

Introduction

One again our discussion will be in two main parts:

1. The first part of our discussion will focus on the whole matter of translating the Scriptures including an examination of different philosophies of translation.
2. The second part of the discussion will focus on some of the principle versions now in use and will provide a brief critique of some of these versions.

The Translation of the Scriptures

1. The need for translations (cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, I, 7):
 - a. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and Chaldee and the New Testament in Greek, not in the languages we speak.
 - b. The importance of the Bible for us as Christians (II Tim 3:16, 17) and our calling to read and study the Scriptures (Jn. 5:39, 40) requires that the Bible be translated into our own languages.
2. The history of translation:
 - a. Translations of the Bible into the languages of the people began at a very early date when the Scriptures were translated into Syriac, Coptic, Gothic, Latin and other languages in the early church.
 - b. In the western church the Latin versions were the most important and the Latin version referred to as the Vulgate became the official Bible of the Church when the church lost the knowledge of the original languages.
 - c. In the Middle Ages the common people did not know Latin, and so the Bible was effectively taken away from them.
 - d. The Bible was restored to the common people again only at the time of the Reformation through the translations of Luther (German), LeFevre (French) and Tyndale (English).
 - e. In modern times the Bible has been translated into many languages. It is estimated that by the end of the 20th century it was available, at least in part in over 2000 languages.
3. The proliferation of modern translations:
 - a. This problem is not unique to the English speaking world (for example, the old Dutch translation, the *Statenvertaling* has been displaced by modern Dutch translations), nevertheless there are far more English version available than in any other language.
 - a. The effort to provide "better" translations of the Scriptures, beginning especially with the Revised Version of 1881 has led to a great deal of debate and caused a number of serious problems. Not only does the sheer number of translation cause confusion but most of the modern versions are not good translations (some do not even pretend to be translations).

Characteristics of Good Translation

1. Accuracy:
 - a. This is without doubt the most important characteristic of a good translation and the point at which most modern versions fail.
 - b. The need for accuracy follows from the doctrine of inspiration, that the Bible is God's holy Word. It is a lack of trust in the Bible as God's Word that leads to the mistakes and failures of the modern versions and the modern philosophy of translation.

2. Literalness:
 - a. By this we mean that a translation ought to be a translation which produces as accurately as possible the very words in which God spoke.
 - b. The desire for literal translation has been replaced in modern versions by the desire to get the thought or meaning across to the reader.
 - c. This characteristic follows from the doctrine of verbal inspiration, i.e., that the actual words of Scripture are inspired and infallible, the actual words in which God revealed Himself.
3. Doctrinal faithfulness:
 - a. By this we mean that a translation must be faithful to the tradition of truth and doctrine that are the fruits of the Spirit's work in the church through the ages.
 - b. Doctrinal faithfulness includes using the language of the faith and not abandoning words like "righteousness", "only-begotten," "justification", and "sanctification" because the modern reader does not easily understand them. It also means that the faith of the church must guide the translators in their work, especially when dealing with difficulties.
 - c. The need for doctrinal faithfulness makes it impossible for those with aberrant views to translate the Scriptures properly. Many modern versions show strong doctrinal biases.
4. Clarity: we do not mean by this that accuracy ought to be sacrificed for the sake of the reader's understanding, but that a translation must present as clearly as possible in good English the actual words of God. This follows from the doctrine of Scripture's perspicuity (clarity and ease of understanding).
5. Good style:
 - a. A good translation should be readable (also in public) and easily memorized. These are outstanding characteristics of the KJV and usually not characteristic of the modern versions.
 - b. Good style also includes reverence. Because it is God's Word which is being translated, the very style must convey a proper awe and reverence. This needs special emphasis in light of the shallowness and irreverence of many newer versions.
 - c. Another issue under style is the tendency of the newer versions to adopt gender-neutral language which is neither good English style, nor accurate translation.
6. Completeness:
 - a. A translation must include the whole of God's Word. This follows from the unity of Scripture, that they are the one revelation of God in Jesus Christ.
 - b. Many versions and Bible Societies reproduce only selected portions of God's Word or just the New Testament, usually in the interest of making the Bible more palatable to modern readers.
7. Textual loyalty:
 - a. This was the main topic of discussion in the last session.
 - b. Here we wish only to emphasize that with only a few exceptions the newer versions have abandoned the traditional text, especially of the New Testament, and thus denied God's providential preservation of His Word through the ages. It is impossible for us to believe that for hundreds of years the church has not had an accurate text of the Word of God (Ps. 105:8; 147:19; Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Is. 59:21).

