

# **Dr. Gary Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Lecture 1, Orientation, So Many Bible, So Little Time, Part 1**

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This is Dr. Gary Meadors in his teaching on the book of 1 Corinthians. This is lecture 1, Orientation, So Many Bibles, So Little Time, Part 1.

I'm delighted to be with you for this series of video lectures on 1 Corinthians for Biblically learning.

My name is Gary Meadors. I'm an Emeritus Professor of Greek and New Testament at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary in Michigan, USA. I'm actually taping these lectures from my home study in Florida, where I'm semi-retired, so we don't have the typical situation where I have a blackboard.

I'm able to walk around and sort of be at ease in that regard. And there may be an occasional house noise of one kind or another that enters the taping, and I just wanted you to know that so that you would understand. In relation to who I am, as I mentioned, being a retired professor from Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, which is also a part of Cornerstone University, I taught for over 30 years in about three schools, particularly at the graduate level.

My main teaching areas were Greek, hermeneutics, and New Testament books. I did a variety of courses over the 30-some years that I taught full-time. I've also done some online items for Grand Rapids Seminary.

I have a website that is [gmedors.com](http://gmedors.com). You can see from the header to the notes my name and how to spell it correctly. My website's a bit out of date. I hope to get that updated before long.

There are a few things under teaching and preaching that might be of interest to you besides some personal issues with me, my hobbies, and the things that I enjoy doing. Now, before you really get started in listening to the lectures on 1 Corinthians, I have some orientation for you to think about in terms of what that means. First of all, by this time, you should have retrieved the note packages, or at least the first couple of them, so that you can have them in front of you as I speak with you.

For example, at this time, you should have 1 Corinthians lectures for biblical learning, including my name and contact information. Then, there's a section called Advice to Students on Biblical Learning, particularly on the issue of learning online. I want to try to help you think about how to prepare yourself to make the best use of the time. I realize that it's not really a lot of fun to sit in front of a computer and listen to a talking head.

I'll try to make it as interesting as I can. We all enjoy much more the issue or the environment of having a group of individuals around where we can ask questions and interact. I'll try to sort of be your question advocate from time to time and raise the question and answer it, and I'll try to keep you sort of in the conversation, even though we can't speak with one another.

Under the Advice to Students, here are some things that you need to do before you get established in your listening to the lectures. First of all, you need to retrieve my notes. I have provided, which I think might be a little unusual for the Biblically eLearning site, a series of notes packages.

Dr. Hildebrandt, who puts the site together, will have these available so that you can see them. They're numbered, and we are in note pack one for our orientation session today and then a mini-lecture that I'll be sharing with you. You need to have these.

You need to print them out or have them on your computer there where you can see them. I will use the note packages like I would use a blackboard. They're only outlines, of course, to a great extent, but I've made them a little fuller so that you'll have the opportunity to see what I'm talking about.

In fact, I'll refer to the page. I'll refer to the section we are in. Occasionally, we'll have charts, or I might have a list of the issues or views in relation to a passage in the book of 1 Corinthians.

So please retrieve those if you haven't already and have at least the first two packages in front of you as you sit down to listen to the lecture today, even though we will be dealing with what's known as file one or note pack one and note pack two. I would highly recommend it, if possible, and I realize that this is probably an international setting, you may not even have a very convenient computer to use for these lectures, but my hope is that you would be able to find a way to get yourself some resources that you can study as you listen along to these lectures. In other words, you be a Berean, as the book of Acts says, that you check out the things that we say, that you look for interpretive ideas.

Now, a little later in the introduction, I will introduce you to some bibliography, but I have some comments here in the middle of this advice to students, where I suggest that you retrieve, maybe a library, maybe a friend, or that you purchase at least a couple of items, a commentary or two that you can be reading. Now, what would you go after? There is a great deal of literature on 1 Corinthians, and there are all kinds of levels of literature. As a student, my suggestion is that, typically, you're well advised to read above yourself.

In other words, don't sell yourself short. Don't look for some easy homiletical sort of a book on 1 Corinthians. Look for a commentary that actually explains to you the meaning of the text in the book of 1 Corinthians.

Don't be afraid if you see a little bit of Greek in a commentary or the fact that commentaries are very focused, and therefore, they're not easy to read, and they're not novels that you would sit down and just read for enjoyment. You're reading them for information. There are two commentaries in relation to these.

The first two that I've mentioned here are Charles Talbert and Garland. The bibliography is a little later in your notes. Those are two commentaries that anyone can pick up and use.

There may be an occasional reference to language, but at the same time, both of these writers are writing for an English-speaking audience, an English-reading audience. And I'll say a word about the fact that these series of lectures that I'm doing, at least, are in English, even though they're available on an international stage. If you want to read more advanced commentaries, then you'll find Talbert and Garland to be very challenging.

Talbert will give you a synthesis of how structure means. Now, that sounds like an odd phrase, but what he does is show you how the Apostle Paul structured 1 Corinthians to communicate to his audience. His audience was mainly a hearing audience, more than a reading audience, and that makes a lot of difference in the way that you structure material.

Garland's commentary, published by Baker, is an excellent commentary for your first serious study of the book of 1 Corinthians. Garland is a superb writer. He seems to have the ability to write in a way that you can understand and get complicated things down in terms of understanding what the issues are.

So, I highly recommend his commentary as one of your first readings. Now, if you happen to be more advanced, maybe even having had a course in 1 Corinthians at some level, you may be ready for some more advanced resources. I've mentioned the Ciampa and Rosner volume, which is a good volume on 1 Corinthians.

