

From Revd Dr David G Palmer, author of ***Challenging New Testament Scholarship, The Texts in Full and in Detail***, Ceridwen Press, Church Gresley, 2023:

Scholarship, The Word of God and the Work of the Writers:

My passion is to see that the writers of the New Testament get justice. Their texts are not being read as *the writers* intended them to be. Indeed, the texts have not been read as they should since they were first translated into Latin and Old Syriac.

The New Testament's texts are highly disciplined in their construction. Most scholars, however, do not know this! For us, our reading of the texts is obscured by the imposition, eight-hundred years ago, of chapter and verse. Our lectionaries too do not often begin and end a reading where the writer of the text would. But most importantly, translators and bible editors give no indication of knowing the rules of Greek composition which all writers had to follow in an era of oral/aural communication, when few could read or write.

Recently, I was at a Methodist Circuit Service and listening to John 10, the 'I am the Gate, the Good Shepherd' passage. The reader read out 'Pharisees', not just once, but twice. I was shocked! I found out later that he was reading from Zondervan's New International American Giant Version (produced for people with poor eyesight). It is the *only translation* in existence, possibly, which interprets this passage as one in which Jesus is speaking to Pharisees. Yes, he is speaking to 'Jews', but in this chapter, in the Greek there is no mention of 'Pharisees'.

At a Methodist Carol Service I attended this last Christmas, the Christmas reading from John chapter 1 was reduced to 1.1-5. The week before it, I had attended an Anglican Service; it was the traditional 1.1-14 that I was asked to read in their service. But, I confess to reading 1.1-18 instead! It is in 1.15-18 that we read the writer's punch-line to his Prologue. Every year, at Christmas, this writer gets no justice! It is true also at Easter. The writer's three readings are 20.1-13, 14-29 and 30-31, but it is 20.1-18 that is read.

On the first Sunday of the New Year, there was a reading from this year's lectionary gospel, Mk 1.4-11. It neither begins nor ends where the writer would have wanted. Most scholars think the Prologue is 1.1-13; some think it is 1.1-15. These are the same people who would deny this gospel an Epilogue. The writer's Prologue is, in fact, 1.2-20. The disciplined text reveals this.

Now for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: we have study notes prepared by Church Leaders in Burkina Faso (in West Africa) which promote a reading of Luke 10.25-37, when for the writer it should have been 10.25-42. Translations of v.38 frequently mislead because they add more than the Greek provides and make people think vv.38-42 cannot possibly belong with 10.25-37. But they do belong! The disciplined text reveals this.

Presentations of Luke 15 frequently exhibit inconsistent translation and inappropriate sub-headings. The NIV is particularly bad here!

Lastly, in this series of exposures, 1 Corinthians 13 is never presented as the writer intended. Translators disrupt the poetic flow of the passage by switching and swapping words. And presenters of the passage invariably include 13.13. But 13.13 begins the following passage! Its inclusion (with 13.1-12) is a distraction which undermines the writer's purpose here. Paul is trying to say that *in our lifetimes* we must never let differences in our understanding cause division in the church, for we can know or prophecy only 'in part', even with the help of spiritual gifts. The key is: 'Love - never - fails'.

We say we value the Word of God, but scholars have not bothered themselves enough to explore the writers' ways of writing. As a result, the translated texts we read and the ways we read them are all not as they should be. Is it possible that scholars will repent? Or will they simply dismiss these exposures as the rantings of some poor old soul?