

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

THE BIBLE TRANSLATION QUESTION

A TEN-PART SERIES | PART TEN OF TEN

WHICH BIBLE TRANSLATION SHOULD A CHRISTIAN TRUST?



DR. THOMAS W. HAWKSLEY

TRUSTING GOD'S WORD THROUGH CAREFUL EXAMINATION

RTS-109: Which Bible Translation Should a Christian Trust?

Sermon Transcript

Reason Together Church

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

If you are visiting with us today, we are especially glad you are here.

We are grateful for every honored guest who has joined us.

Our invitation is simple.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Today we have reached Part Ten of our ten-part series, "The Bible Translation Question."

This is the concluding study in the series.

We began by asking whether the King James Version can be fully trusted.

We examined the KJV printed in 1611 and the KJV commonly printed today.

We considered why modern Bibles omit, bracket or footnote certain verses.

We compared the KJV with the NKJV, NIV, ESV and NASB.

We examined manuscripts, literalness, interpretation and translation philosophy.

Last week we asked whether gender-inclusive translations change God's Word.

Now we must bring everything we have learned home.

A person can learn about manuscripts for ten weeks and still not know which Bible to carry to church.

A person can compare translations endlessly and never settle down long enough to read one.

A person can defend the KJV passionately but fail to obey it.

Another person can own twelve modern translations but never read any of them consistently.

So today we are asking the practical question.

Which Bible translation should a Christian trust?

That question often contains another question beneath it.

Has God preserved His Word?

Can an ordinary Christian know what God has said?

Can I read an English Bible with confidence?

The answer is yes.

God has preserved His Word.

Trustworthy English translations are available.

Every translation is not equally reliable.

Every translation is not equally useful for every purpose.

Yet God has not required every faithful Christian to make the same responsible choice.

Before we go further, let us pray.

Our Father, we thank You for giving us Your Word.

We thank You for preserving the Scriptures through centuries of copying, translation, preaching and teaching.

Give us confidence without pride.

Give us discernment without suspicion.

Help us to recognize real differences without exaggerating them.

Teach us to love truth and to show charity toward those who make a different responsible choice.

Most of all, help us to read, believe and obey what You have spoken.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Our primary Scripture is Second Timothy chapter 3, beginning with verse 14.

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

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.”

Before we continue, let me briefly explain how giving works at Reason Together Church.

We do not pass a plate.

If you are our guest, you are never expected to give.

If you are a member of another church, we encourage you to give through your home church.

If Reason Together Church is your church family and you wish to give, please give only as the Lord leads you.

The Bible says that God loveth a cheerful giver.

There is a giving box in the back for those who choose to use it.

We also have a guest card available.

We ask only for your first name and email address.

After the service, please join us at Reason Together Café.

The coffee is free, and so are the refills on conversations.

COFFEE reminds us that Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

Our Keiki Kids Center is also available for families with children.

Now let us return to the question before us.

Paul told Timothy that the holy Scriptures were able to make him wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

The purpose of Scripture was not merely to give Timothy information.

The Scriptures led him toward salvation.

They taught doctrine.

They reproved error.

They corrected his path.

They instructed him in righteousness.

They equipped him for good works.

That is what the Bible is supposed to do in us.

Paul said, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

Our complete trust belongs to the Scripture God inspired.

That statement requires us to distinguish four connected things.

First, God inspired Scripture.

Second, manuscripts transmitted Scripture.

Third, translators communicate Scripture in another language.

Fourth, publishers produce particular editions.

Those four things belong together, but they are not identical.

God inspired prophets and apostles to give Scripture.

He did not promise that every copyist would make no spelling mistake.

He did not promise that every translator would choose the best English word in every verse.

He did not promise that every publisher would print every edition without error.

Translators are servants of the Word.

They are not inspired apostles.

A translation committee can be highly qualified, faithful and careful while remaining capable of correction.

That does not mean that we cannot trust its work.

We trust many faithful human works without declaring them infallible.

We trust a faithful preacher while still opening our Bibles to examine what he says.

We trust a careful commentary while remembering that the commentator can be mistaken.

In the same way, we can trust a translation responsibly without pretending that its translators became incapable of error.

The King James translators understood this distinction.

They did not claim that God had inspired their English words as a second original Bible.

They revised earlier English translations.

They consulted Hebrew, Greek, Latin and other sources.

They placed alternative renderings in the margins.

They defended the value of improving an existing translation.

They also recognized earlier English translations as the Word of God even when those translations were not perfect.

That was the heart of RTS-100, “Can the King James Version of the Bible Be Fully Trusted?”

The answer was yes.

The KJV is a faithful, authoritative and spiritually sufficient translation.