The bibliography, as I mentioned, comes later. Gordon Fee's revised edition of 1 Corinthians is a very sizable commentary. Fitzmeyer and the Anchor Bible series.

The Anchor Bible series is not what some would immediately think of, depending on your own denominational background. Joseph Fitzmeyer was a Roman Catholic scholar of no small stature. A very interesting man.

His job and his mind were to dig out the facts and lay those facts out in the commentary. He gives opinions, but he's mostly focused on information. There are lots of good things in his work on 1 Corinthians and the Anchor Bible.

There's another recent commentary by Anthony Thistleton of England. It's a very advanced commentary in many ways. Some view it as more hermeneutical, yet that's good at a certain stage.

So, I've listed these in the order that I would suggest that you think of them in terms of a person who doesn't have a lot of background or a little background in the study of the Bible. But they are things that would be great for you to research. There's one thing that I've learned in life, and it's this.

You are what you read. You must read a lot to get a little. You look at a variety of resources that explain a passage, and you pull out information from those resources, and you compare the information from a variety of resources.

Reading one book that may be easy to read or may impress you as being authoritative is not the way to go. The way to go is to compare a range of qualified writers who are explaining 1 Corinthians to you. Find the common denominators between those writers, which are something that you can probably depend on, and then look for where they differ from each other and why they differ.

That's a huge part of the learning process of interpreting a book of the Bible. So, commentaries are for research. They're not bedside reading.

As you listen to lectures and biblical e-learning, you should be thinking about research and focus. This is not an armchair sort of situation. This is serious.

Do you want to be a student of God's Word? Do you want to understand what the Bible teaches? Then, it calls for you to focus more intently on the material that you have the opportunity to access. I would suggest also in your study that you think about a place and a time on a weekly basis when you're listening to this course. That helps, and it particularly helps to have a place.

You need a private place. You need a quiet place. You need a place where you can focus.

If that's not possible, you do the best you can with what you have. I think you'll receive a lot more. Carve out an hour or whatever time you have, and be consistent with that.

That becomes your classroom time and the time that you focus on the materials that I'm going to be sharing with you. Please feel free to contact me in the header of the

page that you're looking at now is my email and phone number in the USA. Email is always the best thing in terms of communication.

I will eventually get that and respond to it. gngmeters@mac.com is my email. I'm most happy to interface you with the course or answer questions even that might not be related to First Corinthians as much as I can.

As I've said, these video lectures are coordinated with the note files that are provided. Always have the appropriate notepad in front of you as you begin a session. You can take notes in the margin.

You can have some extra pages. You can put question marks. I've got to check this professor out on this or maybe a check mark on something that strikes you as useful to you.

I'll always start by directing you to the notepad and keep you in line with that. As I mentioned, I'll use these notes sort of like a blackboard or a chalkboard, a whiteboard, where I would be talking to a class of students in front of me. I would like to say one more thing.

As you will see when we get to the lecture in the introduction on bibliography and what sources are available, there is a lot of literature about the book of First Corinthians. I taught Corinthians for a number of years, and I feel like I've only scratched the surface. In fact, as I sit and talk to you in my home office here in Florida of USA, I'm looking over to a shelf that you can't see.

The bottom three shelves are nothing but folders with articles on the book of First Corinthians. Now, that's not even commentaries. That's journal literature, so to speak.

It's a massive amount of literature. It can be very much overwhelming. And so, what am I going to say to you that's absolutely new? Well, Solomon said a long time ago, in another regard, that there's nothing new under the sun.

And that's a very important concept to get into your mind. In fact, I learned a quote many, many years ago that originality is not so much a matter of content but a matter of individual treatment. I'll treat some things differently, maybe, and hopefully, than you've heard them before.

But if you go out and research the sources that I bring to your attention, you'll see my tracks. You'll see the authors that have influenced me. But it's mostly not so much an author as it is the data that a consortium of authors bring to the surface through which I'll be working.

I'm not deviating from a core understanding of First Corinthians. Yes, I'll have different views than some. We won't always agree on every text that we look at.

But that's part of biblical interpretation. That's part of the search to bring to the surface the things that Paul intended for his original audience, and therefore, we glean from that audience. That's another one of my emphases as I teach is that our task is not to answer the question, what does the Bible mean to me? What it means to me could be very irrelevant to what it means.

My task is not to ask what the Bible means to me. My task is to determine what the Bible means. And to make that more stark, if we don't know what it meant in its original context and setting, we have very little hope of answering the question, what does it mean as I bring it into my own context today? Now, we all have to do that, and in a marvelous way, the Bible was written so that what it meant, for example, in the first century, can be transferred into our own context in appropriate ways and in important ways. But we make a link to what it meant in order to be legitimate as we make assertions about what it means. Now, we'll talk about this as we move through 1 Corinthians.

For example, when we get to 1 Corinthians 5, and we're talking about courts and Christians going to court in 1 Corinthians, we will ask the question, well, that was their time, that was their court system, a Roman system. There are special situations in their context, and my context, how does it compare? An American court system, for example, is nothing like a Roman court system. So, we have to know what it means in order to have a legitimate avenue of asserting what we believe it means in our own situation.

We need to keep that in mind. Now, these lectures, as a result, will expose you to numerous views on a variety of issues. There's probably not another book in the New Testament that raises such a series of issues that are forever issues for Christians.

1 Corinthians may not have it all, but it certainly has enough to keep us busy for a long, long time. And so, I'll be exposing you to different vantage points and different views. Sometimes, these views may be very different, and we may find major scholars who sometimes are at loggerheads over what a particular text is teaching.

