Choosing a translation, #3
Accuracy in Translation

Intro: In our discussion of choosing a translation, we have focused on two important things that have made newer translations helpful.
> *The discovery of ancient manuscripts has helped scholars determine more exactly the original text and has given translators a more accurate understanding of the meanings of ancient words.*
> *Since the English language has changed rather dramatically in vocabulary and style in the past 400 years, new translations are more readily understandable in our contemporary speech.*

However it is important in choosing a translation to be careful about which one is chosen. Often people will browse the Bible aisle, read a few excerpts, and then say, "I like this one. It is easy to read". Last week we noted that understandability is an important factor in the selection of a translation; but there is also another equally important factor—the accuracy of the translation. Here it is important to know a little about the challenges of translating from one language to another and the need to take this into consideration in selecting a translation.

Problems that confront translators
> *Conveying ideas from one language to another is not as simple as going word by word and finding an equivalent in the receptor language.*
>> Saying the same thing in another language does not always mean using the same words in the same number and in the same order.
>> Imagine reading a Bible written like this:
>>> *but indeed also with all these things third this day is leading since which these things came about," (a literal word by word translation of Lk. 24:21).*
> *Languages often differ in several ways.*
>> The structure of the language is different.
>>> *Syntax or word order is often different.*
>>> *Verb tenses are not identical (more or less)*
>> Ways of expressing things are different.
>>> *Suppose I wanted to ask a Russian, "What is your name?" My translator will not find a Russian word for each of the four words and put them together; for it would be non-sense to a Russian speaker. Instead he would say, "Kak vash zavut?" In English word equivalents, "how you they call"? So it is with the Biblical languages.*
> *Cultural differences*
>> All languages have "dead metaphors and similes.
>>> *A dead metaphor may be defined simply as a fixed idiom—a metaphor which has become so much a part of the language that the original impetus for its usage may even be forgotten. In*

English there are such idioms as "being in the doghouse," or "down in the dumps," or "between a rock and a hard place". Language is replete with them, and would in fact lose much of its color if they were excised. On the simile side there are an equal number: "busy as a bee," "reckless as a bull in a china shop," "sly as a fox."
The translator is confronted with the difficulty of how to put these kinds of idioms into another language that may not have them.

Cultures often use different standards of measure.
What if in response to a question about someone I say to my Russian friends, "He is 5 foot 10 and weighs 180 lbs."
It would be better to say, "She is 178 centimeters and 81 kilograms."

We should not be surprised to learn that the translator must deal with these issues in translating the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures into modern English.

There are three basic approaches used in the making of modern English translations.

The first approach focuses most attention on the original text or the source of the translation. This is called the literal or formal equivalence method of translation.

A literal translation seeks a word-for-word equivalency, trying also to retain the grammatical structure of the original insofar as the destination language will permit. This is the traditional method of translation and adopts the source message as its control and seeks to bring the contemporary reader back to that point. It seeks to help the reader identify himself with a person in the source-language context as fully as possible, teaching him the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression of the earlier time.

Examples of the formal or literal translation method:
KJV (NKJV) Authorized Version
ASV (1901) American Standard Version
NASV (New American Standard Bible)
NAV (New American Bible)
RSV (Revised Standard Version)
ESV (English Standard Version)

The second approach is more concerned with the target audience of the translation. This approach is sometimes called the dynamic equivalence or functional equivalence method of translation.

"Dynamic equivalence" is defined as "the quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors." The new aim is to relate the text to the receptor and his modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture, a controlling factor called "the principle of equivalent

effect." With D-E, comprehension of the patterns of the source-language culture is unnecessary. The prime concern given to effective communication by D-E at the expense of the source is a vivid confirmation of this shift in focus.

Examples of the dynamic equivalence method:

>*NIV (New International Version)*
>
>*New Testament in Today's English Version (1966) aka "Good News for Modern Man". Good News Bible (1976).*
>
>*Contemporary English Version, under the title Bible for Today's Family (1991)*

The third approach to translation perhaps might not properly be called translation at all. This approach involves paraphrasing, that is, simply to convey the thought as the editor understands it without attempting to use equivalent terms or phrases across the language barrier.

The difference between a translation and a paraphrase may be expressed as follows: A literal translation tells what the passage says whereas a paraphrase tells the reader what the passage means.

Examples of paraphrases include:

>*J. B. Phillips's Letters to Young Churches (1947)*
>
>*Kenneth S. Wuest's Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament (1956–59).*
>
>*The Amplified Bible (1962)*
>
>*The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase (1965) by F.F. Bruce.*
>
>*Kenneth N. Taylor's The Living Bible, Paraphrased (1971).*

Evaluating the approaches
The formal equivalence
Advantage

>*The literal approach some may argue creates the least amount of "change" to the original wording. Thus, it acknowledges the NT teaching that the Holy Spirit revealed the mind of God in the words which the Holy Spirit chose (1 Cor. 2). Presumably this approach would seem least likely to be affected by translator's bias, though some interpretation is still necessary in a literal translation.*

Disadvantage

>*Depends upon the reader getting information about idioms of the original language and cultural background for figurative speech. Without access to such information the reader may not just by reading the text understand what is being said.*
>
>>The literal translations leave the reader with a lot of work on background and culture to do. How much is a denarius? How far is a stadia? What time is the 6th hour or the third watch of the night?
>
>*Literal translation might not produce the most natural English:*

The common way in Hebrew to report a response to something in conversation is use this idiom, "And he answered and said". But if we were to wanting to say this in English, we might more naturally say, "He replied" or "He responded"?

Dynamic equivalence
Advantages
Clears up meaningless idiomatic expressions
Adapts the message to modern terms readily understood.
Thus, DE assists the reader where the FE approach is weak.
Disadvantages
On the other hand, the more dependent we are upon the judgment of scholars about what a Biblical writer meant, the more at risk we may be to mistranslation or misinterpretation. The greater degree of deviation inevitably reflects a higher proportion of interpretation on the translator's part.

Paraphrases
Advantage
A possible resource for interpretation.
Disadvantages
Not truly a translation but an explanation of Scripture
Most often the product of one person and reflecting his doctrinal leanings. Taylor is a Baptist for example who has strong premillenial leanings and embraces faith only as the way of salvation.

So which is the most accurate?
Here it depends upon how we define accuracy.
If we assume that accuracy depends upon most literal rendering, then we may prefer translations in the formal equivalence category. For detailed and intensive study, especially in preparation for teaching, a more literal translation would probably be best.
If on the other hand we assume that accuracy depends upon the most accurate modern equivalent to the thought, then we might choose a Bible that ventures more into functional equivalence, understanding however that there could be risk of misinterpretation.
It seems hardly possible to call a paraphrase an "accurate" translation when it makes little effort to preserve the wording of Scripture; however such could still be useful as a commentary or study aid.
With these thoughts in mind, I prefer the use of both modified literal and functional equivalence versions, using one to aid the other. Thus in teaching I have chosen the NASV as my pulpit Bible; I find it useful to supplement the readings with many other versions that might give insight into the text and help with problem translations (NIV is helpful). Of course a paraphrase can be useful, just as a commentary is a useful tool for Bible students. I've enjoyed using the J.B. Phillip's Paraphrase, understanding that it is not strictly a translation.

Conclusion: If we acknowledge the complexities of translation, we may be less dogmatic about which version might best serve our purposes. However it is important to be aware of the fact that all translations may to some degree reflect the theological positions of their translators.