

Sola Scriptura and the Life of William Tyndale
Psalm 19; Heb. 1:1-4; 2:1-4
October 28, 2007

I. John Wickliffe and the English Bible

A. First English translation of the Bible (1380-82)

1. translated from the Latin Vulgate
2. all copies hand written

B. Constitutions of Oxford (1408)

1. forbids any translation into English

“It is a dangerous thing, as witnesseth blessed St. Jerome to translate the text of the Holy Scripture out of one tongue into another, for in the translation the same sense is not always easily kept. . . . We therefore decree and ordain, that no man, hereafter, by his own authority translate any text of the Scripture into English or any other tongue . . . and that no man can read any such book . . . in part or in whole.”

2. warns against reading any English translation, with the penalty of excommunication

Canon Knighton: “Wickliffe has made the Gospel common and more open to laymen and to women who can read, that it is wont to be to clerks well-learned and of good understanding; so that the pearl of the Gospel is scattered and is trodden underfoot of swine. The jewel of the Church is turned into the common sport of the people.”¹

II. The Education and Preparation of William Tyndale

A. Oxford University (1506-1519)

1. earned distinction in the study of divinity and liberal arts
2. special distinction as a linguist

B. Cambridge University (1519-1521)

1. surpassed Oxford as the center of humanist education
2. White Horse Group – probably met Reformers such as Thomas Cranmer and Hugh Latimer
3. most importantly, Tyndale introduced to the work of Erasmus
 - a. published a Greek NT in 1516
 - b. Erasmus: “Would that . . . the farmer sing some portion of them at the plow, the weaver hum some parts of them to the movement of his shuttle, the traveler lighten the weariness of the journey with stories of this kind! Let all the conversations of every Christian be drawn from this source.”²

C. Tutor for the family of Sir John Walsh (1522-23)

1. officiate and preach at St. Adeline Church
2. arrested for street preaching in nearby Bristol
3. determined to put the wish of Erasmus into practice

III. Leaves England for Germany

¹ Quoted by F. G. Llewellyn, *Heroes of the Reformation* (London: Protestant Truth Society, n.d.), 26.

² Quoted by James Edward McGoldrick, *Luther's English Connection: The Reformation Thought of Robert Barnes and William Tyndale* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1979), 6.

- A. Translation of NT completed August of 1525**
 - 1. probably finished the work in Wittenberg
 - 2. probably completed in the company of Martin Luther³
 - B. The first printing of the NT in 1526**
 - 1. somewhere between 600 and 3,000 copies
 - 2. finds publisher in Worms under the protection of Philip of Hesse
 - 3. copies immediately smuggled into England
 - 4. 6 or 7 editions in 10 years
 - 5. 1534 – revised edition of the NT – climax of life’s work
 - 6. by death – translated much of the OT (Pentateuch, Joshua-Chronicles, and Jonah)
- IV. Response of the Church in England**
- A. Book burnings begin almost immediately – October 1526**
 - B. Smugglers imprisoned, flogged, and killed**
 - C. Decree in 1530 against heretics and perverters of Christ’s religion**
 - D. Why?**
 - 1. doctrinal reason – not able to defend certain doctrines biblically
 - 2. ecclesiastical reason – their power over people (and over the state) would be lost if certain false doctrines exposed
 - “In the kingdom of Christ, and in his Church or congregation, and in his councils, the ruler is the scripture, approved through the miracles of the Holy Spirit, and men are only servants; and Christ is the head, we all brethren.”⁴
- V. The Price that Tyndale paid for the sake of the Bible**
- A. Arrested and captured in Antwerp (May 1535)**
 - B. Sentenced to death (August 1536)**
 - C. Hanged and burned (October 1536)**
- VI. The Influence of Tyndale**
- A. Literary phenomenon – changed the English language**
 - B. Opened the way for English translations**
 - 1. Coverdale Bible (1539)
 - 2. Geneva Bible (1557) – over 1 million copies sold between 1560 and 1640
 - 3. Authorized Version (1611) – 9/10 from Tyndale’s translation
 - C. Spiritual phenomenon – “lit the fire of the Reformation in England” (John Piper)**
- VII. Why was Tyndale willing to die for an English translation?**
- A. The precious treasure of the Word of God (Ps. 19:7-11)**

McGoldrick: “Tyndale always believed that the greatest obstacle to the spiritual health of England was its ignorance of Biblical teaching.”⁵
 - B. The precious treasure of Christ**
 - 1. In the Word of God, Christ speaks (Heb. 1:1-4)
 - 2. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? (Heb. 2:1-4)

³ Ibid, 44-45.

⁴ Ibid, 70.

⁵ Ibid, 40.

Luther: "When I was twenty years old I had not yet seen a Bible. I thought that there were no Gospels and Epistles except those which were written in the Sunday postils. Finally I found a Bible in the library and forthwith I took it with me into the monastery. I began to read, to reread, and to read it over again, to the great astonishment of Dr. Staupitz."

Quoted in Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 79,

Stephen Vaughn, English merchant commissioned by Thomas Cromwell, June 19, 1531: "I find him always singing one note."

Letter to John Firth, his best friend: "Your cause is Chirst's gospel, a light that must be fed with the blood of faith. . . . If when we be buffeted for well-doing, we suffer patiently and endure, that is thankful with God, for to that end we are called. For Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps, who did not sin. Hereby have we perceived love that he laid down his life for us: therefore we ought to be able to lay down our lives for the brethren. . . . Let not your body faint. If the pain be above your strength, remember: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will give it to you." And pray to our Father in that name, and he will ease your pain, or shorten it. . . . Amen.