That's part of the process. That's part of having many resources and adjudicating through those resources toward a common denominator understanding and, in the specifics of an interpretation, which one you think, on the basis of evidence and on the basis of correlation with what it meant, would be the best answer to what it means now. And I would say even more that there will come times when we will not say, this is the view.

In fact, that will be rather seldom. And I will often say these are two or three of the best answers to what the view is. And we need to think through these and ask ourselves, what is the most likely to be correct out of these views? Now, it's not always that way.

There are certain issues, certain items that are common denominators, morality, for example. There's a common thread through the whole Bible about certain moral issues that we can identify and be very dogmatic about.

But the specifics of text interpretation call for a lot of humility. Now, as I speak, I will occasionally have my water here. Because I haven't been doing a lot of public lecturing, I will probably need a bit of water to keep my throat in good shape.

So, your task is to listen. Your task is to reflect. Do your own research along with processing this course.

I'm going to talk to you in a couple of lessons about what I call validation. So, where you will become an interpreter of scripture, not only do you think this is what it says, but here's the reason you think it says that. Because you've looked at these three or four approaches to what it says and out of that, you've come to this conclusion, and here are the reasons why.

That is biblical interpretation. Biblical interpretation is not what it means to me. Biblical interpretation is what it meant with lines of correlation to my current setting and what it most likely means right now in relation to what we see in biblical history.

So, the meaning of the Bible is not what you think but what you can validate by discipline, research, and reflection. All right, so that's some advice as you begin to think about listening to this course on 1 Corinthians. Now, in that original file, number one, you come to the table of contents.

And I will lay out for you the lectures. I'll try to correlate the page numbers. That's a little more challenging since this is a moving target right now.

But you will have a complete table of contents when you draw it off of the Biblically Learning site. So that, in a sense, is my orientation to you, asking you to be a good student, asking you to in some ways, in many ways, probably to be patient as a good student, to get some resources, to be prepared, and to take seriously the opportunity that is yours to deal with material that relates to the book of 1 Corinthians. Now, in this same introductory lecture, I want to move into what I call the introduction to 1 Corinthians.

I'm going to be doing a variety of things in this introduction. Some of it might be a little bit of my pet peeves. This is my opportunity to share that with you.

This first lecture is very much in that area because the lecture is called So Many Bibles, So Little Time. You'll see in your table of contents that's lecture one. After this lecture and another video, we'll talk about how the Bible teaches us three levels of biblical teaching.

What I try to do here is to answer the question of the nature of text, what they're teaching, and how that teaching relates to us. Someone has said that in the Bible, there is one interpretation, and there are many applications. Let me say that again.

One interpretation, many applications. Well, the problem with that is this: many times, they take the M off of the word many. One interpretation, any application.

And that floats back into what the Bible means to me rather than what the Bible meant and, therefore, what it legitimately means in our current context. We have to be very careful about that. So the Bible teaches us, and I'll talk about that in another lecture.

Then, I'll talk briefly about what's known as a process of validation. That's just a fancy word to say: what should you do when you sit down to study a book in the Bible? I'm going to try to bring you into touch with a process that you should be following when you take the time and the energy to study a book of the Bible.

You need a method. Validation is a method. It also brings out this process of surfacing views so that you can make sound judgments among a variety of views.

Then, after that, we will get into the formal introduction to 1 Corinthians in that first lecture or that last lecture under the introduction. So, four items that we'll be looking at, and you can see that in the table of contents. At this time, I want to make my transition and go to the set of notes that have to do with so many Bibles in so little time.

If I was more, had more ingenuity electronically, I might have some music for you when I pause to take a drink, but you'll just have to enjoy the video instead of the music, I suppose. So, many Bibles, so little time. Now, one of the challenges is that I need to stop and make a comment about the fact that this is a lecture in English.

It's going to relate to English Bibles. I will bring in the Greek New Testament from time to time. Greek is one of the tools in your tool chest if you've had the language.

If you haven't, read books that are written by people who have, and they will help you to understand when they can't. Language is not some sort of a mystery. Language is not some sort of a secret to getting the real meaning of the Bible.



Language is just one of many tools that can be used to access the meaning of the text. It makes that access a little more specific. It gives it a little more authority in the sense that the Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and the more we know about those languages, the more we understand how the authors put down what they did.

But if we didn't understand some of the historical conventions of literature and how literature works, like Psalms or Proverbs or Epistles or Apocalyptic, if we didn't understand how that works, the language wouldn't have a context in which to operate. So, there are many things involved in the interpretation of scripture. But we're going to look at the English Bible primarily.

And I apologize to you; I'm monolingual. I'm underprivileged in relation to languages. I wish that I had been raised in a context where I could have learned several languages and perhaps float into something for you to help you.

Maybe you're a Spanish-speaking person, French, German, Italian, Arabic, or some other language. I'm just going to have to do it from an English base. So, I will use that as my comparison.

Now that doesn't mean it doesn't have application to you. I think that it will, sometimes more, sometimes less. One of the things we have in relation to English is the proliferation of English translations.

I want to step back just a little bit as we begin to think about that. First of all, the Old Testament comes to us in Hebrew and Aramaic. There are a limited number of sections of the Aramaic language, which is very much like Hebrew.

Then, it comes to us as a version, or, in other words, a translation in Greek. We call it the Septuagint. That was provided for us.

