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Journal of Translation
ISSN 1558-7282 (online)
https://siljot.org

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Journal of Translation 5 (1), 2009: 95–96.
https://doi.org/10.54395/JOT-MKMCP

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Short Note

Κλητός 'Called'—A Mistreated Adjective

By J. Harold Greenlee

Long ago, during my theological seminary student days, one Sunday at noon one of my fellow students returned from a preaching opportunity, and jubilantly told me, "I preached on Romans 1:7, 'Called to be saints'!"

I'm confident that he preached a good sermon, but I had read that text in my Greek New Testament and I knew that the King James Version's translation was not the Apostle's meaning. Through the years from time to time I hear that mistranslation read or mentioned. And when I just now checked the *Eight Translation New Testament*, all but one version follows the KJV's erroneous rendering. More than that, the same error occurs in almost every other occurrence of this adjective as well. This is a parade of "agreement in error," because I am confident that later translators of one version after another simply accepted the erroneous rendering without due thought even when the KJV gives a correct translation.

The erroneous translations are based on a mistranslation of the adjective κλητός 'called', an adjective related to the verb καλέω 'to call'. I will use the KJV as the starting point, since that version is the first in the parade of versions. Before turning to these other passages, however, let's look at the occurrence of this word in Romans 1:1, which reads in the KJV "called *to be* an apostle."

One error in the KJV rendering is supplying 'to be'—in italics, to be sure, indicating that this infinitive does not occur in the Greek text, but is necessary to the intended meaning. The Greek text is simply κλητὸς ἀπόστολος, '(a) called apostle'.

Unfortunately, the English word 'called' can have more than one meaning, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between these meanings in English renderings. It can have the meaning indicated by the KJV rendering, meaning "God has called me to be an apostle." However, this meaning would require a Greek participle (probably perfect passive) plus an infinitive, κεκλημένος εἶναι ἀπόστολος, "(I am) called to be an apostle."

A second meaning of 'called' is "God names me (an apostle)" or "God says that I am (an apostle)." But this rendering would require a Greek participle (probably aorist passive), κληθεὶς ἀπόστολος 'having been called an apostle."

It is certainly true that Paul was called to be an apostle. It is doubtless true as well that God calls him an apostle. However, neither of those truths is what the Apostle is stating in this verse. The third meaning of 'called' is the only correct meaning here. 'Called' κλητός is an adjective, describing 'apostle', not a participle with 'apostle' as its predicate. In other words, Paul was not 'a self-appointed apostle' or 'an elected-by-a-majority-vote apostle'; rather, he is an apostle because God has called him to his ministry as an apostle. This call characterizes his apostleship; he is a 'called' apostle, an apostle by virtue of God's call.

This same phase occurs in 1 Cor. 1:1, and the identical discussion applies there.

Now let us return to Roman 1:7 and the KJV rendering, 'called *to be* saints'. We need not labor the issue here, for the same erroneous rendering of κλητός 'called' occurs here, this time in the plural, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις 'called saints'. There is no infinitive 'to be', nor is the meaning 'given the name of saints' or '(God) says that you are saints'. They are saints by virtue of God's call upon them, so 'called' indicates what class of saints they are; they are not 'self-appointed saints' nor 'elected-by-the-congregation saints', but 'called' saints.

This adjective occurs in the preceding verse as well. In verse 6 the KJV correctly translates κλητοὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 'the called of Jesus Christ'. In other words, they are Jesus Christ's 'called' people. Surprisingly, though, the other common versions agree in the erroneous rendering, 'called to belong

to Jesus Christ', which requires a Greek text reading κεκλημένοι γενέσθαι Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ 'called to become to Jesus Christ'.

This same phase occurs in 1 Cor. 1:2, and the identical discussion applies there.

In Romans 8:28 the phrase τοῖς…κλητοῖς οὖσιν is translated in the KJV 'to them who are the called', which is correct, but the other versions make it 'those who have been called' or something similar, which would require a Greek participial phrase τοῖς…κληθεῖσι. It is true that God has called them, but because God has called them, in this verse the Apostle is identifying them as the 'called' ones.

In 1 Cor. 1:24 Paul refers to τοῖς κλητοῖς, Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἕλλησιν, 'the called (ones), both Jews and Greeks'. Again, the versions with one accord erroneously imply the participle τοῖς κληθεῖσι, 'those who have been called', or a similar rendering.

The parade of error and translational mistreatment of the meaningful adjective κλητός 'called' by most or all common versions continues in Jude 1, which reads τοῖς…κλητοῖς, 'the called (ones)', not 'who are called' as most versions read.

Matt. 22:14 (and 20:16 in the TR) read πολλοὶ γάρ εἰσιν κλητοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί, "for many are called, but few are chosen," which the versions follow. This is acceptable, but only if the use of the adjective κλητοί is understood to mean "many are (the) called (ones), but few are (the) chosen (ones)," not as if the clause read the verb καλοῦνται 'are called'.

But the error is not total! In the only other occurrence of this adjective, Rev. 17:14, the phrase οἱ μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί, 'the ones with him (are) called and chosen and faithful' the versions correctly give the adjective its proper meaning. It may not be to their credit, however, for the context makes the correct rendering almost unavoidable.

J. Harold Greenlee, associated with OMS International, is the author of more than a dozen books and more than 150 articles, mostly pertaining to New Testament Greek, including A Concise Exegetical Grammar of New Testament Greek *(1963, 1986), his classic textbook,* Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism *(1964, 1995), and his most recent book,* The Text of the New Testament: From Manuscript to Modern Edition *(2008).*