

Romans 2:4 in the Navajo Bible

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Éí doodaléi' Diyin God bibee ajooba' índa yee ak'édí nilíinii áádóó nízadgóó yee ha'ólníinii yee alááh neel'áanii daats'í t'áadoo nilínígóó baa nitsíníkees? Doósh nił béeéhózin da, Diyin God naa jooba'go łahgo át'éeego tsíndííkosgo shich'í' dah nídidíídááł nízín? (Romans 2:4)¹

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness [*chrēstotēs*], tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness [*chrēstos*] leads you toward repentance? (Romans 2:4)²

Introduction

Notice the words, *Diyin God bibee ajooba'* ("God's goodness, or kindness ") in the first part of the verse and *Diyin God naa jooba'go* ("God's goodness, or kindness, to you") in the second part. Frequently in the Navajo New Testament *ajooba'* corresponds to the English word "grace" (Greek *charis* [HAH-ris]),³ but here it corresponds to English "kindness" (Greek *chrēstotēs* [krays-TO-tays], also *chrēstos* [krays-TOS]). There's no question about the Navajo translation here. I merely point out that the concepts of "grace" and "kindness" have much in common. Below we look at some other shades of meaning that will help us understand these words better.

Two Words

Examples of *charis*

Grace. Forty-seven times in the Navajo New Testament the Greek word *charis* (χάρις) is translated *ajooba'*, or some related form. In these cases NIV often uses the word "grace." God's grace is unmerited favor. He accepts us, or shows favor to us, even though we don't deserve it. He does this because of His kindness.

Thanksgiving. The same Greek word can have other shades of meaning. Six times it conveys the idea of gratitude or thanksgiving.

But thanks be to God [*ahééh hwiindzin*] that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. (Romans 6:17)

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

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³ Luke 2:40; John 1:17; Acts 4:33; Romans 1:7; 5:15, 20, 21; 6:1, 11:6; 16:20; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 15:10, 16:23; 2 Corinthians 1:2; 4:15; 12:9; 13:14 [13]; Galatians 1:3; 6:18; Ephesians 1:2; 3:8; 4:7; 6:24; Philippians 1:2; 4:23; Colossians 1:2; 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 5:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 3:18; 1 Timothy 1:2, 14; 6:21; 2 Timothy 1:2; 4:22; Titus 1:4; 2:11; 3:15; Philemon 1:3, 25; Hebrews 13:25; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2; 2 John 1:3; Revelation 1:4; 22:21.

Thanks be to God [*ahééh nisin*]- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:25)

But thanks be to God [*ahééh daniidzin*!] He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57)

But thanks be to God [*ahééh hasin*], who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. (2 Corinthians 2:14)

I thank God [*ahééh nisin*], who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. (2 Corinthians 8:16)

Thanks be to God [*ahééh hasin*] for his indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15)

Praise. In three cases the same word is translated *nihaa daha'niih*. In English this has to do with being praiseworthy. NIV translates using the word "credit."

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you [*éish bee nihaa daha'niih doo*]? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you [*éish bee nihaa daha'niih doo*]? Even 'sinners' do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you [*éish bee nihaa daha'niih doo*]? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. (Luke 6:32-34)

Being pleased. In the remaining two cases the Navajo translation says *haa bit hózhó*. The idea here is one of God being happy or pleased with someone.

For it is commendable [*Diyin God haa bit hózhó*] if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit [*Diyin God haa bit hózhó*] if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. (1 Peter 2:19-20)

Different meanings of *chrēstotēs*

The word used in Romans 2:4 is not *charis*, but *chrēstotēs* (χρηστότης) or *chrēstos* (χρηστός) There are only ten examples of this word in the New Testament. Eight times it means "kindness."

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness [*Diyin God naa jooba'go*], tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? (Romans 2:4, above)

Consider therefore the kindness [*Diyin God be'ajooba'*] and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness [*Diyin God bibee ajooba'*] to you, provided that you continue in his kindness [*naa jooba'*]. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. (Romans 11:22)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness [*ajooba'*], goodness, faithfulness, (Galatians 5:22)

in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness [*habee ajooba'*] to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:7)

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness [*athaa dajiinohba'*], humility, gentleness and patience. (Colossians 3:12)

But when the kindness [*yee jooba'ii*] and love of God our Savior appeared, (Titus 3:4)

Once, where it also means "kindness," it is translated into Navajo with a different term:

in purity, understanding, patience and kindness [*nihá áhwiinít'í'ígíí*]; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; (2 Corinthians 6:6)

And once it means "goodness."

All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good [*yá'át'éehgo*], not even one." (Romans 3:12)

Discussion

In this context Romans 3:12 is especially interesting. When NIV translates the word *chrēstotēs* as "good" and when the Navajo translators use the corresponding term *yá'át'éehgo*, what does that mean? What kind of goodness are we talking about here? Doing good in this context means doing things that are acceptable to God.

Recall that the basic meaning of our other word (*charis*) is "grace," or "unmerited favor." It describes God's ability and willingness to accept people even when they are not acceptable. God accepts us because we accept His Son, Jesus. When we come to Him in faith, God accepts us as though we had never sinned, because of our relationship with His Son. That's grace!

The real question, though, is not what God does with grace. We know what He does. He accepts us, and when He does this we are saved people. The question is what we do with grace. Do we come to Jesus in our sins, receive His grace, and then keep the sins that drove us to Him in the first place? No! When God accepts us with all our sins, we have the privilege of leaving those sins with Him because of Jesus' death on the cross. We must die *to* our sins, just as He died *for* our sins. The purpose for doing this is to pry people loose from all those sins they like to do. We need to separate from them and give our hearts over to Christ. This is what the verse means that says,

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

Jesus does not save His people *in* their sins, but *from* their sins. When we come to Jesus, we come just as we are, with all the sins we've ever committed. But then we give those sins to Jesus and leave them with Him. At that point we are free from our guilt. But don't do this and then take your sins back home with you again. Leave them with Jesus.

Conclusion

The Navajo translation of Romans 2:4 uses the expression *Diyiin God bee ajooba'* ("God's kindness, or grace"). NIV uses the word "kindness" here. The Greek word is *chrēstotēs*. This word is used only ten times in the New Testament and means things like "kindness" and "goodness." The "kindness" pertains to God, the "goodness" pertains to us in the sense that – because of His kindness – God considers what we do acceptable, when we do it because of our relationship with Jesus.

Another word (*charis*) is used 47 times in the New Testament to mean "grace." The same Navajo (*ajooba'* in its various forms) can translate both Greek words (*chrēstotēs* and *charis*). This is because God's grace is an expression of His kindness. He accepts us even though we have sinned.

When we come to Jesus we do this even though we have sinned – or we could say especially because we've sinned – because Jesus is able to cleanse us from sin and set us free to live new lives in Him. Let's not accept God's grace or kindness, bring our sins to Him, and then take them back home again. We can't enjoy God's forgiveness and continue enjoying our sins at the same time. It's one or the other. God's kindness accepts us just as we are, but He does not leave us just as we were. His grace changes us and makes us new creatures in Christ.