The Septuagint, which uses LXX capitalized as the numeral 70, is the Greek translation from Hebrew sources of the 3rd to 2nd century BC. This work was done primarily in Egypt, and there are a number of interesting studies about the production of the Septuagint. There are even some ancient sources like the Letter of Aristeas, which is what we would call today a PR piece on the Septuagint.

And it's not something to be taken at face value. It makes some rather wild claims and assertions about the Septuagint that we know now historically probably was not the case. But the Septuagint was put together in a rather narrow time frame, and it became the Greek Bible of the 1st century for many Jews whose Hebrew may have not been up to speed, and for particularly the early Christian community's access to the Old Testament was through Greek.

We know that for one reason in relation to the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospels. When we look at the Hebrew text and the Greek text, which will oftentimes be very close, but remember, the Greek is a translation, and we'll find the New Testament using that Greek text rather than the Hebrew text. Not that it's a great big difference, but when you get down into the specifics of the translation, you will see those tracks.

That tells us that the early Christian community prized the Septuagint and used it. And we need to be aware of that. So that's part of the tradition of the Old Testament.

In recent decades, now getting maybe even on to 50 years or more, we've had access to the Dead Sea Scrolls that you may be aware of. If not, you can go on the internet and Google, as we say these days, Dead Sea Scrolls, and learn a lot about them. They were 2nd to 1st century productions, primarily in Hebrew.

They provide both the text of the Old Testament and everything except for Esther. And some of it is partial, but most of it's very complete. And it's given us a whole new version of Hebrew to compare to the Hebrew that we were used to.

You see, the typical Hebrew Bible that's used in classrooms across the world when we study the Old Testament was actually a very late production, about the 9th century AD. And as a result of that, we find something that several centuries earlier, it's very important that those two things be compared. Now, the Jews did a very good job of transmission.

It's a very different situation than we have with the Greek Bible, where we have thousands of manuscripts and a very different aspect of transmission. But at the same time, we have a very strong testimony to the Old Testament in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Now, the New Testament came to us.

There are some 5,200 manuscripts, and some are being found even as we speak. In recent decades, new manuscripts have come to the surface. These manuscripts are from the 2nd to the 16th century up until the time of printing.

We have handmade copies. Anything that's a handmade copy of the New Testament in Greek is a primary manuscript for us. Now, the New Testament was copied into Latin at a very early stage, into Coptic, and there are a number of other languages and their variations, even within those in terms of the versions.

So, as soon as the New Testament was circulating, particularly after Constantine made Christianity a legal religion about 325, the New Testament was being produced and disseminated, especially in the Western world. So, we have Greek, we have

Latin, we have Coptic because of the Egyptian influence, and other versions. But primarily, I'm thinking about the Greek manuscripts at this point.

Of these, about 3,000 are Greek manuscripts. About 2,100 are what we call Greek lectionaries. A lectionary, if you've ever had a hymnal, is getting rather rare these days, but if you've had a hymnal and in the back of that hymnal, there were scripture readings for the day.

Many denominations have a three-year cycle of reading the Bible in the pulpit, and they get through the Bible in three years, each year they have what they call their lectionary, and in the back of the hymnal, sometimes it will be printed, or at least the passages will be printed and those will be read. Well, they had that kind of thing in the early centuries, too, where the Christians who didn't have as much access before printing to these manuscripts would take pieces and would provide for themselves a lectionary, a selected reading, and so that becomes a part of the evidence of the New Testament manuscripts. Now, of this total, only 318 of these manuscripts are thereabouts.

These things are always being updated in terms of statistics, so I'm speaking in the ballpark, very close to the ballpark, using Metzger and Alain's books in terms of these statistics, but about 318 of these come to us before the 9th century A.D. Now, let me mention something here. We've got B.C., before Christ, A.D., which is a Latin after the Domenico tradition, after Christ. That's been the traditional way to refer to dating, B.C., A.D. In most books today, you won't see B.C. and A.D. You will see B.C.E. and C.E., those capital letters.

So, B.C.E. stands for B.C., which means B.C.E., Before the Common Era, and C.E. stands for A.D. That means the Common Era, and you will hear me refer to this division of time with either of those descriptors because many of you will still be B.C., A.D. in your ear. I'll often use that, but I may say B.C.E. or C.E., and you'll know now what we're talking about. So, only 318 manuscripts, in part or in whole, and many of them are fragmentary, before the 9th century.

I think, from that standpoint, when you hear that there are 5,200, over 5,000 manuscripts, you get the point. Something was going on in the 9th century that produced a lot of manuscripts. The church became legal, as it were, about 325, and was able publicly to start doing things, but in the 9th century, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church, there were scriptoria, so to speak, where manuscripts were being copied.

I can't go into the history of this. There's not time. It's a very interesting history, but so you have a lot more.

In that regard, you may hear someone talk about the majority of the text. Well, the Majority Text would be post-9th century, as far as the numbers are concerned, and I'm not going to get into all the issues about the Greek manuscript textual criticism at this point. I don't have time, but that's something for you to be aware of.

All manuscripts are important. We would assume just by the nature of things that something that is closer to the time of the apostles, in terms of its survival, ought to be given a very, very close look and perhaps even a priority over maybe the majority that was post-9th century. At the same time, however, that post-9th century composition of manuscripts will have readings that reflect those early times.

So, it's not simple to say yes or no. We embrace them all. We work through them with the principles of textual criticism, and we find the readings that become a part of what we call our Greek New Testament.

Even the Greek New Testament has footnotes about variations in those readings, and I have one of the manual Greek New Testaments that we use here. You can see here that it has a text, and then here are the footnotes. Well, this is only a student version.

