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The Actes off The Apostles.

The fyrst Chapter.



This fyrst treatise of Deare frende Theophilus I have written off all that Iesus began to do and teache vntill the daye in the whiche he was take vp/ after that he thoro the holy goost/ had geuen commaundement vnto the Apostles/ whiche he chose: to who also he shewed hym selfe alive/ after his passion by many tokens/ aperyng vnto them fourty dayes/ and spake vnto them off the Kyngdom of god/ and gaddered them togedder/ and comaunded them/ that they shulde not departe from Ierusalem: but to waite for the promys of the father/ wher of ye have herde off me. For I hon baptised wyth water butt ye shalbe baptised with the holy goost/ and that wythin this fewwe dayes.

When they were cometogether/ they aied of hym/ sayinge: Master wilt thou at this tyme restore agayne the kyngdom of israel? He sayde vnto them: It is not for you to knowe the tymes or the seasons which the father hath putt in hys owne power: but ye shall receave power off the holy goost which shall come on you. And ye shal

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PREFACE TO THE OBEDIENCE OF A CHRISTIAN MAN

WILLIAM TYNDALE (c. 1494-1536)

English Bible translator and Christian martyr. The text here is taken from the 1831 edition of *The Works of the English Reformers*, vol. I, Ed. Thomas Russell (published in London). Minor edits were made.

Let it not make you despair, nor yet discourage you, O reader, that it is forbidden you, upon pain of life and goods, or that it is breaking the king's peace, or treason to his highness, to read the word of your soul's health. But much rather, be bold in the Lord, and comfort your soul: forasmuch as you are sure, and have an evident token through such persecution, that it is the true Word of God, which is ever hated by the world. Nor was his word ever without persecution (as you see in all the stories of the Bible, both in the New Testament and also in the Old), nor can it be, no more than the sun can be without light. And contrariwise, you may be just as sure that the pope's doctrine is not of God, which (as you see) is so agreeable to the world, and is so received by the world. Or rather, the pope's doctrine receives the world and the pleasures of the world. It seeks nothing but the possessions of the world, and the authority in the world, and to bear rule in the world. It persecutes the Word of God, and with all wiliness, it drives people from it. With false and sophistical reasons, it makes them afraid of it. Indeed, it curses and excommunicates them, and brings them to believe they are damned if they look at it. That is but doctrine to deceive men. It moves the blind powers of the world to slay with fire, water, and sword, all who cleave to God's Word. For the world loves what is the pope's, and it hates what is chosen out of the world to serve God in the Spirit. As Christ says to His disciples (John 15:19), "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but I have chosen you out of the world, and therefore the world hates you."

Another comfort you have is that, just as the weak powers of the world defend the doctrine of the world, so the mighty power of God defends the doctrine of God. You will evidently perceive it, if you call to mind the wonderful deeds which God has ever wrought for His word in extreme necessity, since the world began,

beyond all man's reason. These are written (as Paul says, Romans 15:4) "for our learning, (and not for our deceiving), that we through patience and comfort of the Scripture might have hope." The nature of God's Word is to fight against hypocrites. It began at Abel, and it has ever since continued, and shall continue, I do not doubt, until the last day. Hypocrites always have the world on their side, as you see in the time of Christ. They had the elders, that is, the rulers of the Jews on their side. They had Pilate and the emperor's power on their side. They also had Herod on their side. Moreover, they brought all their worldly wisdom to bear, and all that they could think or imagine to serve their purpose. First, to frighten the people with, they excommunicated all that believed in Him, and put them out of the temple, as you see in John 9:34. Secondly, they found the means to have Him condemned by the emperor's power, and made it treason to Caesar to believe in Him. Thirdly, they sought to have Him hanged as a thief or a murderer, which, after their fleshly-wisdom, was a cause above all causes that no man should believe in Him. For the Jews take it for a sure token of everlasting damnation, if a man is hanged. For it is written in their law, Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (Gal. 3:13), "Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree." Moses also in the same place commands, if any man is hanged, to take him down the same day and bury him, for fear of polluting or defiling the country; that is, lest they bring the wrath and curse of God upon them. Therefore, the wicked Jews themselves, with so venomous a hatred, persecuted the doctrine of Christ. They did all they could to shame Him, though they would have had Christ continue to hang on the cross and rot there (as He should have done by the emperor's law), yet for fear of defiling their Sabbath, and bringing the wrath and curse of God upon them, they begged Pilate to take Him down (John 19), which went against themselves.

Finally, when they had done all they could, and all that they thought was sufficient, and when Christ was in the heart of the earth, and so many bills and pole-axes were around Him to keep Him down, and when it was past man's help, then God helped. When man could not bring Him back again, God's truth fetched Him again. The oath that God had sworn to Abraham, to David, and to other holy fathers and prophets, raised Him up again, to bless and save all that believe in Him. Thus the wisdom of the hypocrites became foolishness. Look, this was written for your learning and comfort.

How awfully were the children of Israel locked in Egypt! In what tribulation, suffering, and adversity they were in! Also the land that was promised to them was far off, and full of great cities, walled with high walls up to the sky, and inhabited with great giants. Yet God's truth brought them out of Egypt and planted them in the land of the giants. This was also written for our learning. For there is no power against God's, nor any wisdom against God's wisdom. He is stronger and wiser than all His enemies. What did it help Pharaoh to drown the male children? So little (I fear not) shall it at the last help the pope and his bishops, to burn our male children who manfully confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, and that there is no other name given to men to be saved by, as Peter testifies in Acts 4:12.

Who dried up the Red sea? Who slew Goliath? Who did all those wonderful deeds which you read about in the Bible? Who delivered the Israelites evermore from thralldom and bondage, as soon as they repented and turned to God? Faith truly, and God's truth, and trust in the promises which He had made. Read the 11th chapter to the Hebrews for your consolation.

When the children of Israel were ready to despair, because of the greatness and the multitude of the giants, Moses ever comforted them, saying, Remember what your Lord God has done for you in Egypt, His awful plagues, His miracles, His wonders, His mighty hand, His stretched out arm, and what He has done for you up to now. He shall destroy them; He shall take their hearts from them and make them fear and flee before you. He shall storm them, and stir up a tempest among them, and scatter them, and bring them to nothing. He has sworn; He is true; He will fulfill the promises that He has made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is written for our learning; for truly He is a true God; and

He is our God as well as theirs; and His promises are with us, as well as with them; and He is present with us, as well as He was with them. If we ask, we shall obtain; if we knock, He will open; if we seek, we shall find; if we thirst, His truth shall fulfill our desires. Christ is with us until the world's end. Let His little flock be bold therefore. For if God is on our side, what does it matter who is against us, be they bishops, cardinals, popes, or whatever names they may have?

Mark this also, if God sends you to the sea, and promises to go with you, and to bring you safe to land, He will raise up a tempest against you, to prove whether you will abide by His Word, and so that you may feel your faith, and perceive His goodness. For if it was always fair weather, and you were never brought into such jeopardy, from where His mercy alone could deliver you, then your faith would be but a presumption, and you should be ever unthankful to God, and merciless to your neighbor.

If God promises riches, the way to them is poverty. Whom He loves, He chastens: whom He exalts, He casts down: whom He saves, He first damns. He brings no man to heaven, except He sends him to hell first. If He promises life, He slays first: when He builds, He first tears all down. He is no patcher; He cannot build on another man's foundation. He will not work until all is past remedy, and brought to such a case, that men may see how His hand, His power, His mercy, His goodness and truth, has wrought it all together. He will let no man partake with Him of His praise and glory. His works are wonderful, and contrary to man's works. Who but God delivered His own Son, His only Son, His dear Son, to death, and did that for His enemies' sake, to win His enemy, and to overcome Him with love, so that He might see love, and love again, and of love, to do likewise to other men, and overcome them with well doing?

Joseph saw the sun and the moon and the eleven stars worshiping him. Nevertheless, before that came to pass, God laid him where he could neither see sun nor moon, nor any star of the sky, and that was so for many years; and also undeserved. It was done to nurture him, to humble him, to make him meek, and to teach him God's ways, and to make him apt and fit for the place and honor he came to; so that he might perceive and feel that it came from God, and that he might be strong in the spirit to minister it in a godly fashion.

He promised the children of *Israel* a land with rivers of milk and honey; but He brought them for the space of forty years into a land where not only rivers of milk and honey were absent, but where not so much as a drop of water was to be had. He did it to nurture them, and teach them, as a father does his son, and to do them good at the end; and so that they might be strong in their spirit and souls, to use His gifts and benefits in a godly fashion, and after His will.

He promised *David* a kingdom, and immediately stirred up King Saul against him to persecute him; to hunt him as men hunt hares with greyhounds, and to ferret him out of every hole, and he did that for the space of many years. He did it to tame him, to make him meek, to kill his lusts; to make him feel other men's diseases; to make him merciful; to make him understand that he was made king to minister to and to win his brothers. He did it so that David would not think that his subjects were made to minister to his own lusts, or

that it was lawful for him to take away from them their life and goods at his pleasure.

Oh that our kings were so nurtured now-a-days! Our holy bishops teach in a far different manner, saying, "*Your grace shall take your pleasure*; indeed, take what pleasure you are inclined to; spare nothing; we shall dispense with you; we have the power, we are God's vicars. Leave us alone with the realm; we will make it painful for you, and see that nothing is well with you. Your grace will but defend the faith only."

Let us, therefore, look diligently to what we are called (Christians), so that we do not deceive ourselves. We are not called to dispute, as the pope's disciples do; but to die with Christ, so that we may live with Him; and to suffer with Him, so that we may reign with Him. We are called to a kingdom that must be won with suffering only, just as a sick man wins his health. God is the One that does all things for us, and fights for us; and we do but suffer only.

EDITOR'S NOTES

With excitement we present to you this year's Fall Reformation special issue commemorating the 500th anniversary of two very significant works produced in 1525 (see cover): *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther and an English translation of the New Testament by William Tyndale. Tyndale's Bible, which consists of the New Testament and some Old Testament books, was published in 1526 with a revision in 1534. However, he completed his masterful translation in 1525 and was planning to print several thousand copies in Cologne, Germany and convey them secretly back into his homeland of England from which he had fled. However, before the printing was completed it was disrupted by the authorities so that Tyndale seized his printed sheets and fled up the Rhine River to Worms where the Bible would be printed a year later. 1525 is, therefore, the date we are commemorating in this special issue of the *SB*.

This issue is divided into two parts, giving equal treatment to each Luther and Tyndale. We cover

Luther first since Tyndale was inspired by Luther in various ways. Serving as our meditation is a selection from Tyndale's preface to his largest and most famous book, *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528). In this polemical treatise Tyndale defended the reformers against the oft-repeated charge of insurrection and sedition as if they taught God's people to overthrow authority. Above, you can read Tyndale's powerful encouragement to his brethren who were persecuted for their loyalty to Christ during the Reformation.

We thank all the writers for their diligent work and excellent contributions. One article came from a new writer, Rev. Matthew Koerner. Two articles came all the way from Europe! We extend a special word of thanks to Rev. Angus Stewart, pastor of the sister church of the PRC in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, and Rev. Jochen Klautke, pastor of the BERG, a Reformed church in Germany with whom the PRC has a corresponding relationship.

B. Huizinga



THE RELATIONSHIP OF LUTHER AND TYNDALE

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It is always fascinating to study great figures of church history whom God raised up for extraordinary service on behalf of His covenant. It is also fascinating to try to determine what kind of personal relationship or communication giants of the faith who were contemporaries may have shared if they did not work side by side. For example, did Martin Luther and John Calvin know each other? How? To what extent? Or think about biblical figures like the Old Testament prophets Jeremiah and Habakkuk, did they have any direct communication? How about Adam and Enoch or Methusaleh, for Adam was still alive when these “sons” of many later generations were adults. Did they visit each other?

The purpose of this article is to explore any connections between Martin Luther of Germany (1483-1546) and William Tyndale of England (c.1494-1536). These two leading figures of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation profoundly impacted history and each produced a very significant work in 1525. As we celebrate the 500th anniversaries of Luther's *Bondage of the Will* and Tyndale's English New Testament, what about the two men themselves? What was their relationship? Did they know of each other? Did they ever meet? Are there any parallels in their work?

