Is it just the “word of men” or is it really “The Word of God”? That’s the baseline question posed in our scripture for today from I Thessalonians. Consider this, consider the passage from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount of the Lilies of the Field...

+The King James Version of the Bible notes: “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” (Matthew 6: 28-30)
+Or consider the Good News for Modern Man version of the Bible as it states: “Hey, look at the flowers. Do you think they worry? No way! Then why should you worry about life?” (Matthew 6: 28-30)
+Or consider The Message, a Bible paraphrase put together by Eugene Peterson: “All this time and money wasted on fashion –do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop. But have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them…” (Matthew 6: 28-30)

Same Bible verses from the same Book, the Gospel of Matthew, spoken by the same Jesus, but which one do you like best? Now for my money on this particular passage, there is no equal for the King James; it is poetry; it is Shakespeare; it is beauty and art together with the Word and the Spirit. But somebody else probably likes something else better. Its just a matter of taste and what we personally like, right? Everyone is entitled to read their own different Bible, right? Maybe, maybe not.

There is a difference between the three, however. The King James Version is an example of a translation from the original languages, Hebrew for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament. In the Enlightenment scholars felt one had to go back to the original sources and translate from the original languages in order to actually understand what God meant. The Reformed Tradition, of which the Presbyterian Church is a part, was so committed to this approach that they required every pastor to study the original languages and be able to translate the Bible from the original languages into the common vernacular of the day. So in the Presbyterian Church we are so strict that to be a pastor you have to not only study one whole year of Greek and one whole year of Hebrew in seminary but you also have to pass your ordination exams that require you to be able to translate from the original language some random piece of scripture, pull out of it its original meaning and draft a sermon on the basis of your work. Every week I go back to the original languages and review them and see if there are interesting words that bear unpacking in the message. Because we are required to do Exegesis, to pull out the meaning that is actually there from the original language; and we must never do Isogesis, to place our already drawn conclusion of what it means and force the text to say what we want the text to say. It is the opposite of how some people twist scripture to mean what they want it to say, not what God originally said. So the danger in a paraphrase versus a translation of the Bible is that someone places their own meaning as an overlay on scripture, rather than taking the clear meaning of what is really there. The Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Versions of the Bible are translations; others, like the New International Version are not; they are conceptual paraphrases.

The problem is always, are we twisting scripture to reinforce our already foredrawn conclusions and prejudices? Or are we allowing it to speak for itself? Are we so hell-bent to make it say a particular thing that we wind up missing what the Spirit originally spoke into it and that through the Holy Spirit speaking again
today it will bring forth the same meaning? Is it the preacher speaking? Or is it God speaking? Is it man’s words? Or is it God’s Word? Holy Spirit come and use Your Word to speak to us. Spirit unlock the depths of the meaning of scripture that we may feast upon Your Word. Speak, Lord; Your servants are listening! Our spiritual ears and our hearts are open to receive Your Word again!

The Apostle Paul is writing to the Thessalonians about the Word of God. His labor and toil is that he has come to work night and day while “we preached to you the gospel of God” (I Thessalonians 2: 9) The work of the pastor is the proclamation of the Word of God. Proclaiming the unvarnished truth. Telling nothing new but unpacking the power of the Gospel hidden away originally in scripture by the Holy Spirit speaking into the hearts of those who recorded it. The Gospel is explosive enough. The Word is sufficient unto itself. There is no salvation apart from it. I do not seek to preach any new thing. I seek only to preach what God already has placed there. I am a servant of the Word, not its master. I am not smarter than God I am only a chosen instrument of His grace. I stand upon the Word of God, not above it. I am humble in my own ego and bold in God’s Spirit. For I know there is a day of accounting where I will be held accountable for every word that has proceeded out of my mouth that was not the whole counsel of God. The Apostle Paul exhorted and encouraged and charged his people to “lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (v. 12) and I have sought to do the same with you. And the Apostle Paul rejoices and is thankful that his people have “received the word of God which you heard from us” (v. 13) In the proclamation of the Word of God, in the spiritual moment that is preaching, as you cease to hear my words and begin to hear only God’s Word, as God Himself comes and speaks through His Holy Spirit what He first spoke into every written page, it is then the WORD of GOD shows up in this sanctuary and speaks, and you have a choice –do I receive it? Or do I reject it? Do I live it? Or do I ignore it? Does it transform me? Or do I seek to manipulate it to say what I want? Beloved are you receiving the WORD of God today?????

I really don’t like all the proliferation of more and more versions of the Bible. More and more translations. More and more paraphrases. More and more quasi paraphrases and quasi translations. More and more options to titillate our modern sensibility that it is we who are important, we who get to choose, we who get to be the measure of God’s Word instead of God’s Word measuring us. I don’t like then that people get to pick and choose which Bible verses they like and will follow and those they dislike and will disregard. I get to pick and choose what Bible I want to follow. I am the authority. My wisdom picks and chooses at the smorgasboard of God’s Word. No way! There are 66 books of the Bible, not 66 Bibles. Sorry, my beloved, there is only one Bible and only one Word of God. It is that in the original Greek and Hebrew and held within it is the Gospel of God and the Word of God. Its not manipulatable, not changeable, it is unshakeable, immovable, it is as true today as on the day pen was put to paper. Paul writes: “You accepted (the word of God) not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you…” (I Thessalonians 2: 13)

The pulpit stands for the proclamation of the Word of God. I charge you, members of this church, to see to it that no one shall ever stand here who does not believe in and preach an inspired Bible, a Living Christ who is God, and the Cross and shed Blood, the only way of everlasting life. Let no graces of speech, executive ability or power, charm or diction or oratory, obscure the paramount qualification, namely, that they shall be true to the Bible, the Confessions of the Church, to the Deity of God’s only begotten Son and Salvation through His precious blood alone. May it NEVER be just man’s word alone. May the Word of God always be proclaimed from this pulpit in Jesus’ name. Amen and Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania

IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!