

The translation of the Bible into native languages is a fruit of the Reformation. The Westminster confession of faith explains the motivation. The second half of WCF 1.8 reads,

Because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.

God commands all Christians to read and search the Scripture in order that we might worship him in an acceptable manner. The Scriptures are our source of patience, comfort, and hope. Through them, the Word of God dwells in us. Therefore, we are to translate the Bible into every native language.

Luther himself translated the New Testament into German and published it in 1522. Wycliffe, the morning star of the Reformation, began the work of translating it into English in the 1380's. Tyndale published the first commonly available English New Testament. After Tyndale was martyred, Myles Coverdale and John Rogers carried on with the work. They printed the first complete English Bible in 1535. In 1523, Jacques LeFevre published the French New Testament, and a few years later, he published the entire French Bible. The Wikipedia article on "Bible translations" reports,

The Bible continues to be the most translated book in the world. (The following numbers are approximations.) As of 2005, at least one book of the Bible has been translated into 2,400 of the 6,900 languages listed by SIL, including 680 languages in Africa, followed by 590 in Asia, 420 in Oceania, 420 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 210 in Europe, and 75 in North America. The United Bible Societies are presently assisting in over 600 Bible translation projects. The Bible is available in whole or in part to some 98 percent of the world's population in a language in which they are fluent.

This part of the story is well known.

However, there is another side of the story as well. In the Reformed tradition, all ministers of the Word of God are required to learn the original languages. The first half of WCF 1.8 reads,

The Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, being immediately inspired by God ... are authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal

to them.

The Greek and Hebrew were immediately inspired. They are the authoritative versions of the Word of God. When preaching and teaching, pastors should know what they say. Whenever a controversy arises in the Church, ministers should appeal to them. I remember one minister telling me that when he preaches, if he has not looked at the Greek or Hebrew, he feels uncomfortable. Teaching is a great responsibility, and a teacher must shoulder this responsibility.

There is a balance here. All Christians should have access to the Bible in their native tongue. Pastors and teachers should be able to read the Greek and Hebrew. The native tongue is enough to know what the Bible teaches above salvation and worship. It is enough for the spiritual needs of believers. It is enough for comfort, patience and hope. Details of doctrine and other fine points require the original language.

It is a blessing to read the New Testament in Greek. It brings you one-step closer to Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, Peter, John, and the other authors. For those who love the Bible, there is exciting to read it in its original language. You are reading the very words that the apostles wrote down. Translations are good. However, in some verses, nuances of meaning are missing in translations; or the translator has "resolved" ambiguities in the Greek. Moreover, the Greek and the Hebrew have a kind of rawness and beauty that translations do not capture. In parts of the Bible, reading a translation is like reading a translated poem. The translation may be excellent, but it is never perfect.

Many Christians would like to learn Greek. However, it is not easy. I have been teaching seminary students Greek for sixteen years. The first day of class, I tell them that this is the most difficult course in the curriculum. It requires three hours a day for an entire school year. At CRTS, we have done our best to organize the grammar in the simplest way possible. We also have selected the most important 350 Greek vocabulary words. Even so, it is not easy. We give students the English word, and require they produce the Greek. This is much harder than simply recognizing Greek words. This is a minor challenge. The major challenge is verb forms. Greek verbs can have six moods, six tenses, and three voices. Actual Greek verbs use about 60 mood-tense-voice combinations. A verb ending can also indicate person and number, and for participles, case and gender. There is a system underlying this, and once you learn it, it is not as hard as it sounds. However, it requires study.

As a rule of them, you will find it easier if you are good at languages, you speak English, and you are young. However, these rules are not absolute. I have had students that could not speak English, but were good at Greek. In our current class, one of the older students is one of the best, and we have two students who are not good at languages. They have conquered Greek with a lot of sweat and tears.

We have a unique way of teaching Greek at CRTS. The first year consists of two courses, one in the fall and one in the spring. The fall course covers most of the grammar. The spring course is half grammar and half Greek reading. By the end of the year, students are able to read the simplest parts of the New Testament, such as the Gospel of John. With the help of various reference tools, they are also able to make their way through parts that are more difficult. In the second year, we cover the grammar a second time. Second-year students grasp it more firmly, and pick up minor points. Students also take Greek reading again. We are pleased with the results.

On one hand, I know by experience that many of our graduates will *not* continue to use their Greek. However, the course still has its value. They are still able to follow commentaries that discuss the Greek. They are still able to make their way through parts of the Greek text. Furthermore, they can refresh their Greek and pick it up again. On the other hand, some of our graduates continue to use their Greek. A minor blessing is that they earn the respect of their congregation. You will hear them boast, "Our pastor reads the Greek!" A more important blessing is that it helps them to understand and to love the New Testament more.

Do you want to try to learn Greek? We offer the entire course on a single CD. It includes videos of the lectures (website size), the electronic version of the textbook and exercises. We virtually give this away (NT \$300). We have had students who have successfully learned this way. Other students have used it to prepare for the actual course. If you are a qualified college graduate, you can apply to take the course here at CRTS. Finally, in the near future, we hope to offer the course live online and in our extension program. If you are interested, give us a call. We will put your name on our list, and we will let you know when and where we will offer the course.