Its trustworthiness does not require us to pretend that its translators were inspired apostles.

It does not require us to deny that English has changed.

It does not require us to deny the existence of difficult or correctable renderings.

It requires us to judge the KJV honestly by the Scriptures it faithfully communicates.

Here is the distinction I want us to remember.

I trust the Bible completely because it is God’s Word.

I trust a translation responsibly because there are sound reasons to believe that it faithfully communicates God’s Word.

How do we identify those sound reasons?

We do not answer one vague question.

We ask six careful questions.

The first question is, what text was translated?

A trustworthy translation should identify the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts behind its work.

The KJV and NKJV New Testaments follow the Textus Receptus tradition.

The NIV, ESV and NASB generally follow modern critical editions of the Greek New Testament.

The NKJV prints the traditional New Testament text while using notes to report many places where the Majority Text or critical text differs.

These differences matter.

Sometimes they affect a word.

Sometimes they affect a phrase.

In a smaller number of places, they affect an entire verse or passage.

But a textual difference must not be exaggerated into the claim that one group has Christianity while another group has lost it.

The fuller discussion belongs in RTS-102, “Why Do Modern Bibles Leave Out Certain Verses?”

It also belongs in RTS-105, “KJV and ESV: Do Different Manuscripts Change the Message?”

We learned that modern translators are not secretly removing Christianity from the Bible.

They are evaluating evidence from manuscripts that differ in particular places.

We may disagree with a committee’s decision.

We should examine its decision.

But we should not accuse people of removing God’s Word merely because they openly identify the evidence they followed.

Textual basis is important, but the label does not settle every English rendering.

A committee may select the best Greek reading and translate it poorly.

Another committee may follow a disputed Greek reading and translate that reading accurately.

We must ask about the text and the translation.

The second question is, who translated it?

Translation requires more than sincerity.

A person can love God deeply and still misunderstand Hebrew grammar.

A person can hold correct doctrine and still choose an English word that communicates the wrong idea.

A responsible translation project should involve people trained in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.

It should also involve textual study, Biblical history, exegesis, linguistics and English style.

The person who can explain a Greek participle may not be the person who writes the clearest English sentence.

That is one reason committee review matters.

The NIV is overseen by a continuing committee of evangelical Biblical scholars.

The ESV used an oversight committee with review scholars and advisers.

The NASB identifies its formal translation commitment and many of the scholars involved in its editions.

The NKJV passed through several stages of translation, English editing and review.

A committee is not automatically correct.

Fifty people can agree and still be mistaken.

Yet responsible review reduces the danger that one individual's private interpretation will control an entire Bible.

The third question is, what translation philosophy was used?

Some translations preserve more of the wording and structure of the original language.

We often call them formal or essentially literal translations.

Other translations give greater attention to communicating the meaning in natural English.

We often call them functional or meaning-based translations.

Others deliberately work between those approaches.

In RTS-107 we learned that these are points on a spectrum.

They are not two sealed boxes.

No translation is word-for-word in every verse.

No responsible translation ignores the words and communicates only a general thought.

Hebrew, Greek and English do not match one another mechanically.

Word order differs.

Idioms differ.

Figures of speech differ.

Words carry ranges of meaning.

Grammar communicates relationships in different ways.

A formal rendering may help us see repeated words and sentence structure.

A functional rendering may help us understand what an ancient idiom meant.

Both approaches require interpretation.

Both approaches can be used responsibly.

Both approaches can be used poorly.

The fourth question is, what does the committee believe?

No translator works without convictions.

The KJV translators worked within the Church of England and under rules established for the project.

The ESV committee states its commitment to historic Christian orthodoxy.

The NIV committee describes itself as evangelical.

The NASB translators affirm the inspiration and inerrancy of the original Scriptures.

The NRSVue represents a broader ecumenical and academic process.

Those commitments matter because translators must make interpretive decisions.

Yet a doctrinal label cannot do all our thinking for us.

Conservative theology does not make every rendering correct.

Academic diversity does not remove every bias.

A translation produced by people who agree with me can still mishandle a verse.

A translation produced by people who disagree with me can still preserve an important feature that another translation missed.

A doctrinal statement tells me something about the translators.

The translated text tells me what they actually did.

We should ask whether a translation consistently inserts ideas that the source text does not contain.

We should ask whether it repeatedly resolves uncertain passages in favor of one organization's distinctive doctrine.

We should ask whether its notes allow the reader to see other possible renderings.

We should examine patterns rather than build accusations on one difficult verse.

The fifth question is, how transparent is the translation?

Does it contain a meaningful preface?

Does it tell us which texts were used?

Does it explain its philosophy?

