Letting Go

A Rationale and Appeal for Making Biblical Content Available Under Open Licenses

Version 3 – November 2024

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Except where otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the Christian Standard Bible *(Holman 2017). All emphasis in citations is mine, unless indicated otherwise.*

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Executive Summary – The rapid expansion of the global church has created an urgent need for Bible translations and biblical content that lead to sound interpretation of Scripture and formation of faithful theology in every culture and people group. The most effective means of meeting this immense need is by the collaboration of the global church in an interdependent and highly scalable manner. This requires minimizing the legal friction intrinsic to the default "all rights reserved" licensing model, by making the needed content available under open licenses. This paper answers many of the objections that are raised by those desiring to open license resources and describes a strategy that equips the global church for freedom.

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The first version of this paper was published in June 2019. Version 2 (May 2022) and Version 3 (November 2024) include minor editorial changes.

1. Introduction

The vision that motivates the writing of this paper is a world in which the entire global church—across all people groups and languages—can freely share excellent Bible translations and other biblical resources, without limitations on their retention, reuse, revision (whether by translating, extending, or adapting for effective use), remixing (by combining with other material to create new resources), and redistribution. This paper is written with the intent of addressing certain misunderstandings about the need for unrestricted biblical content in every language, different models for meeting that need, the nature of copyright law, and how "open" licenses work.

This paper has a limited scope. It describes the factors that may hinder content owners from participating in the "free and open" paradigm of world missions, but it does not provide a complete consideration of the paradigm itself. It makes little (or no) attempt to cover ground that I have addressed in other works, including:

- The biblical, missiological, and technological rationale for unrestricted biblical resources in every language: *The Christian Commons* (**ufw.io/tcc**).
- The description of an exponentially-scalable strategy to make unrestricted biblical resources available in every language: "The Gateway Languages Strategy" (**ufw.io/gateway**).
- The factors that predispose the global church to achieve excellence in translation of the Bible and creation of their own biblical resources: "Trustworthy and Trusted" (**ufw.io/trustworthy**) and "From Unreached to Established" (**ufw.io/established**).

My intent in this paper is not to criticize any licensing model, but to help those who desire to push biblical content over the wall of restrictions into the "free and open" world by pointing out the hindrances that prevent it from happening and describing how to overcome each one. Furthermore, participation in this movement is only ever a voluntary choice on the part of content owners and I am not suggesting that those who do not participate are in the wrong. Even when those who own biblical resources understand all the hindrances, they are not thereby obligated to make their content available under open licenses—it is their legal property and they have the right to do with it as they believe God would have them do.

Finally, it is important to declare up front that I am not an attorney and nothing in this paper constitutes legal advice. I am grateful for the ongoing counsel from IPR attorneys and legal scholars who continue to inform my understanding of copyright law and a biblical theology of property ownership. Their gracious assistance has greatly improved this paper but carries no implication of responsibility or endorsement on their part.

2. The Context

This paper focuses primarily on the "what" and "how" of biblical content and licensing, but it runs the risk of miscommunication unless the context (the "why") is clearly understood. This section addresses four key aspects of the context: (§ 2.1) the expansion of the global church which gives rise to (§ 2.2) increased need for biblical content. This need could be effectively met using (§ 2.3) the new technologies of an increasingly globalized world, but is hindered by (§ 2.4) the restrictive licenses that are the default due to copyright law.

2.1. The Expansion of the Global Church

The global church is multiplying rapidly. Church-planting movements continue to expand the church at a rapid pace, shifting the center of Christianity (in terms of numerical growth) to the south and the east.

> Over the last century, the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably away from Europe, southward, to Africa and Latin America, and eastward, toward Asia. Today, the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found in those regions.[1]

This transition can be seen in the following diagram that shows the percentage of evangelicals in the "global south" (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) compared to the "global north" (Europe, North America, and the Pacific) over the last century.
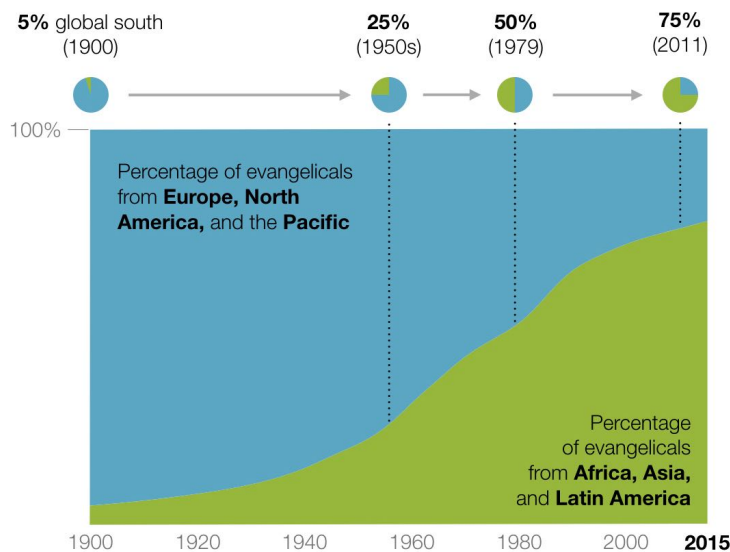
In 1900, only one out of every 20 evangelicals was from a country outside of Europe, North America or the Pacific. Today, **more than three out of every four evangelicals** are from Latin America, Africa, or Asia.

source: Johnstone, Patrick. 2011. *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities.* IVP Books.

Diagram 1: The growth of the church of the global south

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The composition of the global church today (in terms of the approximate number of Protestants) is depicted in the following diagram.[2]

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1   Jenkins, *The Next Christendom,* 1.

2   These charts are not intended to suggest that the global church is only comprised of evangelicals or Protestants (or that all who claim to be such are thereby part of the church) but rather to show the general trends of those elements of the global church that are growing most rapidly and rising in global influence.
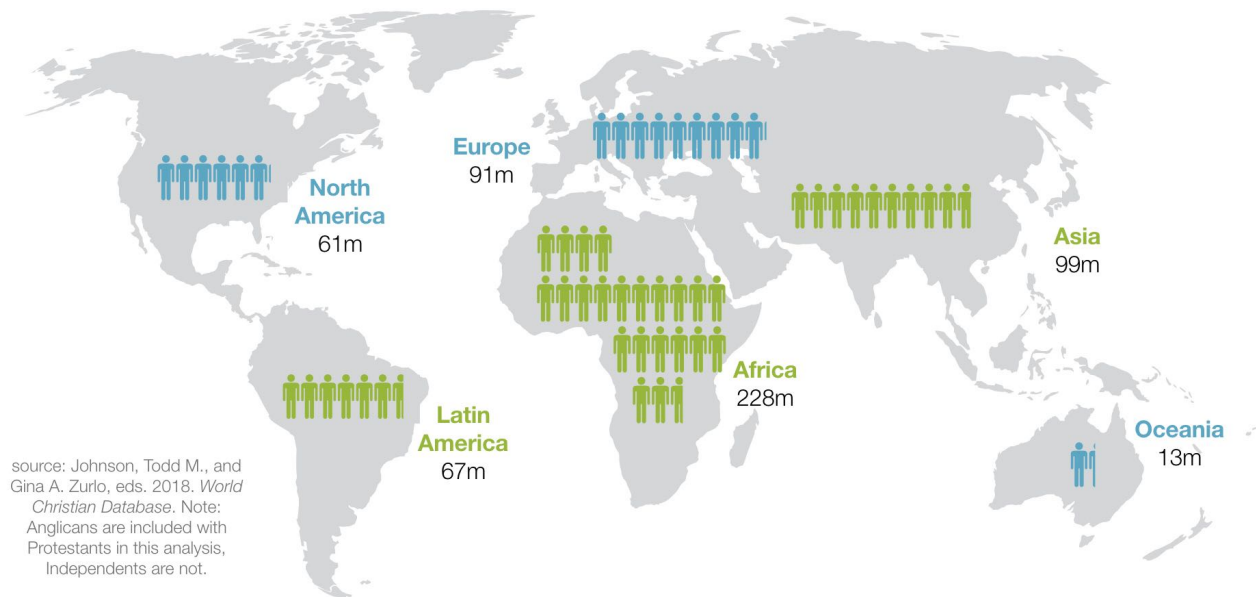
Diagram 2: The global composition of the Protestant church

