



## Translating Truth

...Jesus went to a cross for us. If you and I could be a whole lot better than we are, he could have saved himself a whole lot of trouble and pain.

I've just finished writing the forward to the Korean edition of my book, *How to Talk so People Will Listen*, and I'm quite proud of myself. I know. I'll repent later.

Among some other things, I wrote:

*Just as this book has been translated from the English in which it was originally written into Korean for the Korean Church, the message of Christ must be translated by those who know it for those who don't, so those who don't know the message will understand it, rejoice in its truth and live its precepts. It is my hope that this book will be helpful in that "translation" work.*

After I wrote that, I started thinking about "translation" and how we fail so often to reach out to the world (and even to our brothers and sisters in Christ) because of a mistranslation. I teach my students that our job is to translate the truth in a way that others can understand. That's not just a preacher's job either.

When I was a young pastor, my then mentor, Dr. John Stanton, said to me after a Sunday service, "Son, that was a truly great sermon." I swelled up with my peacock feathers blowing in the breeze until he added, "But nobody understood a word of it. You have got to start using words and concepts people understand." He then gave me my first *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*. It was in paperback, and I wore it out trying to do the "translation" work which is true preaching.

Speaking of translation, the best translation work ever done was when God entered time and space. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14).

When we looked at Jesus, we saw exactly what God wanted us to know of himself. There were no misunderstandings, no errors and no nuances that were left out.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul says that Christ was "the image of God." In Colossians 1:15, he says that Jesus Christ "is the image of the invisible God."

The writer of Hebrews speaks of Christ as being "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3).

What I'm going to say now is going to start out sounding like the normal condemnation that all of us feel when we start talking about translating Jesus through us to others. You know... things like we had better be a lot more obedient, holy and pure or they will never understand and see the truth.

Nothing wrong, of course, with obedience, holiness and purity but, can we talk? We both know we have some significant lack in those areas. That lack, in fact, is why Jesus went to a cross for us. If you and I could be a whole lot better than we are, he could have saved himself a whole lot of trouble and pain.

Paul says in Romans 8:29 that we have been called and, in fact, predestined to be "conformed to the likeness" of God's Son that "he might be the first-born among many brothers."

In other words, the translation work we do is by being like Jesus. That, of course, has a future implication to it (i.e. 1 John 3:2 "When he appears, we shall be like him") but, given the reality and the process, I believe Paul was talking about something quite different than what we generally think when we read that text.

For instance, being conformed to the image of Christ has more to do with our honesty than our purity. Just as Christ

We have  
a “burden”  
we want  
to “share”  
with you  
“just now.”



We have an article that’s been “laid on our hearts,” and we’re “coming up alongside” our readers to ask if they might be a help to us in our “hour of need.” And we truly hope that this will be a “blessing to your hearts.”

The subject of this upcoming article (as you may have already guessed) will be Christian clichés. What do you think of them? Do you avoid them—or do you find that your language is liberally sprinkled with them? Do you find yourself using them around “believers” (oops—there’s another one!) and avoiding them around “unbelievers” (and another!)—or do you find yourself using them around Christians and non-Christians alike?

Some say that Christian clichés and Christianese makes non-Christians (and some Christians) uncomfortable—or that it “hurts your witness.” Others believe that using special in-house words and phrases creates a bond between believers—kind of like a secret handshake. Do you agree? Let us know.

Most importantly, we’re looking for your favorite Christian cliché—and your least favorite Christian cliché.

We’ll summarize and share your responses in a future *Plain Truth* article. You can email us at [managing.editor@ptm.org](mailto:managing.editor@ptm.org) (put “Christian clichés” in the subject line), or send us a letter addressed to:

Christian clichés  
*Plain Truth* magazine  
Pasadena, CA 91129



he asked me...

was honest about his perfection, we are to be honest about our imperfection (see Romans 7).

Every time we proclaim our goodness and purity, those who know us see our hypocrisy and those who don’t know us think that the Christian faith is only for good and pure people. Frankly, I’ve never seen anyone come to Christ because of the purity of another Christian. Our witness is always one of beggars pointing other beggars to the Source of the bread.

Being conformed to the image of Christ has more to do with our vulnerability than our protection. Just as Jesus didn’t try to protect himself (that’s why he went to the Cross when he could have summoned a whole bunch of ticked-off angels), we don’t have to protect ourselves.

We don’t have to beat others over the head to prove that we’re right and they’re wrong. We don’t have to be anybody’s mother or manipulate people to be like us. We don’t have to pretend to be good and wonderful. To put it another way, he was vulnerable so the war would be won, and we can be vulnerable because it has been won for us.

Being conformed to the image of Christ has more to do with our love and kindness than our obedience. If Jesus was a “friend of wine bibbers and sinners” (and he was), we can be that too. For Jesus, his friendship with the sordid types like us was an amazing condescension by the perfect King for his subjects. But for us, we are just hanging out with people like us—sinners in desperate need of love, forgiveness and grace.

Our kindness isn’t because some wonderful people have decided to be kind to some less-than-wonderful people. It’s because sinners can’t afford not to be kind to sinners without appearing to be extremely prideful, dense and stupid.

Frankly, I think that truly godly people don’t know they’re godly and because of the religious/social definition of godliness, their friends probably don’t know it either.

He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown