

Review of *Colossians* in Brian Simmons' *The Passion Translation*

The New Testament, with Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Songs¹

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I first read a portion of *The Passion Translation* (TPT) in 2016 and was immediately struck by the intensity and vividness of Simmons' writing. The chapters I read were a loose form of paraphrase, similar to *The Message*, translated by Eugene Peterson. Over the next three years, as the influence of TPT grew, I continued to read further chapters and began to have concerns. After conducting some research in 2019, I discovered that my concerns were shared by others.

When I was asked to participate in a project to review TPT, I was interested to see what results a detailed study of a particular book would produce. As general rule, I prefer not to criticize major translations of the Bible because of the tremendous complexity involved. Most major translations are the result of careful, long-term work by dozens of scholars who have spent years wrestling with translation philosophy, textual choices, and other issues. However, the more work I completed on this project, the more evident it became that TPT is not a translation of the Bible in any meaningful sense. On that basis, I am comfortable presenting this critical review to bring attention to the dangers that TPT poses.

My approach was to perform a working translation of Colossians in its entirety, using the standard scholarly critical edition of the New Testament, the *Nestle-Aland 28th Edition* (NA28). My working translation is appended to this

¹2nd ed., Madison, CT: BroadStreet, 2018.

paper in [Appendix 1](#) for reference purposes. This paper analyzes TPT’s translation philosophy, evaluates the original language source texts, and presents the relevant findings of word studies as well as grammar and syntax analysis of every verse in the epistle.

TPT Translation Philosophy

By way of introduction to the task of translation, the goal, by definition, is to present the meaning of a text in a particular language in the text of a receptor language, so that a person reading either text would see the same meaning. There is, however, debate over what form the translation must take—should it aim to produce the grammatical form found in the original language, or to produce a form that is natural in the receptor language? If the primary goal is to match the form of the translated text to the original language, this approach to translation is referred to as “literal.” If the primary goal is to produce a form of the translated text that is natural to the receptor language, this type of approach to translation is referred to as “idiomatic.” In practice, however, neither of these approaches is perfectly attainable because of the nature of language itself. Instead, the translated text usually falls somewhere on a spectrum proposed by Beekman and Callow, containing 4 broad categories: highly literal, modified literal, idiomatic, and unduly free.²

Highly literal (which would essentially amount to interlinear) translations are unacceptable because they might convey grammatical form but lose meaning in the receptor language. Unduly free translations (commonly referred to as paraphrases) are unacceptable because, whilst they may communicate a similar general idea, they lack precision and may lose meaning that is communicated by the grammatical form of the original text. Acceptable translations typically fall into the categories of modified literal and idiomatic translations as a whole, but individual translations always contain at least some components of both.

At this point it is important to note that an accurate translation avoids adding, subtracting, or transforming information that is necessary for communicating meaning.³ If the translator wants to claim that the meaning of the original text is preserved, such alterations must not be made. Naturally, some adjustments are needed to convey meaning in the receptor language accurately (for example, when translating a Greek substantive into English, an implied noun is often supplied for the sentence to make sense). This is not an alteration of the meaning, but rather, the form.

Interestingly, at face value, it appears that TPT is marketed as having been produced in accordance with what has been discussed above. In detailing TPT translation philosophy, the publisher notes:

The Passion Translation’s philosophy is that the meaning of God’s original message to the world has priority over its exact form, which is why our goal is

² John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 22.

³ For a discussion of this detail, see Beekman and Callow, *Translating*, 38.

to communicate the meaning of Scripture as clearly and naturally as possible in modern English. Brian and other reviewers have sought to remain faithful to the original biblical languages by preserving their literal meaning, yet flexible enough to convey God’s original message in a way [that] modern English speakers can understand.⁴

In light of the discussion above, the theory of this approach is not unique to TPT, and is followed by many other translations as an objective. In terms of what is stated then, TPT in theory does not have a unique translation strategy at all. As will be demonstrated in this review, however, Simmons does not adhere to the stated translation strategy.

Source Texts

One of the first tasks of translation is to determine the text from which to translate. There is almost entire scholarly consensus that the critical Greek text (the NA28 or UBS5, from which we translate the New Testament) contains the entirety of the original text of the New Testament, either in the main body or in the text variant footnotes. Aside from the NKJV and KJV, which use the *Textus Receptus*, Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss note that “all other modern versions follow the critical text.”⁵

TPT uses the NA27, but, according to the publisher, includes “insights from the Syriac Peshitta, as well as the Roth text.”⁶ This is one of the most problematic areas of Simmons’ translation. The publisher states, “While it is generally agreed upon that Greek was the language in which the New Testament was written, for several decades there has been a debate surrounding the primacy of Greek versus Aramaic as original texts for the New Testament,” and that “recent biblical scholarship has begun tracing many of Jesus’ teachings back to an original Aramaic source. Some even argue the original Greek manuscripts were translations of even more original Aramaic sources.”⁷ This minority perspective, which began investigating the possibility of Aramaic sources for the Gospels, has been debunked. To this date, there have been no ancient Aramaic New Testament sources discovered whatsoever. The entirety of the evidence, and the consensus of New Testament scholars, is that every book of the New Testament was written in Greek. Whilst Aramaic was the lingua franca in the first century, and Aramaic vocabulary and syntax has clearly affected certain authors’ Greek style in some places, there is no doubt that the New Testament was originally written in Greek. In addition, Simmons does not indicate whether he is aware of the fact that Syriac, which is the language of the Peshitta, is actually not the Aramaic that Jesus spoke, but a dialect of Aramaic which uses a different script. There has also been the hypothesis that the Syriac version

⁴ BroadStreet Publishing Group, “FAQs.”

