

hard,” which kind of lacks the emotional power and poetry of Tyndale’s version, don’t you think? My point is that translation and interpretation matter. Tyndale wrestled thoughtfully with this translation because he knew that ancient words often had multiple meanings and his interpretation could change our whole understanding of a passage.

There are five words that Tyndale intentionally translated differently from the official Catholic version of Scripture, and his choices shape our faith today. To be clear: the Catholic translations are not wrong; but Tyndale’s translations added a new and a Reformed perspective to God’s Word. In the case of these five words, that difference is significant, enlightening, and life-affirming for us. I’ve arranged these five words to align with the Reformation motto on the cover of your bulletin: “We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to scripture alone, for the glory of God alone.”

Grace alone. The first word is *metanoō*, which Tyndale translated as “repentance,” replacing the previous translation “penance.” *Meta* is a Greek preposition meaning “after” or “with,” implying a change or a shift; *noō* is the verb “to perceive, think, or understand.” When combined, the meaning of *metanoō* is something like to “reconsider” or undergo a “complete shift in thinking.” *Metanoō* goes deeper than emotional remorse or feeling sorry for wrongdoing; it describes a profound inner reorientation, a fundamental turning away from sin and a turning toward God that reshapes our values, our worldview, and our actions. In other words, what starts in the mind becomes deeply ingrained in the heart, turning one’s life around, bearing fruit in words and deeds.

The earlier translation, “penance,” required the sorrowful person to perform specific acts to be made right with God. Tyndale’s decision to translate *metanoō* as “repentance,” however, is more consistent with the Gospel. John the Baptist “came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of *repentance* for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). Repentance, or a change of heart, was the foundation of John’s ministry. Jesus said: “The kingdom of God is at hand. *Repent*, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). This directive from Jesus is nothing less than a complete reorientation; the alignment with God’s will. The apostle Peter said, “*Repent*, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). He later wrote: “The Lord is...longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

In each instance repentance is a reorienting of the heart and mind away from sin and toward God; there is nothing in there about doing good works or acts of penance. As the apostle Paul puts it: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). There is nothing we can do to achieve our own salvation: we are saved by God’s grace alone.

Faith alone. Paul says this grace by which we are saved is ours through faith. The second word is *homologō*. Tyndale’s translation of *homologō* as to “acknowledge,” or “admit,” or “agree with” varies from the official church translation of “to confess.” Only once in the New Testament does *homologō* refer to the personal confession of sin (1 John 1:9). In every other case *homologō* is a confession of faith, like when Paul writes: “if you confess (*homologō*) with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). To be sure, confessing our sins is an important step of repentance; but to confess our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is the foundation of faith. When we admit that we are not our own savior, when we put our faith in Christ’s redeeming work at the cross, then our faith activates God’s grace in our lives. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone.

Christ alone. The third word is *agape*. In Greek, there are four words for love: *eros* (physical attraction); *philia* (affection, friendship); *storge* (love for family); and *agape* (selfless, unconditional, sacrificial love). *Agape* is the highest form of love; driven by action, not emotion. *Agape* seeks the highest good of another and is best shown by God sending Jesus to lay down his life for us. Tyndale chose to translate this word as “love,” and not the customary “charity.” You’ve heard that translation, too: the King James Version says that “faith, hope, and charity abide, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Tyndale’s translation of *agape* as “love” eliminates the pity that goes along with charity. When John quotes Jesus as saying, “No greater *love (agape)* has one than this, than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13), he not speaking out of pity. Jesus did not come to redeem us because he pitied us; he came because he loved us. “For God so *loved* the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16-17). We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Scripture alone. The fourth word is *ekklesia*. The old translation was “church,” as in the building, the institution. Tyndale’s new translation, was “congregation.” *Ekklesia* combines *ek*, meaning “out of” or “from” and *kaleo*, meaning “to call,” and translates broadly as “the called-out-ones” referring to a group gathered for a common purpose. Every time *ekklesia* occurs in the New Testament it refers to the people of God, gathered for worship to fulfill the will of God. In Acts 11:26, Barnabas and Saul “met with the church (*ekklesia*) in Antioch”; not the building, but the people gathered to worship God. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says of Peter, “on this rock I will build my church (*ekklesia*).” Jesus did not intend to construct a great cathedral, but to gather a people in his name, beginning with Peter.

Over time, the word *ekklesia* took on the meaning of the institutional church, in this case the Roman Catholic Church; and in that ideology, church tradition came to be considered as

important as scripture. The decrees of church leaders equaled God's Word itself and human traditions took on sacred status. Tyndale and other Reformation leaders objected, saying that God's Word alone is the ultimate authority in our lives. It is the body of believers, called together as the congregation (*ekklesia*), that weighs God's Word and interprets it with the help of the Holy Spirit. Tradition may be important, but not as important as Scripture. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone.

