

Luke 2:14 in the King James and New International Version: Applications to our Law and Gospel Ministry

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KJ V. 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

NIV V. 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

(For comparison and curiosity: New American Standard: “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

Beck: “Glory to God in the highest heavens, and on earth peace among people who have His good will!”

KJ Revised in 1881-1885: Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased.”

RSV: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!”

R.C. Douay Version: Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will.

Martin Luther “neu durchgesehen nach dem vom neutschen Evangelischen Kirchnausschusz genehmigten Text” “Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe and Friede auf Erden and den Menschen ein Wohlgefallen!”)

Writing a paper on a subject involving a Bible verse, doctrine, translations and various original texts and editions is something like raising children. Before you start in it all looks so simple. The farther into the subject you get, the more complicated it all turns out to be. Why was there a change made? The good old (original) King James was so very understandable and unmistakable. The church has been singing the “Gloria in Excelsis” every Sunday for Centuries: “Glory be to God on high: And on earth peace, good will toward men.” It goes on to express in ageold words “Thou that takest away the sin of the world”. What could be a clearer statement of universal or objective justification? And in our fine Christmas hymns we have it spelled out just as clearly: 83 v.3: “Peace on earth, good will from heaven, Reaching far as man is found; Souls redeemed and sins forgiven.” Hymn 94: ...Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled... Light and life to all He brings, Ris’n with healing in His Wings.” The paraphrase in 238: “Thou dost the world’s sin take away.”

If one were of a suspicious nature, a very simple solution would surest itself. “Obviously, people are making a translation to buttress their own theological preconceptions!” Yes and no! The NAS surely seems to be pointing at something in man that makes God send peace man’s way: “men with whom He is pleased” What can be pleasing about man the enemy of God which causes God to send His Son? And the Revised 1881 KJ with its “in whom he is well pleased” or the RSV’s “with whom he is pleased” or the Douay Version’s “to men of good will” raise some suspicions. How careful we and our people have to be in the use of translations and paraphrases! (The Living Bible has “peace on earth for all those pleasing him”!) Most surely, doctrinal prejudice does show up here. It is only through, the incarnation and substitutionary work of God’s Son that man becomes pleasing to God. There is nothing in man to incline God’s heart toward peace and pleasure with this totally lost, spiritually bankrupt, actively hostile creature! As Dr. Siegbert W. Becker says in his paper on “Observing the Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel in the Preaching and Teaching Ministry”: “As pastors and teachers who are fully committed to the doctrine of universal justification, we should find it relatively easy to avoid the mistake of mixing law and Gospel which make forgiveness dependent on either our contrition or on faith. In other words, when we proclaim the Gospel, it should be pure Gospel. “Unfortunately, Universal Justification is not universally believed among all Christian churches and all Bible translators. Translations can be, and often are, slanted in the translator’s doctrinal direction.

But can we say this of the NIV? Its accent is on God’s favor, not man’s condition. And conservative Professor Beck says: “among people who have His good will,” in his translation. That’s pretty close to the “good will toward men” of the original KJ. But why change it at all? Why is the NIV (and Beck and other commentators) so concerned that they reword the angels’ message? It’s all because of the little letter “s”. With the letter “s” the word translated “Good will” becomes “of good will”, a genitive instead of a nominative. At the time of Luther and King James, the prevailing manuscripts had the nominative. Already in 1881 the pendulum was swinging in the other direction, due to new discoveries of good manuscripts.

R.C.H. Lenski has some interesting comments: “Some state that textually the genitive is the assured reading. This is claimed especially by those who prefer this reading, but he who examines the texts will find that the nominative is equally well attested. Thus textually the reading is undecided, and internal reasons must decide.” John Martin Creed writes: “...the weight of MS. evidence upholds the genitive...we must therefore recognize two clauses connected by “kai”. The former proclaims God’s glory in heaven, the second his gift of peace to his chosen upon earth... A Christian reader would naturally interpret of the new Israel, the Christian Church.” Quite a difference! Who is right?

Whereas Lenski says that internal evidence favors the nominative, Howard Marshall in the “New International Greek Testament Commentary” says the opposite: “The external evidence favours (the genitive) and the internal evidence also supports this reading.... The phrase means ‘those upon whom God’s will/favour rests’, and expresses the thought of God’s free choice of those whom he wills to favour and save.” Law and Gospel are mixed again!

