

That's how closely justification and heaven are linked together. While, therefore, we are justified by faith, that faith includes all that will carry us home to the place which Christ is preparing for us.

Once we understand the fulness, freeness and utter graciousness of God's act in justifying sinners on the ground of Christ's perfect, finished work, and have ourselves been touched by the amazing love that's couched at the very heart of this doctrine, then I believe the foundation has been laid for the powerful, passionate, preaching of a doctrine that nestles at the very heart of the gospel of God's saving grace. This is not cold doctrine but something that should set our hearts afire and make us persuade men by all means to rest on no other foundation.

THE BIBLICAL LANGUAGES:

THEIR USE AND ABUSE IN THE MINISTRY: Part Two

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In the previous issue we sought to break through some of the barriers erected in the minds of students and pastors against the acquisition and use of the biblical languages. At the same time, it was emphasised that the prime need in the understanding and ministry of God's Word was for the Holy Spirit's illumination and power. Languages do not make a preacher but they are very useful aids in the minister's own personal study and preparation for preaching.

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We now put forward the following arguments from the Bible, Church history, the lives of preachers of the past, as well as practical considerations to stimulate and motivate preachers to take up and use the Greek and/or Hebrew Bible.

THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments we believe to be

the infallible, inerrant and authoritative Word of God. It is God's revealed Word written for our eternal salvation and profit (2 Tim.3:15-17). This is where we must begin in our thinking. The very nature and content of the Book should impress upon us the need to give careful attention to every word that is written. We live not by bread alone "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord" (Deut.8:3). Of all people the evangelical, protestant pastor, who holds such a high view of Scripture and seeks to expound it faithfully should see the need and advantage of acquiring some ability, however small, in the handling of the sacred text in the original tongues.

Paul tells us to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess.5:21). It is inevitable that traditions will arise in the life of the church. But no tradition, however good, must be accepted merely because we revere it as a tradition of the fathers. The church was brought into bondage through such thinking. It was the concentrated, earnest study of God's Word, taking nothing for granted, not even a translation, which liberated the Church from the shackles of unbiblical traditions. God's Word is truth and leads us to Him who is the Truth and to real freedom. The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily to see whether the apostle's words were true. The pastor likewise has a duty to prove all things and to search the Scriptures, and some knowledge of the original languages can be of immense value in this direction.

Pastors are ministers of God's Word. If every believer is to delight in this Word and to treasure it above the riches of this world how much more those set apart to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. They should spare no effort in becoming conversant with the whole Bible and this will inevitably draw them into portions of God's Word where some knowledge of Greek and Hebrew would be very helpful.

The apostle Paul exhorts Timothy and every godly minister, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim.2:15). Slovenly, slipshod handling of the text of Scripture is a disgrace to the ministry and a dishonour to God. God demands that every Christian give of his best, whatever he puts his hand to do. The nature of the pastor's calling and the character of the Book he is handling should be added incentive to persevere in giving of his very best. As part of that concern to be an able minister of the Gospel he will seek to

gain at least a knowledge of the rudiments of the biblical languages. I repeat, such learning is not essential or even of first importance to a godly ministry, but a godly minister will do all in his powers, God helping him, to be a faithful servant of the Word, and use such means as are available to clearly and accurately expound the text of Scripture.

HISTORICAL ARGUMENT

The importance of studying the original texts of Scripture is nowhere more clearly in evidence than at the time of the Reformation. Here are some of the lessons we can learn from the period in connection with our subject:

1. When the use of the Greek and Hebrew texts are set aside pastors and people are at the mercy of any and every commentator or translator. This was the position in the Church during the Middle Ages. In the Eastern Church the Old Testament as well as the New was read in the Greek, while in the West the only acceptable version was the Latin Bible read for the most part in very inferior and corrupt editions. Gospel light was dim and ignorance bred superstition and idolatry. Evangelical words took on completely different meanings. For instance, the Greek word for 'repentance' was read as 'penance', 'righteousness' as 'conversion' and 'faith' was considered to be a work. There was little or no means of checking the theology of the medieval schoolmen. Let us be on our guard. It is not impossible for such a thing to happen again. Dabney reminds us, "The ingenuity of error is abounding".¹

