

The Authorised Version: Its Relevance Among the Young in a Multicultural Society

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THE SERMON PREACHED AT THE 180TH ANNUAL
GENERAL MEETING, EDITED FOR PUBLICATION

‘Wherewithal
shall a young man
cleanse his way?
by taking heed
thereto according
to thy word.’

Psalm 119.9

God. The Scriptures are full of the young, but also remember that the Bible is not only for the young; it has much to say about adults too.

The children of Israel are called children for many reasons, including because in many ways they showed the immaturity of children and needed sanctification. Here in the text and in many other places we are told that the Bible is to be used by young people, boys and girls, the youth, because young people are often wrong.

‘Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?’ It says ‘his way’. Children are born in an unclean life. They may come from a clean hospital, a clean home, but they are born in an unclean life. They are on the wrong path, the wrong journey, towards eternal misery. They are on an unclean road and need to be cleansed; in the sight of God they are on an impure journey, an impure path, an impure way. So, what are young people, young adults, to do? They must examine their lives and the path they are on.

The word, in the original for ‘way’ is a track or a rut that is made by a cart or by a chariot wheel. This young man is on this path, this track. So, how can he remove himself from this path? What does God say? ‘By taking heed *thereto* according to thy word’. Young people must take heed; that is, they must keep guard, they must listen, they must

The subject given to me at this Annual General Meeting of the Trinitarian Bible Society is ‘The Authorised Version: Its Relevance Among the Young in a Multicultural Society’: a mouthful, isn’t it! But the ninth verse of this Psalm is most fitting, I believe: ‘Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed *thereto* according to thy word’. There is much connection between young people and the Bible. The Bible is full of young people: young people who came to a saving knowledge of God, young people who served the Lord, young people who rejected Him, young people who came under the wrath of



preserve the way that God has said. What is that way? His instruction, the instructions of this book, 'thy Word'. That is the beginning of this path to eternal life, the Word of God. Young people reading this book will find the Person who is called the Way, who by His blood cleanses them from all their sins; they become the living disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. This book is about the Lord Jesus Christ; on every page Christ is found: it is written about Him.

The Bible is relevant

We must realise that the Bible itself is relevant since it is the eternal Word of the eternal God. It is the revealed mind of God: about Himself, who He is, His nature, about His world, about His relationship to us, and about our relationship to Him. The Bible is relevant.

The Bible is relevant because of what it is. People do not make the Bible relevant. We do not allow it to be relevant; it is not the church's responsibility to make the Bible relevant to society at large. It is inherently relevant because it is the Word of God. The Bible by nature is relevant to every young person in every culture, even in our multicultural society. The impact of this book, both in its originals and in its translation into English or in any other language, has turned individuals from a life of sin to a life in Jesus Christ. It has turned families, turned nations, turned cultures from ungodliness and hedonism to true Christianity. The Bible has formed nations and changed barbaric, idolatrous, superstitious societies into orderly, industrious, prosperous and God-glorifying cultures. It has changed people's lives and it shall continue to direct people's destinies. A single text transformed Luther when he read it and was blessed by the Spirit of God, and launched a new epoch. The Word of God always has come and continues to come into our communities with regenerative force when it is blessed by the Holy Spirit. Is the Bible relevant for us today? Of course it is, because it is the Word of the Almighty God to His creatures.

Is the Authorised Version relevant?

Our subject today is the relevance of our English Bible, this book that was translated four hundred years ago. The Bible is relevant, but is this particular one relevant in a multicultural society for our young people, in our churches or for evangelism?

What do we mean by relevant? The dictionary defines it as to have significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand, to make connection, to be applicable, to be fitting; in our context, to relate in the right way. The question is this: Does the four-hundred-year-old English translation do that in our increasingly multicultural society, for young people both in our churches and out? Is it suitable to be used among the various people who are from near and far? Our convictions and conclusions regarding the AV's relevance must be based upon facts of history, reason, Scripture and the doctrines that come out of this book; and its relevance must apply not only to the young, but also to the old; not only to those from a multicultural society, but in any culture in any time and in any place. Our answer regarding the Authorised Version is a definite, affirmative, yes. This Authorised Version is relevant; it is the relevant English Bible among the young in a multicultural society.

