

Sunday, January 7, 2018—I Corinthians 13:4-8 Doth Thou Readeth an Archaic Bible?

## Introduction

- It has been four weeks since we were last in I Corinthians 13. We took a break from this study for a few weeks during the Holiday Season to talk about some other things.
- Before continuing, I would like to review a few general points about the context and the content of chapter 13.
  - I Corinthians 12:31—the Corinthians had become covetous and competitive with respect to the spiritual gifts. Therefore, Paul is going to show unto them a more excellent way than the gifts.
  - I Corinthians 13:1-3—Paul opens the chapter by stating that even if one can speak with the tongues of men and angels if they do not have “charity” they are all noise and no substance.
- After spending two weeks looking at issues related to the words “love” and “charity” our last study dealt with verses 1-3.
  - *Webster’s 1828*—“ **In a general sense, love**, benevolence, good will; **that disposition of heart** which inclines men to think favorably of their fellow men, and to do them good. In a theological sense, it includes supreme love to God, and universal good will to men.
    - 1 Corinthians 8:1. Colossians 3:14. 1 Timothy 1:5
  - *OED*—“1) Christian love: a word representing *caritas* of the Vulgate, as a frequent rendering of *ἀγάπη* (agape) in N.T. Greek. With various applications: as
    - C) The Christian love of one's fellow human beings; Christian benignity of disposition expressing itself in Christ-like conduct: one of the ‘three Christian graces’, fully described by St. Paul, 1 Cor. xiii.
    - “But the 16th cent. English versions from Tyndale to 1611, while rendering *ἀγάπη* sometimes ‘love’, sometimes ‘charity’, . . . used ‘love’ more often (about 86 times), confining ‘charity’ to 26 passages in the Pauline and certain of the Catholic [Jewish] Epistles (not in 1 John), and the Apocalypse, where the sense is specifically [1c](#) below.” (*OED* etymological information)
- Verse 1—notice how the lack of “charity” cancels out the legitimate witness of the gift of tongues. Instead of being a wonderful manifestation of God the Holy Spirit a lack “charity” transforms them into a sounding brass or tinkling cymbal. Imagine if every time you speak all people heard was a sounding brass.

- Verse 2—Paul says that even if one could do/understand all these wonderful things they are “nothing” if they don’t have “charity.”
- Verse 3—this verse proves that “charity” in this context is not talking about giving one’s money to help the less fortunate. Rather “charity” is “disposition of the heart” out of which the action is taken.
  - “Give my body to be burned”—during our last study on I Corinthians 13, I said that I wasn’t sure what this phrase was talking about. There are no obviously cross references to aid with understanding what Paul is referring to. I said that I was open to hearing from anyone who might have some thoughts on the matter. After the message Bud Chrysler sent me an email that contained the following:
    - Cornelius Tacitus (Annals 15.44), a Roman historian writing about AD 115-117. This would be about 85 years or so after the crucifixion of Jesus. Tacitus made his comments in the context of discussing Nero’s blaming the Christians for the fire of Rome in AD 64, which Nero was rumored to have started himself:
      - “Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. **Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.**”
- According to Paul, one could give all their money to feed the poor and give their body to burned and have it been of no profit if it wasn’t done with “charity.”

### I Corinthians 13:4

- **Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,**
- 12 times in verses 4 through 8 the reader of the King James Bible encounters a verb with the extended “eth” verb ending. Critics of the KJB will often chastise the use of the extended verb ending as archaic and cite its use as a reason why 21<sup>st</sup> century readers should use a modern version. Nothing could be further from the truth.

