

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

A Rendering Revised.

BY PRINCIPAL THE REV. DAVID BROWN, D.D., LL.D., ABERDEEN.

‘He that was begotten of God keepeth him.’—1 JOHN v. 18 (R.V.).

In his volume of sermons, lately published under the title of *Triumphant Certainties*, Dr. Maclaren puts a number of questions, and in his answers to these we can all agree; but the last one, namely, What is the ground of John’s assertion about him that is born of God? and the answer to it, according to the *Revised Version*, I must take exception to.

In the New Testament Revision Company I did my utmost to convince the other members that the true reading of the Greek text could not be ‘He that is begotten of God keepeth him.’ This is a case in which to determine the true text by mere external evidence, even were it much more decisive than it is, is to endanger Divine truth, or at least seriously to derange the New Testament expression of it—so much so that I cannot review the reading of the Revised Version without pain. For it ascribes to the Son of God what is never said, save of the *regenerate man*, that he was ‘begotten of God.’ The usage of the New Testament on this subject is full of interest and pregnant with instruction of the deepest importance. 1. The phrase, ‘begotten of God,’ is a Johannine one. No fewer than seven times, without reckoning the present one, is it used in this epistle: 1 John ii. 29; iii. 9, twice; iv. 7; v. 1, twice; and in the first of this verse of ours. 2. When Christians are said to be ‘born of God’ they are never called ‘sons’ (*υιοι*), but always ‘children’ (*τεκνα*) of God,—a nice distinction, unhappily lost sight of in the Authorized Version, but carefully noted in the Revised Version—one of those numberless improvements which it is a pleasure to me to call attention to when constrained to object to such changes in the text as the present—improvements which English-speaking students of the New Testament will yet come to observe with gratitude. The first example of this wary distinction of the term employed to express the relation of believers to God occurs in John i. 12, 13: ‘As many as received Him,

to them gave He the right to become children (*τεκνα*) of God, which were born (observe the word) not of blood . . . but of God.’ Still more striking, perhaps, is Rom. viii. 14–16, where the word ‘sons’ and ‘children’ are each warily used to distinguish between ‘sons’ by adoption and ‘children’ by regeneration: ‘As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons (*υιοι*) of God. For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit witnesseth with our spirit that we are children (*τεκνα*) of God; and if children, then heirs,’ etc.; the word ‘sons’ being now warily changed to ‘children,’ because, though *adopted* sons may be *made* heirs, children are their father’s born heirs. 3. Our Lord is never called ‘The Child of God’ (*τεκνον θεου*), but ever ‘The Son of God’ (*υιός θεου*). His earthly parents, when, at twelve years of age, they missed Him in Jerusalem, might call him by the endearing term ‘child’ (*τεκνον*, Luke ii. 48), as rightly rendered in the Revised Version; and since our Lord was certainly born (or begotten) man, of the blessed Virgin, the same word is used as for the birth of any man (*γεννώμενον*, Luke i. 35). But just as He is never called God’s *Child*, but ever God’s *Son*, so the naked phrase, ‘He that was begotten of God,’ being the phrase appropriate to designate *regenerate* man, is never used—or rather is warily avoided—in designating our Lord, but the august term, ‘The Only Begotten Son’ (*μονογενής υιός*, John i. 14, 18; iii. 16, 18; 1 John iv. 9).

In the light of these striking facts of New Testament phraseology, who will readily believe that in this one passage the beloved disciple has gone clean off from his wary phrase by applying to the Son of God his customary designation for regenerate men? Do not one’s Christian instincts at once recoil from it? Those who (whatever *admissions* they make) practically look at nothing but external evidence in determining the true reading of any passage will disregard all this, simply telling us that we have no right to dictate to an author how he ought to express himself,

and that the textual evidence ought alone to decide what he *did* write. But those who hold themselves bound to pay some regard to the correct phraseology of the New Testament, especially where it varies its forms warily to express varying shades of the same idea,—and most of all when that phraseology and those varying forms are those of the same writer, and a writer whose style is eminently his own,—will insist that the external evidence shall be *very strong indeed* ere they can reconcile themselves to the reading of the Revised Version here, confounding, as it does, the way in which unregenerate men and the only-begotten Son of God are described.

But is the external evidence for this reading so overmastering? That A and B should both have this reading is a strong point, for in disputed readings A usually goes with the bulk of the later MSS., B with the few earlier ones. But on the other hand, **8**, which in disputed readings usually goes with B, has the received reading, and a corrector of A. This pretty much equalises the evidence, especially as three other uncials, K L P., have the received reading.

But, after all, the real question is, Were both readings not meant for the same pronoun? For not only were breathings very rarely used in the oldest Greek MSS., but, in particular, Cod. A—which is quoted as reading *αὐτόν*—has no breath-

ings at all in the New Testament;¹ so that when it reads AYTON it may just as well have been *αὐτόν* = *ἑαυτόν*, 'himself,' as *αὐτόν*, 'him.' That it actually was so meant, I judge from the fact that the Fathers, Greek and Latin, so far as I have observed, all seem to have understood the apostle's statement in the sense of the received text and our Authorized Version. Thus Jerome (Vulg.) reads, 'but the generation of God preserveth him' (*sed generatio Dei conservat eum*); in other words, his own regenerate nature keeps him.² And this is exactly what the same epistle says in chap. iii. 9: 'Whosoever is born of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.' Didymus also (before Jerome) has, 'He that is born of God keepeth himself' (*sed qui natus est ex Deo servat semetipsum*); and Origen not only has the received reading, but comments upon it in that sense.

But all this went for nothing with the majority of the Company, for they had determined to adhere to the reading of the Greek text, which they had adopted.

¹ Scrivener, Intro., third edition, p. 44. But anyone may see this for himself in the British Museum.

² Tischendorf misunderstands Jerome's statement as if in favour of *αὐτόν*, because his words end with *eum*. But the nominative clause, *generatio Dei*, which can mean nothing else than the believer's own regenerate nature, makes *eum* equivalent to *semetipsum*.

Sermonettes for Children on the Golden Texts.

I.

'And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation.'—Mark xvi. 15 (R.V.).

It was the Duke of Wellington who heard a young man question the worth of foreign missions, and said, 'You forget your marching orders.' These are our marching orders: 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.' (The Revised Version translates the Greek more accurately: 'to the whole creation,' but the meaning is not altered.)

1. *The gospel is to be preached.*—Both the Greek word *euangelion* and the English word *gospel* means *good news*. (Some say 'gospel' is literally God's news, but that is the same thing.) Now we may hear good news often, and often it is not worth hearing. But this good news is so *good* and so *new*, that it deserves to be called *the good news, the gospel*. What is it? The angels came with it to the

shepherds, and we cannot better their way of it: 'Unto you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.' You see, the misery and madness of the world is due to sin. But sin is the hardest thing to get rid of. So it is good news to be told that a Saviour has come to save us from it. And the good news is not only of salvation from sin, but of a *Saviour*. God does not send word of salvation; He so loves the world that He gives His only begotten Son. And so we can love the Saviour who saves us from all sin. That is good news indeed.

Well, this gospel is to be *preached*. To preach is to speak clearly out. It means that we have something to say, think it worth saying, and say it firmly and clearly. The Greek word is 'cry like a herald,' literally 'herald it.' So a great Scottish evangelist called the paper he founded *The Herald of Mercy*. Whatever makes clear declaration of the gospel is preaching.

2. *Everybody is to preach the gospel.*—In the passage where the Golden Text is found, only the eleven are