Does it identify alternate translations?

Does it report important textual variants?

Does it explain words supplied for clear English?

Does it identify its translators, editors or review process?

Transparency is one of the strongest reasons for confidence.

Some readers become nervous when a footnote says, "Some manuscripts."

They think the note is attacking the verse.

Often the opposite is true.

The committee is telling us that a real difference exists in the manuscript evidence.

It is allowing us to see the evidence rather than hiding the decision.

The ESV preface calls its textual notes an integral part of the translation.

The NKJV notes many differences among the traditional text, Majority Text and critical text.

The NET Bible is especially useful as a supplementary study Bible because it explains thousands of textual and translation decisions.

A Bible that tells you where the translators faced a difficult decision may deserve more confidence, not less.

The sixth question is, can the intended reader understand it?

Nehemiah chapter 8, verse 8 says:

“So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.”

Understanding mattered.

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 9 says:

“So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken?”

Paul was addressing understandable speech in the church.

He was not directly discussing English Bible translations.

Yet the principle is relevant.

Communication has not succeeded when the hearer cannot understand what the words mean.

This does not mean that the Bible should contain no difficult ideas.

Second Peter chapter 3 says that some things in Paul’s writings are hard to be understood.

Some difficulty belongs to the subject itself.

The Trinity is profound.

The relationship between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility is profound.

Paul’s arguments can be complex.

Ancient customs may require explanation.

A translation should not simplify away the depth of Scripture.

But difficulty in God’s message is different from difficulty created by English words that have changed meaning.

The KJV word “conversation” often refers to conduct or manner of life, not merely talking.

“Prevent” can mean precede.

“Quick” can mean living.

“Suffer” can mean permit.

“Peculiar” can describe a people belonging especially to God.

A longtime KJV reader may understand those words from years of study.

A new believer may assign their modern meanings and misunderstand the verse.

That is not a criticism of the KJV translators.

They used the English of their time.

It is a recognition that living languages change.

Accuracy requires attention to what the original meant and what the English reader will understand.

Once a translation passes these objective tests, personal preference has a legitimate place.

Some people prefer traditional language.

Some prefer contemporary language.

Some value familiar cadence.

Some value conversational clarity.

Some prefer pronouns for God to be capitalized.

Others note that the original manuscripts did not contain that English convention.

Some prefer a Bible arranged in traditional verses.

Others read more naturally from paragraphs.

Some prefer the translation used in their church.

Some prefer the translation from which they have memorized Scripture for forty years.

These preferences matter.

They do not prove that every Christian must share them.

Familiarity does not prove perfection.

Newness does not prove improvement.

Difficulty does not prove accuracy.

Simplicity does not prove corruption.

Popularity does not prove faithfulness.

Preference becomes pride when I turn the Bible that helps me into a law that God never gave to every Christian.

No single translation maximizes every strength.

Consider Romans chapter 3, verse 25.

The KJV says of Christ:

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.”

The NKJV, ESV and NASB also use the word “propitiation.”

The NIV 2011 uses the expression “sacrifice of atonement.”

The NLT explains the idea more fully in contemporary language.

The word “propitiation” preserves important theological vocabulary.

It points toward the satisfaction of God’s righteous judgment against sin through the sacrifice of Christ.

But a reader who has never heard the word may not understand any of that.

“Sacrifice of atonement” communicates more immediately to many readers.

At the same time, that expression may not display every part of the theological discussion carried by “propitiation.”

Which translation is more accurate?

We cannot answer merely by selecting the shortest expression.

We cannot answer merely by selecting the easiest expression.

We must ask what the Greek expression means in Romans 3 and how faithfully each English expression communicates it.

That is why a formal translation can serve close study while a more readable translation can help explain the sense.

Let us consider another difference.

Mark chapter 1, verse 41 describes Jesus responding to a man with leprosy.

The KJV says:

“And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him.”

Most translations also speak of compassion.

A smaller textual tradition has a reading associated with anger.

That is not merely a case of two committees giving different English meanings to the same Greek word.

It involves a difference in the underlying textual evidence.

Now consider First Timothy chapter 3, verse 11.

The KJV says:

“Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.”

Some translations say “wives.”

Others say “women.”

The Greek word can have either meaning.

The surrounding discussion must help determine whether Paul refers to deacons’ wives or to women serving in a recognized ministry role.

That is primarily a translation and interpretation question.

Then consider Psalm 1, verse 1.

The KJV says:

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.”

Some translations retain “the man.”

Others use “the one” or “that person.”

The broad moral application includes women.

Yet the singular masculine form may carry literary or theological connections that deserve attention.

That was the issue we examined in RTS-108.

