

Literal vs Dynamic Translation Styles

Why I Require Literal/Formal Translation for Scripture

by Daniel Stanfield

First Reason - Verbal Inspiration

A common core tenant of conservative Christianity is acknowledging the Holy Bible as the Word of God. Consider the example below from a typical Statement of Faith:

"We believe in the **verbal** and plenary inspiration, inerrancy, and divine authority of the Holy Bible. It is the completed special revelation of God to man and is comprised of the 66 books recognized as the Protestant Canon."

In the statement above, '**Verbal**' is a technical term that does not indicate word-for-word dictation. Rather, it specifically means that **the actual words** chosen by the author, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, **are vital to the integrity of the passage of Scripture**. This opposes the concept translating 'ideas' instead of the words. This is the primary reason why Christians should reject translations which reword Scriptures, i.e., the 'Dynamic Equivalence' style of translation. Rather, Christians should require 'Literal' or 'Formal Equivalence' translation style.

Variance from Literal - Even very faithfully literal translations like the KJV and the NASB have a degree of non-literal translation to improve readability. The distinction between Literal and Dynamic Equivalence is really a variance of degrees - 'literal,' 'formal equivalence,' and 'essentially literal' describe Bibles which respect 'verbal' inspiration. Contrarily, 'Dynamic Equivalent' and 'Modern Language' Bibles emphasize

readability without respect to 'verbal' inspiration, but also have their own range of variance from their literal sources. Some read very similarly to 'literal' Bibles while others are almost paraphrases.

Second Reason - Interpretive Errors and Inconsistencies

Errors - When a passage is translated as a dynamic equivalent, the translator's own interpretation is applied to the translation. Anybody can make a mistake, and 'equivalent' words are rarely completely synonymous. Rewording Scripture for a purpose of simpler language means that any subtle nuances of literal interpretation will inevitably be lost. Interpretive translation ignores the reason the original words used were chosen, which is contextually relevant to both the author and the audience. Finally, the translator may have a poor understanding of the passage and their reinterpretation can be off, or even dead wrong.

Inconsistencies - When passages are being reworded on a case-by-case basis, discrepancies can easily develop in the handling of key words such as 'agape,' 'angelos,' or 'baptizo.' Bibles are usually translated by teams of several people, so inconsistency is very hard to avoid when using dynamic equivalence methodologies.

Interpretive Bias - There are about 30,000 verses in the Bible, about 8,000 in the New Testament. That is way too much volume to be 'reworded for better understanding' without adding some degree of personal, scholastic, or religious bias to the created text. The ONLY way to effectively avoid translation bias is to stick to the literal translation methods.

Third Reason - Gender Translation

Literal Gender Translation - There are two ways literal translation methods can handle gender-generic use of masculine pronouns - 'Original Gender' or 'Gender Accurate.' Traditionally, Original Gender has been used (KJV, RV, ASV, NASB 1995) and later versions (ESV, NASB 2020) have started using Gender Accurate translation methods. See the [Colorado Springs Guideline for Gender Accurate Translation](#).

Dynamic Equivalence Gender Translation - allows Scripture addressing a masculine term to be changed to a gender-inclusive or gender-neutral term, REGARDLESS of the original intent of Scripture. This is obviously a problem because Scripture is being changed by the translator based on gender-inclusive bias. Some of the most popular / best-selling Bibles are gender-inclusive to a degree which is not accurate to the original language and meaning.

Examples of Literal vs Dynamic and Paraphrase

Literal Bibles Used: KJV, ASV, NASB(1995)

Dynamic Bibles Used: NIV, NLT

Paraphrase Bible Used: The Message (MSG)

Verse	Literal Translations	Dynamic / Paraphrase Translations
	KJV But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.	NIV But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
Matthew 6:33	ASV But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.	Note: Replacing "added unto you" (literal Greek) with "given to you as well" is a great example of dynamic equivalence.
	NASB 1995 But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.	NLT Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

		MSG Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Note: This is a good example of the degree to which paraphrases can vary from Scripture.
	KJV And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.	NIV Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Note: Replacing "a man's life" with "life" and "which he possesseth" with "an abundance of possessions" is an example of Gender Inclusive translation modifying Scripture.
Luke 12:15	ASV And he said unto them, Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.	NLT Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own."
	NASB 1995 Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."	MSG Speaking to the people, he went on, "Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot."

		KJV But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.	NIV But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
	Romans	ASV But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.	NLT But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.
	5:8	NASB 1995 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.	Note: Compare this rendering to the very literal NIV rendering - the NLT reorders the second sentence for no reason, seemingly changing Scripture just to change it.
			MSG But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him.
	2 Timothy 3:16-17	KJV All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.	NIV All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
		ASV Every scripture inspired of God is also	Note: Another example of gender-neutral modification, changing "man of God" to "servant of God."

	profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.	NLT All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.
	NASB 1995 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.	MSG Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another-showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.
	KJV For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.	NIV For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. Note: Replacing "set his heart" (literal Hebrew) with the more modern "devoted himself" does not increase understanding and detracts from the intensity of Ezra's commitment.
Ezra 7:10	ASV For Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of Jehovah, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances.	
	NASB 1995 For Ezra had set his heart to study the	NLT This was because Ezra had determined to

	law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.	study and obey the Law of the LORD and to teach those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel.
		MSG Ezra had committed himself to studying the Revelation of GOD, to living it, and to teaching Israel to live its truths and ways.
	KJV The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?	NIV The LORD is my light and my salvation- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life- of whom shall I be afraid?
	ASV Jehovah is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? Jehovah is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?	NLT The LORD is my light and my salvation- so why should I be afraid? The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?
Psalm 27:1		MSG Light, space, zest- that's GOD! So, with him on my side I'm fearless, afraid of no one and nothing. Note: This paraphrase is so bad as to be offensive!
	NASB 1995 The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?	

	KJV So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.	NIV so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
Isaiah 55:11	ASV so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.	NLT It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.
	NASB 1995 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.	MSG So will the words that come out of my mouth not come back empty-handed. They'll do the work I sent them to do, they'll complete the assignment I gave them.

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