I believe that the multiplication of modern versions and modern language English Bibles is one of the most important religious phenomena of recent decades, and one which has served to undermine the spiritual foundations for our young people and weakened the message of the churches of Christ. The new versions have not brought about the promised spiritual effect they advertise. They have not brought about what they promised to the masses and to the churches, let alone to the young people. They have had nowhere near the effect that the old English Bible has had upon your life and my life.

The problem of relevance that we face in our generation does not lie with the young; it lies with the old. They are the ones who feel that the old Authorised Version is irrelevant. I have yet to hear a young child complain about the old words of the Authorised Version; the young simply accept it as the Word of God. So we must ask: Are the new English versions relevant for our young people in a multicultural society? The answer, I believe, is no, these have not been relevant. They have not helped the cause of Christ in the church among our young people living in a multicultural society.



A standard Bible

There are a number of reasons why the Authorised Version is still relevant and is the best Bible. Let me begin with this: the Authorised Version is the relevant Bible among the young in a multicultural society because, first of all, it has been the standard English Bible of the English-speaking world. This makes it relevant for anyone.

Let us think about the society in which young people are raised. People are coming from all over the world, living in the UK and in other Western countries. The only Bible that will be culturally effective and useful is a Bible that the majority know, a Bible that is standard and stable.

The church of Jesus Christ once had a standard Bible. Christians were all united on this point: we had one Bible. But now Muslim websites, as part of their promotion of Islam, give as one of their first points of anti-Christian apologetic that we have so many versions: the church does not know which Bible to use. How are our young people to deal with such things? We should return to this one book so our young people can say we have one Bible, one English Bible that is standard.

Historically, the Authorised Version has been the only Bible used throughout the Commonwealth and quickly became the Bible of the United States. Any culture that has English as their first or second language, or was affected by the missionary movement of the 18th century and beyond, had only one Bible: the Authorised Version. Their language, their form of expression, their form of grammar has been affected by this one Bible. It is the Bible that people still use today in Africa, in India, in the Far East, in the West Indies, and in the USA. The Authorised Version became the Bible that moulded and formed society and its foundation laws. From its very arrival, it was the source of truth through which many cultures came to know the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The historical success of this English Bible as it was taken to the other cultures of the world is noteworthy if we are to reach those very cultures who come and meet us on our own shores.

Our young people need a standard Bible. None of the others has established itself. The Revised Version that came out in 1881 was to be a replacement of the AV, but who uses the 1881 today? The 1901, the American Standard Version, was to be the standard version in America, but Americans do not use it today. The Authorised Version is the only Bible that is a standard for our young people; that is what makes it effective.

A stable, unchanging Bible

The Authorised Version is relevant because it is the most stable Bible. Our youth need to rely upon a stable Bible which does not change every few years; they should not need to face people of other cultures ever explaining, ever apologising, ever having to say why we have a new version with different wording and with different footnotes. Our young people are living in a world that is ever changing, and at such a rapid speed. They must have a spiritual anchor which does not change; there must be a stable translation of the English Bible. One thing that should not change in this world is the Word of God, and it is this book alone which has been the most stable version.

The Psalmist says in verse 11 of Psalm 119, ‘Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee’. How can an ever-changing English Bible be retained in the heart and mind of the young? It cannot be memorised. We have a culture of young adults who have been brought up on modern versions. Is the condition of our young, or those adults in their thirties and forties, who twenty years ago would have been young, more stable? Are they more Bible literate? Do they know their Bibles? Or are we having trouble finding faithful men to fill our pulpits? Are we having difficulty finding deacons

and elders who are faithful and spiritual and serious about the things of God? An ever-changing Bible does not help remedy these problems: it cannot be retained, and you cannot put your confidence in it because you do not know what will come again in a few years' time.

Some of those things of course do not rely only on which version of the Bible has been used by people, but I believe the multiplicity of versions contributes a great part to the spiritual downfall of the Western church. The many easy-to-use or easy-to-read versions have not helped at all; they have not been as relevant as this old book. To relate to our youth, to relate to our children, we need to provide something stable, something that does not change, and this book is the answer: a stable English Bible.

