

Leisure to Consider the ESV

By David Cook

NAs I write this, I am half-way through my self-isolation, following my return to Australia from Malaysia, nine days ago, and taking advantage of this opportunity to read books which have accumulated, unread, on my shelves.

Last year, the men's group, of which I am a part, began to read *Knowing God*, by J. I. Packer, a chapter a fortnight. I have been challenged by our studies and so I have chosen to read Leland Ryken's biography of Packer (Crossway 2015).

I have enjoyed reading of Packer's early life, notably his discussions with a chess friend, the son of a Unitarian minister, who was affirming the ethic of Jesus while denying his divinity. Packer struggled with the question: 'Why, if this man believes so much, does he not believe more? but if he believes so little, does he not believe less?'

Packer was converted when he arrived as a student at Oxford in 1944. His calling was to prepare people for ministry and this is traced through his time at Tyndale Hall, Bristol, Latimer House, Oxford and Regent College, Vancouver. Ryken lists Packer's many books, essays and articles. He then describes the work of which Packer himself said: 'I thank God for the books I have been able to write ... I find myself concluding that the most significant thing I have been enabled to do...has been to serve in the production of the English Standard Version (ESV), a reality so much more important for the Church than any of the books of Packer'.

Last year (2019) I bought what I think should be my last new translation of the Bible.

When I was converted I was an RSV user, then at Moore College the RV, then in parish ministry it was the NIV in general use. I

was able to maintain through various re-bindings my 1996 NIV. But now, having been rebound twice, I have laid the NIV to rest and taken up the ESV.

Ryken summarises the Preface of the ESV: It preserves the full range of meanings in the original text; it is faithful to the words used by the original authors; it uses the same word in translation when the author uses a recurrent word; it preserves the stylistic variety of each author; it uses the best available scholarly resources; it has a simplicity, beauty and dignity of style. Packer says: 'The ESV is the all users version, all purposes Bible, that our day needs. Good for personal reading and study, for public reading and it is good and easy for memorising.'

For me it doesn't read as fluently as the NIV, but we get used to a translation over a long period of time. I want to do three things:

1. Memorise a verse a week, keeping my brain active.
2. Mark verses and write in the margin, as God's Spirit underlines truths for my own life.
3. Pray that the hearing of the Word will be matched by Spirit-empowered doing of the Word.

As an example here is Week 1's memorising and marking: memorise Ephesians 2:8-10; marking – underline 'saved'; underline the prepositions 'by' grace and 'through' faith; underline 'for good works' – why I am saved, not how I am saved.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for this Word. I praise you that my being saved is contrary to my deserving and that it is through faith in Jesus. Help me not to ground my relationship with you in what I do, and to remember that I stand right with you through what Jesus has done. May the Holy Spirit awake in

me today to all the good works which you have prepared for me to do and to help me to do them, for that is why you have re-created me in Christ. Help me to live today to your glory and I pray with thanks, trusting in the merits of Christ alone. Amen.

The Translation Oversight Committee concludes the Preface of the ESV by saying: 'We hope this Bible will help you know God

by trusting in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

"To God alone be the glory!"

David Cook was the former principal of SMBC.