

**Original Language or Original Author?**

“Does he know the Original Language?”

Jim Bicknell was taken aback and did not know how to answer for a moment. He later told me that he thought of a “cute” answer he could have used: “No, but he is well acquainted with the original Author.” The incident took place in the foyer of the First Southern Baptist Church in Phoenix, Arizona, where Grand Canyon College meets for its chapel service. I had been invited to speak there that morning. Jim had placed some of my books in the college bookstore and they had gained some circulation before my speaking engagement. Earlier that morning, the bookstore manager had received a call from some high official in the college (who apparently had been favorably impressed by the content of some of the books), and had been instructed to arrange a display of the books in the foyer when I spoke. The questioner was the bookstore manager.

In reflecting on the incident later, it occurred to me that Jim’s “cute” answer had a lot of wisdom in it. Perhaps that is why I have never been the least bit embarrassed to preach dogmatically and write books with strong theological content, even though my knowledge of the Greek language is limited and I know even less Hebrew and Chaldee. The urgent needs of men and of churches for the practical aspects of the Gospel have consumed all my study and time. So I have contented myself with the fruits of other men’s labours in the area of these languages, whose labours a lifetime of my own study could not duplicate. And if they should, what should I have gained? Might I expect to write better lexicons, concordances and grammars than those already available? Would God be pleased with my spending my fleeting lifetime looking for minor weaknesses in these great men’s work while men perish for lack of truth? In order for there to be any *significant* advantage to personal study of the original languages from a grammatical and literary standpoint, one would need a minimum of four to six years in Greek, and twice that in Hebrew and Chaldee. The only advantage a person has with less than that is whatever prestige might be produced in his audience’s mind when he says, “I have studied the languages.”

On the other hand, who is most likely to understand what a person is saying, the one who knows best the grammar and the literature of the language spoken, or the one who knows best the speaker? When my wife speaks, I know better what she is saying and what she means than a roomful of men with doctorates in English, simply because I know *Her*. I know her likes and her dislikes, her personality, her values and her moods. A love bond ties us together with a communication that cannot be analyzed by the rules of grammar. When she speaks, I hear more accurately than anyone else.

This speaks to all of us. We need to know the Holy Spirit. Praise God for any opportunity you have to avail yourself of knowledge of the languages. But this will avail you nothing if you do not know God. The new Christian discovers this shortly after he is converted. The Bible that once made no sense to him now speaks clearly and profoundly – even the King James! The Apostle’s hear cry, “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.”

-C.M.