

A Reflection for Bible Sunday, 25th October 2026

The last Sunday in October is sometimes designated 'Bible Sunday', being the same day on which Lutheran Christians commemorate 'Reformation Day'. This is a memorial of 31st October 1517 when Martin Luther pinned onto the door of the church in Wittenberg his 95 *Theses*, or *scholarly opinions* in criticism of the abuses of the Catholic Church of his day. It was a gesture of *protest* – against widespread venal corruption – which set into motion the process of religious change in Europe which led to the permanent split between the 'Protestant' Churches of northern Europe, and the Catholic Church, which itself recognised the need for systematic renewal in the form of what is sometimes called a 'counter-Reformation'.

We can question whether the right response to the corruption of the Church was to stage a kind of *revolution* (which is the effect of the Protestant challenge to the Church authorities, specifically in Rome) or a more gentle process of *reform* and *renewal* (which is what ultimately took place within the Catholic Church itself). But that there needed to be *some kind* of cleansing and reawakening of the Church as a whole to the call upon us all of the *Gospel* isn't seriously in dispute. To that extent, the real issue is perhaps the place which the *Bible* has in our consciousness and understanding. That is certainly why, for us in the Church of England, the designation of this day as *Bible Sunday* is absolutely right. And perhaps we can make sense of our own Church of England – which honours both the ancient traditions of faith as handed down from the saints who first brought Christianity to our islands in the first millennium *as well as* the need for reform and renewal in the middle of the second millennium – specifically as a Church which takes seriously the witness of the *Bible* as our guide and foundation. It is no accident that most precious of all the books to survive from Anglo-Saxon and medieval England, for example, are *Bibles* and *Gospel Books* – books which contain the '*words of life*'.

In that same pattern, 2026 is significant as the 500th anniversary of the first *printing* of a text of the New Testament in *English*. At the very height of the tensions in Europe between traditionalists and radicals – between those who thought that the Church needed to *return to its roots* and those who thought it needed to *start again* – William Tyndale published his own translation of the New Testament. It was provocative enough an act that he had to seek refuge on the continent as he made his preparations

for the printing, and his New Testament was printed in Worms and imported into England from Germany in 1526. Very few copies survive, not least because the book was banned in England, but one is currently on



display (until 18th November) in Blackburn Cathedral, a precious relic of that seriousness of intention that the *Word of God* should be made *accessible* to us in such a form that we can *receive* it and *understand* it. To our eyes, William Tyndale's English is a bit more quirky than the better-known text of the *King James Bible* (1611), which used the older

version as one of its starting points. What was revolutionary, in 1526, was William Tyndale's own attempt to write a text which was genuinely meaningful in the English of his day, as well as accurate in its comparison with the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible as it had originally been written. That is a hugely challenging task, but profoundly important if the text we read is to be *accurate*, and to communicate the *meaning* of the text *truthfully* and *effectively*.

We receive the Word of God as the basis of our whole pattern of life and outlook and behaviour, which is why, this Bible Sunday, we have part of the *Letter to the Colossians* as one of our readings. Here the focus is not only on right belief, but also on right attitudes and right behaviour – the *moral* aspect of our faith as it applies *in practice*:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3.12-17

For comparison, here is the same text as proposed in 1526 by William Tyndale himself:

Now therefore as elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercy, kindness, humbleness of minds, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel to another, even as Christ forgave you, even so do ye. Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. And the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which peace ye are called in one body. And see that ye be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you plenteously in all wisdom. Teach and exhort your own selves, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs which have favour with them singing in your hearts to the Lord. And in all things (whatsoever ye do in word or deed) do in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the father by him.

It is a version of the text which seems slightly rough by our standards, although it is close to the patterns of speech in the English of its day. One or two words differ in the modern version, partly the result of access to more reliable versions of the Greek text from which this is translated: but we can see that the backbone of the very text as we know it, including some of the particular turns of phrase in English, is already there. It is a remarkable achievement, and one which merits our respect and honour.

We read these words in the light of the Collect Prayer written by Thomas Cranmer for the *Book of Common Prayer*, originally for the Second Sunday in Advent, and now used on Bible Sunday:

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning: help us so to hear them, to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and for ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

These are words which many Anglicans were brought up to remember by heart, even when I, too, was still a child. They reflect a *veneration* for the words of the Holy Scriptures, and a *seriousness of purpose* in our study of the Word of God, which themselves owe something to the vision and commitment of William Tyndale himself. May we be worthy of this heritage entrusted to us. And may we commend it to those who follow us.

William Tyndale's text is edited with modernised spellings by David Daniell (Yale University Press, 1989).