

Peru Tribune - Choosing a Bible Translation.

As a pastor I'm often asked "Which Bible translation is the best?"

This is not an easy question to answer because there are so many different options. The American Bible Society estimates that there are over 900 English translations available for people to choose from. Nowadays, Bibles come in every shape, size, and variety you can imagine, from serious study Bibles like the John McArthur Study Bible to, trendy editions like Faithgirlz and the video gamed-themed variety, the Minecrafters Bible.

Besides all the extras, such as cross references and study notes, it may be helpful to a little about Bible translation theory. There are only two major approaches to Bible translation; there is the Word-for-word method, also known as **Formal Equivalence**. The second theory is known as the thought-for-thought method, also known as **Dynamic Equivalence**. The answer to the question of which one is the best, is in part, dependent on these two translation philosophies

Let's look at each so you can begin to choose one which best fits your needs.

1. The Formal Equivalence method. (Word-for-word)

This style of translation gives the highest priority to matching the closest English words with what the original language says and how it says it. So they pay painstaking attention to the meaning of each word with the goal of preserving the integrity of the original languages. The KJV, ESV, and NASB come the closest to this ideal.

With this approach there are advantages and disadvantages.

The advantages to Formal Equivalence translation:

1. It gives careful attention to the original languages which helps preserve the integrity to the original text. This gives us the closest meaning to what the original writers wrote.

We need to keep in mind that no translation is perfectly word-for-word because not every language has exact word equivalents.

2. It preserves a consistent translation of original words that are repeated.

Bible translators call this concordance. This is an important consideration

because it helps readers identify key words or phrases that are repeated in their original writings.

The drawbacks to Formal Equivalence translation:

1. It reads at a higher grade level. Most of these translations are at a 11th or 12 grade level.
2. Because of the above reason, it is more difficult to understand what the original writers were trying to communicate.

2. The Dynamic Equivalent method. (Thought-for-thought)

This style of translation is not as concerned with the exact words or the grammatical form of the original language, but the meaning or thought of the original writer, then translate the meaning of those thoughts into modern prose.

This approach also has pros and cons.

The advantages to Dynamic Equivalence translation:

1. It gives priority to what the text means, therefore it is easier to comprehend and they feel more modern.
2. It is more accessible for those who have less experience with the Bible and who read at lower levels.

The drawbacks of Dynamic Equivalence translation.

1. It puts the translators into the position of commentators, therefore they are making interpretive decisions that might not be accurate.
2. It compromises accuracy in the details in order to make it more understandable.
3. It lacks concordance and the ability to see main words or ideas that are repeated in the original text.

So that you can understand the different types of translations, let's look briefly at a few of the major Bibles available today in order of their literalness.

King James Version (KJV). The KJV is a true word-for-word translation and is

considered by most to be the most literal. The drawback is that it is difficult to read and it can feel out of date in today's world.

New American Standard Bible (NASB). The NASB is also a true word-for-word translation. It includes a careful balance of accuracy and readability. For this reason, many people used the NASB only for reference when doing close study, while using other more “readable” versions for other purposes.

English Standard Bible (ESV). The ESV is the newest major translation. It leans toward the word-for-word spectral and is popular with pastors and theologians. It also has a literary quality like a word of great literature rather than a manual for daily life.

New International Version (NIV). The NIV is the most conservative of the thought-for-thought versions. It is a good balance of clarity and readability. The drawback for the 2011 version includes a shade of gender neutrality but does not alter the masculine language typically applied to God in Scripture.

In summary, If you can't afford various versions, I would suggest that you purchase a parallel Bible which places several versions side-by-side.

May your study of God's word be enjoyable, rich, and profitable.