

Scholarship's Corruption of Philippians 2:5-7– Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

A number of the early geologists (1800 AD forward) were German and as many of their works had not been published in English, in the late 1950's that language was required for the BS degree in geology. It was even more necessary for my Ph.D. dissertation research.

Second year German consisted largely of translation, both oral and written. To obtain a high mark required not only proper syntax, it was also basic to – as close as possible – render German nouns and verbs into English nouns and verbs rather than into adjectives, adverbs etc. Years later it became evident that the same was true with Hebrew and New Testament Koiné Greek (a dialect that died out c.550 AD, thereby leaving the meaning of the words “fixed”).

German syntax was different, but at least their alphabet consisted of the same 26 letters as English. However, with either OT Hebrew or NT Greek not only does the sentence structure differ from our language, Bible Hebrew has only 22 letters, Koiné Greek 24. In both some letters are the same, some different and others do not exist in English. Thus, a flawless translation of Holy Scripture is not possible without direction from the Holy Spirit. Brilliance and/or education are not enough. Moreover, time and again a literal word-for-word translation simply will not suffice. John 3:16 illustrates: “For so loved God the world that the His Son the only begotten He gave that everyone who believes on Him may not perish but may have life eternal.” Such is hardly everyday English, and most verses are far more challenging.

The problem is that Bible translators understand all this, yet most feel they are above such mundane common sense guidelines and are free to freewheel “outside the lines”. Philippians 2:5-8 is such an example. The 1611 AD King James Bible (KJB) correctly reads:

5 ...Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But **made himself of no reputation**, and took upon him the **form** of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

The 1380 AD Wycliffe verse 7 says *lowered Himself*: 1534 Tyndale, 1535 Coverdale, 1537 Matthew's, the 1539 Great Bible, 1560 Geneva, and the 1568 Bishop's Bible all read as the KJB.

The NASV, RSV, ASV and many others (if not in the main text, the margin) translate verses 6-7 as: “did not regard **equality** with God a thing to be **grasped**, but **emptied Himself**”. Hence, Phil. 2:7 in the NASV reads: (and note the literal translation under the Greek – understandable English?)

“But **emptied himself**, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* being made in the likeness of men” with *emptied himself* supposedly equivalent to “made himself of no reputation” (KJB).

ἀλλ' ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος
but himself emptied (the) form a servant taking in (the) likeness of men becoming

This has led to vast theological debates as to what “emptying Himself” meant. Of what did He empty Himself and just how far did our Lord go in emptying Himself. The Gnostic heretics in the early church proposed that Christ completely emptied Himself of His deity and thus was no longer both 100% God yet still 100% man – that deity entered into Him at His baptism and departed from Him when He went to the Cross. He had to face crucifixion as only a mere man. Such is heresy. If Jesus emptied Himself of anything when He came to earth, it was not His deity. Jesus was even 100% God when but a baby in Mary's womb. There was never, neither ever has been, a moment when He was not God.

The “debate” issue is but a mirage. The context is unmistakable and clear. He “emptied” Himself from being in “the form of God” (vs. 6) – that is, the *outward* attributes of Deity. He laid aside His glory and then “took upon him the form of a servant” (vs. 7). Specifically, Christ took upon Himself self-imposed limitations. Further, we deny that *emptied* is the best rendering – we hold to the old reading.

The Lord Jesus was never “emptied” of His eternal deity or Godhood! He merely laid His glory aside – His outward deity. Moreover, in John 17:5 our Lord prayed to the Father to restore His *glory*, not

His deity – that, He never gave up. Our Lord always had His attributes of Deity (else was no longer God) but didn't use them during His earthly stay.

Instead, as an *unfallen man* He relied on the leading and gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to complete His appointed mission (Heb. 2:4). In so doing, Christ accomplished at least two significant deeds. First, He furnished a living example of a godly life and secondly He demonstrated that Adam could have won the contest in the Garden of Eden. He had not yet sinned (thus still had no fallen sin nature) and had God's *spoken* Word to uphold him against the devil's wiles: simply repeat Genesis 2:16-17 to Satan. Satan has power, but an unfallen man wielding the Word can easily defeat his attacks. The Creator did not unfairly place the first man into a setting in which he had no possible way to emerge victorious.

The NASV, NIV, and nearly all other translations since 1881 have also produced another corruption at Philippians 2:6. Here, the Greek reads:

ὅς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων, οὐχ ἄρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ
who in (the) form of God existing not **robbery** thought it to be **equal** with God

The problem is not with the above Greek. The problem is that none of the old New Testament manuscripts support the *English translations* in these modern versions, for whether one uses the traditional NT Greek *Textus Receptus* text, UBS³ or Nestle²⁶, the Greek of Philippians 2:6 reads *exactly* the same.

The first error made by most translators since 1881 is their deliberate alteration of the adverb ἴσα (English = isa) in vs 6, which means equal. Instead of retaining the Greek grammatical form, these translators have changed the neuter **adverb** equal (ἴσα = isa) into the **noun** *equality* and thereby altered the strength of the meaning (as the Greek ἴσα is neuter, equal is an adverb here).

Thus instead of vs. 6: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be **equal** with God” as we find in the King James (as well as all the older English bibles named on the first page) we instead read: “Whom, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard **equality** with God a thing to be grasped” (i.e., clung to, held on to), which is weaker. Equality with God does not have the same force as “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30) whereas “equal” better conveys the John 10:30 energy and calls to mind the stronger concept that “equals of equals are equal”. The subtlety is without justification, nor is this all the mischief they have done.

The second error concerns the Greek noun, harpagmos (ἄρπαγμὸν), meaning “robbery” (see Greek above). As before, modern translators were not content to leave the grammar alone. Instead, they have changed the **noun** “robbery” into the **verb** “to be grasped” (see verse 6 translation in preceding paragraph). Again, there is absolutely no real justification whatsoever for their having so done.

Harpagmos means: to seize, carry off, take by force, plunder, or robbery (Liddell & Scott, 1976 *Greek-English Lexicon*; Wigram-Green, 1982 *Greek-English Lexicon*; Strongs #725). Indeed, all the older English bibles already named and published in the 1500's support the 1611 KJB by also rendering the Greek as “robbery”. So what is the justification modern scholars offer to justify such changes?

The major factor in justifying the need for revising the King James is that several thousand manuscripts (mss) have been discovered since 1611. As this data was not available to the King James translators, it must be considered. Such is compelling as some of these manuscripts are dated between 350-380 AD whereas the 10 Erasmus used to produce his 1516 AD Greek NT text (plus the 200 he had studied) were mainly from the 10th to 15th centuries. Being older, critics take them as more reliable.

Indeed, the new translations are rife with footnotes informing the reader that “the oldest, the best mss read such and such” as opposed to the King James (almost always the same two corrupt MSS are meant). Is it not devastating to learn that what has been kept from the church is the fact that 90–95% of the several thousand recent finds agree with the Greek text of those few Erasmus had – moreover, they read like the 1522 AD Text of Erasmus, which underlies all the Reformers Bibles as well as the King James.

Beloved, for over 400 years we have had the verbal, plenary, inerrant, infallible Word to bring us into the presence and family of the living God. Through the gospel embedded in its words and the Holy Spirit to bear witness to its truthfulness, we have been given the gift of eternal life. Those words now instruct and guide us so that we may be pleasing to our Lord. The true and only God has faithfully preserved them for us – as He promised. Let not the opinions of mere men dissuade us.