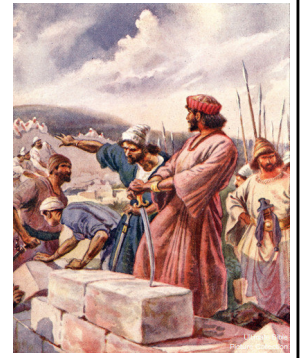


The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

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Words

Words are simple things. Yet we rely on these simple things more than we may realize. We probably do not always appreciate the power that resides in these simple things. We communicate through words. We learn through words. We engage in recreational activities that are associated with words in one way or another. So many of these are so taken for granted that we may not always pay attention to any of it. Let us also consider that the gospel, which consists of words, is the power to save the soul (Rom. 1:16).

One of the first things an infant does is learn to say a few words. This initial foray into communication will absolutely thrill a parent. That infant will continue to add more and more words to its vocabulary. Those words will greatly factor into everything that child will become as an adult. Likewise are the words for a babe in Christ.

If you ever learned anything, words were involved. Education? Some skill? How to throw a curve ball? When to plant potatoes? How to fix your hair? How to write a check? How to drive a car? All will be taught, one way or another, through words and thus learned by everyone.

I remember a man in West Virginia saying that words are the vehicles of thought. Of course they are! There is no better way to express our thoughts than through words. I also remember a radio personality say that words mean things. Of course they do! That further illustrates the importance of words and how we should never take them lightly. We ought to use caution in order to insure that good, and not harm, is the result of our employment of words. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Prov. 25:11). "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov.

15:1). "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones" (Prov. 16:24).

We read this in Hebrews 1:1, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets" (Heb. 1:1). When God spoke to the fathers and the prophets, what did they hear? They heard words. God called to Moses from Mt. Sinai and, among other things, said this, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel" (Ex.19:5-6). The Law itself consisted of words spoken and written in stone (Deut. 5:22). God inspired the prophets of Old to speak His words to the people, "Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth'" (Jer. 1:9).

We also read in Hebrews 1:2, "[God] has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (Heb. 1:2). God now speaks through his Son, Jesus Christ. And how has Jesus spoken unto us? He speaks through words. His words are described as "gracious" (Lk. 4:22). So different were the words spoken by Jesus that they astonished His listeners, even those sent to apprehend Him (Jn. 7:46). Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (Jn. 6:63). Those who heard them knew that they were the words of eternal life (Jn. 6:68). The words of Jesus are permanent, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matt. 24:35). There is an absolute completion to the words of Christ in which everything has

been said as He wished it to be said. There is not going to be some source from heaven that is going to change His words and no one on earth should be so audacious as to alter them in any way.

The followers of Jesus went out into the world to continue His message. The very first time the gospel was preached after Jesus ascended to Heaven was on the Day of Pentecost. In the very first sentence of that gospel address, Peter implores his audience to "heed my words" (Acts 2:14). He said, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know" (Acts 2:22). Truly the words of the gospel are about Jesus of Nazareth, how He is the Son of God and what He teaches us to do. And—it is all done through words!

These words are ever so important. Listen as Jesus still speaks to us about His words and the importance of them. "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak" (Jn. 12:46-50). Those words will have the potential to save us if we believe them. They certainly will judge us if we reject them. I do not know how to emphasize any stronger the importance of the words of Christ than is in these few verses!

There was a man, a Gentile, named Cornelius who understood how important these words are. He gathered his kindred and near friends to hear the words of the gospel of Christ (Acts 10:24, 33). What they were about to hear were "...words by which you and all your household will be saved" (Acts 11:14). We see that those who heard of this occasion "...glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life'" (Acts 11:18).

We read of the necessity to adhere to "sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13). The word "sound" comes from the same Greek word as our English word "hygiene." Strong says this means, "to have sound health, that is, be well (in body); figuratively to be uncorrupt (true in doctrine): - be in health, (be safe and) sound, (be) whole (-some)." We might say that something or someone described as "sound" is "just what the doctor ordered." 2 Timothy 1:13 is telling us that there are some words that are that way. 1 Timothy 6:3 mentions "wholesome words" ("wholesome" is the same Greek translated elsewhere as "sound"). These "wholesome words" are "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ." Dear reader, if they are wholesome or sound words and they are good for me, then I want them and you should want them. We need these words for our salvation. We need them because they will tell us what God has said. We need them because in them we will find what God wants us to do. Let me further emphasize that we need **all** the words and we need them accurately transmitted to us so we can get the most and the best out of them.

There is a serious admonition at the end of Revelation about words. In this particular admonition there is an implication that something might happen with them. Apparently, some may want to alter words. This is an alteration that is evidently done to change the meaning. This may not be done and, in the most serious language possible, John writes about it. "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19). This tells us that extreme

caution ought to be used in translating the words of God—each one of them!

The words of the New Testament were not written in English. They were written in a first century language known as Koine Greek. It was a language that was known throughout the world as it existed at the time. It may be said that this was the universal language of the day. For centuries Bibles in Koine Greek was all that was available. It was not until the invention of moveable type printing that translating any of the Bible into anything other than the original languages was remotely feasible. Handwritten translations existed, but were extremely few in number. We stand on the receiving end of technology that has allowed the Bible to be translated out of the original language into many languages of the world today. My native language is English and, being unable to read or speak Koine Greek, I need a Bible in English so I can have these words that I need. I am sure that the majority of those who read this article find themselves with the same need. I want the words and I want them accurately translated. I do not care so much about the name of the translation or its legacy or its history. I want the words because I need them and I want all of them. I can't imagine any other scenario.

There are a number of translations available in English today. I do not know how many are currently being mass-produced. I suppose I could take a catalogue and count them, but I am not disposed to do so. All English translations are the product of human translators. Consequently, they are all susceptible to mistakes and flaws. I do not charge all of these with being damnable blasphemy. It is just something that is inevitable when one translates from one language to another. However, we can learn much and make physical and mental notes of correction in the places where it is necessary. Not one English translation has ever been inspired by God as the days of inspiration ended long before there even was an English language. Some of these translations are quite good, some are fair, some are less than adequate, and some beg description. I do not have a list categorizing them all, nor do I own one of each although I do own several. Some have attempted to translate as closely as possible in a word-for-word fashion. Some have determined to fol-

low a thought-for-thought procedure. There will be more accuracy in the former than in the latter. Thought-for-thought translating leaves the door open for the translator to become a commentator and, unfortunately, this has probably happened too often.

Some of the translations available today exist on the basis of being something that is "readable." This idea of readability is open for debate. I prefer to think that all translations in English are capable of being read by folks who are conversant in the English language! Nevertheless, there will appear reviews that will pronounce some translation as "more readable." More readable than what is, as far as I can tell, unsaid. For the life of me I cannot understand the great drive for something "more readable." It appears to me that, in some instances, accuracy will be happily forfeited as long as the product is "readable." In such cases, one wonders what is accomplished by the exchange! A more "readable" translation will likely deprive us of the words we need or change them until they are far from what was originally said. Leland Ryken, in his book *The Word of God in English*, wrote on page 91, "To put it bluntly, what good is readability if a translation does not accurately render what the Bible actually says." I believe he hit the nail right on the head. It might be good for people to realize that what we need are the words and that they are THE most important thing. I am confident that we can handle any supposed issue of readability when that comes, but first and foremost, give us the words. We simply must have the words lest we miss what God would have us to know.

"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (Jn. 14:23)

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