⁵ Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation For All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 114.

⁶ BroadStreet Publishing Group, “FAQs.”

⁷ BroadStreet Publishing Group, “FAQs.”

was translated from an Aramaic source but, again, no evidence of this has been discovered.

Simmons is therefore inaccurate when he uses the phrase “the Aramaic reads...” in his footnotes. Instead, it should be “the Syriac reads...” Further, from studying the footnotes, there is no evidence that Simmons actually knows any Aramaic or Syriac. Instead, it seems that he simply inserts ideas from Andrew Gabriel Roth’s translation of the Peshitta when they seem interesting to him or helpful in making his point.

Additionally, the publisher claims that “it’s time to bring this forgotten, neglected language [Aramaic] into the translation equation because of how influential the language was during the first and second centuries on the biblical world and the Bible itself.”⁸ The publisher continues, “This translation reclaims lost Aramaic texts, bringing the full texture of God’s Word to the surface, and helping you recapture the original essence of the teachings of Jesus and His disciples.”⁹ The use of “forgotten,” “neglected,” and “lost” as adjectives of the Aramaic texts is surprising, since almost all modern translations make comparisons with, and draw insights from all relevant ancient texts when translating the New Testament from the Greek manuscripts. This indicates an ignorance of the process of translation in general at best, or a deliberate misrepresentation at worst. Further, whilst the idea of recapturing the “original essence of the teachings of Jesus and His disciples” might seem like an intriguing proposition, in addition to being thoroughly misleading, the use of these terms strongly resembles the language of Gnostic texts, which regularly claim to provide secret, lost, or hidden information.

The publisher makes one final unsubstantiated claim that “Greek speaks to the mind while Aramaic and Hebrew speak powerfully to the heart.” Firstly, this statement is meant to warm the audience to Simmons’ use of “Aramaic,” but has no factual basis. Secondly, this esoteric rhetoric bears striking resemblance to the Islamic view that the “*Qur’an’s* essence as Allah’s very words is tied to the Arabic tongue.”¹⁰

In summary, Simmons’ use of the Syriac Peshitta (which he calls Aramaic) is inappropriate, and as demonstrated in the analysis section below, results in inaccurate translations of some verses in Colossians.

Analysis of Colossians

For ease of reference, I have presented the analysis by grouping similar observations, rather than in a verse-by-verse format. Where multiple errors occurred in the same context, I have usually grouped the errors separately (meaning a reference may appear in more than one observation). The observations below represent the most significant broad categories of errors identified, but there

⁸ BroadStreet Publishing Group, “FAQs.”

⁹ BroadStreet Publishing Group, “FAQs.”

¹⁰ James R. White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur’an* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 2013), 52.

remain a significant number of more minor errors that have been excluded for the sake of brevity.

Observation 1: The Length of TPT

The overall length of Colossians in TPT in comparison to many major published translations, as well as my own ([Appendix 1](#)), is a clear indicator that Simmons is not actually translating. TPT is longer than other translations by 38-48% (see [Table 1](#) below). This is primarily due to radically expanding and altering phrases, as well as adding adverbs or adjectives.

Linguists know that translations tend to be somewhat periphrastic (expansionistic) in general, and necessarily so, because languages have differing grammar and syntax as well as idioms, word plays, and other devices, which are not always possible to approximate without using more words. As an example, the Greek text of Colossians is approximately 1609 words, (depending on textual variants) and so the major English translations below contain between 20% (ESV) and 32% (NASB) more words than the Greek text. By comparison, TPT has 81% more words than the Greek text. This is a clear indicator that Simmons is not simply translating.

Translation	Total words	TPT is longer by
TPT	2,919	-
ESV	1,932	51%
NIV	2,023	44%
NASB	2,122	38%
KJV	1,975	48%
Author's own	2,020	45%

Table 1

Observation 2: Inconsistency in Translation

A further striking example that shows how Simmons is not translating can be found in 1:1 and 1:2. Simmons translates the phrase in 1:1, “through the will of God” (διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ), as “by the calling and destined purpose of God.” Simmons translates the phrase in 1:2, “grace to you, and peace” (χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη), as “release upon your lives the riches of his kind favor and heavenly peace.” These translations are clearly inaccurate, but what is most interesting is how there is inconsistency in his translation of the identical phrases in Paul’s other letters. If Simmons was translating, then these phrases would be rendered consistently. [Table 2](#) and [Table 3](#) below compare his translations of both phrases across various letters. Evidently, Simmons renders the same phrases in Greek arbitrarily in different places.