2.2. The Need of the Global Church

In terms of numerical growth through evangelism and church planting, it is clear the church of the global south is expanding rapidly. But in terms of access to Bible translations and theological resources that make possible sound hermeneutics and accurate interpretation of Scripture, it is generally lagging far behind. These essential tools are available to only a small fraction of the global church, and then only to those who have the means to acquire them and speak one of the few languages in which they are available (usually English). This means that front-line leaders of local churches all over the world who urgently desire to become doctrinally sound and confidently teach faithful theology within their own cultural contexts are cut off from the wealth of biblical knowledge that is available only to a privileged minority. The foundational need, then, can be described like this:

> The task… is to precipitate in each lingual church[3] **the capacity to perpetuate knowledge of interpretation**. This includes direct access to the original languages of the Bible and the fundamental principles of translation, hermeneutics and the cultural and historical context of the Bible. When a lingual church has this capacity, not completely in and of themselves, but in the interdependent manner supported by the global church and academia, they are **well-equipped to provide and preserve the Bible and theological resources in their language**.[4]

What kinds of resources might be helpful for sound hermeneutics and reliable interpretation of the Bible? In addition to trustworthy translations of the Bible, Carson suggests the value of study notes "explaining cultural, religious, ecological, and linguistic points, especially in Bibles designed for groups made up largely of first readers who thus have very little knowledge of the biblical world" (provided that the notes are "as

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3   A "lingual church" refers to a portion of the global church that is linguistically homogeneous, speaking either the same language or variants that have a sufficient degree of mutual intelligibility, and including all traditions that are faithful expressions of sound doctrine (Ep 4:1-6; 1Ti 6:3; Tt 2:1). See Jore, "From Unreached to Established."

4   Griffin and Price, "Unrestricted Original Language Resources."

theologically neutral and objective as possible"[5]. Fee and Stuart suggest that good exegesis is promoted by the use of "a good translation, a good Bible dictionary, and good commentaries."[6] Osborne describes deductive study as building upon grammatical, semantical, and syntactical study and is where "all the tools—grammars, lexicons, dictionaries, word studies, atlases, background studies, periodical articles, commentaries—are consulted in order to deepen our knowledge base regarding the passage and to unlock the in-depth message under the surface of the text."[7] As I have observed elsewhere, the need for these kinds of resources is acutely felt:

> Church leaders around the world consistently maintain that... they need the entire New Testament, then the entire Old Testament (not always in that order), study notes for the entire Bible, a Greek New Testament and Hebrew/Aramaic Old Testament (together with corresponding grammars and lexicons) available as interlinears in print and digital formats, then a commentary that further elucidates the author's intent and context of the original recipients.[8]

Essentially, the need is for equality across the entire global church—in every people group and language—in the realm of biblical study and theological formation. It is an appeal for all who trust in Jesus Christ and love his Word to be able to share together of the very best biblical, exegetical, and hermeneutical resources. In terms of the amount of content needed in every language to make this possible (whether in text or audio formats), the need is immense. This diagram is an approximation of the *potential* amount of biblical content (vertical axis) that could be needed in every language (horizontal axis).[9]

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5   Carson, "The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation," ch. 3.

6   Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth,* 33.

7   Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 30-32.

8   Jore, "From Unreached to Established," 9.

9   This diagram is derived from a to-scale representation of the word count of various resources, as well as the number of languages in the world and the progress of Bible translation so far (Simons and Fennig 2018; Wycliffe Global Alliance 2018). *It does not assume that every lingual church (particularly among the deaf or predominately oral groups) will need all or even the same kinds of resources!* It attempts to depict a general approximation based on available data and expressed need, but it makes no attempt to account for discrepancies in the numbers due to such things as translations that are not in use, in need of revision, or in progress by church networks not included in these statistics.
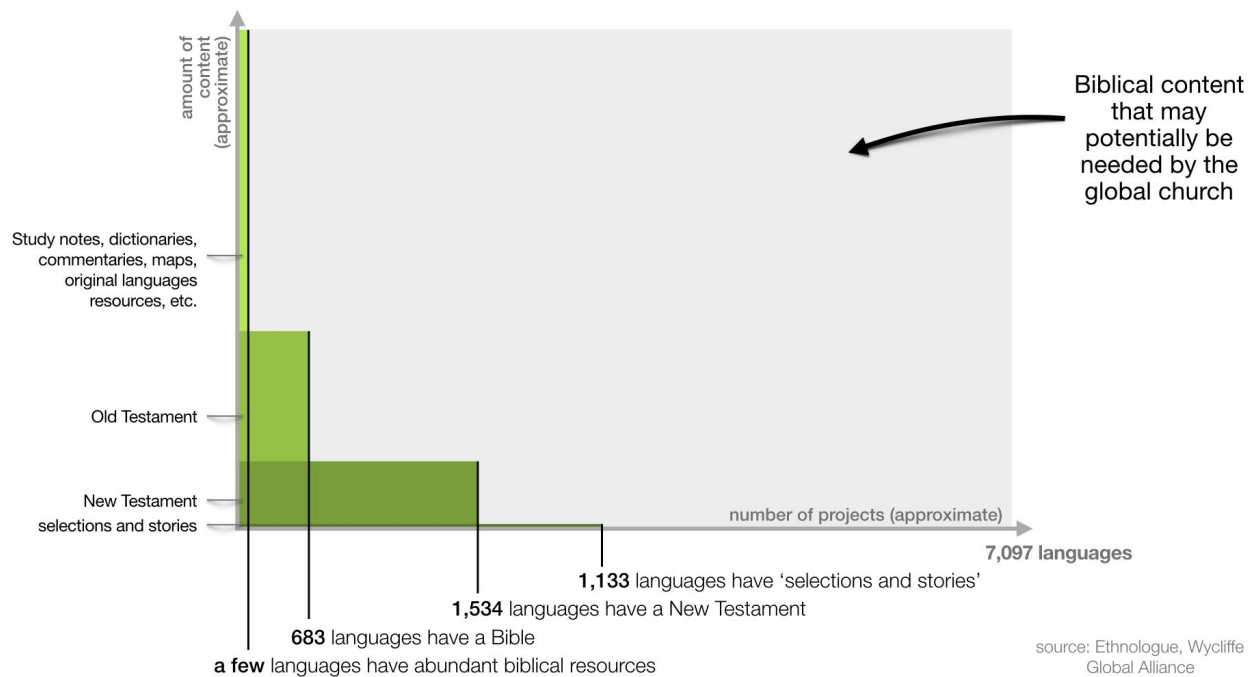
Diagram 3: Potential biblical content needed across all languages

2.3. The Opportunities of the 21st Century

The 21st century is bringing with it profound changes, many of which constitute significant opportunities to meet the massive need of the global church for biblical content. **Globalization** continues to increase the life expectancy and general standard of living of many. These economic improvements are expanding and, in turn, being further improved by the global reach of **mobile technology**. Freeland observes:

> "Today, **two terrifically powerful forces are driving economic change: the technology revolution and globalization**... together they constitute a dramatic gearshift comparable in its power and scale to the industrial revolution... What these twin transformations have done is trigger an industrial revolution–sized burst of growth in much of the rest of the world—China, India, and some other parts of the developing world are now going through their own gilded ages."[10]

Two-thirds of the world now have a mobile phone, and over half of the world uses the internet.[11] This growth in internet-connected mobile technology can be seen in the diagram below that shows the mobile and internet use (vertical axis) over time (horizontal axis).

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[10]   Freeland, *Plutocrats*, 4. Emphasis added.

[11]   See "Global Mobile Trends 2017," 11, and "Measuring the Information Society Report 2018." Nearly 75% of the world is expected to have a mobile phone by 2020 ("Global Mobile Trends 2017," 11). Some analysts predict that the slowing growth rate of mobile adoption is a consequence of mobile nearing a natural ceiling of 70-80%, with the remaining unreached demographic segments those that are the hardest to reach (such as elderly people or those in rural areas) ("Global Mobile Trends"). Globally, the growth of internet users is also slowing down and will need to pick up again if the goals of the ITU Connect 2030 Agenda and the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development are to be met. These include a target of 70 per cent Internet penetration by 2023, and 75 per cent by 2025 ("Global Mobile Trends").
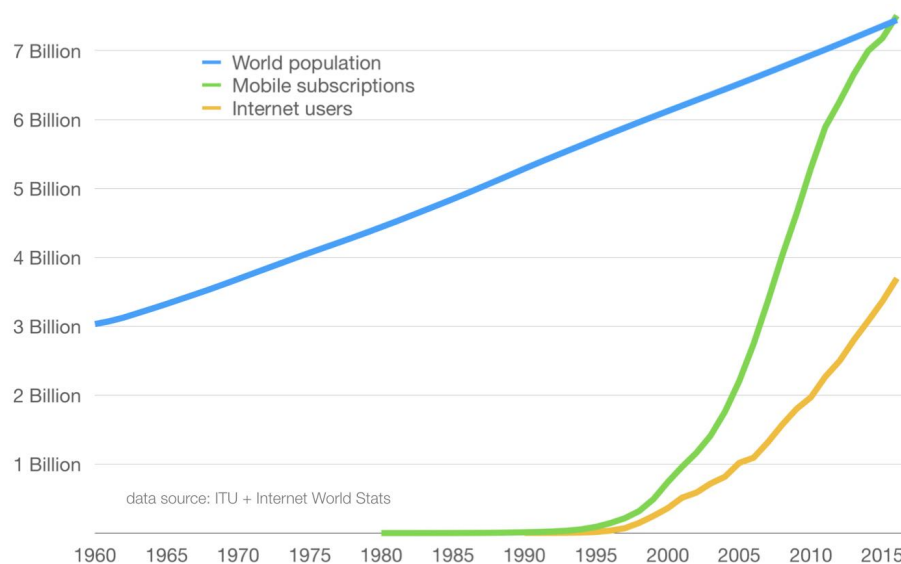
Diagram 4: Worldwide increase of mobile and internet use

Global **education** levels also continue to rise. The diagram below shows the increase in global literacy levels in the past two centuries, as well as global education levels (within the last few decades and projecting forward). *Note: these charts should only be seen as indicators of general trends, as even the best data on global literacy and education can be misleading.*[12]
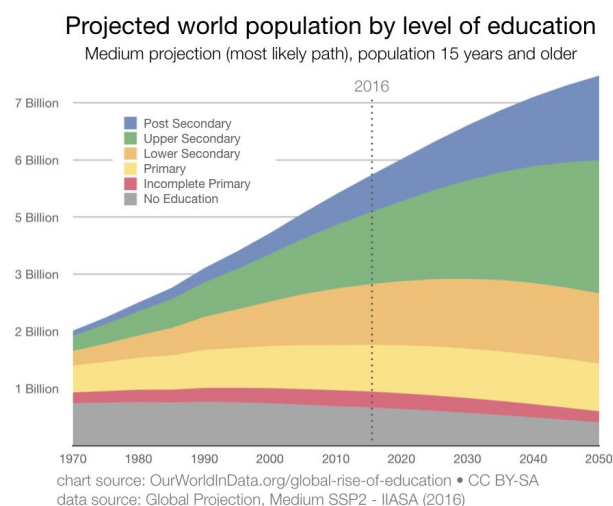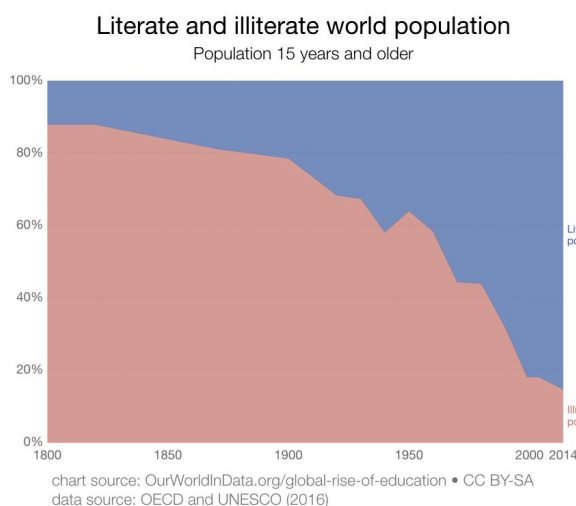
Diagram 5: Rise of worldwide literacy and education levels

As globalization creates more job opportunities in cities, **urbanization** continues to increase, with approximately 55% of the world living in cities.[13] Urbanization and the increasing levels of education and

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[12] Lovejoy ("The Extent of Orality") cautions against attempting to derive a single worldwide literacy statistic. The criteria used by countries to determine literacy are inconsistent and tend toward a simplistic binary "literate/illiterate" definition where people who have quite limited reading comprehension are considered "literate" merely because they can do simple tasks such as signing their name or writing a simple sentence. He concludes that "5.7 billion people in the world are oral communicators because either they are illiterate or their reading comprehension is inadequate. That is over 80% of the world's total population (Ibid, 29).