We would need about 10 volumes or more to be able to present the array of manuscripts that come to us. Those variations could often be a different spelling of a word. There are a lot of minor issues.

There's very little in the manuscript tradition at the end of the day that comes down to something that is extremely serious. It is miniscule to pun on that word. Now, English versions.

So, we have the Old Testament in Hebrew, Aramaic, and then the Greek version called the Septuagint. We have the New Testament, which came to us as far as our manuscript tradition is concerned, as it is primarily in Greek. There may have been some other things floating around in Hebrew, but primarily in Greek.

But then, we're dealing with English versions, and it was a long time before the English Bible really came into the hands of the Western world. Now here, if you're in an Eastern world or Southeast Asia or somewhere, here again, I'm speaking of this history, particularly from the vantage point of the Western world, because that's where that history collected itself. The Bishop of Rome commissioned Jerome, for example, under English version C, to do a Latin translation of the Bible in about 382.

Now, you'll notice Christianity became legal in 325. It took until 382 to start putting the Greek Bible into the language of the Roman Empire, which would have been Latin. So, it's a slow process.

Many things were going on in those early decades after Christianity became a legal religion, particularly in theology, as you can learn from the Church Fathers. This version culminated in Bethlehem in about 404 CE. The Vulgate, as it was called, was the Bible of the Western Church for over a thousand years, and only those who knew Latin had access to it.

So, you have that Roman world that conquered a huge geographical area, and many didn't have their own language. Many people may have known Greek, but they may not have known, so to speak, everything, but maybe a localized approach to Greek. I have a number of Greek Bibles, classical Greek, you have Greek of the New Testament period, and you have modern Greek, and they're not the same.

It's kind of like in English; if you go to read Beowulf or you go to read Shakespeare, it takes you a while because all of a sudden, you're reading English. It's not like the English you're used to. And so, Greek, although it's been a long-standing language, has changed in a variety of ways, and we have to take that into consideration when we look at Greek sources.

The Gutenberg, who was in the Western world, printed Jerome's version about 1452 to 56. In the Western world, we think of modern printing coming at the time of Gutenberg. In all fairness, I need to note here that while Gutenberg dominated the Western world in understanding printing, the Arabs printed movable prints a long time before Gutenberg.

But because we live in the Western world, that's usually not part of our history. There's a magazine called Aramco World. That's the Arabian American oil company, Aramco World.

And I read an article a long time ago about movable printing in the Arab world before the time of Gutenberg. But from our standpoint, we have to work from that Western world and the development of the Bible coming up to the English Bible in the Western world. So, Gutenberg is what we refer to.

A Greek New Testament, however, the Greek Bible wasn't printed until Erasmus, who was a humanitarian Roman Catholic scholar. He was a humanitarian scholar. He was also Roman Catholic as far as religion was concerned.

And he printed that in 1514. At the same time that Erasmus was working, there was a little bit of competition going on. Who could put out the Greek Bible? This is part of that Renaissance spirit, if you please, of getting back to the original sources.

And the Catholic Church wanted to be the first one, at least a group, a certain group. And so, they commissioned Erasmus to produce that. Here again, we could talk all

day about Erasmus, who had less than a dozen manuscripts and didn't even have the whole Greek Bible from which to produce his Greek New Testament.

He had to translate a large part of the Book of Revelation from Latin back into Greek to have an entire Greek Bible. Now you can imagine what that does in terms of a Greek scholar trying to decide what the original Greek was in relation to other manuscripts later on. But nonetheless, there's Erasmus.

And then, there was a very academic Bible called the Complutensian Polyglot. Polyglot means many writings that were put together but were not published until 1520. It may have even been ready before Erasmus.

However, it was such a massive product that it didn't get the press because it didn't come out until a few years after Erasmus. So, there we have, up until the period of the Reformation that was going on in the Western world, in the Renaissance, and this unique interest in the original sources of the Bible in the Western world, and particularly in Greek as we're concerned. A little bit before that, there was a man named John Wycliffe, who was interested in getting the Bible into the hands of the people.

You can see his dates here, 1329 to 84. He was an Oxford resident in England. He resisted the Roman Catholic Church to some extent and their ban on translating the Bible into the vernacular, that is, the language of the people.

Only the Latin Vulgate was available in many parts of the world at this time, and like in England, where they were speaking only English, Latin was an unknown language to many people, and so therefore, the people did not have the Bible in their own language. And there is a major quest, not only in the Western world but throughout the globe, to get the Bible into the language of a common person who's reading, who is reading the language that they speak, so that they can have access to what the scriptures say. John Wycliffe was one of the early individuals to do that for us, but he had a very difficult task.

He and his associates provided a very literal, and anything literal can be choppy, a very literal translation of the Vulgate. Now, notice they're providing a translation of the Vulgate, not the original languages. This virtually underground rendition was strongly resisted by Rome for whatever variety of reasons they wanted to control.

It was controlled by them, resisted by them, so much so that the Council of Constance, which was a Roman Catholic Church council in 1414, ordered Wycliffe's body disinterred and burned. Get rid of this history. William Tyndale, in 1526, printed the New Testament.

In 1525, but he was executed in 1536 before finishing the Old Testament. As one American scholar named Bruce Metzger said, some time back, he was sent in an urn. Bruce Metzger was a professor at Princeton.