Different Philosophies of Translation

1. There are really three different philosophies of translation that are followed today:
 - a. There is first of all the philosophy of literal equivalence, the idea that a translation ought, as much as possible, to be a word-for-word translation of the original languages and that this is more important than getting the meaning or thought across to the reader. This, we believe is the only theory that does justice to Scripture as God's Word.
 - b. In the second place there is the theory of dynamic equivalence, which while still attempting to produce an actual translation, nevertheless is interested in more than word-for-word accuracy. It is really a thought-for-thought reproduction of the Word of God.
 - c. Finally there is the tradition of paraphrasing, which is really nothing else than putting God's Word into men's words., a denial of the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible.
2. Versions which follow these philosophies:
 - a. The more important word-for-word translation are the old English versions that predated the KJV, the KJV itself and its revisions, and the RV and its descendants (ASV, RSV, NRSV, NASV, ESV).
 - b. The most significant new version that uses the theory of dynamic equivalence is the NIV. Others are the CEV, NEB, NAB and Jerusalem Bible.
 - c. The more important paraphrases are the Living Bible (also published as Reach Out, The Greatest is Love and Living Letters) and Today's English Version (also published as the Good News Bible and Good News for Modern Man).

The Dangers of Modern Versions

1. As to their contents:
 - a. They are based on a faulty text (cf. last week's materials).
 - b. Many of them are not true translations and even those that are are not good translations.
 - c. They do not meet the requirements listed above for a good translation.
 - d. Most of them show clear doctrinal biases, the NIV being the Bible of modern evangelicalism, the NKJV of fundamentalism, the RV and its descendants of liberalism and modernism, the Living Bible the Bible of Arminianism. In other words, these versions lack doctrinal integrity and trustworthiness.
 - e. They are often prepared by men or societies that are not spiritually equipped to understand and to translate accurately and honestly the word of God.
2. As to the proliferation of versions:
 - a. It is through the abundance of modern versions more than anything else that the Bible has once again been taken away from God's people. Because so many different versions are in use at home, church, school and in private, the Scriptures are not memorized, remembered, recognized or used any more.
 - b. It is ironic that the modern versions, which were supposed to make the Bible more accessible to the ordinary public have had the very opposite effect. There is no generation since the Reformation so ignorant of Scripture as our own.
3. Another problem: there is also the difficulty with the creeds and the liturgical forms which would all have to be modernized and changed every time a different translation was adopted by the church. Proof texts in some cases would need to be changed or dropped as well.

List of Modern Bible Versions

Major Modern Text Versions in the RV

Family

- Revised Version (RV) - 1881
- American Standard Version (ASV) - 1901
- Revised Standard Version (RSV) - 1946
- New American Standard Version (NASV) - 1970
- New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) - 1989
- English Standard Version (200)

Other Major Modern Text Versions

- Moffatt's Modern Speech NT - 1913
- New Testament in Modern English (Phillips) - 1947
- Berkeley Version - 1959
(New Berkeley - 1979)
- New English Bible (NEB) - 1961
(Revised English Bible - 1989)
- Modern Language Bible - 1969
(Revision of Berkeley)
- New International Version (NIV) - 1973
- New Century Version - 1984
- Contemporary English Version - 1995
- New International Reader's Version - 1996
(for children)