[13] By comparison, approximately 34% of the world lived in cities in 1960 ("Urban population (% of total)"). Johnstone observes,

technology use lead to more people using a common language in order to communicate. Consequently, this has increased the level of **multilingualism** such that it is generally the norm worldwide. De Swaan observes that a growing number of speakers of majority languages are multilingual:

> There are those whose native speech is one of the peripheral languages and who in due course have acquired the central language. In fact, **everywhere in the world the number of this type of bilinguals is on the increase**, as a result of the spread of elementary education and of the printed word, as well as of the impact of radio broadcasting.[14]

Perhaps the most important opportunity of the 21st century for the equipping of the church in every people group is the emergence in many parts of the world of influential and **highly motivated church leaders** who are taking responsibility for meeting the Bible translation and theological formation needs of the people within their own countries and spheres of influence. Many of them are highly educated, all of them are bilingual in Gateway Languages and they are proactively seeking to establish the churches in sound doctrine and with mature leadership. To the extent that they (and the leaders in their networks) are equipped with the biblical content, technology tools, and training resources in a language they understand well, the capacity of the entire global church can be activated to meet the immense need for Bibles and other biblical resources in every language.

But we run into a significant obstacle at this point, because the use of Bible translations and other biblical resources is governed by copyright law. As we shall see, the advantages and opportunities of the 21st century for the equipping of the church in every people group are often impeded by these laws that were designed for a previous era.

2.4. The Reality of Copyright Law

According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, 176 countries are signatories of The Berne Convention. Because of this (and with a few exceptions), copyright law functions in a similar manner worldwide. The following are the main points that work the same for these countries.

Copyright reserves all rights for the owner – Copyright law is designed to establish state-sanctioned and globally-applicable[15] control over the use of content by its creator in order to increase its commercial value and maximize the potential for its monetization.[16] The original intent of these restrictions was to encourage

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"In 1800, only 3% of humankind lived in cities. It is estimated that in 2100 the figure will be nearly 90%... The 21st Century will be the first urban century in history" ("The Future of the Global Church," 6).

[14] De Swaan, "Language Systems," 57. He explains the increase in bilingualism of the "central" language (analogous to the "gateway" language used in this paper) "...[Small, peripheral language groups] were increasingly confronted by teachers, policemen, officials, and traders from the nearest city, such people are now more likely to acquire one and the same second language: the medium of government and of the market. This is, in each case, the language which is 'central' to a cluster of these peripheral language groups, like a planet surrounded by so many moons" (Ibid., 56).

[15] "Global applicability" refers to those countries that are signatories of the Berne Convention.

[16] This is not to say that copyright creates a monopoly, as patent law does. For example (and at least in the United States), the restrictions established by copyright law extend only to that particular expression of the underlying idea, but not to an identical work that is created by another creator without any reference to the other work. A true monopoly would also prevent all uses of the content, whereas, in the United States and some other countries, limited use of copyrighted content is permitted without permission from the copyright holder for "fair use" purposes such as criticism, parody, news reporting, research and scholarship, teaching, and "transformative" use.

further innovation and creativity that would benefit society, so it was originally limited to fourteen years.[17] The Berne Convention states in Article 8:

> Authors... shall enjoy the exclusive right of making and of authorizing the translation of their works throughout the term of protection of their rights in the original works.

and in Article 12:

> Authors... shall enjoy the exclusive right of authorizing adaptations, arrangements and other alterations of their works.[18]

Copyright lasts for (more than) a lifetime – Over time, the term of copyright has been extended considerably. The Berne Convention stipulates that the duration of the term for copyright protection is the life of the author plus at least 50 years after their death (Article 7).[19]

Copyright starts at the point of creation – The "all rights reserved" of copyright starts at the point the content is created, even if the creator of the work is not aware of it or does not necessarily want it to be so.[20]

Copyright requires a license for use of content – In general, copyright law tends to forbid what is not explicitly permitted. With regard to replication, adaptation, and creation of derivatives (including translations), use of copyrightable content that still enjoys copyright protection and that is owned by someone else requires a license that grants explicit permission to do so. In this regard, the default answer to the question, "Can I do _____?" is "No" until (and unless) permission is granted otherwise.[21] This can be seen in a traditional copyright statement:

> All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher.

The implications of copyright law for the translation of the Bible and other biblical resources are significant: most of the biblical resources that could otherwise be useful to the global church for translation of the Bible and creation of other biblical resources are governed by licenses that greatly restrict their usefulness.[22]

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17   This was the original duration of copyright for both Great Britain (Statue of Anne, 1710) and the United States (Copyright Act of 1790). "The law was meant to provide an incentive to authors, artists, and scientists to create original works by providing creators with a monopoly. At the same time, the monopoly was limited in order to stimulate creativity and the advancement of 'science and the useful arts' through wide public access to works in the 'public domain'" (Association of Research Libraries n.d.). Boyle argues that all intellectual property rights have inherent monopolistic dangers and may in some cases hinder rather than encourage innovation (*The Public Domain,* 68). Regarding the downside of monopoly, Thomas Macaulay, in a speech delivered to the House of Commons in 1841, observed, "Copyright is monopoly, and... the effect of monopoly generally is to make articles scarce, to make them dear, and to make them bad" (Ibid., 22).

18   Other restrictions include reproduction of the work (Article 9), public performance and broadcast of the work (Article 11) ("Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works" 1886).

19   The term of copyright varies across countries, from "life + 25 years" to "life + 100 years" (see "List of Countries' Copyright Lengths" 2018). Note that different terms sometimes apply, depending on the content. For example, in the United States, "... copyright protection lasts for the life of the author plus an additional 70 years. For an anonymous work, a pseudonymous work, or a work made for hire, the copyright endures for a term of 95 years from the year of its first publication or a term of 120 years from the year of its creation, whichever expires first" (U.S. Copyright Office n.d.).

20   In the United States, for example, "Your work is under copyright protection the moment it is created and fixed in a tangible form that it is perceptible either directly or with the aid of a machine or device" (Ibid.). For the United States, see *Copyright Act of 1976* (2016). Globally, see *Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works* (1886).

21   The copyright laws of some countries provide limited exceptions to these restrictions for "private use" and "fair use" (or "fair dealing"), though the laws differ from country to country.

22   For example, without a license that grants permission otherwise, translations and adaptations (including revisions) of a copyrighted work are only legal for personal use and cannot be shared with others. Some assume that when a Bible publisher makes a text available for translation to a provider of translation software that this constitutes an "implied license" that permits direct translation of the resource. Perhaps it does, but there are at least two significant detriments to this approach.

