

A Little Bit of Greek

Session 7: The NIV, ESV, and Greek NT

In person at Wai 'alae Baptist Church

Online via Zoom:

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Translation involves interpretation. We cannot move from one language to another without it. There many different English translations of the New Testament, but they can largely be categorized as one of two types:

- Formal (think about shape, not your senior prom)
- Dynamic

Formal follows the “form” of the Greek as much as possible. Dynamic follows the form but is more likely to stray from it to make it more understandable. Look at these idiomatic sayings from different groups.

ARMENIAN/TURKISH Stop ironing my head. *Stop annoying me.*

CHEYENNE Are you still riding the goat? *Are you still separated from your spouse?*

CZECH To walk around hot porridge *to beat around the bush*

DUTCH Smoke like a heretic. *Smoke like a chimney.*

DUTCH I sweat carrots. *I'm sweating like a pig.*

KOREAN It's a carrot. *It's obvious.*

Note how if you keep some of them literal, they will have little meaning in English. Note also that some of the idioms are translated into English idiom. Which is the best way to translate?

Smoke like a heretic.

Smoke like a chimney.

Smoke a lot.

In each, what is lost and what is gained?

All translation theories try to do the same thing – translate Greek into English that is faithful to the Greek text and the meaning of the text.

Let's look at some of the passages where the ESV and NIV differ.

John 17:4

“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” NIV

“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.” ESV

⁴ ἐγὼ σε ἐδόξασα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὸ ἔργον τελειώσας ὃ δέδωκάς μοι ἵνα ποιήσω.

I have brought you glory

I glorified you

ἐγὼ σε ἐδόξασα

The NIV uses a different tense from the Greek – perfect tense rather than aorist.

Is the difference in wording significant?

John 17:11

¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. NIV

¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

¹¹ καὶ οὐκέτι εἰμὶ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ εἰσὶν, κἀγὼ πρὸς σὲ ἔρχομαι. πάτερ ἅγιε, τήρησον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου ᾧ δέδωκάς μοι, ἵνα ὥσιν ἕν καθὼς ἡμεῖς.

The Greek literally is “in your name,” but as we learned, prepositions can have a wide range of meanings in any language. What does the NIV have to do to use the word “by” instead of “in” and does this change the meaning of the verse?

John 17:20

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.” NIV

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.” ESV

Οὐ περὶ τούτων δὲ ἐρωτῶ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν εἰς ἐμέ,

The NIV adds the words “my prayer” and “pray” although it is not in the Greek. Why do you think the translators did so?

Do these differences change the meaning of the text?

John 17:26

I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” NIV

I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” ESV

καὶ ἐγνώρισα αὐτοῖς τὸ ὄνομά σου καὶ γνωρίσω, ἵνα ἡ ἀγάπη ἣν ἠγάπησάς με ἐν αὐτοῖς ἢ κἀγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς.

How could the loss of “your name” affect how people interpret this verse? What does this tell us about the name of God?

Ephesians 6:18

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” NIV

“Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.” ESV

διὰ πάσης προσευχῆς καὶ δεήσεως, προσευχόμενοι ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ ἐν πνεύματι, καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ ἀγρυπνοῦντες ἐν πάσῃ προσκατερήσει καὶ δεήσει περὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων,

The word for “pray” is a participle.

The word translated “occasions” or “times” is the word καιρῷ.

The word translated “keep alert” or “be alert” is a participle.

The word translated “Lord’s people” or “the saints” is the word often translated “holy.”

Do the differences have a significant impact on the meaning? If so, what is it?

Philippians 2:7-8

rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι ἐύρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος ⁸ ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ·

What are the main differences here and what potential problems could arise with “made himself nothing” and “in appearance as a man”?

Colossians 1:18

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. NIV

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ESV

καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας· ὃς ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων,

What does the seemingly inconsequential addition of “and” do to the NIV that is not seen in the ESV or Greek?

1 John 3:8

“The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.” NIV

“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” ESV

⁸ ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν, ὅτι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ὁ διάβολος ἁμαρτάνει. εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου.

The Greek literally reads “The one doing sin.” The verb is a participle. What is the difference between the two English translations?

Romans 3:20

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.” NIV

“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” ESV

διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας.

The first difference centers on the addition of the word “declared.” What is the difference between “will be justified” and “will be declared righteous”?

The last part of the verse is actually three nouns side by side. νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας.

Literally – law/knowledge/sin

If we add the sense of the genitive of law/knowledge/of sin

The verb is implied, which always makes it more challenging for non-native speakers. Do you see any difference between “become conscious of sin” and “comes knowledge of sin”?

1 John 4:16

“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” NIV

“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” ESV

¹⁶ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐγνώκαμεν καὶ πεπιστεύκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχει ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν.

Ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ θεῷ μένει καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει.

Is there a difference between “rely” and “believe” or are they synonymous?