

## WOMEN TRANSLATORS

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### *About the author...*

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### Introduction

The topic of this discussion has for sometime been one that has caused confusion and even in some cases it has caused a rift between brethren. Our intention is neither to impugn anyone's character nor to determine the motive for what has been done relative to the use of women translators. I simply want to look at the infallible Word of God and determine what is found therein and to walk accordingly. I believe this to be the case with every God fearing brother or sister in Christ.

It is not my intention to limit the role of women in their work for the Lord. A woman's role is essential and important to the growth and development of the church. From the very first, she has had a wonderful part in God's plan for the salvation of mankind (Titus 2:3-5). The Bible records the example of many godly women that shows their great worth (Acts 9:36-39). However, there are some limitations placed upon her as to the time and place in which she is to exercise her responsibilities (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). This does not make her a second class Christian. It is just the way in which God set things in order.

### What Is a Translator?

A translator is one who turns one language "into one's own or into another language, to express in more comprehensible terms: explain..." (*Webster's* 1241). If one is speaking in English to a Spanish audience, there is need for understanding if the message is to be made known. The hearer must know what is being stated before there can be a response to the message. Therefore, the work of a translator is clear. It is to make known the message which is being given in a language not understood by those in the audience. This often requires the thoughts and ideas of the translator to be used for clarity's sake. Words must be changed or substituted if there is to be knowledge of the message.

When one language is being translated into another, there will of necessity be some changes made in the wording. In an article written for *Seek The Old Paths*, May 1996, Roger D. Campbell, a missionary for many years in the foreign field, stated that the translator

Sometimes explains the message. This is sometimes absolutely necessary. Example:  
Suppose you go to Taiwan and preach on the church. You emphasize that the word

church is 'singular' in Matthew 16:18, saying that Jesus promised to build only one church. However in the Chinese language, the word for church and churches are one and the same (no distinction in plural and singular). Question: what does the translator do? In all cases that I can remember he has said what the American said about the singular, and then the translator explains to the audience that the speaker is making an argument based on the Greek or English text. Example 2: Same situation occurs when the American speaker emphasizes that 'elders' is in the plural in Acts 14:23 and 20:17. In Chinese, the word is not in the plural. What does the translator do? He explains what the speaker is saying, and usually the speaker does not have any idea what the translator said (Campbell).

I believe that this example shows that a translation is not always the words that have been given at the outset. It is not and cannot be "word for word."

Another point that needs our attention under this heading is the determination as to whether or not the translator is parallel to a microphone. There are some that are saying the translator acts as a microphone, in that the translator only echoes what another has said. We have already observed that a translator cannot by virtue of language barriers give "word for word" translation. A microphone can and does exactly that! We might add that there are no restrictions in the Bible that prohibit amplification of one's voice. Whereas, there certainly is a clear command showing that women are to be silent in the churches. A public address system cannot translate from one language to another. I believe this is so clear that this objection will fall upon itself.

Also, we must note that a translator does not fall under the heading of an expedient. For a thing to be expedient there must be Bible authority for its being done. Some have said that a translator is much like a songbook in that it is used to carry out the command to sing. First of all one does not need a songbook in order to sing. It is never expedient to violate a commandment. The songbook is an expedient, but to use the mechanical instrument is an addition and is in violation of our command to sing. It adds a part that is not authorized (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). We are to sing in our worship to God, but we have some restrictions upon the what and the how. The same is true with the teaching in the worship assembly. Men are to proclaim the gospel of Christ and women are not to have any part of leading in this part of worship.

### **Do We Have Any Bible Examples of Women Translators?**

All that we do in religious matters must be by divine authority. For there to be authority, it must be given in Scripture (1 Peter 4:11). It is never found in unlearned emotionalism or in the "end justifies the means" philosophy. Emotions sometimes move us to want to do or say a particular thing, but it must never be our guide. If the principle of the "end justifies the means" were to be applied to our religious practices, we could emotionally justify a number of things that are unscriptural. For instance, it might sound good to help the church raise funds for its growth by using "cake sales, raffles, bingo", or any other fund raising device. However, we know that the Bible authorizes the church to be supported by the membership giving on the first day of every week as they have "prospered" (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). This offering is to be in proportion to what one has earned (2 Corinthians 9:7). Fund raisers are not authorized; therefore they are not to be done in the Lord's church. The above example will show the emptiness of the argument given by some who say, "we are doing it because

there is no other person to translate.” Of course we can see that the “end does not justify the means.”

There is not one command, not one authorized example, nor one inference that will give the authorization for women to translate in the worship assembly. Thus, we must conclude that it is not God’s design for her to be in this position. In fact, we have a restriction relative to this matter. Paul clearly prohibited women from exercising spiritual gifts in the assembly, including the gift of interpretation. *“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law”* (1 Corinthians 14:34). If God gave this restriction to the Spirit-gifted women during the time of miracles and forbade them from exercising that gift, surely we can see the error in saying that she can exercise a non-spirit gift today.

### **Does Anyone Have the Right to Give Her this Authority?**

One of the main arguments that I hear is that she can be in the position of translating before the worship assembly if she is given the authorization. Some say it is an expedient. But for a thing to be an expedient there must already be an authorization for the action. There is not one single person with the right to make changes in what God has legislated.

It is without question that when she is translating she is in a position of authority! A careful reading of 1 Timothy 2:9-12 shows that a woman is not to have the authority over a man. She is not to be his teacher or take the position of authority.