One challenge we face in answering these questions is that William Tyndale wrote very little autobiographically, most likely because much of his adult life was spent on the run as an outlaw hated and hunted by Roman Catholic authorities. He was very careful in writing about himself lest he endanger himself or close friends and jeopardize his life's goal of translating the Bible. Nevertheless, there are many good biographies of Tyndale that rely on what his contemporaries wrote about him and then piece together the story of his life. Combing through these works we see that Luther and

Tyndale knew of each other, met each other, were co-objects of the ire of Rome, and had similar convictions. Also, while Tyndale was his own man, he was certainly influenced by Luther.¹

TYNDALE READING LUTHER

What appears to be the first connection between Luther and Tyndale occurred at Cambridge University in 1520 where Tyndale would have encountered and read some of Luther's published works. Tyndale was a university student in England in the dark days before the fervor of the Reformation gospel spread through the land. University professors delivered long, dull, and monotonous lectures full of useless hair-splitting in scholastic debates and vain speculation while bound to the opinions of the Roman Catholic Church. There was no lively, faithful, soul-stirring exposition of Scripture.

However, in those days change and excitement were in the air for two reasons. First, university students were learning Greek and reading and discussing the Greek New Testament. Having toiled in the bondage of Rome's corruption, many students were rejuvenated by the Word of life. Edwards recounts how one student exclaimed, “I seemed unto myself inwardly to feel a marvelous comfort and quietness insomuch that my bruised bones leaped for joy” (Edwards, 34-35).

1 This article relies on four major biographical works, and I list them here in chronological order from the date of publication. Any reference to one of these works hereafter will simply give author and page number in parentheses. Robert Demaus, *William Tindale: A Contribution to the Early History of the English Bible* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1871). J.F. Mozley, *William Tyndale* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937). Brian H. Edwards, *God's Outlaw: The Story of William Tyndale and the English Bible* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1976). David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

Second, students discovered something equally exciting, the writings of Martin Luther. By 1520, which is three years after Luther nailed his Ninety-five theses, the German reformer had published several notable works, including his latest, the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, for which he was excommunicated. Luther created an enormous problem for the papacy as his writing spread throughout Europe. His works were banned and burned, and the circulation of them incurred severe penalties. Luther's works found their way into Cambridge. How liberating to hear God speak, not through the twisted, contradictory, and corrupt claims of the Romish church, but through the Scriptures as faithfully explained by Luther! The students devoured his writings so that it was reported to the local Romish clergy, "the university is infected with Lutheranism" (Edwards, 35). Tyndale would have been one of those "infected" students and he likely witnessed the grand spectacle at Cambridge the following year, 1521: a huge burning of Luther's books at St. Paul's Cross organized by Cardinal Wolsey and attended by his peers, bishops, and foreign ambassadors (Mozley, 20; Daniell, 50).

This first connection reminds us of God's providence working through Gutenberg's printing press for the wide distribution of literature and the spread of the Reformation. Tyndale did not need to sit under Luther's lectern in Wittenberg to hear the polemics and triumphal gospel heralded by the German reformer; he could read Luther from far away, across the English Channel in Cambridge.

TYNDALE MEETING LUTHER

But Tyndale *did* go to Wittenberg! After Tyndale graduated from Cambridge, he was busy studying, teaching, preaching, and growing in his conviction that the common man of England must have a translation of Scripture in English to read it for himself. He traveled to London to seek approval and financing from the church but quickly discovered there was nowhere in England he could safely translate and print the Bible in a language people could understand. He left his native land and would never return, spending the rest of his life dodging ecclesiastical authorities who wanted him dead. After arriving in Hamburg, Germany, Tyndale eventually traveled to Wittenberg and met Martin Luther.

Neither Luther nor Tyndale ever wrote of their encounter and modern writers deny that the two ever met. However, Demaus demonstrates that contemporaries of Tyndale, whether friendly (John Foxe) or hostile (Sir Thomas More or Cochlaeus), maintain with one voice that Tyndale went to Wittenberg to see Luther, and any denials of this by modern writers are too feeble to merit serious refutation (58). Edwards surmises that the reason the two reformers never wrote of their encounter was probably that "Luther considered the meeting of relative unimportance in the light of his pressing problems, and Tyndale had already begun to draw a veil of silence and mystery over all his movements" (78). The biographer J.F. Mozley discovered some very intriguing evidence of Tyndale's visit to the University of Wittenberg (52-53). A copy of the registers of the University of Wittenberg shows the names of students who enrolled there. One entry from June 10, 1525 reads: *Guilhelmus Roy ex Londino*. This is William Roye of London, a well-known friend and assistant of Tyndale. And, one year earlier, under the date May, 27, 1524, a strange entry appears: *Guillelmus Daltici ex Angila*. This is to be read as William Daltici of England, that is, William Tyndale. To conceal his identity as an exile on the run in these perilous times when men commonly disguised their names, he reversed the two syllables of his last name turning Tin-dale into Dal-tin (a copyist confused the 'n' for 'ci,' mistakenly giving Daltici). Thus, the register appears to show Tyndale enrolled in Wittenberg.

It is estimated that Tyndale remained in Wittenberg nine or ten months, probably working on his English translation and nearly bringing it to completion. We can only imagine, somewhat romantically, what it must have been like for Tyndale to hear Luther preaching or teaching, or to sit in on his "table-talk," or for the two to sit down in private conversation. Tyndale would have had to learn the German language, but he could have accomplished that with God's blessing during his stay in Wittenberg, for his Roman Catholic adversary Cochlaeus once labeled Tyndale and his friend William Roye as "two apostates from England who learned the German language at Wittenberg" (Demaus, 60).²

² It was well known that Tyndale was exceptional in eight languages: Latin, Greek, German, French, Hebrew, Spanish, Italian, and English.

However, we will never know of any private discourse between the two reformers, unless some details of this and other mysterious meetings of history will be divulged in heaven as we converse about God's wonderful works.

TYNDALE CONDEMNED WITH LUTHER

Another important historical connection between Luther and Tyndale is that in their day their books topped the “banned books” list of the church. This was true in England where merchants and other travelers would clandestinely carry into the country these books, often smuggling them in bales of cloth tucked away in their boats. In addition to Luther's works, Tyndale's Bible became so influential already in 1526, the year of its publication, that it also came under the church's public condemnation. For example, Cardinal Wolsey ordered a rigorous search of London, Oxford, and Cambridge for anything written by Luther and for Tyndale's Bible so that they might be burned. One sure way for an Englishman to get punished by the church and perhaps even burned at the stake was to be caught with Luther or Tyndale in his possession (Edwards, 95-96; Demaus, 84).

One reason for the vehement opposition to Tyndale, who had merely put God's Word into another language, was that the authorities were convinced he was allied with Luther, and therefore, a heretic bringing treason, anarchy, schism, and the overthrow of the government. One cardinal of Rome wrote to his colleagues calling Tyndale and others “children of iniquity...maintainers of Luther's sect, blinded by extreme wickedness, declining from the way of truth and the orthodox faith, have with crafty trickery translated the holy gospel of God into our vulgar English language...” (in Mozley, 115). A bishop wrote to King Henry VIII of England warning him against Tyndale, “I need not to advertise your grace what infection and danger may ensue hereby, if it be not withstood. This is the next way to fulfill your realm with Lutherans...” (in Mozley, 65).

What an honor it must have been for these two faithful servants to draw the ire of Rome *together* and suffer for the cause of the Lord *together* as co-heirs of the grace of life. As the inspired Peter, who together with John drew the ire of the Sanhedrin, once wrote, “But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are

ye, and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled” (1 Pet. 3:14).

TYNDALE INFLUENCED BY LUTHER

The monumental achievement of Tyndale's life was his English translation of the New Testament. Tyndale used Luther's 1522 German translation of the Bible as an aid in his work, as is evident from a comparison of the first edition of his English translation with Luther's Bible. Also, his explanatory notes in the outer and inner margins borrow largely from Luther (Edwards, 83; Mozley, 63; Daniell, 113-124).

The clearest example of Luther's strong influence is seen in Tyndale's “Prologue to the Book of Romans.” The book of Romans was arguably the single most important book of Scripture for the reformers, as it showed most clearly the pure gospel of salvation by faith alone and brightened a way into the whole Bible. When introducing this significant book, Tyndale relied heavily upon Luther. Whereas most of Tyndale's prologues consist of a one-page introduction to a book of Scripture, this one extends to *seventeen* pages. Demaus notes that this work “is in truth hardly an original work but is much more correctly described as a translation or paraphrase of Luther's Preface to the same Epistle” (83).

Another evidence of Luther's influence can be seen in Tyndale's well-known treatise, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, which is essentially an exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. About this book Demaus writes,

The choice of subject may fairly enough be considered an indication of the paramount influence which Luther now exercised over the mind of Tyndale, and indeed, there are several striking similarities of sentiment and expression which were almost certainly suggested by the writings of the great German Reformer. Tyndale at the same time, treats the subject in a perfectly original manner, with the boldness and clearness of a man who had perfectly grasped it in his own mind... (54).

Though inspired by Luther, Tyndale did not produce his English translation from Luther's German, but from the original Greek. Cochlaeus, a bitter foe of the Reformation, alleged that Tyndale did not even know Greek. He once excoriated Tyndale as an English apostate who hoped that “all the people of England

would shortly become Lutheran, by means of Luther's New Testament, which [he] had translated into the English tongue" (in Mozley, 58). Tyndale did not translate from Luther's German, but from the original Greek. One New Testament scholar of the nineteenth century said about Tyndale's Bible, "It is impossible to read a single chapter without gaining the assurance that Tyndale rendered the Greek directly.... He deals with the text as one who passed a scholar's judgment upon every fragment of the work, unbiased by any predecessor" and if he used the help of others like Luther he did so "as a master and not as a disciple... style and interpretation are his own" (in Mozley, 87).

In his analysis of Tyndale's use of Luther in translating the Bible, Daniell illustrates the situation this way: "(T)hough he [Tyndale] is swimming alone, Luther is never far away" (123). That is, if translating the New Testament from the original Greek is like swimming across a large lake, Luther was not the canoe in which Tyndale paddled, but a fellow swimmer available for assistance. Tyndale swam alone all the way across the lake, though he probably would not have made it without Luther.

Luther might even acknowledge that Tyndale's work in translating the Bible was more impressive than his

own. Luther was aided by many counterparts who knew German. But Tyndale worked alone in a foreign country—an Englishman in Germany with no aids to assist him. As Luther himself once quipped, "In the work of translation, one man is no man" (Mozley, 54). That is, translating Scripture is so difficult it exceeds the capability of one man, so that one man is as good as no man. Tyndale was certainly aided and influenced by Luther's German translation, but Tyndale did his own work.

SHARED CONVICTIONS

William Tyndale and Martin Luther had much in common as reformers and they shared many of the same religious, theological, and biblical convictions. Above all, both men were grieved and restless that the common man did not know the simple gospel of the righteousness of Christ because the church corrupted it and the Bible was closed to them. Both men were driven by love and willing to hazard their lives so that their fellow countrymen could have a Bible in their own language. In His marvelous faithfulness, God gave to the Germans through Luther and to the Englishmen through Tyndale a Bible (and many another published works and sermons) for beholding the lovely and soul-comforting gospel of Christ.



THE BACKGROUND OF LUTHER'S *THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL*: A BATTLE FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE GOSPEL

REV. STEVEN KEY

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Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* is a book that is doctrinally foundational to the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, to be outdone only by the much more extensive doctrinal treatment of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Martin Luther wrote extensively during his lifetime. The published volumes of his works now number 79. Luther considered *The Bondage of the Will* the most important of his writings.

But there is a background to his writing and publication of this book that must be considered in order to understand the great value of the book for the church of the Reformation as well as the church today. In it Luther set forth what he considered to be the doctrine that lay at the heart of the gospel. The matter under debate was the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation.

Throughout history the great adversary, Satan,

has attempted to call into question God's sovereignty. In the early part of the fifth century, a man named Pelagius was rejecting the doctrine that Adam was the representative head of the whole human race, as is taught in Romans 5:12-18. To Pelagius there was no such thing as original guilt and original sin. Adam's fall did not affect us except to leave us a bad example. Sin comes by imitating various bad examples that we are confronted with in the course of our lives. Pelagius' views had two consequences when it came to the doctrine of man's salvation. First, with his denial of Adam's legal headship over the human race, Pelagius also denied the legal headship of Christ our Savior. Second, Pelagius rejected the biblical doctrine of total depravity and maintained that man's will remained free after the Fall. With this free will man was able to choose the good or the evil. God's grace was only necessary to assist man in choosing the good, by which he would be justified before God.

