

Philemon's consent (verses 13–14). However, Paul was indirectly hinting at the possibility that Philemon would set Onesimus free so that Onesimus could return to Paul and help him. "I am sure, as I write this, that you will do what I ask—in fact I know that you will do *even more*." (Verse 21—italics are mine).

Lastly, Paul was hoping that God would answer the prayers of the believers that he would be set free from prison and be sent back to them. Therefore, Paul requested that a room be made ready for him for his coming visit (verse 22).

Result

After hearing a presentation on the story line, our translators were able to see the overall picture of the contents of the letter. They were then able to make the necessary changes and adjustments so the letter could be translated meaningfully. And when the translation was tested by reading it aloud, the reaction of listeners to it was that it sounded like a natural spoken message.

From this experience we would recommend that we not only ought to provide translators with a good common language translation model, but also with adequate background information—preferably in story-line form—when we deal with New Testament letters.

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EXPRESSING RELIGIOUS TERMS IN SIMPLE LANGUAGE

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We need to decide a number of things before we actually begin to translate the Bible. One important decision is what level of language to use in general. And in order to make this decision we must know exactly what the version is to be used for, and above all, the readers it is intended for. Are these readers young or old, educated or semi-literate? Do they have a Christian background or not? These questions must be answered before we can decide how much help our readers will need from us, or how much we can take for granted that they will understand.

For the purposes of this article I will assume that we are planning some form of clear and simple language version. What type of reader needs such a version? There are several:

1. In countries with low literacy rates there is a need for a version that is easy enough for a slow reader to grasp. This type of reader is not able to handle longer, more difficult words or terms. It is possible that he also has the added handicap of having little or no previous knowledge of Christianity. Therefore many of the ideas in the Bible may seem strange and hard to understand, even when they are clothed in very simple language.
2. Many countries in Europe have undergone a rapid de-Christianization during the last 20 or 30 years. There is now little or no religion in the home or in the school, let alone regular church attendance. Thus we find educated people whose knowledge of the Bible is almost nothing. They can read well, but they do not understand the peculiar terminology found in the Bible. A

version to suit their needs would not be in simple language throughout, but it would try to make the Biblical technical terms clearer than the traditional more literal versions do. In these countries there are also a large number of marginal readers who find reading books in any form a real struggle. They will need a version which uses simple everyday language throughout and even greater clarification of Biblical terms.

3. Children and youth in our secularized society find the traditional versions of the Bible even more confusing and "foreign" than their parents do. Both the concepts of the Bible and its language are quite beyond their grasp. This has been brought home to me very forcibly by oral tests on the Bible among children from Christian homes and written tests I have given to pupils in both church and secular schools.
4. Another type of reader who would benefit from a version which renders religious terms into clear contemporary language is the regular church goer. He may be able to say all the terms, but often he is not able to understand what they really mean. A simpler language version, which he could use alongside his traditional version would help his own understanding, and also help him to express his convictions in language that non-Christians can understand.

In other words, we are faced with both adults and young people who, because of general difficulty in reading, or a lack of Christian background, need help in understanding what the Bible says. The biggest hurdle for all the types of people mentioned above is the terminology used in the Bible. We who work with the Bible have come to learn and understand these terms over the years. These same terms are new and often misleading to readers who come across them for the first time. All the above readers will need help in understanding these terms, help which should be given within the translation itself rather than in a commentary. And this help is best given by expressing the technical terms which are found in the traditional versions in simple words or phrases.

This does not mean that *one* version will cover the needs of all the types of readers. Far from it. The level of language and the simple treatment of religious terms has to be suited carefully to the needs of each specific group. Common language versions such as the GNB do cover the needs of several types of readers, but by no means all.

Our first step as translators, then, is to accept the fact that our readers today need help with religious terminology. The second step will be to find out *how much* help our particular readers need. Thus we need to have very good knowledge of this group's reading ability, general language level, and how much, or how little, previous knowledge they have of the Bible or Christianity in general.

Making religious terms easy for people today to understand should be a central concern in Bible translation. These terms are often the key to the understanding of whole passages, particularly some of the difficult passages found in the Epistles. So we will need to ask ourselves *which* words or phrases actually are difficult to understand. This is not as easy as it may sound, as we ourselves probably find most terms very clear. We may find that words used in the traditional versions, though still in use today, now have a very different meaning than the Bible writers intended to convey. This is the case with the word

“grace” in English for example. Another pitfall to avoid is that of thinking that words which are in themselves short and simple, such as in the phrase “put on Christ”, are easy to understand without any clarification.

Studying the meaning of Biblical terms

Let us now assume that we have decided that we must express difficult religious terms in simpler words, and that we have at least a general idea of how much clarification will be needed for our intended readership. What we need to do next is to discover for ourselves the *full* meaning, within each context, of the terms we want to express in clearer language. This is one of the translator’s basic tasks. But how can we do this? Are there short clear words in our language which carry all the necessary meaning and which could be used instead of the difficult term? The answer is often No, and therefore it will probably be necessary to use more than one word, and sometimes longer explanatory phrases.