He was sent in an urn, a copy of a Bible that people didn't like that he happened to be a translator of, and they burned it, put it in this urn, and sent it to him. That was their statement of what they thought about his work. Well, Metzger, as he was apt to do, made the classic statement that he was glad that at least they were burning the Bible rather than the translators.

Well, in the old days, they burned the translators. They had the power to do that, and we see that with this famous individual with Wycliffe's remains and others who tried to get the Bible into the hands of the people. Now, religious intrigue was the mode of operation until Tyndale's death.

Afterward, politics changed. England became a hotbed for translating the Bible into the language of the people, and we have a whole series of Bibles that come in English. In 1535, we have the Coverdale, the Great Bible in 39, and the Geneva Bible.

You want to put an asterisk on that. That's a very important Bible. In 1560, the Bishop's Bible in 68.

Then, probably one of the most famous Bibles in Western history, and rightly so. In fact, we celebrated, I believe, not long ago, its 150th anniversary. Actually, what? 16, 17, 18, 19.

It's 300. It's 400 years from 1611 to 2011. 400 years of the King James Version, and it's still being printed and still around.

It was put out in 1611. This version began in about 1604 with about 54 translators involved. Only 47 of the names have been preserved.

The King James Version was as controversial in its own day, in the time that it was produced, as new Bible translations are as controversial today. That's always the way it is. Nobody wants anything new.

We want the old. They wanted the Bible. In fact, when the pilgrims came to the United States, it is said that they did not allow a King James Bible on the boat.

That it could only be a Bible that had been around for a while, the Geneva Bible. Now, the King James managed to dominate until a new revision was commissioned in 1870. All of this is in a chart with the American Bible Society out of New York City.

American Bible Society, New York, New York. You can go online and see if you can find a chart on the English Bible in their scholarly sources. The King James set the stage for the English Bible.

For example, the Revised Standard Version, which is a major Bible in the English-speaking world, is not a brand new translation but a revision of the King James with updates according to an increasing understanding of Bible manuscripts. You see, the King James Version came from Erasmus's Greek Text, and that text was based on about a dozen manuscripts, and he didn't even have the whole Greek Bible when he did it. Now, we have over 5,000 manuscripts, so a lot of work can be done to check, compare, and update these translations.

Now, that's the King James Version in 1611 in the English world. So, that doesn't really bring us up to the modern time, does it? But it shows us that in this struggle to get the Bible into the language of the people, we've had a lot of translations from the Old Testament and from the New Testament. The New Testament, particularly out of Greek into English, all the way back to the times of these famous individuals.

Now, if you want to know more about it, it's very difficult to reduce it because it's a fascinating story. I've given you a bibliography here so that you can try to retrieve more information about the King James Version in various ways. I want to go over all these with you, just three of them here. Try to keep my bibliographies to a limited amount so it's not overwhelming.

You can look these up and read about the history of the King James Bible. Now, let's come up toward the modern day. You're an English Bible student, more than likely.

What do you do with all the translations that are out there? And I'm just listing a few of them. Well, I want to give you the big picture of this so that you can make some reasonable judgments about what to do with your English Bibles. All right? Now, defining English Bible translations and English translation procedures.

This is on page two of the notes on So Many Bibles, So Little Time. Now, you'll notice here that under defining English Bible translations, I have two major categories. One is called formal equivalence, and one is called dynamic equivalence.

The term dynamic isn't used so much right now. We've changed to what we call functional equivalence. Terminology changes.

People like to get a little different perspective on things. But formal and dynamic have been major terms from looking at the development of these English Bibles, these English translations. And I'll just use those terms but update you on the fact that dynamic is usually functional translation these days.



I'll give you some bibliography on that in a little while. Now, if you would, please look at page two of the paragraph under formal equivalence. You'll see behind formal equivalence you have the King James version, the KJV.

Then you have an ASV. The ASV was put out in 1901. Then, the NASV is the New American Standard Bible, which has gone through some revisions as well.

That was very popular for a long time among English Bible people. Then, the RSV was a major, major version among English Bible people. The major denominations primarily use the RSV.

That went under a revision called the NRSV, and it has gone through some revisions as well. Then we came more recently to something called the ESV, the English Standard Version, which was a version put out by a smaller community but has become popular among some. Now, that last word, there is not an English version per se.

It's not exactly the same as these others, but I wanted to put it there. It's called the Tanakh. That's the Hebrew translation of the Bible into English, and you can look that word up, and you can get their translations of the Bible from Jewish scholars as well.

I'm primarily looking at the others. Now, you need to realize that those formal equivalent translations are all in the King James stream of things. They're revising the King James, updating it, so to speak, to make it more user-friendly.

The King James Bible, for example, was written at what we would call a 12th-grade reading level. Well, one of the most recent translations of the Bible was written at most a 6th-grade reading level. Reading has taken a turn for the worse in the English world over recent centuries, and so, therefore, putting the Bible in the hands of the people is a constant project to provide them with something they can understand.

Let me tell you a little story. I have an extremely good friend who teaches in a tradition that likes to use the King James Version. Now, they don't use the King James Version because they're naive about the Greek manuscripts or naive about the fact that the King James can use a little help sometimes, but they use the King James Version because it set the language for some 400 years, it seems, that it set the language of the liturgy.

A lot of your hymns use phrases from the King James Version, and people memorize the generation before me, particularly the King James only, not for theological reasons, but because that was the main Bible, and the Bible was memorized in the King James Version. So, when new versions come to the table, and they deviate a little bit from that, that would have been a shock to them. But the King James Bible is not an easy Bible to read because it's at that 12th-grade level, and it does participate

to some extent in Old English, even though the King James has been revised to try to upgrade how it says it without messing too much with its tradition.

