

## Lesson #4



# PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSES

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## Introduction

*Try reading the following English translations of John 3:16:*

Anglo-Saxon Proto-English Manuscripts (995 AD): "God lufode middan-eard swa, dat he seade his an-cennedan sunu, dat nan ne forweorde de on hine gely ac habbe dat ece lif."

Wycliff (1380): "for god loued so the world; that he gaf his oon bigetun sone, that eche man that bileueth in him perisch not: but haue euerlastyng e liff,"

Tyndale (1534): "For God so loveth the worlde, that he hath geuen his only sonne, that none that beleve in him, shuld perisshe: but shuld haue everlastinge lyfe."

Great Bible (1539): "For God so loued the worlde, that he gaue his only begotten sonne, that whosoeuer beleueth in him, shulde not perisshe, but haue euerlasting lyfe."

Geneva (1560): "For God so loueth the world, that he hath geuen his only begotten Sonne: that none that beleue in him, should peryshe, but haue euerlasting lyfe."

Rheims (1582): "For so God loued the vworld, that he gaue his only-begotten sonne: that euery one that beleueth in him, perish not, but may haue life euerlasting"

1st Ed. King James (1611): "For God so loued the world, that he gaue his only begotten Sonne: that whosoeuer beleueth in him, should not perish, but haue euerlasting life."

Common KJV (1679): "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

New International Version (1984): "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

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Discuss:

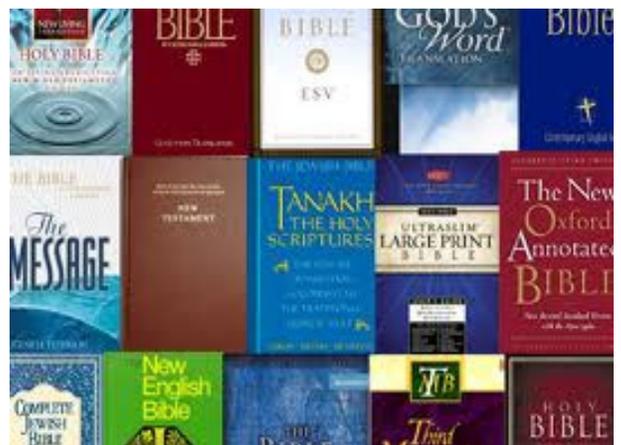
Considering the history of the English language through the years as outlined in the translations above, do you think it is a good thing to have new English translations? *Answers will vary. It is obvious, however, that we don't speak the old English that many of these translations represent. If nothing had ever changed, then we wouldn't be able to understand God's Word at all anymore. People would have to be specially trained to understand the Bible. One of the principles and blessings of the Reformation was that God's Word should be in the language of the people.*

From the time the KJV received widespread use in the 1600's until the late 1800's, there were very few English translations other than the KJV. Do you think this was good or bad? Why? *Answers will vary. One good thing is that with one dominant translation which most used for those years, there was agreement in passages memorized and used in publications of all different church bodies. One bad thing is that as language changed, people's spoken language moved farther and farther away from the language of the Bible, making it seem as if God's Word were somehow separate from everyday life.*

From the late 1800's until 1970 (about 100 years) there were a handful of new English translations that became popular in America (the American Standard Version - ASV; Revised Standard Version - RSV; Berkeley Bible; New English Bible - NEB) What might have brought about the need for newer translations during this time period? *Answers may vary. Some might suggest that the change in our English language was accelerating with the advances in travel and communication that brought about more contact with people from all over the world. The world wars and some of the discouragement that came with those might also have led people to want to learn more of God's Word in a way they could understand it. After the 1950's there was rapid change in many things in America, perhaps the time was ripe for a change in the language of their Bible to a more "modern" sound.*

From 1970 until today there have been manifold new English translations, including ....

New American Standard Bible (NASB),  
New International Version (NIV),  
Today's English Version (TEV),  
English Standard Version (ESV),  
New King James Version (NKJV),  
Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB),  
God's Word (GW),  
Living Bible (LB),  
New Jerusalem Bible (NJB),  
An American Translation (AAT),  
New English Translation (NET), and  
New Living Translation (NLT)



....just to name some of the most popular ones.

