

The Epistle of First John

Lesson Two

Prelude to the Prologue of 1st John

Introduction:

- I. Prologue to 1 John is unique.
 - A. One long compound, confusing sentence – even in the Greek (1 Jn 1:1-4).
 1. This has been problematic for translators.
 - a. Some translate it as one long complicated sentence.
 - b. Others as two, five, nine, or even eleven sentences.
 2. Points up the need to carefully choose versions or translations.
 - a. Best to have several reliable versions to compare.
 - b. No single English version or translation is accurate in every detail.
 - B. Consider why there are variations in the English translation of the prologue to 1 John.
 1. Many are not prepared to answer critics who undermine the Christian's confidence in the Scriptures.
 - a. We believe Scripture is given by inspiration of God.
 - b. We also believe the Scriptures are inerrant.
 - c. But we do not have the original manuscripts (autographs) – only copies of the originals.
 2. How do we know these are reliable and trustworthy?
 3. How do we know we can rely on versions and translations today?
 - C. It is a mistake to dismiss these things.
 1. We cannot have "blind faith" – "blind faith" is having no faith at all.
 - a. Remember the definition of faith (Heb 11:1).
 - b. Remember the source of our faith (Rom 1:16-17; 10:17; Jn 20:30-31).

2. We want to know: (1) can we trust the original writings of the Bible; (2) can we trust the manuscripts we have; and (3) can we trust the English translations and versions of the Bible – especially the New Testament?

Discussion:

I. Can we trust the original writings of the Bible?

A. Understanding the process of inspiration.

1. Inspiration – the process God used to reveal His word.
 - a. It is called "revelation" by Paul (Eph 3:1-6).
 - (1). Revelation came through the Holy Spirit to apostles and prophets.
 - (2). They wrote things revealed to them.
 - (3). When we read, we are reading what God revealed through the Holy Spirit.
 - (4). When we read, we can understand the same as the apostles and prophets understood.
 - b. This process of revelation is called "inspiration."
 - (1). Things written by apostles and prophets did not originate with them.
 - (2). The source of revelation is God.
 - (3). The medium of revelation was the Holy Spirit.
 - (4). The means of revelation were words – words to read and understand.
2. Paul affirmed all Scripture given by inspiration is profitable (2 Tim 3:16-17).
 - a. But the writer was not the source (1 Cor 14:27; 2 Pet 1:20-21).
 - (1). The message originated with God.
 - (2). God revealed His message to the Holy Spirit.
 - (3). Holy Spirit moved, guided, and directed these holy men of God.
 - (4). Holy men of God – apostles and prophets – wrote things revealed to them for us to read.
 - (5). When we read, we are reading a message originating in the mind of God – written in words we can understand.

B. The problem of disagreements over what was written is not with the original message.

1. The problem is:
 - a. Either an unreliable version or translation that does not accurately convey the original message.
 - b. Or, we do not understand what we are reading, or interpreting what is written based on our own prejudices and preconceived ideas.
2. We can and must agree (1 Cor 1:10-11).
 - a. Otherwise, we run the risk of twisting and perverting the Scriptures (2 Pet 3:14-16).
 - (1). Untaught (unlearned): "illiterate, untrained, uninstructed; to be educated with too little learning; or one who has not acquired a formal education" – some versions define these as "ignorant people."
 - (2). Unstable: "to be uncertain, unsteadfast, wavering back and forth, to vacillate (colloquial "wishy washy"); pertaining to a tendency to change by whoever seems to make a stronger argument; those who are easily swayed by the opinions of others."
3. There should be no confusion if we have a reliable version or translation of the Scriptures.

II. Can we trust the manuscripts we have?

A. We have several reliable sources of the Old and New Testament.

1. Biblical manuscripts: any document or book written by hand.
 - a. We have about 5,800 complete or fragmented Greek New Testament manuscripts.
2. Quotations: quotes from writings of "Patristic Witnesses" – early leaders and writers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.
 - a. Quoted from New Testament manuscripts that existed in their day.
 - b. To date, we have more than 36,000 quotes of the New Testament alone.
 - c. "In fact, if there were no biblical manuscripts available today, the entire New Testament could be reconstructed from the writings of the Church

Fathers of the first three centuries with the exception of eleven verses."
(Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*).