Well, my friend came to me out of that context of a tradition that liked the liturgical sound of the King James Bible, and he is himself a major scholar, but he's a churchman. He was working with children from the 1st to the 12th grade, trying to get the Bible into the hands of children. Now, of course, since he used the King James Bible and they prized it in their tradition, they wanted to put the King James into the hands of the children.

And he came to me one day, and he said, I'm telling you, this is very difficult because children can't read the King James English. It doesn't make any sense to them. So, he was confronted with a challenge.

He wanted to put the Bible in the hands of the people. And yet that was a challenge because to do so meant that he was giving them a Bible they couldn't read. What's he going to do? He was in a stressful position trying to protect the liturgical language of his denomination.

Well, not for some super theological reason, but for a reason of that tradition. And yet he's confronted now with ministry needs to get the Bible into the language of people so they can read it and understand it. And as a result, he had that challenge.

Very interesting, isn't it? Well, let's think about this. It was getting the language, getting the Bible into the language of the people. Formal equivalence.

Here's an explanation of it in the paragraph. All of these English translations are revisions of the King James version, except the Tanakh. I need to review my pronunciation of that, which is a fresh Jewish literal rendition.

We'll factor that out. They all, the King James through the ESV, follow a formal equivalence procedure for translation. Dr. Bruce Metzger, a famous Princeton New Testament scholar, a very fine conservative scholar, explains this by his comment in the introduction to the new Revised Standard Version.

I highly recommend that you retrieve his introduction to the NRSV. You'd find it in the RSV as well, but you kind of need that first edition of the NRSV when he put it in there because that was a period in which some issues were going on that his introduction was appraised to. It also helps to read it from the NRSV, which is an early version, not necessarily the most recent revision.

Quote, the directive to continue in the tradition, this is what Metzger is saying about the translation of the NRSV, in the tradition of the King James Bible, but to introduce such changes as are warranted on the basis of accuracy, clarity, euphony, and

current English usage. So, it wasn't a new translation, it was an updated translation. Within the constraints set by the original text and by the mandates of the division, the committee was following the maxim.

Here's the little statement that Metzger uses: quote as literally as possible, as free as necessary. Now let me stop there just for a moment. As literal as possible, as free as necessary.

There is no such thing as a literal translation of the Bible if we want to speak absolutely. Because if we translated it literally, it would be nonsense. The Greek doesn't use a word order like English.

You know, English uses subject, verb, and object. It has a fixed order. The Greek is all over the place.

For example, in 1 John, you don't get the main verb of that sentence until verse 4. And so you cannot translate Greek in the same way that you render English. You have to actually translate it. You can't just render it.

Many times I see these Bibles called interlinears, where they take the Greek language, they put the English language below it, and if you just read the English, you're all over the place. I understand that Spanish is a little bit this way, and many modern languages probably are that way. They don't use what some might think of as a boring word order like English uses.

And you have to make judgments about how you do things. When the Iron Curtain came down, and the Russian, a well-established Russian church, both in terms of the Russian church and in terms of like Russian Baptists. I had some times of teaching with Russian Baptists in the Ukraine early after the Iron Curtain came down.

Well, they had Bibles that were translations of Luther's, a German Bible. And I would sit in the office of, they called him the Duke, Dukonchenko, I think was how he pronounced his name. We would be talking about the Bible through a translator, and I happened to be looking at a Greek New Testament. I rendered something, and he was looking at his German.

Well, he was actually reading his Russian Bible, which was translated out of German, and the German Bible was translated from the King James Bible, or at least it had some connections there. We weren't the same, so we started talking about the question of the way a version renders itself. As literal as possible, as free as necessary.

And so, the NRSV is, if you please, a literal translation, a formal translation of the Greek manuscripts as they're laid out. Consequently, having a literal translation is

almost an oxymoron. You can't do that exactly because the languages are not the same.

So, all translations make judgments. And I'm going to illustrate that to you just a little bit later. So as literal as possible, as free as necessary.

As a consequence, the new revised standard version remains essentially a literal translation. A literal translation requires more from the reader since the translators don't do any more than they have to make it a readable translation. You have to be more on your toes when you're reading a formal equivalent version of the Bible than one that takes more liberties.

And I'll talk about what that means in this next paragraph. Now, I'll just tell you, I watch the clock while I'm doing these lectures, and I'm realizing that this lecture has become a great deal longer than I anticipated it becoming. Part of that is due to the fact that I'm talking to a camera, and I'm trying my best to try to explain some of the statements that I make and to illustrate them for you.

And that has a way of expanding the context, and things come to my mind that I think is an illustration of what I'm saying. I hope I don't lose my train of thought too often, as I did a moment ago. And so that tends to yeast out these lectures just a little bit.

Consequently, I am committed to never going over an hour. I had hoped to keep my lectures down to about 30 minutes so that you have brief takes and you can go and come. I'm beginning to think that might be impossible, but I will never go over an hour in a lecture, even if I have to cut in the middle of the notes that I'm dealing with.

Since we have those before us, that's easy to do. Right now, what I'm going to do is finish through point B so that you have my presentation on formal and dynamic equivalence in this lecture, so you get the big picture. Okay, now let me do that.

So, formal equivalence. English Bibles that follow that rule of translation. They are as literal as possible, as free as necessary.

They're trying to write the Bible out, in that King James tradition even, in a way that you can understand it. I'll give you one passage to always go to, to see this. It's Romans chapter 7. I call it the doobie-doobie-do section of the Bible.

