

There remains only the matter of the role of verse 25 in the overall argument of the chapter. Since there is no textual evidence either for its deletion or for the placement of 25b between verses 23 and 24, the *only* valid solution is to allow the verse to stand where it is. In fact verse 25 performs a double function: 25a ("Thanks to God who accomplishes this through Jesus Christ") is an abbreviated response to the problem raised in 7.7-24, while 25b ("With my mind I serve the Law of God, but with my body I serve the 'law' of sin") contains a brief restatement of the problem in anticipation of the full reply which follows in chapter 8.<sup>11</sup> Thus in the translation of verse 25 it must be kept in mind that Paul's primary concern throughout the chapter is to delineate the place of the Law in the divine purpose, not to describe the psychological struggle of the believer or of the unbeliever. Viewed from this perspective verse 25 functions both to remind the readers that what the Law could not do (25b), the power of God was able to accomplish through Jesus Christ (25a).

<sup>11</sup> Ernest Best, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967).

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## SOME COMMENTS ABOUT STYLE AND MEANING: 1 CORINTHIANS 9.15 AND 7.10

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Most Bible translators today recognize that the author's meaning has priority over the author's style. Nida and Taber set forth this concept quite clearly over a decade ago.<sup>1</sup> Obviously the translator will sometimes depart from an author's style when he or she considers it necessary in order to safeguard the meaning.

Rhetorical questions, for example, may mislead the reader; and they may therefore be translated more adequately as a statement.<sup>2</sup> I remember reading Romans 8.31-32 in the KJV as a child ("What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all . . ."), and thinking that it was God who would be against us. The GNB makes clear the answer to Paul's rhetorical question by translating 8.32a as "Certainly not God, who . . ."

I certainly agree that meaning has priority over style. But the more I study the New Testament writings in Greek and compare modern translations in several languages, the more I wonder if we have not sometimes gone too far in making the receptor language so stylistically smooth for the sake of readability then we actually ignore certain nuances which help us perceive a writer's emotions or thinking. This is nothing new. Scribes very early began polishing the style of the New Testament writings, improving harsh grammatical

<sup>1</sup> *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

constructions. The manuscripts of the Byzantine text type clearly reflect the efforts to improve the writers' styles in verse after verse.<sup>3</sup>

The Apostle Paul's style can sometimes be characterized by phrases such as "literary excellence" and "could rise to the heights of Plato and Cleanthes".<sup>4</sup> But other words such as "spontaneous", "inelegances", "harsh", "parentheses and discords" are also appropriate descriptions at times.<sup>5</sup> Translators should attempt to preserve this variety of styles in Paul's letters and not level out all verses of his letters into a homogeneous, innocuous style.

Rather than writing in a theoretical manner, I will examine two texts in 1 Corinthians in several modern translations and will suggest that translators of these passages need to preserve a certain nuance in the Greek which is often lost in efforts to produce a stylistically smooth translation.

### 1 Corinthians 9.15

In 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul addresses the question raised by the Corinthian Christians regarding the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. Although some Christians, the strong in faith, have clear consciences about eating this meat, Paul tells them that they should abstain from eating it if it becomes a stumbling block to the faith of a Christian whose faith is weak. Then Paul reinforces his admonition to the strong in faith by telling them that he himself did not insist on his rights while he ministered among them (chapter 9). He could have claimed his rights to be supported financially by the church in Corinth. Indeed there were four good reasons that would support such a claim: (1) everyday custom (9.7), (2) Old Testament teaching (9.8-11), (3) religious practice (9.13), and (4) a command from the Lord Jesus (9.14). But he made use of none of these rights in order not to hinder the gospel (9.12, 15).

Then in verse fifteen Paul states directly and clearly that in enumerating the rights (9.7-14), he was not doing so in the hope that they would now begin to support him. The last half of verse fifteen is broken grammatically and reflects Paul's strong emotions. He begins by writing, *kalon gar moi mallon apothanein ē*—"For I would rather die than . . ." He never finished the sentence. Instead he breaks off that sentence and declares with a measure of defiance, *to kauchēma mou oudeis kenōsei*. "No one will empty my boast!" He has no ground for boasting that he preaches the gospel, because he is compelled to do so. But he does have freedom of choice about whether to claim material support, and he boasts in the fact that he does not demand his rights in this regard.