Before we can even start trying to “explain” a Biblical term we need to put down on paper all the elements of meaning that are hidden within it. This kind of study of the components of meaning is of particular value when we are dealing with terms that are closely related in meaning. Careful study of each term will help us see not only what the terms have in common but also what their distinctive meanings are. This type of study will be of help to us as we then try to choose words which give the correct “slant” of each particular term we are working with.

The best way of setting out the different components of meaning in each term is to arrange them in an order starting with the most general components and working down to the most specific. (It should be made very clear at this point that a given term may have some different “components” in another setting, in another passage, and that we therefore can *not* assume that the *same* word or phrase will necessarily be adequate every time the term appears in the original. Examples of this will be given below.)

In order to show how components of meaning can be set out in order we will look at three terms which have quite a bit in common. We will begin by setting out the components of the word “grace”, as used in Eph 2.8.

Grace

1. implies two parties, of which one has a higher position than the other.
2. implies that the party with the higher position has a favourable attitude towards the lower party.
3. implies that the higher party takes/has taken action to help the lower party in some way.
4. implies that this favourable attitude and this action is of benefit to the lower party.
5. implies that the lower party does not deserve, or cannot earn, this favourable attitude or this help—it is a pure gift.

These same components could also be used to cover the meaning of the terms “redeem”, and “make righteous” (or “justify” in the Pauline sense). With five identical components for all these words it might seem that they all have the same meaning. But we know that this is not so. Our next step, then, is to

continue to those components which will help us to discover where the differences lie, and what is characteristic for each of these terms. It is not until we are fully aware of what these words, and others like them, have in common and yet how they differ, that we can begin to translate them correctly and clearly. Let us now look at further components of these words, components which we could add to the above and which will highlight the differences between these words:

grace: God's loving attitude towards man.

redeem: the basic meaning is to set free or buy back by paying a ransom—to free from physical or spiritual bondage.

make righteous: bring into a right relationship with God. God himself does this.

Simple language to express the meaning

Once we have studied the terms like this we are faced with the next problem, that of finding a simple, clear word or phrase which will convey as much as possible of the meaning of each term. We may choose very simple words, or more literary but modern words, depending on the need of our readers, or on how clear the word is made by its context. We can also choose to use short descriptive phrases to convey the meaning of a term, phrases which can be tailor-made to suit the meaning in each particular context.

Let us now look at some of the possibilities there are for translating these three terms into simpler non-technical words or phrases. In so doing we will see how some modern translators of the Bible into English have rendered these particular terms. We will also note how words or descriptive phrases can be altered to fit different contexts, so as to make the meaning clear in each setting. We will start with the word "redeem". We have already seen above the main components of meaning of this word which is always translated in the same way in the more formal translations, even though there are places where the original Greek word is different, as in Gal 3.13 "redeemed from the curse of the law" (RSV). The Greek verb used here is that of "buying back" and therefore a translation which tries to avoid abstract technical terms should choose a verb which implies buying in some form. Several versions into simple English put "bought us" (La, Cr) while Ledyard wants his readers to understand what is implicit here, namely *how* Christ "buys", and he therefore writes "bought us with his blood and made us free". In another context, Eph 4.30, "sealed for the day of redemption" (RSV), the component of "loosening" or "setting free" comes into focus. Some examples of translations of this phrase are: "day of deliverance" (Ba), "day you will be set free" (Be, Le). The GNB makes explicit *who* does the freeing and writes "Day . . . when God will set you free." Heb 9.15, "a death has occurred which redeems them" (RSV), appears in a context where the method of redeeming is explained in the foregoing sentences (by the shedding of blood) and some translators have here tried to stress the further aspect of "redeem", namely "to pay the price" and "to rescue". Cressman uses short words here: "he died and paid for the bad things that were done". Beck uses both the idea of paying and rescuing: "paid the ransom to free people from the sins . . .". Laubach writes "pays the price to deliver us" while in Barclay we find: "a death has occurred—the death of Christ—as a result of which men have been rescued from their sins."

