

Second Sunday Q & A

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Assembly

Introduction:

As is our common custom on the Second Sunday night of each month, we devote this time to answering questions submitted by our members and guests. At this time, I only have two questions that have been submitted. If you have one that was lost in the shuffle at some point, please resubmit it. Or if you have a question you would like answered, place it in the box outside my office or e-mail it to me.

Our two questions are quite diverse, but I think I can cover them both in one time period:

- 1) What is the church of Christ translation of the Bible?
- 2) Is it wrong to circumcise today?

Discussion:

- I. What is the church of Christ translation of the Bible?
 - A. The answer to this question is there is none. First, we need to recognize what the church of Christ is. In **Acts 2:47**, the Bible tells us the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. The church of Christ is nothing more than the collection of people who have been saved by Jesus Christ. It is not some organized entity that translates the Bible. Nor is it an organized institution that can place some stamp of approval or an endorsement on a translation.
 - B. Those who are Christians and, therefore, members of Christ's church are those who simply want to follow the word of God. Thus, we do need to take care how we use the translations we have. No doubt, the ideal situation would be for all of us to learn the original Greek and Hebrew languages at the level of utter scholarship so we could take the extant manuscripts, study them for ourselves and come up with our own understanding. However, that is just not practical. Therefore, most modern Christians have to rely on the scholarship of others.
 - C. With that in mind, I simply want to share with you some helpful hints of understanding about picking translations.
 1. *Rely more on translations that were translated by groups of people rather than one person.* When groups translate, there is a natural set of checks and balances. Individuals have to defend their translation to other scholars before publication. When you are reading a translation that comes from one individual, you may have a valuable resource in seeing what that one individual thinks the passage means, but you may not be getting tested and properly defended translation.
 2. *Rely more on translations that were translated by interdenominational or nondenominational groups rather than by a specific church, denomination or religion.* If the translation is put out by a group that all come from one denomination, there is a real possibility of their losing sight of the actual translation and replacing it with their preconceived doctrinal notion. A great example is the Bible translation put out by the Jehovah's Witnesses—"The New World Translation." They may have had some great scholarship go into some of that translating, but it is very well established that they allowed their doctrinal cart to get before their translation horse when they changed **John 1:1** to say, "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was **a god**" (Emphasis mine, ELC). This is a tricky point because even the King James Bible was translated by men who were mostly Anglicans and trying to please the King. Yet, we can put more reliance on those whose scholarship is not vested in a particular doctrinal stance.
 3. *Rely on a translation that you can understand.* I know that some of our brethren have a tendency to act like the KJV or the old American Standard are the translations we should all stick with as if those translators were somehow inspired. If you can understand those translations, great. If you can't, don't feel bad about getting one that is more easily understood. After all, when the KJV was translated there were older versions that were hard to read and they simply translated it in a way that made it easier for them to read too.
 4. *Understand the translation philosophy of your Bibles' translators.* There is actually a spectrum of translation philosophy that most folks don't understand. Each translation will fit on that spectrum. The spectrum moves from one side of trying to simply translate exactly the words that are in the manuscripts to the other side of being concerned with only conveying the idea of what was being taught. Grab an interlinear sometime and see the problem of

having a translation that does nothing but translate word for word in the same order as the Greek or Hebrew and you will see why folks move increasingly to the other side of that spectrum. Understand a few concepts of translation.

