

Translating James 1:23

The King James Version: For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass...

The Christogenea Version: Because if one is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing the appearance of his race in a mirror...

I have recently had a quite succinct email message from a reader who stated “At verse 23: change *race* to *face*”. It is true that errors in typing where one word is substituted for another similar and properly spelled word, and therefore not detected by a software spelling checker, are very common. And while I do imagine that people will find errors in my translations – for no man is perfect – this however, is not one of them. Still, I would encourage those who feel that they have found such errors to notify me, and I shall be more than happy to reply, and to make any necessary corrections. Here my translation of the phrase in question is purposely “the appearance of his race”, and I shall explain why.

The Greek to this passage reads: τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ, which transliterated into English characters and words, is here *to* (the) *prosōpon* (appearance) *tes yenesēōs* (of the race) *autou* (of him). The words τὸ πρόσωπον are a noun with the definite Article and are in the Accusative case and therefore are the object of the verb translated “observing”. The words τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ are respectively a noun with the definite Article and a pronoun, and are both in the Genitive case. Together here they are treated as an adjectival phrase modifying the noun πρόσωπον by the King James and most other translators. While the phrase itself may be adjectival, the words are still nouns, and should not be merely reduced to an adjective, i.e. his *natural* face. The Greek language certainly had adjectives for such a purpose.

The word πρόσωπον is defined by Liddell and Scott: “...*the face, visage, countenance ... one's look ... outward appearance, beauty ...*” The word γενέσεως is the genitive form of γένεσις (from which we have the English *genesis*) and is defined “... *an origin, source, productive cause ... a beginning ... manner of birth ... race, descent ...*” In the context here, speaking of the sight of a person in a mirror, I have translated the word *race*, and would assert that *descent*, *origin*, or *source* would bear the same meaning in this case and would only be masking the intent of the statement if employed in place of *race*.

All of this is supported by a comment found at the word *face* here in the Bible Works program in the edition of the New American Standard Bible, where it is stated: “Lit., *the face of his birth*; or, *nature*”, yet I would assert that neither do they understand the literal and true meaning of the phrase. Phrases such as “the face of his birth” or “the appearance of his birth” make no sense. I have translated them “the appearance of his race” because I believe that such is exactly what James meant: that although we may be children of Adam and of Israel, born in the image and likeness of Yahweh our God, this is not enough by itself: for unless we are also doers of His Word then we are certainly not doing well, and not performing to the intent of our Creator.