

Among my pet peeves are English translations of the Bible with some Hebrew or Greek words left un-translated. This leads to misunderstanding the meanings of these words and their application.

For example, in Matthew 16:18, when Jesus said, "I will build my church," (as in most English translations) he was speaking of a gathering of his disciples. He did not say church. He said (Greek Word) ἐκκλησία. If we give the sounds of that Greek word English letters we get **ekklēsia**. This giving of a word in one language the letters of another language we call a transliteration. This is not a translation at all. If we translate the word ekklēsia we get "called out ones" or "assembly". Jesus wasn't going to build a building. He wasn't going to build an organization. He was going to call together His followers.

When William Tyndale created the first English translation of the Bible, he used the word "congregation" to translate ekklēsia. But that did not sit well with the Roman Catholic Church, the only church there was in Europe at that time. They preferred using the word "church" in Matthew 16:18 instead of congregation because it supported the idea of the church as this big organization instead of individual, and independent, congregations. So they arrested William Tyndale and later executed him.

Another word that is usually not translated is the Greek word βάπτισμα. If we transliterate this word, giving it English letters we get **baptidzo**. Over the course of 1500 years, through Latin and then into English, this became baptism.

This Greek word means to dip or immerse something into something else. That's why Baptists baptize by immersion. We put the whole person under water. To speak literally, Baptists immerse by immersion. Or better still, we immersers immerse by immersing. So you see, the Greek word has not been translated. It has simply been adopted, un-translated, into English.

But there are many Christians who sprinkle or pour water over the heads of converts instead of immersing them. **This means that some Christians change the Bible to match their practice instead of changing their practice to match the Bible.** They do this by not translating the Greek word *baptidzo*. If we do not fully translate the word *baptidzo* it will lead, as it has, to misunderstandings and misapplications of its meaning.

This morning as we continue our study of 1 Timothy we come across another word that is not usually translated into English and therefore gets misunderstood and misapplied. It has left the application of this word open to broad interpretation.

We pick up this morning in chapter 3 of 1 Timothy. Chapter 3 started with a description of the character qualities needed to be an elder in the church. Now we turn to another group in the church.

**1 Timothy 3:8-13 (NIV) Deacons (servants), likewise, are to be [men] worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They**

must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them **serve** [as **deacons**]. In the same way, {**their wives**} (**women**) are to be [women] worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon (**servant**) must be {**the husband of but one wife**} (**a man of one woman**) and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

[ ] = NIV added words      ( ) = literal translation      { } = interpretation

The un-translated word in this passage is the Greek word *διάκονος*. This word also has been left un-translated. The transliteration into English is **diakonos**. This word too was carried over transliterated into Latin and later morphed into English as **deacon**.

You might be thinking to yourself, "Oh I know what a deacon is." Well maybe you do and maybe you don't. Likely, what you mean is that you know what a deacon has been in the churches of which you have been a part. That does not mean you know what the biblical meaning is.

Remember, a transliteration is different from a translation and tells you nothing of the word's true meaning. If the writers of an English Bible translated the word, it would be the word "servant." This Greek word comes directly from the verb "to serve" in Greek.

So, our passage in 1 Timothy should begin as follows, "Servants, likewise, are to be worthy of respect..." Note that the word servant has been un-translated in the New International Version. And they added the word "men". They did this because of their interpretation of the whole passage. We will see why in a few moments. But first let me describe these servants.

Paul is not writing about domestic servants like a maid, a butler, a cook, or a housekeeper. Instead, he is writing about people who had a position as servant in a church. He is writing about those who serve in the church.

It appears there were three groups of people in the early churches. There were the elders/pastors/overseers, those who led and watched over the church. They had authority over the church.

The second group were servants of the church. They had responsibility for some task in the church.

And then third was everyone else in the church. The elders had responsibility and authority. The servants had only responsibility. Responsibility and authority are not the same.

So what did these church servants do? We are not told in the Bible what the roles were, except that the authoritative role was that of the elders. I think there are two possibilities. Let me explain using our church structure. In both possibilities the elders took care of the teaching, preaching, counseling, and administrative needs of the church. The first possibility is that the elders also divided up the "programs" of the church and served as the chairpersons or team leaders of each. The servants of the church then made up the rest of the committee or team. So the head usher was an elder and the

servants were the rest of the ushers. The chairperson of the Properties Committee was an elder, and the rest of the committee was made up of the servants of the church.

The other possibility is that the committees and teams as well as the chairpersons of each were made up of the servants of the church, all working under the authority of the church elders.

