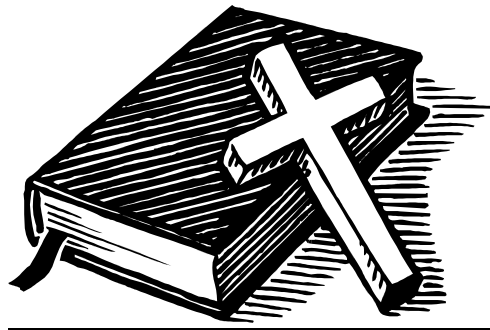


**Portage Avenue Baptist Church:**

A Statement Regarding the Use of Bible Versions



## **I. The History of the English Bible**

The first hand-written English language Bible manuscripts were produced in the 1380's AD by John Wycliffe, an Oxford professor, scholar, and theologian. With the help of his followers, called the Lollards, and his assistant, and many other faithful scribes, Wycliffe produced dozens of English language manuscript copies of the Scriptures. They were translated out of the Latin Vulgate, which was the only source text available to Wycliffe.

One of Wycliffe's followers, John Hus, actively promoted Wycliffe's ideas: that people should be permitted to read the Bible in their own language. He also opposed the Roman Catholic Church's position that threatened anyone possessing a non-Latin Bible with execution. Hus was burned at the stake in 1415, with Wycliffe's manuscript Bibles used as kindling for the fire.

In 1516, the scholar Erasmus published a Greek-Latin New Testament from a half-dozen partial Greek New Testament manuscripts he had acquired. It was the first non-Latin New Testament to ever be printed on the printing press, which Johann Gutenberg had invented in the 1450's.

William Tyndale wanted to use the same 1516 Erasmus Greek text as a source to translate and print the New Testament in English. He was forced to flee England because he was going to be arrested for translating the Bible into English. He traveled to Germany to be with Martin Luther and in 1525 the Tyndale New Testament became the first printed edition of the Scriptures in the English language. They were confiscated and burned by the church authorities but copies trickled into England. The penalty of possessing a copy was death by burning. Eventually, Tyndale himself was arrested, strangled, and burned at the stake in 1536. His dying words were, "Oh, Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Myles Coverdale and John "Thomas Matthew" Rogers were loyal disciples of William Tyndale and they carried the English Bible project forward after Tyndale's death. Myles Coverdale finished translating the Old Testament. In 1535, he printed the first complete Bible in the English language, and it is known as the Coverdale Bible. He had used Martin Luther's German Bible and Latin as his sources.

In 1537, John Rogers printed the second complete English Bible. It was, however, the first English Bible translated from the original Biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek. He printed it under the pseudonym, Thomas Matthew, since it was still illegal to print Bibles in English. It is commonly known as the Matthew – Tyndale Bible.

In 1539, Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, hired Myles Coverdale at the request of King Henry VIII to publish the Great Bible. It became the first English Bible authorized for public use and it was distributed to every church and chained to the pulpit. God had answered William Tyndale's dying prayer three years after his death! In 1555, John Rogers and Thomas Cranmer were burned at the stake by Mary, the ruling Queen of England in her desire to eliminate all Protestants from England.

In the 1550's, the church at Geneva, Switzerland, was very sympathetic to the reformer refugees and was one of only a few safe havens for the desperate people. Many of them met in Geneva, led by Myles Coverdale and John Foxe. There the church of Geneva determined to produce a Bible that would educate their families while they continued in exile.

The New Testament was completed in 1557, and the complete Bible was first published in 1560. It became known as the Geneva Bible. This Bible was the first Bible to add numbered verses to the chapters. Every chapter was also accompanied by extensive marginal notes and references so that it is also considered the first English "Study Bible." The Geneva Bible became the most popular Bible for over 100 years for English

speaking Christians. The Geneva Bible holds the honor of being the first Bible taken to America and it was the Bible of the Puritans and the Pilgrims. It was more popular than the King James Bible for many years.

After the reign of Mary, Queen Elizabeth I allowed the printing of the Geneva Bible. The marginal notes did not rest well with the rulers of the day and another version was desired. In 1568, a revision of the Great Bible was published and was known as the Bishop's Bible but never gained much of a foothold in popularity among the people. In 1582, the Catholic Church published an English translation of the Latin Vulgate called the Rheims New Testament. In 1589, the Catholic Church published a complete English Bible called the Douay/Rheims Version.

