



Biblical Insights that are “Out of Sight” (Part 1)

Without a doubt, Bible translation is one of the most daunting linguistic tasks imaginable. We are grateful that the Lord enabled scholars to translate the original languages of the Bible and, as a result, billions of people can read and study God’s Word in their own languages.

Recognizing and appreciating the awesome work of Bible translators, this study spotlights some aspects of God’s truth that rest just below the surface of Bible reading. Even though “out of sight,” these insights are not “out of reach” for those who honor and love God’s Word. After examining this presentation, your perceptions may change concerning three topics . . . conversation, speaking the truth in love, and senior pastor. May you be edified and may God be glorified!

Our study begins with an obvious challenge of Bible translation that deals with changing definitions.

WORD DEFINITIONS CAN CHANGE

Word definitions are basic to communication and are vital to understanding the Bible. Confusion can occur, however, when a word definition changes from one era to another or from culture to culture.

For example, the word “conversation” indicates communication between two or more people. When the 1611 King James Version of the Bible was produced in England, however, “conversation” meant “how one lived.” The following verse has this definition in mind (underlining added for emphasis).

1 Peter 1:15 (KJV), But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation

In 1611, the above verse meant to live holy in all aspects of your life, not just your speech. Since “conversation” no longer indicates one’s conduct but, instead, refers primarily to verbal interchange, the newer Bible versions do not use “conversation” when behavior is indicated. With reference to 1 Peter 1:15, notice the wording change in later Bible versions (underlining added for emphasis).

1 Peter 1:15 (NIV), But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

1 Peter 1:15 (ESV, NKJV), but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

1 Peter 1:15 (NASB), but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;

The meaning of 1 Peter 1:15 was the same for the original readers of the KJV in the 1600’s as it is for those who now read that verse in the NIV, ESV, NKJV, NASB or other versions today. The words used then and now to express this same truth, however, are obviously different.

Bible editors often clarify the meaning of older words with notes in the margins. When too many words need explanation, translators produce newer Bible versions. Thankfully, the definitions of the vast majority of words in the Bible stand the test of time but, sometimes, a definition change requires explanation for the original meaning to be maintained.

See [Words of Scripture Requiring Explanation](#) on the Blue Letter Bible website.

THE PHRASE “SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE” IS IN EPHESIANS 4:15 . . . DOES IT HAVE A MORE COMPREHENSIVE MEANING THAN THAT?

Believers who read Ephesians recognize foundational spiritual truth presented in Ephesians 4:10-16.

Ephesians 4:10-16 (NASB), He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)¹¹ And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;¹⁵ but **speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,¹⁶ from whom the

whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. [emphasis added]

It may surprise you to discover that the phrase “speaking the truth in love” in Ephesians 4:15 is not present in the original language of the New Testament. There are various Greek words that can be translated as “speaking,” “saying,” “declaring,” or “proclaiming” but all of them are absent from that verse.

Instead, the Apostle Paul, the divinely inspired author of Ephesians 4:15, used a verb that can be translated literally as “to truth” (i.e. “to deal truthfully” or “be truthful”). He used a present participle of the verb to indicate that the “truthing” is to be continuous. So, with truth in view, this verb indicates on-going truthfulness as a way of life.

On the other hand, “speaking the truth in love” emphasizes only verbal communication, which is but one aspect of a truthful life. A more literal translation of Ephesians 4:15 would be, “Being truthful in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, Christ.”

Admittedly, Bible translators wanted Ephesians 4:15 to be readily understood but, in making it easier to understand, the more comprehensive meaning was lost in translation. Some Bible versions attempt to present the more complete meaning of “truthing it” by adding notes apart from the text or by including more words into the verse itself. For example:

The Amplified Bible—Rather, let our lives lovingly express truth [in all things, speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly]. Enfolded in love, let us grow up in every way and in all things into Him Who is the Head, [even] Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One).

Darby translation—but, holding the truth in love, we may grow up to him in all things, who is the head, the Christ

Douay-Rheims 1889 American edition—But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in him who is the head, even Christ:

Phillips New Testament—But we are meant to hold firmly to the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ, the head.