Inclusive wording can clarify the original meaning.

Inclusive wording can also remove a meaningful distinction.

The decision must be made from the source and context.

When translations disagree, ask one question first.

Am I looking at different manuscripts or different translations of the same manuscript reading?

That question will prevent much confusion.

Then follow a responsible process.

First, read the whole paragraph.

Do not begin with an isolated phrase on a social media image.

Context limits possible meanings.

Second, confirm the exact editions being compared.

The NIV 1984 and NIV 2011 are not identical.

The NASB 1995 and NASB 2020 are not identical.

The KJV has also appeared in editions with differences in spelling, punctuation and a limited number of words.

Third, read the preface and the footnotes.

The preface explains what the translators attempted to do.

The footnote may tell you whether the difference concerns manuscripts, alternate meanings or words supplied for English clarity.

Fourth, classify the difference.

Is this a textual question?

Is it a question of word meaning?

Is it grammar?

Is it an idiom?

Is it gender reference?

Is it translation philosophy?

Is it merely English style?

Fifth, compare translations from different parts of the spectrum.

Consult a more formal translation.

Consult a mediating translation.

Consult a meaning-based translation.

But do not count translations as votes.

Five English versions may depend on the same Greek edition and similar translation principles.

They are not five independent manuscripts.

Sixth, consult responsible study resources.

Use lexical tools, textual notes and reputable commentaries.

Ask someone who has studied the Biblical languages.

Do not assume that an interlinear solves the question automatically.

An interlinear gives an English gloss under a Greek or Hebrew word.

It cannot place the entire grammar, context and range of meaning inside that small space.

Seventh, test doctrinal conclusions against the whole Bible.

Do not build a major doctrine on one disputed phrase.

Ask what clear passages teach about the same subject.

The doctrine of the Trinity does not depend upon the disputed words in First John 5:7.

The deity of Christ does not disappear when John 1:18 is translated differently.

Salvation by grace does not depend upon one translation's wording of one verse.

God has given His truth throughout Scripture.

Comparison should help us investigate the passage.

It should not allow us to shop for the wording we already wanted.

After we evaluate translations, we must choose a primary Bible.

A primary Bible is the translation you normally read, carry, mark, study, hear and memorize.

Using one primary translation gives continuity.

Its wording becomes familiar.

You remember where passages are located.

Repeated phrases settle into your mind.

You can listen in church without mentally changing every line.

Your primary Bible should be trustworthy.

It should be understandable to you.

It should be stable enough for memorization.

It should be suitable for sustained reading.

It should fit your church and ministry setting.

It should be available in a format you can comfortably use.

What should a longtime KJV reader do?

If you understand the KJV and have spent years reading and memorizing it, you have no Biblical obligation to abandon it.

The KJV is trustworthy.

It is spiritually sufficient.

Its cadence, dignity and stability remain genuine strengths.

Continue reading it confidently.

At the same time, recognize changed English honestly.

Consult another trustworthy translation when a familiar word may no longer communicate its older meaning.

Do not assume that unfamiliar modern wording is automatically unfaithful.

What should a new believer do?

Give that person a Bible he or she can understand and will actually read.

The NKJV may be an excellent choice for someone who values the KJV tradition but needs contemporary grammar.

The NIV may serve someone who needs natural contemporary English.

The ESV may serve someone who values a more formal literary style.

The NASB 2020 may serve someone who wants formal correspondence with more current English.

The CSB may provide a strong balance of precision and readability.

The NLT may help a developing reader understand the meaning clearly.

The translation used by the believer's church also matters.

No single answer fits every new believer.

The goal is not to give the easiest possible book.

The goal is to give an understandable and trustworthy Bible that can support growth.

What should we give a child?

Give the child genuine Scripture in understandable language.

The New International Reader's Version, often called the NIrV, was prepared for children and adults who benefit from simpler English.

The NLT can also serve developing readers well.

As children grow, teach them Biblical vocabulary and deeper forms of expression.

Simple language should be a doorway, not a permanent ceiling.

What about a reader with limited English proficiency?

Do not confuse difficulty with spiritual depth.

A simpler contemporary translation may communicate the Biblical meaning more accurately to that reader.

Whenever possible, encourage Scripture in the language that person understands best.

God did not command every nation to learn Early Modern English before hearing His Word.

The Gospel was carried across languages from the beginning.

What role should supplementary translations play?

They can clarify an idiom.

They can preserve a grammatical structure.

They can explain an unfamiliar term.

They can reveal a textual difference.

They can expose an interpretive decision.

They can help a teacher communicate to a different audience.

But supplementary translations have limitations.

Constant switching can weaken memorization.