3. Meeting the Need of the Global Church

There are at least four ways that copyright law can be approached when it comes to the translation, adaptation, redistribution, and use of biblical content in every people group and language:

1. The "**Higher Law**" Model (Ignoring Copyright Law)
2. The **Independent** Model ("Reinventing the Wheel")
3. The **Dependent** Model (Oversight by "Gatekeepers")
4. The **Interdependent** Model (The "Open" World)

These four models can be considered as a flowchart, as in this diagram.
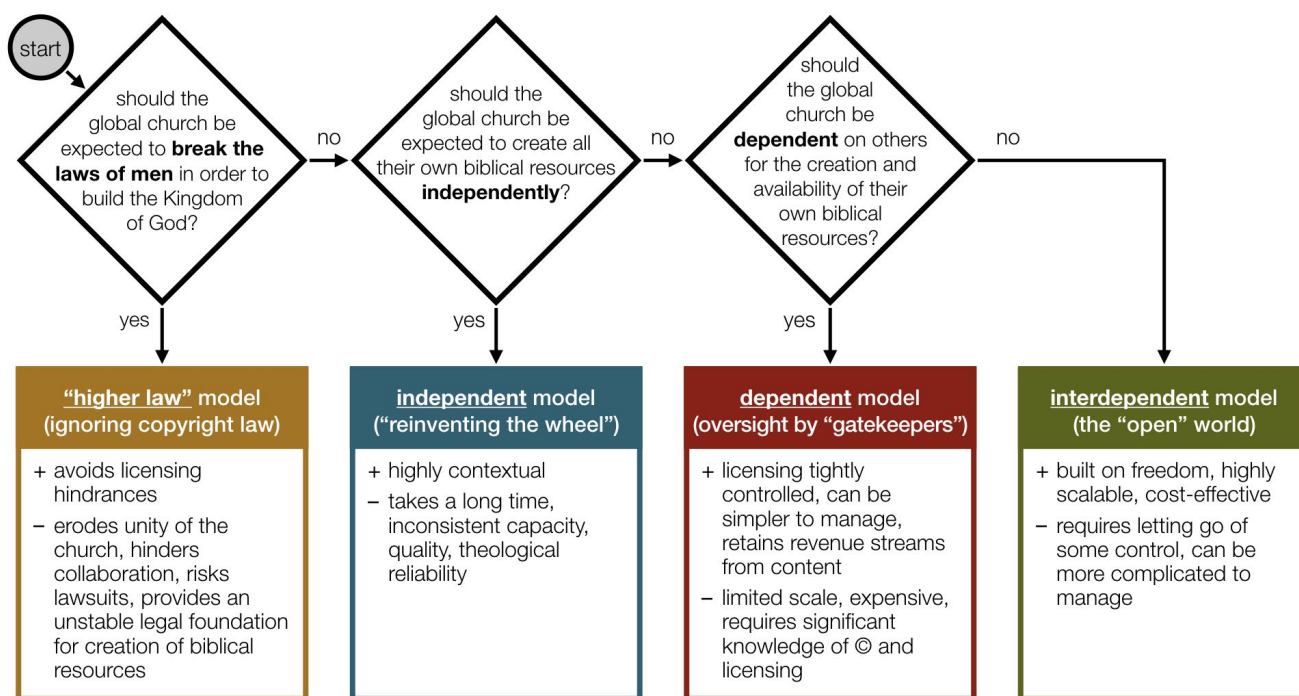
Diagram 6: Four models for meeting the global need for Bibles and other biblical content

3.1. The "Higher Law" Model (Ignoring Copyright Law)

There is precedent in Scripture for Christians to disregard the "laws of man" in order to obey God. In response to the Jewish leaders' demands that they stop preaching in the name of Jesus, Peter and John answered them, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Ac 4:19-20 NIV). The obvious advantage of a

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First, it is an ambiguous "gray area" which therefore constitutes an uncertain foundation on which to base a translation (or other resources that build on it). For example, this approach does not explicitly address what rights are granted, for whom they are granted, under what conditions, if the rights apply in any/every legal jurisdiction, etc. Second, even if the implied license is viable, it is presumably only valid within the scope of use granted by the publisher, thus it might only apply to users of the software, and possibly only when they are using the software. The ambiguity of this model exists at many levels, making it all but impossible for translators to know if their use of the content is legal. If owners of resources desire to unambiguously permit others to translate them, a preferable approach would be to make them available under the terms of a Free Translate License, which explicitly grants the freedom to translate the work and for the translator to own the rights to their own translation (see "Free Translate 2.0 International Public License" n.d.).

model for equipping the church that claims to be following the laws of God rather than man is that it bypasses all the friction of restrictive licenses and the resource expenditure (particularly in terms of time and money) that is inherent in the copyright system. (At least in the short term, and as long as the infringer is not caught and prosecuted.)

It is not hard to find "gray areas" in copyright law that can be leveraged to gain greater access to the intellectual property of others. This has led some to resort to "hacks" and clever manipulation of legal loopholes in order to circumvent the intent of publishers and exploit digital resources. "In some parts of the world outside the West," we are told, "copyright means 'right to copy.'"

While the hindrances experienced by the church *are* real and a decisive solution is urgently needed, implementing the "higher law" model to that end is both unwise and unhelpful. It is unwise because it is a misapplication of the principle suggested in the passage.[23] Furthermore, it erodes transparency, honesty, and forthrightness—all of which are important aspects of faithful ministry (2Co 4:2) and should not be discarded for pragmatic reasons.

Even if this principle did apply in the context of biblical resources and copyright law, it is unhelpful because this model critically undercuts the ability of the church to work together as one—across all denominations and mission organizations—to meet the needs of the entire global church. It not only violates the God-given right of those who own the content, but it would likely pit Christian against Christian in legal battles, in a way that would bring discredit to the name of Christ (1Co 6:6-7).[24] This is exactly the wrong way to resolve the problem and meet the need.

3.2. The Independent Model ("Reinventing the Wheel")

In this model, the church in each people group creates their own biblical resources in their own languages with little or no reliance on existing resources. This "reinvent the wheel" model has the advantage of being highly contextual, with forms and structures of resources that are reflective of the culture and religious context in which they are designed.

The disadvantages of this approach are significant, however. Some people groups will languish for a long time before developing the capacity to recreate for themselves some of the most complex resources (e.g., a Hebrew Grammar). Furthermore, the quality, theological reliability, and technical interoperability of the resources across languages would likely be inconsistent.

3.3. The Dependent Model (Oversight by "Gatekeepers")

Due in large part to the exhaustive (i.e., "*all* rights reserved"), automatic (i.e., transpiring at the point of creation) and enduring (i.e., lasts longer than a lifetime) nature of copyright law, the dependent model is the worldwide default. By virtue of creating the resource, copyright law establishes the creator as the owner (with a few exceptions) of the resource and, therefore, the gatekeeper who may (or may not) authorize use of

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[23]   The contexts are not equivalent, because, in the case of the disciples' preaching, the "law" imposed on them provided them with no recourse but to break it. They *had* to preach the name of Jesus, and there was no way for them to obey both God and man. This is not the same context we are addressing here. If the laws of man prohibited the creation of biblical content at all, perhaps the case could be made that this principle applies.