- The use of the extended verb ending “eth” was already becoming archaic in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the KJB was being translated. In his ground-breaking book *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*, Alister McGrath states the following:
  - “One of the most interesting aspects of the King James Bible is its use of ways of speaking that were already becoming archaic in the standard English of the first decade of the seventeenth century.” (McGrath, 265)
- Leland Ryken author of *The Legacy of the King James Bible* comments on I Corinthians 13:3-4, 7 stating the following:
  - “The passage flows in a wave-like cadence out of the rise and fall of sound. The passage also shows how the unaccented eth verb endings keep the rhythm flowing smoothly. Robbed of these verb endings, modern translations often bump along in staccato fashion.” (Ryken, 140)
- Why did the translators retain these archaic forms if they were already falling out of usage in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century? Because they were commissioned to produce a Bible that would be “read in churches.” Even the *Reader’s Digest* book *The Bible Through the Ages* recognizes this fact regarding the KJB.
  - “Because the text of the King James Version was to be used at church services, the translators worked hard to make it suitable for reading aloud—its punctuation indicated emphasis and its rhythmic prose could be used to great effect. . . The text’s oral quality can also be traced to the translation process. Since each translator had to read his version aloud to the others, his work was written as language to be spoken.” (quoted in Ryken, 140)
- This auditory fine tuning was a product of the culture in which the translators were reared.
- “The demise of the Roman Catholic Church in England—outlawed as it was from the days of Henry VIII, confiscated as all its properties were, abbeys, castles, lands—left a hole in culture, a big gaping hole.” (Teems, 180)
- “In 1576, James Burbage built the first theater in London. There had not been a theater in town for more than a thousand years, since the Roman occupation. . . What was lost to the people with the pageantry of the Roman Catholic Church was returned to them with the rise of the theater. This great gaping hole in culture gave them a new champion, indeed, a new kind of church, a new priesthood. And it was so very English.” (Teems, 181)
- “The pulpit was exchanged for a stage, and the language of plays was reminiscent of the high tone of the Mass. It was after all, a listening culture, a culture of the word, a peculiarly English occupation. Other forms of art—sculpting, painting, music, even architecture—with only a few

exceptions were to be found elsewhere, outside the little island, in Italy, Holland, Germany, France. English captures its reflection in words, in the subtleties of the human voice.” (Teems, 181)

- “It should be little wonder that English had become the *lingua franca* of the civilized world, or that English dominates music, film, literature, the dramatic arts. . . The English imagination was, and remains, aural. It expressed itself in sound, and the culture was tuned for it. . . Shakespeare and others, would not have written the way they did had the audience not been able to understand. . . Touching Englishness to the quick, the play was the very soul of the English Renaissance. It is a key to understanding the age itself.” (Teems, 181-182)
- “To ignore the development of the theater is to ignore the spirit of the age, the powerful linguistic tide that swept everyone up, that saturated a culture. In the years between 1584 and 1623, hardly more than a single generation, more than fifty million people passed through theater doors.” (Teems, 183)
- “. . . the King James Translators were steeped this Elizabethan aesthetic, this powerful linguistic vitality, this Hamletized soul of the age that was characterized by a penetrating, high-velocity wit and melancholy that spun forth the finest lines ever written in any language.” (Teems, 187)
- “The Translators were all Elizabethans, all passionately literate. This aesthetic could only enhance the beauty and magnificence that was already there in the fold of Scripture. It had the ability to make beautiful even more beautiful . . . The Elizabethan aesthetic was the filter through which the King James Translators tested every word. . . It was a literary spirit that governed culture, a spirit of the word, a profoundly English spirit that had risen to its zenith in the age of Elizabeth.” (Teems, 189-190)
- “The plays of William Shakespeare were never written to be read, or worse, studied. He did not publish his plays in his own lifetime. . . The King James Bible was appointed to be “read in the churches. . . One of the last steps of the translation was a hearing, an aural review.” (Teems, 175)
- John Bois records in his notes from the final review committee that in the final step one man read from the translation and the others sat around and listened. . . It was an auditory review. It was an auditory enterprise. (Teems, 209)
  - Andrew Downes—“Jesus Christ, yesterday, and to day the same, and for ever.”
  - Final Version—“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” (Hebrews 13:8)
- The KJB is both simple and majestic. Adam Nicholason, author of God’s Secretaries writes:
  - “One of the King James Bible’s most consistent driving forces is the idea of majesty. Its method and its voice are . . . regal. . . Its archaic formulations, its consistent attention to a

grand and heavily musical rhythm are the vehicles by which that majesty is infused into the body of the text. Its qualities are those of grace, stateliness, scale, power. There is no desire to please here; only a belief in the enormous and overwhelming divine authority.” (Nicholuson, 189)

- “Translators of modern prosaic Bibles engage in a self-defeating venture when they produce Bibles that do not yield the effects common to readers of the King James Bible and its heirs. A Bible translation that sounds like the daily newspaper is given the same level of attention and credence as the daily newspaper. . . Someone has correctly said that modern colloquial translations ‘slip more smoothly into the modern ear,’ but they also slide ‘out more easily; the very strangeness and antique ceremony of the old forms make them linger in the mind.’” (Ryken, 156-157)

### Works Cited

McGrath, Alister. *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001.

Nicholuson, Adam. *God’s Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003.

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Teems, David. *Majestie: The King Behand the King James Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010.