

"She and I used to carry on a friendly battle. She would hear me on the radio and sometimes when I referred to her Amplified Version, I would question some things. She was a brilliant woman, and I want to be very frank and say that I lost most of the battles."

*— J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible*, vol. 45*

Loved & Prized

*Frances Siewert Explains the
Translation Philosophy Informing
the Amplified Bible*

*A Scholarly Panel Discussion
synthesized and moderated by Michael-James B. Weaver*

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∞ ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT ∞

The *Amplified Bible* is a literal translation on par with the NASB, ESV, and NRSV translations. In this short text, you will see Francis Siewert—who researched the *Amplified Bible*—in conversation with eminent scholars of Biblical languages. Her words, which I have highlighted in blue so that they stand out for you, are taken from the two-page introduction the *Amplified New Testament*, first published in 1958. Here we will focus exclusively on the *Amplified Bible*'s rendering of the Greek word *pisteuo* ("to believe").

The following is an imagined or virtual dialogue that I have synthesized from quotations spread out over several chapters in [*Context is for Kings: Is the Amplified Bible Guilty of Illegitimate Totality Transfer?*](#), where their full citations are recorded for you. Since that book has grown to 360+ pages, I decided to collect together in short form here some of the material gathered there—quotes, for example, from linguist Eugene Nida who positively used *amplification* in his "functional equivalence" translation philosophy. About having faith, Eugene Nida said, in part:

The declaration of our faith is most important, but it must never be permitted to obscure our dependence upon the Risen Christ. In a near-by language the act of faith is described as "committing oneself to be held." This is the same phrase which is used to describe the act of a mother who tenderly commits her child into the arms of someone else while she must be occupied with other tasks. This likewise is the experience of dependence, based upon confidence and trust.

∞ *WHAT DOES THE WORD "BELIEVE" MEAN?* ∞

FRANCIS SIEWERT: There never has been, nor can be, an entirely adequate translation of the New Testament from the original Greek.

MARK STRAUSS: The vision for the NIV began in the 1950s with a Christian businessman named Howard Long. An avid evangelist, Long found the King James Version increasingly inadequate for sharing his faith.

FRANCIS SIEWERT: No matter how perfectly done the work of the translators may be, the difficulties involved in expressing the ideas bound up in one Greek word or phrase in an equivalent English word or phrase are often insurmountable.

NIGEL STATHAM: Eugene Nida used this concept essentially as a means of explicating the inadequacy of traditional understandings of "equivalent meaning" which were based too much on literal word-for-word perceptions of the translation task and were therefore not truly meaning-oriented at all.

FRANCIS SIEWERT: In some cases the translator finds himself confronted with a Greek term that combines the thought of a number of English words, each of which conveys some shade of meaning not to be found in the others. His only choice is to select the most fitting of these expressions and omit the others.

JOHN PIPER: For a long time, I have been troubled by the inadequacy of the words *faith* and *belief* and *trust* (or any other single words) to make clear what is required in order to be saved.

FRANCIS SIEWERT: In this way the reader is deprived of much that would clarify the meaning of the text if he only knew it, and it often leaves him with only a vague understanding of what would otherwise be delightfully clear.

MARK STRAUSS: John Bertram Phillips was motivated to translate the Bible while working with young people who found it difficult to understand the KJV.

FRANCIS SIEWERT: The *Amplified New Testament* is designed to overcome much of this existing deficiency by furnishing in one volume, and as the Greek text legitimately permits, multiple expressions for a richer, fuller and more revealing appreciation of the divine message. It is not a substitute for other translations. It is intended to supplement them, authentically, concisely and in convenient form.

EUGENE NIDA: In some instances phrases represent compact semantic relationships, with many of the finer distinctions left to the context. Literal transfers of such phrases may, however, result in ambiguity, and hence may require amplification.

CHARLES KRAFT: There is “illegitimate paraphrase,” where the translator actually adds to the information intended by the original author. But legitimate paraphrase is simply intended to keep the author’s intent from being misinterpreted due to the differences in the ways source and receptor languages handle information.

