



into the Melting Pot

the question is more important than the answer

Sunday 09 February 2020

Gods Words? - Translations

Information about a number of English translations, edited from the Bible Society website. I have tried to put them on an equivalence scale.

1 - Formal equivalence: literal, staying close to the original sentence structure but changing it where meaning is compromised

1a King James Bible (KJV)

- 1611 :: Reading age 17+ :: Gender neutral - No
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - Beautiful poetic language
 - Language that has influenced many phrases in modern English
 - Very close to the original text
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - Archaic language that many people do not understand
 - Based on the Hebrew and Greek texts available in the 16th century.
 - Some words used in the KJV now have very different meanings (eg the word suffer as in 'suffer the little children')
- 1 John 3:17 - 'But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?'

1b Revised Standard Version (RSV)

- 1952 :: Reading age 17+ :: Gender neutral - No
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - Intended to be a readable though literal translation (at the time)
 - The Old Testament was translated to reflect Jewish interpretations of the text
 - Used more up-to-date versions of the Hebrew and Greek text
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - Language has moved on and it is no longer up-to-date
 - The Old Testament was translated to reflect Jewish interpretations of the text. The problem for some here is prophecies that were later seen to be about Christ. Some think their translation should always reflect this; others that they should be translated in such a way as the original audience might have understood them.
- 1 John 3:17 - 'But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?'

1c New King James Version (NKJV)

- 1982 :: Reading age 12+ :: Gender neutral - No
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - A maintenance of the poetic language of the KJV updated into modern English
 - Uses as much as possible the same version of the original text as the KJV did
 - Often follows the translation in the KJV
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - Its attempt to be very literal can make it hard to read
 - Largely based on the Hebrew and Greek texts available in the 16th century.
 - Often follows the translation in the KJV
- 1 John 3:17 - 'But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?'

1d New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

- 1989 :: Reading age 16+ :: Gender neutral - Yes
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - Uses up-to-date language (in particular it uses less archaic language for God)
 - The Old Testament reflects Jewish interpretations of the text
 - Used more up-to-date versions of the Hebrew and Greek text
 - Tried hard to avoid 'male-only' language
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - The Old Testament was translated to reflect Jewish interpretations of the text. The problem for some here is prophecies that were later seen to be about Christ. Some think their translation should always reflect this; others that they should be translated in such a way as the original audience might have understood them
 - Sometimes its choice of inclusive language obscures connections in the text
- 1 John 3:17 - 'How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?'

1e English Standard Version (ESV)

- 2001 :: Reading age 15+ :: Gender neutral - No
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - A revision of the RSV, undertaken by various iconic evangelical theologians
 - Has tried to keep some of the best-loved passages in a translation that is close to the KJV
 - Avoids inclusive language
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - For some, the evangelical theology that has guided the translation is problematic
 - Avoids inclusive language
 - Some find the sentence structure hard to understand
- 1 John 3:17 - 'But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?'

2 - Mixed Formal and Dynamic Equivalence: attempts to adopt a midpoint between staying close to the original text and communicating its meaning in a way that is easy to understand.

2a New International Version (NIV)

- 1978 (updated 2011) :: Reading age 12+ :: Gender neutral - No (1978) Yes (2011)
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - One of the few translations that tries to balance literal translation with an emphasis on meaning
 - Is often clear and easy to read
 - Has tried to keep an emphasis on literary beauty, making it a good translation for reading in church
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - Its attempt to maintain clarity has caused it to introduce words that are not in the original
 - Some people do not like its style of writing, finding it bland or lacking in poetry
- 1 John 3:17 - 'If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?'

2b New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)

- 1985 :: Reading age 13+ :: Gender neutral - a little
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - A heavily revised version of the Jerusalem Bible
 - Introduces some inclusive language
 - Attempts to make the translation a more literal translation than the Jerusalem Bible
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - The attempt to be more literal loses some of the poetry of the Jerusalem Bible
 - Introduces some inclusive language
- 1 John 3:17 - 'If anyone is well-off in worldly possessions and sees his brother in need but closes his heart to him, how can the love of God be remaining in him?'

2c Revised English Bible (REB)

- 1989 :: Reading age 11+ :: Gender neutral - Yes
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - One of the few modern translations to originate in Britain
 - Aims for a mix of accuracy, poetry and comprehension
 - It is especially good for reading in public
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - It isn't widely used and so is quite hard to get hold of
 - Because it doesn't follow the best known translations, sometimes its phrases sound unusual
- 1 John 3:17 - 'If we have all we need and see one of our own people in need, we must have pity on that person, or else we cannot say we love God.'

