

The translation question posed to Dr. Morris -

It's been a while since I asked you to ponder a question for me, but I'm back. My question is about John 20:17. Growing up reading the King James Version, I had the idea that Jesus told Mary not to touch him because he had not ascended yet. Recently I saw a translation that read "do not cling to me." I checked it in the New International, which reads "do not hold on to me."

This is a very different idea from "touch me not." I remember Sunday School class discussions that this may tell us something about the glorified body. Exactly what it tells us I'm sure I don't know. But it seemed significant that Jesus would say that she must not touch him because he hadn't ascended yet. Saying "do not hold on to me" seems to reference more of an emotional attachment.

So, my question is, what is the most accurate translation of John 20:17? Or more specifically, how do you translate John 20:17?

Thanking you in advance because I know you'll have a good answer for me, Sandy Harris.

The information from Dr. Morris -

Hello Sandy:

You have presented an interesting, if not difficult challenge.

The Greek text is: Μή μου ἅπτου - me mou haptou.

The last word is the key here. It is a second person (you) singular, present tense (relating immediately to Mary Magdalene) and the imperative mood, that indicates a command, and in the middle voice, that indicates "doing something for, by, of yourself. It comes from the verb ἅπτω - haptō, and this word has several possibilities.

In the middle voice, which is used here by John, it generally means "touch, take hold of, hold on to, cling to." However, the issue here is that a linguistic analysis cannot be decisive. The issue, as with almost all other issues in Scripture, must be subordinated to a contextual study and analysis.

Remember this, as I have told hundreds of homiletics/Biblical students, *A text without a context is a pretext for a proof-text.* And depending on such for interpretation casts an important matter into the arena of faulty analysis.

Therefore, and this is unusually brief for me, as you can tell, what Jesus said, as interpreted in the light of WHO He is as the Resurrected Redeemer, recognized as the Jesus with whom Mary had associated in the days previous, is "Do not hold on to Me" in the sense of who she knew Him to be prior to His crucifixion and resurrection.

This was a shock to her mind, but obviously a communication to her that is affirmed in her words to the Disciples when she referred to Him as the Resurrected Christ ... the God of very God, when she announced that she had seen the LORD. In this she affirms that her relationship with Jesus the Christ is now based on the reality of the fulfillment of His promise as stated in John 16:19.

Therefore, I am not pleased with most of our English translations, because they do not, nor cannot fully communicate the expansive exegesis that must emerge from a much larger contextual study than I have given it in this brief response to you.

However, I think would hold to a more traditional (*but altered!*) translation, and allow the words of Jesus to say in English: "Do not continue holding on to Me." But I insist that this must be followed by her report to the Disciples, when she acknowledged His LORDSHIP as God of very God.