Tired of doing good?

Translators should consider the two verses Galatians 6.9 and 2 Thessalonians 3.13 together. One is in the first person, the other in the second; the tense of the verb is different, though this is not too important. But the message of both is the same. The AV (King James), RV and RSV all translate in much the same way: "Let us not be weary *in* well-doing". RSV in Galatians has a possible improvement: "Let us not *grow* weary in well-doing". We can see Paul's meaning when we stop to think. The translation is a correct one. But the word "in" has proved confusing. Many later English translations have been somewhat misled. NEB, Jerusalem Bible, even TEV, all have "let us never tire *of* doing good", or similar wording. They are joined by many individual translators, for example Moffatt, Phillips and Barclay. Kingsley Williams in the Galatians verse has "Let us not grow tired *in* doing right", but in Thessalonians he translates, "never grow tired *of* doing right".

It is easy to see how the phrase "to tire *of*" has come in. It is a common expression: "I am tired of him", "he got tired of his job and went off to find another". The expression always implies abandoning someone or something, or at any rate the desire to abandon. "I am tired of him" means at its strongest "I don't want to have anything more to do with him", and at least "I wish he would shut up". The expression "to tire *in*", however, is not normal English. So the change to "tire *of*" takes place.

But the Greek cannot really mean "tire *of*". In each case a present participle is used in translating "in well-doing". This construction normally implies action going on at the same time as the main verb, so that a literal translation would be "while doing good, do not be discouraged or weary". It would hardly be possible to make the Greek mean "Do not get tired of doing good". The Latin Vulgate evidently did not understand it to mean this. Its translation is somewhat literal, "Doing good let us not fail", but there is no doubt that the Vulgate thinks of the two actions as simultaneous. Again I have consulted my old friend, Mr. G. D. Kladis, retired Secretary of the Bible Society in Athens. He tells me that he has always taken the two actions in this sentence as simultaneous, and as a Greek he might be expected to have a better sense of his language than an outsider. Bishop Westcott's commentary on Galatians also takes the words in this sense, though it does not attempt to improve on the word "in".

How can we express this in good modern English? The Translator's New Testament in Galatians has "In doing what is good let us not be discouraged". This avoids the error, but it is not such natural English as the Thessalonians translation: "As long as you are doing what is right never lose heart". It is easy to get depressed even while still holding on to one's Christian standards. The people of the first century knew that as well as we do. Paul is giving his early converts some good advice. He does not question their desire to keep on doing the right thing, but he wants to be sure that they will do it cheerfully all the time.

H. K. MOULTON