In “A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke” F. Godet in 1870 wrote: “The gen. ‘of goodwill’ may refer to the pious dispositions towards God with which a part of mankind are animated. But this interpretation is hardly natural. “eudokia”, from “eudokein” to “delight in,” denotes an entirely gracious goodwill, the initiative of which is in the subject who feels it. This term does not suit the relation of man to God, but only that of God to man. Therefore, with this reading, we must explain the words thus: Peace on earth to the men who are the objects of divine goodwill. But this use of the genitive is singularly rude, and almost barbarous; the men of goodwill, meaning those on whom goodwill rests..., is a mode of expression without any example. We are thus brought back to the reading of the T.R....With this reading, the song consists of three propositions, of which two are parallel, and the third forms a link between the two. In the first, glory to God in the highest places, the angels demand that, from the lower regions to which they have just come down, from the bosom of humanity, praise shall arise, which, ascending from heavens to heavens, shall reach at last the supreme sanctuary, the ‘highest places’ and there glorify the divine perfections that shine forth in this birth. The second, ‘peace on earth’, is the counterpart of the first. While inciting men to praise, the angels invoke on them peace from God. This peace is such as results from the reconciliation of man with God; it contains the cause of the cessation of

all war here below. These two propositions are of the nature of a desire or prayer.... The third, which is not connected with the preceding by any particle, proclaims the fact which is the ground of this two-fold prayer.... The sense is, "for God takes pleasure in men." You note that the above remarks are from 1870, when the nominative still was more often being defended as a good reading, better than the genitive. But it surely does bring some good food for thought!

Assuming that a change has been made (and not a mistake) the question is, why? William Hendriksen in "Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke" lists one of the kinds of reasoning: "Since the genitive case is, on the surface, harder to grasp, change to the nominative is understandable. The opposite process-changing from the nominative to the genitive-would be unnatural." Maybe so, but a lover of the Word had better have better reasons than that one!

Since it seems to be so much easier to understand in the analogy of faith, why did the NIV translators drop the nominative and accept the genitive? Can it be correctly understood without denying universal justification? Can we rightly divide the word of truth; can we separate law and Gospel with a genitive here?

Those are good questions, but they should not be the first questions. As Riess named his Adult Instruction Manual, "What Does the Bible Say?" Next question: "Which version of the original text are we talking about?" Which is the correct one? The answer: "The one that says it the way I think it would be said" is not a good answer, even though we have our teachings straight and are comparing scripture with scripture. Dr. Walther says in his "Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel": "Comparing Holy Scripture with other writings we observe that no book is apparently so full of contradictions as the Bible, and that not only in minor points, but in the principal matter, in the doctrine how we may come to God and be saved." Couldn't we eliminate a lot of questions and problems by eliminating from Scripture David's many wives, James' words on the necessity of works, Jesus' "this generation shall not pass away until...", John's use of the word millenium, etc. etc. But we would be going against some other clear words about changing the Word if we did that! We simply have to look at the many old copies of Scripture which God Himself has allowed -- no, caused -- to be preserved, found and studied. And, let's face it, we most likely are not that proficient in the work of comparison, so we will have to study the work, the arguments, the conclusions of those who know more than we do -- just like our members have to listen to us, THEIR next step up in scripture study, and compare and choose, according to the facts and the analogy of faith, comparing scripture with scripture. And we had better do some real study of the context, too!

Expert Rev. Alfred. Plummer writes: "The reading is a well-known problem, but the best textual critics are unanimous for 'eudokias' The external evidence is very decidedly in favour of the apparently more difficult reading eudokias. Roughly speaking, we have all the (best) MSS, with all Latin authorities, against the inferior MSS, with nearly all versions, except the Latin, and nearly all the Greek writers who quote the text... (This) agreement... affords a peculiarly strong presumption in favour of eudokias." The NIV was submitted to our Seminary faculty. I know of no objections being raised to use of the genitive here. Nor does Robertson in his Grammar of the Greek N.T. bring any problems to the fore in the understanding of the grammar in verse 14. Therefore, in spite of the fact that you have a copy of the "Expositor's Greek Testament" listing the nominative "eudokia", we had better do the same as my father did in his Greek-German N.T. at Wauwatosa in 1904-1906, and use the Nestle text with the genitive. (Excuse the scribbling on the Nestle Text from MY NT -- they don't teach penmanship as well as they used to in the late 1800's!) The Greek text printed on the lower left is from the "Huck-Lietzmann SYNOPSE DER DREI ERSTEN EVANGELIEN", an excellent study help used extensively at Oberursel, Germany, in 1951. The footnotes are easier to read than those on the right side; the "Apparat" is very extensive also.