With the death of Queen Elizabeth, James VI of Scotland became King James I of England. The Protestant clergy approached the new king in 1604 and announced their desire for a new translation to replace the Bishop's Bible. Though the Geneva Bible was very popular with the people of England, the clergy did not want the marginal notes. They desired a Bible for the people with scriptural references only for word clarification or cross reference.

The King James Bible was the result of the combined effort of about fifty scholars. They took into consideration The Tyndale New Testament, The Coverdale Bible, The Matthews Bible, The Great Bible, The Geneva Bible and The Rheims New Testament. From 1605 to 1606, the scholars engaged in private research. From 1607 to 1609, the work was assembled. In 1610, the work went to press and in 1611, the first pages came off the printing press. The First Edition was a huge pulpit-sized Bible and was printed and chained to every church pulpit in England. In 1612, they began to print the earliest normal size King James Bibles for individuals to own.

The King James Bible is textually 95% the same as the Geneva Bible. It is the most printed book in the history of the world and the only book with one billion copies in print. For over 250 years, it reigned without much of a rival until the English Revised Version of 1881. For the last 200 years, almost all of the King James Bibles published in America are actually the 1769 Baskerville version that updated the spelling and wording. The first English language Bible to be printed in America was the King James Bible in 1782.

In 1885, the English Revised Version was published in England as a replacement for the King James Bible and it did gain widespread popularity. In 1901, the American Standard Version was published in America and was nearly identical to the English Revised Version. In 1971, the American Standard Version was revised and called the New American Standard Version Bible. It is the most popular version among theologians, professors, scholars, and seminary students. It is a word-for-word translation but does not flow as easily in conversational English.

In 1973, the New International Version was produced. It was designed not for a word-for-word translation but for a phrase-for-phrase translation with the ease of reading at a Junior High School level. It was meant to help and appeal to a broader cross-section of the general public. It has become the best selling modern English translation of the Bible.

In 1982, Thomas Nelson Publishers produced the New King James Version. The intent was to keep the basic wording of the King James Version while changing the most obscure words and the Elizabethan pronouns of "thee", "thy" and "thou."

In 2002, a major attempt was made to bridge the gap between the simple readability of the N.I.V. and scholarly N.A.S.B. That translation was called the English Standard Version and it is gaining popularity for its readability and scholarliness.

In 2005, the First Edition of the New English Translation was made available. The NET Bible, like the NIV, is a completely new translation and not a revision of former versions of the Bible. It is the work of over twenty biblical scholars who used the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek manuscripts. It is sponsored by the Biblical Studies Foundation.

## **II. Excerpts From The Preface To The 1611 King James Version As To Why The Translators Produced Another English Version**

### **The Translators To The Reader**

#### **The Best Things Have Been Calumniated**

[Calumniate = Making false statements about a person, intending to hurt their reputation]

“Zeal to promote the common good, whether it be by devising anything ourselves, or revising that which hath been laboured by others, deserveth certainly much respect and esteem, but yet findeth but cold entertainment in the world. It is welcomed with suspicion instead of love, and with emulation instead of thanks: and if there by any hole left for cavil [to raise trivial objections] to enter, (and cavil, if it do not find a hole, will make one) it is sure to be misconstrued, and in danger to be condemned. This will easily be granted by as many as know story, or have any experience. For, was there ever any-projected, that savoured any way of newness or renewing, but the same endured many a storm of gainsaying, or opposition?”

#### **His Majesty’s Constancy, Notwithstanding Culmination, For The Survey Of The English Translations**

“This, and more to this purpose, His Majesty that now reigneth (and long, and long may he reign, and his offspring forever, Himself and children, and children’s always) knew full well, according to the singular wisdom given unto him by God, and the rare learning and experience that he hath attained unto; namely that whosoever attempteth anything for the public (especially if it pertain to Religion, and to the opening and clearing of the word of God) the same setteth himself upon a stage to be gloated upon by every evil eye, yea, he casteth himself headlong upon pikes, to be gored by every sharp tongue. For he that medleth with men’s Religion in any part, medleth with their custom, nay, with their freehold; and though they find no content in that which they have, yet they cannot abide to hear of altering.”

