

Friday, February 2, 2024,

Hello family & friends of AHPC,

People have often asked me for recommendations in purchasing a bible for themselves, their children or as a gift to someone. They have also wondered what version or translation of the bible is best.

Even though the King James version of the bible produced in 1611 was a masterful work of translation and poetic literary style, there are far more accurate translations of the bible that have been produced in the past 50 years. Scholars today have access to many more manuscripts of the original Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) versions to work with and many more scholars collaborate together globally to achieve this. English translators from all over the world work together to produce translations for every purpose and age group. Some are written with language accessible to children or younger persons, some aim for accuracy more than popular readability and some are written to draw in first time readers.

One of the most popular translations prepared by a scholar/pastor named Eugene Peterson is called "The Message". But this is more a paraphrase than a translation, making the bible contemporary and more an interpretation than a translation. If it draws in people and makes the bible relevant, it achieves its purpose. Others are intended for everyday readability and accessibility like the Common English Version or the New Living Translation. Roman Catholics have their own translation: The Jerusalem Bible. Evangelicals prefer the New International Version (NIV) and Mainline Protestants like us Presbyterians prefer the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). All of these are carefully done with scholarly integrity and the preference of one over the other is simply that: preference.

Finally, should the bible be read by an individual without any guidance in interpretation? Before the 16th century in Europe, the bible was written primarily in Latin and read and interpreted by church leaders alone. What they said and taught was in the bible was it. The Protestant Reformation was all about translating the bible into the language of the people and making the bible available for all people to have for themselves (the invention of the printing press made this possible). But this also led not only to people questioning official church teaching (which was a good thing), but also to various groups and denominations all interpreting the bible in their own way. Authority was diversified (a good thing), but freedom to be different also led to schism and conflict with some devastating consequences as well, especially in Europe.

So then, what's the answer? As Presbyterians we believe the bible should be in every person's hands, and we encourage people to read and reflect on the bible for themselves. God speaks into the hearts and minds of each and every person who opens themselves up in prayer to God

for guidance. At the same time, reading ancient scripture without historical knowledge, context and a broader community of insight and wisdom is ignorant, arrogant, lazy, and bound to lead to misinterpretation. And so, we Presbyterians prize deep scholarship from multiple sources to support the wisdom and truth of scripture speaking to the heart of every individual and within a tradition and community of faith.

What do you think?