind of objection which they feel to a new translation is very like the objection which was once felt to any English translation at all. Dozens of sincerely pious people in the sixteenth century shuddered at the idea of turning the time-honoured Latin of the Vulgate into our common and (as they thought) 'barbarous' English. A sacred truth seemed to them to have lost its sanctity when it was stripped of the polysyllabic Latin, long heard at Mass and at Hours, and put into 'language such as men do use' -- language steeped in all the commonplace associations of the nursery, the inn, the stable, and the street. The answer then was the same as the answer now. The only kind of sanctity which Scripture can lose (or, at least, New Testament scripture) by being modernized is an accidental kind which it never had for its writers or its earliest readers. The New Testament in the original Greek is not a work of literary art: it is not written in a solemn, ecclesiastical language, it is written in the sort of Greek which was spoken over the Eastern Mediterranean after Greek had become an international language and therefore lost its real beauty and subtlety. In it we see Greek used by people who have no real feeling for Greek words because Greek words are not the words they spoke when they were children. It is sort of 'basic' Greek; a language without roots in the soil, a utilitarian, commercial and administrative language. Does this shock us? It ought not to, except as the Incarnation itself ought to shock us. The same divine humility which decreed that God should become a baby at a peasant-woman's breast, and later an arrested field preacher in the hands of the Roman police, decreed also that He should be preached in a vulgar, prosaic and unliterary language. If you can stomach the one, you can stomach the other. The Incarnation is in that sense, an incurably irreverent doctrine: Christianity, in that sense, an incurably irreverent religion. When we expect that it should have come before the World in all the beauty that we now feel in the Authorised Version we are as wide of the mark as the Jews were in expecting that the Messiah would come as a great earthly King. The real sanctity, the real beauty and sublimity of the New Testament (as of Christ's life) are of a different sort: miles deeper or further in.

In the second place, the Authorised Version has ceased to be a good (that is, a clear) translation. It is no longer modern English: the meanings of words have changed. The same antique glamour which has made it (in the superficial sense) so 'beautiful', so 'sacred', so 'comforting', and so 'inspiring', has also made it in many places unintelligible. Thus where St Paul says 'I know nothing against myself,' it translates 'I know nothing by myself.'² That was a good translation (though even then rather old-fashioned) in the sixteenth century: to the modern reader it means either nothing, or something quite different from what St Paul said. The truth is that if we are to have translation at all we must have periodical re-translation. There is no such thing as translating a book into another language once for all, for a language is a changing thing. If your son is to have clothes it is no good buying him a suit once for all: he will grow out of it and have to be re-clothed.

And finally, though it may seem a sour paradox -- we must sometimes get away from the Authorised Version, if for no other reason, simply because it is so beautiful and so solemn. Beauty exalts, but beauty so lulls. Early associations endear but they also confuse. Through that beautiful solemnity the transporting or horrifying realities of which the Book tells may come to us blunted and disarmed and we may only sigh with tranquil veneration when we ought to be burning with shame or struck dumb with terror or carried out of ourselves by ravishing hopes and adorations. Does the word 'scourged'³ really come home to us like 'flogged'? Does 'mocked him'⁴ sting like 'jeered at him'?

We ought therefore to welcome all new translations (when they are made by sound scholars) and most certainly those who are approaching the Bible for the first time will be wise not to begin with the Authorised Version -- except perhaps for the historical books of the Old Testament where its anachronisms suit the saga-like material well enough. ... It would have saved me a great deal of labour if this book had come into my hands when I first seriously began to try to discover what

t Christianity was.

Re: Modern Translations of the Bible - posted by TaylorOtwell (), on: 2010/2/6 11:13

Interesting insights.

With care in Christ...

Re: - posted by ccchhrrriiiss (), on: 2010/2/6 14:56

"I don't mention the Bible because I take that for granted. A modern translation is for most purposes far more useful than the Authorized Version."