Majority Text Versions

- Tyndale's New Testament - 1525
(Including parts of the OT)
- Coverdale's Bible - 1535
- Matthew's Bible - 1537
- Great Bible - 1539
- Geneva Bible - 1557, 60
- Bishop's Bible - 1568
- King James (KJV) - 1611
- King James II - 1971
- New King James (NKJV) - 1982
- Modern King James (MKJV) - 1990
- 21st Century King James - 1994

Paraphrases

- Amplified Bible - 1958
- Today's English Version, Good News Bible, Good News for Modern Man - 1966
- Living Bible, Reach Out, The Greatest is Love, Living Letters - 1971
- New Life Bible - 1986
- The Message - 1993
- God's Word - 1995
- New Living Translation - 1996
(Life Application Study Bible)
(Revision of Living Bible)

Roman Catholic Versions

- Rheims-Douai Bible - 1609-10
- Challoner's Revision - 1749-50
- Confraternity Version - 1941
- Jerusalem Bible - 1966
(New Jerusalem Bible - 1985)
- New American Bible - 1971
(1st RC translation from originals)
(Includes the Apochrypha)
- The Way - 1971
(RC version of The Living Bible)

Russellite (JW) Versions

- New World Translation - 1950
- The Bible in Living English - 1972

Interfaith Versions

- Anchor Bible - 1964

The King James (Authorized) Version

1. Information

- a. This version is usually referred to in America as the King James Version (KJV) and in Britain as the Authorized Version (AV).
- b. It was preceded by a number of earlier English translations:
 - John Wycliff in 1380-82).
 - William Tyndale in 1524 and 1534 (the KJV is really a revision of Tyndale).
 - Miles Coverdale in 1535.
 - John Rogers in 1537.
- c. Work on the KJV was begun in 1604 and the version was first printed in 1611:
 - the work was done by a company of 54 scholars (reduced in time to 47).
 - these men were divided into 6 companies that checked each other's work.
 - the final result was reviewed by a committee of 6.
- d. Its complete title is: "The Holy Bible, containing the Old Testament and the New: Newly translated out of the original tongues; and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised by his Majesties special Commandment. Appointed to be read in the churches."
- e. Since its first publication there have been many editions:
 - 2 printings in 1611 - the second characterized by a serious misprint (*Judas* instead of Jesus in Matt. 26:36).
 - further editions in 1612, 1613, 1616, 1617, 1629, 1638 & many since with various minor changes.
 - 1762, 1769 (Thomas Paris, Benjamin Blayney) - spelling and punctuation modernized, obsolete words changed and italicizing added.

2. Evaluation:

- a. The KJV is not without faults:
 - perhaps the most important fault is the failure to translate the name "Jehovah".
 - of lesser importance is the small amount of obsolete language most of which is easily and quickly explained to those who do not understand certain words and expressions.
 - we would add, however, that much of the difficulty people experience in using the KJV is due to a lack of spirituality, ignorance, a lack of study and application to God's Word, disinterest and a desire to be entertained instead of to learn.
- b. Nevertheless the KJV is without question the best of the available versions:
 - Of great importance is the fact that it is one of the few based on a reliable text.
 - Its accuracy and literalness are evident in its use of italics and of thee, thou and thine. No version comes close to the KJV at this point.
 - It is doctrinally sound and meets all the other requirements for a good translation as well. It was prepared when the church was still strong and by men who stood for its teachings and were not guilty of aberration and heresy.
 - Not of the least importance is its style which makes it readable both in private and in public and easily memorized and remembered.

The New King James Version

1. Information:

- a. It was produced in 1982 by Thomas Nelson Publishers and claims that it to "stays as close as possible to the familiar word structure of the time-honoured King James Version, yet reflects a sensitive updating of the language."
- b. It can be characterized as the Bible of fundamentalism. This bias towards fundamentalism comes out especially in certain passages that have to do with Israel, the covenant and baptism, and with certain aspects of eschatology (see below).