Augustine was the chief figure in defending the truth of the Scriptures over against the Pelagian heresy. Augustine knew his own deliverance from the bondage of sin. He knew the horrible power of sin and how it enslaves the very nature of man so that sin is not merely in the external act. Adam being the legal head of the whole human race, his sin was the sin of all, and death was the consequence of sin upon the entire human race. That death included the loss of freedom to do the good and the bondage to evil and, finally, physical and everlasting death. In this connection Augustine developed the biblical doctrine of total depravity and emphasized that salvation is entirely by the sovereign work of God and a wonder of divine grace in Christ Jesus that changes the will, enlightens the mind, and works faith. In answer to the question how some happen to be recipients of the grace of God and others are not, Augustine unfolded the doctrine of predestination.

But while the church would condemn Pelagius as a heretic, she would not have Augustine's doctrine of man nor of God's absolute sovereignty. At that time certain aspects of Pelagian teaching were already too deeply ingrained in the church and would become even more so in later centuries with the rise of the Renaissance. A form of semi-Pelagianism ruled the thinking in the Roman Catholic Church, even as today

the descendant of that Pelagianism, Arminianism, rules the thinking in much of the evangelical church world. At the heart of that thinking is the exaltation of man. In the church prior to Luther's day that meant that while salvation is God's work, man also plays a cooperative role. Man is not dead in sin, but seriously ill, and in need of the great Physician. But he must summon that great Physician. God's healing mercies will not take effect until man requests it and applies the remedy.

Couple that corruption of biblical truth with the immorality in the church, especially notable in the highest offices during the Borgia dynasty of popes and family-appointed cardinals and other prominent leaders in the church, and you have the background of the controversy that arose between Martin Luther and the Dutch humanist, Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466-1536).

Martin Luther (1483-1546) needs no introduction for us. I would only emphasize that Luther himself was a great scholar. Though not as widely known as Erasmus in the years prior to the Reformation, Luther had begun as a law student, receiving his master's degree when he was 22, before changing the direction of his studies entirely to theology and becoming a monk. Even so, by the age of 29 he had received his doctorate and had succeeded Johann von Staupitz as Professor of Theology in the University of Wittenberg. At the same time he was a pastor and preached at the Castle Church at Wittenberg.¹

Erasmus, blessed with a brilliant mind, was known as the most influential scholar in all of Europe. He was some seventeen years older than Luther and well established in scholastic circles throughout Europe by the time Luther rose to prominence in the Reformation of 1517. He had embraced some of the principles of the Renaissance with its emphasis on learning and scholasticism and the elevation of the human mind.



¹ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 19-22.

Erasmus was a humanist. The term *humanism* in our day has taken on a different connotation with a total rejection of God, and is usually associated with atheists and “freethinkers.” But at its root, humanism emphasizes human ability and potential, the natural goodness of the human being, and the solution to all problems coming from man’s knowledge. You can sense, therefore, that humanism is fundamentally another development of the Pelagian heresy. But humanism also sought a return to learning from original sources. And when the ancient city of Constantinople fell to the Muslims in 1453, many Byzantine Greek scholars fled to Europe, renewing an interest in Greek studies, the language of the New Testament Scriptures. In 1516 Erasmus would publish his *Novum Instrumentum*, the first printed New Testament in Greek, which also included his own Latin translation and scholarly annotations alongside the Greek text. This would later be used by Luther in translating the New Testament into the German language. But it also set him on the pathway of being led by the Spirit to an understanding of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone through his study of the epistle to the Romans.

Both Luther and Erasmus were deeply disturbed by the corruption and immorality that plagued the church even to its highest offices. Erasmus wrote *In Praise of Folly*, published in 1511, in which the ignorance of the church and its leaders were the object of his sharpest wit. It was a satirical examination of the supposedly pious but superstitious practices of the church as well as the immorality of its members and clergy. Erasmus longed for a return to the Scriptures. But he did not see the corruption in the church as something rooted in a profoundly erroneous theology. Luther, on the other hand, did.

Luther came to his theological position in his study of the Scriptures. He had been deeply troubled, not only by the notorious corruption of the clergy, but by his own lack of assurance. Already as a young man, Luther had been terrified of dying. It was not unusual in those days to be confronted by death frequently. Luther had lost several friends and acquaintances to the plague. He himself had just about lost his life when the sword

that he was carrying as a student accidentally cut his leg and severed an artery. His traveling companion ran to a nearby town to summon a doctor who could treat the wound.² Later Luther found himself outside in a severe storm and in his perceived threat of being killed, the terrors of damnation swept before his mind and he vowed to Saint Anne that he would become a monk. But life in the monastery did not deliver him from the terrors of hell. His devotion to a life of good works could not relieve him from the perception that he was a guilty sinner who could not escape the just judgment of the holy God.

A chief consideration in his struggle was the truth—and an inescapable biblical truth—that sin is not simply in the actions, but permeates the nature. That truth had been lost in the semi-Pelagian teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Nothing Luther could do in the way of good works according to the church could open the way to salvation. Christ alone is the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). Luther had to come to the realization that justification is not by works, but by Christ’s imputed righteousness. God imputes the righteousness of Christ to His people by grace alone through faith alone.

As God brought Martin Luther to this knowledge through the study of Paul’s epistle to the Romans, God prepared Luther for the work that lay before him. He gave Luther the understanding that the sins plaguing the church of his day were not just moral improprieties or a lack of knowledge to be solved by humanistic education. The sins plaguing the church were rooted deeply in doctrinal errors, and especially the denial of the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation.

When Erasmus, therefore, in 1524 published a treatise *On the Freedom of the Will* in which he criticized Luther’s doctrine of divine sovereignty and predestination and defended the traditional Roman Catholic teaching of man’s free will in the matter of salvation, Luther was fully prepared to respond. The result would be his book *The Bondage of the Will*, in which the teaching of divine truth is clearly set forth from Holy Scripture.

2 Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (Penguin Publishing Group, Kindle Edition), 29.





THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL: A DEFENSE OF SOVEREIGN GRACE

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The Bondage of the Will is famous reformer Martin Luther's most significant writing for God's church. Why? It is such a strong defense of salvation by grace alone. The Lord used this work to expose Rome's error of salvation by merit and keep the Reformation going. Filled with biblical arguments, this treatise still helps us today battle those who teach that man contributes to his own salvation.

This writing, and its fame, clearly came about by the providential hand of God. Luther wrote *The Bondage of the Will* as a response to Desiderius Erasmus, a world-renowned Dutch scholar. The Lord so directed all things that this giant in the academic world read Luther's previous rejections of the free will of man and decided, at the encouragement of friends, to challenge Luther in a work entitled *On the Freedom of the Will* (1524). Although Erasmus had formerly written against some of the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, and had called for certain reforms, he made clear in this writing that he had no intention of leaving Rome. What he did desire was that the fighting between Luther and Rome over free will would cease. He believed this subject was not so important and not so clearly explained in Scripture that the church should be divided over it.

In opposition to Luther, Erasmus provided several arguments for the freedom of the will of man, arguments that are noteworthy because they represent Rome's view of salvation and are still used by semi-Pelagians today, including Arminians. First, Erasmus contended that the fact that God gives commands implies that man can obey the commands. Since Jehovah, for instance, demands that men repent, men must be able to will repentance.

Second, Erasmus taught that man must have free will because God would be unjust and cruel if He punished sinners who could not will to obey Him.

Related to this, he wrote that God's predestination is based on foreknowledge. God foreknew who would serve Him and who would not, and chose certain people on that basis.

In the third place, Erasmus maintained that natural man does not only perform evil. Every man has a certain inherent grace that has been weakened by sin but not taken away. Having that inherent grace, all men can seek virtue and therefore do some good. Erasmus basically argued the position of the semi-Pelagians, saying that while the will of natural man is weak, it is not powerless. Grace assists every man in doing good.

Fourth, Erasmus repeatedly contended that man must have a free will because man can merit something with God. He maintains, as Rome emphatically does, that because the Bible speaks so often of rewards for man, it must be true that man merits with God by doing good works. He added that the church had taught this doctrine of merit for centuries, and thus it must be correct. Erasmus' conclusion is that since man can merit with God, he must have a free will. In consideration of Luther's emphasis on grace in salvation, Erasmus did admit that grace performs nearly everything in man. There is only a small measure of man's will that is working. Because the work of man is so small, Erasmus said man must still ultimately magnify God for salvation.

Related to the freedom of the will, Erasmus taught one more thing that was of great importance to Luther, which is that grace is resistible. Erasmus basically contended that grace operates, but it does not necessarily save. That Erasmus held to this view of grace makes sense. For all men to have free will, God's grace must be resistible.

How then did Luther answer Erasmus in *The Bondage of the Will*? Before getting into the doctrinal

issue itself, Luther argued that, contrary to Erasmus' claims, the issue of the freedom or bondage of man's will is an essential issue. The truth about God Himself and His place in salvation is at stake. Luther wrote,

For if I am ignorant of the nature, extent, and limits of what I can and must do with reference to God, I shall be equally ignorant and uncertain of the nature, extent, and limits of what God can and will do in me.... Now, if I am ignorant of God's works and power, I am ignorant of God Himself; and if I do not know God, I cannot worship, praise, and give thanks, or serve Him, for I do not know how much I should attribute to myself and how much to Him (78).¹

Luther then explained over against Erasmus that Scripture is indeed clear on this important matter of the will since it involves a salvation issue.

Next, Luther addressed the term "free will." He desired that the term never be spoken because it can be deceiving. It wrongly suggests that men have the power of free choice in salvation. Luther indicated that man, in a sense, does have the free will to decide what he will do with his possessions and money, but even then, God is ultimately sovereign. Yet, in things that have to do with man's salvation, Luther stresses that man has no free will. He is a servant to God's will or Satan's (103).

After commenting on the importance of the topic and addressing the term "free will" itself, Luther proceeded to refute Erasmus' arguments about the freedom of the will, emphasizing that salvation is all of God's sovereign grace. First, Luther explained that God's commandments do not imply the ability to keep them. He writes,

It is from this passage that I derive my answer to you: that by the words of the law man is admonished and taught, not what he can do, but what he ought to do; that is, that he may know his sin, not that he may believe that he has any strength. Wherefore, my good Erasmus, as often as you confront me with the words of the law, so often shall I confront you with the words of Paul: 'By the law is knowledge of sin;'—not power of will! Gather together from the big concordances all the imperative words into one chaotic heap (not the words of promise, but the words of the law and its demand)—and I shall at once declare that they always show, not what men can do, or do do, but what they should do (159).

¹ All quotations from *The Bondage of the Will* are taken from the translation by J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston, published by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1957.

In connection with this, Luther often reminded Erasmus of the implication of his doctrine. If God's command truly does imply man's ability to keep it, then man can keep God's commandments himself. He can save himself and does not need grace. He does not need the Spirit or even the blood of Christ (172).

Second, Luther corrected Erasmus by explaining what Scripture says about natural man. Man cannot do good, but is bound to sin. Satan adds blindness so that man feels like he is free, but he is in fact, "captive, sick and dead" (162). Luther explained that all men are in bondage to sin by nature, but some men believe and obey because God, in His counsel, willed them to receive the gospel and enjoy His mercy (169). During their lives, God sends them His Word and graciously heals them (170).

In the third place, Luther addressed the great problem of merit. He contended from Scripture that man cannot merit with God by doing good works of his own free will. God does promise rewards, but these are gracious promises. These promises are made to God's elect, to those who are "in grace, higher than 'free-will' can rise...and righteous" (180). Luther explained that rewards are all of grace in Christ, writing, "If you have worthiness in view, there is no merit and no reward. If 'free-will' cannot will good by itself alone, but wills good by grace alone (for we are speaking of 'free-will' apart from grace, and inquiring into the proper power of each), who does not see that the good will, and merit, and reward, are of grace alone?" (181)

Fourth, in answer to Erasmus' teaching on free will, Luther defended the truth of sovereign election. He argued that if man has free will and God chooses someone based on what He sees they will do, then God is "robbed of His power and wisdom in election" (199). If man chooses to do good in his own free will, then God did not sovereignly elect certain people unto salvation as Scripture says He did. Luther went on to teach that God's sovereignty and foreknowledge are closely connected, and connected in the sense that God knows because He has sovereignly determined what will happen. Basically, Luther showed here that since God is sovereign—and He must be sovereign to be God—man cannot possibly have a free will. Salvation cannot come about by the free will of man.