Verse	Greek	TPT
Col. 1:1	διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ	by the calling and destined purpose of God
1 Cor. 1:1	διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ	according to the plan of God
2 Cor. 1:1	διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ	according to God's perfect plan
Eph. 1:1	διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ	chosen by God
2 Tim. 1:1	διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ	appointed by God's pleasure

Table 2

Verse	Greek	TPT
Col. 1:2	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη	release upon your lives the riches of his kind favor and heavenly peace
1 Cor. 1:3	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη	may joyous grace and endless peace be yours continually
2 Cor. 1:2	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη	may undeserved favor and endless peace be yours continually
Eph. 1:2	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη	release grace over you and impart total well-being into your lives
Phil. 1:2	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη	may the blessings of divine grace and supernatural peace. . . be upon your lives
1 Thess. 1:1	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη	may God's delightful grace and peace rest upon you

Table 3

Observation 3: Adding or Subtracting Various Parts of Speech

- **Adding adjectives:** true (1:2), heavenly (1:2), devoted (1:4), tender (1:4), perfect (1:9), explosive (1:11), divine (1:25), of heaven (2:2), great (2:2), heaven's (2:3), festive (3:12), cherishing (3:19), loving (4:10-11) and warm (4:14)
- **Substituting adjective:** “spiritual” songs becomes “prophetic” songs (3:16)
- **Changing an adjective to a compound phrase:** “fully pleasing to him” becomes “God's pleasure over your lives” (1:9), and “gracious” becomes “drenched with grace” (4:6)
- **Adding adverbs:** powerfully (1:6), thoroughly (1:7), completely (1:13), divinely (3:12)
- **Changing verb phrases:** “bearing fruit” becomes “changing hearts” (1:6), “giving thanks” becomes “your hearts can soar with gratitude” (1:12), “make known” becomes “equip you” (1:25)

- **Changing a verb into a noun:** “be comforted/encouraged” becomes “wrapped in the comfort of heaven” (2:2), “as I ought” becomes “my delightful assignment” (4:4)
- **Adding verbs:** overflow (1:3), “to advance” (1:23), and intimidate (2:8 – an unnecessary and incorrect double translation)
- **Altering verbs completely:** “take captive” becomes “distract and intimidate” (2:8), “rule” becomes “guide” (3:15), and “be with you” becomes “overwhelm you” (4:18)
- **Adding nouns:** riches (1:2), inspiration (1:28-29), hearts (1:28-29), passion (1:28-29), masquerade and disguise (3:9), and intercessors (4:2)
- **Substituting nouns or converting nouns to compound phrases:** “the gospel” becomes “the astonishing revelation of the gospel” (1:5-7), “knowledge” becomes “endless riches of revelation knowledge” (2:3), “bond” becomes “mark” (3:14), “comfort” becomes “blessing” (4:10-11), “greetings” becomes “love” (4:10-11)

Observation 4: Radical Expansions

Simmons regularly makes substantial expansions, rewriting sentences and producing verses and phrases of much greater length. See the following as examples:

- **1:6** “as it is among you” becomes “*Every believer of this good news bears the fruit of eternal life as they experience the reality of God’s grace.*”
- **1:8** “your love” becomes “*many wonderful ways love is being demonstrated through your lives*”
- **1:5** “because of the hope that is being reserved for you in heaven, of which you have heard beforehand in the word of truth, namely the gospel,” becomes “*Your faith and love rise within you as you access all the treasures of your inheritance stored up in the heavenly realm. For the revelation of the true gospel is as real today as the day you first heard of our glorious hope, now that you have believed in the truth of the gospel.*” This is more than double the number of words that it takes for a clear translation (54 words compared to 26).

Observation 5: The Use of Unusual Words

Simmons has some favorite words that are artificially imposed on the text:

- He uses the word “revelation” 7 times despite no warrant in the Greek text (1:5, 1:7, 1:28-29, 2:2, 2:3, 3:10, 4:3).

- The word “realm,” although somewhat related to the idea in some passages, is used 10 times (1:5, 1:11, 1:13, twice in 1:16, 2:12, twice in 2:13, twice in 3:2), in a way that doesn’t allow for clear distinctions that exist in the Greek to be made like domain, kingdom, sphere of authority, etc. There are certainly appropriate ways in which to utilize the word “realm,” but Simmons chooses inappropriate contexts.
- The word “release” is used 4 times (1:1-2, 1:14, 1:21-22, 3:13). This concept is not part of the Scriptural way of thinking or speaking. Forgiveness is not a substance or force that is released, rather, it is the act performed where a person ceases to hold another in their debt for sin. In contrast, redemption is accomplished (on the cross by Jesus Christ) and applied (by the Holy Spirit through faith).
- Other unusual words include surprise (1:26), intercessor (4:2), assignment (4:4), explosive (1:11), infused (2:7), and drenched (3:17, 4:6). These are either sectarian ideas or terms or are not valid translations of words used in Colossians.

Observation 6: What the Joint Verse Numbers Indicate

Proof that Simmons is entirely rewording whole paragraphs/sentences is that he has joined many verses together: 1:1-2, 1:21-22, 1:28-29, 3:7-8, 4:7-8, 4:10-11, and 4:12-13. This means that the underlying grammar has been entirely reworked in such a way that individual verse numbers cannot be assigned to the results.

Observation 7: Divine Titles

Simmons makes various alterations to the divine titles present in the Greek. For example, in 1:1-2 when translating Christ, Simmons adds “The Anointed One” which, although a true description, is a double translation. “The Anointed One” is added as a kind of fixed phrase when the Greek word for Christ appears. However, he does not do this consistently, omitting it in 1:28 without explanation. In 1:3, Simmons inserts “Father” before God, which is not present in the Greek. In 3:24, “Yahweh” is added. Simmons at least footnotes that this is “absent” from the Greek, but this is a claim which may mislead the reader into thinking that the Syriac (which he calls Aramaic) is complete and the Greek is not.