Commentators recognize that the anacolouthon is evidence of Paul's strong emotion. But various scribes altered the text in order to make the style smoother.<sup>6</sup> The KJV is based on one of these secondary texts, and reads, "for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void".

<sup>3</sup> Cf. F. G. Kenyon, *The Text of the Greek Bible*, 3rd ed., rev. by A. W. Adams (London: Duckworth, 1975), 208-21.

<sup>4</sup> Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. IV, *Style* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976), 80.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-86.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 558f; and Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 156, n. 6.

C. K. Barrett, commenting on the textual variants in the Greek text, says, "There is no difference in sense; only in intensity".<sup>7</sup> Perhaps there is no difference in sense, but certainly something is lost in the "improvement" of the original grammatical construction. When a speaker or writer breaks off in mid-sentence and makes a passionate assertion as Paul has in this verse, that assertion is highlighted as being more important than the thought of the sentence which is left incomplete behind. We perceive the speaker's intense emotions which have not allowed him to finish his first sentence.

Most modern translations of 1 Corinthians are based on the better Greek text; but in interest of smooth style in the receptor language, many translators have rounded off the rough edges of Paul's style. The results are translations much like the KJV:

**RSV**—"For I would rather die than have any one deprive me of my ground for boasting".

**Phillips**—"Indeed I would rather die than have anyone make this boast of mine an empty one!"

**NEB**—"I had rather die! No one shall make my boast an empty boast".

**GNB**—"I would rather die first! Nobody is going to turn my rightful boast into empty words!"

**NIV**—"I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast".

**NAB**—"I would rather die than let anyone rob me of my boast!"

**NASB**—"For it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one".

**Goodspeed**—"I had rather die than do that. No one shall deprive me of this boast of mine".

**VP**—"¡ Prefiero morir, antes que alguien me quite esta satisfacción que tengo!"

**A Boa Nova**—"Antes queria morrer do que fazer tal coisa. Não quero que ninguém me tire este motivo de orgulho".

**FC**—"J'aimerais mieux mourir! Personne ne m'enlèvera ce sujet de fierté!"

**Die Gute Nachricht**—"Eher wollte ich sterben. Meiner Ruhm soll mir niemand nehmen!"

**LB**—"In fact, I would rather die of hunger than lose the satisfaction I get from preaching to you without charge".

**C. K. Barrett**—"For I would rather die than—no, no one shall make this boast of mine an empty thing".

**H. Conzelmann**—"For I would rather die than—no one shall make my boast an empty one".

**Twentieth Century NT**—"indeed I would far rather die—Nobody shall make my boast a vain one!"

**Osty et Trinquet**—"Plutôt mourir, en effet, que de . . . Cette vanterie, personne ne la réduira à néant".

**TOB**—"Plutôt mourir! . . . Personne ne me ravira ce motif d'orgueil!"

I have provided eighteen translations above for study and comparison. It is my contention that none of these is entirely adequate for conveying the meaning and emotion of the Greek text. Some are more adequate than others.

<sup>7</sup> *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 208f.

Least adequate are the following: RSV, NIV, NASB, Goodspeed, A Boa Nova, and LB. None of these indicates a break in Paul's train of thought and the abrupt insertion of a more important thought, i.e., no one will rob him of his boast. Neither do any of these punctuate so as to indicate the intense emotion which the Greek syntax expresses.

Other translations use exclamation marks to show the intense feeling but do not reflect the syntax of the Greek: Phillips, NEB, GNB, NAB, VP, FC, Die Gute Nachricht, TOB. The Twentieth Century NT uses a dash but does not really show clearly that Paul left his initial sentence incomplete; the words "indeed I would far rather die" make a complete sentence. The NEB renders the incomplete sentence as a complete sentence and places the exclamation mark there, as if that were the more stressed of the two sentences. But that is incorrect. It is the second thought, overriding the initial thought, which should receive the exclamation mark.

The other translations reflect the incomplete thought and the insertion of a more important thought, but they fail to punctuate in a way which reflects the intense emotion: Barrett, Conzelmann, Osty et Trinquet.