2. Evaluation:

- a. Its doctrinal bias is evident in a number of ways:
 - The word "seed" is mistranslated throughout the OT as "offspring" or "descendants" thus obscuring the reference of these passages to Christ (cf. Gal. 3:16) and cutting one of the links between the OT and the NT.
 - Acts 7:38, one of the clearest proofs in the NT that Israel is the church, is changed and the word "church" retranslated as "congregation." No one would ever realize on the basis of that translation that the verse actually calls Israel "the *church* in the wilderness," using the ordinary NT word for the church.
 - I Peter 3:20, 21 where we learn that the flood is a type of baptism, is changed so that the typical nature of the flood in relation to baptism is obscured.
 - Hebrews 8:13 is retranslated to suggest the dispensational separation between the OT and NT in that the first covenant is described as "obsolete."
 - The capitalization of "he" in II Thessalonians 2:7 is almost certainly by way of pushing the dispensational notion that this verse refers to the Holy Spirit and His removal from the earth for 7 years after the rapture.
- b. Other criticisms of the NKJV are:
 - It drops the use of "thee" and "thou" which is not only a matter of language but of accuracy of translation (the use of "thee" and "thou" and its other forms in the KJV helps distinguish between the second personal singular and plural).
 - It introduces the use of capitals where the translators think the reference is to God. This is a matter of interpretation since the Hebrew and Greek do not use capitals in this way.
 - It is guilty of numerous omissions from the actual text of the New Testament. There are, for example, at least 30 verses in the Gospel of Mark that omit the word "and."
 - Like the NIV it almost completely eliminates "hell" from Scripture by retranslating the word as "Hades" or "Sheol," no doubt a concession to the modern evangelicals who are abandoning the Biblical doctrine of eternal punishment.
 - It has some very bad translations such as Hebrews 2:16, "For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but he does give aid to the seed of Abraham," and Matthew 2:16, "male children."
 - One of its greatest blunders, however, is in its translation of Revelation 19:8, "for the fine linen is the righteous acts of saints." This is nothing less than a denial of gracious justification and reflects the modern heretical tendency among evangelicals to include the works of sanctification in justification.

The New International Version

1. Information:

- a. It was produced by a interdenominational committee that included men from the "Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Christian Reformed, Church of Christ, Evangelical Free, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Wesleyan and other churches."
- b. The most popular modern version, it has become the Bible of evangelicalism, but is, short of the paraphrases the worst of all the modern versions.

2. Evaluation:

- a. The basic fault of the NIV is its theory of translation (dynamic equivalence) which aims only at a thought-for-thought translation of the Word of God and is not faithful to the *words* of Scripture.
- b. It is also based on a faulty text, the same text as most of the modern versions, thus denying the preservation of God's Word through the ages, as we have noted.
- c. It has little or no doctrinal integrity, the result of the mixed biases of the translators:
 - It weakens the testimony of Scripture to Christ's divinity by re-translating "only begotten Son" as "only Son" as translation that is not even truthful since Christ is not the "only" Son of God..
 - It also weakens the testimony of Scripture to Christ's divinity by its translations of Proverbs 8:22; Micah 5:1, 2; Romans 14:10-12; I Timothy 3:16, and Hebrews 1:3.
 - It removes all references to hell in the OT a major concession both to the liberal teaching that the saints in the OT had no conception of the afterlife and to the tendency among evangelicals to deny the doctrine of eternal punishment.
 - It weakens the doctrine of predestination in its translation of Jude 4, I Peter 2:8 and Proverbs 16:4.
 - It makes concessions to the Baptists by its translations of Acts 2:39 and 16:34.
 - It undermines the Biblical teaching regarding marriage by by its translations of I Corinthians 7:15 and Matthew 19:9.
 - It compromises the doctrine of justification by its translations of I John 3:7 and Revelation 19:8.
- d. It eliminates many words, phrases, verses and sections of Scripture (at least 15 verse in the New Testament are completely eliminated and many more called into question by brackets and footnotes).
- e. It makes arbitrary changes to the word of God which have no textual foundation, the most infamous of which is its translation of Hebrews 11:11. Others include translating mercy as love throughout the OT, re-translating "peace-offering" as "fellowship offering," eliminating the name "Lord of Hosts in Scripture and re-translating the name "Lord GOD" as "Sovereign Lord."
- f. It eliminates from the vocabulary of Scripture many words which are not only of long use in Reformed churches, but which have very specific and important meanings, words such as "Comforter," "Advocate", "inspiration," "propitiation," and "imputation."
- g. Like so many other versions it eliminates the use of "thee," "thou" and "thy" and "thine" as well as the use of italics to indicate words not in the original.

