

Greek & Hebrew Knowledge as an Idolatrous Substitute for Understanding the Holy Scripture.

Samuel Richardson

{An Answer to the London Ministers Letter &c., 1649}

Greek & Hebrew Knowledge as an Idolatrous Substitute for Understanding the Holy Scripture: The Priests say that we know not the original, and our Bibles are not rightly translated, nor cannot be pronounced according to the original; besides in translations there are errors, for no translation is simply authentical, and the undoubted Word of God. We demand of you, answer if you can; as to how know you that your Hebrew and Greek copies are true copies? Is it not possible for any to write contrary to their copy, if copies may be printed false, they may be written false, the art of Printing is not above 350 years old. Can you produce the first original copy, or any of those the Apostles wrote? If not, the cause is the same and you know the original no more than those that know not Greek or Hebrew? If you may depend upon the faithfulness of the Writer and Printer of your Copies, why not others upon those that did it upon oath? Doctor Fulke in his confutation of the Rheims Testament justifieth the English Translation of the Bible. {William Fulke "New Testament Confutation," 1589} But we receive not the truth by tradition. I would know of you that are so for Hebrew and Greek, &c., if the knowledge of the tongues be sufficient to teach those that have those tongues the mind of the Spirit of God in the Scriptures or no? If yea, then all that know these tongues know the mind of God; if no, then it is but an insufficient help, and what is an insufficient help worth more than nothing. The knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is a help to read a Greek and Hebrew Bible, because else they cannot read them. So the knowledge of the English tongue is of necessity to read the English Bible. The cause is the same; but the understanding the English tongue, and reading it in the Bible cannot give them to understand, the meaning of it no more than the knowledge of the tongues Greek and Hebrew though it helps them to read the Bible in those tongues, yet is not able to give them to understand the meaning of it. That this is so, some of them, who know the tongues confess; for Apollo was a learned man, he saw the first copies of the Bible, and if that could have caused him to know the mind of God what need had he to learn of Aquila a tradesman {one of the laity as the Priests use to say} and Priscilla his wife the mind of God as he did. {Acts.18:26} Also what is the reason that those that know the tongues cannot agree among themselves? What is the mind of God in his Word, that some of you in your expositions are as contrary to each other as light is to darkness; the natural man cannot perceive the things that be of God; a natural man may be, and some are learned men it's confessed; some of the Jesuits are good Scholars, &c., for they know the tongues, &c.; then it will follow a man may be such a learned man and yet cannot understand nor perceive the things of God. Nicodemus was a great scholar and teacher in Israel yet how simple was he

concerning the meaning of Christ's words. Tell me then what a help their human learning is to them in spiritual knowledge in the things of the Spirit. The Word saith that he reveals to us the deep things of God by his Spirit, {I Cor.2:10;} he saith not by Greek and Hebrew. If our translation be true then we can tell the meaning of it as well as you; if it be not true tell me what is that Preaching worth that is proved by a false translation, and if we must believe contrary to our translation because you say so, what is this but an implicit faith and human? And seeing you so differ among yourselves about the meaning of the word or the mind of God in it, tell me, how I may know which of you I am to believe? Also you confess that one word {in the 'original'} could bear nine or ten divers significations; how know you which of them is the mind of God in that place, unless he reveal it to you? And if God please he can reveal it to a simple man, and God doth do so, and this is that for which Christ thanks his Father, because he hath hid these things from the wise and the learned, and revealed it unto babes, "the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed; and the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I am not learned." "For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes; the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered." {Is.29:10-12} Neither of them can read it, both put it off for they cannot understand it, the unlearned thinks as he hath been taught, that if he were learned in Greek and Hebrew he could understand it; but the former who was such a learned man could not do it, it is hid from the learned; for it's not in being learned, nor in not being learned. What then will some say, it is because God hath not revealed it to them therefore they do not know it. The Lord saith that none can know the things of God, but he to whom the Spirit will reveal them. {I Cor.2:9-16} {See also Ps.119:99,100} The knowledge of Greek, Hebrew and English are all human learning of equal excellency, necessity, and use for the translation and reading of the Bible; and as without the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, the Bible could not be translated into English, so he that translated the Bible into English, could not have done it without the knowledge of the English tongue; therefore there is the same use and help and necessity of the English tongue as of the Greek or Hebrew tongue; so there is the same to be said for the French and Dutch tongue, and all other tongues and therefore why the Greek and Hebrew tongues should be of any more use and excellency than other tongues, there is no reason to be given for it. As Aaron the Priest set up the golden calf it was called a god and Aaron made Proclamation, {Ex.32:4-8, &c.,} and the people idolized it and danced about it, so the Priests have set up Greek and Hebrew as a god, and the people rejoice exceedingly in it, for they Idolize it and fall down and worship it, because the Priest have made a Proclamation for it and commended it for such a rare thing to help them to the knowledge of the mind of God. A golden business by custom is turned into necessity and it is in such an esteem as they do idolize it and worship it, as they did the calf. - But, what, are there not means and helps to the understanding the Scriptures without Greek and Hebrew? Yes, only the self-evidencing light of the Spirit of God, which first inspired the Pen-men of Scriptures, who is in the hearts of the Saints, the only Interpreter of the Scriptures. Secondly; the knowledge of the body of Divinity, or the Analogy of the faith, to which the Scripture is to be referred for its right interpretation. Thirdly; the Law of God written in the hearts of the Lord's, which favors the truth, and disrelishes errors. The fourth help to the understanding the Scriptures, is the manifold experience of varieties of temptations, and the experiences of the work of Grace in the soul. Lastly, to compare

Scriptures that are dark with Scriptures of the same nature that are more plain, and so to let the Scriptures expound themselves. I conclude this, all men are pure blind, yea dead, till God gives life, and opens men's eyes. And although human learning is necessary for translating the Scriptures, &c. yet many idolize it, as the children of Israel did their golden Calf. Samuel Richardson {Answer to the London Ministers Letter &c., 1649}