#### **Translation Necessary**

“But how shall men meditate in that, which they cannot understand? How shall they understand that which is kept close in an unknown tongue?.....Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most Holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water, even as Jacob rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which means the flocks of Laban were watered (Gen. 29:10). Indeed without translation into the vulgar [common] tongue, the unlearned are but like children at Jacob’s well (which is deep) (John 4:11) without a bucket or something to draw with; or as that person mentioned by Isaiah, to whom when a sealed book was delivered, with this motion, “Read this, I pray thee,” he was fain to make this answer, “I cannot, for it is sealed.” (Isa. 29:11)”

## **The Speeches And Reasons, Both Of Our Brethren, And Of Our Adversaries Against This Work**

“Many men’s mouths have been open a good while (and yet are not stopped) with speeches about the Translation so long in hand, or rather perusals of Translations made before: and ask what may be the reason, what the necessity of the employment: Hath the Church been deceived, say they, all this while?.....Was their Translation good before? Why do they now mend it? Was it not good?.....We will answer them both briefly: and the former, being brethren, this, with S. Jerome,.....’Do we condemn the ancient? In no case: but after the endeavors of them that were before us, we take the best pains we can in the house of God.’ As if he said, Being provoked by the example of the learned men that lived before my time, I have thought it my duty, to assay whether my talent in the knowledge of the tongues, may be profitable in any measure to God’s Church, lest I should seem to laboured in them in vain, and lest I should be thought to glory in men, (although ancient,) above that which was in them. Thus S. Jerome may be thought to speak.”

### **A Satisfaction To Our Brethren**

“And to the same effect say we, that we are so far off from condemning any of their labors that travailed before us in this kind, either in this land or beyond the sea, either in King Henry’s time, or King Edward’s (if there were any translation, or correction of a translation in his time) or Queen Elizabeth’s of ever renowned memory, that we acknowledge them to have been raised up of God, for the building and furnishing of his Church, and that they deserve to be had of us and of posterity in everlasting remembrance.....Therefore blessed be they, and most honoured be their name, that break the ice, and giveth onset upon that which helpeth forward to the saving of souls. Now what can be more available thereto, than to deliver God’s book unto God’s people in a tongue which they understand? Since of a hidden treasure, and of a fountain that is sealed, there is no profit,.....Yet for all that, as nothing is begun and perfected at the same time, and the later thoughts are thought to be the wiser: so, if we building upon their foundation that went before us, and being holpen by their labours, do endeavor to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us; they, we persuade ourselves, if they were alive, would thank us.....Therefore let no man’s eye be evil, because his Majesty’s is good; neither let any be grieved, that we have a Prince that seeketh the increase of the spiritual wealth of Israel (let Sanballats and Tobiahs do so, which therefore do bear their just reproof) but let us rather bless God from the ground of our heart, for working this religious care in him, to have the translations of the Bible maturely considered of and examined. For by this means it cometh to pass, that whatsoever is sound already.....the same will shine as gold more brightly, being rubbed and polished; also, if anything be halting, or superfluous, or not so agreeable to the original, the same may be corrected, and the truth set in place.”

### **An Answer To The Imputations Of Our Adversaries**

“Now to the later we answer; that we do not deny, nay we affirm and avow, that the very meanest translation of the Bible in English, set forth by men of our profession,.....containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God. As the King’s speech, which he uttereth in Parliament, being translated into French, Dutch, Italian, and Latin, is still the King’s speech, though it be not interpreted by every Translator with the like grace, nor peradventure so fitly for phrase, nor so expressly for sense, everywhere.....No cause therefore why the word translated should be denied to be the word, or forbidden to be current, notwithstanding that some imperfections and blemishes may be noted in the setting forth of it.”

### **The Purpose Of The Translators, With Their Number, Furniture, Care, Etc.**

“But it is high time to leave them, and to show in brief what we proposed to ourselves, and what course we held in this our perusal and survey of the Bible. Truly (good Christian Reader) we never thought from the beginning, that we should need to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one,.....but to

make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against; that hath been our endeavor, that our mark.”

### **III. Reasons Why People Are Changing From The King James Version To Other Translations**

Why do we need another Bible when we have the King James Version? The King James Bible was written in common and current language in 1611 but our language has changed much since then. It is no longer as current as it was originally.

#### **Spelling Changes Since 1611**

The following are a few verses in the original 1611 KJV that demonstrate the changes in spelling:

S. Iohn 3:16 – “For God so loued y world, that he gaue his only begotten Sonne: that whosoeuer beleeueth in him, should not perish, but haue euerlasting life.”