For the glory of God alone. The final word is *presbuteros*, from which we get the word "Presbyterian." In Greek, *presbuteros* means "elder," as in an older, senior, wiser man or woman; someone you look to for advice or spiritual guidance. Tyndale held to the original translation of *presbuteros* as "elder" even when the established church altered the translation to "priest." But the Greek word for "priest" is *hiereus* denoting a holy person who is set apart for sacred duties in the presence of God. Over time, this meaning led to a strict hierarchy in the church: the clergy (priests) would conduct the sacred rites in worship, and the laity (people) would observe from a distance.

The use of *presbuteros* is more egalitarian: Peter writes, "to the elders (*presbuteros*) among you, I appeal as a fellow elder...be shepherds of God's flock...watching over them" (1 Peter 5:1-2). Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders (*presbuteros*) in every town (Titus 1:5-7), and he highlights the governance and teaching roles of church leaders (1 Timothy 5:17). Tyndale's use of "elder" instead of "priest" highlights the fact that some form of ministry is given to all the followers of Jesus, not just a select few. Each of us is called to use our spiritual gifts and our resources to bring light and love, share hope and joy, and spread the good news of the Gospel all for the honor and glory of God. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, for the glory of God alone.

Words matter. Meaning matters. Tyndale believed it, and he died for that belief. His translation of these five words changed the course of religious history. The Anglican Church, Tyndale's church, now commemorates William Tyndale on October 6th with this prayer of the day: "Lord, give your people grace to hear and keep your word that, after the example of your servant William Tyndale, we may not only profess your gospel but also be ready to suffer and die for it, to the honour of your name." But I think the last word should be Tyndale's own: "Thus is Christ all and the whole cause why I love thee, and to all can naught be added."

Prayer: Lord, I ask You to reform any crooked ways within me. I seek Your will and ask for Your heart and Your mind in all things. Less of me, more of You. Show me what pleases You, let Your will be done, and make me more holy. Bring renewal to my heart, my home, and my community, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Source: Teems, David. "Tyndale: The Man Who Gave God an English Voice." Thomas Nelson. Nashville, TN. 2012.

Five Words That Changed Everything

Reformation Sunday, October 25, 2026

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Isaiah 55:6-11

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Etymology is the study of words: their origin, history, and structural evolution over time. I'm a big word nerd, so I felt compelled to look up the etymology of the word "etymology." It's a blend of two Greek words: *etymon* ("true sense" or "literal meaning") and *logia* ("study of" or "logic of"). Words are powerful tools that communicate our thoughts, desires, plans, and hopes. Words are also complex tools which can be interpreted and misinterpreted, used to heal and to harm, so our words must be handled with care.

Speaking of words: William Tyndale, the 16th-century English Bible scholar and linguist, believed every person should be able to hear and read God's word in their own language. Tyndale was the first person to translate the scriptures into English. The Roman Catholic Church, the predominant church at the time, used the Latin *Vulgate* Bible and closely guarded access to the scriptures. Church leaders objected to translating scripture into local languages, believing the clergy should interpret scripture so people wouldn't misconstrue God's meaning. It is also true that once people could read God's Word on their own, the clergy would lose some of their power and control.

Tyndale labored from 1525-1526 to translate the New Testament from Greek into English. The Catholic Church and the English King Henry VIII condemned Tyndale for this work. Tyndale fled to Germany, where he continued to translate scripture into English; but he was betrayed by his best friend, imprisoned, tried, convicted of heresy, and executed by strangulation and burning in 1536. I bring this up because 2026 is the 500th anniversary of Tyndale's New Testament translation; yet few people know his name or what he did. But you do know his work! Tyndale had to create a great many new words as he translated the original Hebrew and Greek into English.

- When Adam and Eve sewed "fig leaves" together for clothes (Genesis 3:7): that's Tyndale.
- When Esau sold his "birthright" to Jacob (Genesis 25:31-33): that's Tyndale.
- When Mary wrapped Jesus in "swaddling clothes" (Luke 2:7): that's Tyndale.
- If you've ever wished someone "God-speed" on a journey (2 John 1:10-11): that's Tyndale.
- If you've heard the name of God, "Jehovah" (Exodus 6:3): that's Tyndale.
- If you know the terms "judgment-seat" or "mercy-seat" – places of authority where decisions or judgment were administered (Exodus 25:17-22; John 19:13): that's Tyndale.
- If you use "Passover" or "Easter" (Exodus 12; John 1:29, 36; Acts 12:4): that's Tyndale.

One other example: when he denied Jesus, scripture says Peter went outside and "wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). By contrast, a recent translation says that Peter went outside and "cried