

Are Dictionaries Reliable?

Generally, we think of a dictionary as being the final authority on the meaning of words. Usually that is true. However, dictionaries can have an ideological bias, especially when certain theological truths are involved.

How are dictionaries made? (Another name for dictionary is "lexicon.")

Dictionaries, no matter who does them, are compiled by examining how words are used by people. The meaning of words is always determined by how they are used.

Just because a dictionary says a word has a certain meaning does not mean it is correct. A dictionary can be wrong, just as any human work can be in error. Humans make mistakes!

Only God is infallible. In the Bible we have the words God gave His prophets. These words were originally written in the Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) languages.

The Holy Spirit, who is the real Author of the Bible, knows the meaning of words. There is no higher authority than the Bible itself for determining the meaning of a word used in the Bible. The way the Holy Spirit directed men to use certain words and the context they were used in, is the best way to determine what meaning a word was meant to convey to us.

Why would anyone compiling a dictionary provide a definition that was not true, or at least not the whole truth? It's not too difficult to understand one possible reason. Until recent times, it was very expensive to publish a book. Unless you could depend on good market demand for a book, you simply would not bother. With a Bible translation or a dictionary of Biblical words, you would understand that if the established Church did not support your publication, you would not be able to publish profitably, for you would have few buyers.

I'm not saying that all publishers of Bible dictionaries made conscious decisions like this. But once a few "authorities" agreed on a certain meaning of a word, then it was accepted and reasonable to go along with tradition, especially once a definition had been "accepted" for several centuries.

What we are dealing with here is the Bible: God's revelation to man. We should not consult some man to tell us what the words mean when we can examine how the Holy Spirit Himself used the words in Scripture. That is how we can and should determine the meanings of the words used in the Bible.

So in this book when we examine the words used in our Bibles for hell and eternity, instead of looking mainly to human works like dictionaries, we will look directly to the Word of God to determine the meaning of these words.