Why do you suppose there have been so many new translations in the last 40 years? *Answers may vary. Certainly technology and the ability to publish through computers have made production costs more affordable. Also access to resources for those who want to translate has increased greatly through mobility and technology. Greater diversity in the mainline Christian religions and some major “movements” in society may have also led to some of the new translations.*

## Purposes

Consider the following quote:

“Now the race is on for translators to be the most imaginative and visionary. Indicative of the inquisitiveness of human nature, many are accepting the challenge to produce more sensationally reading bibles that exhibit a greater latitude of imagination. Dynamics and Paraphrases are interpretative by nature and this should be well understood by the reader, because this freedom has often removed the guard rails of safety where not a few verses have leaped from roadbeds of propriety into fields of recklessness.” (Written by Ronald J. Gordon Published: April, 1997 ~ Last Updated: August, 2011 © accessed from <http://www.cob-net.org/compare.htm> on 12/10/2011)

How do these words reinforce the emphasis at our synod’s seminary to have our pastoral candidates continue to graduate with a working knowledge of the original languages of the Bible? *Certainly we need to have pastors who are still able to compare translations to the original language texts that are available to us. Since translations can never “bring everything over” from one language to another, it is important that our spiritual leaders are able to read and study the original Greek and Hebrew to catch some of those things which can’t be caught from the English translations. They will also need to be able to warn us when a translation departs from the original languages in ways that change the teaching of Scripture.*

As we’ve seen in this study, a “faithful” and “accurate” translation isn’t just putting down an English equivalent word for each Hebrew or Greek word—which is more or less what many of our pastors do in their studies as they search for the meaning of a Scripture text. A translation also needs to communicate to a target audience in a way in which that audience can understand.

What would you think will be the difference in a translation that is geared for...

- use at a grade school level?
- use in a prison with criminals?
- use as a pastor’s resource to check his translation?
- use as a Bible to be read in a worship service?
- use in an assisted living home where most of the residents suffer from dementia or Alzheimer’s disease?
- use in a pre-school?

*Answers will vary. The point to be made is that the purpose for which the translation is being made does influence the language that is used in translating. A pastor's resource can be much more "word for word" because it helps him check his personal translation. But that might not be fluent enough to be read in a service where congregation members only hear the words and cannot study them in depth or go back and reread them several times. Likewise, a child's Bible might use much simpler language than a Bible used by adults. The same with a Bible intended for prisons or for those with weakening intellectual abilities.*

Perhaps, as suggested above, there will be some modern translations which we will have to reject simply because they recklessly abandon the truth of Scripture in ways that we can't accept. Some paraphrases that take overly great liberty with the text of the Scripture might fall into this category. So do those where the translators do not acknowledge the Verbal Inspiration of the Bible.

But there are any number of modern English translations that render the original languages in accurate and understandable English (though no translation is perfect). How will we select a translation to use? What determines for us what a "good" translation is? More importantly, on what basis will our synod select one translation from among these translations to use as the publishing version for our synod? *These are simply rhetorical questions.*

## **Principles**

The Translation Evaluation Committee which was established by our synod in 2010 to help us to evaluate the many new translations now available and especially the new NIV 2011 revision has developed and is operating with the following principles for evaluating a translation. A brief expansion on each principle is given below each principle in bold.

1. **We expect a translation to conform to the presuppositions of faith. These include a firm conviction that we are dealing with God's verbally-inspired, inerrant Word. Though speaking through many different human authors, one single divine Author addresses us in every word. The Scriptures find their center and beating heart in Jesus Christ, our Savior. The whole Bible testifies of him and in his name proclaims repentance and remission of sins.**

- This is fundamental and not disputable. If you do not believe the Bible is God's Word and that its focus is Jesus Christ, then you cannot approach it with the proper frame of mind to translate it into another language.

2. **We expect, with Luther, that a translation will communicate in the language of the people, using idioms and expressions that are understandable and in common, current use.**

- This is saying that we believe that what is heard read from the lectern and pulpit on Sunday should not be vastly different English than what is heard by the

members of our congregations every other day of the week as they converse with one another and carry on their business. There should not be a language “heard at church” and a language “used at home.”

- This not saying it should be full of “slang,” however. It should use language that is acceptable and respectable in current usage.