Luther indicated that he was aware of how offensive

this doctrine of predestination is to man, this teaching that God has sovereignly determined to be gracious to some and to harden others. However, he emphasized that the truth of Scripture cannot and may not be changed. God is sovereign, and yet man's sins are his own, for man is not forced to sin.

After clearly answering the points of Erasmus, Luther argued emphatically for salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone. He showed from abundant Bible passages that men, who cannot will or do anything pleasing to God, are righteous before God only in Christ, and that this righteousness is imputed by faith alone. Men do not and cannot earn anything.

Luther then concluded by stressing the weightiness of the issue: "I could wish that the guardians of 'free-will' would be taught by this passage to recognize that when they assert 'free-will' they are denying Christ. For if I obtain the grace of God by my own endeavor, what need have I of the grace of Christ for the receiving of my grace?" (304-305). Luther added, "In setting up 'free-will' you set aside Christ, and make havoc of the entire Scripture" (307-308). Thus, this issue of the bondage of

the will is "the hinge on which the whole" Reformation turns (319).

We today need this defense that the Lord provided through Luther because we continue to face the same errors concerning salvation. Many hold to free will in the broader church world. I hear about it from my catechism students often. The popular take is that God wants to save everyone, offers salvation to all, shows a certain grace to all that will assist them, and man must only accept that offer of salvation in his own free will. Understand that if we do not see the truth that our will is in bondage to sin by nature as Luther teaches, we end up with the idea that what man decides to do in his free will is what separates the man in hell from the man in heaven. Both were shown grace by God, but one used his free will the right way. If we do not see the truth that our will is in bondage by nature as Luther explains, we end up denying that salvation is by God's grace alone and we take away from the glory of God. So, thanks be to God for working in Luther to defend salvation by grace alone. May we hold fast to this truth and magnify Christ as the only and complete Savior.



BOUND TO DEBATE: THE LEGACY OF LUTHER'S *ON THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL*

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Regarding [the plan] to collect my writings in volumes, I am quite cool and not at all eager about it because...I would rather see them all devoured. For I acknowledge none of them to be really a book of mine, except the one *On the Bound Will* and the *Catechism*.¹

With these typically pointed words Martin Luther classified his many works in a letter from 1535. Of all his numerous writings (which, when combined, amount

to over 80,000 pages!), he was only truly convinced of the quality of two. Interestingly, one of these two works is *On the Bondage of the Will* from 1525.

So, while Luther was definitely convinced of the importance and quality of his book, the questions arise: How has the book been perceived by others in the 500 years since then? What influence did it have? And what can we learn from it today?

LIKE-MINDED REFORMERS

Initially, the question of God's sovereignty and human free will was not the central issue of the Reformation. In the controversy with the Roman Church, the focus was on

¹ Martin Luther. *Luther's Works*, Volume 50: Letters III. Ed. Gottfried G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 172-173.

the relation between the Word of God and ecclesiastical tradition as well as on the question of justification.

The early representatives of the Reformation were in agreement on the issue. So, in 1521 Luther's close associate Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) already professed his belief in the bondage of the will in his *Loci Communes*, the first systematic theology of Protestantism. The topic only became a subject of debate with the publication of Luther's response to Erasmus' work *On Free Will*.

INITIAL OPPOSITION: HUMANISTS AND CATHOLICS

With *On the Bondage of the Will*, Luther provoked two groups at once.

On the one hand, the Roman Catholic Church objected. Human free will plays an important role in her soteriology. From 1545 onwards, many Catholic officials met at a council in the northern Italian city of Trent to formulate a critical response to the Reformation.² In their resolutions, they not only contested the Reformation's convictions on Holy Scripture and justification, but also on the doctrine of the bondage of the will in clear terms: "If anyone says that man's free will...in no way cooperates in disposing and preparing itself for obtaining the grace of justification; that it cannot refuse its consent...let him be anathema."³

On the other hand, the humanists around Erasmus felt provoked. The doctrine of the enslaved will simply did not fit in with their optimistic view of humanity and the world. For this reason Erasmus responded to Luther's reaction in 1526/27. The response is titled: *The Hyperaspistes [A Shield-Bearer] of the Diatribe against*

Luther's 'Bondage of the Will' and comprises two volumes. Other humanists, such as the Spaniard Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540) and the Frenchman Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (1455-1536), also defended free will and, despite their own criticism, remained members of the Roman Church (as did Erasmus).

MELANCHTHON AND THE SYNERGISTIC CONTROVERSY

It was Luther's close ally Philip Melanchthon who brought the controversy into the Reformation camp. Whereas in 1521 he had written in favor of the bondage of the human will, he changed his views in 1535 in a new edition of his *Loci Communes*. In addition to the work of the Spirit and the power of the Word of God, he now mentioned the will of man as a third "cause of conversion." In doing so, he significantly softened his view of the bondage of the human will. Luther was not happy at all about his friend's change of mind, but remained unusually reserved in public.

It was not until after Luther's death (1546) that a dispute over this question arose among Lutherans in the second half of the 1550s. This controversy in some ways resembled the debates in the Reformed churches in the run-up to the Synod of Dordt. It has gone down in history as the *synergistic controversy*.

On one side were Luther's followers, who were called Gnesio-Lutherans. They were led by the Croatian theologian Matthias Flacius (1520-1575) and Luther's close friend Nikolaus von Amsdorff (1483-1565). They vehemently defended Luther's doctrine of the bondage of the will. Unfortunately, some of them went too far, equating the bondage of the will with complete passivity on the part of human beings. In an effort to defend Luther's position, Flacius insisted that man after the fall is purely passive, like a stone or a tree stump.⁴

2 Despite the clear words of the Council of Trent, there were repeated debates within Roman Catholicism in the following centuries about human free will. The Dutch Catholic Michel de Bay (1513-1589) argued in favor of the bondage of the will and was condemned for this in 1567 by Pope Pius V for deviating from the Council's decisions. Several decades later, the controversy erupted again when the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535-1600) was contradicted for his defense of free will by Domingo Báñez (1528-1604) and later by the Dutchman Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638). The Catholics who opposed the decisions of the Council had arrived at their position less through influences of the Reformation and more through the study of Augustine.

3 Council of Trent, Session VI, Canon VI.

4 This formulation was considered too radical not only by most Lutherans, but also by the Reformed. The Canons of Dordt teach (3/4, 16): "But as man by the fall did not cease to be a creature endowed with understanding and will, nor did sin which pervaded the whole race of mankind deprive him of the human nature, but brought upon him depravity and spiritual death; so also this grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor takes away their will and its properties, neither does violence thereto," And the Second Helvetic Confession states (Art. 9.2): "To be sure, his [man's] reason was not taken from him, nor was he deprived of will,

On the other side were Melancthon's followers, the so-called Philippists. Leading representatives of this school of thought were Viktorin Strigel (1524-1569) and Johannes Pfeffinger (1493-1573). They defended a certain participation of human (free) will in conversion (that is, synergism). In 1559, Flacius wrote a defense of the bondage of the will under the title *Konfutationsbuch* (Book of Confutation). When Strigel refused to sign the book, he was imprisoned for several months. The debate about free will had now become not only theological but also political.

In 1560, a public disputation organized by the Saxon elector took place in the city of Weimar, without the question really being resolved. It was not until the formulation of the Formula of Concord in 1577, the latest Lutheran confession in terms of time, that the waves could be largely smoothed.

THE FORMULA OF CONCORD: THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION ON THE BOUND WILL

In its first two articles, the Formula of Concord professes Luther's view of the enslaved will, thereby refuting Melancthon and his followers. So, the rejection of the free will of natural human beings is equally part of both the Lutheran and Reformed confessions. And yet the formulations of the Formula of Concord on the sovereignty of God (Art. 11) are significantly more cautious and weaker than the formulations of the Canons of Dordt or the Westminster Confession—and also weaker than Luther's words in *On the Bondage of the Will*.

This contributed to Luther's book being increasingly pushed into the background in German-speaking countries. The Reformed were clearly in the minority compared to Lutherans and Catholics, and had been harshly criticized by Luther because of their position on the Lord's Supper. Although they appreciated Luther as a reformer, his writings had little influence among German-speaking Reformed Christians. The Canons of Dordt also had little influence in Germany, while the Heidelberg Catechism (the dominant Reformed confession in German-speaking countries) only touches on the question of free will in passing.

and he was not entirely changed into a stone or a tree. But they were so altered and weakened that they can no longer do what they could before the fall. Emphasis added.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

From the seventeenth century onwards, other issues dominated among Lutherans. The confessional "orthodox" emphasized questions relating to justification, the doctrine of Christ, and the Lord's Supper. The other schools of thought within Lutheranism, Pietism and the Enlightenment, led to a fundamental shift away from the confessions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both movements focused on the human subject, so that the bondage of the will was either denied or at least hardly emphasized.

Thus, the work receded further into the background. Other works by Luther, such as *On the Freedom of a Christian* or his commentary on Galatians, are today considered by the public to be Luther's central writings. And yet, time and again, there were theologians who rediscovered Luther's work in the centuries following the Reformation.

One example of this is the Lutheran theologian Hans Joachim Iwand (1899-1960). While being imprisoned by the Nazis, he wrote in 1938 about *On the Bondage of the Will*, "Anyone who does not put this book down with the realization that protestant theology stands or falls with this doctrine of the bound will has read it in vain."⁵

Even today, the work has not been forgotten in Germany. In 2016 it was republished in modernized German. It is interesting to note that it is often not Lutherans who appreciate it. The German reissue was published by a Baptist publishing house. The English editions were translated and edited by Anglicans Henry Cole and J. I. Packer⁶, while the Dutch editions were published by Reformed publishing houses.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BOOK FOR TODAY?

On the Bondage of the Will is not an easy read. Over the past five centuries, numerous books on the question of free will have been published that are more systematically structured and argue in a more

5 Hans Joachim Iwand, *Theologische Einführung in Martin Luthers Schrift De servo arbitrio* (Munich, 1939), 289.

6 Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will: Written in Answer to the Diatribe of Erasmus on Free-will, translated by Henry Cole. London 1823. Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will: A New Translation of De Servo Arbitrio (1525), Martin Luther's Reply to Erasmus of Rotterdam, translated by J.I. Packer & O.R. Johnston. Old Tappan, NJ, 1957.

comprehensible way. And yet the book is still of fundamental importance today.

For many Protestants, the defining feature of the Reformation is the importance of the Word of God (*sola scriptura*) and justification by faith alone (*sola fide*). This is, of course, entirely accurate. But the fact that Luther described *On the Bondage of the Will* as one of his most important works and that the Catholic Council of Trent also defended free will so vehemently shows that the question of free will was also one of the central issues of the Reformation period. Today's Protestantism, which is often characterized by synergism, is much closer to the Catholic position on the question of free will than to the Reformation position of Luther, Calvin, and both the Lutheran and Reformed confessions. Of course, this in itself does not prove the truth of the bondage of the human will. But it does make it clear that many Protestants (similar to Melancthon) deviate from Reformation doctrine on a central point.

SURPRISED BY LUTHER

For many Protestant Christians, the term Calvinism has very negative connotations. Calvin is said to have been a tyrant, and his teachings are said to deny human responsibility. In short, many evangelical Christians consider the doctrine of the bondage of the human will to be an exclusively Reformed doctrine—with the unspoken implication that “all Christians believe in human free will except for the ‘odd’ Calvinists.” In addition, a very negative image of Calvin prevails in secular culture as well.

Time and again, I have seen people express great

surprise when they learn that there were no significant differences between Calvin's and Luther's views on free will. As negative as the image of Calvin often is, Protestant Christians generally have a very positive image of Luther (even if they are hardly familiar with his actual theology). So, if you want to gently introduce Christians to the doctrine of God's sovereignty, it can be very helpful to start with Luther and make it clear that the doctrines of grace are not only Reformed but one of the central truths that were rediscovered throughout the Reformation.