It's about time we looked at the word itself: eudokia. Thayer says: 1. will, choice, in particular, good-will, kindly intent, benevolence. 2. delight, pleasure, satisfaction: with gen. of the thing that pleases; en anthropois eudokia, either among men pleasure produced by salvation, or God's pleasure in men, Luke ii 14; anthropoi eudokias, men in whom God is well pleased (i.e. not a particular class of men, viz, believers, but the whole race, contemplated as blessed in Christ's birth); 3. desire.

Arndt-Gingrich says: 1. good will (of men) “This may be the place to classify Luke 2:14 en anthropois eudokias, which would then mean ‘among men of good will’. Others, including some who prefer the reading eudokia, would rather translate it: 2. favor, good pleasure; this would refer to n the persons upon whom divine favor rests (so often LXX;..) and the meaning (with the reading eudokias) would be ‘among men with whom he is pleased or whom he favors.’ 3. wish, desire.

Other uses of the word eudokia in Scripture: Philippians 1:15 “It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of, good will.” 2:13 “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” In the first verse it is man’s good will (worked, indeed, by God, through faith); in the second it is purely God’s good purpose. In II Thessalonians 1:11: “With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.” How theo-centric the Christian is to be! All of our good purposes are to be fulfilled by God’s power and each of our acts -- as believers -- is to be prompted by our faith! “On earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” His favor rests on all men, there is peace decreed and announced by the angels. Especially helpful in this word study is Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, 1:5ff: “He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.” Not only is eudokia used twice here, but it seems to echo the angels’ message: ‘adopted as his sons through Christ’ takes us into the incarnation; ‘to the praise of his glorious grace’ reminds us of the angels’ “glory to God in the highest”; ‘the riches of God’s grace’ reminds us of the ‘on whom his favor rests’, as also ‘according to His good pleasure’; ‘which he purposed in Christ’ leads us into the Word being made flesh again.

We should also note the context: Luke himself specifies the contents of the angels’ message as praise of God : “praising God and saying;”. The context in v.10 tells us that the angel of God has been sent to herald ‘good news of great joy that will be for all the people’.

But who are ‘all the people’? ‘Who makes up this group of men, on whom his favor rests’? Arndt-Gingrich defines ‘laos’ 1. people, crowd, with ‘pas’ the whole crowd, all the people. But he lists Luke 2:10 under meaning 3. the people of God, a. the people of Israel with this parenthesis: (here, however, the evangelist may have intended the word to have its universal sense: all the people = everyone).” Thayer lists Luke 2:10 with this addition: ‘Especially of the people of Israel under his first meaning: 1. a people, tribe, nation, all those who are of the same stock and language’. Since this expression, ‘panti to lao’ is definitive for the understanding of our verse 14, let’s look further into the context and into a nearby use of the exact same words. Luke 2:31 is part of Simeon’s thanksgiving to God as he held the Savior in his arms. His eyes have seen God’s salvation “which you have prepared in the sight of all people’, and then Simeon goes on to define who these all people are: “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel”.

The immediate context, the further away context, the analogy of Scripture combine to give the broadest possible meaning to “Men on whom his favor rests”. We can not only ‘live with the NIV translation if we have to’, but we can even find in it and in the better-attested Greek manuscripts from which it is taken a much more powerful message in what the angels said/sang. “Peace on earth, good will to men” may be comfortable, familiar, and correctly understood . Christians have found and will continue to find joy in what it says. We can not fault Lenski or Godet, or anyone else who defends the Textus Receptus with its reading of the nominative, eudokia. But neither can we say that the genitive changes everything and loses the real meaning. It doesn’t. Knowing what is wrong with the “Higher Criticism” does not call for ignoring one hundred years of archaeology and research. Kretzmann in his Popular Commentary uses the King James version. Yet he also was aware of the many manuscripts found which had the genitive. Therefore, he quotes the King James, but also alludes to the newer text with the genitive, as he writes: “And this peace will be toward the men of good will, it will assure all men of the good will of the heavenly Father in and with the Babe in the manger.” The NIV surely

makes it much clearer than Kretzmann's "men of good will" as it translates, 'and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests'.