Comparison can distract us from sustained reading.

We may choose only the wording that supports what we already believe.

Owning many Bibles does not mean that we know the Bible.

Here is a sensible pattern.

Use one trustworthy translation as your primary Bible.

Consult a more formal translation when you need to see structure and repeated terms.

Consult a readable translation when an idiom or long sentence remains unclear.

Use a resource with detailed translation notes when the issue is genuinely disputed.

Read one translation deeply.

Consult several translations carefully.

Submit every conclusion to the whole counsel of God.

Let us give a balanced assessment of the major translations we have discussed.

The KJV is trustworthy, dignified and spiritually sufficient.

It is especially valuable for readers who understand its English and have learned its cadence.

Its limitations include changed English and a New Testament textual base that predates later manuscript discoveries.

The NKJV is trustworthy and provides the most natural bridge for readers who value the KJV tradition but need clearer contemporary English.

It retains the traditional New Testament text while reporting important alternatives in its notes.

The NIV 2011 is a trustworthy general-purpose translation with natural contemporary English.

Its functional decisions can communicate clearly, though interpretation becomes more visible in some passages.

The ESV is a trustworthy and generally more formal translation.

It serves preaching, study and memorization well, though some of its English syntax may be more difficult for developing readers.

The NASB 1995 and NASB 2020 are trustworthy formal translations.

They are especially valuable for detailed study.

The 2020 edition modernizes the English while the 1995 edition remains familiar to many established readers.

The CSB is a credible general-purpose translation that seeks a balance between precision and readability.

The NLT is a genuine committee translation, not merely a paraphrase.

Its meaning-based method serves readability well, though detailed verbal study benefits from comparison with a more formal translation.

The NET Bible is especially valuable as a study companion because its extensive notes explain many decisions.

The NRSVue can be useful for academic comparison and recent textual scholarship.

Conservative readers should examine its inclusive-language policies and broader theological setting just as they should examine the stated commitments of every committee.

Trustworthy does not mean equally strong for every reader, passage or purpose.

We must also recognize warning signs.

Be cautious when a work conceals who produced it.

Be cautious when it refuses to identify its textual basis.

Be cautious when an English translator claims divine inspiration for personal wording.

Be cautious when a group says that only its translation may be examined and all correction is rebellion against God.

Be cautious when distinctive doctrines repeatedly appear in English even though the source text does not require them.

Be cautious when private revelation is offered as translation evidence.

Be cautious when emotionally expanded language goes beyond the source while the work is presented as a direct translation.

Be cautious when a paraphrase quietly assumes the authority of a translation.

A paraphrase can still be useful.

The Message may help someone encounter a familiar passage from a fresh angle.

But it should not ordinarily serve as the primary text for preaching, close study or the formulation of doctrine.

A paraphrase may help us think about Scripture.

It should not quietly replace Scripture as the authority being examined.

After ten studies, what have we learned?

In RTS-100, we learned that the KJV can be trusted as a faithful, authoritative and spiritually sufficient translation.

In RTS-101, we learned that the KJV commonly read today is substantially the translation printed in 1611 but is not identical in every detail.

In RTS-102, we learned that modern translations do not secretly remove verses.

They evaluate and disclose manuscript evidence.

In RTS-103, we learned that the NKJV is more than the KJV with a few old words replaced.

It is a carefully reviewed translation that remains connected to the traditional text.

In RTS-104, we learned that the NIV is a genuine translation even though its method makes interpretation more visible in some passages.

In RTS-105, we learned that different manuscript bases can change particular wording without producing a different Christianity.

In RTS-106, we learned that literalness cannot be measured by how old or formal the English sounds.

In RTS-107, we learned that word-for-word and thought-for-thought describe a spectrum.

In RTS-108, we learned that inclusive wording can preserve the original meaning or obscure an intentional distinction.

Now in RTS-109, we apply those findings.

A Christian should trust a translation that faithfully communicates the Biblical text.

It should be produced through qualified and accountable work.

It should explain its principles.

It should disclose meaningful uncertainty.

Among translations that meet those standards, Christians may choose different primary Bibles according to comprehension, church setting and intended use.

The translation question is important.

But the greatest spiritual danger may not be choosing the wrong translation.

The greatest danger may be defending a Bible we rarely read.

It may be comparing translations without obeying any of them.

It may be attacking another believer's Bible while ignoring what our own Bible says about charity.

First Corinthians chapter 8, verse 1 says:

“Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.”

Knowledge about manuscripts can puff us up.

Knowledge about Greek words can puff us up.

Knowledge about translation committees can puff us up.

The test of Biblical knowledge is not whether I can win an argument.