3. Later Versions: trusted versions of both the Old and New Testaments written after the third century in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Aramaic, and other languages.
- B. Total amount of manuscripts, quotes, and later versions numbers nearly 27,000.
1. We have thousands of reliable sources to help reconstruct the biblical text, especially the New Testament.
- III. Can we rely on the versions or translations of the Bible we have today?
- A. All manuscripts of the New Testament are categorized into "Text Types" or "families" of manuscripts based on grammatical and stylistic differences.
1. Not all New Testament manuscripts were copied word-for-word.
 - a. During the 2nd and 3rd centuries, reproductions of the New Testament often took on the writing characteristics and linguistic style common to people living in certain geographical areas.
 - b. These were some of the earliest "versions" of the New Testament.
- B. Text Types fall into four major categories:
1. Byzantine Text Type: also known as "The Majority Text."
 - a. Comprise about 94 percent of all existing 5,800 Greek New Testament manuscripts.
 - b. Term "Byzantine Text-Type" originated from the Byzantine Empire that warehoused and protected manuscripts until Greek scholars fled with their manuscripts to Rome during the rise of the Ottoman Empire.
 - c. Dr. Bruce Metzger: "The framers of this text sought to smooth away any harshness of language, to combine two or more divergent readings into one expanded reading, and to harmonize parallel passages." (Dr. Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*).
 2. Alexandrian Text Type: manuscripts traced to large Christian communities living in Alexandria, Egypt during the 2nd and 3rd century AD.

- a. Comprise about 3 to 4 percent of all existing Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.
 - b. Dr. Metzger writes: "Characteristics... are brevity and austerity. That is, it is generally shorter than the text of other forms, and it does not exhibit the degree of grammatical and stylistic polishing that is characteristic of the Byzantine..."
3. Caesarean Text Type: found in the city of Caesarea on the coast of Palestine.
- a. A sub-group of Alexandrian manuscripts with some Western influence, and comprise less than 1 percent of all known Greek New Testament manuscripts.
 - b. Dr. Metzger describes it as, "characterized by a distinctive mixture of Western readings and Alexandrian readings. One may also observe a certain striving after elegance of expression."
4. Western Text Type: manuscripts from Carthage (North Africa) and Rome.
- a. Comprise about 1 percent of all existing New Testament manuscripts and were often quoted by Patristic witnesses in the 3rd and 4th century AD.
 - b. Dr. Metzger writes: "The chief characteristic of Western readings is fondness for paraphrase. Words, clauses, and even whole sentences are freely changed, omitted, or inserted with surprising freedom, wherever it seemed that the meaning could be brought out with greater force and definiteness."
- C. All English versions and translations of the New Testament are based on one or more of these text types.
1. Translating the New Testament into English using all 5,800 known Greek manuscripts would be an impossible task.
 - a. Biblical scholars and textual critics disagree over which manuscripts are closest to the originals (autographs).
 - b. They disagree over which manuscripts provide the best choice of wording.
 - c. They also disagree over whether text omitted in some manuscripts was included in the originals (autographs).

2. Textual scholars made several arbitrary decisions to translate manuscripts and text types into English (or other languages).
 - a. They gathered manuscripts and text types believed to be closest to the original (autographs) – which was an educated guess.
 - b. They combined manuscripts into a single Greek text of the New Testament known as a "Critical Text" – the product of a critical examination of all New Testament manuscripts.
 - c. The "Critical Text" used as the source from which all English versions and translations are based.
 3. Every contemporary version or translation of the New Testament is based on one or more "Critical Text."
- D. The most prominent critical texts today include:
1. Textus Receptus: The Textus Receptus (Latin: "received text") is the 15th century Greek New Testament used for all translations of the Reformation period.
 - a. Textus Receptus is based almost exclusively on manuscripts from the Byzantine text type – 94 percent of all known Greek New Testament manuscripts.
 - b. Versions translated include the Martin Luther's German translation of the New Testament, Tyndale's English translation, the King James Version, and the New King James Version.
 2. Westcott and Hort Critical Text: The Greek version of the New Testament generally considered the first modern critical text.
 - a. Published in 1881 by Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, this critical text is principally based on the Alexandrian text type – comprising 3 to 4 percent of all known manuscripts.
 - b. Westcott and Hort claimed manuscripts of the Alexandrian text type are among the oldest known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament – a claim that is hotly debated among scholars even today.

