

6/5/75

BST Theological Institute, 1975

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Problems in Translation

TRANSLATION AND TEXT

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Lecture # 2

We noticed the great importance of the Word - the Word of God.. But we noticed that the Word is not just a series of sounds, but that it is a matter of the ideas God wants to give us. One thing I tried to bring out yesterday, but perhaps did not make altogether clear is that the word for word translation is an impossibility. Every translation is to some extent a paraphrase. If you simply look at a book and try to decide what it means and express it in your own language, that is a paraphrase. A really thorough-going paraphrase gives what you think the original means, but gives no one any way of checking on whether what you think is right. A word for word translation gives somebody a way of checking if he knows the original language. Then he might as well use the original language in the first place. A word for word translation makes no sense to somebody who does not know the original language. So every translation is to some extent a paraphrase, but a translation has two purposes: A translation should have impact. It should take an idea and get it into people's minds. It should hold them; it should seize them with these ideas that are to be presented. Now a paraphrase can be far more effective than a translation for this purpose. But a translation also has an equally important purpose of taking a certain idea and making them available so that you can study and decide for yourself what the original means. And from that viewpoint the less a paraphrase is necessary the nearer it comes up to a certain point to something that someone can study for himself and perhaps get ideas from it that were in the original but that were not grasped by the person who made the paraphrase or the translation.