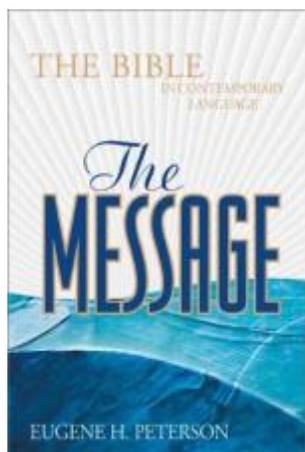


A Brief (and by no means exhaustive) Summary of Passages Contained Within “The Message” by Eugene Peterson Which Directly Compromise Fundamental Tenets of Historical Christianity



What follows is a comparison/contrast and analysis of several well-known passages as found in major translations such as the KJV, NASB, and NIV as well as these same passages as found in *The Message* authored by Eugene Peterson. Any intellectually honest assessment of the following notes leads to the inescapable conclusion that *The Message* compromises some of the fundamental doctrines of historical Christianity.

I began this study when I was made aware that the high school seniors of a church with which I was familiar were given copies of *The Message* as graduation gifts. I did not at the time own a copy of *The Message* nor had I read it. My exposure to it at that point was seeing it cited in other works. I purchased a copy and began to read and study this paraphrase more in-depth. What I discovered stunned me. *The Message* is not only a poor paraphrase, but it is, in fact, heretical.

Matthew 6:9			
New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update	The King James Version	The New International Version	The Message
9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.	9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.	9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.	9 With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this: Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are.

This is a passage from what is commonly referred to as "the Lord's Prayer." There are two problems with Peterson's rendering of this familiar verse. The first is that Peterson includes an imperative from Jesus to the Father that is not in the text. The second, and much more serious, problem is the *nature* of His imperative – **Reveal who you are**. Why would Jesus Christ who *is* the revelation of God (Heb. 1:1-3) ask God to reveal Himself? The Revelation of God is the One Who is praying the prayer! This imperative by Jesus certainly strongly implies that God *has yet* to reveal Himself. I beg to differ. Also, notice the room which is implicitly provided for a later revelation of the antichrist who will, of course, claim to be the revelation of God.

John 10:30			
New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update	The King James Version	The New International Version	The Message
30 "I and the Father are one."	30 I and my Father are one.	30 I and my Father are one.	30 I and the Father are one heart and mind. "

This is another familiar passage. The NASB, NIV, and KJV are all practically identical, save for the insertion of a personal pronoun found in the latter. Not so *The Message's* rendering. *The Message* denigrates the uniqueness and deity of Jesus. Let us remember that David was a "man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22) but he was not God.

1 Timothy 4:1-5			
New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update	The King James Version	The New International Version	The Message
1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,	1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;	1 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.	1 The Spirit makes it clear that as time goes on, some are going to give up on the faith and chase after demonic illusions put forth by professional liars.

Of the passages which I have cited in this letter, this is the least worrisome but is worrisome nonetheless. Paul is clearly referring to demonic powers but note the unmistakable human spin which Peterson employs. He diminishes the demonic powers by referring to them as mere “illusions” which are forwarded not by demons but by “professional liars.” Such a reference could encapsulate a carnival barker.

Matthew 5:5			
New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update	The King James Version	The New International Version	The Message
5 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth	5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth	5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth	5 You are truly blessed when for they shall inherit the you are content with just who earth you are – no more, no less.

Not only does this not have anything to do with the passage at hand, it is stunningly un-biblical. What if a homosexual is reading this? Should he be content with “just who he is?” What about an agnostic? A Hindu? What about one who believes himself to be a “Christian” but is living in sin? This is not even true for a Bible-believing, committed Christian! There should *never* be a time when we are “content with just who we are.” This is a *profoundly* unbiblical statement.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update	The King James Version	The New International Version	The Message
<p>9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.</p>	<p>9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.</p>	<p>9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves, nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.</p>	<p>9 Don't you realize that this is not the way to live? Unjust people who don't care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex,</p> <p style="color: red;">Guess what's missing?</p> <p>10. Use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don't qualify as citizens in God's kingdom. 11. A number of you know from experience what I'm talking about, for not so long ago you were on that list. Since then, you've been cleaned up and given a fresh start by Jesus, our Master, our Messiah, and by our God present in us, the Spirit.</p>