LUTHER'S LEGACY

Luther was aware of the value of his book—perhaps because he sensed that its message would be repeatedly attacked not only by Catholics but also by his own followers. This may have been the reason why—in the same year as Melancthon's fatal reversal (1535)—Luther demanded the survival of *On the Bondage of the Will*. And also in the *Catechism*, the other book that Luther wanted to survive, he professed this truth with marvelous words:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.... This is most certainly true.⁷

⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 2019, 11.



LUTHER'S DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN *THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL*

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Among the benefits God graciously bestowed upon His church through the Reformation, one of the greatest was (and still is) a return to the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church had strayed in many respects over the centuries,

and at the heart of all of her other issues was this: she had left God's Word behind. Church tradition and the decrees of popes had become the ultimate authority for faith and living. So severe was the neglect of God's

Word that few people had any idea what the Bible said. But the Reformation championed the principle of *sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone, and that meant careful study of what the Bible had to say on all matters.

Martin Luther led the way in this, beginning already early in his career. His high view of God's Word is very evident in *The Bondage of the Will*, and the reader finds that his doctrine of Scripture is strong and thorough. This enabled Luther to deal with the arguments of Desiderius Erasmus effectively, and it ensured a lasting impact from Luther's work.

FOUNDATION

Luther's doctrine of Scripture had a sure foundation, because it was itself a *scriptural* doctrine of Scripture. He believed that the whole of the Bible—every word, every grammatical structure, *everything*—was inspired. While Luther implied this throughout *The Bondage of the Will*, it is particularly evident at certain points. To refute some of Erasmus' claims, Luther appealed to the Spirit's use of the imperative for issuing commands, as opposed to the indicative, a simple statement of fact. Luther argues that Scripture therefore presents a difference between what man is able to do and what he must do.¹ Later, Luther compares Erasmus' treatment of a text with the writings of the ancient church father Jerome, who essentially taught that Paul misunderstood and misused certain Old Testament texts. Luther shows that such an interpretation is a direct attack on the Holy Spirit, and he faults Erasmus for so much as appealing to Jerome (251-255). Notably, Luther would go on to teach the inerrancy of Scripture explicitly in his Large Catechism a few years later.² This illustrates that Luther saw we must take seriously every verse of the Word of God. The reason for that need is the verbal inspiration of the Bible (see 2 Tim. 3:16). With this foundation that the Spirit inspired Holy Scripture, Luther naturally affirmed related perfections of Scripture.

1 Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Henry Cole (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 154-55. Subsequent references are taken from this edition with page numbers noted parenthetically in text.

2 See Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *A Place to Stand: The Word of God in the Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2005), 197.

SCRIPTURE'S ATTRIBUTES

Luther clearly affirmed at least three key attributes of Scripture in his work. The first is the *authority* of God's Word. Erasmus was a Renaissance humanist, so he laid great emphasis on human reason in determining truth. His own reason, guided by what the Roman Catholic Church said, really became his final authority. Luther saw the error of this and recognized the need for Scripture to be the authority in all matters. Intellectually, Luther was extremely gifted, which meant he was more than capable of fighting Erasmus' reason with his own, and he did occasionally follow this method. However, he always maintained the Bible as the final and highest authority. Addressing the possibility of "a medium," a form of willing that could be exercised either unto good or unto evil, Luther answers logically, but his logic centers in the logic Jesus presents in Matthew 12:30 (136-38).³ While Erasmus leaned on tradition and his own intellect, Luther leaned on the Word of God.

Throughout Luther's work, it is more of the same. Already in his introduction, Luther wrote that while Erasmus objected to making assertions, Christians "must delight in assertions," then added that he was referring to those assertions "delivered to us from above in the Holy Scriptures" (18-19). What is the Bible for the child of God but a book of God's authoritative assertions? Over against skepticism, Luther maintained that the Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible is no skeptic, and that "He has written on our hearts...assertions more certain, and more firm, than life itself and all human experience" (24). Later, Luther answered Erasmus' numerous appeals to the church father Jerome by essentially saying, "We are not debating the teachings of Jerome, we are debating the teaching of the Bible" (274-75, 280-81, 286). At one point, Luther wrote that he desired "that we may also see, how weak, arguments drawn from human authority are in divine things, where the authority of God alone avails" (187). In theological discussions, the final authority must be God's Word.

3 The idea of the "medium" was that the will was essentially neutral, unable to will good apart from grace, but not actually willing what is evil either. Luther quotes Jesus' words, "He that is not with me is against me," arguing that there is no neutrality or middle ground: one's will is either for God or for Satan.

The second major attribute of Scripture Luther taught was Scripture's *sufficiency*. This is very much related to the first: if Scripture is authoritative, it is also sufficient, and if it is sufficient, it clearly is authoritative. Although Luther *did* use reason at times, he saw that he ultimately had no need to do that; the Bible was enough to speak to every matter. Repeatedly, Luther multiplies Scripture references to back up his assertions (for example, 44-45; 55-56; 105ff.). This illustrates that Luther recognized that the Word of God needs no help to destroy the arguments of man.

Erasmus approached the debate over free will differently. Luther said this about him: “[T]here is no place, in which you do not invent something whereby to contradict the Scriptures. At one time, you fly to the interpretations of the Fathers: at another, to absurdities of Reason: and when neither of these is sufficient, you dwell on that which is irrelevant or contingent” (291). Luther would have none of this strategy; he unashamedly stressed *Scripture* as what would prove a point. He wrote, “We are waiting, therefore, for some passage of Scripture, to shew us that this interpretation is right; we give no credit to those who hatch it out of their own brain. For, we deny, that any passage can be found which attributes all to man” (270). So constant was this emphasis that it evidently irked Erasmus (81). May the church today have such men as well, men who so hold to the sufficiency of Scripture that they annoy their opponents with their appeals to it.

One theologian wrote this about *The Bondage of the Will*: “For [Luther], the contest is not to be decided by fire from Mt. Carmel, but from the Word alone. He repeatedly asserts both the sufficiency and perspicuity of the Scriptures in this context.”⁴ This ties the second attribute of Scripture that Luther taught with the third, the *perspicuity* (or clarity) of Scripture. Erasmus held that certain portions of Scripture are obscure and muddled, which conveniently allowed him to pivot from Scripture to his own reason as he tried to explain free will. Luther, on the other hand, maintained that any difficulty in understanding the Bible is due to man's own ignorance, adding that no *teaching* is unclear, because other passages clarify each difficult passage (24-26). Luther makes a

helpful distinction between the external and the internal clarity of Scripture: some parts of the Bible are clear to anyone who reads them; other parts only the believer can understand, guided by the Holy Spirit (29). God wills that His people *do* understand His Word.

So it was not the intention of the men inspired to write down God's Word to conceal things in darkness; instead, the Scriptures display certainty, clarity, and light (106ff.). Luther puts the matter very emphatically: “[T]here is no contradiction in the words of the Scripture, nor any need of an invented interpretation to clear up a difficulty” (271). The Bible can stand alone: authoritative, sufficient, and also clear, so that nothing else is needed. Knowing this, we ought to confess “that the Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light by far more clear than the sun itself,” particularly regarding salvation (104). As brightly as the sun illuminates your way on a cloudless day, its brightness and the clarity it provides are infinitely dimmer than the brightness of the Word of God.

DEVELOPMENT

Luther's strong doctrine of Scripture naturally developed into good hermeneutical principles, or principles for interpreting the Bible. One of these principles is that Scripture interprets Scripture. Luther would say that Paul is his own best interpreter (342). The student of Scripture does need to be careful, lest he or she bring together two passages that actually discuss different things (263), but the central point is that believers must allow the Bible to interpret itself, following the biblical writers' own use of their terms (288). The principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture follows very directly when we see that the Bible is inspired, authoritative, sufficient, and clear: if a passage is difficult to understand, other passages will provide the answer for how to understand it.

A second principle of biblical interpretation the reader finds in *The Bondage of the Will* is the need to understand certain figures of speech. Luther addresses Hebraisms (325), the uses of the words “turn” and “world” (165-66; 367-68), and how to understand good works being called “ours” (195-96). Again, if God's Word is inspired, we must take each word seriously, and in part, that means understanding that certain

4 R. C. Sproul, “An Analysis of Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*,” in Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will: 500th Anniversary Edition* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier, 2025), xiv.

expressions have a figurative sense.⁵ When we affirm that Scripture is authoritative, sufficient, and clear, we will be able to make sober judgments about how to interpret its figures of speech.

Both of these principles indicate the importance of reading Scripture in context. In that way, they both drive us to one final point, a very important one. Luther indicates that we must interpret every passage in light of the whole message of the Bible, a message that centers in Christ, in His cross and resurrection, in His sending the Spirit to indwell our hearts. The gospel governs all interpretation of God's Word; any interpretation that contradicts it is inherently wrong. Luther writes that if Deuteronomy 30:11-14 teaches an ability and power in man to do what God commands, "What need now of Christ! What need of the Spirit!...What need was there for Christ to purchase for us, even with His own blood, the Spirit, as though necessary, in order that He might make the keeping of the commandments easy unto us, when we were already thus qualified by nature" (175)! To interpret the Bible this way is to reject Christ's

5 If only Luther had applied this to his understanding of the phrase "This is my body"!

saving work, to the eternal destruction of souls. But God's people may not and do not adopt this approach in studying the Bible. Instead, they always seek Christ, knowing they can find Him on every page (Luke 24:25-27).

CONCLUSION

Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* has instructed and edified generations of Christians who stand in the tradition of the Reformation. 500 years after he published it, it remains an excellent treatment of its topic. Churchmen produce many theological works every year; most quickly fade into obscurity, even those that treat such important issues as this one does.

So why does Luther's work remain so widely read? No doubt, it is because of its theological precision, but what gave Luther that precision? The answer is simple: God's Word. Because Luther stuck so closely to Scripture and held it in such high regard, his work has endured the test of time. Let this encourage us to hold *sola Scriptura* just as tightly today as did the reformers. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand for ever" (Is. 40:8).



WILLIAM TYNDALE, MARTYR FOR THE WORD OF GOD

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INTRODUCTION

The Reformation did not come quickly to England. Separated from continental Europe by water, and held tightly by Rome under a united monarchy and clergy, England sat in medieval darkness longer than Germany and the Lowlands. To be sure, there had long been discontent with clerical corruption, the wealth of the monasteries, and, since Wycliffe, the church's resistance to Scripture in the English tongue. Yet, it was not until the 1530s that the Reformation formally began to take shape in England. One man God used to

ensure the English Reformation's shape was the shape of Scripture was William Tyndale. Tyndale had one passion: to translate the holy Scriptures from the Greek and Hebrew and place them into the hands of the English people. This desire both determined the course of his life, and the circumstances of his death. In the end, God used him more than any other individual, to give the Bible not only to the sixteenth-century English speaker, but also to us English speakers today.

EARLY LIFE

Tyndale was born in 1494, likely in Gloucestershire, only fifty miles from Oxford. At the young age of 14, Tyndale made that fifty mile move to begin his studies in earnest. In 1515 Tyndale received his master's degree at the then rising university. Excelling at all things linguistic, Tyndale was able to read the Scriptures, to which his soul became "addicted."¹ After Oxford, Tyndale likely spent five years in Cambridge (1516-1521). It was while in Cambridge that he came into contact not only with Reformation ideas freshly come ashore from Germany, but also with Erasmus' Greek New Testament published in 1516. Cambridge is also where Tyndale gathered with fellow future reformers (Ridley, Bilney, Coverdale, Latimer, Barnes, Cranmer) at the famed White Horse Inn, to discuss Luther's theology over pints of ale. In the end, most of these men would give their lives for the faith that bound them together.

