YOU WOULDN'T CHANGE THE LANGUAGE IN SHAKESPEARE!

Posted on April 20, 2012 by Eddie

Category: Bible Translation

You wouldn't update the language in Shakespeare, so why would you want to change the language in the Bible!

You might be surprised at how often people say things along these lines to me, when I'm talking about Bible translation. In a sense it is understandable. After all, Shakespeare and the King James Bible are both wonderful examples of the English language from around the same point in history and we would never think of updating and improving Shakespeare's prose, so why would we change the Bible?

The problem, of course, is that the Bible isn't actually a brilliant piece of Jacobean English. Unlike Shakespeare's plays and poems, the Bible was written in antiquity, in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The King James Version was an English translation of the original completed over a thousand years after the Bible was first written. So when if we compare Shakespeare and The King James Version, we are actually comparing apples and oranges. Yes, they are both examples of wonderful English writing, but one is a translation of a much older document and one belongs to the time.

So, we would not want to update Shakespeare, but the King James Version of the Bible was already an 'update' of what had originally been written. When we translate the Bible today, we are merely carrying on the work that was done by the translation team who developed the KJV. So yes, of course, we should keep translating the Bible today, even if we wouldn't update 'to be or not to be...'.