

PREFACE

As I proposed in our last session, were this portion of Chapter Seven a stage play, v32 is where the main character would turn upstage, back to the other character, to nail down the specifics of what he has just been philosophizing to the audience. Now in this next paragraph we listen in on face-to-face dialogue; no longer general philosophy, now the main character—the apostle Paul—gets down to real-life.

But before we dig into that paragraph, the passage before us presents a perfect opportunity to pause and address in greater detail the subject of discrepancies between our popular translations—something which seems to come up in just about every session.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:32-35.

In our next passage we find three obvious differences between our common translations—primarily between the KJVs and the rest.

v32

NASB, NIV: “...free from concern”; ESV: “anxieties”
KJV: “...without carefulness”; NKJV: “without care”

v34a

NASB, NIV, ESV: “...and his interests are divided”;
KJVs: “There is a difference between a wife and a virgin.”

v34b

NASB: “The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin”; NIV: “An unmarried woman or virgin”; ESV: “And the unmarried or betrothed woman”
KJVs: “The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord”

For our purposes—this is just a thumbnail sketch of the background explanation for these differences (a “*Reader’s Digest*” version)—we can whittle down the reason for these and similar discrepancies found in our NT text to four common possibilities:

1. the theological or doctrinal stance of the translators ([seen less often in our common versions \[KJVs, NASB, NIV, ESV\], but may be evidenced more often in less-common versions](#));
2. the translators’ understanding of the context, and thus choice of English words with which to assign to a particular Greek word or phrase;
3. as is very often the case with the KJV, the vernacular of the era in which the translation was made; ([e.g., “In my Father’s house are many mansions” \[John 14:2\], Greek *mone*’\) *Doesn’t mean it is necessarily wrong; just doesn’t translate well for the 21st century.*](#)
4. the different source Greek manuscripts used by the translators.

This latter is the predominate reason for the differences we see in this passage.

There are some 25,000 early manuscripts [of the NT] in existence, almost 6,000 of which (many being only recognizable fragments) are Greek texts and the others being early translations of the Greek New Testament. The earliest textual evidence we have was copied not long after the original [40-60 years]. (*Institute for Creation Research*)

Over recent centuries there have been a number of scholarly efforts to accurately compile and refine these early manuscripts into a cohesive version of the NT Greek. [This set of scholars over here, another set of scholars over there, doing their own compilations—putting in order the thousands of Greek fragments from the many “shoeboxes”—not translating, but simply compiling a cohesive, one-package Greek NT.] Very often—but not always—the discrepancies we discover between our modern translations can be traced back to the translators working from different versions of these Greek compilations.

On the surface this might sound as if we can have little faith in the accuracy of *any* of our versions of God’s inspired word. But that would be wrong. Renowned Bible scholar F.F. Bruce declares, “There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.”

The academic discipline of “textual criticism” assures us that the Bible translations we have today are essentially the same as the ancient Bible manuscripts, with the exception of a few inconsequential discrepancies that have been introduced over time through copyist error. We must remember that the Bible was hand-copied for hundreds of years before the invention of the first printing press. Nevertheless, the text is exceedingly well preserved. Of the approximately 20,000 lines that make up the entire New Testament, only 40 lines are in question. These 40 lines represent one quarter of one percent of the entire text and do not in any way affect the teaching and doctrine of the New Testament. Compare this with Homer’s *Iliad*. Of the approximately 15,600 lines that make up Homer’s classic, 764 lines are in question. These 764 lines represent over 5% of the entire text, and yet nobody seems to question the general integrity of that ancient work. (taken from *All About the Journey* web site)

Our Bible—no matter the translation—is vastly more reliable, more authenticated than Homer’s *Iliad*, Caesar’s *The Gallic Wars*, Herodotus’ *History*, or all of Shakespeare’s plays. Written as recently as the 1600s, **there are no surviving manuscripts of any of William Shakespeare’s 37 plays**, and scholars have been forced to fill some gaps in his works. Compare this with the over 5,600 copies and fragments of the NT in the original Greek that, together, assure us that nothing’s been lost. In fact, all of the New Testament except eleven minor verses can be reconstructed outside the Bible from the writings of the early church leaders in the second and third centuries AD. So understand that time frame: The NT was written during the first century AD—from, by our calendar, AD 0 to AD 100. Then we have individuals—church leaders, etc.—writing out, copying these original documents, sometimes immediately, sometimes within the next century, and the next. So, historically speaking, you have hundreds of copies written not just very soon after the originals, but at times by those who even knew the original writers—at time fresh from the apostles’ handwriting! There is *nothing* in ancient manuscript evidence to match such textual availability and integrity. (Ibid).

So we are left to ask the question: Should we be concerned about that “one quarter of one percent” that is in question? Does this render the Bible we hold in our hands unreliable? The bottom line is this: In those few passages about which questions still exist, *no questionable passage contradicts any Bible teaching*. That is, just as in the passage before us in Chapter Seven, none of the discrepancies between the translations changes or even challenges our theology, our doctrine, or the gospel. Put bluntly, not one of these affects your salvation in Christ Jesus, nor your eternity with Him. They are peripheral in nature.

I would take the position, as do many others, that God, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, not only breathed into existence His written word, but that He, through the many centuries that followed—up to this very day—ensures the faithful and dependable integrity of that written word. Father God has never let loose of this Book; even today He is superintending its essential inerrancy.

At the same time we must remember that no translation, no commentary, no margin explanation in any study Bible is one-hundred percent perfect. There will be times when the KJV is the best, there will be times when the ESV is best. But again, the Holy Spirit has never relinquished His control of this Book: the same Spirit who wrote it and helps us understand it, remains alongside to help us properly adjudicate even these small, ultimately inconsequential variations.

There are several passages from God’s word that should rightly haunt the sleep of those who teach it.

Read 1 Timothy 1:6-7.

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-4.

Right there is a description of our own times. People who claim to be Christian ministers preaching and teaching heresy and calling it truth; dispensing teaching utterly against God's word. Why? Because it is what the people want to hear—or worse, to make themselves rich.

Read James 3:1.

Acknowledging that burden and personalizing it, every week I do *my* best to

- compare all the common translations;
- examine, where necessary, the original language, whether it be Greek or Hebrew;
- add to this the scholarship of respected commentators—every one of which is smarter than I—comparing them to each other in the same way as the different translations;
- finally—but certainly not least—I rely on the counsel of the Holy Spirit to help me digest all this information and understand any given passage ([John 15:26](#))—all the while praying that my conclusions are faithful to God's word as a whole, and will both glorify Christ and edify His body.

I would encourage every one of you, whenever and wherever possible, to do the same in your *personal* study. Use every tool at your disposal to understand God's written word. Don't settle for what you think you find on the surface, but

- establish the habit of digging deeper,
- compare translations,
- consult one or more reliable commentaries, and
- find joy and fulfillment in doing everything you can to grasp the truth of God's word.

Why? Can there be anything more important—aside from worship itself—to a Christian's daily walk in Christ and in the Spirit than to know and understand what God the Father has put down—in writing!—for the conduct of that walk? Is there anything more important than that?

Discrepancies

| | Total Lines | In Question | % of Whole |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| New Testament | 20,000 | 40 | 0.25 % |
| Homer's <i>Iliad</i> | 15,600 | 764 | > 5.0 % |

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Session 69