Paul the Apottle to the Theffalonians 5:15 – “See that none render euill for euill vnto any man: but euer follow that which is good, both among your selues and to all men.”

II Timothie 4:8 – “Hencefoorth there is layde vp for me a crowne of righteousnesse, which the Lord the righteous iudge shall giue me at that day: and not to me only, but vnto them also that loue his appearing.”

I Timothie 3:6 – “Not a nouice, lest being lifted vp with pride, hee fall into the condemnation of the deuill.”

#### **Word Definition Changes Since 1611**

Over 300 words in the King James Bible no longer have the same meaning that they did in 1611. Here are few of those changes:

Matthew 19:14 – “But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

In 1611, “suffer,” meant, “to allow or permit” but now it means, “to undergo something painful.”

2 Timothy 2:15 – “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

In 1611, “study” meant, “to be eager or diligent” but now it means, “to apply the mind in order to acquire knowledge.”

1 Thessalonians 4:15 – “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.”

In 1611, “prevent,” meant, “to precede or go before” but now it means, “to stop or keep from doing something.”

#### **Words and Phrases No Longer Used**

A number of words that were common in 1611 are no longer common today. Following is a brief sample:

“ceiled” – Haggai 1:4 = paneled

(Haggai 1:4) “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?”

“clouted” – Joshua 9:5 = patched

(Joshua 9:5) “And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy.”

“cotes” – 2 Chronicles 32:28 = a small shed or shelter

(2Chronicles 32:28) “Storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks.”

“brigandines” – Jeremiah 46:4 = armor

(Jeremiah 46:4) “Harness the horses; and get up, ye horsemen, and stand forth with your helmets; furbish the spears, and put on the brigandines.”

“wen” – Leviticus 22:22 = a skin tumor or skin ulcer

(Leviticus 22:22) “Blind, or broken, or maimed, or having a wen, or scurvy, or scabbed, ye shall not offer these unto the LORD, nor make an offering by fire of them upon the altar unto the LORD.”

“a going” – 2 Samuel 5:24 = the sound of marching

(2 Samuel 5:24) “And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines.”

For the last 200 years, almost all of the King James Bibles published in America are actually the 1769 Baskerville version that updated the spelling and wording.

The King James Bible is used and loved by many Christians. It is a good translation and has been used by God in the lives of many people for hundreds of years. It is, however, not the only Word of God. In our day, God has given us the privilege of choosing from a variety of versions. The problem that many people have with the King James Version is its older English; it is harder to understand, so they have changed to a translation with a more common language.

#### **IV. The Reason We Use the English Standard Version**

Historically, our church used the King James Version of the Scriptures as the primary Bible version of our church. We were never King James Bible only but we used it almost exclusively in teaching and preaching, whether it was in Sunday School or the Preaching Services.

The Pastors of the church believe that the time has come for us to change from the King James Version to the English Standard Version as the primary preaching and teaching version of our church. We want to explain why and we want to clarify our policy for teachers and preachers in our church.

We are convinced that God has greatly used the King James Version of the Bible in the English-speaking world for almost 400 years and some will continue to use it for many more years. We thank God for this version.

However, languages change and the English language has changed a great deal since 1611 and even 1789, which is the KJV that we have been using. Currently, there are over 300 words used in the King James Version that have changed their meanings since it was written. Some of those words mean the complete opposite of their original meanings. For instance, 2 Timothy 2:15a (KJV) states: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God.” The word “study” actually means “to be diligent” or “to do your best,” not to “study.” The English Standard Version translates this verse as follows: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved.” We are convinced that the Scriptures must be clear to each generation of readers. The King James Version was clear to 17<sup>th</sup> century readers but is too often unclear to readers today.

Our desire is to follow the principles of speech and language that the Apostle Paul gave to us in 1 Corinthians 14:7-11 – “If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.” (ESV)

Even the translators of the King James Version stated that their reason for their new translation was so that people could have a copy of the Scriptures in their common language – “Now what can be more available thereto, than to deliver God’s book unto God’s people in a tongue which they understand?... Indeed without translation into the vulgar [common] tongue, the unlearned are but like children at Jacob’s well (which is deep) (John 4:11) without a bucket or something to draw with; or as that person mentioned by Isaiah, to whom when a sealed book was delivered, with this motion, “Read this, I pray thee,” he was fain to make this answer, “I cannot, for it is sealed.” (Isa. 29:11)” The translators also stated that they believed that there would be and should be future translations to accomplish these same goals.