The test is whether the Word brings me to Christ, corrects my life and equips me for good works.

Paul told Timothy to continue in the things he had learned.

Are you continuing in the Word?

Paul said the Scriptures make us wise unto salvation.

Have you received that salvation?

Paul said Scripture is profitable for doctrine.

Are your beliefs being formed by Scripture or by slogans you inherited?

Paul said Scripture reproves and corrects.

Do you permit the Bible to tell you that you are wrong?

Paul said Scripture instructs us in righteousness.

Are you obeying what is already clear?

The final question is not merely, "Which Bible do I defend?"

The final question is, "Will I read, believe and obey the Word God has placed before me?"

Second Timothy chapter 3, verse 15 says that the holy Scriptures "are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Every trustworthy translation we have examined speaks with a united voice about the Gospel.

All have sinned.

The wages of sin is death.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Christ died for our sins.

He was buried.

He rose again.

Salvation is by grace through faith.

"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

No translation dispute in this series has removed that Gospel.

You can own the most accurate Bible available and still remain unsaved.

You can understand every textual footnote and still refuse to trust Christ.

The Scriptures were given to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ, you can come to Him today.

He died for your sins.

He rose from the dead.

He offers forgiveness and everlasting life.

You cannot earn salvation by church attendance, religious knowledge or good works.

Receive the gift of God by placing your faith in Jesus Christ.

If you are ready to trust Him, you may pray with me now.

The words of a prayer do not save you.

Jesus saves the person who comes to Him in faith.

Let us pray.

Lord God, I know that I am a sinner.

I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins, was buried and rose again.

I ask You to forgive me, save me and make me Your child.

I place my faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Help me to follow You and live according to Your Word.

I ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

If you prayed that prayer and trusted Christ, please speak with me after the service.

We would be honored to pray with you and help you begin reading the Bible.

For every believer, let me close with a simple application.

Choose a trustworthy primary Bible.

Choose one you can understand.

Choose one you will read consistently.

Choose one you can examine honestly.

Then open it.

Read it daily.

Mark the passages that raise questions.

Read the footnotes rather than fearing them.

Consult another trustworthy translation when necessary.

Ask for help when a passage remains difficult.

Do not build doctrine on an isolated disputed phrase.

Do not measure another Christian's faithfulness merely by the letters printed on the cover of that person's Bible.

Psalms 119, verse 105 says:

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

A lamp does not help the person who argues about its design but refuses to walk in its light.

The KJV can be trusted.

Several established modern translations can also be trusted.

They have real differences.

Those differences deserve honest examination.

They do not prove that God has lost His Word.

Choose responsibly.

Read faithfully.

Study carefully.

Obey humbly.

Place your ultimate confidence in God and in the Scripture He inspired.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Aloha Nui Loa.

RTS-109: Which Bible Translation Should a Christian Trust?

Detailed Commentary

Reason Together Church

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Commentary Purpose

This commentary follows the sermon in order and explains the Biblical, textual and pastoral reasoning behind its principal claims. It identifies where the sermon summarizes an earlier study, where a technical distinction must be protected and where the final application moves from translation knowledge to obedience.

The sermon's answer is deliberately neither exclusive nor indiscriminate. Several established translations meet objective standards of trustworthiness, but they do not make identical decisions or serve every reader equally well.

1 Series Introduction

The opening identifies Part Ten as the conclusion without spending too much time retelling the series. Its practical question distinguishes this sermon from the research-focused studies that precede it. The examples of defending one Bible or owning many Bibles expose the possibility that translation interest can replace Bible reading.

The questions about preservation and ordinary access name the fear beneath many translation controversies. The sermon answers that fear before introducing technical criteria.

2 Opening Prayer

The prayer thanks God for inspiration, preservation, translation, preaching and teaching without declaring every human act infallible. Confidence is paired with humility, and discernment is paired with charity. This anticipates the sermon's final warning from First Corinthians 8:1.

The prayer ends in the name of Jesus, consistent with Reason Together Church practice.

3 Second Timothy 3 14 to 17

Second Timothy 3:14-17 controls the sermon. Paul's concern is the divine origin, saving purpose and practical usefulness of Scripture. The passage prevents the sermon from treating Bible selection as a consumer decision detached from salvation and obedience.

The KJV expression thoroughly furnished means completely equipped. The sermon does not pause to explain it because the surrounding lines state the idea in contemporary English.

4 Congregational Elements

The giving note follows the established Reason Together pattern. No plate is passed. Guests are not expected to give. Members of another church are encouraged to give at home. Giving by members of Reason Together Church is voluntary and cheerful. The giving box is identified without pressure.