After his time in Cambridge, and now an ordained priest in the Roman Catholic Church, Tyndale took a position back home in Gloucestershire as a tutor to the children of Sir John and Lady Walsh who lived at Little Sodbury Manor. Once there, he preached often in the area churches, his sermons marked by a distinct commitment to the text of Scripture, the Reformation gospel, and railings against the abuses of Rome. The laypeople were ignorant of the Scriptures and they considered Tyndale's preaching peculiar. But to the area clergymen Tyndale's preaching was more than odd. The more Tyndale preached, the angrier his colleagues became. Things finally came to a head as the area clergy gathered around Lady Walsh's table one evening. As Tyndale argued for the authority of Scripture and the obvious need for an English Bible, one clergy member cried out, "We were better to be without God's law than the Pope's!" Tyndale famously replied, "I defy the Pope and all his laws, and if God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow, shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."²

THE FIRST PRINTING

God moved Tyndale to put this work into motion almost

immediately. Enemies began to threaten the Walshes for continuing to employ Tyndale, driving the pastor/scholar to London to spare his friends. In London, Tyndale attempted to begin a translation of Erasmus' Greek text into English under the sponsorship of the Bishop of London. However, by this time Luther's writings were flooding into England, and the tension Tyndale felt between darkness and light in Gloucestershire, he now felt in London as well. The bishop did not have the stomach to defy the civil and church law that forbade a vernacular Bible. Thwarted in London, Tyndale realized if he was going to translate the Bible *for* his native land, it could not be accomplished *in* his native land. However, while Tyndale was in London, he made connections to important merchants who were in favor of the project, themselves influenced by Wycliffe's translation of the Bible from the Latin more than a century earlier. These merchants provided Tyndale the financial support and shipping connections he needed to make his translation on the continent and to smuggle it back into his native land. Tyndale never returned to England.

Tyndale's first stop, in 1524, was Cologne, Germany. Cologne had double the printers of London. And though it was illegal in Cologne as much as in London to print the Bible in any language other than Latin, Luther's work had made it more possible. In 1522 Luther published his German Bible. Printers all over Europe had made a fortune printing the Bible and Luther's writings. When Tyndale arrived in Cologne in 1524, there were printers eager to take the risk for the monetary reward Reformation material produced. The plan was to print 3,000 copies of the completed New Testament. However, betrayed by a loose-tongued assistant and some besotted printshop workers, Tyndale's work was destroyed when authorities raided the shop in 1525. All that remains of this initial printing is the first 22 chapters of Matthew, in precisely one copy (currently held in the British museum). Even so, this printing was the first appearance of the English Scriptures (from the original languages) in the history of the world.

THE SECOND PRINTING

Tyndale then fled up the Rhine River to a place even more friendly to the Reformation, Worms. Here,

1 John Fox, *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 176.

2 Fox, 178.

Tyndale was able to print the full New Testament in 1526. “It was the common Greek (*koine*) materialized as common English.”³ So impressively wrought was Tyndale’s translation that subsequent translators (including those behind the King James Bible) could not improve on over 80 percent of it! As Tyndale Bibles flooded into England, smuggled in bales of cloth, Henry VIII, at this point under the control of the Romish Cardinal Wolsey, declared that the Bibles “[were] to be burned, with further sharp correction and punishment against the keepers and readers of the same.”⁴

But whereas the “keepers and readers” would only be “punished,” Tyndale was ordered captured and burned along with his Bibles. Because of the threat of various secret agents sent over the English Channel to accomplish this, Tyndale was forced to move up and down the Rhine to escape notice. Doing so, he endured hunger, thirst, cold, danger, absence of friends and fellowship, even shipwreck, all to “do honor to God, true service to my Prince, and pleasure to His command.”⁵ The shipwreck, off the coast of Holland, saw him lose to the sea the manuscripts of the first five books of the Bible translated from the Hebrew. Tyndale immediately started over.

What drove Tyndale was the gospel of justification by faith alone. This truth had to become known by the people in England, and they had to know it was *God’s* gospel and *God’s* truth as revealed in Scripture. Though he suffered so much difficulty and finally yielded his life for the cause, the gospel made it all to him a light affliction, but for a moment.

If any man ask me, seeing that faith justifieth me why I work? I answer love compelleth me. For as long as my soul feeleth what love God hath showed me in Christ, I cannot but love God again and his will and commandments and of love work them, nor can they seem hard to me.⁶

In God’s gracious provision, Tyndale was finally able to land in Antwerp, in what must have seemed to him a

strong tower. There an influential citizen named Thomas Poyntz offered him protection. Poyntz was a cousin of Lady Walsh of Little Sodbury Manor. Inside Poyntz’s house, Tyndale was safe, benefiting from a Netherlands (Habsburg) law that said citizens and their guests may not be arrested inside a citizen’s house. From this refuge, Tyndale worked in peace. With the help of a man named John Frith, who became to Tyndale like a Timothy to Paul, Tyndale busily revised his New Testament translation (a second edition published in 1534), published six books, and Englished the Old Testament books from Genesis to 2 Chronicles, and Jonah.

SIR THOMAS MORE, AND DEATH

In the late 1520s, the English authorities were engaging in outright persecution of those who embraced the Reformation. With the ascent of Thomas More as chancellor of England in 1529, persecution worsened. More’s little finger was thicker than his fathers’ loins. He arrived on the scene with an almost obsessive hatred of the Reformation, and Tyndale in particular. More pledged “to crush them and their beliefs, and if need be to burn heresy out of England with fire.”⁷

He was not speaking figuratively. In March of 1531 Thomas Bilney (one of the brotherhood at the White Horse Inn) was burned at the stake for passing out copies of Tyndale’s New Testament along with one of Tyndale’s other books. John Frith, Tyndale’s dear friend and helper in Antwerp, was burned at the stake for denying purgatory and the physical presence of Christ in the sacrament, having been captured by More on a return trip to England.

Tyndale himself was not spared. First, More took up the pen against Tyndale. In a scathing rage, More lodged nine volumes over the English Channel against Tyndale, to which Tyndale responded only once, defending the gospel of justification by faith alone and the authority of the Word of God. But More did not stop at words. He continuously searched for Tyndale. In the end, it took a “Judas” to catch him. Likely sent by More and Stokesley (current bishop of London), a man named Henry Philips found Tyndale in Antwerp. A learned Oxford man himself, Philips befriended Tyndale and even helped him in his work. Philips was patient. The weasel worked

3 David Teems, *Tyndale: The Man Who Gave God an English Voice*, (Nashville: Nelson, 2012), 62.

4 Teems, 78.

5 Peter Gurry, “The Life and Legacy of William Tyndale” (May 3, 2022), 7. <https://textandcanon.org/the-life-and-legacy-of-william-tyndale>. Accessed 9-17-2025.

6 Quoted in Teems, 208.

7 Teems, 137.

his way into Tyndale's confidence and into Poyntz's house. Finally, the trap set, Philips invited Tyndale out for dinner, having set up two officers in the alley just outside the house. Tyndale and Philips walked together down the narrow hall to the front door. Each sought to allow the other to go first out of the passageway and into the street. Finally, at the dogged insistence of Philips, Tyndale proceeded and was immediately ambushed, ignorant of the treachery of his "friend."

Tyndale was taken back to England and spent a year in a tower prison. Eventually he was condemned to die for his Reformation beliefs and his English Bible; not even Thomas Cromwell or Thomas Cranmer could save him. Because he was a priest and a scholar, Tyndale was given the respect of being strangled to death first and then burnt at the stake. The executioner slipped a looped rope over Tyndale's head (and the post), but the breath was not forced out of the reformer before he cried out, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"

While it is doubtful the king of England's (Henry VIII) eyes were ever truly opened, he was the king who,

only months after Tyndale's death, gave an English Bible his royal blessing. In less than a year, Tyndale's life's work, with the help of John Rogers, was in the hands of every plow boy in England.

CONCLUSION

Tyndale gave his life for the Word of God in English, a gift bequeathed to you and me. Do we value it? Let us realize the work of God in His use of Tyndale to give us the great privilege of the Scriptures faithfully translated into English and take up God's Word with awe and joy. Second, let everyone who reads this, plow boy or otherwise, learn something from Tyndale's commitment to persevere in a personal calling. Tyndale hoped, but did not know, what would become of his efforts. Yet he labored through thick and thin. May we all, whether we are called to do something great for the kingdom as Tyndale was, or are called to do something that seems less exciting and grand, be faithful, determined, and courageous, willing even to suffer to serve our great God who has revealed to us glorious truths in His Word.



TYNDALE'S TRANSLATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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In the begynnyng was that worde
and that worde was with god:
and god was that worde.

John 1:1¹

For we knowe wele that all thynges worke for the best
unto them that love god,
which also are called of purpose.
Romans 8:28.

Nowe abideth fayth, hope, and love, even these thre:
but the chefe of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13.

For I knowe whom I have beleved, and am sure that he
is able

to kepe that which I have committed to his keypyng
agaynst that daye.

1 Timothy 1:12

Fayth is a sure confidence off thynges which are hoped
for,

and a certayntie off thynges which are not sene.
Hebrews 11:1.

¹ All quotes are taken from *The New Testament 1526*, transl. William Tyndale, original spelling edition, ed. W. R. Cooper (London: The British Library, 2000).

These quotations are from William Tyndale's translation of the New Testament. Tyndale's New Testament was a significant Bible translation. It was the first English Bible that was translated from the original Greek language. It was the first mass-produced English Bible, making it the first one that the general public could afford. And, while a Bible translation that is faithful to the original languages is not inherently *Reformed* or *Protestant*, Tyndale's New Testament was intended to promote the cause of the Protestant Reformation. Finally, as another article will highlight, Tyndale's New Testament had a significant effect on the King James Version, published almost a century later.

This article focuses on Tyndale's New Testament translation. When he died in 1536, Tyndale had published at least three New Testament editions (1525, 1526, 1534). He began translating the Old Testament too. Parts of it were published in the 1530s, but he never fully completed the work.

HISTORY OF TYNDALE'S NEW TESTAMENT

The standard Bible version for all of Christendom in the Middle Ages was the Latin Vulgate. John Wycliffe (1320-1384) was the first to translate the complete Bible into English. Yet the Wycliffe Bible was a translation of the Latin, not the Hebrew and Greek. Also, most could not afford Wycliffe's Bible because it was printed and copied by hand.

Two events in the middle of the fifteenth century made possible the production of a better English translation. The first was the invention of the printing press. Now a Bible could be mass produced. The second was a resurgence in Hebrew and Greek studies. By bringing these to pass, God providentially prepared the English people to receive a better translation.

God also prepared Tyndale to produce that better translation. By 1515 Tyndale had learned Hebrew and Greek. The year 1524 found him fleeing England to Wittenberg, Germany; just two years earlier Luther had produced his translation of the New Testament in German.

Tyndale's first edition was published in Cologne in 1525. Tyndale probably chose to have it published in Cologne because from there it could be more easily shipped into England than from Wittenberg. Also,

Tyndale wanted to make clear that he was not Lutheran.² But while this first edition was being printed, the work was discovered and Tyndale had to flee. As a result, the 1525 edition was incomplete, consisting only of the book of Matthew and perhaps part of Mark. Though not a complete translation of the New Testament, this edition was the first mass printing of a part of the Bible in the English language.

In his preface to this edition, Tyndale explained his *goal* for this translation, but not his *reasons* for translating: "I have here translated...the New Testament for your spiritual edifying, consolation and solace.... The causes that moved me to translate, I thought better that others should imagine, then that I should rehearse them."³ Recognizing that he was writing to people who had never read the Bible with understanding before, Tyndale devoted most of his preface to explaining terms such as "Old Testament," "New Testament," "law," "gospel," "nature," "grace," and others.

The following year (1526), in Worms the complete New Testament was printed, "the first printed New Testament in English, and from the original Greek."⁴ From Germany copies were smuggled into England, where they cost the mere sum of less than four shillings, very affordable.⁵ Tyndale's preface to this edition began with these words:

Give diligence, reader (I exhort thee) that thou come with a pure mind, and, as the Scripture saith, with a single eye, unto the words of health and of eternal life, by the which (if we repent and believe them) we are born anew, created afresh, and enjoy the fruits of the blood of Christ....

Mark the plain and manifest places of the Scriptures, and in doubtful places see thou add no interpretation contrary to them; but (as Paul saith) let all be conformable and agreeing to the faith.⁶

² Edwards, *God's Outlaw*, 80.

³ Prologue from the Cologne quarto, 1525, in *The First New Testament Printed in English*, 3, as found online at https://dn720002.ca.archive.org/0/items/ENGTYN_DBS_HS/English-%281525%29-Tyndale-New-Testament-%28text%29.pdf. Accessed September 11, 2025.

⁴ Daniell, *Let There Be Light*, 15.

⁵ W. R. Cooper, "Introduction," *The New Testament 1526*, xv.

⁶ Preface to the Worms octavio edition of 1526, 13; see footnote 4 for the source.

To this, Tyndale added an explanation of the difference between law and gospel, and called his readers to repentance and faith. Tyndale was aware that he was introducing the true gospel, in written form, to English readers who had only recently begun to learn and hear of the true gospel.