2. The Roman Church at the time of the Reformation is a warning against taking an obscurantist position. Only sin and error want to shy away from an enquiring mind. "Back to the sources" became the slogan of the Renaissance scholars and it was the study of the Early Church Fathers and the examination of MSS of the Bible in the original languages which had such a devastating effect on the late medieval church. This, coupled with the invention of the printing press and the establishing of new universities and colleges all over Europe majoring in the study of Greek, Latin and Hebrew, provided the way for the evangelical revival of the 16th century. No wonder the Roman establishment generally disliked the men of the new learning!

Hebrew studies were frowned on by the ecclesiastical authorities and

Jews caught teaching Hebrew to Christians were dealt with accordingly. Nevertheless, interest in Hebrew grew and Reuchlin the first Christian Hebrew scholar of the period published his rudiments of the Hebrew language in 1506. Other Hebrew aids increased including in 1527 the first Aramaic grammar by a Christian. From the end of the 15th century onward Greek grammars were being published in great numbers. In the preface to one published in 1495 we read, "There is a multitude of those who yearn to be well-instructed in Greek". Erasmus used such knowledge to publish his Greek New Testament in 1516. Speaking of Zwingli, Potter writes, "What was wonderful to him and his generation was that they had before their eyes the original Greek and Hebrew texts. The very words directly inspired by the Holy Spirit were there for them to read and the printing-press made possible an exactness unknown previously".² We should not despise or ignore such learning but count it a privilege that we have the original texts so freely available, and grammars and lexicons that are much more accurate and detailed. "For unto whosoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48).

3. It was through their study of the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible that the Reformers were helped in their understanding of the truth. Zwingli mastered Greek and Hebrew in order to study the Bible in the original and from that Bible he began preaching Sunday by Sunday. The Zurich congregation heard not the legends of the saints, or anecdotal sermons but the plain text of Scripture expounded and applied, and with no appeal to pope or tradition. In this way, he and many of his parishioners were led to embrace the Christ of the Scriptures.

Luther poured over his Hebrew and Greek Bible and discovered anew the doctrine of justification by faith alone and gave to the German people a Bible in their own language based on the original texts. Tyndale and others did the same in England. Both Luther and Calvin broke away from the medieval methods of interpreting Scripture and concentrated on weighing every word in its context to bring out the plain meaning of the text. In their pulpits, their faithful hard labour in the study was put to good use as they instructed and exhorted the people.

4. As a necessary corrective we should also point out that the study of the languages and text of the Bible does not in itself guarantee that a person will come to Gospel light. Reuchlin, the Hebrew scholar,

remained faithful to Rome although disliked by the authorities. He tried unsuccessfully to dissuade his grandnephew Philip Melancthon, professor of Greek at Wittenburg, from joining Luther and the Protestants. Erasmus, the most celebrated Greek scholar of his lifetime did not come to a clear understanding of the Gospel even though he wrote satirically against many of the doctrines and institutions of the Roman Church, and popes even prohibited the reading of his works. It is the Spirit of God who alone can illumine the mind and give that spiritual understanding (1 Cor.2:9-14). What the Reformation period shows is the importance of the Spirit and the Word acting together.

BIOGRAPHICAL ARGUMENT

It is always inspiring to turn to some of the great preachers and missionaries of the past and learn from their full and disciplined lives. Those who have no intention of acquiring and using the biblical languages sometimes try hiding behind such an impressive figure as Augustine (354-430 AD), bishop of Hippo in North Africa, who was ignorant of Hebrew and hated Greek at school. He also emphasised during his ministry the supreme importance of using Scripture to bring us to God and to enjoy God rather than to acquire knowledge merely for its own sake. The other side of the story is this, that he tried to make up for his mispent youth. When he became a bishop, with great demands made upon his time, he studied hard at his Greek, consulted authorities over Old Testament problems and encouraged those training to expound the Scriptures to gain a knowledge of both Hebrew and Greek.