Luther had only the *Textus Receptus*, and to him there were three parts in the angels' message, as in the King James: 1. Glory to God in the highest, 2. and on earth peace, 3. good will toward men. Luther says: "That is the third strophe, that we may have a happy, joyful, defiant courage against all suffering which may happen to us, that we may say to the devil,... Christ gives me more joy than you do sorrow." The NIV has but two parts to the angels' message: 1. Glory to God in the highest, 2. and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.

To do some summing up, the KJ version of Luke 2:14 makes it very clear that the good will is God's, not man's. That's good, and that is what prompted so many to defend it and retain it. The genitive for *eudokia* seems to open a door to perfectionists, synergists, work righteousness believers, etc. But it does that only if you do a Jehovah Witness trick and forget entirely the context, and go right ahead and contradict it. No honest scholar will do that -- if he regards the Bible as God's Word. It has to mean: 'men whom the Divine favor has blessed' (Plummer, *op. cit.*). But we need to recognize that not all will go on in their interpretation as Plummer does: "all, male and female, young and old, are included."

Because that beautiful Bible teaching of objective justification is so often not known, or confessed, many do not understand the magnitude of God's love and Grace, as here announced to the shepherds. Dr: Becker has very helpful insights for us. "The distinction between the antecedent and the consequent will of God, which is really the distinction between law and Gospel expressed in different terms, is often misunderstood. The whole matter becomes crystal clear if we remember that the point of reference in this terminology is human behavior. When God takes human behavior into consideration in determining to act in a certain way, we say 'that He is acting in accord with His consequent will and what happens to men is a consequence of their own action. In that sense it can be said that men send themselves to hell, yet it is clear that the Bible teaches that it is God who destroys the sinner body and soul in hell.

"On the other hand, when God does not take human behavior into consideration when He determines to act in a certain way, we say that He is acting in accord with His antecedent will, and, in this case, what happens to men is not a consequence of their action, but it comes to them as a consequence of the will of God acting in perfect freedom.

"It may help to clarify this matter if we point out that one of the great distinctive doctrines of Lutheranism is involved in this matter. Calvinism makes both the salvation and damnation of men a matter of God's antecedent will. This is their doctrine of unconditional election, which says that God, in eternity, by an act of His sovereign will determined that a certain specified number of men would be saved and that the rest would be damned. In doing this God's choice was not conditioned by anything that he foresaw in man's behavior, for He saw nothing but total depravity in all of them. His choice was simply an act of sovereign freedom.

Romanism, and the various forms of synergism, on the other hand, make both the salvation and the damnation of men a matter of the consequent will of God. In effect Rome teaches that those who do evil works will be rewarded for this with eternal damnation and those who do good works will be rewarded for this with eternal life. Their doctrine of election follows the same pattern. God from eternity predestined those of whom He foresaw that they would do good to eternal life and those of whom He foresaw that they would be predestined to eternal death. The Synergistic view which substitutes the word "believe" in that sentence for "do good" is obviously only a variation of the Roman doctrine.

"Lutheranism, however, insists that man's salvation is a matter of God's antecedent will, in which the behavior of man is left out of consideration as a cause of salvation. With equal force it holds that man's damnation is a matter of God's consequent will, in which the behavior of man is viewed as the cause of damnation"

"Men on whom His favor rests" has its full meaning only when we thus see the totality of the gift, the universality of the peace, the unconditionally of the good news. It was pure gospel, and still is. And it followed the law. "...they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." To people who are afraid the Good news comes with a message that helps them

no longer be afraid. The repeated sacrifices, the lamb slain, the decrees of stoning, the forty years of wandering, the flood, all of their history combined with the written and inner voice of the law made them fear these holy beings and remember their sin. To such the pure Gospel must be brought.

We should be thankful that we belong to a "liturgical" church which uses the centuries old wordings. By the time we get to the sermon, we and our people have already twice heard the law and the gospel. In the Scripture readings and in the sermon we are able to again bring these truths. And the angels' song (saying) is an important part of this, every single Sunday. Luther said that the purpose of the Gospel is to declare us not guilty and acquit us, to exalt us, to make us alive, to carry us to heaven and to make us possessors of all things. Lost and on our way to hell, Christ finds us and declares us "men on whom his favor rests." How many "All the people!" Praise His Grace!

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