

Lesson Two: The Basic Tool: A Good Translation

- I. The Bible Was Not Written in English
 - A. The Old Testament
 1. The Old Testament is almost entirely written in ancient Hebrew.
 2. There are small sections of Aramaic in Daniel and Ezra.
 - B. The New Testament
 1. Koine Greek
 2. The “common” or “market place” Greek.
 - C. We Need an English Translation
 1. Because the Bible was not originally written in our language, we – for the most part – rely on translators to tell us what the Bible says.
 2. For the most part, we can trust our English translations to accurately convey the original text.
 3. However, when choosing our **primary study Bible**, we need to be aware of the translators’ approach to the original text.
 4. “There is much value in critical evaluations of translations and knowledge of the translation process, but all of this knowledge comes to fruition when the individual is in the position of choosing a translation” (Burgett, p. 511).
- II. Questions to Ask When Selecting a Translation
 - A. For what purpose will this translation be used?
 1. There are various reasons why you might be selecting a translation of the English Bible.
 - a. Will this be your **primary study Bible**?
 - b. Will this be used for your daily devotional reading?
 - c. Will this be used for textual comparison in your study?
 - d. Will this be used to study with someone else already using this translation?
 2. Each of these uses will determine how you choose the translation.
 - B. Answering each of these questions will help determine the translation you use.
 1. When selecting your **primary study Bible**, it is recommended that you use a *literal word-for-word* translation.
 - a. *Word-for-word* does not necessarily mean that each word of the Greek or Hebrew text is brought straight over into English.
 - b. For example, the preface to the *English Standard Version* says, “The ESV is an ‘essentially literal’ translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, its emphasis is on ‘word-for-word’ correspondence, **at the same time taking into account differences of grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original languages.** Thus it seeks to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original.”
 - c. There are three basic types of translation:
 - 1) **Literal** translations.
 - 2) **Dynamic Equivalency** translations.

- 3) **Paraphrases.**
- d. Dynamic Equivalency and Paraphrases **should not** be used as a **primary study Bible!**
 - 1) We know that the word of God, in its original autograph, is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21).
 - 2) The Holy Spirit guided the biblical writers into “all truth” (John 14:26; et al).
 - 3) Because of this, when we are studying the Bible for our reverent submission to the will of God we should want to know – as closely as possible – exactly what the Holy Spirit originally said.
 - 4) Dynamic Equivalency and Paraphrases **do not** claim to focus on the words of Scripture.
 - (i) Dynamic Equivalency is a “thought-for-thought” translation rather than a “word-for-word” translation. That is, the translators determine what they **think** the text means rather than just giving the most literal translation of the words used.
 - (ii) A paraphrase is nothing more than a commentary put in the form of biblical narrative. When I study the Bible, the first thing I want to do is determine for my self – to the best of my ability – what the actual text says. I don’t want my study of the text biased by what a commentator thinks it means. Consulting a commentary – including paraphrases – should be the last thing I do in my study, not the first. So I absolutely do not want to do my daily study from a paraphrase Bible.
2. Selecting a Bible version for daily devotional.
 - a. Ask yourself, am I well read in my primary study Bible?
 - b. If a person is just getting started with the Bible they have selected as their daily study Bible, then they will want to do their daily devotional reading out of that translation until they are well read and very familiar with it.
 - c. However, if a person is very well grounded in their primary study Bible then they may want to spend time reading from alternative translations.
 - 1) Many accomplished Bible students choose a different translation every year to read through in their daily reading.
 - 2) Even though they are doing their devotional reading from an alternate translation, they will still do their daily study out of their primary study Bible.
3. When selecting translations for textual comparison.
 - a. “The best thing to do is to use translations that *one knows in advance will tend to differ*” (Fee, p. 34).
 - 1) The benefit of textual comparison is to see where different translations use different words.
 - 2) By comparing the differences, we can come to a more informed understanding of what the text means.

- b. Where we may not use a particular translation for our primary study, or even want to spend much time reading from it, it may still be useful for comparison.
 - c. However, textual comparison *is not* the same thing as consulting commentaries. So, I wouldn't want to use a paraphrase for textual comparison. I wouldn't use a paraphrase in my study until I am at that last stage of my study.
4. There may be translations that I wouldn't normally use but because I am studying with someone that already uses that translation I will use it in my study with them.
 - a. The translation a person uses can make it difficult to have a good study with them.
 - 1) For example, Eph. 5:19, NIV, TNIV, ESV, NKJV.
 - 2) "Don't get drunk on wine, which leads to wild living. Instead, be filled with the Spirit¹⁹ by reciting psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for your own good. Sing and make music to the Lord with your hearts" (Eph. 5:18, 19, GWT).
 - b. However, we can begin with them in their translation and, using textual comparison, bring to a better understanding of God's word.

III. How do I know which translations use which translation philosophy?

A. Check the preface.

1. "Where new translation has been necessary in the New King James Version, the most complete representation of the original has been rendered by considering the history of usage and etymology of words in their contexts. This principle of complete equivalence seeks to preserve *all* of the information in the text, while presenting it in good literary form. Dynamic equivalence, a recent procedure in Bible translation, commonly results in paraphrasing where a more literal rendering is needed to reflect a specific and vital sense" (NKJV preface).
2. "The ESV is an 'essentially literal' translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, its emphasis is on 'word-for-word' correspondence, at the same time taking into account differences of grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original languages" (ESV preface).
3. "The first concern of the translators has continued to be the accuracy of the translation and its faithfulness to the intended meaning of the biblical writers. This has moved the translators to go beyond a formal word-for-word rendering of the original texts" (TNIV, NIV preface).
4. "The first consideration for the translators of GW was to find equivalent English ways of expressing the meaning of the original text, ensuring that the translation is faithful to the meaning of the source text" (GWT preface).
5. "The attempt has been made to render the grammar and terminology in contemporary English. When it was felt that the word-for-word literalness was unacceptable to the modern reader, a change was made in the direction of a more current English idiom" (NASB preface).

B. Look for keywords:

1. NKJV, “etymology of words in their contexts...complete equivalence”
 2. ESV, “essentially literal... precise wording... word-for-word”
 3. TNIV, NIV, “the intended meaning... go beyond a formal word-for-word rendering”
 4. GWT, “expressing the meaning of the original text”
 5. NASB, “the word-for-word literalness was unacceptable to the modern reader”
- C. Ask someone that has studied translations.