We have all been amazed at the determination of John Brown of Haddington (1722-1787) who became a great preacher and biblical scholar. As a poor orphan boy, minding sheep on the Scottish hills, he mastered Latin, went on to learn Greek the hard way without a grammar and later, in College, studied Hebrew in preparation for the ministry. His story ought to make us blush at our own slackness and mismanagement of time.

The godly Murray M'Cheyne accomplished more in the twenty-nine years of his life than many find time for, given their three score years and ten. Andrew Bonar his biographer writes, "He could consult the Hebrew original of the Old Testament with as much ease as most of our ministers are able to consult the Greek of the New Testament".³ When they were students training for the ministry, M'Cheyne, Bonar and

others used to meet once a week during the Summer vacation to encourage and test one another in their reading, and in their knowledge of the biblical languages.

John Elias (1774-1841) one of the most powerful preachers of his generation had no College training. He was a born preacher and exercised a mighty ministry in North Wales even before he had any schooling whatsoever. It would have been easy for him to have rested in his remarkable preaching gifts and not to have bothered with any formal education. Indeed, there were those who suggested that to have any schooling would make him puffed up and useless. But it weighed heavily on Elias that the churches should be the losers on account of his disadvantages as a boy. So it was when he was about twenty-one years old he was granted permission to learn English! From such beginnings he went on to grapple with the biblical languages so that with the help of lexicons he was able to read the Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture. Towards the end of his life he wrote concerning his time at school "I was given help to work diligently day and night until I acquired in some degree a general knowledge of the things that were most necessary for me. But I am still learning, even in my sixty-seventh year and see a greater need of knowledge." ⁴ His biographer adds, "He was blessed above all with that knowledge which flesh and blood cannot attain to, spiritual knowledge ... it kept him humble and prevented him from being puffed up." ⁵

The Puritans were well versed in the original Scriptures. One of them, Philip Henry, was very keen to impress on ministerial students the importance of studying the Scriptures in the Bible languages. He even taught his eldest daughter Hebrew when she was only about seven years old! His famous son, Matthew, put to good use such early and deep training in the Scriptures with a commentary which has been a source of great blessing to ministers ever since, including Whitefield and Spurgeon.

The members of the Holy Club at Oxford studied the Scriptures in the original tongues. John Wesley was, in fact, a lecturer in Greek. We are told that George Whitefield was reading his Greek New Testament at sixteen. The notes he made in his Greek Testament show his deep knowledge of the language and provided much help in his sermon preparation. He also turned his reading of the Greek text into prayer.

Spurgeon did not have any university or College training but unlike

32.

Elias he did have good schooling as a boy, learning among other things a little Greek. Because he had a thirst for knowledge and as an aid to the work of the ministry he taught himself many things. From his sermons and commentaries it is clear that he had some ability in Hebrew as well as Greek.

We could spend time reviewing the lives of many who left these shores to preach the Gospel overseas in pioneering situations and who laboured much in the biblical languages. Space will only allow us to mention William Carey the founder of the modern missionary movement. As a young preacher and cobbler in Northamptonshire he taught himself Greek and Hebrew with the help of neighbouring ministers and made it his regular practice to read his daily portion of Scripture in the original tongues. This helped him greatly in his preaching and later in his missionary endeavours in India. He corresponded regularly with Dr Ryland of Bristol concerning Hebrew and Greek words as he sought to convey divine truth accurately in Bengali, Hindi, Marathi and Sanskrit.

PRACTICAL ARGUMENT

Here we mention just a few examples of the practical benefits of gaining a knowledge of the biblical languages.

1. A little knowledge goes a long way. Broadus used to say that a little is a big per cent on nothing.⁶ With the many good aids that there are available these days there is every encouragement to persevere.