The guest card asks only for first name and email address. The café invitation includes free coffee, free refills on conversations and the COFFEE explanation. The Keiki Kids Center is named. The transition back to the sermon is brief.

5 Inspiration Transmission Translation and Edition

The four-level distinction is the sermon's theological foundation. Inspiration identifies the divine act associated with Scripture. Transmission concerns the manuscript history. Translation concerns communication across languages. Edition concerns later publishing decisions. A mistake at one human level should not be described as God failing at the divine level.

The comparison with preaching and commentaries helps the congregation understand responsible trust. Christians can rely on faithful human ministry while retaining the Biblical obligation to examine it.

6 The KJV Translators

The description of the 1611 preface is historically important because it prevents modern claims from being projected backward onto the KJV committee. The translators viewed revision and marginal alternatives as compatible with reverence for Scripture.

The sermon affirms RTS-100's approved conclusion. It does not use translator fallibility to weaken the KJV. It uses that distinction to explain how the KJV can be fully trusted without being treated as a newly inspired original.

7 The First Objective Test

The textual-basis section is intentionally short. RTS-102 and RTS-105 already supply the detailed manuscript discussion. The present sermon needs only enough information to show why textual basis belongs on the checklist.

The statement that differences matter avoids minimizing evidence. The statement that they do not create a different Christianity avoids alarmism. The distinction between selecting a Greek reading and translating that reading prevents textual preference from becoming the only criterion.

8 Translator Qualifications and Review

The sermon does not treat degrees or committee size as guarantees. It identifies the distinct abilities required for responsible work. Original-language expertise, textual judgment and clear English are related skills, but they are not identical.

The committee examples are factual descriptions from publisher documentation. They establish accountability mechanisms rather than proving the superiority of a translation.

9 Translation Philosophy

Formal and functional approaches are presented as emphases. The sermon avoids the misleading suggestion that formal translation contains no interpretation or that functional translation ignores words. The spectrum language follows the conclusion of RTS-107.

The pastoral purpose is to prevent listeners from using a marketing category as a verdict. A translation must be evaluated in actual passages.

10 Doctrinal Commitments

Every committee has assumptions and institutional relationships. Disclosure helps the reader interpret difficult decisions. The sermon names the evangelical identity of several committees and the broader setting of the NRSVue without turning those labels into praise or condemnation.

The pattern test is crucial. A single debatable rendering may reflect grammar, context or ordinary judgment. Repeated insertion of an organization's distinctive doctrines is stronger evidence of controlling bias.

11 Transparency

Prefaces and notes are treated as part of responsible Bible use. Many readers have been taught to fear textual notes. The sermon reverses that assumption carefully by explaining that disclosure can demonstrate honesty.

The NET Bible is recommended as a supplementary resource because its notes expose decisions. It is not declared the best primary Bible for every reader.

12 Comprehension

Nehemiah 8:8 directly joins reading with giving the sense and producing understanding. First Corinthians 14:9 concerns intelligible congregational speech rather than translation, so the sermon acknowledges the immediate context before applying the communication principle.

Second Peter 3:16 prevents an oversimplified readability argument. Some difficulty belongs to the inspired content. The list of changed KJV words demonstrates unnecessary modern misunderstanding without ridiculing the KJV or its readers.

13 Objective Criteria and Preference

The sermon protects personal preference after establishing an objective threshold. Cadence, formatting and church use can affect whether someone reads and remembers a Bible. Those matters are legitimate, but they do not establish universal superiority.

The warning about preference becoming pride advances the unifying purpose of the conclusion. It challenges exclusive claims without accusing every person who strongly prefers one version.

14 Romans 3 25

Romans 3:25 demonstrates the relationship between theological vocabulary and immediate comprehension. Propitiation preserves a term with a substantial doctrinal history. Sacrifice of atonement communicates more of the concept to readers who do not know the technical word.

The sermon does not declare one expression unquestionably superior. The point is that accuracy requires examining the Greek expression, Paul's argument and the understanding produced in the English reader.

15 Mark 1 41

The compassion and anger variation provides a compact example of a textual question. The sermon correctly identifies the anger reading as a smaller textual tradition and does not imply that the major translations generally print it.

The example trains listeners to distinguish manuscript differences from alternative translations of the same wording.

16 First Timothy 3 11

The Greek *gyne* can mean woman or wife. Context determines the relational sense. The verse is therefore useful for showing how translation and interpretation remain connected even in the absence of a textual variant.

The sermon refuses to settle the larger question of women and church office because that subject would distract from the translation method and require a separate Biblical study.

17 Psalm 1 1

Psalm 1:1 connects the final study with RTS-108. The broad application plainly includes women, but the individual masculine form may have literary and canonical importance. The example reinforces the rule that inclusive meaning and masculine form must both be considered.

