

The Predicament of Translators

by G.W. North

The sermon addresses the complexities of translating the term 'spirit' in scripture, highlighting the implications for understanding God's message.

Scripture: Romans 8:10

Topics: "Understanding Scripture", "The Spirit of God vs. the Spirit of Man"

Description

G.W. North addresses the complexities faced by translators of the Bible, particularly regarding the interpretation of the word 'spirit' in various contexts. He highlights instances where the Authorized Version may have miscapitalized 'spirit', leading to confusion about whether it refers to the Spirit of God or the spirit of man. North emphasizes the importance of understanding the distinction between these spirits, especially in the context of the believer's union with God. He illustrates how this union transcends mere grammar, as it involves a profound spiritual connection that enables intercession. Ultimately, the sermon calls for careful consideration of the text to grasp the intended meaning of the scriptures.

Transcript

Sometimes when reading the scripture and the word spirit is being used, as in this section, it is very difficult to decide to which spirit the text is referring. For this reason the translators of the Authorised Version, though very reliable, obviously found it difficult to interpret the text aright in all cases. Sometimes, where they could not be sure, they drew their own conclusions, in which instances we are left in a measure of uncertainty. In verse sixteen the distinction between the two uses of the word spirit is clear, so the first is correctly given a capital and the second a diminutive first letter, for the first is the Spirit of God and the second is the spirit of man. But in verse ten the word spirit is wrongly given a capital. The translators, and evidently the publishers and printers, all thought that the word referred to the Spirit of God, and therefore capitalized it; but the word surely refers to the spirit of man made righteous, and therefore alive. As the incoming of Christ by the Spirit renders the body of a man dead in the sense of being freed from the dominion of sinful compulsions and habits, so the spirit of that man is made life or alive from the spirit of death which it formerly was by reason of sin.

Another instance occurs in verse eleven, where the word spirit is capitalized upon both occasions, whereas it is dubious whether it should be rendered so in either. The first refers to him who raised up Jesus from the dead, and that person is the Father, as is made clear in chapter six. It might therefore be more proper or deferential to capitalize the pronoun thus: 'Him', and not the word referring to His spirit. By

the same principle, if the word Christ be capitalized, then the pronoun referring to Christ later in the verse should be capitalized also - 'His' - and the word referring to that which is His, written with the diminutive, thus: 'spirit'. This may be a matter of opinion, but it finely illustrates the difficulty facing translators when the word 'pneuma' recurring in the text refers to different individuals, or perhaps even things. Sometimes it plainly refers to the different persons of God, and should therefore be given the capital; sometimes it does not, and occasionally it is difficult to decide to which person or thing it refers, or how to interpret Paul's thinking at that point.

A typical instance of this latter occurs in verse fifteen: 'the spirit of bondage'. In verse fourteen the word pneuma obviously refers to 'the Spirit of God', which is none other than He who is 'the Holy Spirit'; there is no difficulty about that; but turning to the next verse the interpretation of the word is not so clearly arrived at. Twice it is used in the verse; upon the second occasion it is undoubtedly capitalized correctly, but what of the first? It seems easily resolvable that the word does not refer to the Holy Spirit, and should be given the diminutive, but in the light of its use in verse ten, where it indicates the spirit of a man.

From the beginning of the section he has moved into the realm of spirit, God's Spirit and man's spirit; more, he is speaking of the conjoining of these live spirits so that they become one. It is precisely here that grammar fails us, for we have no word to describe this union other than spirit, but whether or not the word should be capitalized, who can say? Should that union be called Spirit or spirit? If it were a union only, the difficulty might more easily be overcome, but more than joining or unifying, this union is unto oneness, 'he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit'. Spirit has power of combination, mixing and integrating and impregnating spirit with spirit -- in this case Spirit with spirit. It is this precious unification of spirit so that we can be in and move in the realm of spirit for purposes of intercession.

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