

No Fear of the Bible in the Hands of the Uneducated

By Chris Galanos

One of the questions/criticisms people often have about movement approaches is, “If you encourage people to read the Bible together without an educated teacher there, won’t people fall into heresy?”

I was reading the account of William Tyndale’s martyrdom last night in Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, and I think his life story provides a great answer to this concern. Here are some quotes from his story that I found helpful:

Tyndale was born near the border of Wales in 1494. He was educated at Oxford and Cambridge, and soon after began his life work of translating the Bible into English.

*Tyndale disputed with a certain theologian about the truth of the Scriptures until the man cried out in these blasphemous words, “We would be better without God’s laws than without the pope.” When Tyndale heard this, his godly zeal burst forth and he replied, “I defy the pope, and all his laws! If God spares my life, it will not be many years before **I will cause every boy who works on a farm plowing fields to know more of the Scriptures than the pope does!**”*

*During that year Tyndale felt an increasing urge to translate the New Testament from Latin into a **plainer language**.*

*Soon God provided him sufficient money through Mummuth and some other men so he could leave England and go to Germany, where Martin Luther had just finished translating the New Testament into German (1521)... Undoubtedly [Tyndale] was influenced in this decision by seeing Luther’s translation and **the effect it was having** on the German people.*

*Tyndale knew it wasn’t possible to establish the lay people in any truth unless the Scriptures were so **plainly laid out before their eyes** in their own language that **they could understand** the meaning of the text.*

*He was certain that the chief cause of all the trouble in the Church was because **the Word of God was kept hidden from the people**, and so for a long time the abominations and idolatries of the hypocritical and self-righteous clergy could not be seen. For this reason the clergy did all they could to keep the Scriptures hidden so that they could not be read at all.*

*For this and other reasons, God stirred up this good man to translate the Scriptures into English for the benefit of **the simple people** of his country.*

*Tyndale's books, especially the New Testament translation, were of great spiritual benefit to the godly lay people, but of great harm to the ungodly clergy, who were afraid that by the shining beams of truth **their deeds of darkness would be clearly seen.***

*At the end of his English New Testament, Tyndale inserted a letter asking any who read the translation to inform him if they found the least error in it, or if there was any of the translation that they thought was wrong and should be corrected. But the papist clergy, not wanting the book to succeed, cried out against it and said there were **a thousand heresies** in it, and that it was not to be corrected, but totally done away with.*

*Some of the clergy said it wasn't possible to translate the Scriptures into English. Some said it wasn't lawful for people to have a New Testament in their common language. **SOME SAID IT WOULD MAKE ALL OF THE LAY PEOPLE HERETICS.***

*On October 6, 1536, in the town of Vilvorde in the Netherlands, William Tyndale, God's first translator of the New Testament into English, was brought to a place of execution, tied to a stake, strangled by the hangman to the point of death, and then **burned in fire for doing God's work.** As he met the Lord, Tyndale cried with a loud voice, "Lord! Open the king of England's eyes!"-----*

Wow, wow, wow!

Tyndale, Luther, and other translators weren't concerned about ordinary people reading the Scriptures on their own (apart from clergy being there to help them interpret). That was the whole point! They knew that ordinary people having the Scriptures wouldn't likely turn them into heretics, it would show them that the people teaching them were heretics!

To encourage people to read the Bible on their own (or in a group) is to protect them from heresy, not promote heresy. The accusation that people reading the Bible on their own might make them heretics is the same accusation made by the enemies of Tyndale and Luther who were trying to keep the Bible out of the language of the people, and burning the "heretics" who were translating it!

To prevent heresy, get more lost/saved people reading the Bible, not fewer! Let's remember the lessons we learned in the 16th century!