I would propose that this verse could best be translated by following the last three mentioned translations and placing an exclamation mark at the end—"For I would rather die than—no one shall make my boast an empty one!" Surely such a translation better preserves Paul's intense feelings and shows that he is not simply stating his thoughts, as in the RSV, but he is defiantly standing his ground. To that extent, an aspect of the meaning becomes lost when we smooth out the grammar.

### 1 Corinthians 7.10

The second passage I would examine is 1 Corinthians 7.10. Beginning in 7.1 Paul replies to questions that the Corinthians have raised concerning sex, marriage, and divorce in a letter sent to him. Interpreters usually regard verses 10 and 11 as a general principle, but recently Jerome Murphy-O'Connor has argued that in 7: 3-5 Paul speaks to the situation of a specific couple in the church, he then gives his personal option (7.7a) and digresses regarding "the unmarried and the widows" (7.8-9), and then he returns (7.10-11) to his original topic begun in 7.3-5.<sup>8</sup> If this reconstruction is correct, then 7.10-11 are not the formulation of a general principle, but are directed to a specific couple.

In any case, Paul writes in 7: 10a, "*Tois de gegamēkosin parangellō, ouk egō alla ho kyrios . . .*" Various modern translations of this verse may be noted:

**GNB**—"For married people I have a command which is not my own but the Lord's: . . ."

**FC**—"Aux mariés chrétiens, je donne cet ordre (que ne vient pas de moi, mais du Seigneur): . . ."

**Die Gute Nachricht**—"Für die Verheirateten habe ich eine verbindliche Vorschrift. Sie stammt nicht von mir, sondern von Christus, dem Herrn: . . ."

**VP**—"Pero a los que están ya casados les ordeno que la esposa no deje a su esposo. Este mandato en realidad no es mío, sino del Señor".

<sup>8</sup> The Divorced Woman in 1 Cor. 7: 10-11, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (1981), 601-606. Murphy-O'Connor also argues that the aorist passive verb *chōrīsthēnai* in 7: 10 should be translated "the wife should not allow herself to be separated from her husband".

None of these translations carries the correct nuance to express Paul's thought as reflected in the Greek text. They all imply that all along Paul intended to give a command from the Lord. Murphy-O'Connor correctly perceives that "the dominical logion does not control Paul's thought in 7.1-11; it is brought in as an afterthought because of its pastoral utility".<sup>9</sup> It is this element of an "afterthought" which is missing from the four translations cited above. Each has smoothed out Paul's style, but at the expense of hiding from the reader an insight into Paul's thought. He was going to give the command on his own authority as in 1 Corinthians 7: 12, and only as an afterthought added "not I, but the Lord" as he recalled the dominical saying. A translation more faithful would be, "I give the order; no, not I, Christ gives it".<sup>10</sup>

In summary, I have argued that the broken syntax in 1 Corinthians 9.15 reflects Paul's intense emotions as he wrote or dictated that passage. By "improving" his style, we risk losing the emotion, which is an aspect of the meaning. In 1 Corinthians 7.10 the words "not I, but the Lord" are an afterthought on Paul's part, and to translate this verse as if Paul planned from the outset to exhort the readers with the authority of a teaching of Jesus is to alter subtly the meaning by masking the train of Paul's thought.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 606.

<sup>10</sup> A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 140-141.

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## TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH (A COMMENT ON MATTHEW 13.1-3)

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Matthew does not explicitly inform his readers of the reason *why* Jesus "sat" beside Lake Galilee. In many cultures the use of the verb "sit" without qualification would normally imply some degree of tiredness on the part of the person performing the action, though readers of more pious inclination might conclude that Jesus sat beside the lake to meditate.

To avoid either of these misunderstandings, the *Good News Bible* translates 13.1b as "where he sat down to teach".<sup>1</sup> So does the Italian common language translation *Parola del Signore. Die Gute Nachricht* does not supply the verb "teach" as a complement to "sit", though its rendering of 13.3 implies similar exegesis: "and he explained to them his message with the help of parables".

<sup>1</sup> It would also be helpful to make Luke 4.20 explicit, where "sat down" is immediately followed by "All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him" (TEV). For many readers the implication is that by "sitting down" immediately following the reading of scripture, Jesus had done something unusual, which explains the reason that everyone fixed their eyes on him. Some languages may even require a cultural note, indicating that sitting was the customary practice.