

Is the word "Charity" an error in the King James Bible?

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." 1 Corinthians 13:13

Dr. Robert Joyner has written a long article criticizing the King James Bible in an effort to convince you that it is not the infallible word of God. He wants you to switch to the NASB, NIV or one of the other modern versions. Of course Mr. Joyner does not have any Bible he considers to be the inerrant, complete, infallible word of God. His only final authority is his own opinion.

One of his alleged "errors" is the use of the word "Charity". Mr. Joyner says: "The KJV uses the word "charity" for love. This is confusing because charity today means giving to the poor or needy. In I Corinthians 13:3 the KJV says, "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity." Actually giving to the poor is charity, so the statement is a paradox. The NASB uses the word love, which makes more sense."

Dr. Joyner then says: "The KJV sometimes uses the word "charity" in the place of love. Most people probably think charity is old English for "love." That is not the case. The noun "agape" is used 114 times in the Greek. The KJV translates it "love" 87 times and "charity" 26 times. This shows they knew the Greek word means "love." Yet they purposely translated the word as "charity" in some places. "Charity" means giving and helping the needy. Love is described in I Corinthians 13. The KJV weakens this basic Christian doctrine about God and man by substituting "charity" for "love." The modern versions undergird it by rightly translating agape as love."

First of all, using the word charity is not a "paradox" as the good Doctor says. Mr. Joyner is fudging the truth either out of ignorance of his own English language, or deliberate intent. Webster's Random House College Dictionary 1999 lists under the word Charity one of the meanings as "Christian love; agape". He should know this; after all, he has a Ph.D.

In my Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary right here on my desk, if you look up the word Charity the very first meaning listed is 1. LOVE. The second meaning listed is 2. Kindness or help for the needy or suffering.

The Wikipedia online Encyclopaedia says: "Charity is also a term in Christian theology (one of the three virtues), meaning loving kindness towards others; it is held to be the ultimate perfection of the human spirit, because it is said to both glorify and reflect the nature of God. In its most extreme form charity can be self-sacrificial. Charity is one conventional English translation of the Greek term agape."

Webster's 1913 Dictionary

Charity

Charity fr. L. caritas dearness, high regard, love, from carus dear, costly, loved; akin to Sanskrit. kam to wish, love, cf. Ir. cara a friend, W. caru to love.

1. Love; universal benevolence; good will.

Now abideth faith, hope, charity, three; but the greatest of these is charity. 1. Cor. xiii. 13.

"With malice towards none, with charity for all." Abraham Lincoln.

2. Liberality in judging of men and their actions; a disposition which inclines men to put the best construction on the words and actions of others.

The highest exercise of charity is charity towards the uncharitable. Buckminster.

3. Liberality to the poor and the suffering, to benevolent institutions, or to worthy causes; generosity.

4. Whatever is bestowed gratuitously on the needy or suffering for their relief; alms; any act of kindness.

Even the word Love can have many meanings. What love might mean to a lusty teenager is not the same as it would mean to a godly Christian woman. The use of the word Love in "I love apple pie" and "I loved that movie" does not have the same meaning as when we are told to love one another.

Again the modern dictionaries tell us the word "love", just as the word "charity", has different meanings depending on the context. Notice the order of meanings as given in Webster's 1999 Random House Collegiate Dictionary.

Love

1. A profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person, especially when based on sexual attraction.

2. a feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection.

3. a person toward whom love is felt.

4. a love affair.

5. sexual activity

6. a personification of sexual affection, as Eros or Cupid
7. affectionate concern for the well-being of others.
8. a strong predilection, enthusiasm, or liking - a love of books.
9. the benevolent affection of God for His creatures, or the reverent affection due from them to God.

It can also mean a score of Zero in tennis!

The word charity, as found in the King James Bible, always expresses Christian love for other Christians. The word charity is never used in the King James Bible to express the love relationship between God and man, a husband and his wife, between parents and their children, or between the believer and the nonbeliever. It is always used in reference to the love Christians should have for other Christians.

The Modern Versions are Wrong for using "love" instead of "charity"

Not only is the use of the word "charity" as found in the King James Bible and many others not wrong, but it is in fact more accurate than the use of the simple word "love". Why? Well, let's look at 1 Corinthians 13 for a moment and then compare the characteristics of "charity" to those of "love" as found in some other Scriptures. We will see that by translating the word agape as "love" instead of "charity", the modern versions in fact create several contradictions.

