Love's Labor Lost - Charity Revised In The A. V.

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In our last post, we traced the debates between William Tyndale and Thomas More about the word "charity." When it came to the English Bible, Tyndale was convinced that it claimed "charity" and that Sir Ladye Vergate is creating a distinction between "love" in most passages where the Greek agape occurs, verses "charity" in some of these passages. Tyndale was adamantly opposed, claiming that the English "charity" has a different meaning. More charged Tyndale with trying to slip in Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone into the English Bible. Tyndale was not trying to do any such thing, he was just trying to make the English Bible should teach justification by faith alone, because that was the way he understood what Paul himself taught in the original Greek. See the last post for all those details.

Love Lost - The AV Rendering

Not having looked at Tyndale's verses that fight to banish charity from the English Bible, convinced as he was that it was an English word that could capture the sense of the Greek agape, we now have the question what happened to Tyndale's love in the Authorized Version? Tyndale have shown that the KJV 1611 & 1769 the words of William Tyndale remained without direct credit being given. In fact, they sometimes return to the Greek agape, sometimes to the Latin caritas, but never to the English word Tyndale chose. The KJV 1611, using "love" for most uses of agape has "charity" for 27 of these uses. And this can, surely be accident, or can they be consequence of the biased and public opinion of Tyndale and More.

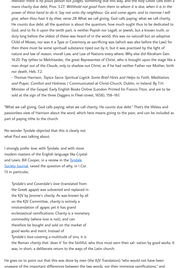
Why bring charity back, after Tyndale fought so hard, at such cost, to exclude it?

Charity Through A Century

At this point, some look back at many years of the frequency of the words usage might prove helpful. If we take the century from 1550 to 1650 we find some quite interesting results.

Notably, the word seems to have engaged a very brief stint of favor just as the 1572 revision to the Bishop's Bible would have been worded or took surprisingly, with the spelling the Bishop's Bible said, "am beloved, charitie is patient, charitie is bountifull, charitie envieth not, charitie doth not boast itself, charitie is not puffed, charitie is not ambitious, charitie seeketh not her profit, charitie is not provoked to wrath, charitie thinketh not evil, charitie rejoyceth not in iniquitie, but rejoyceth in the truth, charitie suffereth all things, charitie beleeveth all things, charitie hopeth all things, charitie endureth all things, charitie fayleth not, &c." Charity, the state here are limited, and provide no way to parse out biblical citations, means, when they are compared, that charity would seem to be a very rare commodity.

This is all the more striking when we compare it in the same period to the broader days at which point, charity-at-last ultimately disappears, with a notable decline in favor to almost non-usage just as the KJV was being worked on.



"If Charity" as a common synonym for love was not obscure when the KJV was printed, it clearly was within a few short years of its publication. The results might suggest that he can small decade as a Charity-year has been legitimately understood as something breaks perhaps, then giving to the years. In this small window of time, perhaps their overlapping is not meaningless. The window was clearly small and it passed quickly, lasting for only the window of time in which the KJV had the influence of being first and being widely used.

Charity in the Bible Today

Now, let's look at the current usage of charity in the Bible today. Tyndale's verses that fight to banish charity, make an argument that the KJV has itself so shaped the English language that it is now fitting, carrying a distinctly Christian meaning into the 2021 century. Does anyone use more around it, is it now so ingrained in the English language and its history, took up the question of what the word means in modern usage.

First, is the meaning of the word, "Charity" now means simply what used to be called alms? Has the word, "Charity" been so shaped by Christian usage that it now means, "Christian alms-giving" or even, if it was the Bishop's Bible, "charity is patient, charity is bountiful"? Is the word so shaped by Christian usage that it now means, "Christian charity"? Is the word so shaped by Christian usage that it now means, "charity" is the most obvious thing that a person, or people come to talk of is that were the whole of charity. In the same way, "rhyme" is the most obvious thing that a person, or people come to mean by poetry? Is the word so shaped by Christian usage that it now means "love, in the Christian sense"? But, love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state of mind, the feeling of all of the sense of the self which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people.

C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, Mere Christianity (1952), 125

David Capital (a contributor to the Oxford English Dictionary) likewise offers some hesitation:

The meaning of charity has weakened somewhat over the centuries, so that it now includes such notions as benevolence and the indiscriminate, the sentimental, the unpleasant, and even condescension, as in the phrase cold as charity, especially heard in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, referring to a person who is cold, aloof, and unfriendly, but who is forced by social pressure to behave as though he/she/it/they were warm, friendly, and generous. Today, charity does, Charity Commissioners, and other such phrases have added an institutional tone to the word.

"Notwithstanding, St Paul's emphasis on love in 1 Corinthians 13 bending with true adelphi-faith. Agape, charity, remained the greatest virtue. Nevertheless, the Christian ethic, especially Protestant, emphasized the emotional force originally carried by this word would be better to use love. The word well illustrated just how far, 1611, where the use of charity ceased to be the synonym of the Greek agape.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

This formulation has carried the day. The first part compared with Douai-Rheims (Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends) and Tyndale (Greater love hath no man, that he bestow his life for his friends) and Tyndale compared with Wycliffe (just for lay down) and Geneva (Greater for lay down). There is still some syntactic variation today, but Greater love hath no man than this is the formulation most commonly used as the phrase.