We also believe that since 1611, when the King James Version was completed, that many new discoveries have been made in regards to biblical manuscripts, history, archaeology, etc. to help in translating the Scriptures. Thousands of biblical manuscripts have been discovered going back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and we believe that those discoveries will only help us to understand the Scriptures more accurately.

We have decided that we will show our love to new believers and future believers that come into our congregation by making this change now. Some of the people of our church, including the Pastors, have been using the King James Version most of their lives but are willing to make the change to a new version for the current generation of believers and those to come so that they will be able to understand God’s Word more clearly.

Our intention is to make the English Standard Version the primary preaching Bible Version of our church. This means that we will use it most of the time in preaching. But we will also use other translations, including the King James, when we believe that the text that we are going to preach from is translated more accurately in another version. We are also allowing our teachers to use the translation of their choice in teaching their classes, but only if their translation is considered an accurate one by the Pastors.

John Piper (author and Pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota) writes: “I praise God that we have the Bible in English. What a gift! What a treasure! We cannot begin to estimate what this is worth to Christians and churches, and even to the unbelievers and the cultures of the English-speaking world. Ten thousand benefits flow from the influence of this book that we are not even aware of. And the preaching of this Word in tens of thousands of pulpits across America is more important than every media outlet in the nation.

I would rather have people read any translation of the Bible—no matter how weak—than to read no translation of the Bible. If there could be only one translation in English, I would rather it be my least favorite than that there be none. God uses every version to bless people and save people.

But the issue before the church in the English-speaking world today is not "no translation vs. a weak translation." It is between many precious English Bibles. A Bible does not cease to be precious and powerful because its translators overuse paraphrase and put way too much of their own interpretation into the Bible. That's the way God's Word is! It breaks free from poor translations and poor preaching—for which I am very thankful. But even though the weakest translation is precious, and is used by God to save and strengthen sinful people, better translations would be a great blessing to the church and an honor to Christ.”

Bible translations basically fall into two general categories: “free translations” or “paraphrase” (dynamic-equivalence) or “literal translations” (formal-equivalence).

The chief concern of the “free translations” approach is readability. It centers on conveying the thought of the original languages to the reader with the greatest possible clarity and gives little or no attention to obtaining a word-for-word correspondence between the original and the translation. The New International Version (NIV), and the New English Translation (NET) are considered “free translations” while the Living Bible (LB) is considered a “paraphrase.”

A literal translation concerns itself primarily with accuracy or faithfulness to the original text. It seeks as close a match as possible between the elements of the receptor language and those of the source language (word for word translation). The King James Version (KJV), the New King James Version (NKJV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and the English Standard Version (ESV) are considered literal translations.

We believe that a more literal translation is best for studying and preaching the Word of God. We are convinced that it serves best in our goal of expository preaching that gives clear explanation and arguments from the wording of specific Biblical texts.

We believe that the English Standard Version is a literal interpretation of the Scriptures and yet is a beautifully readable and memorizable Bible.

The language in the ESV is more common to our day than the King James Version and it is more readable than the New American Standard Bible. It is the version being used more and more in Bible Colleges and Seminaries. We are convinced that it is the best Bible Version currently available for our goal of teaching, preaching and learning the Scriptures at Portage Avenue Baptist Church. We are not requiring the members of our church to use the ESV, but they are given the freedom to choose any version that they may desire to use.

## **V. A Few Resources for Additional Study**

### **Books:**

1. Robert L. Thomas, *How To Choose A Bible Version (revised)*, (Christian Focus Publications, 2000)
2. James White, *The King James Only Controversy*, (Bethany House Publications, 1995)
3. Rick Norris, *The Unbound Scriptures*, (Unbound Scriptures Publications, 2003)
4. Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, (Moody Press, 1968)

### **Online Articles:**

1. KJV-Onlyism [www.solagrati.org/categories/view/KJVOnlyism](http://www.solagrati.org/categories/view/KJVOnlyism)
2. English Bible History [www.bible.org/series.php?series\\_id=117](http://www.bible.org/series.php?series_id=117)