



Our Changing Taste for the Timeless Word

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever.” Isaiah 40:8

Over the past decades, there has been a move away from detailed study of the Word of God. There has been a move away from studying the Bible toward just reading it. Paralleling that, there has been a move toward versions of the Bible that tell us what the Word means rather than just presenting what it says. That change can be seen in the widespread popularity of the latter two types of Bibles listed below ... both in personal use and referenced from our pulpits. The three types of Bible versions are:

1. Word-for-word translations such as the NASB, ESV, KJV, and NKJV.
2. Dynamic equivalents (thought-for-thought translations) such as the NIV.
3. Paraphrases (idea-by-idea re-wordings) such as the New Living or The Message.

Our tastes have changed. However, the pure Word has not. Unfortunately, dynamic equivalents and paraphrases have become the most popular. We prefer their pre-processed food to the pure milk and raw meat of the Word. Every translation from the original languages requires the translators to decide what the original words, phrases, and sentences actually say ... and how to best say that in our language. However, dynamic equivalents and paraphrases go beyond that to what the translators decide that the texts mean ... i.e., how it would be understood by the original readers and transposed into today's societal tastes. However, our society and language are no surprise to God. His Word does not need to be re-phrased or re-worked for our times and tastes. *“The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace, refined seven times,”* Psalm 12:6. His Word is already refined. It does not need to be re-refined by dynamic equivalence or paraphrase. His Word is timeless, eternal, and accurate to the finest detail. Word-for-word translations are the closest we have to that in our language. Dynamic equivalents and paraphrases are not ... blurring or losing the details of His Word.

Studying a paraphrase of the Bible is like flying over the mountains in a small plane ... blurring and losing many, if not most, of the details. Studying a dynamic equivalent is more like an ATV drive through the mountains with a guidebook telling us what we are really seeing ... blurring significant tactile details. However, studying a word-for-word translation is like a life-long hike through the mountains ... visually, physically, and emotionally drinking in a snow-capped peak, a shadowy canyon, a towering cliff, a lush summer mesa, a flowering meadow, a rock outcropping, a solitary path, the rustling leaves or a cracking twig underfoot, the smell of a stand of pines, the

effortless beauty of a soaring red-tailed hawk, the sound of a rushing snow-melt stream, and so much, much more ... from the detailed beauty of a single flower, the feel of moss on some rough north-side bark, the smell of a new rain, to the grandeur of a range of jagged peaks. As a disciple abiding in the Word, choose a good word-for-word translation (being closest to the original texts) for your personal Bible study. Choosing a dynamic equivalent or a paraphrase may make easier reading ... but you will miss out on some, or much, of the detail, accuracy, depth, meaning, impact, richness, and grandeur of His Word. The meanings of the Bible's phrases and thoughts need to be understood. However, we must not sacrifice the details and the words of His Word for the sake of easy reading or superficial study.

Jesus stated that each and every word, the smallest letter, and even a piece of a letter in God's Word are important. He said, "*man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,*" Matthew 4:4 ... and "*until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished,*" Matthew 5:18. More than the others, word-for-word translations give us the important details of His Word.

An important warning. Like many others today, I use Bible software and a variety of online versions of the Bible ... on my phone, tablet, notebook, and desktop. However, it is invaluable to me to have a good printed one as my main Bible. I have a single-column (room for my notes) New American Standard Bible. It is like an old friend ... familiar, comfortable, and very trustworthy. No digital copy can be that to me. Invest in one of high quality. Mark it up and wear it out. But be prepared because when it starts falling apart and you have to replace it, it will be traumatic.

Abbreviations: New American Standard Bible (NASB), English Standard Version (ESV), King James Version (KJV), and the New International Version (NIV).

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