

Theme: There are many good English translations of the Bible, and we should use a variety of them to help us understand God's Word as accurately as possible.

I. Introduction – Some Great Bible Verses

- A. Read some bible verses together
- B. The languages of the inspired Biblical writings
 - 1. Hebrew – almost the entire OT
 - 2. Aramaic – portions of Daniel and Ezra
 - 3. Greek – the entire NT
- C. Key questions regarding Bible translation
 - 1. How did Bible translation begin?
 - 2. How does Bible translation work?
 - 3. Can I trust my English translations?
 - 4. Which translations should I use?

II. A Brief History of Bible Translation

- A. Translation: A key difference between Christianity and Islam
 - 1. Islam does not translate the Qu'ran – it can only be read in the original Arabic
 - 2. Christianity has always translated the Scriptures into the language of the people it was trying to reach
- B. Early Bible translations
 - 1. Septuagint (LXX) – Greek translation of the OT
 - 2. Aramaic targums – loose translations and commentaries on the OT

3. Syriac, including the Peshitta – translations of the OT and NT into Syriac – a language similar to Aramaic
4. Coptic – translations of the OT and NT into the language of Egypt
5. Latin, including the Vulgate – translations of the OT and NT into Latin, the official and dominant language of the Western half of the Roman Empire. Jerome created the Vulgate at the request of the Pope.

C. A major change for the worse

1. As time progressed, Latin became dominant in the West, and Islam began to conquer the East
2. This had the effect of stopping missionary activity in the East, while in the West the church began to oppose translating the Bible into the language of the people
3. A few translations were made, such as the one by John Wycliffe, but these were generally opposed by the Church
4. As time progressed, Greek and Hebrew were virtually lost in the West
5. The few translations done in the West prior to the Renaissance had been done using the Latin (rather than the Hebrew and Greek) as the source text

D. Factors leading to the rebirth of Bible translation

1. The fall of Constantinople and the Renaissance led to a rebirth of the Greek and Hebrew languages in the West
2. The printing press – books could now be printed cheaply and accurately
3. The Reformation - a desire to translate the Bible into the language of the common man

E. The modern explosion in Bible translation

1. Beginning with Luther and the Reformation there has been an explosion of Bible translations
2. Wycliffe Bible Translators and the current Bible translation movement – trying to get the Bible into the language of every people group

III. How Bible Translation Works

A. Important steps in translation

1. Which books will be translated? (canonization)
2. Which manuscripts will be consulted? (textual criticism)
3. What theory of translation will be followed?

B. Which books will be translated?

1. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox versions will contain the Deutero-canonical books
2. Protestant versions will usually not include the Deutero-canonical books
3. Some Protestant versions have included the Deutero-canonical books separately (KJV, RSV)

C. Which manuscripts will be consulted?

1. Virtually all modern translations base the OT primarily on the Masoretic text
2. Virtually all modern translations consult other ancient versions (LXX, Samaritan Pentateuch, etc) and will occasionally follow them against the Masoretic Text
3. Most modern translations use an eclectic NT text, choosing the manuscripts that seem best to the translators

4. In general, most modern translations give priority to the Alexandrian text over the Byzantine/Majority text
5. The key exception to this rule is the New King James Version which gives priority to the Majority text
6. Most modern translations will footnote any major differences between the manuscripts

D. Which theory of translation will be used?

1. Three major theories: essentially literal, dynamic equivalence, paraphrase
2. Essentially literal (word for word)
 - a. Definition – “An essentially literal translation translated the meaning of every word in the original language, understood correctly in context, into its nearest English equivalent, and attempts to express the result with ordinary English word order and style, as far as that is possible without distorting the meaning of the original...The main point is that essentially literal translations attempt to represent *the meaning of every word* in the original in some way or other in the resulting translation.” Wayne Grudem, *Translating Truth*, 20.
 - b. Examples of essentially literal translations: King James, New King James, Revised Standard, New Revised Standard, New American Standard, English Standard
 - c. Advantages of essentially literal translation
 - i. Keeps full meaning of text – even secondary nuances
 - ii. More consistent translations of Greek and Hebrew words – more helpful for word studies
 - d. Disadvantages of essentially literal translation
 - i. More difficult to read – in many versions the English is not as smooth, and unfamiliar words and metaphors are often used

- ii. Misunderstanding can occur if people do not understand the words and metaphors being used

3. Dynamic equivalence (though for thought)

- a. Definition – “A dynamic-equivalence translation can also be called a thought-for-thought translation...In making a thought-for-thought translation, the translators must do their best to enter into the thought patterns of the ancient authors and to present the same ideas, connotations, and effects in the receptor language.” From the Introduction to the New Living Translation.
- b. Dynamic equivalence translations do not attempt to translate every word, but rather give the meaning of every thought (though most words will be translated).
- c. Examples of dynamic equivalence translations: New International Version, Today’s New International Version, The New Living Translation, Contemporary English Version, the Good News Bible
- d. Advantages of dynamic equivalence translation
 - i. The translations produced by this method are easier to read and understand, and generally are written in smoother English
 - ii. These translations make it easy to understand the central meaning of a verse
- e. Disadvantages of dynamic equivalence translation
 - i. Nuances and secondary meanings of the verse are often lost, especially when comparing with other verses having the same underlying words or phrases in the original languages.
 - ii. This method requires more interpretation by the translator than an essentially literal translation