2. Study becomes much more rewarding. When Greek and Hebrew words are discussed in the commentaries we have a far better idea what the problems are. We can look into the matter ourselves with far more understanding.

3. It helps prevent staleness and becoming a slave to the comments of others. While we shall never be better in our grasp of languages than the experts yet the reading of the text in the original can stimulate the mind and bring us to see God's Word in a new light. A.T. Robertson remarks that we need to know much of the English Bible by heart "so that it will come readily to hand for comfort and for service. But the minute study called for by the Greek opens up unexpected treasures that surprise and delight the soul".⁷

4. It is helpful in evaluating Bible translations and textual criticism problems. Without some understanding of the issues involved, which necessarily includes some knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, the faithful pastor is at a great disadvantage in helping his bewildered flock. Escape into obscurantism is a poor way out as we have seen.

5. It saves money. Instead of obtaining a plethora of word books, all you need is a good concordance, lexicon and grammar alongside the many helpful commentaries that you can either borrow or purchase.

6. A by-product of learning the biblical languages will be a better grasp of your own language. It will improve your vocabulary, grammar and style.

The Tools to help us

Texts: An interlinear Bible is helpful because at a glance you can see how the Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic text is translated into English. There is an O.T. interlinear in three volumes published by Baker which may prove too expensive, but there are various Greek interlinears moderately priced.

If you are looking for a Hebrew Bible then there is (a) N.Snaith's Bible Society edition which contains no notes, or (b) 'Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia' - this is dearer but has marginal notes on variant readings.

As for the Greek New Testament again there is (a) Trinitarian Bible Society 'Received Text' edition without notes, or (b) B.Metzger's British & Foreign Bible Society edition, which is an eclectic text with marginal notes on variant readings.

Grammars: J.W.Wenham's 'Elements of NT Greek' is still the best student introduction. Other useful reference works are: C.F.D.Moule's 'An Idiom Book of NT Greek'; Moulton-Howard-Turner 'A Grammar of NT Greek' in 3 vols or Blass-Debrunner-Funk 'A Greek Grammar of the NT'. J.Sawyer's 'A Modern Introduction to Biblical Hebrew' is an excellent way to begin. For those who wish to brush up their Hebrew the 'Journal of Pastoral Practice' edited by J.Adams started an introduction to 'Hebrew Helps for Busy Pastors' in Vol.3 No.1, 1979. For reference purposes the standard work on Hebrew grammar is Gesenius' 'Hebrew Grammar' 2nd English Ed. by A.E.Cowley.

Lexicons: Baxter's Analytical Lexicons have been of inestimable value to generations of students. The best Greek Lexicon is 'A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament' by Bauer, translated by Arndt and Gingrich. As for Hebrew and Aramaic, a new standard Lexicon is still awaited but 'Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament' by Brown, Driver and Briggs is fairly acceptable.

Concordances: All that you will need is found in 'Young's Analytical Concordance' which is based, of course, on the AV text. If you have Strong's concordance then you do not need Young.

Concerning these tools R.C.Sproul remarks, "Scholars may be able to make more sophisticated use of them but they are also beneficial for the layman. One need not be a professional carpenter to learn how to make good use of a hammer." ⁸

Abuses

Before we go speeding merrily along language lane a touch on the brakes is needed at this point. The following items we do well to remember:

1. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. In the wrong hands it can lead astray with most painful consequences. Dr Lloyd-Jones draws our attention to this matter when discussing the word 'led' in Rom.8:14. "there is the kind of man who is always ready to say dogmatically that any particular problem can be solved with ease by a knowledge of the Greek original. Nowhere is the adage about a little learning being dangerous more important than at this point ... Let us be sure, if we are looking at this word in the original, that we use an authoritative lexicon, and that we consider all the possible meanings."⁹

2. Do not display your learning in the pulpit. To bog down a sermon with Hebrew and Greek words is not helpful. It may impress some, it will confuse many more. Some of the best preachers and teachers have laboured long and hard in the study and have refused to allow their sermons to draw attention to their scholarship. Just as scaffolding is to a building so are the biblical languages to a sermon, very helpful in the building process but obtrusive and unsightly in the finished work.