New American Standard Bible—but ^[a]speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ (*marginal note* ^[a]—*holding to or being truthful in*)

Young’s Literal Translation—and, being true in love, we may increase to Him [in] all things, who is the head—the Christ

Even though the use of “truthing it” in Ephesians 4:15 indicates having a lifestyle of truth, the concept of verbally communicating truth is specifically referenced ten verses later in Ephesians 4:25 (NASB). Paul wrote, “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one *of you* with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” [emphasis added] In Ephesians 4:15, however, the original language indicates that the way we deal with others—not merely in speech—must mirror truth and be practiced in love.

DOES THE MODERN DAY CONCEPT OF “SENIOR PASTOR” HAVE A COUNTERPART IN THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH?

What if a word is translated correctly but its accepted meaning in 1611, as well as today, has little correlation to what was understood in the first century church? This situation has occurred with regard to the concept of *pastor*, translated as such in Ephesians 4:11 by the KJV, NIV, NASB, and NKJV.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NASB), And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. [underlining added for emphasis]

The word for “pastor” (*poimen*) is translated as “shepherd” in every other place where it occurs in the New Testament. For some reason, *poimen* is translated as “pastor” only in Ephesians 4:11. There is no clear reason to translate the word differently in this passage than elsewhere.

Even though many Bible versions translate *poimen* as “pastor” in Ephesians 4:11, *poimen* is translated as “shepherd” in that verse by the Wycliffe Bible, Darby Bible, World English Bible, Young’s Literal Translation, and English Standard Version (ESV). It is translated as “church leader” in the New Life Version, translated as “those that guide and teach” in the J.B. Phillips New Testament, and translated as both “pastors” and “shepherds” in the Amplified Bible.

The Greek word for shepherd (*poimen*) indicates a guardian of the flock whose primary spiritual functions in a

church are to “guide, teach, and protect.” The modern concept of a separate clergy member holding an executive office was alien to the picture of church leadership presented in the New Testament.

Perhaps surprisingly, there is no practice of one shepherd being the sole leader (chief shepherd, senior pastor) over a local church in the first century. The only possible exception noted in Scripture is Diotrephes, who ruled as a spiritual tyrant and was castigated by the Apostle John.

3 John 1:9-10 (NASB), I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. ¹⁰ For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire *to do so* and puts *them* out of the church.

On the other hand, when church leadership is mentioned in the New Testament, multiple elders were to exercise spiritual oversight within a church family under the headship of Christ. In the New Testament, the term “elder” is used interchangeably with “shepherd” (pastor) and “overseer” (bishop). For example:

Acts 20:17, 28 (NIV), From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. . . . Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. [emphasis added]

1 Peter 5:1-3 (NASB), Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your fellow elder* and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. [emphasis added]

In other words, a person who was an elder was also a shepherd (pastor) as well as an overseer (bishop). The qualifications for this ministry responsibility are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These three—elder, shepherd, and overseer—were all descriptive of every servant leader in a first century church and did not indicate different levels of authority or ministry responsibility.

Surprising to many, even though the concept of “senior pastor” is commonplace in today’s world, there is no scriptural counterpart in the first century church. The only possible correlation to “senior pastor” in the New Testament is in 1 Peter 5:4 where a description of Jesus is provided.

1 Peter 5:4 (NASB), And when the chief Shepherd (“*senior pastor*”) appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (*explanation added*)

Spanish translations of the above verse designate Jesus as *el Príncipe de los pastores (el Pastor Supremo)* or *Gran Pastor*, which can be translated as “The Chief of the Pastors, The Supreme Pastor”). The supreme leader of any and every church was and is the Lord Jesus Christ, the only person in Scripture who is referenced as Chief Shepherd (senior pastor) in the Bible.

A pastor in 1611 or a pastor today—ideally joined in ministry with other servant leaders—is of great benefit to a local church family; but every church’s real Senior Pastor in any century is the Lord Jesus Christ.

It should be noted that the above information is not to intimate that any church with a person designated as “senior pastor” has purposefully disobeyed Scripture. On the other hand, we should understand that the concept of “senior pastor” that is prevalent in many churches—a hierarchical position at the pinnacle of a corporate flow chart—is based on a tradition of church leadership that began in the second century out of perceived ministry expediency and not specific scriptural teaching.