4. Paraphrase

- a. Definition – A paraphrase or free translation is a loose rendering, usually from the same language, which intends to convey the meaning of the original document in an easier to understand version.
- b. Paraphrases or free translations are most concerned with a fresh way to express the meaning of the passage, and are generally not concerned to translate each underlying word or even phrase from the original language
- c. Examples of paraphrase or free translations: the Living Bible, the Message
- d. Advantages of paraphrase or free translation
 - i. Translations produced by this method will usually be very original and may cause the reader to take more notice of the passage
- e. Disadvantages of paraphrase or free translation
 - i. These translations are highly interpretive
 - ii. These translations have no concern for translating each underlying word or phrase and so are not good for study purposes

5. Comparison of different translation methods

- a. Some common renderings of 2 Corinthians 5:14
 - i. NASB - **For the love of Christ controls us**, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;
 - ii. NIV - **For Christ's love compels us**, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.
 - iii. NLT - **Either way, Christ's love controls us**. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life.
 - iv. Message - **Christ's love has moved me to such extremes. His love has the first and last word in everything we do**. Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat.

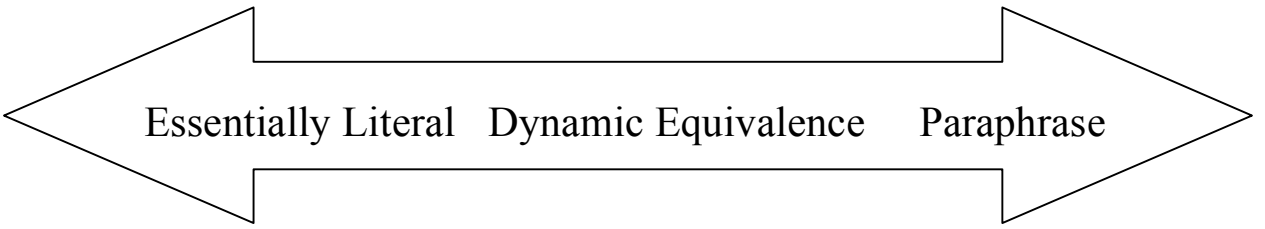
- b. Some common renderings of 1 Corinthians 7:27
 - i. NASB - Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be **released**. Are you **released** from a wife? Do not seek a wife.
 - ii. NIV - Are you married? Do not seek a **divorce**. Are you **unmarried**? Do not look for a wife.
 - iii. NLT - If you have a wife, do not seek to **end the marriage**. If you **do not have a wife**, do not seek to get married.
 - iv. Message - Are you married? **Stay married**. Are you **unmarried**? Don't get married.

IV. How To Choose and Effectively Use Bible Translations Today

- A. Some introductory comments
 - 1. There is no such thing as a perfect translation – language is simply too complex
 - 2. Due to the fact that languages change, all translations will have to be updated over time
 - 3. All translations involve some amount interpretation by the translator, although there is much less of this in essentially literal translations
 - 4. No translation is perfectly “word for word”, nor is any translation perfectly “thought for thought” or a complete free rendering. All exist on a spectrum. See the chart below.

B. Choosing the right translations for use

1. If you can not read Greek and Hebrew, you should use several different English translations
2. You should choose translations which use different translation methods. Note the graphic below, and choose translations from different parts of the continuum.
3. Your main Bible should be one of the translations on the left half of the graphic. I would not recommend anything less essentially literal than the NIV for your regular Bible.
4. You should have at least one translation that is based on a different set of manuscripts (if your main Bible is the NIV, have either the King James or New King James as well), or at the minimum pay careful attention to the translation notes given in the margins/footnotes.
5. Use or consult essentially literal translations for serious study
6. It is helpful to sometimes use a paraphrase to “shock” you into paying attention to the passage.



The Message
Living Bible
Contemporary English Version
New Living Translation
New International Version
New Revised Standard Version
New King James Version
English Standard Version
New American Standard Bible
Interlinear Bible

C. Getting the most out of your Bible

1. Read the introduction – most of them are quite informative on how the translation was created – which manuscripts were used, what translation theory was followed, how footnotes/marginal notes work in the Bible, how the Divine Name YHWH is printed, etc.
2. Although you will have one version that is your favorite, use several versions in your study, and occasionally use a different version for reading. This will ensure that you are not missing anything and will help you to see the Scripture more accurately.
3. Use good Bible helps – commentaries, introductions, Bible encyclopedias, Bible dictionaries, etc.
4. Read and study the Scripture prayerfully, and with your whole heart AND mind. God deserves no less!

V. Conclusion & Summary

- A. We live in a great time to be a man or woman of the Word
 1. God's inspired Word has been preserved, passed down, and given to us through the sacrificial work on countless thousands of men and women who have sacrificed much that we might have God's Word.
 2. We have more manuscripts available than ever before to make sure that the Bible we have is the Bible Jesus and the Apostles had!
 3. We have more translations available to make sure that we can accurately understand the fullness of God's Word to us
 4. We have great Bible tools and teachers available to help us understand and apply God's Word
- B. Be a man or woman of the Word!