[24]   Whoever takes this approach opens themselves up to serious consequences including broken trust, lost time, and wasted financial resources. Furthermore, in some countries, copyright is a criminal matter, not civil, and governments can sue infringers without the involvement (or volition) of the copyright holder. This could result in putting legal matters pertaining to the creation and distribution of copyright-infringing biblical resources into the hands of secular (and sometimes antagonistic) governments.

the content by others. There are definite advantages to this model, particularly the order and tight control over the content (and all translations of it) that it affords the owner.

Furthermore, many content owners are generous when asked for permission to translate and use their content. But this model is built on several implicit assumptions that greatly hinder its effectiveness. For example, it is unrealistic to assume that any given content owner has the missional motivation or institutional capacity to provide translations of the content in more than a small fraction of the languages spoken by the global church. Consequently, the model implicitly assumes that everyone else who would benefit from a translation of the content in their own language…

- …can identify the copyright holder
- …shares a common language with which to ask them for permission
- …knows how to contact them and is able to do so
- …has adequate legal knowledge (e.g., how copyrights and licensing works)
- …has the ability to formulate a license request that accurately reflects their exact need
- …gets a response from the copyright holder (and it is in the affirmative)
- …understands the contract
- …has access to the counsel of an intellectual property rights attorney and sufficient financial resources to secure their services
- …is able to comply with all the terms and conditions of whatever license is granted, etc.

These are unrealistic expectations for the majority of situations, especially as meeting the need of the entire global church could require thousands of such processes happening concurrently with the same copyright holder. The generosity toward those who *have* overcome these hurdles and have received permission to translate provides no indication of the number who have *not* asked because the implicit assumptions are not true of them.[25]

The critical point to recognize is that regardless of the generosity of some content owners and the fact that it has worked reasonably well in some contexts, this model is intentionally designed to *decrease availability* of content. The whole point of reserving all rights for the content owner is so that everyone *cannot* redistribute it freely, and all requests for the content are funneled back to the content owner so that they may control (and optionally monetize) access to the content. This establishes a legally enforced *dependency* on the owner of the content for all access to and use of the content.

This model is well-suited for the purpose for which it was designed—providing a revenue stream from the content. But, due to the scope and degree of the legal restrictions that govern the use of the Bible and other biblical resources, the dependent model is misaligned with (if not diametrically opposed to) such missiological objectives as "eradicating Bible poverty" and "ending the spiritual famine of the global church." The objective of providing everyone in the world with their own copy of the Bible and the resources to study it effectively, in their own language, as soon as possible, and at the lowest possible cost is in conflict with the *de facto* licensing model that limits the availability of these resources.[26]

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[25]   Furthermore, this model also assumes that each content owner (the licensor) has the legal and administrative infrastructure to manage individual licenses with people who speak thousands of languages, using the content in dozens of different applications, with licenses of non-conforming term lengths, and in dozens of legal jurisdictions globally. The legal and administrative complexity intrinsic to this model limits its effectiveness as a global strategy to reach every people group and language, due to its inefficiency.

[26]   Around this point in the conversation, two perspectives tend to emerge, both claiming Scriptural support for their position.

An underlying skepticism regarding the need for open-licensed biblical content is sometimes voiced in the form of a question: "How much Bible translation and theological formation of the global church is actually being hindered by the 'all rights reserved' licensing policies that govern the use of most Bibles and biblical resources?" While this is an understandable question, it is based on the "argument from ignorance" fallacy (*argumentum ad ignorantium*, i.e. "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence"). The conclusion ("Traditional licensing policies do not critically hinder the global church in any significant way") is based primarily on the expectation (and perceived lack) of decisive evidence to the contrary. While there is considerable qualitative and anecdotal evidence that legal restrictions hinder the church in significant ways all over the world,[27] the absence of comprehensive or quantifiable evidence proving the severity and scope of the hindrance does not prove that the hindrance does not exist.

As ministry models are redesigned in light of biblical principles and the strategic opportunities God has given us today, unhindered progress can be made toward the alleviation of the spiritual impoverishment of the global church. The theological abundance that God has given the West will then no longer be only selectively shared with relatively few in the global south, but will be available without partiality to all.

3.4. The Interdependent Model (The "Open" World)

In the "open" world, the default answer to the question, "Can I do _____?" is always "Yes!"[28] In this model, biblical content is licensed in such a way that anyone who encounters it is already pre-cleared to use it, in accordance with the terms of the open license. This means that church leaders in a people group on the other side of the world who desire to translate a resource into their own language for use in equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Ep 4:12) are already authorized to do so, with the full blessing of the content owner. They do not need to establish contact with the owner or negotiate terms and conditions for use of the resource, as the owner has voluntarily (and proactively) overcome all those hindrances by making the resource available under an open license.

In the "open" world, content can be shared in any format, on any device, by anyone, to anyone, online or offline. This not only exponentially increases the availability of the content (because anyone can also become a redistributor), it also avoids the expense and risk of accessing biblical content online (or in apps). In the "open" world, the Bible belongs to the church as its common property, with no strings attached.[29]

The one side maintains that the biblical principles "The worker is worthy of his wages" and "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain" (1Ti 5:18) apply here. They point out that providing financially for those "who labor in preaching and teaching" is a New Testament injunction with Old Testament support. The other side questions whether Paul meant that the worker should continue to be paid for their work for several decades after they are deceased (as provided for by copyright law). They also observe that the restricting of the Word of God by legal means conflicts with Paul's assertion to Timothy that, in spite of the chains that bound him, "...the Word of God is not bound" (2Ti 2:9). Furthermore, they observe that the explicitly profit-oriented nature of the model raises at least some questions in light of Paul's statement to the Corinthians regarding the monetization of the Word of God: "For we do not market the word of God for profit like so many..." (2Co 2:17). A full treatise of these conflicting perspectives is beyond the scope of this paper, though we shall consider several of the points later.

27   See Jore "Free and Open" for a brief list.

28   As we shall see below, this freedom may be subject to the condition of attribution of the original and perpetuating freedom in the derivatives.

29   The concept of translations of the Bible belonging to the church as their common property without gatekeepers is not new. Regarding Luther's translation into German, Schaff observed, "This inestimable blessing of an open Bible for all, without the permission or intervention of pope and priest, marks an immense advance in church history, and can never be lost... The Bible is the common property and most sacred treasure of all Christian churches" (Schaff and Schaff, "Luther's Translation of the Bible," 341, 354).

The open license under which biblical content is available tends to encourage collaboration and healthy interdependence across traditional boundaries of organizations and denominations. Church networks in India—many of whom have found it difficult to work together in the past—now have leaders working together to create improved translations of the Bible in their common languages. One of the factors they point to as instrumental in fostering this collaboration is the open license under which the Bible translation is being created and made available. By virtue of the fact that it is "locked open" no one entity can take it from the others and make it their proprietary, restricted content. This strongly predisposes collaboration by mitigating what might otherwise be a very real risk.