Observation 8: Softening Difficult Ideas

Simmons regularly alters the translations of difficult passages or concepts:

- **1:20** Instead of the Greek “making peace,” Simmons has “back to original intent, restored to innocence again.” Despite being partially true, this removes the important element of the necessity of peace because people are under divine judgment as enemies of God.

- **1:21-22** Simmons translates the Greek “above reproach” as “restored.” Although he footnotes that the Greek has “without indictment,” his translation has removed the idea of having previously been under the judgment of God.
- **1:28-29** The verb in Greek “warning” becomes “awaken hearts.”
- **2:22-23** Instead of “they are of no value in preventing the indulgence of the flesh,” Simmons has “worthless to help you spiritually.” This undermines the clarity of Paul’s point - one cannot control the flesh by fleshly means; one needs a new heart.
- **3:9** The Greek has “evil practices,” but Simmons has “masquerade and disguise.”
- **3:24** The Greek clearly says, “the wrongdoer will be repaid for what he has done wrong,” yet Simmons completely revises this by using a phrase from the Syriac Peshitta, “A disciple will be repaid for what he has learned and followed,” which is completely different from the point of the passage.

Observation 9: Deletions

The phrases, “abounding in thanksgiving” (2:7) and “concerning things which all perish with consumption” (2:20) have been completely removed.

Observation 10: Failure to Reference Authoritative Reference Works

In addition to the various examples already provided, Simmons regularly supplies a meaning that is not attested in authoritative lexicons. Some examples are:

- **1:9** “Pleasure,” which does not mean the emotional experience, but rather, “whatever you please”
- **1:25** “Authority” is not the meaning, but rather, “stewardship,” (BDAG, meaning 1) which is the apostolic task with which God has charged Paul
- **3:21** The verb ἐρεθίζω means “to cause someone to react in a way that suggests acceptance of a challenge, *arouse, provoke*” (BDAG), so the translation “have unrealistic expectations” does not convey the meaning of provocation)

Evidently, Simmons does not appear to have used authoritative lexicons to determine the meaning of words. Regularly he states that a particular word “means” something, but he is simply listing one possible meaning which does not necessarily fit the context at all, or is actually incorrect altogether (for examples, see his footnotes for vv. 2:5; 2:11; 3:18 (see below); 4:6). Additionally, it seems that

Simmons' footnotes are produced by consulting basic concordances like Strong's (which is not an authoritative source for determining the meaning of words) and rephrasing words to support his ideas, instead of the standard scholarly works such as Liddell and Scott, Bauer-Danker, Blass Debrunner Funk, Louw-Nida, etc.

Observation 11: Double or Triple Translations

Sometimes Simmons translates a single verb or noun with multiple verbs or nouns. There are occasions in which this is helpful when translating Greek into English (for example, when there is a word play with a double meaning), but these are rare and certainly not justified on the occasions Simmons selects in Colossians. Below are some examples:

- **1:26** Adds “unfolded and manifested” to “revealed” – a triple translation.
- **2:8** Adds “distract”
- **3:20** Adds “pay attention to”
- **3:22** Adds “listen well”
- **4:1** Adds “Lord” in addition to “Master,” most likely to deal with the awkwardness of calling God an employer, which would have been necessitated by his decision to incorrectly translate the Greek for “master” as “employer.”

Observation 12: Purposefully Overriding the Text

On a number of occasions, Simmons intentionally overrides the clear meaning of the Greek text. Firstly, in 1:24, Simmons translates the Greek text, which should read something like “and I am supplementing in my flesh what is lacking regarding Christ’s afflictions,” as “for as I join with you in your difficulties, it helps you to discover what lacks in your understanding of the sufferings Jesus Christ experienced...” In a footnote, Simmons states, “The text contains an ellipsis that is completed by the translation. The sufferings of Christ were complete, sufficient to transfer righteousness and forgiveness to every believer. Paul’s sufferings were meant to be an example of Christ and a testimony to his converts that his ministry was sincere.” This is not correct. This is his personal textual emendation where he has decided there must be text missing. In the NA28, there is no textual variant listed in connection with Simmons’ claim. Clearly, Simmons has (understandably) been offended by his mistaken assumption that the text implies that Christ’s sufferings were incomplete. While it is admirable that he cares about the sufficiency of the atonement, he has misunderstood the theological implications of the grammar. He has clearly not understood the various grammatical options available in interpreting this text. The genitive “of Christ” can be used in a number of ways that might explain what Paul means, including possessive genitive, genitive of reference, or

attributive genitive. Paul could be referring to the full range of sufferings that are connected with the mission of Christ, which includes sufferings connected with the spreading of the gospel, which must be shared in by the apostles, amongst other options.