3. Do not think that a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew will settle every

theological and hermeneutical problem. No doctrine of the Faith is based exclusively on the meaning of Greek and Hebrew words. If we are trying to argue in favour of some subtle point simply on the basis of linguistics then it may be proper to think again and perhaps abandon the idea.

4. A lot of needless argument results from an over emphasis on the etymology of words. You often hear the phrases 'the root meaning' or 'originally the word meant' and sermons and arguments are built up very successfully on this very unsound foundation. The usage of a word by the author is far more important than its origin. Words change their meaning over the years or take on a new significance by a particular writer. On this subject James Barr's book 'The Semantics of Biblical Language' is an important work.

5. I may be biased in my thinking, reading into a text what is not there and using the Greek or Hebrew to prove my point. As a necessary corrective always refer to a good exegetical commentary which will provide a check on personal judgments that may be quite wrong.

In conclusion, we return to the words of John Newton, this time writing to Thomas Charles (Bala) and his friend during their student days at Oxford: "Time was when I thought a minister a sort of superior being, and hardly could be persuaded they had the infirmities with other men. Perhaps you may have thought so likewise. But by and by when you shall be admitted behind the scenes, you will find that the office, though it calls us to difficult services, and exposes us to dangerous snares, yet will not of itself afford us one additional grain of grace or strength. If when we commence teachers, we do not continue learners, if we do not watch unto prayer, if we think because we have been ordained, and can read Latin and Greek, we have a right to go forth as if we were wise or good, experience will soon teach us, or observation will soon convince others, that we are but empty and broken cisterns - and can do nothing right".¹⁰

References

1. R.L.Dabney, Discussions: Evangelical and Theological, Vol.2, p666
 2. G.R.Potter, Zwingli, p64
 3. A.A.Bonar, Memoir and Remains of the Rev Robert Murray M'Cheyne, p28
 4. John Elias: Life, Letters and Essays by Edward Morgan, revised 1973 p.37
5. op. cit. p21

6. Quoted in 'The Minister and his Greek New Testament' by A.T. Robertson, p15.
7. op.cit. p21.
8. R.C.Sproul 'Knowing God's Word'.
9. D.M.Lloyd-Jones, Romans 8:5-17 'The Sons of God' p172f.
10. Quoted in 'The Rev Thomas Charles of Bala' Vol.I by D.E.Jenkins, p55f.

REVIEWS IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

The Editor

"Here is John Robinson at his brilliant and provocative best, as he looks back, primarily over the 1970s, but at the same time over the wider formative influences which have led to his own distinctive approach to theology and to wider social issues", so reads the publisher's blurb to the book, *THE ROOTS OF A RADICAL* (SCM Press, 1980, pp168, £3.50). Despite the author's unorthodox theology, this is a most readable and informative book.

Robinson's first firing shot needs to be heeded by all ministers! While working hard as a bishop in the seventies, he claims to have read and written more during those ten years than at any other stage of his career, "which to me is some answer to the excuse that busy bishops or ministers are far too preoccupied to read, let alone to write" (p.vii)!

His opening chapter is entitled, 'A tale of two decades' and in a lively and, at times, an amusing manner, he surveys the sixties and seventies. He describes the sixties as "a time for being out on the edges" (p2) beginning with President Kennedy, race marches, student demonstrations, the curtailing of the Lord Chamberlain's powers of censorship and the development of the 'permissive society'. It was also the period of radical Christianity expressed in phrases such as 'Religionless Christianity', 'Honest to God', 'Death of God', the 'New Morality', 'Situation Ethics' and the 'New Reformation', etc. By contrast, Robinson describes the seventies as a 'Return to the Centre', epitomised "by the withdrawal from Vietnam, the energy crisis and conservation ... a time for turning east and turning in, for the search of self and the exploration of inner space, for the recovery of mysticism and meditation, integration and wholeness" (p3) as well as a