The English Standard Version

1. Information:

- a. As far as the ESV is concerned, it is little more than a sanitized version of the older RV/RSV/ASV/NASV line of translations, perpetuating many of their errors. Those older versions were often criticized for concessions to liberalism and the ESV makes many of the same concessions as well as a few new ones of its own, though it does correct a few blatant errors of the RSV (Is. 7:14; Rom. 3:25 and 9:5).
- b. It is probably the version which will replace the NIV as most popular.

2. Evaluation:

- a. It consistently translates "only begotten" as "only" thereby denying Christ's uniqueness. He is *not* the "only" Son (cf. LD XIII), but He *is* the "only begotten" Son. The NIV is also guilty of this horrendous error.
- b. It eliminates the references to Christ's deity in Micah 5:2 and I Timothy 3:16.
- c. It mistranslates Philippians 2:6 to say that Christ *was* in the form of God, thus lending credence to the old theory that He emptied Himself of His divinity while in the flesh.
- d. It weakens the teaching of Jesus on divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19:9 by its translation of "fornication" as "immorality." This comes very close to making the passage teach what some of the Pharisees taught, that divorce is permissible for any cause. It also omits the second half of the verse, thus leaving out the prohibition against marriage to a divorced wife.
- e. It weakens the case for the headship of man over woman by translating I Corinthians 11:3ff as though it only refers to the husband-wife relationship, i.e., by substituting "husband" and "wife" for "man" and "woman."
- f. It omits the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, so that this is not part of the Lord's Prayer in any NT version (cf. also Luke 11:2-4), also omitting John 5:4, Acts 8:37 and numerous other passages (Matt. 17:21; 18:11; 23:14; Mark 7:16; 9:44, 46; 11:26; 15:28; Luke 17:36; 23:17; Acts 8:37; 15:34; 28:29; Rom. 16:24; I John 5:7).
- g. It perpetuates the RSV's infamous addition to the end of Judges 16:13, "and fasten it tight with a pin, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man," an addition which has no textual support whatsoever, but is wholly speculative.
- h. Worst of all it makes the same doctrinal error concerning justification that NKJV does. it translates Revelation 19:8: "for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of saints." This one verse and its denial of sovereign and gracious justification is sufficient ground all alone for rejecting both the NKJV and the ESV as acceptable versions or substitutes for the KJV.
- i. It drops the use of the "thee" and "thou."
- j. It drops the use of italics to indicate words that are not in the original, a matter of accuracy in translation. The NKJV continues the practice but is not as scrupulous as the KJV.
- k. It has completely eliminated all references to hell in the OT, retranslating the words that refer to hell as references to the grave or simply using the Hebrew word "Sheol."
- l. It makes concessions to the "gender neutral" movement in many verses by omitting references to "he" or to "man." An example is Matthew 10:41, "the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward."

Other Criticisms and Some Infamous Errors in Other Versions

1. The Revised Version

- a. Included a Unitarian on the translation committee: George Vance Smith.
- b. Translated Isaiah 7:14 - "Behold a young woman shall conceive."
- c. Re-translated I Timothy 3:16, the first of the modern versions to do so, as "*who* was manifested in the flesh."