18 The Seven Step Comparison Method

The seven steps move from the easiest discipline to increasingly specialized help. Reading context and notes comes before using lexicons. This order prevents technical tools from detaching words from sentences and arguments.

The warning against counting translations as votes is essential. English versions are not independent manuscript witnesses. The warning about interlinears also corrects the assumption that a gloss eliminates interpretation.

19 Doctrine and Disputed Passages

The sermon neither says that no variant matters nor suggests that doctrine is unstable. A sentence-level difference can matter greatly in exposition. Essential doctrine remains secure because Biblical doctrine rests on cumulative testimony.

First John 5:7 and John 1:18 are named because they are frequently used in public translation debates. The sermon does not attempt to repeat their full textual histories.

20 The Primary Bible

The category of a primary Bible is the sermon's most practical contribution. Stability encourages memorization, recognition and sustained reading. The recommendation prevents translation comparison from becoming endless consumer choice.

Church use is a legitimate consideration because believers hear Scripture communally. It remains one consideration rather than an absolute requirement.

21 Longtime KJV Readers

The sermon explicitly affirms that informed KJV readers need not change translations. This honors the approved conclusion of RTS-100 and avoids treating contemporary language as a spiritual advancement.

The call to recognize changed English is equally important. Supplementary comparison serves understanding without demanding abandonment of a familiar primary Bible.

22 New Believers Children and Developing English Readers

Recommendations are conditional because comprehension, church setting and reading development differ. The NKJV, NIV, ESV, NASB 2020, CSB and NLT all meet a credible threshold while emphasizing different strengths.

The NIrV is mentioned for its intended audience. The statement about using Scripture in the strongest language reflects the missionary purpose of translation and avoids treating one historical form of English as spiritually necessary.

23 Supplementary Translations

The sermon gives supplementary versions a defined role. Formal comparison, readable comparison and translators' notes answer different questions. The pattern is a recommendation rather than a required collection.

The limitations section protects memorization and sustained context. It also warns against choosing whichever English wording supports a prior conclusion.

24 Balanced Translation Assessments

Each description states a strength, a limitation and a likely use. The KJV is affirmed without exclusivity. The NKJV is described as the strongest bridge to contemporary English within the traditional-text tradition. The NIV is valued for natural general use. The ESV and NASB are valued for formal correspondence.

The CSB, NLT, NET and NRSVue expand the comparison without turning the sermon into a catalog. The NLT is correctly identified as a committee translation. The NRSVue is discussed with awareness of its stated policies rather than by attributing hidden motives.

25 Warning Signs

The warnings focus on process and observable patterns: secrecy, undocumented authority claims, doctrinal insertion, private revelation and mislabeling. A single translator or paraphrase is not condemned automatically.

The Message is presented as potentially useful reflection rather than a primary doctrinal authority. This distinction is pastoral and avoids a needless attack on readers who have benefited from it.

26 Series Recapitulation

The nine-study recap uses one conclusion from each preceding study. It should be delivered steadily rather than dramatically. Its purpose is to show that RTS-109 rests on the accumulated work of the series while offering a new application.

The governing decision framework follows immediately so listeners understand what the series changes in practice.

27 Knowledge Charity and Obedience

First Corinthians 8:1 turns the sermon from evaluation to self-examination. Knowledge about translation can become a source of pride. Charity and obedience are not substitutes for truth, but they are Biblical tests of how truth is being used.

The questions drawn from Second Timothy 3 follow Paul's own categories: salvation, doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction and good works.

28 Gospel Invitation

Second Timothy 3:15 supplies the bridge to the Gospel. The sermon emphasizes the agreement of trustworthy translations on the cumulative Biblical witness to sin, Christ's deity, His death, His burial, His resurrection and salvation by grace through faith.

The invitation distinguishes owning or understanding a Bible from trusting the Savior revealed in it. The prayer confesses sin, affirms the death and resurrection of Jesus and places faith in Christ alone. It ends in the name of Jesus.

29 Closing Application

The paragraphs after Amen preserve the Reason Together pattern. They direct believers to select, read, mark and examine a primary Bible. The instruction not to build doctrine on an isolated disputed phrase summarizes the responsible comparison method.

Psalms 119:105 supplies the final image. The lamp illustration moves the sermon from argument about translation to obedience. The closing affirms the KJV, acknowledges trustworthy modern translations, preserves real differences and denies that those differences prove God lost His Word.

The final lines return to the church tagline and Aloha Nui Loa. The sermon therefore travels from Aloha to Aloha and ends with a practical commitment to Scripture.