Tyndale prepared a third New Testament edition in 1534 because he had come to understand the Greek language better, and realized the influence of the Hebrew Old Testament on the Greek New Testament. This 1534 edition “is the basis of most English Bibles thereafter. It is a triumph of Greek scholarship, and of attention to the forms and rhythms of English.”⁷

OPPOSITION TO TYNDALE'S NEW TESTAMENT

Satan always opposes God's Word and, under God's providence, worked in the hearts of men to oppose the 1526 translation. The Ephesians had burned their books of magic (Acts 19:9); Cuthbert Tunstall, the Romish Bishop of London, encouraged the burning of Tyndale's translation, by which the Holy Spirit would graciously bring some to faith and repentance. Slyly, Tunstall encouraged merchants on the continent to buy multiple copies of Tyndale's work; this would mean less copies could be smuggled into England.

Why did Tunstall oppose it so? First, the printing of a Bible in English undermined the position of Rome that the people did not need to know the Bible, but should rely on the priests to teach them what they did need to know. Second, Tyndale's translation did not accord with Rome's view of the church. It translated Latin words such as “church,” “priest,” and “do penance” with the English words “congregation,” “elder,” and “repent.”⁸ The Bible promoted Reformation ideas!

A London businessman told Tyndale of Tunstall's plot, and was surprised to hear Tyndale enthusiastically endorse the plan. Opposition to the English translation would only increase interest in it, requiring the printing of more Bibles, and giving Tyndale more money to pay his debts!⁹ Tyndale's plan worked. After all, as Paul reminded Timothy when Paul was in prison, “the word of God is not bound” (2 Tim. 2:9). God will not permit it to be.

⁷ Daniell, *Let There Be Light*, 29.

⁸ Brake, *Visual History*, 108.

⁹ Brake, 100.

TYNDALE'S STYLE

Wycliffe's New Testament had a notable deficiency: it was very wooden. The sentences used English words, but had a very Latin feel to them; they did not read smoothly.

Tyndale's translation did not suffer from this defect. If the quotations at the beginning of this article are not easy for you to read, it is because the spelling seems unique to us. But it was not unique to the people of Tyndale's day; they readily understood it. His translation was clear.

His translation had two other characteristics of a good Bible translation. It was an accurate translation, and it was memorable. Some phrases are still found in the King James Version, such as the Beatitudes and much of the Sermon on the Mount.

TYNDALE'S LEGACY

The New Testament in English is Tyndale's great legacy to the church. Even though we do not commonly use his translation today, his is the first in a series of English translations from the Greek, and in some way his translation influenced ours.

For making this translation, Tyndale gave his life; in 1536 he was burned at the stake. But as he died, he prayed, “Lord, open the king of England's eyes.” “Little did he know that not only did his prayer open the king's eyes, but all of England was soon to have open eyes.”¹⁰ But even before Tyndale died, God used him to fulfill a promise that he made to another man in 1522: “If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth a plow to know more of the Scripture than thou dost.”

¹⁰ Brake, 105.



WILLIAM TYNDALE AND THE KING JAMES BIBLE

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In the honorable history of the translation of the Bible into English, there is one heroic man and there is one magnificent version that stand out. The former is William Tyndale of Gloucestershire (c.1494-1536) and the latter is the Authorised Version (AV) or the King James Version (KJV) of 1611, named after King James VI of Scotland (1567-1625), who became King James I of England and Ireland (1603-1625). A helpful way to understand both better is to compare them, considering both their striking differences and their highly significant similarities.

DIFFERENCES

It could be said that, in the minds of both parties of Bible translators, the idea of their translations started with British monarchs—one providing a tenth-century example and the other issuing a seventeenth-century directive. At an early age, William Tyndale was impressed by the history of the long dead King Æthelstan (c.894-939), a grandson of Alfred the Great, who ordered the translation of part of the Bible from Jerome's Latin Vulgate into Anglo-Saxon.¹ The desire to translate the Scriptures burned deeply in the heart of Tyndale the more he studied God's Word and realized the terrible spiritual ignorance of his fellow countrymen. In 1604, James I, prompted by John Reynolds, the head of the Puritan delegation to England's recently crowned monarch at Hampton Court, commissioned a new version of the Scriptures that would bear his royal name.

The role of the contemporary English kings varied immensely. On the one hand, Henry VIII (1509-1547),

of the Welsh Tudor dynasty, sought to destroy William Tyndale and his translations of Scripture, such that he had to flee the realm never to return. On the other hand, James I, of the Scottish Stuart dynasty, not only initiated the King James Version, but also wrote fifteen rules or principles for its translation and authorized it as the official Bible for use in the Church of England. Whereas the English establishment was mortally opposed to William Tyndale in the 1520s and 1530s, both church and state heartily supported the production and promotion of the King James Version less than a century later.

The King James men translated all 66 books of the Bible, plus the uninspired Apocrypha. However, William Tyndale only did 42 scriptural books before his martyrdom, leaving 24 books undone. He translated the 27 books of the New Testament (published in 1525, 1526, and 1534), the Pentateuch (1530), Jonah (1531) and the historical books from Joshua to 2 Chronicles (1537).

Who did the translating? There were 54 men appointed to produce the King James Bible, though most reckon that only 47 of them were actually involved in the work. All were Anglican clergymen except one, Sir Henry Savile. They were arranged in six "companies" or committees, each with a "director." William Tyndale, of course, was just one man and so he is to be ranked with other worthy individuals who translated God's Word, such as Jerome (Latin Bible) and Martin Luther (German New Testament).

Who funded these men during their arduous and lengthy translation work? King James' men were financed not by the monarch but by the Church of England, with the bishops finding "livings" for those translators who needed additional income. William

¹ Benson Bobrick, *Wide As the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired* (USA: Penguin, 2002), 80.

Tyndale was supported economically by his friends, many of whom were involved in the cloth trade.

Where did the translators do their work? The King James men worked in England, with two of the committees based in Oxford (covering Isaiah-Malachi; the Gospels, Acts and Revelation), two of the committees based in Cambridge (1 Chronicles-Song of Solomon; the Apocrypha), and two of the committees based in Westminster in London (Genesis-2 Kings; the Epistles).² Though Tyndale started his translation work in England, most of it was done in continental Europe in what are now Germany (Cologne and Worms) and Belgium (Antwerp).

Just as one man, William Tyndale, translated most of the Scriptures into English, so he performed the work of editing and checking it more or less on his own. With the King James Bible, it was a collegial affair. The drafts produced by each of the six committees were thoroughly compared and revised for harmony with each other. Then a general committee met in London to review all the translations. Richard Bancroft, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1604-1610), made fourteen further changes.

Living relatively early in the Reformation age, Tyndale's literary resources for translating the Scriptures from their original Hebrew and Greek texts were limited to a few key books. Even though he was on the run, he apparently had access to Hebrew and Greek dictionaries and grammars, the ancient Greek Septuagint (Old Testament), the late fourth-century Latin Vulgate Bible of Jerome, Erasmus' Latin translation of the Greek New Testament (1522), Luther's German New Testament (1522), and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples' French New Testament (1523).³ From Tyndale's death to the publication of the King James Version, Hebrew and Greek scholarship had come a long way, and the Stuart translators were able, for example, to consult the libraries of the two oldest and greatest universities in England and in the whole of the British Isles: Oxford and Cambridge, at both of

which Tyndale had studied nearly a century before. They were also able to compare their work with recent translations of the Bible in other modern European languages, as well as earlier English versions: the Coverdale Bible (1535), Matthew's Bible (1537), Taverner's Bible (1539), the Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560), and the Bishops' Bible (1568).

What about the printing and distribution of the respective translations? The Authorized Version was produced by the royal printer, Robert Barker of London, and distributed publicly throughout the realm. It was very different with the translations of Scripture by William Tyndale. These were printed clandestinely by deliberately unnamed or misnamed foreign publishers on the River Rhine (Cologne and Worms) and the River Scheldt (Antwerp) in order to be shipped across the North Sea.⁴ This contraband was smuggled into ports on the east coast of England in bales of cloth. Though some copies were discovered and burnt by the authorities, Tyndale's books were disseminated and read with alacrity throughout England.

The circumstances of the two parties of translators could hardly have been more different. William Tyndale was a fugitive from his earthly king for the latter part of his adult life, as was David the son of Jesse during the early part of his adult life. The Gloucestershire man was hounded and hunted by the English state, the Romish church, and the Habsburg Empire, whereas King James' translators were honored by the English church and state of their day. Tyndale was betrayed for money by Henry Phillips, a thief and a gambler, who had squandered his inheritance; imprisoned for a year and a half in a cold, dark cell in the castle of Vilvoorde near Brussels in Belgium; and strangled to death while tied to a stake, before his dead body was burned. None of the Anglican churchmen who translated our Authorized Version were martyred.

What about their respective places in the history of the English Bible? Tyndale produced the first English translation of the whole of the New Testament directly from the Greek and the first English translation of 15 of the 39 books of the Old Testament directly from the

² These last two committees met in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey, where the Westminster Assembly deliberated (1643-1653) and produced all three of the creeds that constitute the Westminster Standards.

³ Besides his native English and the ancient languages of Hebrew, Greek and Latin, Tyndale was also skilled in German, French, Italian, and Spanish.

⁴ The cover page of some of Tyndale's books even claimed that they were published in Utopia (literally, no place) as a windup of his nemesis, Sir Thomas More, who wrote a famous work in 1516 with this as its title.

Hebrew. Moreover, Tyndale's were the first English translations of Scripture that were mass-produced by the relatively new invention of movable-type printing. If, as a first-generation reformer, Tyndale's work of translation was that of a pioneer in the field, the King James Version marked the culmination of almost a century of interest and labor in English Bible translation since the beginning of the Reformation in 1517.

SIMILARITIES

This relatively short article has given a considerable amount of space to the differences in the origin, scope, editing, printing, and distribution of the Authorized Version compared to William Tyndale's translations of the Scriptures. It has also contrasted the numbers, locations, financial support, literary resources, and political and religious circumstances of the respective translators. This has highlighted some aspects of the fascinating and colorful stories of these two Bible translations.

It remains, however, to state their main similarities, and stress the essential unity between Tyndale and the King James Version in the clear and refreshing river of faithful English Bible translation. Though they are presented more briefly than the differences, theologically and with a view to the Bible translations themselves, the similarities are the most important things for the child of God to know.

First, both translations used essentially the same source texts. Both employed the Hebrew Masoretic Text for the Old Testament. For the New Testament, Tyndale used Erasmus' Greek text, while King James' men used a later version of it, the Textus Receptus. This is not the case with most modern English Bible translations.

Second, both parties of translators held the biblical and orthodox doctrine of Scripture. Its inspiration is both plenary and verbal (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). Therefore, God's written Word is inerrant, infallible, perspicuous, and supremely authoritative. By Jehovah's "singular care and providence," it has been "kept pure in all ages" (Westminster Confession, 1:8). This God-honoring conviction, though essential for a Bible translator, is very rare in recent times.

Third, Tyndale and the King James men shared the same Reformed philosophy of translation: *formal*

equivalence, which prioritizes fidelity to the wording, grammar, and structure of the Hebrew and Greek originals. Sadly, most modern translations of the Bible employ *dynamic* equivalence, which claims to provide a rendering that is more natural to the target language (for example, the New International Version).

Fourth, both William Tyndale and King James' men used italics in their Bible translations to indicate words or phrases added for clarity or grammatical necessity in English that were not explicitly present in the Hebrew or Greek texts. Tyndale's use of italics was innovative for its time and reflected his deep commitment to the inspired sources.

Fifth, Tyndale and the King James men translated with one eye on the ears of the listeners, considering those who would hear the Word of God read aloud. The explanation is simple: this was part of their Reformation goal to make the Bible accessible to English-speaking men, women, and children. The early sixteenth-century English ploughboy, who was included in Tyndale's target audience, was illiterate and the Anglican churchmen who translated the Authorized Version were thinking of the public reading of sacred Scripture in divine worship services.