FRANCIS SIEWERT: To illustrate, let us take the sentence, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31, KJV). What does the word “believe” mean? It is extremely important, for multitudes are pinning their hope of heaven on it. Yet that word long since ceased to convey, if it ever did, the sense of the original.

CHARLES KRAFT: The belief required for salvation is not simply the kind of intellectual assent that the English word ordinarily connotes.

WILLIAM MOUNCE: Someone can believe God and still not possess saving faith, since even the demons believe God (Jas. 2:19). This indicates that to believe is not simply to give mental assent, but to turn one’s whole being over to God.

FRANCIS SIEWERT: Webster’s long definition of “believe” includes such synonymous expressions as, “to place credence....apart from personal knowledge; to expect or hope....to be more or less firmly persuaded of

the truth of anything, to think or suppose.” In this sense, most people believe in Christ—that He lived; that He was a perfect man Who sincerely believed Himself to be the Son of God, and that He died on the cross hoping to save sinners. But this is by no means the meaning of the Greek word which twenty-two New Testament versions out of twenty-four consulted render “believe”. Yet they do so because there is no single better word in the English.

JOHN PIPER: We will not know what *faith* and *belief* and *trust* mean unless we press into the way they are used in the most illuminating biblical contexts. Even our own experience impels us to probe into these contexts for more depth and precision. Experience teaches us to probe for distinctions. We know there are different kinds of faith and different ways of trusting.

FRANCIS SIEWERT: The Greek word is “pisteuo,” and means, “To adhere to, cleave to; to trust, to have faith in; to rely on” — which summed up in, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” means an absolute personal reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

BARCLAY NEWMAN: Any term for *faith* or “belief” must imply more than mere intellectual assent to the existence of some one or some thing. There must be some measure of “trust” or “confidence.”

EUGENE NIDA: In many languages this is translated as “to lean on,” “to depend on,” or “to hang on to with the heart.” Mere intellectual acknowledgement of the truth of a proposition is certainly not what is meant in this type of context.

MODERATOR: The 1987 edition changed its *pisteuo* example from Acts 16:31 to John 11:25.

MARK WARD: This really isn’t right. “Believes in” is the correct translation. Jesus could have said “adhered to” or “trusts in” or “relied on,” and he didn’t. Adhering, trusting, and relying are not ideas hidden in *pisteuo* (πιστεύω) but concealed by the ESV, NASB, NIV, CSB, etc.

MODERATOR: Dr. Ward, if Jesus *could* have said it differently—saying “trusts in” instead of “believes in”—then what different Greek word besides *pisteuo* might He have used?

MARK WARD: What could be the point of telling people who read the Bible in English something they already know, that “believe” means “believe”?

MARK STRAUSS: In the *Expanded Bible* sometimes we would introduce a word that was almost a complete synonym, and at first glance you might say, “Why introduce that? You’ve already said the word,” but as we went along we realized that this was an enormous

benefit to the reader of God's Word because in any language words can have a variety of meanings. And as you're reading along, you come to a word: that word could mean this, or that word could mean this. But if you add a synonym right beside it, you're telling the reader precisely what it means in that context.

J. EUGENE BOTHA: A single meaning can usually be described by quite a number of words in a language, which we call translational equivalents. Often these different renderings of the same meaning are given as different meanings. This is incorrect.

EUGENE NIDA: We make distinctions where no distinction should be made, and by the very abundance of our vocabulary we deceive ourselves.

MODERATOR: The 3rd edition of BDAG says in its entry for *pisteuo*: "to entrust oneself to an entity in complete confidence, *believe (in)*, *trust*, with implication of total commitment to the one who is trusted" (p. 817).

WILLIAM MOUNCE: This word means "to trust, rely on, depend on," with the sense of being completely confident and feeling utterly safe. The full biblical concept of believing in both the OT and the NT is not merely acknowledging something to be true, nor is it the popular notion of belief that implies little more than having a deep emotional resonance with something. The biblical concept of believing involves action.

D. EDMOND HIEBERT: It is a faith that intellectually accepts and actively commits itself to the fact “that Jesus is the Christ.”