This release of restrictions not only increases the amount of content created but the variety of the content. The owner of a biblical resource intended primarily for believers in the West, for example, is unlikely to have the best sense of how the resource might need to be adapted for effective use in other cultures and languages. But leaders of church networks around the world usually do. Open-licensed biblical content can be adapted as needed by the church "on the ground" in every region in the world for effective use.[30]

The "open" world is not without disadvantages, however. First, it necessitates a quite different approach to traditional concepts of ownership and licensing. It requires that content owners consciously think through the implications of copyrights and licensing (a nontrivial undertaking) and then overcome every hindrance that would otherwise prevent them from proactively making their biblical content available under an open license.

In the "open" world things can also become less orderly, because the restrictions on distribution and reuse of content have been lifted. This results in an increased number of potential 'pipelines' of new content, none of which are directly controlled by the original content owner. Some, understandably concerned that the Word of God not be compromised and that doctrine not become corrupt, argue that the risk is too great and that it would be better to maintain tight control over Bible translations and biblical content, regardless of the inefficiencies and limited reach of this approach. This concern—that "bad things will happen to good content"—is one of several hindrances that prevent owners of biblical resources from making them available under open licenses. We will address each one in the next section.

4. The Hindrances to "Open" (and How to Overcome Them)

I have been a proponent of the "open" model for several years, and many objections to it have been raised. All of them are variations of six main hindrances, any of which may prevent the owner of a biblical resource from releasing it without restrictions for use by the global church. Each of these hindrances is addressed in this section.

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[30] In recent years, the Divine Familial Terms (DFT) controversy has created significant concern and may cause some people to fear that open-licensed biblical content could encourage theological distortions of this nature. We will address this concern in greater detail below, but observe here that this concern has almost nothing to do with copyright and everything to do with the theological formation of the leadership of the church in a given region. That is, an "all rights reserved" license at a legal level is little more than a band-aid when addressing what is fundamentally a doctrinal problem in the church. Second, this concern is rooted in the assumption that it is the local church leaders who are doctrinally suspect and the "gatekeepers" are trustworthy. In reality, the DFT controversy was greatly promoted by outsiders and was often strongly opposed by the leadership of the church in the regions where it occurred. Note also that the controversy took place within the default "all rights reserved" gatekeeper model, which raises an important question: If the gatekeepers in this model become corrupt and that corruption is reflected in a copyright-restricted Bible translation, what can the element of the church that speaks that language do when they do not have the legal freedom to fix the problem for themselves and thus maintain faithful theology and sound doctrine? This suggests that open-licensed Bible texts may actually be one of the best deterrents to the propagation of unfaithful translations. Those who are creating these distorted translations tend to be strongly opposed to making them available under open licenses, because there are no secrets in the open—everything is visible and freely accessible to all.

1. Fear of bad things happening to good content
2. Reluctance to give sacrificially
3. Content-dependent monetization models
4. Incomplete missiology
5. Confusing copyright and trademark
6. Misunderstanding 'open' licenses

4.1. Fear of Bad Things Happening to Good Content

Setting aside this hindrance involves overcoming the fear that releasing some copyright restrictions on biblical content will result in malicious doctrinal distortion of the content.

Perhaps the most pervasive and effective obstacle preventing the release of biblical content under open licenses is the fear that doing so will make it possible for others to create derivatives that are doctrinally corrupt. This concern—that "bad things could happen to good content"—can be addressed from several perspectives but here we will focus on three: historical, practical and theological.

4.1.1. Historical Considerations

Elsewhere, I have considered the historical perspective and argued that attempts to protect the Word of God inevitably result in more harm than good (2015b:16). One example is the leaders of the institutional church in the 15th and 16th centuries who believed God had granted the Bible to their safekeeping as its stewards. But because of men like John Wycliffe, everyone could now have unrestricted access to it, unprotected. This caused no small sense of alarm, as it seemed that, without their protection of God's Word and its interpretation, grave theological error was sure to follow. Henry Knighton (Chronicler of the Catholic Church) expressed the perceived danger posed by unhindered access to the Bible in no uncertain terms:

> "Christ gave His Gospel to the clergy and the learned doctors of the Church... But this Master John Wycliffe... by thus translating the Bible, made it the property of the masses and **common to all and more open to the laity**... And so **the pearl of the Gospel is thrown before swine and trodden underfoot**..."[31]

In order to "protect" the church from the bad doctrine that would surely ensue if the Bible was made too freely available, some ecclesiastical authorities sought to maintain their exclusive control of the Bible by fiat. Pope Pius IV issued such an edict:

> "...if the Holy Bible... be indiscriminately allowed to everyone, **the rashness of men will cause more evil than good to arise from it**... bishops or inquisitors [may]... permit the reading of the Bible translated into the vulgar tongue... this permission must be had in writing... Regulars shall neither read nor purchase such Bibles without special license from their superiors."[32]

The similarity between this anti-Reformation papal edict and the licenses restricting the use of Bibles today is remarkable.

- Both are driven by the fear that bad things will happen if access to the Bible is not restricted.

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[31]   "Why Wycliffe Translated the Bible into English."

[32]   Schaff, "Bible Reading by the Laity, Restrictions on."

- Both employ a policy of discrimination, where only those who are considered worthy by the ones in the position of controlling access to the content are granted permission to handle the Bible.

- Both establish "gatekeepers" in authority over the church who unilaterally grant permission (or not) to the church for how they can use the Bible.

- Both require the permission to be expressed in the form of a written license.

By contrast, the Reformers consistently and unanimously communicated the importance of "free and open" access by all people to the Word of God.

4.1.2. Practical Considerations

Before addressing this concern, we must first illuminate an implicit assumption held by those who have this concern: anyone who would make doctrinally-corrupt derivatives is *law-abiding* and submits to copyright law. If we are to assume people will honor the copyright-enforced terms and conditions of an "all rights reserved" license, then we must logically also assume they will honor the copyright-protected terms and conditions of an open license. This is important to clarify, because people who wish to damage the credibility of the Bible (or a publisher), cannot legally take a Bible translation that is made available under an open license, change some wording to distort critical doctrine, and make it available under the same branding, as though it were the original.[33] ***This is as illegal to do with an open-licensed translation as it is with an "all rights reserved" translation.*** If such a thing were to happen, the same legal mechanisms for righting such a wrong would be available to the copyright holder in either scenario.[34]

A variation on this concern is that cults might take the open-licensed translation, create their own derivative work by editing the translation in a few key verses to match their teachings and do so in far less time than would otherwise have been possible. While this may be legally permissible, there are other factors that suggest this may be quite unlikely to happen. In order to understand this, it is helpful to understand how the cults see the world in light of how open licenses work.