Sixth, in light of the preceding five points, it ought to come as no surprise that Tyndale heavily influenced the King James Bible. Citing a thorough 1998 analysis, Brian Moynahan states, "Tyndale's words account for 84 per cent of the New Testament [of the Authorized Version], and for 75.8 per cent of the Old Testament books that he translated."⁵ Many articles and books have been written detailing the profound impact of both translations on the English language and the religious culture of the English-speaking world. With the King James Bible in our hands, we hold an inestimable treasure: the infallibly inspired Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek, faithfully preserved by our heavenly Father, and coming to us in His gracious providence through the pioneering work and sacrifice of Tyndale, and the scholarship and majestic style of those 47 translators from the early Stuart period—the Word of God in our mother tongue "which [is] able to make [us] wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15)!

5 Brian Moynahan, *Book of Fire: William Tyndale, Thomas More and the Bloody Birth of the English Bible* (London: Abacus, 2002), 1.



WILLIAM TYNDALE'S HIGH REGARD FOR SCRIPTURE (1)

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INTRODUCTION

The assigned topic for these articles was “William Tyndale’s Doctrine of Scripture,” but Tyndale did not have any systematic doctrine of Scripture. Hints of a doctrine can be found in his writings, but so far was he from having a systematic and developed doctrine that words such as inspired and infallible, so important in a well-developed doctrine of Scripture, are not found in his writings.

Different reasons can be found for this lack of a developed doctrine of Scripture. Outstanding is Tyndale’s interest in putting the Scriptures into the hands of the common folk. That was more urgent to him than writing doctrinal treatises. He was far more interested in helping God’s people than in sitting in a theologian’s chair. Thus he spent his time in translating the Pentateuch, the New Testament, and a few other books into English, a work that was cut short by his martyr’s death at age 42. Perhaps if he had lived longer he might have given us a doctrine of Scripture, but it is more likely that he would have given those extra years to the work of translation.

What stands out in Tyndale’s writings is his high regard for Scripture as the Word of God. He did not doubt that Scripture was inspired and infallible, though he never used those words. Tyndale assumed always that Scripture was God’s Word and the last word on anything pertaining to faith and life. He reminded his readers repeatedly that Scripture is the only guide for faith and life because it shows the way of salvation:

Give diligence, reader, I exhort thee, that thou come with a pure mind, and, as the scripture saith, with a single eye, unto the words of health and of eternal life; by the which, if we repent and believe them, we are born anew, created afresh, and enjoy the fruits

of the blood of Christ; which blood crieth not for vengeance, as the blood of Abel, but hath purchased life, love, favour, grace, blessing, and whatsoever is promised in the scriptures to them that believe and obey God; and standeth between us and wrath, vengeance, curse, and whatsoever the scripture threateneth against the unbelievers and disobedient, which resist and consent not in their hearts to the law of God, that it is right, holy, just, and ought so to be.¹

This high regard for Scripture was also evident from his willingness to suffer for his life’s work, work that was cut short by his martyrdom for God and for His Word.

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

Though Tyndale did not publish a systematic doctrine of Scripture, there are some notable aspects of the doctrine of Scripture in his writings. Outstanding in Tyndale’s writings are his references to the analogy of faith. Though only mentioned a few times, Tyndale takes it for granted that this follows from the fact that Scripture is God’s Word.

The analogy of faith is part of the truth that Scripture is the one Word of God and must be interpreted in light of itself. No passage of Scripture may ever be understood apart from the rest. The analogy of faith means that the difficult parts of Scripture must be interpreted in light of the plainer and easier parts.

Tyndale says:

Mark the plain and manifest places of the scriptures, and in doubtful places see thou add no interpretations contrary to them; but (as Paul

1 William Tyndale, “Epistle to the Reader,” in *Works of William Tyndale* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), 389. This “Epistle” was his introduction to his translation of the New Testament, first published in 1526.

saith) let all be conformable and agreeing to the faith.²

This principle means that one does not take what Revelation 20 says about the thousand years and the binding of Satan (not an easy passage to understand), and interpret it apart from more plain passages like Psalm 50:10 and Matthew 12:29. One does not interpret James 2:24, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only,” apart from the teaching of Romans 3:28 and Galatians 3:11. Scripture is the one Word of God and may not contradict itself.

SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS ITSELF

Closely related is the important truth that Scripture interprets itself, which is to say that the Holy Spirit, the divine Author of Scripture, is the only Interpreter of Scripture. The Spirit tells us what a passage of Scripture means when that passage and its words are carefully studied in light of the rest of Scripture and explained by other passages of Scripture. Tyndale’s words to this effect are:

For, saith Peter (2 Pet. i.), “No prophecy in the scripture hath any private interpretation. For the scripture came not by the will of man; but the holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” No place of the scripture may have a private exposition; that is, it may not be expounded after the will of man, or after the will of the flesh, or drawn unto a worldly purpose contrary unto the open texts, and the general articles of the faith, and the whole course of the scripture, and contrary to the living and practising of Christ and the apostles and holy prophets. For as they came not by the will of man, so may they not be drawn or expounded after the will of man: but as they came by the Holy Ghost, so must they be expounded and understood by the Holy Ghost.³



The question is never whether I have or someone else has the correct interpretation, but “what saith the Scriptures?”

In speaking of the correct sense, which he calls the literal sense of Scripture, Tyndale says the same:

Beyond all this, *when we have found out the literal sense of the scripture by the process of the text, or by a like text of another place*, then go we, and as the scripture borroweth similitudes of worldly things, even so we again borrow similitudes or allegories of the scripture, and apply them to our purposes; which allegories are no sense of the scripture, but free things besides the scripture, and altogether in the liberty of the Spirit.⁴

THE LITERAL SENSE OF SCRIPTURE

Tyndale’s emphasis on the literal sense of Scripture was not the slavish literalism of many fundamentalists and dispensationalists, but a reaction against the Romish method of interpreting Scripture in order to obscure its plain sense:

They divide the scripture into four senses, the literal, tropological, allegorical, and anagogical. The literal sense is become nothing at all: for the pope hath taken it clean away, and hath made it his possession. He hath partly locked it up with the false and counterfeited keys of his traditions, ceremonies, and feigned lies; and partly driveth men from it with violence of sword: for no man dare abide by the literal sense of the text, but under a protestation, “If it shall please the pope.”⁵

What Tyndale calls the literal sense could better be called the plain or obvious sense of Scripture—what has come to be known as the historical-grammatical interpretation of a passage. That method of interpretation has to do with the words and grammar of a passage in its historical context. It assumes that words and grammar have plain meaning and simply asks, What do the words and grammar mean and what is the author trying to say in the historical context?—this without attempting to force some private interpretation on the Scriptures.

As Tyndale saw, this “literal” sense of Scripture does not exclude the possibility that Scripture itself uses figures of speech, analogies, types, proverbs,

2 Tyndale, 389.

3 Tyndale, “The Obedience of a Christian Man,” in *Works*, 317.

4 Tyndale, 305. Emphasis added.

5 Tyndale, 303.

allegories, and symbols, but these belong to that “literal” sense:

Thou shalt understand, therefore, that the scripture hath but one sense, which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all, and the anchor that never faileth, whereunto if thou cleave, thou canst never err or go out of the way. And if thou leave the literal sense, thou canst not but go out of the way. Neverthelater, the scripture useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles, or allegories, as all other speeches do ; but that which the proverb, similitude, riddle, or allegory signifieth, is ever the literal sense, which thou must seek out diligently: as in the English we borrow words and sentences of one thing, and apply them unto another, and give them new significations.⁶

“Literal” to Tyndale does not mean, therefore, that “thousand years” (Rev. 20:1-7) can be nothing else but a millennium measured by calendar years. It may be symbolic or a figure of speech as the “thousand hills” is in Psalm 50:10.

It is interesting that after translating the Five Books of Moses and the New Testament, Tyndale turned to the historical books of the Old Testament. Most of these he translated, but his translations (never published) are lost, with the exception of his published translation of Jonah. Following the principle of historical-grammatical interpretation, he believed that the book of Jonah was actual history:

Now, that thou mayest read Jonas fruitfully, and not as a poet’s fable, but as an obligation between God and thy soul, as an earnest-penny given thee of God, that he will help thee in time of need, if thou turn to him, and as the word of God, the only food and life of thy soul, this mark and note.⁷

He believed that Jonah was actual history and believed this as result of letting Scripture interpret itself:

And that Jonas was three days and three nights in the belly of his fish, we cannot thereby prove unto the Jews and infidels, or unto any man, that Christ must therefore die, and be buried, and rise again: but we use the ensample and likeness to strength[en] the faith of the weak. For he that believeth the one, cannot doubt in the other: inasmuch as the hand of God was no less mighty in preserving Jonas alive

against all natural possibility, and in delivering him safe out of his fish, than in raising up Christ again out of his sepulchre.⁸

VERBAL INSPIRATION

What Tyndale says about the literal sense of Scripture is part of the doctrine of verbal inspiration, that the very words of Scripture are from God. Scripture is not the Word of God in some ill-defined sense, that is, only in its teachings or themes, but in the actual words. This principle, the doctrine of verbal inspiration, guided Tyndale’s work of translating the Scriptures. He was concerned that his translation reproduce as carefully as possible God’s own words. He says in “A Pathway to Holy Scripture,”

I have here translated, brethren and sisters, most dear and tenderly beloved in Christ, the New Testament, for your spiritual edifying, consolation, and solace; exhorting instantly and beseeching those that are better seen in the tongues than I, and that have better gifts of grace, to interpret the sense of the Scripture, and meaning of the Spirit, than I, to consider and ponder my labour, and that with the spirit of meekness; and if they perceive in any places that I have not attained the very sense of the tongue, or meaning of the scripture, or have not given the right English word, that they put to their hands to amend it, remembering that so is their duty to do. For we have not received the gifts of God for ourselves only, or for to hide them; but for to bestow them unto the honouring of GOD and Christ, and edifying of the congregation, which is the body of Christ.⁹

And again,

If I shall perceive, either by myself or by information of other, that aught be escaped me, or might more plainly be translated, I will shortly after cause it to be amended. Howbeit, in many places methinketh it better to put a declaration in the margin, than to run too far from the text. And in many places, where the text seemeth at the first chop hard to be understood, yet the circumstances before and after, and often reading together, make it plain enough.¹⁰

6 Tyndale, “The Obedience of a Christian Man,” in *Works*, 303-4.

7 Tyndale, “The Prologue to the Prophet Jonas,” in *Works*, 453.

8 Tyndale, 457.

9 Tyndale, *Works*, 7, footnote 1.

10 Tyndale, “Prologue Upon the Gospel of St. Matthew,” *Works*, 468. As for the word “chop,” the editor adds this note: “Lit.: at the first proposal of a bargain: or the first consideration.”

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Would God that modern translators had the same regard for the actual words of God. Lacking a belief in verbal inspiration, they follow, in translating, the principle that the only thing necessary is to get across to the reader the message or theme of a passage—the actual words do not matter that much. They often follow what is known as the principle of “dynamic equivalence,” that is, “get the idea across no matter what words you use.” The extreme is a paraphrase like *The Message* which renders Psalm 1:1, “How well God must like you—you don’t walk in the ruts of those blind-as-bats, you don’t stand with the good-for-nothings, you don’t take your seat among the know-it-alls,” not even close to what God actually said and bordering on blasphemy.

Tyndale’s high regard for the Scriptures was not abstract. The most important thing about the Scriptures was its “usefulness.” He says in his “Preface to the Five Books of Moses,”

Though a man had a precious jewel and a rich, yet if he wist not the value thereof, nor wherefore it served, he were neither the better nor richer of a straw. Even so, though we read the scripture, and babble of it never so much, yet if we know not the use of it, and wherefore it was given, and what is therein to be sought, it profiteth us nothing at all. It is not enough, therefore, to read and talk of it only, but we must also desire God, day and night instantly, to open our eyes, and to make us understand and feel wherefore the scripture was given, that we may apply the medicine of the scripture, every man to his own sores; unless that we intend to be idle disputers, and brawlers about vain words, ever gnawing upon the bitter bark without, and never attaining unto the sweet pith within, and persecuting one another in defending of lewd imaginations and fantasies of our own invention.¹¹

Does that say anything to you and me?

11 Tyndale, *Works*, 398.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CORRECTION

Prof. R. Cammenga’s article in the October 1, 2025 issue: “Of the Law of God” ended too abruptly (see page 24). We finish the article here, with apologies to Prof. Cammenga for the oversight: “Not the law our righteousness, but Christ our righteousness! Not our obedience, but His perfect obedience!”

SB FOR BINDING

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