3 - Dynamic Equivalence: does not try to follow original sentence structure and focuses on what the text means

3a Jerusalem Bible (JB)

- 1966 :: Reading age 16+ :: Gender neutral - No
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - A Catholic Bible containing the 73 books of the Catholic canon
 - Literary in style with some well-known writers involved such as JRR Tolkien
 - Some passages are beautifully poetic
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - Some claim it is more a paraphrase than a translation (translated from French)
 - Criticised for being insufficiently literal
- 1 John 3:17 - 'If a man who was rich enough in this world's goods saw that one of his brothers was in need, but closed his heart to him, how could the love of God be living in him?'

3b New International Readers Version (NIRV)

- 1996 :: Reading age 7+ :: Gender neutral - Yes
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - All the advantages of the NIV but easier to read
 - Designed so that people can go on to read the NIV if/when they want to
 - One of the clearest and easy to read translations around
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - It does sometimes slip more into interpreting the text than simply translating it
 - Some avoid it because of its advertised low reading age
- 1 John 3:17 - 'Suppose someone sees a brother or sister in need and is able to help them. And suppose that person doesn't take pity on these needy people. Then how can the love of God be in that person?'

4 - Mixed Dynamic and Functional Equivalence: still a translation but is often very colloquial and renders the original language loosely

4a New Living Translation (NLT)

- 1996 :: Reading age 11+ :: Gender neutral - Yes
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - Began as a revision of The Living Bible but became a full translation from the original language
 - Kept The Living Bible's emphasis on accessibility
 - Changes some metaphors from the Bible into more understandable phrases (e.g. being 'in sorrow' rather than 'beating their breasts')
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - Its emphasis on accessibility sometimes makes it feel a long way from the original
 - The change of metaphors into more modern language often changes their meaning more than what was intended
 - Not one of the strongest among the accessible translations
- 1 John 3:17 - 'If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion – how can God's love be in that person?'

4b Good News Bible, or Today's English Version (GNB or TEV)

- 1976 :: Reading age 12+ :: Gender neutral - Yes
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - Designed to be accessible to (and is very popular among) non-native English speakers, especially in Africa and the Far East.
 - Its line drawings are iconic and help with understanding the text
 - An easy-to-read and understand version
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - Often criticised for lack of depth in its phrasing
 - Some feel that, occasionally, it goes too far from the original text in its attempt to communicate meaning
- 1 John 3:17 - 'If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God?'

4c Contemporary English Version (CEV)

- 1995 :: Reading age 10+ :: Gender neutral - Yes
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - Designed for people who do not know Bible 'jargon'
 - Easy to understand and to read out loud
 - Intended for people who struggle to read other translations
 - In 1996 the CEV won the Crystal Mark award from the Plain English Campaign
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - Sometimes simplifying Bible jargon changes what it was originally saying (or only communicates part of what was meant)
 - Those who know the Bible already find that its richness has been lost
 - There is very little poetry in the translation
- 1 John 3:17 - 'If we have all we need and see one of our own people in need, we must have pity on that person, or else we cannot say we love God.'

4d The Message (MSG)

- 2002 :: Reading age 9+ :: Gender neutral - Yes
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - A fresh easy-to-read, idiomatic translation
 - It often presents a different insight to a passage
 - It captures some of the passion of the original
- Often stated cons of the translations:
 - Its colloquial style works for some and not for others
 - Its idioms are quite American and British readers can find this difficult
 - The translation is very free, which can lead to questions about its accuracy
- 1 John 3:17 - 'If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear.'

5 – Functional Equivalence: paraphrase, not translated directly from the original languages

5a The Living Bible (TLB)

- 1971 :: Reading age 12+ :: Gender neutral - No
- Often stated pros of the translation:
 - One of the very few genuine paraphrases, based on the American Standard Version translation
 - One of the earliest accessible versions of the Bible
 - Careful to communicate the meaning of each passage
- Often stated cons of the translation:
 - One of the very few genuine paraphrases
 - The language is not designed to be elegant
 - Sometimes the verses or passages are given unusual interpretations.
- 1 John 3:17 - 'But if someone who is supposed to be a Christian has money enough to live well, and sees a brother in need, and won't help him – how can God's love be within him?'