A Brief (and by no means exhaustive) Summary of Passages Contained Within “The Message” by Eugene Peterson Which Directly Compromise Fundamental Tenets of Orthodox Christianity

What follows is a comparison/contrast and analysis of several well-known passages as found in major translations such as the KJV, NASB, and NIV as well as these same passages as found in The Message authored by Eugene Peterson. Any intellectually honest assessment of the following notes leads to the inescapable conclusion that The Message compromises some of the fundamental doctrines of orthodox Christianity.

I was led to this study when at my home church of FBC Vicksburg, MS all of our high school seniors were given copies of The Message as graduation gifts. I did not at the time own a copy of The Message nor had I read it. My exposure to it at that point was limited to seeing it cited in other works. This event, however, led me to read and study this paraphrase more in depth. Let us remember that what we believe about God is derived from what we read in His word. If one reads an erroneous Bible, then it logically follows that what one believes about God will also be in error. This product is labeled on the front cover as being “The Bible in Contemporary Language.” It is being promoted to teenagers and young adults – the most impressionable of those among us.

Matthew 6:9

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<td>9 &quot;Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.&quot;</td>
<td>9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.</td>
<td>9 &quot;This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,</td>
<td>9 With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this: “Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are.</td>
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This, of course, is a passage from what is commonly referred to as “the Lord’s Prayer.” There are two problems with Peterson’s rendering of this familiar passage. The first is that Peterson includes an imperative from Jesus to the Father that is not in the text. The second, and much more serious, problem is the nature of His imperative – Reveal who you are. Why would Jesus Christ who is the revelation of God (Heb. 1:1-3) ask God to reveal Himself? The Revelation of God is the One Who is standing there praying the prayer! This imperative by Jesus certainly strongly implies that God has yet to reveal Himself. I beg to differ. Also, notice the room which is implicitly provided for a later revelation of the antichrist who will, of course, claim to be the revelation of God.
John 10:30

Another familiar passage. The NASB, NIV, and KJV are all practically identical, save for the insertion of a personal pronoun found in the latter. Not so The Message’s rendering. The Message denigrates the uniqueness and deity of Jesus. Let us remember that David was a “man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22) but he was not God.

1 Timothy 4:1-5

Of the passages which I have cited in this letter, this is the least worrisome but is worrisome nonetheless. Paul is clearly referring to demonic powers but note the unmistakable human spin which Peterson employs. He diminishes the demonic powers by referring to them as mere “illusions” which are forwarded not by demons but by “professional liars.” Such a reference could encapsulate a carnival barker.

Matthew 5:5

What?!! Not only does this not have anything to do with the passage at hand, it is stunningly un-biblical. What if a homosexual is reading this? Should he be content with “just who he is?” What about an agnostic? A Hindu? What about one who believes himself to be a “Christian” but is living in sin? This is not even true for a Bible-believing, committed Christian! There should never be a time when we are “content with just who we are!” This is a profoundly unbiblical statement.
1 Corinthians 6:9-11

New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update
9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

The King James Version
9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

The New International Version
9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders,

The Message
9 Don’t you realize that this is not the way to live? Unjust people who don’t care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use the earth and everything in it, don’t qualify as citizens in God’s kingdom.

This one is serious. One of the sins to which the Apostle Paul is clearly referring is that of homosexuality. Notice that The Message completely omits the word. In its stead, Peterson inserts the phrase “those who use and abuse the earth.” The earth? From where in the world (or the text as the case may be) did he get the earth? There seems to be an environmental agenda at work here. One could not read this passage in a real Bible and come away believing that homosexuality was permissible under any circumstances. One would never know from reading The Message, however, that it was a problem in any sense.

Romans 1:26-27

New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update
26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

The King James Version
26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

The New International Version
26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

The Message
26 Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn’t know how to be human either—women didn’t know how to be women, men didn’t know how to be men.

27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the

27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that

27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, then they paid for it, oh, how they paid for it—emptied of God and love,
This passage dealing with homosexuality is quite a bit more problematic for Peterson because here he has more with which to contend than a single word. Here, he has two entire verses with which to wrestle. With 1 Cor. 6:9-11, Peterson could simply leave out a word. What to do here? Well, Peterson provides a loophole: all lust, no love. The not-so-subtle insinuation is that ‘Well, if these people had just done this out of love, then it would have been ok.’ There is clearly in The Message room for a ‘committed, loving’ homosexual relationship. You see, it is not the nature of homosexuality that is the grievous sin in The Message, it is simply the absence of love.

1 Timothy 1:10

The Message again simply leaves out the reference to homosexuality and replaces it instead with the generic “sex.” Inexplicably, the NIV appears to do the same. There are 3 passages in the N.T. that deal with homosexuality and The Message utterly fails on all 3.

Note: The Message does, in fairness, appear to be relatively on track in regards to Leviticus 18:22. This, though, does not excuse its abject failure in the N.T. Let’s be honest, how many people (teenagers especially) are realistically going to do devotional reading from Leviticus? Quite more likely, though, they will read Romans and 1 Corinthians.

Romans 8:35

This one really is troublesome. Notice that all of the elements which Paul rightly asserts will never separate us from Christ are very earthly and temporal (tribulation, persecution, famine, etc.). Paul is basically talking about hard times. Look at what Eugene Peterson brazenly inserts into the passage: not even the worst sins listed in Scripture. Wow. This should trouble any clear thinking believer. Sin IS what separates us from God! That is why we need a Savior! Sin is not even remotely in view in this passage. This is heresy.