- c. Versions translated from Westcott and Hort include the Revised Version (RV) (called the English Revised Version in England), and the American Standard Version (ASV) in the U.S.
3. Nestle-Aland Critical Text (27th Edition): The critical text used for all modern translations of the New Testament.
- a. It is named after Eberhard Nestle (d. 1913) a German biblical scholar and textual critic, and Kurt Aland (d. 1994) a German theologian and professor.
 - b. Numerous revisions have since been made to the original text, so that the Nestle-Aland critical text today is the 27th edition.
 - c. The Nestle-Alan text is strikingly close to the Westcott and Hort text and is largely based on the Alexandrian text type, with a few manuscripts from the Byzantine text type.
 - d. Versions translated from the Nestle-Aland critical text include all modern contemporary English versions and translations of the New Testament, such as: the New International Version (NIV), Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), Revised Standard Version (RSV), English Standard Version (ESV), and the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and many others.
4. United Bible Society Critical Text (USB):
- a. Released in 1975, this text is based almost entirely on the Nestle-Aland critical text.
- E. This explains why there are so many variations among modern versions and translations of the New Testament today.
- 1. All modern contemporary versions and translations are based on a specific critical text that often favored one text type to the exclusion of others.
 - 2. The wise Bible student will avoid trusting only one modern or contemporary version of the New Testament.
 - a. They will always compare text from several reliable versions.
 - b. They will always rely on several competent Greek-English lexicons when the meaning of words is unclear.

IV. One more important fact about versions and translations – not all are word-for-word translations from the original Greek.

A. All versions and translation of the New Testament fall into one of three categories.

1. Form driven (word-for-word translation) where translators attempt to render the text in much the same form as the original.
 - a. However, even form driven, so-called word-for-word translations are not truly word-for-word translations.
 - b. These versions must rely on incorporating common English dialect and expressions to help the reader make sense of the Greek text.
2. Meaning driven (thought-for-thought translation) where translators try to capture the meaning of the original text.
 - a. Translators are not so much concerned with the grammatical form of the original language as they are in conveying the meaning of the original language.
 - b. Although these versions are often easier to read, translators can misunderstand or misapply the meaning of the original text.
3. Paraphrased driven where the translator paraphrases either the original Greek or an older English version.
 - a. Some paraphrased versions are done by those with no knowledge of Greek or Hebrew but base their version on what they think the text means.
 - b. Although they are intended to be reader-friendly, the translator can pass on their misunderstanding or misapplication of the text to an unsuspecting public.

B. Bible student should consider the following about all versions and translations.

Contemporary English versions arranged by translation method

Form-Driven	Meaning-Driven	Paraphrased
NKJV ESV NRSV NASB RSV	NIV NJB JB NLT NAB REB NCV	JBP LB CEV The Message
⇐ ⇐ More Literal		Less Literal ⇒ ⇒

Versions ranked from more literal to less literal: NKJV (New King James Version); NASB (New American Standard Bible); ESV (English Standard Version); RSV (Revised Standard Version); NRSV (New Revised Standard Version); NIV (New International Version); NAB (New American Bible); NJB (New Jerusalem Bible); REB (Revised English Bible); JB (Jerusalem Bible); NCV (New Century Version); NLT (New Living Translation); JBP (J.B. Philip's New Testament in Modern English); CEV (Contemporary English Version); LB (Living Bible); The Message.

Conclusion:

- I. These are all the factors to help explain the confusion over translating the opening remarks of 1 John.
 - A. The grammatical style of John's prologue is neither careless nor accidental.
 1. John's extraordinarily complex mix of thought and emotion is intended to set the object of his letter (Jesus Christ) center-stage (1 Jn 1:1-4).
 2. He affirms the eternal nature of Jesus Christ – the same eternal divine nature he affirmed in the opening of his Gospel (Jn 1:1-2).
 - B. His principle concerns in both the Gospel and his first letter are to affirm:
 1. The incarnation of Jesus Christ (Christ coming in the flesh).
 2. Eternal life comes only through believing in Jesus Christ.
 3. Fellowship with God the Father and other believers is only possible through believing in Jesus Christ.

Review Questions:

1. Explain the process of inspiration (Eph 3:1-6)?
2. Why is the inspiration of the Scriptures important (2 Tim 3:16-17; 1 Cor 14:27; 2 Pet 1:20-21)?
3. Is it possible for us to be of the same mind and the same judgment when it comes to the Scriptures (1 Cor 1:10-11)?
4. What kind of person is most likely to twist and pervert the Scriptures (2 Pet 3:14-16)?

5. What are the reliable sources we have for the Old and New Testament?
6. What is a text type and what are their major categories?
7. What is a critical text, what purpose does it serve, and what are the most common used in Bible translations today?
8. What is a form driven version or translation? What are its strengths and weaknesses?
9. What is a meaning driven version or translation? What are its strengths and weaknesses?
10. What is a paraphrase driven version? What are its strengths and weaknesses?
11. Although John's prologue (1 Jn 1:1-4) is lengthy and somewhat confusing, what is its purpose?
12. How does the prologue to John's first letter (1 Jn 1:1-4) mirror the prologue to his Gospel (Jn 1:1-2)?