
William Tyndale

1494-1536

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January 13, 2017

William Tyndale was educated at Oxford. He earned a Master of Arts Degree before he was allowed to begin to study theology. He complained about his education that, "They have ordained that no man shall look on the Scripture, until he be noselled in heathen learning eight or nine years and armed with false principles, with which he is clean shut out of the understanding of the Scripture." He was fluent in seven languages including Greek and Hebrew.

He was inspired by the work of Martin Luther and translated the Bible into English. He concluded, "Christ desires his mysteries to be published abroad as widely as possible. I would that [the Gospels and the epistles of Paul] were translated into all languages, of all Christian people, and that they might be read and known." Because of opposition to translating the Bible in England, he traveled to the Lutheran city of Worms where he safely completed the work. He used both Hebrew and Greek sources, rather than the popular Latin Bible used by the Catholic Church, which had been translated by Jerome. He described his effort, "'I call God to record against the day we shall appear before our Lord Jesus, that I never altered one syllable of God's Word against my conscience, nor would do this day, if all that is in earth, whether it be honor, pleasure, or riches, might be given me."

In his translation he used the word "congregation" rather than "church" for the Greek "ecclesia." Tyndale's translation of the word was not only correct, it was revolutionary. Although this small correction may seem insignificant to readers today, at the time it undermined the Roman Catholic claims to be the only true church and therefore the exclusive body meant by the word "church." Likewise by rendering the Greek word "metanoeo" as "repent" and not as "do penance" the translation challenged the financial interests of the church in the sale of pardons and indulgences. He translated "agape" as "love" instead of "charity" which also had an economic impact on church

donations. In each case Tyndale's translation conveyed the better meaning, but it came with an economic impact on the church, and therefore offended the church.

The Bible translation was considered an act of defiance of both English law and the Roman Catholic Church. He was said to have predicted that not many years following his work on the Bible, "I will cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the Scriptures than" the Catholic clergy. When the New Testament translation made its way to England in 1525 it was condemned by King Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey, Sir Thomas More and others. Thomas More called it the work of the "Antichrist."

He was opposed to King Henry VIII's planned annulment to Catherine of Aragon in order for him to marry Anne Boleyn and published a work condemning it as unscriptural. This made him the King's enemy.

In 1536 Tyndale was convicted of heresy, stripped of the priesthood, strangled to death and his body burned at the stake. Within three years following his execution, however, King Henry VIII decreed that an English translation of the Bible should be available in every Parish for the public to read. Tyndale's Bible translation was later used to produce The Great Bible for the Church of England two years following his death, and the King James Bible in 1611. The King James Version copies Tyndale in 83% of the language of the New Testament and 76% of the Old Testament.

While he lived, in England possession of a copy of his translation resulted in a death sentence for unlicensed possession of scripture in English. He consoled himself and others while he was in prison awaiting trial on heresy by writing, "if God be on our side, what matter maketh it who be against us, be they bishops, cardinals, popes."

Tyndale summarized how to find happiness in everyday life, "There is no work better than to please God; to pour water, to wash dishes, to be a cobbler, or an apostle, all are one; to wash dishes and to preach are all one, as touching the deed, to please God."