

Bible Translation Errors

By Mary Pearson

"Proud as a peacock" - The phrase comes from the glorious fan-shaped, multi-coloured (not quite rainbow-coloured) plumage of the male peafowl when he is courting his mate.

Thus, just as the peacock, someone who is "proud as a peacock" is similarly "strutting his or her stuff".

As gays and lesbians, for years we have hidden our *"tail feathers"* in closets, hidden the beauty of God's creation in us, afraid to "strut our stuff" because "the church" said that we were an abomination to God. That mindset infiltrated society in general, and many of us adopted that belief for ourselves.

Well, it's time to come out of the closets my friends, and be proud! We know now from new research that the church has been wrong all these years, just as they have been wrong on so many other issues. With this new information, we can now spread the Good News that gays are loved and accepted by God, just as we were created, with no need to change our orientation. We are free to be who we were created to be, and to love whom we choose to love!

Why do Christians persecute us? Scripture admonishes Christians to judge and to not associate with the sexually immoral. (I Cor 5:9-11) Unfortunately Christians have included loving, monogamous homosexuals in that group, thinking incorrectly that we are immoral. What could be more moral than a committed relationship between two people!

They do not understand that homosexuality is not sinful or immoral. It is simply an orientation. Certainly there are immoral homosexuals, just as there are immoral heterosexuals, but orientation alone carries no sense of morality or immorality. In fact, just as electricity existed in Bible times but was unknown, so homosexuality existed but was unknown, so how could they write about it. They only knew of same-sex acts, thinking that all people were heterosexual, and therefore such acts would be lustful and unnatural.

People are making the same mistake now as when they used Scripture to support slavery and segregation, when they tried to stop interracial marriage, and when they encouraged the burning of women at the stake as witches. Just as no one any longer sanctions those atrocities, so no one any longer should accept or allow the oppression or persecution of ANYONE!"

"Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world but that the world, through Him, might be saved." John 3:17

If Jesus didn't come to condemn us, how dare others condemn us! Jesus' only law was love and inclusiveness. Some folks wrap it up in pretty phrases like "love the sinner but hate the sin" to try to convey their acceptance of us, but that still implies judgment and exclusion.

So let's try to understand why so many people who claim to be followers of Christ have chosen to judge, and in some cases, even hate us. Perhaps if we understand them, we may be able to educate them.

TRANSLATORS SOMETIMES INTERPRET INCORRECTLY

I believe the Original Scriptures are the Word of God, but subtle errors in subsequent translations have often led to gross misunderstanding. For example:

Example 1: The most accurate translation of the word "Abba" is "Daddy", but the translators of the King James Bible felt that the term "Daddy" was not reverent enough, and so, although the CORRECT translation of "Abba" is "Daddy", in your Bibles you will read "Father".

The translators had the best of intentions but for their own reasons they translated "Abba", (Daddy) into "Father", a term which is much more formal and rather distant compared to "Daddy".

Do you regard God as your Father - or your Daddy? Think about it. The essence is the same, but the connotation is quite different. Our God wants us to approach Him as a loving Daddy - or Mommy, since God is Spirit encompassing the qualities of all genders. But many people think of God as a stern "Father" waiting to crack the whip when you "sin". Instead of thinking of God as "Father", stop now and think for just a moment of God as "Daddy" or "Mommy". This is a more accurate translation than "Father".

Example 2: Compare the incorrect translation of **The Living Bible** with the correct translation of the **New International Version** of the same verses.

"No prostitutes are permitted in Israel, either men or women; you must not bring to the Lord any offering from the earnings of a prostitute or a homosexual, for both are detestable to the Lord your God." Deut 23:17,18 (TLB)

"No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute.. You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute ^[a] into the house of the LORD your God to pay any vow, because the LORD your God detests them both." Deut 23:17,18 (NIV)

The Hebrew word in question is qadesh, which means a male prostitute but the authors of The Living Bible chose to interpret "male prostitute" as homosexual. Well certainly some homosexuals are male prostitutes but most are not. This was an unkind and unjustified translation.