*In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.*

Notice that this verse tells her to “*be in silence*” (1 Timothy 2:12). How then can she translate (vocalize the message) and not be in violation of this passage? Then in 1 Corinthians 14:23-35, Paul again gives instructions to the assembled saints concerning this matter (vs. 23 “whole church”). He begins by instructing the MEN to remain silent if there was no interpreter (other man) present (27-28). If men in the first century had this prohibition, and they did, how can we today say that we can use women to interpret if no other man is present? Remember that she is to be silent in this assembly (1 Timothy 2:12)!

There are some that contend that 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy are not referring to the same restrictions. However, they are parallel passages. Notice the ways they are alike: 1) Women are not to teach in the public assembly (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 14:34). 2) She must not usurp authority (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 14:34). 3) She is to be in silence in the church (1 Timothy 2:11; 1 Corinthians 14:34). 4) She is to be in subjection (1 Timothy 2:11; 1 Corinthians 14:34). 5) From the beginning it was God’s plan for the woman to be in subjection (1 Timothy 2:13-14; 1 Corinthians 14:34).

From these passages we can see that there is no one with the power to change God’s restrictions upon the women concerning their actions in the church. To do so is to violate God’s plan

(Revelation 22:18-19).

### Who Is the Teacher?

I truly believe that when we have answered this question we will have closed the door on the use of women translators. I know that there are some that contend that the translator is not the teacher, and are only repeating what the preacher has stated. We have already shown that the translator must take some liberties in conveyance of the message. In my mind this fact alone proves who is doing the teaching.

The responsibility of a teacher is to make known a certain topic. For there to be a transfer of information there is by necessity a need for the hearer to understand. Without understanding there can be no response to that which is presented for consideration. In Romans 9:23 we find a very interesting phrase: “...that he might make known the riches of his glory...” The words “make known” comes from the Greek word *gnorizo*, meaning to make known; subj. to know:--certify, declare, make known, give to understand, do to wit, wot” (Strong 20). In other words the gospel must be made known so that a believer might obey that which was made known. What if the message was not understood? It could not be obeyed and it is the teacher who makes known the message. Notice 1 Corinthians 1:21: “*For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*” (Emp. TLS). Of course we know that it is the gospel that brings the message of salvation (Romans 1:16). But we must also realize that we are saved by a faith that acts upon the gospel that is taught (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:17; James 2:26). If anyone is to obey the gospel they must first hear the message. The word “hear” does not mean simply to audibly hear, but to understand. Notice Acts 19:5; “*When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*” The word “heard” means to understand. I do not believe that any faithful student of the Bible will argue with this conclusion. A person must know what is being said before they can understand and they must understand before they can obey!

In 1 Timothy 2:8-15, the apostle Paul by inspiration is dealing with the woman’s role. Verse 8 shows that men are to pray in mixed company. Verses 9-10 teach that she is to be modest in her attire; and verses 11-13 give instructions relative to learning, teaching and the reasons for such. The word “teach” in verse 12 comes from the word *didasko* which means “to teach or speak in the public assembly, to direct, admonish” (Moulton 98). The verse prohibits women from having a teaching role in the public assembly. Some would say that she is not teaching; that she is only translating what is being said. My conviction is that she is the only one who can teach those who are hearing (understanding) what she is saying. If a language is not understood there is no information being transferred! Teach means to provide instruction, to cause one to understand the subject, to guide a study or to impart knowledge concerning a given subject. Suppose that I was teaching World History in a college course and I spoke in a language that was not known by the class, would the students learn from me? Of course, we know that this class would never know anything about World History because they would not understand. However, if there was a translator present who could “give understanding” to the foreign language that I spoke then the class would learn. It would not be from me but from the one who taught them!

Let me pose a question. I believe that when this question is honestly answered, without preconceived notions, we can come to an understanding of just who the teacher is in reality. Let us

suppose that an English speaking man is preaching the gospel to an audience that only understands Russian. He is preaching the plan of salvation and has given every step required by God with book, chapter and verse. He has been true to the Bible, but the translator, in her giving the message to the audience, leaves out baptism for the remission of sins. Which of these two would be the false teacher? What will the audience obey? Oh, I know that some will say the translator was not true to the message she received; but my friends that is not our question! Which speaker's instruction will the audience be able to obey? It is clear that the person who is heard and whose language is understood is the teacher.

I have often wondered what might be the thoughts of an audience who could not understand the man who is giving a lesson on 1 Timothy 2:12, but is able to understand the woman translator. What would be the reaction of a sincere person who is seeking the true church when they would hear a woman saying, "the woman is to be silent in the church?" I just wonder if they would be confused when they heard, *"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church?"* (1 Corinthians 14:34-35) We have often said that the way to recognize the church of the Bible is to find one that is doing what the Bible teaches. We have taught that this is what distinguishes the true church from denominationalism. I still believe that this is true. I also believe that an unbeliever who hears a woman teach that she is not to teach, would certainly be confused.

### Conclusion

It is a wonderful thing to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). I am so thankful for every person who is making sacrifices in order to carry the saving message to a lost and dying world. I love and commend every good and faithful brother and sister who has made it their goal to please God in this great work. We need more faithful people who are willing to be mindful of lost souls. Every Christian will answer to God in judgment for their involvement in evangelism. We must be careful never to do anything that is so clearly contrary to God's instructions.

I pray that all of us will prayerfully consider these matters and not simply be led by the heart or by someone else's zeal and enthusiasm. May God help us ever to *"seek and save that which is lost"* (Luke 19:10). But at the same time let us never do things that are clearly prohibited.

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