

Spot On

Restoring the Hebraic foundational emphasis on the processes of how you live your life:

- the responsive actions our Lord commands all of His followers,*
- and their responsibility to deferentially obey by grace the One they love*



Spot 6. Are “Things” Hiding A Fear of “Works” or “Words”?

In English, whenever you can’t think of a specific word you want to say, you probably substitute the word “thing” and hope that your listener will get the idea of what you’re talking about. In the Greek language of the Newer Testament there are specific terms for the word for every thing. But on many occasions the NIV translators, in particular, ignored the Greek text and inserted the word “things” instead of the specific word.

Most often this generic substitute of “things” has been inserted to replace the very clear and specific Greek word for “works”. No doubt you’ve seen people from certain denominational persuasions cringe when they hear about “works” — as though “works” are in opposition to faith, or something that must be done to gain God’s favor! (Not so.) Yet it’s the Spirit-empowered “works” of obedient response to our Father’s will which authenticate the faith of followers of Jesus (see James 2:14-24 for a thorough examination of this biblical truth).

Let’s look at some of the instances in which specific terms have been replaced by a foggy and imprecise “things”.

- *“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!* (Matthew 18:7, NIV).
- *“Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!”* (Matthew 18:7, KJV).
- *“Woe to the world from skandalon; for it is a necessity that skandalon come, but woe to the man through whom the skandalon comes”* (Matthew 18:7, literal Greek).

So, what does that very specific Greek word “*skandalon*” mean? Technically it’s the trigger on which bait is placed when you’re trying to trap an animal. Injury or ruin comes to the animal which is trapped this way. When you put this in terms of a person, the “trap” is something which entices an individual into an action or behavior in which ruin or devastation results. In the case of our verse above, the ruinous trap — the *skandalon* — leads others to turn away from their saving trust in our Lord, and they come to spiritual ruin. (The same word substitutes are found in the parallel verse of Luke 17:1.)

Our next example reveals the Greek word for “works”, but the NIV substitutes a generic “what” in one place and inserts “things” in another. The “works” of Jesus and of His Father are specific actions taken which require supernatural involvement to bring them about. They attest to the divinity of the Father and of His Son. Note too that the NIV

misses the *ongoing action* of *believing in Jesus as trust*, and substitutes “anyone who has faith” as though faith were an intellectual commodity.

- *“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father”* (John 14:12, NIV).
- *“Truly, Truly I tell you, the one believing in Me, the works which I do that one also will do, and greater than these he will do, because I am going to the Father”* (John 14:12, literal Greek).

Why should this make a difference to you? Because once more, **“works” are a response of action being poured out through an ongoing, obedient trust relationship with Jesus**. Recognize that Jesus was referring to actions which His Father Who is *in Him* does (John 14:9-11). That’s a power-filled statement of intimacy, and that same level of power-filled intimacy was promised by Jesus to His own upon His ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Those very works would evidence the Spirit’s presence in those who loved and followed Jesus as Lord.

Not to belabor a point, but here’s one more substitution of “things” for a specific Greek word.

- *“[He] was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell”* (2Corinthians 12:4, NIV).
- *“that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not permissible for a man to speak”* (2Corinthians 12:4, literal Greek).

If Paul had heard “things”, it might have been noises, shouting, songs — any number of sounds. However, the Greek here is very precise. The apostle heard real *words* — specifically, *rhemata* — which indicate very precise verbal expressions which *could* be repeated by human vocal chords (as opposed to noises), but in fact were words which were forbidden for him to speak. For us today, such an account from the apostle creates in us an amazing sense of awe and eagerness to be part of this glorious and very real place which he so briefly describes but which pierced his very soul with its impact.

What to take away from this discussion:

Our Father was very precise when His Spirit breathed into the writers of both Testaments the messages He wanted to be made known and obeyed for all generations. The danger to us today comes when translators have a personal agenda as they take specific words and change them to fit their own doctrines and denominational bents. While this discussion may seem nitpicking, there are many more such misuses of the word “things” which we could have cited. Keep alert that when the Bible is specific in the choice of certain words being used, there’s a reason for it!