

ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER

The Biblical texts for this study are as follows:

διὸ παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους καὶ οἰκοδομεῖτε εἷς τὸν ἕνα, καθὼς καὶ ποιεῖτε. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

The NIV translation of this verse is: *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

ὁ Θεὸς συνέκερασεν τὸ σῶμα τῶ ὑστερουμένῳ περισσοτέρῳ δούς τιμῆν, ἵνα μὴ ᾖ σκίσμα ἐν τῷ σώματι ἀλλὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων μεριμνῶσιν τὰ μέλη. (1 Corinthians 12:24, 25)

The NIV translation of these verses is: *God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.*

An exegetical analysis of the Greek text will be helpful in not only justifying the translation presented, but in gaining some insights into the nuances of some of the key words in the verses. Of special interest for this study are the words translated by the English words “encourage” in the 1 Thessalonians reference and the word “concern” in the 1 Corinthians reference.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

διὸ - *dio* is an inferential conjunction introducing content in the light of what has just been written. The basic translation should be “*therefore*” with the reader returning at least in thought to what the writer has just concluded. This employs a syntactical analysis (*word relationships*) as well as contextual insight, and in this verse returns the reader to the information and instruction relating to the return of Christ. *A very important consideration here!* The thought is: “*In the light of Christ’s coming, as depicted in verses 1-10,*” although that would not stand as a good translation, since it is syntactically explanatory rather than specifically translational.

παρακαλεῖτε – *parakaleite* is a finite verb, present imperative, active voice, second person plural from the verb παρακαλέω – *parakaleo* meaning “*to call alongside,*” “*to encourage,*” “*to bring cheer and comfort through caring.*”

ἀλλήλους – *allelous* is the accusative case reciprocal pronoun, and therefore the direct object of the action expressed by the finite verb it follows. It is translated correctly as “*one another.*”

καὶ - *kai* is the most frequently used conjunction, and expresses the idea of “*in addition to...*”

οἰκοδομεῖτε – *oikodomeite* is another finite verb, present tense, active voice, second person plural, and either indicative or imperative. It is from the primary verb οἰκοδομέω – *oikodomeo* meaning “*to build up,*” “*to strengthen,*” “*make more able,*” or “*embolden.*” Being a finite verb, it will produce some action expressed in the direct object.

εἷς τὸν ἕνα – *heis ton hena* is an accusative case, masculine direct object, and quite idiomatic as an expression using the cardinal number “*one.*” It translates literally as “*one and the other,*” but this simply means the same as the reciprocal pronoun “*one another.*”

καθὼς καὶ - *kathos kai* meaning “*just as also,*” with the conjunction expressing the idea of “*and in addition.*”

ποιεῖτε – *poieite* is also a finite verb, second person plural, present tense, active voice, indicative mood. It is a form of the primary verb ποιέω – *poieo* meaning “*to do,*” “*to make.*” It is most frequently used as the verb communicating the idea of “*doing something.*” So, the translation here is “*doing*” with the understanding of the present tense idea based on (1) the present tense form of the finite verb, and (2) the use of “*just as.*”

This verse is rather easy to translate. Here is a translation that is somewhat expanded, but accurate:

Therefore, in the light of the truth that Christ is coming again, call one another alongside for comfort and encouragement, and continue building each other up just as you are now doing.

That translation is not only true to the original text, but expresses the nuances of the Greek words.

-2- Encouraging One Another

Translating the verse into a shorter form while maintaining integrity to the Greek text, the following is offered:

Therefore encourage one another and continue building one another up just as you are presently doing.

Now to the next two verses to be considered in this study:

1 Corinthians 12:24, 25

ὁ Θεὸς συνεκέρασεν τὸ σῶμα τῷ ὑστερουμένῳ περισσοτέρῳ δούς τιμῆν, ἵνα μὴ ᾖ σκίσμα ἐν τῷ σώματι ἀλλὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων μεριμνῶσιν τὰ μέλη. (1 Corinthians 12:24, 25)

The NIV translation of these verses is: *God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.*

In order to gain more accurate insight into the concept of “encouragement” or “caring,” it is necessary to pick up Paul’s statement at the half-way point of verse 24 and then proceed through verse 25. The analysis of the Greek text is as follows:

ὁ Θεὸς συνεκέρασεν – *ho Theos sunekerasen* translates *God has blended together*. The articular form ὁ Θεὸς – *ho Theos* is in reference to the Person of God. One of the unique patterns of Greek grammar is how the definite article is used. When a noun is articular, that means it is prefaced by the definite article, and has reference to the actuality or reality of the essence of the nominal presentation. If a noun is anarthrous, that is a noun without the definite article, the reference is to the nature or character of that which the noun is representing. Thus ὁ Θεὸς – *ho Theos* is in reference to the Person of God, the actuality or reality of the fact that God is and that He is performing whatever the phrase, clause, or sentence is communicating. If Θεὸς – *Theos* had been used anarthrously, the reference would be on the nature or character of God. That kind of grammatical construction is nearly impossible in translating a sentence such as Paul presents in this passage. So, the reference is on the Person of God doing whatever the ensuing verb indicates.

The verb συνεκέρασεν – *sunekerasen* is a third person singular, aorist tense, active voice, indicative mood finite verb. It seems to have a variety of translational possibilities, such as “blend together,” “unite,” “mix,” “mingle together,” “combine,” and “put together.” These are the standard available translations from which the Biblical translator may select in accord with the context of the Greek text.

τὸ σῶμα – *to soma* is a neuter noun, and obviously in the accusative case. It translates “the body.” The idea of the NIV translation, “the members of the body” is somewhat interpretive rather than pure translation. It is an inference from the context rather than translating any word that means “members.” In context this word can refer to the individual elements of one’s physical body, the whole physical body, or to the members of the body of Christ, the redeemed, known as the Church, or it can refer simply to the entire body of believers, the Church. In this instance, the context lends itself to the latter with the idea of the individual members making up that body.

τῷ ὑστερουμένῳ – *to husteroumeno* a dative singular neuter present passive participle built on the primary verb ὑστερέω – *hustereo*, meaning “to lack,” “to be inferior to,” “to be in need,” “to be less than.” Being in the dative case, and syntactically closely aligned with the aorist active participle δούς – *dous*. This articular participle is used as the indirect object, needing therefore, the English directional word “to.” Thus, “to the less honorable,” or “to those inferior to,” or “to those who are considered less than.”

περισσοτέρῳ – *perissoteron* is a comparative adjective, feminine accusative, and singular in number. It is from the adjective περισσός – *perissos*, which in turn has been built on the verb περισσεύω – *perisseuo*, meaning “to be present in abundance,” “to overflow with,” “to be rich in,” “to have more than enough.” The adjectival form περισσοτέρῳ – *perissoteron* is in harmony with the feminine accusative noun τιμῆν – *timen*.

This last part of verse 24 translates: “God has united the body, giving greater honor to the less honorable.” That is a translation that easily takes each word into account. It does not take into account the various nuances of all the Greek words. Yet, it is an accurate translation.

-3- Encouraging One Another

ἵνα μὴ ᾖ σκίσμα – *hina me he skisma* – a purpose clause that needs to be considered as a grammatical unit. The rather “famous” *hina* clause nearly always translates “in order that,” or “so that” and this prevails here in verse 25. The tiny one letter word ἥ - *he*, pronounced “hay,” is a dative feminine singular relative pronoun. It must be translated in the context of the clause. The focus of the clause is μὴ ... σκίσμα – *skisma*, “no division.” Thus the translation of the purpose clause is: “So that there might not be any division.”

ἐν τῷ σώματι – *en to somati* is a prepositional phrase beginning with the tiny preposition ἐν – *en*, a directional/locational preposition indicating “within.” The object of the preposition is “the body.”

ἀλλὰ - *alla* is the strong adversative, and shows the immediate “other side of the coin.” It translates best by the English “but.”

τὸ αὐτὸ - *to auto* a third personal neuter pronoun. When the third personal pronoun is used following the definite article, the translator is to simply insert the English word “same.” This word must then relate to another word or concept in the sentence, and in this instance, to the honor bestowed upon the less than honorable within the body.

ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων μεριμνῶσιν τὰ μέλη – *hyper allelon merimnosin ta mele* is a rather long prepositional phrase beginning with the preposition ὑπὲρ that governs a significant part of the rest of the sentence. The preposition ὑπὲρ – *hyper* is one of two prepositions that can be used with one of three cases, genitive, dative, or accusative. When used with the genitive case, as in the instance of 1 Corinthians 12:25, the meaning is “for,” or “in behalf of.” This is followed by the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλων – *allelon* meaning “one another.”

μεριμνῶσιν – *merimnosin* is a third person plural, present tense, subjunctive mood, and active voice. The primary verb is μεριμνάω – *merimnao* meaning “to care for,” “to be concerned for.” The force of the subjunctive mood here brings forth the idea of “that they might have concern for.”

τὰ μέλη – *ta mele*, a neuter plural accusative case form of the noun μέλος – *melos*, meaning “a part of the body,” and figuratively, of one who belongs to the Christian community, and thus a part of the body of Christ.

How then shall this “verse and a half” be translated? In the light of the morphological, lexical, syntactical and contextual considerations, the following appears to be accurate:

God has united (or blended together) the body, giving greater honor to the less honorable (or to those who may be considered less than others in any way), so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members might have (and express) the same concern (and care) for one another.

There are some overtones in what Paul has presented that may register negatively with some of us who labor in God’s vineyards. I find his use of the term τῷ ὑστερουμένῳ - *to husteroumeno* - “to the less honorable,” or “to those inferior to,” or “to those who are considered less than” to be problematic for some. However, it is still God’s Word, recognizing the human condition for what it really is, and offers God’s remedies. In this instance, the Apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit recognizes that in the body of Christ, there will be those who have achieved at levels quite different from the levels of others. In this sense, the term need not hold negative overtones, but rather it simply recognizes that God has a concern for every member of the body of Christ, and provides for their “up-building” through others in the body of Christ. This is then a “caring, encouraging” ministry that we must have one to the other.

Now, let’s put these two Scriptures together, and note the positive outcome:

Therefore encourage one another and continue building one another up just as you are presently doing. For God has united (or blended together) the body, giving greater honor to the less honorable (or to those who may be considered less than others in any way), so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members might have (and express) the same concern (and care) for one another.