2. The Living Bible

- a. Isaiah 55:2 - "Why pay for groceries that don't do you any good?"
- b. Luke 10:40 - "Martha was the jittery type."
- c. John 11:49 - "You stupid idiots."
- d. Acts 13:48 - "and as many as wanted eternal life believed."
- e. Romans 8:28- "And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans."
- f. Romans 9:11 - "In the words of Scripture, 'I chose to bless Jacob, but not Esau.'"
- g. Romans 9:22 - "Does not God have a perfect right to show his fury and power against those who are fit only for destruction?"
- h. Ephesians 1:18 - "I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can see something of the future he has called you to share."

3. Today's English Version/Good News Bible

- a. Isaiah 7:14 - "a young woman ... will have a son."
- b. Micah 5:2 - "out of you will I bring a ruler for Israel, who family line goes back to ancient times."
- c. Acts 20:28 - "Be shepherds of the church of God, which he made his own through the death of his Son."
- d. Romans 9:5 - "They are descended from the famous Hebrew ancestors; and Christ, as a human being, belongs to their race. May God, who rules over all, be praised for ever. Amen."

4. The New World Translation

- a. John 1:1 - "Originally the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a God."
- b. John 8:58 - "Before Abraham came into existence, I have been."
- c. Romans 9:5 - "to whom the forefathers belong and from whom Christ sprang according to the flesh: God who is over all be blest forever. Amen."

Quotations

The Westminster Confession of Faith

VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by his singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; [17] so as, in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them. [18] But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, [19] therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, [20] that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner; [21] and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope. [22]

17. Matt. 5:18; Psa. 119:89

18. Isa. 8:20; Matt. 15:3, 6; Acts 15:15; Luke 16:31

19. John 5:39; Acts 17:11; Rev. 1:3; II Tim. 3:14, 15

20. Matt. 28:19-20; I Cor. 14:6; Mark 15:34

21. Col. 3:16; Exod. 20:4-6; Matt. 15:7-9

22. Rom. 15:4

The Translators to the Readers (The Preface to the Authorized Version of 1611)

It is not only an armour, but also a whole armoury of weapons, both offensive and defensive; whereby we may save ourselves and put the enemy to flight. It is not an herb, but a tree, or rather a whole paradise of trees of life, which bring forth fruit every month, and the fruit thereof is for meat, and the leaves for medicine. It is not a pot of *Manna*, or a cruse of oil, which were for memory only, or for a meal's meat or two, but as it were a shower of heavenly bread sufficient for a whole host, be it never so great; and as it were a whole cellar full of oil vessels; whereby all our necessities may be provided for, and our debts discharged. In a word, it is a panary of wholesome food, against fenowed³⁴ traditions; a physician's shop (Saint *Basil*³⁵ calleth it) of preservatives against poisoned heresies; a pandect of profitable laws against rebellious spirits; a treasury of most costly jewels against beggarly rudiments; finally, a fountain of most pure water springing up unto everlasting life. And what marvel? the original thereof being from heaven, not from earth; the author being God, not man; the inditer, the Holy Spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or Prophets; the penmen, such as were sanctified from the womb, and endued with a principal portion of God's Spirit; the matter, verity, piety, purity, uprightness; the form, God's word, God's testimony, God's oracles, the word of truth, the word of salvation, &c.; the effects, light of understanding, stableness of persuasion, repentance from dead works, newness of life, holiness, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost; lastly, the end and reward of the study thereof, fellowship with the Saints, participation of the heavenly nature, fruition of an inheritance immortal, undefiled, and that never shall fade away. Happy is the man that delighteth in the Scripture, and thrice happy that meditateth in it day and night....

Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water, even as *Jacob* rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which means the flocks of *Laban* were watered