Secondly, in 3:6, Simmons translates the Greek, “Because of these the wrath of God is coming [upon the sons of disobedience]” as “when you live in these vices you ignite the anger of God against these acts of disobedience.” Simmons footnotes that the Greek has “sons of disobedience” (although this is a textual variant which probably should include brackets to indicate that), but his footnote also states that it is the deeds which receive God’s anger. It seems he has purposely altered this because of personal theological convictions, despite being different from the text. Regardless of whether Simmons disagrees with biblical teaching that it is people who receive judgment, not their actions (which do not have personhood and therefore cannot be punished), the Greek text is clear. Interestingly, Simmons is also inconsistent in his translation of this phrase and translates the phrase as “those who are disobedient” (Eph 2:2) and “the rebellious” (Eph 5:6) in the parallel passages in Ephesians. It is interesting that, for Simmons, the meaning of the same phrase can change between books written by the same author, referring to the same concepts.

Thirdly, in 1:28-29, Simmons translates “so that we may present everyone mature in Christ” as “present to every believer the revelation of being his perfect one.” This is completely unconnected with what the text says. The ministry of warning and teaching is transformational and results in progressive conformity to the standard of holiness, with the final goal of presenting believers as mature. The Greek does not say that believers are already mature and just need to be told that “revelation.” This is another case of Simmons completely altering the clear meaning of the text.

Observation 13: Inconsistency in Italicizing Additions or Expansions

Simmons regularly adds whole phrases that have no basis in the Greek Text. He states that any additions are italicized, but this is often not the case. The following are a number of cases where additions were not italicized or footnoted:

- 1:5 “Your faith and love rise within you as you access”
- 1:10 “yielding to his life”
- 1:21-22 “Now there is nothing between you”
- 1:25 “in his detailed plan”
- 1:26 “secret surprise”
- 1:27 “embedded within us”
- 1:27 “heavenly treasure chest of . . . filled with the riches of . . .”

- 1:28-29 “inspiration and passion”
- 1:28-29 “the revelation of being”
- 2:10 “as Christ’s fullness overflows within us”
- 2:15 “every weapon and all their spiritual authority and power to accuse us”
- 3:12 “as you endeavor to understand others”
- 3:13 “the weaknesses”
- 3:16 “given to you spontaneously by the Spirit”

Observation 14: Varying Issues in the Translation of the Rules for Households

Slaves and Masters

In an apparent attempt to modernize Paul’s instructions, and perhaps to soften the difficulties associated with the discussion of slavery in the New Testament, Simmons has used “employees” (3:22) and “employers” (4:1) instead of “slaves” and “masters.” There is no justification for this decision, as there were already employment type relationships at the time Paul was writing. Clearly, Paul is writing to Christians who are slaves and encouraging them to remember that their true master is, in fact, Christ. He also writes to Christians who own slaves, reminding them to act with justice, because they themselves have a master in heaven. The weakness of Simmons’ choice here is made clear in 1 Peter 2:18, where Simmons is forced to use “servant” and “master” because of the theological point being made that we are to do what is right, even when mistreated (v. 20).

Husbands and Wives

The objective at this point is not to offer an interpretation of Paul’s words, but simply to comment on Simmons’ translation. In 3:18, the Greek says, “submit yourselves to your husbands.” ὑποτάσσω means “*subject oneself, be subjected or subordinated, obey*” (BDAG, meaning 1(b)β). Simmons’ footnote here is a mixture of misleading and uninformed. Firstly, the assertion that ὑποτάσσω means supportive is false—this meaning is not in the semantic range of the word. Secondly, Simmons does not seem to understand how lexical meanings work. To state that ὑποτάσσω can mean “attached,” when that meaning is “to add a document at the end of another document, *attach, append, subjoin*” (BDAG, meaning 2), is significant ignorance. The various meanings of a word cannot just be listed, one needs to do the work to figure out whether the usage of a meaning makes sense in the context. Clearly Paul did not mean, “Wives, staple yourselves to your husbands.”

Children and Parents

In 3:20, the Greek says, “Children, obey your parents.” The word ὑπακούετε means “to follow instructions, *obey, follow, be subject to*” (BDAG, meaning 1). Simmons incorrectly double-translates this as “respect and pay attention to,” without offering a footnote in support of his total departure from what the Greek says.

Observation 15: Interpretive Theological Alterations and Definitions

A major feature of Simmons’ translation of Colossians is that he regularly makes speculative theological interpretations, either transforming the meaning of the text or adding his own ideas into it. There are many examples of this, so the reader will be able to see the pattern clearly:

- **1:5** The noun “hope” becomes “inheritance.” This narrows the idea and limits hope to inheritance. Christian hope is multi-faceted. But the primary hope is the hope of glory – that we will be finally transformed into the likeness of Christ, being completely freed from the presence of sin. Christ in us is that hope.
- **1:14** “Forgiveness of sins” becomes “all our sins are cancelled.” We do, of course, believe that our sins have been blotted out, but the removing of the noun of forgiveness is unjustifiable and alters the emphasis of the verse.
- **2:3** The addition of “revelation” as an adjective of knowledge is interpretive. There is no adjective in the Greek and Simmons has decided to specify the nature of this knowledge. By adding “revelation,” this theologically interprets the knowledge as that which comes unmediated from God (perhaps prophecy, visions, dreams, etc.). This appears to eliminate the agency of ministers teaching in the church and the illumination of the Holy Spirit of existing revelation (i.e., the Scriptures).
- **2:5** The Greek says, “I am with you in spirit” which is very different from Simmons’ “my spirit is present there with you.” This is not possible because the human soul is finite, bound by space (the body), and limited to a geographic location. Only God is omnipresent – this is one of his incommunicable attributes, which means it is only true of him.
- **2:6** Simmons renders “so walk in him” as “continue your journey of faith, progressing further into your union with him.” This has changed the meaning of the phrase from being about the manner in which we live to a claim about making progress of some kind. Whatever is meant here, there is a difference between the Greek, which communicates a manner of life, and Simmons’ translation, which communicates a spectrum in which one must progress.