Last week, we looked at the qualifications for elders as qualities that all Christians should all be growing in. The same is true of the qualifications of the church servants. Let's now look at what Paul writes.

**1 Timothy 3:8-9 (NIV) ... they "are to be... worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.**

It was written of a candidate for church elder that he must not be a recent convert. It does not say that of the servants of the church, but they must be solid on the basic teachings of the Christian faith. Likely elders were drawn from this serving group, so they were already solid on the basic teachings.

**1 Timothy 3:10 (NIV) They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve...**

This testing probably had to do with testing their understanding of the deep truths of the faith.

And then we come to verse 11. It is here that we run into trouble. A literal reading of the verse is as follows:

**1 Timothy 3:11 Women, similarly, must be respectable, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.**

You will note that a literal translation does not say wives. Nor does it use the word "their," as in their women. That would clearly be wives. As worded it is not clearly wives. It simply says women. The wording favors "women" over "wives".

And yet many English versions of this passage have wives instead of women. Why? Well, they do so to match their practice. Just like some churches do not immerse and so do not translate *baptidzo*, some churches do not have women "deacons" and so do not translate *diakonos*. They make the Bible match their practice instead of changing their practice to match the Bible.

The job with the greater responsibility was the job with authority, that of the elders. And yet it doesn't say anything about the character of their wives. So why would Paul write that the wives of male servants in the church have to be of a certain character for their husbands to serve as servants? That makes no sense at all. The context, then favors "women" over "wives."

So the wording favors "women" instead of "wives" and the context favors women instead of wives. I believe that men only served as elders in the early churches and both men and women served as servants in these churches.

I don't really know why many Baptist churches don't have elders. But the need for elders has been obvious and so many developed a Board of Deacons who function like elders in many ways. This is true in many churches of both Baptists and many non-Baptists. These church do not have elders, but have a group of deacons who basically run the church.

The history of our church, Emmanuel Baptist Church of Gambrills, took us away from deacons having any governing authority over the church. So not only does Emmanuel Baptist Church not have elders who lead the church, we don't have deacons who lead the church. We have almost a pure congregational style of church government. And that makes a big difference in the role of deacons in our church compared to most Baptist churches you have been in.

Some years back a woman was nominated to serve as a deacon in our church. Before we voted yea or nay we decided to study the issue. Our church-wide study on this passage determined two things:

- 1. In our church, deacons do not have authority over the church. They do not serve as elders in function.**
- 2. The context of this passage leans toward an interpretation of "women" and not "wives."**

The conclusion we came to was that women could serve as deacons in Emmanuel Baptist Church. Now if our structure was different and the deacons in our church had an authoritative role, we would have said no to women serving as deacons. But that is not the case.

I believe Paul is writing with the intent that there are both men and women serving as servants of the churches. We see one such in the book of Romans.

**Romans 16:1-2 (NIV) I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.**

It appears that Phoebe is on her way to the church at Rome. She has been given a responsible job to do on behalf of the church. She is not an elder, nor an apostle. But she has a job to do in serving those who do have authority in the church.

Then Paul returns to character qualities. Like elders, the servants of the church must be people of sexual fidelity and must be good parents in the home.

**1 Timothy 3:12 (NIV) A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.**

I dealt with this phrase, "husband of one wife" in last Sundays' sermon. I believe it does not mean husband of one wife, but rather a man who is faithful to his wife. There is a sheet on the table on the foyer with a more detailed explanation and rationale for that interpretation.

While verse 12 goes back to masculine endings on the words, that does not preclude Paul from meaning men instead of women or men and not women. I think all of these qualities apply to both men and women. The reason why has to do with how some languages speak groups of men and women.

I learned this a few years ago in my study of Spanish. **One man is an hombre. A group of more than one man is hombres.** If you add a woman to the group, it is still hombres. In fact if it is a group of 100 women and only one man, it is still hombres. It is men in the plural.

The same is true in the Bible. Groups of people, men and women together, are listed with the masculine plural noun. That is the way many languages work. I believe, because of the context that has included both men and women, that verse 12 applies to both the male and female servants of the church. All must be faithful in their marriages.

Here is the application for our church today: **The church cannot function with only leaders. The church needs servers.** The church needs maturing Christians, solid in their faith, who can and will take on responsibilities to serve in the church.

Right now the Nominating Committee is looking to fill the roles of service within Emmanuel Baptist Church for the coming year. We need you to serve. If there is character quality on this list that you are deficient in and so unqualified to serve, you should tell us when we ask you to serve. Otherwise, we ask that you pray about serving as asked.

We need you to serve. Jesus needs you to serve.