

Scholarism

by Hendrik Joubert

The dark ages is often described as the time during which the Bible was in the hands of a select few who could read Latin and Greek. This situation was encouraged by the Catholic Church because knowledge could be manipulated. Although there were parts of the Bible available in English as early as the seventh century, John Wycliffe is accredited with producing the first full translation of the Bible, hand written. The Protestant movement put the Bible back into the hands of the common people. However, it was soon removed again, only this time at an intellectual level when it was suggested that one has to receive formal training in order to properly handle the text. (1Corinthians 1:18-31; 2:1-4)

The professor addressing young aspiring preachers for the Dutch Reformed Church at the first class for New Testament Greek told them if they hope to use their knowledge of the language to prove some doctrinal point they would be sorely disappointed. He explained that if one could not prove it from a reputable translation, it is unlikely that you would be able to do so from the Greek. Consider the scholarly arguments proving opposing positions from the Greek – in spite of the unique characteristics of this language. The situation reminds one of the following warning: ***If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, ⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.*** (1Timothy 6:4)

Consider the exclusive arguments made based upon **words** used in a specific translation, only to find that another supply synonyms which do not support the argument. One may easily consider optional readings by comparing translations, and then notice which reading is more truthful to the context. A friend used to declare that he is a firm believer that the Bible will interpret itself, if we will allow it through careful study.

How many of us know all the intricate rules of the English language? Yet we communicate without much difficulty – unless we have an agenda. How many of the Corinthians knew the technical aspects of the language Paul communicated in? ***For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God.*** (1Corinthians 1:26-29)

How many of the **Galatians** knew that Paul used the *hortatory subjunctive* when he made the statement that they were to ***do good unto all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith*** (6:10), and that it therefore meant that it was the duty of the church, and not of the individual – in spite of the context? Ignoring the fact that every verse dealing with the benevolent acts of the church specifies that it is *for*

saints, by saints? So that **Matthew 6:33** is fulfilled in this most elementary way – God takes care of those who seek the kingdom first? His care should not be used as *bait* to lure carnally minded people to consider the gospel. The gospel, His **power for salvation** (**Romans 1:16-17**), demands an unconditional renewing of the mind. (**Romans 12:1-2**)

Over the years specialized training and argumentation became more prevalent in the church, and the old time common sense preaching lost its attraction for many. We (unofficially) look up to scholars to define our faith, and it is not a personal matter of wrestling with the scriptures in an elementary way as we **long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.** (**1Peter 2:2**) Citing scholars make us look less *primitive* in the eyes of the world. Certainly we are to depend on those able to teach, but not without **examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so?** (**Acts 17:11**), in order that our trust may be in the **Lord** and not in men. (**1 Corinthians 4:6; 2Corinthians 2:4-5**) I really do find it somewhat amusing that we have to talk about the rules of interpretation (*hermeneutics*) in order to prove a point. Again common sense should dictate as we take care that we do not find ways to make our view exclusive with the use of fancy terminology. Paul's advice or instruction to the Ephesians simply is **when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.** (**Ephesians 3:4**)

We may spend time on the semantics of what may or may not be included in the context of **Romans 14**, but one important lesson we may learn from the text is our personal responsibility to **search the Scriptures daily** in order to establish God's will for us. **The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God** (**14:22**) suggests a personal responsibility that goes wider than the immediate context. One should be careful to **not condemn himself in what he approves.** Practicing things without conviction will condemn us: **But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.** (**14:23**)

The responsible Christian should wrestle with the Scriptures daily to confirm the will of God is carried out in his or her life. In the letter to the **Corinthians** Paul writes: **my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.** (**1Corinthians 2:4-5**) **Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.** (**1Peter 4:11**)