D. A. CARSON: Such faith apprehends who Jesus truly is, the revelation of the Father; and it trusts him.

HERMAN CREMER: Only by the combination of both these elements, to acknowledge Christ and to cleave to Him, is the Johannine πιστεύων adequately interpreted.

MODERATOR: *The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* says in its entry for *pisteuo / pistis*: “To believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance,” and that “In rendering πιστεύω and πίστις, it would be wrong to select a term which would mean merely ‘reliance’ or ‘dependence’ or even ‘confidence,’ for there should also be a significant measure of ‘belief’ since real trust, confidence, and reliance can only be placed in someone who is believed to have the qualities attributed to such a person.”

MARK WARD: Define the word, sure. Even use a definition from a Greek-English lexicon. But don’t tell Christ’s sheep you have access to a hidden and deeper meaning when you simply don’t. They already know that “believe” means “believe.” Don’t cock your head sagely and point it out to them again.

FRANCIS SIEWERT: As negligible as only one small misconceived idea may seem, the sum of dozens or hundreds of such obscurities may become appallingly important, and spell the difference between faith and unbelief.

BARCLAY NEWMAN: It is important in rendering the verb “believe” to indicate more than merely accepting the truth about some statement. John’s use of the expression *believed in him* refers certainly to confidence and trust placed in Christ as the Word. Therefore, it is not merely “believed what he said,” but “trusted in him” or “put their confidence in him” or, as expressed idiomatically in some languages, “hung onto him with the heart” or “leaned their weight upon him.”

EUGENE NIDA: *Believes in him* involves far more than mere intellectual assent. It is equivalent in most languages to “puts his trust in him” or “shows complete loyalty to him” or, expressed figuratively, “leans on him” or “hangs on him.”

FRANCIS SIEWERT: For it is difficult to realize how bewildering such unexplained terms can sometimes become, unless one has had the perplexing experience himself. It is the purpose of this method of translation to reduce this particular difficulty to a minimum by including in the text all the associated words necessary to convey the sense of the original thought.

JOHN PIPER: I am not content to replace one word (say, *faith*) with some other words (say, *trust* and *confidence*), call it a definition, and say my work is done. My goal, for myself and others, in all my Bible reading and teaching and writing is to penetrate through language to the *reality* that words represent.

JAMES VOELZ: You've got to try your darnedest to get people on the same wavelength you are. And then, when they're on the same wavelength, they actually hear the same radio show! That's exactly why most writing essentially has a high degree of *redundancy*: You keep repeating, keep pointing out the same thing—*why?*—so that the conceptual signifieds start to merge.

BENJAMIN BAXTER: There are many words whose ranges of meaning overlap, and therefore can be used as synonyms in certain contexts. Even though each word has a unique range of meaning, it is possible that in certain contexts two different words can be used interchangeably without any noticeable difference in meaning.

PETER COTTERELL: If amongst its range of senses a different lexeme shares the same meaning, it may act as a synonym for the former word in the given context, and in like contexts.

MAX TURNER: That is, it can be substituted for it without significant conceptual change.

EDITORIAL NOTE: Here are the four “valid” meanings that J. Eugene Botha claims exist for *pisteuo* in the New Testament, citing the scriptural example he gives for each, as quoted from the *Amplified Bible* (to see if it illegitimately conflates these meanings):

3.0	3.1	3.2	3.3
Grk. <i>pisteuo</i>	Grk. <i>pisteuo</i>	Grk. <i>pisteuo</i>	Grk. <i>pisteuo</i>
<i>To accept something as true, to believe something to be true.</i>	<i>To trust, to rely on somebody or something. To have confidence in someone or something.</i>	<i>To be a believer, a Christian, to accept the Christian faith.</i>	<i>To entrust something to the care of somebody.</i>
However, the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the man’s parents. (John 9:18, AMP)	For this reason I am telling you, whatever things you ask for in prayer [in accordance with God’s will], believe [with confident trust] that you have received them, and they will be <i>given</i> to you. (Mark 11:24, AMP)	so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (1 Thess. 1:7, AMP)	But on the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised (Gentiles), just as Peter had been [entrusted to proclaim the gospel] to the circumcised (Jews); (Gal. 2:7, AMP)

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