

The Bible and Translation Methods

Often there is strong debate over the subject of Bible versions. Are there legitimate objections to most of the new versions, or are those who insist that the King James and the American Standard Version of 1901 are still the only standard versions in English merely prejudiced as is often charged? Is it true, as some insist, that those who know nothing of the original languages are unqualified to speak and should be excluded from the version debate. The answers are: They (we) are not merely prejudiced, and because of the matter of translation methods, the English only reader should and does have a voice in the version debate. There are four translation methods from which to choose in the making of a Bible version or translation. These are: literal, modified literal, dynamic equivalence and paraphrase. A brief explanation of these is in order.

A highly literal version is one that is so literal that it retains the Greek syntax, resulting in difficulty for the English reader. Interlinears are an example of this. As I write this, I have before me *Berry's Greek Interlinear New Testament*. Matthew 18:12 in the Interlinear reads: *"What think ye? If there should be to any man a hundred sheep, and be gone astray one of them, [does he] not, having left the ninety-nine on the mountain having gone seek that which is gone astray?"* Obviously a Bible reading in such a fashion would not be desirable for an English speaking person.

The second translation method is known as, modified literal. This process results in a translation that is as much as possible a word by word translation, but also, for understanding's sake, observes the syntax of the language into which it is translated: in our case, English. This is the process by which the KJV, ASV (1901), the NASB and the NKJV were made. It should be noted at this point, that translation method alone does not guarantee the trustworthiness of a version.

The third process is called dynamic equivalence. This process concentrates more on the receptor language than upon the original. It is more important to the makers of these versions that the product be understandable than for it to convey the exact meaning of the original text. Versions produced in this way are not literal translations, are wordy and often contain poor commentary that is passed off upon the reader as translation of the text. This translation philosophy is the reason almost all of the new "Bibles" have denominational bias and doctrine right in the text. The New International Version is in every way an example of this process.

The fourth type of translation method is paraphrase. The "Bibles" produced by this method are almost always the work of a sole individual, because no group of genuine Bible scholars would accept it as legitimate. The method results in nothing more than someone reading a passage and putting it into his own words. These are not strictly translations, but interpretations. The Living Bible Paraphrased is an example of this process. Obviously, calling a paraphrase a translation of the Bible at all is both condescending and repugnant to the sincere Bible student.

Anyone who considers these four processes carefully and reasons that salvation depends upon one obeying the Word of God realizes that he needs first, an accurate and second, an understandable translation, of the original. Thus, the only one of these four processes appealing to the serious Bible student is the modified literal process.

As noted before, the translation method is not the only factor determining the worthiness or unworthiness of a version. For instance, when there is a primary meaning, a broader or narrower meaning for a Hebrew or Greek Word, unless the context reveals that the broader or the narrow definition is the one conveyed, the primary meaning should be understood as the

author's intent. One of the most justified complaints against both the New King James and the New American Standard is the failure of their producers consistently to apply this reasoning. For instance, both of these versions fail consistently to translate the Greek word *Porneia* by its primary meaning, fornication. Without justification, immorality or sexual immorality is employed instead, thus the meaning of the original word, we believe, is lost. This can and has led to, or contributed to, false teaching on the subject of divorce and remarriage.

Dynamic equivalence is the darling method of the modern translator. The New International Version, due to its inaccuracies and popularity has done as much or more to lead God's people from Christ to Calvin (see Psa. 51: 5; Rom. 7 & 8 et. al.) than any other factor. Years ago, brother Foy E. Wallace warned that the perversions in the texts of the new Bibles would change the church. Obviously, the church has changed. Doctrinally, part of the change has been to accept the error of Calvinism. The NIV is the Bible of Calvinism. The NIV is the current version of choice with a great number of members of the church. It defies reason, then, to deny that the NIV has contributed greatly to the current acceptance of Calvin's errors. What good is understanding a Bible if in understanding it, one understands and accepts soul condemning error? The opposition against most of the new versions is not driven by prejudice, but by respect for the Word of God and an unwillingness to cast off reliable translations for those replete with error.

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