- **2:11** “Stripping off of the body made of flesh” has been changed to “All of the guilt and power of sin has been cut away and is now extinct.” This is factually correct, but it is not a translation. The imagery of stripping off the body made of flesh is important to Paul’s teaching in Colossians of putting off the old and putting on the new. Because Simmons has not translated this correctly, the connection is significantly weakened.
- **2:15** “Disarmed” becomes “stripping away from them every weapon and all their spiritual authority and power to accuse us.” While this may be partly true, it is an interpretive and highly expansionistic insertion with no basis in the text.
- **2:18** The Greek text clearly states that false teachers go on in detail about what they have seen (translated as “visions” in a number of translations, e.g. ESV). Strangely, Simmons removes the idea of visions and chooses, “For they take pleasure in pretending to be experts of something they know nothing about.” The point is not simply that they don’t know what they are talking about, but rather, they are obsessed with esoteric visions and are self-important because of a sinful, fleshly mind. The purpose of these words is to highlight the contrast between the visions of these false teachers and Christ, who is the substance. Simmons’ translation does not convey this point.
- **3:2** Simmons uses the highly interpretive phrase “distractions of the natural realm” instead of the Greek “things that are on the earth.” This is not even remotely close to the idea in the text. Paul is drawing a contrast between things above: spiritual/heavenly things, and things on the earth, like the contrast between things of the Spirit and things of the flesh elsewhere. Here, he means that which is earthly/wicked—which is why the vice list follows in verses 5-8. There is nothing inherently wrong with the material reality of the earth - so this use of “realm” and “distractions” unintentionally has a similar sense of the dualism present in Gnosticism.
- **3:16** The Greek is “spiritual songs,” but Simmons translates this as “prophetic songs.” This idea is not found anywhere in the semantic range of “spiritual,” nor is there any warrant for this in the text. This is simply Simmons’ own inaccurate interpretation.

Observation 16: Sectarian Theological Ideas

TPT suffers from Simmons’ constant insertion of sectarian theological ideas, meaning concepts which are the view of a minority group that do not represent the broader perspectives of Christian theology. Several obvious examples are:

- **1:2** The idea of “releasing” is not a Scriptural one, nor does it have any verbal basis in the Greek.

- **1:27** Simmons adds “embedded within us” to mystery. This has no warrant in the Greek. Jesus is not a mystery who is imbedded in us, but rather, it is a mystery that Christ is in us! Simmons has overridden the grammar to communicate an entirely different idea.
- **1:27** The Greek has “Christ in us the hope of glory” but Simmons radically alters this to, “This mystery becomes a heavenly treasure chest of hope filled with the riches of glory.” This is a completely different idea than what is present in the text. The Greek text clearly states that the presence of Christ in us is the hope (guarantee) of final glorification. There is nothing about being a treasure chest filled with glory.
- **2:7** Simmons uses the phrase “faith you have absorbed” which is a strange concept. The Greek is the faith which “you were taught.” Paul is talking about “the faith” (it has the definite article in Greek), i.e. Christian doctrine that the Colossians were taught, not faith as in the Christian’s act of trusting.
- **3:5** Simmons inserts the phrase “Live as one who died to diseases,” which he has added from the Syriac Peshitta. This is clearly a foreign concept to the Scriptures in general, and to the passage in which it appears in particular. *(Please note: As of the new 2020 edition of TPT, this phrase has been removed, but we consider it a good example to include since it was included in millions of copies of TPT that are currently on people’s shelves.)*

Observation 17: Other Arbitrary Phrase Changes

This section includes a general list of phrases which Simmons has altered for no apparent reason, but do not necessarily fit under one of the categories above. These are mostly just random changes, usually without footnotes or italics to indicate changes:

- **1:7** “Just as you learned it from Epaphras” becomes “Epaphras was there from the beginning to thoroughly teach you.”
- **1:11** “For all steadfastness and patience” becomes “filling you with great hope.” There is no connection to the Greek.
- **2:2** “To reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ” becomes “This will give you access to all the riches of God as you experience the revelation of God’s great mystery—Christ.” This completely changes the meaning that the riches *are* full assurance of understanding and knowledge of Christ, to being some other riches which are received by a revelatory experience. This is a different meaning altogether.

- **2:8** “Takes you captive” becomes “distracts or intimidates you,” which as he footnotes is not the Greek, nor is it really in the Syriac which he is using. This takes away the clarity of the combat/military metaphor of being stolen away, which is necessary to understand Paul’s point.
- **2:14** “Certificate of indebtedness” becomes “old arrest warrant.” The idea of a warrant (only utilized in Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*) does not adequately capture the metaphor of legal debt created by sin. At best, “death warrant” may be a more analogous choice, as it conveys the legal substance with its judicial penalty specified, since the verdict has already been rendered.
- **3:1** “Seated at the right hand of God” is clear in the Greek, but becomes “enthroned at the place of all power, honor, and authority.” While this is, of course, true, this is an expansionistic interpretation, not a translation.
- **3:17** “Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” becomes “be drenched with the beauty of our Lord Jesus,” which has no connection with the Greek.
- **4:12-13** “Fully assured in all the will of God” becomes “perfect in the beauty of God’s plan for your lives.” There is no connection to the Greek here at all.
- **4:12-13** “He has worked hard for you” becomes “has such great zeal and passion for you.” Again, no connection to the Greek.