3. **We expect that a translation will understand itself as a “direct quotation” of an ancient document, rather than merely supplying the “gist” of the original’s meaning in a contemporizing paraphrase.**

- This is saying that when we read Isaiah it should strike us that he was a prophet of ancient Israel and not a street preacher of today. John the Baptist chastising the Jewish leaders should not sound like a modern evangelist in a sports stadium revival service.

4. **We expect, with Luther, that when theologically necessary a translation will adhere closely to the exact wording of the original.**

- This is saying that while we want the translation to speak the language of those who will be reading it, there may be times when in order to maintain accuracy to the meaning of God’s Word a translation may have to use words that sacrifice some readability.
- Note that there is some tension between this principle and number 2. That’s OK. Translating is not always uncomplicated. There is give and take that has to be done. Uniformity in how we translate isn’t always possible. Sometimes a translation might be a bit “freer” in its wording to really allow the audience to understand the meaning quickly and easily. Other times it may “tighten up” to come as close as possible to the exact wording of the original language even though it takes more effort on the audience’s part to figure out the meaning. This is a judgment call on the part of the translator who wants to communicate the Word of God as accurately as possible.

5. **We expect that the translation will be aimed at native English speakers who can handle Standard American English at a late-primary school or early high school level, people who are neither professional theologians nor biblical illiterates. They can appreciate the difference between texts that don’t aim at literary beauty and those that do, and they have some appreciation for the latter.**

- This helps us direct what kind of translation we will want to use as our publishing translation. We aren’t expecting this to be read by preschoolers. Nor do we see

this as the translation that pastors will use to compare and check their more literal translation work done for sermons.

- The focus that we have in mind is the average English speaker and reader among us. There are some in the audience who might not yet have a 7-10th grade reading level. There are some who are far beyond that with doctorates before their names. Our target reader and speaker is somewhere in-between.

**6. We expect that the primary way in which most WELS people experience most of the Bible most of the time is by hearing it read—in the context of the public worship service. Consideration must therefore be given to a translation’s suitability for being read aloud.**

- Where do most of our members come into contact with God’s Word? For better or for worse, isn’t it in the worship service or catechism class? Isn’t it where Scripture is being read aloud? For this reason we felt it was important that the translation is easy to understand when being read. Going back to principle number 2 this suggests that it uses words that people are used to hearing. It speaks in grammar that is familiar to people on a day to day basis. It doesn’t take “translating” effort to go from the English I am hearing to the English I understand.

Discuss:

What do you think of these principles? Do you agree? Disagree? Why or why not? *This is entirely opinion. However, opinions should be supported by cogent reasons.*

Why are these principles sometimes going to have a certain amount of tension between them? *No translation can “do it all.” Translators have to make choices. Sometimes the idioms of the Greek or Hebrew are unintelligible to an English speaking audience and might have to be altered to get the meaning across. Other times, even though the language is a bit less than English would normally speak, a particular phrase might be retained because of its theological importance. This is a judgment call by a translator. How does a translator convey “acrostic” psalms to an English speaker? How does he bring across onomatopoeic language (words that sound like what they mean)?*

Why are these principles only going to lead us to what we think is the “best” of the translations for our purpose and not to the “only” translation for our purpose? *Answers will vary. In some way there should be discussion of the fact that these principles could lead us to different conclusions among the various translations that are out there. But it is important for us to agree on some principles that we are going to use to evaluate them so that we are at least looking for something similar among the many translations. Finally, it also needs to be said that there is no perfect translation. There are always going to be judgment calls and choices to be made.*

**For further study:** You may want to do further study on your own regarding the topics that are taken up in these four lessons. We suggest that you look up the Web site of the Translation Evaluation Committee (TEC) at the following address: [www.wels.net/translation](http://www.wels.net/translation). There are links to articles and comparisons that can give you much more information located on this page.

**Leader's Note:** As you conclude this four lesson study, you may now have much interest in exploring and/or comparing some of the Bible translations that are available. This could take several more weeks of Bible classes. You are welcome to do this. Resources to assist you can be found at the TEC Web site at [www.wels.net/translation](http://www.wels.net/translation). You may be especially interested in the "Pros and Cons" document as well as the side-by-side comparisons of both the salvation passages and the catechism passages.