- Bagot, The King James Bible And The English Language, Inside Vacuum, 2017-12-03

Charity Revised In The Bible Today

Charity is a word that has shaped, and shaped, and shaped, and

As it turns out then, when the OED asserts that, "the 16th cent. English versions from Tyndale to 1611," used *charity* in 26 passages in Paul, it is at best only telling part of the story, and perhaps even misleading. The historical reality is almost exactly the opposite of the picture one would assume from their words. All the more so when the OED astonishingly claims (like Burgon) that it was the 1881 RV that displaced *charity*, as though Tyndale and his campaign against the word had never even existed! So much the worse for the forgotten Tyndale.

In reality, Tyndale banished *charity* from the English Bible, and it remained in almost total and complete exile through all of the major Protestant English translations. The KJV was not continuing a long tradition that the 1881 ERV would finally reject; it was rejecting a long tradition that Tyndale had begun, and others had long perpetuated.

The Source

So how did we get from that to the AV revival of *charity*? The answer, in part, lies in the realization that it was specifically *the 1602 edition* of the Bishops Bible which served as the basis for the AV which was a revision of that text, not the earlier editions, as has been conclusively shown by Vance.

When we examine the 1602 edition (I have not examined any intervening editions, and the text may have changed as early as the 1572 - Vance suggests in passing that the 1572 first introduced the word *charity* in I Cor. 13 at least), we realize it has come straight into the KJV. The 1602 has *charitie* or its similar forms at Rom. 14:15, I Cor. 8:1; 13:1-13; 14:1; 16:14; Col. 3:14; I Thess. 3:6; II Thess. 1:3; I Tim. 1:5; 2:15; 4:12; II Tim. 2:22; 3:10; Titus 2:1; I Pet. 4:8; 5:14; II Pet. 1:7; III John 6; Jude 12; Rev. 2:19. That is, in the exact places where the AV also has the word. (And perhaps some others besides - I have not searched the whole text, though preliminary spot checks show it having love in most places I would suspect it to differ, like Rom. 5:8; 13:10). Tyndale's great poem to *love* has become the odd ode to *charity* already in Parker's revisions.

What changed at some point between 1568 and 1602 that directly caused the restoration of charity to the English text remains to be investigated.

The KJV translators (or better, revisers of the Bishops Bible) had before them the options of many or even most of the English translations that had gone before them. Yet, without so much as a word, they retained the wording not of Tyndale, or any of the later Protestant translations, not the wording of the original Bishops's text, but exactly the word used in each place in the 1602 revision of the Bishop's text.

Notably, with the one exception of Rev. 2:19, every other use of charity is in a part of the text handled by the Second Westminster Company. "Love" seemed to work just fine in every other place for every other company. This Company alone preferred "charity" in places where the Bishop's text had it. Headed by William Barlow as President, this company had some of the strongest anti-Puritan sentiments of any that worked on the KJV. Barlow himself had made his disdain for the Puritans clear from the very start of the Hampton Court Conference that birthed the KJV, and his account of the Conference drips with hatred for them. In the Second Westminster Company's work, apparently, Separatist ideas could be allowed no pass. And Rule 1a and 3 have apparently given them license to snub Tyndale.

And when we turn to the KJV preface, penned by Miles Smith, at least one possible reason thus suggests itself. (See a detailed explanation of this section and the whole preface here). In a brief note towards the end, under the last heading of the Preface, they explain,

> Lastly, we have on the one side avoided the scrupulosity of the Puritans, who leave the old *Ecclesiastical* words, and betake them to other, as when they put *washing* for *Baptism*, and *Congregation* instead of *Church*: as also on the other side we have shunned the obscurity of the Papists, in their *Azimes, Tunike, Rational, Holocausts, Præpuce, Pasche*, and a number of such like, whereof their late translation is full, and that of purpose to darken the sense, that since they must needs translate the Bible, yet by the language thereof it may be kept from being understood. (Scrivener, CPB)

This quiet admission, which almost escapes notice, perhaps explains as best as anything else we can find. Here are several of Tyndale's very batch of explosive words, and while "love" is not mentioned directly, their "as" with the examples of *baptism* and *church* might well stand for the whole group. Tyndale's words got him killed, a fate he faced with courage. But from Tyndale's perspective at least, the King, on the other hand, has fallen prey to fame. Study divorced from passion was thought better. The King wants little to do with Tyndale and his battles. The Puritans have had little or no say in the work, short of the fact that they asked for it (though they didn't actually want it, and are now stuck with it against their wishes, for theirs was, "but a poore and empty shift").

And in a quite literal way, love has been lost.

All that dangerous and nasty business that Tyndale has fought for has been let go as too extreme, too messy, and too, well, radical. They judge Tyndale far too concerned to follow the dictates of his conscience. He should have cared less. They do. Like the Puritans of their day, he was too "scrupulous." He would think they have hidden his blood-wrought legacy behind a wall of easy compromise. From his stake, he might claim, with prayerful lips, that they have sacrificed flippantly what he had fought for so valiantly. Tyndale was willing to die for his words. The KJV translators instead at best sit silently by while he is burned.

The annual reckoning has come to the King. It turns out that all that protestation, said over and over, was little more than empty blunder.

Love's labor has been lost.

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