Observation 18: Basic Grammatical Errors

Simmons’ lack of basic grammar knowledge is evident in the verses below. For someone who claims to be a linguist and Bible translator, these are particularly concerning:

- **1:5** Apposition. “The word of truth, namely the gospel” becomes “truth of the gospel.” This is a misunderstanding of the genitive of apposition, which explains that the word of truth is the gospel. Simmons’ translation instead conveys a quality of the gospel (its truth).
- **1:15** Uses of the genitive. Consulting a reference grammar would have helped Simmons understand the presence of a genitive of subordination and hence the best translation is “firstborn over all creation.”
- **1:28** This verse contains a double accusative of the object-complement construction which in this case deals with the idea of presenting. Simmons switches the idea of presenting the person as mature/perfect (which would be to God) to the idea of a revelation being presented to the person. This is clearly not what the grammar communicates at all.
- **2:9** Genitive of content. Simmons has “For he is the complete fullness of deity living in human form” rather than “For in him all the fullness of deity

dwells bodily.” This genitive of content (deity is the fullness) explains the divinity of Christ. He is not merely the fullness of deity in human form, but is both truly human and truly God (as we confess, “truly God, truly man”). Simmons’ translation (unintentionally, I am sure) gives the sense that Jesus is deity dwelling as a human form, when the Scriptures clearly express that Jesus took on human nature and flesh in the hypostatic union.

- **2:15** Agency. Simmons translates the verse in a way that states that the agent of the spectacle is Jesus. But the next sentence identifies Jesus as the instrument of triumph, and therefore, God is the agent. Understanding of the grammar would have enabled Simmons to communicate the correct agent and instrument.
- **3:9** Imperative. "Lay aside your old Adam-self" is an instruction, but the Greek actually gives a statement of fact “since you have taken off/laid aside. . .” Bizarrely, his footnote says this is translated from the Greek and that the Aramaic has an imperative, but he has still translated it as an imperative.
- **3:17** Instrument vs. cause. “Through him” is the Greek phrase which indicates that Christ is the one through whom we offer our thanks to God. Simmons has “because of what Christ has done” which ignores the basic grammatical reality that διὰ with a genitive is translated as “through.” The accusative case is translated “because.” So, we are not, in this instance, giving thanks to God *for* Christ (although we definitely do this!) but *through* Christ.

Observation 19: Pauline Literature

In addition to the extended criticisms above, one final and important observation concerns the style of the translation. One of the remarkable and precious aspects of Scripture is that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit such that in its writing it contains both the style, language, and thoughts of the writer, and simultaneously, it is truly the Spirit’s word. This is the teaching of 2 Peter 1:19–21, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (NIV); and 2 Timothy 3:16–17, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (NIV).

Part of what this means is that each author has a clear style, with a high degree of consistency within and across their writings (if there are more than one). In the New Testament we have a great number of writings by Paul and therefore an accurate understanding of Pauline style. If one were to revert TPT into Greek, the result would be unrecognizable compared to the original Greek text, and the style and vocabulary would not be even remotely Pauline. Having read portions of every book of the New Testament in TPT myself, it

is evident that Simmons has overwritten the style of all the individual authors, such that all books of the New Testament appear to have been written by the same overexuberant author. The constant additions of hyper-emotive and often sensual verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and nouns produces an undifferentiated and occasionally inappropriate style. Simmons' translation methodology so alters the style of the authors that they are no longer recognizable.

Conclusion

The analysis in this paper leads to a number of conclusions. Firstly, while some elements of the stated translation approach are acceptable, these are not applied in practice. Instead, Simmons has made significant linguistic and theological alterations, even importing foreign ideas into the text. Despite Simmons' claim that he is a linguist and translator, a close evaluation of his translation work casts serious doubt on this assertion. Combining the significant errors in word choice, description of meaning, grammar, syntax, and text-criticism, it is clear that what Simmons has produced is not an accurate translation—nor does he appear to possess the skills and experience which he claims.

Despite the stated intentions, TPT appears to have been reworded from an interlinear, imposing the author's sectarian and personal reflections on the text. If TPT was marketed as a personal reflection on Scripture, or some kind of commentary instead of a translation, it would still be problematic, but this paper would not be needed. Simmons, however, claims that TPT is an accurate and clear translation to be used for preaching and serious study. *It is not.* Simmons' objective of representing the "fiery heart of God" results in a translation approach that is substantially a hermeneutic, rather than a method. While many people may believe that they are reading the Bible when reading TPT, they are in fact often receiving personal teaching from Simmons rather than Scripture. Unfortunately, the end result of Simmons' work is not Christian Scripture, but an unduly free and sectarian translation that is not suitable for either public ministry or private devotion.