Another group of terms which needs clarification is "righteous", "make righteous (justify)" and "righteousness". These terms also have several components of meaning and these will need to be reflected in the various contexts in which they appear. We will look at three such contexts. Firstly, Rom 4.6 "So David pronounced a blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works" (RSV). The whole context here in Rom 4 stresses the idea of God's gracious acceptance of man. Some renderings of this phrase are "the man whom God accepts apart from anything he has done" (TT), "the person whom God accepts as righteous" (GNB). In Rom 6 Paul stresses a slightly different aspect of righteousness, namely "goodness", "right doing". We can take Rom 6.13 "Yield your members to God as instruments of righteousness" (RSV) as an example of how some translators have tried to reflect this aspect: "Offer . . . your whole body as an instrument of goodness" (TT), "use your organs as tools for doing what is right" (Be), ". . . as weapons in the hand of all that is right" (Ba). Some translators try to make clear that this goodness comes about by the giving of oneself to God and not by mere human efforts: "Put yourselves in God's hands as weapons of good for his own purposes" (Ph), "tools in the hands of God, to be used for his good purposes" (GNB), or the more simple "give your bodies to God to be used to do good things" (Cr). Another aspect of "righteousness" is found in Rom 10.6 "the righteousness based on faith" (RSV) where the concept of a right relationship with God is in focus. A few examples of translations which try to bring this out here are: "the right relationship [with God] which comes from faith" (TT), "the right relationship which comes through faith" (Ba) and "being put right with God through faith" (GNB).

As was mentioned earlier, the word "grace" may seem clear, but few people today understand it in the sense in which the Bible uses it. Quite a number of recent translations into English therefore try to give a descriptive phrase for it instead, at least in passages where the context does not make the meaning of "grace" clear. Rom 4.16 in the RSV reads: "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace". Here "grace" is used to depict God's loving attitude toward man. Various attempts to render this in a descriptive phrase are "his loving favour" (Le), "his forgiving love" (La), or phrases which bring out the fact that this "grace" is a gift: "a gift of God's love" (Be), or the rather vaguer "God's free gift" (GNB). For the word "grace" in Rom 5.2 "Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand" (RSV), the same phrases cannot be used. Here it is a question of a position of favour in the eyes of God: "into this favour wherein we stand" (Ro), "the sphere of God's favour" (TT), or the more vague "the highest place of privilege" (Ta), or the somewhat misleading "the place where God blesses us" (Cr) are some of the renderings of "grace" in this context.

The above examples show us that it is possible to find clear words or phrases to convey the meaning of even profound technical terms. We have also seen how the words and phrases chosen to "explain" a technical term will need to vary at times in order to give the best expression of the meaning in each context in which the term appears. In other words, instead of trying to construct one long phrase that would incorporate all the components of meaning, and repeating this long and cumbersome phrase, shorter phrases which can vary accord-

ing to the needs of the context, will help the reader to get a full picture of what is being said. We can take the word "redeem" as an example. To get all the meanings of this word into one descriptive phrase we would end up with something like this: "to pay the price for undeserving sinful people, by means of Christ's death on the cross, so as to free them from the bondage of sin and death". A phrase this long cannot be worked with. Instead we choose to use a short word or phrase which highlights the elements of meaning in focus in each context, for example, "buying back", "paying the price", "freeing", as was shown above. At times an added phrase may be necessary to explain *how* or *by whom*, for example, if this is not clear from the context. Such a translation, clear at every point, putting hidden meaning into words where necessary, will speak straight to both the heart and intellect of people, even to those for whom the Bible is a totally new book.

Conclusion

To sum up: Before we start on any translation we need to know exactly the abilities and/or limitations of our prospective readers. Secondly, we must be perfectly clear in our minds about the full meaning of the terms we are dealing with, and the best way to discover this is through the use of a study of the components of meaning. This is not the end of the matter, however. We still need to study each context of a given term if we are to give the components of meaning that need to be brought out in each. Context will also determine how much or how little of the full range of meaning we need to include in order for the reader to comprehend the meaning correctly. Then, as our work progresses, we need to try out the harder passages on the readers we are working for, so as to find out if they can understand what we are trying to put across. We also have to make sure that our expanded phrases are not so vague that they can have several meanings, some of which may be highly misleading. God wants his message to be understood by all. He will help us to make a translation that is clear for the readership He has sent us to work for.

Explanation of abbreviations of versions quoted:

- Ba: William Barclay, *The NT, Volume 2, The Epistles and the Revelation*
 Be: William Beck, *The Holy Bible: An American Translation*
 Con: W. J. Conybeare, *The Epistles of Paul*
 Cr: Annie Cressman, *The NT in Worldwide English*
 GNB: *Good News Bible: Today's English Version* (British edition)
 La: Frank C. Laubach *Inspired Letters of the NT in Clearest English*
 Le: Gleason Ledyard, *The Children's NT*
 NEB: *The New English Bible*
 Ph: J. B. Phillips, *The NT in Modern English* (revised)
 RSV: *The Revised Standard Version* (1952)
 Ta: Kenneth Taylor, *The Living Bible* (British edition)
 TT: *The Translators NT*
 Wa: Arthur Way, *Letters of St. Paul to 7 Churches and 3 Friends*
 Wms: Charles B. Williams *The NT: A Translation in the Language of the People*
 AV: 1611 *Authorized Version* (King James Version)