- C. S. Lewis in *On the Reading of Old Books*

Re: - posted by bible4life (), on: 2010/2/6 19:56

I personally understand what he is trying to get to but i think the words translated by the authorized version has more power behind them, i have read some of the versions and compared them to the kjv and their is a difference, i think their is power in the words of the kjv. I here people complain about the thy's and thous and say it is difficult it is not difficult for me and truly their really is not as much as everyone says their is, they speak as if every word is unheard of. The Lord spoke to me strongly using the king james version.

Re: - posted by TaylorOtwell (), on: 2010/2/6 20:08

Bible4Life,

This "power" perceived behind the words sound like the kind of surface level appreciation for the KJV that Lewis is critiquing. He sees this as the same argument used by those who wanted to keep the Scriptures in Latin, because the Scriptures felt more "special" and "sacred" being read in Latin.

With care in Christ...

Re: Modern Translations of the Bible - posted by Veronica226 (), on: 2010/2/6 20:25

Very interesting read! For the most part I do agree. There are times however when the KJV and others have translated certain things better or more correctly. Which is why I always have a concordance at hand and a lot of the things I read out of 4 different translations.

However, I would say that I hope this is not used to justify things like The Message Bible. I feel that it has too much New Age influence to be the sole Bible "translation" to read or study out of. But then, the Message isn't a translation, just a paraphrase. A bad one in my opinion, it still doesn't sound like modern english. More like broken english.

Thanks for sharing! I enjoyed it!

Re: - posted by hoohou (), on: 2010/2/7 0:00

Quote:
-----But then, the Message isn't a translation, just a paraphrase. A bad one in my opinion, it still doesn't sound like modern english. More like broken english.

That's funny and I couldn't agree more. I've used it at times as a secondary text to bring a point home when it agrees with a real Bible. That's a little harsh, but not too harsh.

What strikes me when I read some of these threads is that the AV is a translation of a translation, etc, itself. I have no doubt that it is fantastic, but I just get lost at times. But my thought is always that if God can't protect His own Word, or do

esn't want to... I just think that, like C.S. Lewis, that if serious scholars did the translating, and there are no major deviations in doctrine we are getting the Word of God.

I've held back on a lot of these threads but couldn't resist this time. I love C.S. Lewis' writing and he agrees with me, or I with him. Just my thoughts.

Re: - posted by Giggles (), on: 2010/2/7 3:23

Good posts by everyone!!

Re: - posted by Giggles (), on: 2010/2/7 23:17

What 4 translations do you like Veronica?

Re: - posted by Veronica226 (), on: 2010/2/7 23:29

Quote:

-----What 4 translations do you like Veronica?

I use the NIV, KJV, NASB and the ESV. Some of that might be because I am most familiar with them though. I like to compare them all to each other and to a concordance. Plus sometimes a verse hits home a little harder with one than the other. I also like them all for different reasons. The NIV is easy for me to read and easy for me to memorize and remember. I think the KJV was translated... how do I put this gently? translated with more reverence maybe? I don't know that for certain, just from the few things I've read about how certain versions were translated this seems to be the case. And I really like the language. I find that in the way it was translated that a lot of the times NT passages hit home harder and convict me more than other versions. But maybe that's me! And I like how the NASB and ESV are pretty accurate word-for-word translations. Sorry for the long explanation! What translations do you like Giggles?

Re: - posted by Giggles (), on: 2010/2/8 13:35

Great explanation, and just the right length too. I have shared many of the same sentiments you have concerning translations.

For me, I mostly read NKJ. Like you with the KJV, I feel it hits harder and cuts deeper in a lot of ways. I do like the KJ but I've been reading the NKJ for a long time now, so I usually just reach for it. Like you said with NIV, the NKJ is my memory version. I also like the NASB for their word for word accuracy. Then the only other version I'll consistently reach for is the Amplified, sometimes for reading (I'm working on reading it through all the way)but mostly for verse comparison. Some passages come out so rich and full in it, like Phil. 3:8-10 mmmm...check it out.

Other than that, I don't usually look at too much. I do compare scriptures occasionally in Wycliffe because I like the rawness of it and some other odd translations like Bible in Basic English.