In an age where we have many excellent translations in modern English, each completed by committees of dozens of highly respected scholars, there is no need for *The Passion Translation*. The errors are so extensive, and the revision of the meaning of the Greek is so extreme, that perhaps Simmons should have ended his translation of Colossians with 4:18 reading instead, "I, Brian, write this with my own handwriting," because it certainly is not the letter that Paul wrote in Greek to the saints at Colossae.

APPENDIX 1. AUTHOR'S OWN WORKING TRANSLATION

Note: This working translation is included solely for reference purposes in relation to this paper and should not be considered a critique of any translations other than The Passion Translation.

Colossians

1 ¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy, our brother,

² To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: grace to you and peace from God our Father.

³ We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ on account of the hope that is being reserved for you in the heavenlies, of which you have heard beforehand in the word of truth, namely the gospel, ⁶ that has come to you, just as also in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing, just as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow slave, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ who also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and insight of the Spirit, ¹⁰ so that you may begin to conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing to him in every respect – bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God, – ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all steadfastness and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us for our share of the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³ He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in the heavenlies and on the earth, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities; all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, namely the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he may come to be supreme in everything, ¹⁹ For God was pleased for all his fullness to dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile all things to himself, whether things on the earth or things in the heavenlies, by making peace through his blood on the cross.

²¹ And you, who were once alienated and hostile-minded because of your evil works, ²² he has now reconciled in his physical body through his death, in order to present you holy, blameless, and above reproach before him; ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, established and steadfast, not shifting from the hope

of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a servant.

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and I am supplementing in my flesh what is lacking regarding Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I myself became a servant, according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, in order to fulfil the word of God, ²⁶ the mystery that has been hidden during ages and generations, but now has been revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God purposed to make known among the Gentiles what is the nature of the glorious super-abundance of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning each person and teaching each person with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this reason I labor, struggling in accordance with the manifestation of his power which is working mightily within me.

2 ¹ I want you to know how great a struggle I have on behalf of you and those in Laodicea and as many as have not seen me face to face, ² in order that their hearts may be comforted, as they are being united in love, to obtain all the riches of the full assurance of understanding in the knowledge of God's mystery, namely Christ, ³ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. ⁴ I say this so that none of you may be deceived by misleading arguments. ⁵ For even though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and it is with joy that I observe your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

⁶ Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ firmly rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, just as you were taught, overflowing in thanksgiving. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by means of empty and deceitful philosophy, according to human tradition, according to the transcendent spiritual powers of this world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him all the fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. ¹¹ In him you have also been circumcised, a circumcision not performed by hands, in the stripping off of the body made of flesh, by Christ's circumcision, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were once dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by blotting out the certificate of indebtedness against us, with its requirements, which are hostile to us. And this he took away from among us, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ Having disarmed the rulers and the authorities, he made a spectacle of them publicly, triumphing over them in him.

¹⁶ Therefore, do not let anyone judge you regarding eating, drinking, participation in feasts, new moon festivals, or sabbaths. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-humiliation and the worship of angels, going into detail about things which he has seen, being puffed up without cause by his unspiritual mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. ²⁰ If you have died with Christ to the transcendent spiritual

powers of the world, why, as though you were alive to the world, do you submit to its regulations like, ²¹ “Do not handle,” “Do not taste,” “Do not touch,” ²² (concerning things which all perish with consumption), according to human commandments and teachings? ²³ These regulations might seem like wisdom, with their self-made religion, self-humiliation and harsh treatment of the body, but are worthless in preventing sensual indulgence.

3 ¹ Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not the things on the earth. ³ For you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Therefore put to death what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful passion, evil desire, and greediness, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these things the wrath of God is coming [upon the sons of disobedience]. ⁷ You also once walked in these ways, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must also lay all of these aside: anger, rage, malice, slander, and obscene speech from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its evil practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here, there is neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free – but Christ is all, and in all.

¹² Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and beloved, put on compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, ¹³ and bear with one another, and forgive each other if anyone has a complaint against someone – just as the Lord has forgiven you, you must also do likewise. ¹⁴ But on top of all these virtues, put on love, which is the bond that unites them all. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you have indeed been called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you all the more richly, teaching and admonishing each other in all wisdom, with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing in your hearts to God with gratitude. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

¹⁸ Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, so that they will not become disheartened. ²² Slaves, obey your human masters in everything, not only when you are being watched, like people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord also, not only for people, ²⁴ because you know you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as your reward. You are to serve the Lord Christ. ²⁴ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for what he has done wrong—there is no partiality.

4 ¹ Masters, grant to your slaves what is just and fair, because you know that you also have a master in heaven.

² Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving, ³ praying for us also at the same time, that God might open a door to us for

our message, to speak the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am still imprisoned; ⁴ that I might make it clear, just as I ought to proclaim it. ⁵ Live with wisdom before outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. ⁶ Ensure your speech is always gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

⁷ Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is my beloved brother, and faithful servant and fellow slave in the Lord, ⁸ whom I sent to you for this very reason: that you may be informed about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹ With him is Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will inform you of everything that has happened here.

¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, as well as Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you have received instructions: if he should come to you, welcome him), ¹¹ and Jesus, who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, greets you. He is a slave of Christ Jesus, always wrestling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may come to stand mature, being fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I testify of him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and those in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, and so does Demas.

¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, ensure that it is also read among the Laodicean church, and that you also read the letter from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And tell Archippus, "Direct your attention to the ministry that you received in the Lord, so that you may complete it."

¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.