In 1 Corinthians 13:5-6 we read that CHARITY "doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own". Charity as well "thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth". However when the new versions tell us that "love (agape) thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth" (NKJV), then this creates several direct contradictions with the rest of Scripture.

If "love seeks not her own and thinks no evil" then what do we do with the following Scriptures where "love" (agape) clearly seeks her own and does rejoice in evil?

John 3:19 "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men LOVED darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Agapao

John 12:42-43 "they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they LOVED the praise of men more than the praise of God." Agapao

Luke 6:32 "for sinners LOVE those that LOVE them." Agapao

2 Timothy 4:10 "For Demas hath forsaken me, having LOVED this present world..." Agapao

2 Peter 2:15 "Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam to son of Bosor, who LOVED the wages of unrighteousness." Agapao

1 John 2:15 "If any man LOVE the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Agapao

It should be abundantly clear that the scholar who insists the word 'agape' means an unconditional, God-type love has not compared Scripture to Scripture. Words have different meanings in different contexts, and in 1 Corinthians 13 the King James Bible's rendering of "charity" is far more accurate and consistent with the rest of Scripture. It is the modern versions that create the contradictions!

The word Charity in other English translations

Mr. Joyner says: "William Tyndale, who translated the first English version in 1525, used only the word "love." So did the other versions that followed - Coverdale, Matthew, Great Bible and Geneva Bible. Only the second edition of the Bishop's Bible and the KJV use the word charity."

Mr. Joyner's information about the other English versions not using the word "charity" to mean Christian brotherly love, is totally inaccurate, and there are several modern versions that still use this word to describe Christian brotherly love.

Not only does the King James Bible use the word Charity, but so also do the following Bible versions:

The Wycliffe Bible translation of 1395. In fact Wycliffe used the word "charite" in place of "love" some 93 times throughout both Testaments.

Tyndale 1525 - "If thy brother be greved with thy meate now walkest thou not charitablye. Destroye not him with thy meate for whom Christ dyed." Romans 14:15.

Bishop's Bible 1568 - "Charitie worketh no yll to his neyghbour, therefore the fulfylling of the lawe is charitie." Romans 13:10

"These are spottes in your feastes of charitie, whe they feast with you, without al feare feedyng the selues: cloudes they are without water..." Jude 1:12

"But if thy brother be greued with thy meat, nowe walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not hym with thy meat, for whom Christe dyed." Romans 14:15

Coverdale's Bible 1535 and the Geneva Bible 1599, 1602 - Romans 14:15 "walkest thou not after charite"; Jude 12 "feastes of charite"

Mace's New Testament 1729 uses the word "charity" some 15 times, as in 1 Timothy 1:5 "such a charge will produce that charity, which arises from purity, from a good conscience, and a sincere belief."

Wesley's translation 1755 - "salute ye one another with a kiss of charity" 1 Peter 5:14.

Webster's 1833 translation used the word "charity" in place of "love" 24 times in his New Testament. "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." 1 Peter 4:8

In addition to these earlier English Bibles that use the word "charity" to signify Christian brotherly love, we also have the Rheims Bible of 1582, and the later Douay-Rheims both used charity in 1 Corinthians 13:1 and many other places as well - "with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity", Whiston's Primitive New Testament of 1745, the Worsley Version 1770, Webster's 1833 translation, the Douay version of 1950, the KJV 21st Century 1994, Green's Modern KJV 1998, the Catholic Public Domain Version of 2009 - "Charity is patient, is kind. Charity does not envy", and the Third Millennium Bible 1998.

J. P. Green's 1998 Modern King James Version often uses the word "charity" to describe Christian love for other believers. In the MKJV 1 Corinthians 13 reads:

1. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I have become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.
- 2 And though I have prophecies, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so as to move mountains, and do not have charity, I am nothing.
- 3 And though I give out all my goods to feed the poor, and though I deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, I am profited nothing."

The use of the word charity to describe the Christian's love for his fellow believers in the body of Christ is not an error, but is in fact more accurate. The King James Bible is right and the Bible critic is wrong.

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