A theologically sound and stable Bible

The third thing I want to say is this: the Authorised Version is the most sound and stable Bible in its theology. This is the kind of Bible that our young people need. They do not want a Bible that denies the deity of Christ, or puts a question mark on the virgin birth of Christ, that cannot say whether this verse or that is correct or not. Our young people need a Bible that is theologically accurate. Those who translated the Authorised Version believed in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures; hence they have given us a Bible that is theologically sound. No doctrine that God has revealed is compromised in the Authorised Version, and that makes it very relevant. How can a theologically weak Bible, or one that compromises or questions truth, be relevant to any people, let alone young people or to any culture or to any age? When doctrine is weakened, a Bible is no longer relevant for the reader.

The Authorised Version has been well tested. Sound theologians in the past four hundred years have quoted from it without questioning it. But today, those who advocate some new versions in their systematic theologies have to apologise for certain points of rendering. So is there today a Bible that is sound theologically? The only answer that can be given, and the only version that is most faithful in the English language today is this old Authorised Version that we so love, and that in itself makes it relevant.

A correct textual basis and method of translation

I am a young person coming from a different culture, and I can say that this book is still the most relevant in our day. It is sound and stable, particularly in its textual basis and method of translation. Many people, both in the pulpit and the pew, do not know that the textual source of the various new English Bibles differs from that used for centuries; nearly all of the modern versions since the Authorised Version have been based on a different family of texts.

The Authorised Version is the only English Bible in publication today that relies solely upon the Textus Receptus family of the Greek New Testament, and the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament. It is the only English Bible that gives us without questioning the fullest and most authentic available text of the Scriptures. Knowing that this English Bible follows the vast majority of the more than five thousand manuscripts and is therefore authentic gives great assurance in the Word of God. Most other versions of the

English Bible that are published today are based on the minority of manuscripts that are defective, and which disagree among themselves, thus making many question the authenticity of the Biblical text in many places. The many textual footnotes of the modern versions put a question mark or a doubt upon the authenticity of the inspired Word of God. These comments do not help the youth who need a stable and authentic Bible. It shows the modern versions' textual instability. The wise man of Proverbs 24.21 gives this counsel to the young: 'My son, fear thou the LORD...*and* meddle not with them that are given to change'.

How can we defend the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ when the text in our Bible says 'he appeared in a body' in 1 Timothy 3.16? But for me talking to a Muslim, I can say, 'God was manifest in the flesh.' The Authorised Version is very relevant when I am dealing with the subject of eternal punishment, and we come to Mark 9, particularly when not just words but whole verses are omitted from the modern English versions. Then I do not find modern versions relevant.

Our Lord said, 'man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God' (Matthew 4.4). Every man, both young and old, is a living soul that needs every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God: not most of it, not ninety per cent of it, but a hundred per cent of it. He does not need a Bible that lacks the purity and fulness of the Word of God. You would not feed your child food that you know has most of the vitamins and the nutrition removed; you would want a diet that is complete. What about our spiritual soul? Would you want a Bible that lacks what God wants you to have?

I believe if you were to ask the majority of the youth in our churches or even outside, they would say that they want a stable Bible, an accurate Bible, a Bible that accurately teaches the doctrine of God—even though they might reject that doctrine, they want to know what it is. They want to know the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ and no one else; they do not need the translator's thoughts, nor a reviser's thoughts, but a true translation of the original Greek and the Hebrew.

There are many young people living amongst us, both within our churches and coming from other cultures. They are very educated, many coming from other faiths or belief systems, and many come with prejudices against Christianity. The best way to be relevant to them is to use a tried and tested Bible. Our Authorised Version has passed the test of four hundred years. This book has never failed us. It has been ever faithful. Has it ever been your best friend? The best friend tells the most truth about you, and this book has done that. We have not always liked what we have read, but we know that it is the Word of God, and it has spoken to our souls.

An appropriate Bible

The Authorised Version is the relevant Bible because it is the most appropriate Bible for public and for private use and in the churches. More than any other version, the Authorised Version sounds like a Bible, sounds like the Word of God, even to unbelievers. Just note all the publicity about the Authorised Version that we have had this year, from the mouth, not of the church nor of Christians, but of the ungodly, the deniers of the faith, atheists. Even Richard Dawkins agreed,¹ commenting that, although he

rejects what the Bible teaches, and does not believe in God, if there was such a God the Authorised Version would be his Bible; it sounds like what He would say. This translation commands the hearers, both young and old, to the reverent hearing of the Scriptures. Its language arouses in the mind of the hearer the timeless and eternal character of God's Word.