This one is serious. One of the sins to which the Apostle Paul is clearly referring is that of homosexuality. Notice that *The Message* completely omits the word. In its stead, Peterson inserts the phrase “those who use and abuse the earth.” The *earth*? From where in the world (or the text as the case may be) did he get the *earth*? There seems to be an environmental agenda at work here. One could not read this passage in a real Bible and come away believing that homosexuality was permissible under any circumstances. One would never know from reading *The Message*, however, that it was a problem in any sense.

Romans 1:26-27

New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update	The King James Version	The New International Version	The Message
<p>26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.</p>	<p>26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.</p>	<p>26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.</p>	<p>26 Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn't know how to be human either—women didn't know how to be women, men didn't know how to be men.</p> <p>27 Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, men with men—all lust, no love. And then they paid for it, oh, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. how they paid for it— emptied of God and love, godless and loveless wretches.</p>

This passage dealing with homosexuality is quite a bit more problematic for Peterson. In 1 Cor. 6:9-11, he had only to omit one word. Here, he has two entire verses with which to wrestle. What to do here? Well, Peterson provides a loophole: ***all lust, no love***. The not-so-subtle insinuation is that ‘Well, if these people had just done this out of *love*, then it would have been ok.’ There is clearly in *The Message* room for a ‘committed, loving’ homosexual relationship. In Peterson’s rendering of the Bible, it is not the nature of homosexuality in and of itself that is the grievous sin, it is simply the absence of *love*.

1 Timothy 1:10

New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update	The King James Version	The New International Version	The Message
10 and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers...	10 For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars...	10 for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers...	10 but for the irresponsible, who defy all authority, riding roughshod over God, life, sex, truth, whatever!

The Message again simply leaves out the reference to homosexuality and replaces it instead with the generic “sex.” Inexplicably, the NIV appears to do the same. There are 3 passages in the N.T. that deal with homosexuality and The Message *utterly fails* on all three.

Note: The Message does, in fairness, appear to be relatively on track in regards to Leviticus 18:22. This, though, does not excuse its abject failure in the N.T. Let’s be honest, how many people (teenagers especially) are realistically going to do devotional reading from Leviticus? They are far more likely to spend their time in the New Testament.

Romans 8:35			
New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update	The King James Version	The New International Version	The Message
35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?	35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?	35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?	35 Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture:

This one really is troublesome. Notice that all of the elements which Paul rightly asserts will never separate us from Christ are very earthly and temporal (tribulation, persecution, famine, etc.). Paul is basically talking about hard times. Eugene Peterson brazenly inserts into the passage: *not even the worst sins listed in Scripture*. Wow. This should trouble any clear thinking believer. Sin IS what separates us from God! That is why we need a Savior! For the one who is lost, sin separates from God positionally. For the believer, sin separates from God relationally. Sin is not even *remotely* in view in this passage. This is heresy.

Conclusion:

Pick up a copy of *The Message* and you will see on its front cover "The Bible in Contemporary Language." *The Message* is NOT the Bible. It is one man's commentary on the Bible, and an extraordinarily poor one at that.

Some object to criticism of Peterson's work by saying *The Message* is not a literal translation but rather a paraphrase. True. But even paraphrases should be an accurate thought for thought rendering of the original biblical text. We are not talking here about a paraphrase of "Green Eggs and Ham." We are talking about the Word of God. God holds His name and His word above all things (Psalm 138:2). His Word must be rendered and handled accurately. What we believe about God is

derived from what we read in His Word. If one reads an erroneous Bible, then it logically follows that what one believes about God will also be in erroneous.

The Message is, in large part, marketed toward teenagers, young adults, and young believers – the most impressionable among us. Youth ministers are reading this to their students and teaching from it. Many preachers are, sadly, quoting it in their sermons. Hopefully, much of this is being done in ignorance.