EXODUS, THE SECOND BOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT - TWO MEANINGS

In Hebrew, "Exodus" means "these are the names", since this is the book in which many of Israel's ancestors are recorded.

In the Greek version of the Old Testament (The Septuagint), "Exodus" means "exit" or "the way out", referring to God's leading the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt.

So in one very important word, "Exodus", we can see two very different interpretations between the Hebrew and the Greek. In this case both words are accurate, although distinctly different. Language and interpretation are complicated. There are so many possibilities.

INTERPRETATION & CONTEXT

"These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." Matt 10:5,6

This passage of Scripture sounds to me very much like Jesus is saying that the Good News is not for the Gentiles or the Samaritans. It is only for the Jews. But do we accept that interpretation? No. We believe that Jesus was telling the disciples to start evangelizing in their home towns. But that is an interpretation, not a literal translation because we have the rest of the Bible to put it into context for us.

In the same way, we cannot take a few verses of Scripture that some think refer to homosexuality and take them out of context of the overall message of the Bible which is that of inclusion. What Jesus said about not going among the Gentiles or Samaritans was said to a certain people (His disciples) at a certain time (the beginning of the faith). Surely we are to include Gentiles and Samaritans NOW, just as we are to include gays and lesbians NOW.

LANGUAGES CONSTANTLY CHANGE

New words are always being added to our language, and others take on different or added meanings. For example, only recently have we begun using the words "Internet" and "Software" as part of everyday speech, and the word "Cool" in a conversation does not always refer to the weather!

It wasn't that long ago that "Grass" was mowed, we drank a cold "Coke" on a hot day, and "Pot" was a cooking utensil. "Gay" meant to be happy, "Queer" just meant odd, and "Aids" were helpers in a hospital. Today these words have completely different meanings.

There are also differences in language depending on where we live. In North America "Trousers" are called "Pants" but in England "Pants" are "Underwear".

There will always be misunderstandings and confusion because of cultural differences.

NEW DISCOVERIES LEAD TO NEW UNDERSTANDING

Bible scholars are constantly learning more about ancient Israel and the Near East, giving more insight into the historical and cultural context from which the Bible emerged. We understand more today about the various social classes and interactions of families, clans, and tribes in ancient Israel than ever before. These discoveries often affect our interpretation of the words and stories of the Bible.

Archaeologists continue to find documents that help translators understand the ancient Hebrew and Greek languages better, increasing the accuracy of the Bible as time goes on.

Among recent archaeological discoveries are the Nag Hammadi Texts, found in 1945, and the famous Dead Sea Scrolls, a huge collection of manuscripts found between 1947 and 1956 which have shed light on ancient Israel, the Hebrew language, the beginnings of the early Church, and the way the Scriptures were organized and used by ancient communities.

SUMMARY

I have not dealt with the verses specifically used against gays because I have covered them in previous issues and I will deal with them again in future articles.

My point is not to denigrate the Bible, for its wisdom is worth seeking and its message is one of hope, joy and eternal life. No. My point is not to criticize this life-changing "World's Best Seller", but to emphasize the necessity of using the most recent research to challenge any agenda which does not support the overwhelming theme of the Bible, which is God's love and acceptance for ALL.

Subtle errors have occurred in the translation of many parts of the Bible, sometimes with horrific results as mentioned above, and in the case of homosexuality, unjustly resulting in the marginalization of a whole segment of the population. This would never have happened if the Original Scriptures had been translated correctly and were understood in the context of the culture in which they were written.

Please remember that Christianity is based on Christ, not on the actions of "the church". Don't lose your faith because of people. Christians have done so much to damage Christianity, but there ARE Bible-believing churches who know these truths and who will support you fully as a gay Christian. Find one this week and renew your relationship with God.

And now that you understand that Scripture has been mistranslated, misinterpreted and misunderstood; now that you know that the church has once again been wrong, pull out that self-esteem, dust off those glorious "tail feathers" that have been hiding in your closet, and start "strutting your stuff". It's not only OK to be gay. It's great to be gay! God loves His/Her gay children! Be Proud!