It is interesting that whenever a translation of the Qur'an has been made, they use 'thee' and 'thou,' along with the appropriate verbal forms. Where do they get the idea to do this? They are trying to communicate, to mimic the Authorised Version. The Qur'an translators want people who read it to think that it sounds like the Word of God.

Someone has said that the modern unbeliever, if he has any spiritual concern at all, is well aware that the contemporary scene really offers him no help, and wants the church to speak in a way that is timeless, and from another world. The young as well as old, Westerners as well as people of other cultures, are more likely to take seriously what is said to them if they sense that this is something more important than just casual conversation.

In times past, when people read books, when they went to conferences, when they heard sermons, they were not confused by the multiplicity of different renderings because they all quoted from the same book, from the same Bible. The source of authority was, and should be, one English version. This would demonstrate to the young that the churches and the denominations have unity, at least in their source of authority.

Young people are living in a confusing world, in an age of apostasy and spiritual weakness. The use of the Authorised Version in Reformed and evangelical congregations underscores our unity and identity with other conservative and evangelical Christians and churches.

Appropriate English

The final thing I have is this: the Authorised Version is relevant because it uses the most appropriate English, suitable to be used in private and in public, to be memorised, to be learnt by heart. It uses short words, simple words that come from Anglo-Saxon roots, and that continue to provide the very basic vocabulary of the English language today. This makes it timeless English. The nature of the language that the Authorised Version uses, simple language, short words, slightly different to our modern language and grammar, sticks in the mind.

When you are in a group, we all tend to look and dress similarly, but if someone came in who was very different—looked different, talked differently, wore something very strange—that person would stick in your mind. You might forget other people's names or faces or what they wore, but you would not quickly forget the stranger. This book is not the same as any other book, both in its nature and its language, and so it is also most relevant.

Coming back to something I started with, the problem is not with the young; the problem is with our elders. Have you ever heard a child complain about the complexity of the language of the Authorised Version? They may say they do not understand; and then you explain it and they accept it. An educated Englishman, however, says he does

not understand this Elizabethan language and even if you explain it, he still says he does not understand it. The difference is what is happening to a child or a young person: their English, their vocabulary is growing, and they are learning the language. A person coming from another culture, like myself, in learning the language, simply accepts it. I must learn the vocabulary of the Word of God, that is all! So it is that a child does not complain about this book. It is always, in my experience, adults, who are well educated, white, English, men and women, who complain about this book.

The young are in need of a mature instruction, not simply a casual, easygoing instruction. They are immature and unstable; we have difficulty dragging them into our meetings. Yet we ought not to give them things that will soothe their immaturity. What is it that they need? What will relate to our young people? Something that is mature and something that comes not from today, but from eternity and which sounds like it has just come from the mouth of God: it is the Authorised Version that fits that category.

Conclusion

So the Authorised Version is the most relevant Bible for the young in a multicultural society because it has been the standard English Bible for the past four hundred years. There is nothing to match it, and that makes it relevant. It is the most stable translation because it does not undermine doctrine, because it has a stable and sound source text and translation method, because it is perfect for public and private use and in churches, because it unites the churches of Christ under one authority, and because it uses appropriate English.

In 1999, the Lord, by His grace, brought me to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. As a young man coming from a different culture, living in a multicultural society, what kind of Bible did I look for? I was searching for a Bible that was relevant to me. I was not concerned that the Bible was difficult to read, or that I would have to use my dictionary or to re-read certain passages. I desired a Bible which was the most accurate, most stable, textually faithful and complete translation of the inspired Hebrew and Greek texts. I knew from James 1.8 that ‘a double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways’—how much more unstable, then, would be an unstable Bible which was not sure of the authentic readings.

Let us not underestimate the young, and let us not underestimate our young people. I believe most young people have such high values and desires; therefore what do we have to offer them other than the Authorised Version? There is nothing other than this book. ‘Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed *thereto* according to thy word’.

The Authorised Version still remains the most relevant English Bible that you can offer to any young people in any age, from any culture, for this multicultural society. Amen!

Endnotes:

1. See *King James Bible Trust*, ‘Richard Dawkins lends his support to The King James Bible Trust’, www.kingjamesbibletrust.org/news/2010/02/19/richard-dawkins-lends-his-support-to-the-king-james-bible-trust.