The question must be asked, ‘Would Jesus Christ approve of this rendering of His word?’ Certainly any honest intellectual assessment would have to lead one to the answer of an emphatic “No.” If Christ would not approve then certainly we must not either.

We must also keep in mind that it is neither Mr. Peterson’s intentions nor his sincerity which is important. In fact, they are irrelevant entirely. Peterson may well be sincere. Sincerity, though, is not the issue – *Truth* is the issue. Misplaced sincerity is a profoundly dangerous commodity.

If you own a copy of *The Message*, you may be wondering, ‘Well, what do I do with it?’ Use it for kindling, target practice, a level for your RV, but just please, please do not sell it in a garage sale or give it away to someone. The last thing we want to do is pass it on to another unsuspecting person who could be led astray by its heresies.

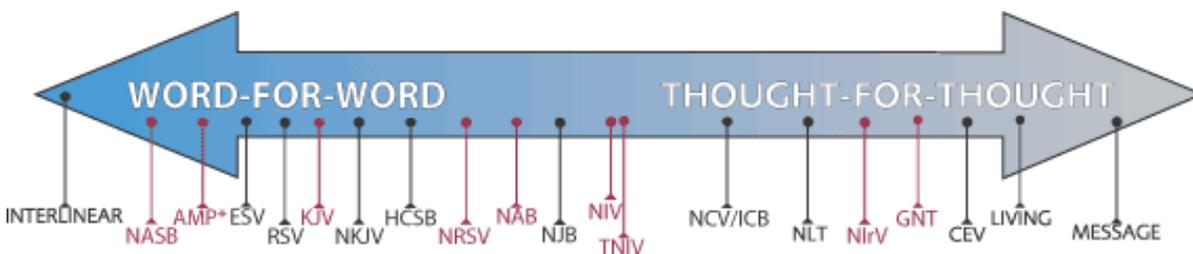
So, what Bible should you use? There are, essentially, two genres of Bible translations, or, two approaches to the work of transferring the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts into another language which, if you are reading this, is, of course, English. The first of these is known as Formal Equivalence. This approach represents a commitment to, as much as possible, present a “word for word” rendering of the original biblical texts. A strict word for word translation is not truly possible because the biblical languages are structured far differently than English or any other modern language. Nonetheless, translations produced under the approach of Formal Equivalence will attempt to provide an accurate rendering of the original texts. Formal equivalent translations are literal translations.

The other approach is that which is known as Dynamic Equivalence. Dynamic Equivalent translations are not word for word but are more “thought for thought.”

Some of these translations are even more “sentence for sentence.” In other words, the objective is not to give us an exact rendering of the original languages, but more the essence of what they mean. The danger of this is that such translations inevitably slide into at least some degree of interpretation, opinion and conjecture - if not even personal bias. Dynamic equivalent translations are sometimes referred to as paraphrases.

I am philosophically and theologically committed to literal translations because I want to know what the original text *says*. I do not want to read a Bible that has already passed through the filter of others’ personal opinions and/or agendas. Now, not all translations in either of these camps are equally good or bad. There is a continuum along which they fall. Some literal translations are more literal than others. Similarly, some of the paraphrases are more paraphrastic than others. For example, the NIV is a literal paraphrase, if you will, but still it is a paraphrase. I use and study from the KJV, NKJV, ESV, and the NASB. It is good to have two or three literal translations at hand. However, I tell people that if I were stranded on a deserted island and could have only one Bible for the rest of my days, it would without a doubt be the NASB. The NASB is my go-to Bible for it is, in most scholars’ opinions, the English translation which is the *most* literal. Is it perfect? No – no translation is. With certain verses the KJV and ESV renderings are a bit clearer. In fact, there are a few verses in which even the NIV’s rendering might be preferred (but very few). All in all, however, if I had to recommend one over all others, it would be the NASB.

The following graph may help to give you a better “birds eye view” of some of today’s more popular translations and where along the line they would fall.



I would also recommend that if you do not already have one, get a good study

Bible. The two I would recommend are (in order of enthusiasm) the John MacArthur Study Bible (www.gty.org) and the ESV Study Bible.

In Him and for His Truth,

Justin Peters

www.justinpeters.org