Doobie-doobie-do. What I want to do, I can't do, but what I ought to do, I don't do, and what I should do, I have trouble doing. If you read through Romans 7 in the King James version, you'll get that doobie-doobie-do effect, and you're all twisted up.

If you read it in a more modern version, such as the NRSV, you will find that it's been smoothed out a great deal. When we get to the dynamic equivalence, it's smoothed out even more. Now, here comes the problem.

Where are judgments made about how much to smooth something out so that it's readable, and you don't just get all tongue-tied and twisted as you go down through as literally as possible, as free as necessary? Translators are always making those judgments, and even as major versions are from time to time updated, and the King James has been updated as a King James, as much as an RSV is updated as an RSV, because the reader now, maybe decades later, has got to be able to read the thing, and so the translators are constantly making those kinds of judgments. That becomes a challenge in interpretation.

You are reading the Bible when you read any of these versions, but you are reading the translation. Commentators are the ones who are supposed to keep you in touch. What's the difference? That's why you must use good, solid, credible resources when you research the Bible.

If you don't, you may be using a Bible version that has taken you a little bit away from that literal as possible, and you need some help in getting back to what the scriptures meant in that regard. The translator is trying to do that for you, but we will see as we move into the dynamic that sometimes that can get a little farther away. So now, dynamic equivalence or functional equivalence has quite a spectrum and an array.

I'll give you some bibliography later where you can read on this, but here's the basic introduction to it. You can read Metzger for formal equivalence in his introduction to the NRSV. Now you're going to get another way of translating, which came particularly to us from the New International Version we call the NIV.

Notice what I've said here in the text. This translation procedure is well explained in the introduction to the New Living Translation. The New Living Translation was a revision of the Living Bible.

The Living Bible has been around for a long time. Many viewed the Living Bible as sort of what we call a paraphrase, which is a few steps removed from as literal as possible. However, the revision of the Living Bible was led a great deal by a fine scholar named Tremper Longman, who wrote this introduction to the New Living Translation.

He explains their principles of translation in providing a Bible that's even more readable than the formal equivalent Bibles. Now, notice this. This translation procedure is well explained in the introduction to the New Living Translation Bible.

Quote, a dynamic equivalence translation that is a functional equivalence translation, can also be called a thought-for-thought translation. Now before you get your hackles up too much, I'll come back and explain that a little more later. Comma, as contrasted with a formal equivalence or word-for-word translation.

Of course, listening carefully and translating the thought of the original language requires that the text be interpreted accurately and then rendered in understandable idioms. Okay, there's the secret, there's the key, there's the insight into the difference between functional, excuse me, in between formal and functional. Formal is trying to stick with the original languages as much as possible, as literal as possible, as free as necessary.

However, the new translation styles, particularly in the NIV tradition, which is a fine tradition, are called dynamic equivalence. They've adopted the word functional these days; maybe that helps them to try to be less dynamic, but nonetheless, it's a fine word. But here is the secret to that.

They've got the translator to sort of have a view of that text to be able to render it in the most readable English. That means interpretation. So, in the column to your notes that you have for me, up to the maybe over on the right of dynamic equivalence, you could put an interpretive translation.

That's what they say here: It requires that the text be interpreted accurately and then rendered understandably in an idiom. Now, to claim that you've interpreted the Bible accurately all the way through is a pretty big claim. So, I call the dynamic or dynamic equivalent versions interpretive translations.

Now that's not bad if it's being done by good scholars who have strong controls placed upon them. The NIV is an interpretive translation. It's a dynamic translation.

It is a functional translation. And I will show you in the next lecture what that means by some very specific verse items that we will compare in these traditions of translations. So that's my lecture number one for today.

And we're stopping on page two after the dynamic. So, you need to stop and reflect. Try to retrieve the NRSV and the NLT, the New Living Translation, and read the introductions to those two Bibles.

When we come back next time, I'm going to illustrate to you the difference between these English versions. Now, why am I spending so much time on this? Well, the answer is it's important. You have a bible that you like and that you use.

Well, say you become a pastor, and you're facing a crowd of a couple of hundred people. Have you ever thought how many different bible versions are sitting out

there? Or even more stressful, one of those people walks into your office the following week with their Bible, and they're having a crisis in their life, and they've selected a verse. And they throw that thing down on your desk and say, the bible says.

And it's an interpretive translation, even something as good as the NIV. But they have given that verse a meaning that you might disagree with. Now you're disagreeing with the bible because here's what it says.

Now, we've all experienced this if we've been in ministry. And the answer to that is not to run from it. The answer is to embrace and learn what these Bibles are and how translation works so that you can help people to maneuver through a world that has become such a proliferation of English Bibles that sometimes it becomes quite confusing.

Thank you. I'm sorry for such a long lecture. I'll try to keep these down a little bit more and find some way to do that, even if it just means cutting and running at, say, 45 minutes so that you don't have to sit so long.

Of course, you can stop me; you can shut me up anytime you want and come back later. I know that's doable. But I want to try to find a way to package these into a more reasonable length package.

So, thank you. I'm Gary Meadors, and I'm signing off on lecture one of this study on 1 Corinthians. These introductory lectures will lay some groundwork so that when we get into the actual text, I can refer back to these issues, and you'll understand why we're doing what we're doing with the Bible.

Thank you very much, and have a great day.

This is Dr. Gary Meadors in his teaching on the book of 1 Corinthians. This is lecture 1, Orientation, So Many Bibles, So Little Time, Part 1.