- a. Some translations attempt to be “word for word” translations. That is, they translate the words to their corresponding English words using the same tense, as far as possible. And they try to put the words in as close an order to the original as possible and yet still convey something understandable. Perhaps the translation we are most familiar with like that is the old American Standard Version.
 - b. As you move across that spectrum you get to what is called “thought for thought” translations. That is, instead of trying to get all the words right, these translators strive to figure out what the thought being conveyed is and express that in the translation. Perhaps the most well-known translation in this camp is the New International Version. The thought for thought translation philosophy is not bad or wrong, but we do need to be careful with those because sometimes when conveying the thought of the passage instead of what is actually written a translator can stop translating the Scripture and start providing his interpretation of it.
 - c. Then we move to “paraphrase” Bibles that attempt to make the Bible really easy to understand by paraphrasing. Paraphrasing means to reword for clarity or simplicity. It is not bad, it is like when a preacher reads a passage and then says, “In other words...” and provides a simple clear statement. However, we have to grasp this. A paraphrase Bible is not a translation of the words of the original languages. It is a person’s interpretation of what they think God meant. It is a person’s or a group’s assessment of what a particular passage means and then saying that instead of what was actually written. Further, the paraphrase is sometimes not even based on the original texts but on someone else’s translation. No doubt, sometimes the paraphraser’s assessment may be correct, sometimes maybe not. I’m not saying don’t ever use one. I’m saying that you must understand that with a paraphrase translation you are not getting the translation, you are getting someone’s opinion of what it means. So if you have one, use it as a reference book in the same way you might use a friend calling them up and saying, “Hey, what do you think this verse means?”
5. I’m not going to tell you which translations to use or which ones are the best examples of which category. Usually, each Bible has a preface with an explanation of their translation philosophy at the front of their Bibles.

II. Is it wrong to circumcise today?

- A. In **Galatians 5:2-4**, Paul makes a pretty strong statement: “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace” (ESV). Does this mean those who are circumcised today are going to hell? Does it mean we are condemning our boys to hell if they are circumcised? In our modern culture, circumcision is relatively normative. While the percentages are actually dropping, more than half of all boys born in the United States are circumcised.¹ Are all these boys condemned to an eternity in hell just because they were circumcised? Are their parents? No.
- B. Notice very carefully that Paul is not just talking about the act of any circumcision. Rather, he is talking about those who become circumcised out of a desire to be justified by the Old Law. That was exactly what he was arguing against in **Acts 15**, when some of the Pharisees demanded that the Gentiles first had to be circumcised and then could become Christians. Instead of viewing the New Covenant as superceding the Old, they simply saw it as being added to the Old. They believed a person had to submit to the Old Law before they could submit to the new, thus they believed every one who wished to be justified by Christ had to first submit to the Law. In that scenario, Paul refused to let Titus be circumcised according to **Galatians 2:3-6**.

¹ <http://www.cirp.org/library/statistics/USA/>

- C. However, in another scenario, Paul not only permitted circumcision, he performed it. In **Acts 16:3**. Why this seeming contradiction? Because in Titus' case the push was to be circumcised in order to be justified by keeping the Old Testament law. In Timothy's case, it was a matter of expedience. Paul did not circumcise Timothy so Timothy could be saved. He did it so Timothy would not be a stumbling block for other Jews. Certainly, mature Christian Jews needed to understand that circumcision wasn't necessary, but Paul was seeking the lost Jews, not the saved ones. He was going to go to people that still believed the Jewish nation was the chosen people of God and everyone had to become a Jew to be saved. If, somehow, they discovered that Timothy was not circumcised, it would set up a roadblock to any and all teaching. So Paul removed the roadblock. The point for us, however, is that God does not, in the New Covenant, condemn any and all circumcision. Rather, He condemns trying to be saved by keeping the Old Testament, including circumcision. Thus, circumcising our children for health and hygiene reasons or to be like their dad, which are the two most common reasons, is lawful.
- D. The important thing for us to note, however, is that God is not concerned about circumcision of the flesh. He is concerned about circumcision of the heart. **Romans 2:29** makes that clear. **Colossians 2:11-15** also drives it home. Serving God is not about removing an actual part of our flesh. It is about removing the sins of the flesh, cutting the flesh's hold off of our heart and submitting to God. We undergo that circumcision when we are baptized into Christ and then live to serve Him always.

Conclusion:

As always, I do not answer these questions because I think I know all the answers. I answer them because I think the Bible has all the answers to all the questions we need ask. If you feel I have misrepresented what the Bible says on some issue, please feel free to talk with me about it. I want us to be able to help one another serve God and understand His word. If you have any questions you would like discussed during our second Sunday night of the month, please get them to me.