Not all cults create their own, doctrinally-slanted translations of the Bible. Some cults are intent on proving that they are legitimate Christians and so are highly resistant to creating their own doctrinally-adjusted translations, because this would delegitimize them as Christians. They use existing Bible translations (often preferring those that are hard to understand) and provide supplementary resources that interpret the Scriptures according to their own doctrines.[35]

Some cults *do* (mis)translate the Bible according to their own doctrines. They do so because they believe that others who call themselves "Christians" are corrupt in their doctrines and these corruptions are reflected in their Bible translations. In spite of fears to the contrary, this would strongly predispose cultic translators to

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[33] Even in situations where this doctrinal error has accidentally happened, correcting the problem is a relatively straightforward process. Some well-known examples include the "Adulterous Bible" (a 1631 reprint of the KJV that inadvertently omitted the "not" in the seventh commandment, making it: "Thou shalt commit adultery") and the "Unrighteous Bible" (published in 1653 and accidentally omitting the "not" in 1 Corinthians 16:9, making it: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall inherit the kingdom of God?..."). These errors were corrected by identifying the publisher that committed the error (confirmed by checking the wording used in the book, chapter, and verse of the offending passage), recalling that edition, and replacing it with a corrected one.

[34] That said, even works in the public domain—where there is no copyright protection—are effectively immune to this kind of abuse. *The originals are always safe and uncorrupted*. The KJV, ASV, the hymn "Amazing Grace", and the *Apostles' Creed* are in no danger of being corrupted, regardless of the fact that they have no legal protection preventing the creation of any number of distorted derivatives.

[35] For example, even though their founder created his own "translation" (in this work he added extensive sections that do not appear in any known manuscript), the Mormons explicitly use the English KJV and declare forthrightly that they do, as evidence of their purported orthodoxy.

not create a derivative of an existing Bible translation, even if it were available under an open license. Not only would the cultic translators be building on what they believe to be doctrinally corrupted texts, but *the nature of the license itself* would require them to indicate that the original (which they believe to be corrupt) is not only a legitimate translation but the foundation on which their own translation is built. That is, *it would clearly indicate that the cult is a derivative of true Christianity*, when they believe the exact opposite.

Specifically, if a Bible translation is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 license (which we will consider in greater detail below), the creator of any derivative work based on it is legally required to forthrightly declare:

1. That **their work is a derivative**, based on an original work (which implies authoritativeness).

2. **What they have changed in their derivative**, as well as the reason for the change.

3. The **identity of the owner of the original** work.

4. That **the original work is available** at the location (e.g., a website) stipulated in the license by the owner of the original.[36]

To illustrate how unlikely this is to occur, consider the issue from the other direction. If the *New World Translation*, which unequivocally belongs to the Jehovah's Witnesses and which is known to be deeply flawed theologically, were made available under an open license, would evangelicals use it as the basis to create a derivative translation, even if they fixed the doctrinal problems in it? It is most unlikely, because even though they could save years of time (compared to creating a completely new translation) their work would be *forever tied to a doctrinally lethal original.* They would be legally required to show that their derivative translation is "Based on an original work by the Jehovah's Witnesses, available at www.jw.org, edited for doctrinal integrity." Not only would this clearly attribute the *New World Translation* as authoritative, reputable, and worth building upon, but it would direct all readers of their derivative translation—both now and for the rest of time—to the website of those who teach false doctrine. This is, of course, highly unlikely. So, would it not also be equally unlikely going the other way?[37]

In summary, the fear that bad things will happen to good content if it is made available under an open license is usually rooted in three assumptions that seem alarming but, upon careful scrutiny, turn out to be more frightening than dangerous.[38] The first assumption is that restrictive "all rights reserved" licenses prevent bad things from happening to good content. As we shall see in detail below, **copyright restrictions do not (and cannot) prevent bad things from happening to good content**. The second assumption is that making

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36   Regarding the requirement of "Attribution" the license states: "You must give appropriate credit *(If supplied, you must provide the name of the creator and attribution parties, a copyright notice, a license notice, a disclaimer notice, and a link to the material)*, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made *(In 4.0, you must indicate if you modified the material and retain an indication of previous modifications)*. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use." This is further clarified (Creative Commons, "License Versions"): "In the 4.0 license suite, licensees are required to indicate if they made modifications to the licensed material. This obligation applies whether or not the modifications produced adapted material."

37   If a cult engages in Bible translation in other languages, they choose one of these same approaches. Both the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses are active in Bible translation. The former tend to translate the KJV and the latter have translated their Bible translation into more than 160 languages ("New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures: Online Bible" 2018). It is critical to note that regardless of the translation strategy employed by the cult, they are in complete agreement with everyone else: establishing the *identity* of the work and who created it is of paramount importance. Whether the work contains distortions like the *New World Translation*, fabrications like the *Joseph Smith Translation*, or deletions like *The Jefferson Bible*, the identity of the work and its creator is never confused—identity is everything.

38   It is important to recognize the difference between something that is frightening (our perception) and something that is dangerous (actual reality). Hans Rosling explains: "Because 'frightening' and 'dangerous' are two different things. Something frightening poses a perceived risk. Something dangerous poses a real risk. Paying too much attention to what is frightening rather than what is dangerous—that is, paying too much attention to fear—creates a tragic drainage of energy in the wrong directions" (*Factfulness,* 121).

content available under an open license makes it easier for cults (or malicious characters) to distort the content and deceive others by claiming it is the original. **In reality, this is not permitted by open licenses any more than by restrictive licenses.** Finally, it may seem that making content available under an open license makes it easier for cults or others who are opposed to the truth (but who purport to be its defenders) to perpetuate their error by granting them legal permission to create their own derivatives, in which they introduce theological distortions. While this *is* legally permitted, it is highly unlikely to occur, because they would be legally required to declare that their work builds on original work done by someone else—thus establishing someone whom they believe to be theologically deceived and whose work is doctrinally corrupt as the authoritative source. **The same open license that permits the creation of the derivative work also requires that the truth be made known regarding the provenance and authoritativeness of the original.**

As important as it is to understand these things, practical considerations alone do not adequately address this hindrance. At its heart is a fear that can only be overcome by an unshakeable confidence in the sovereignty of God in all things—particularly his self-sufficiency for the protection of his Word.

4.1.3. Theological Considerations

When one considers the ferocity of the hatred that Satan has for God's people and God's Word, and that God has faithfully protected both for over two millennia despite opposition of every conceivable form, the notion that God—who created the universe by his Word (He 11:3) and who upholds it by the Word of his power (He 1:3)—is dependent on copyright restrictions to prevent bad things from happening to his good Word is illogical.

God works all things according to the counsel of his good will (Eph. 1:11) and accomplishes every one of his purposes (Is 46:10-11). He sets absolute and non-negotiable limits on what Satan is allowed to do (Jb 1:12; 2:6) and even those who oppose God are used by him to accomplish whatever his hand and his plan have predestined to take place (Ac 4:27-28).

> For his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
> and his kingdom is from generation to generation.
> All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing,
> and **he does what he wants** with the army of heaven
> and the inhabitants of the earth.
> **There is no one who can block his hand**
> or say to him, "What have you done?" (Da 4:34–35)

Theologians throughout the centuries bear witness to God's sovereign rule over all things.

> God... foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His immutable, eternal, and infallible will. —Martin Luther (1525)

> All events whatsoever are governed by the secret counsel of God. —John Calvin (1536)

> Who is regulating affairs on this earth today—God, or the Devil? [The Scriptures] affirm, again and again, that God is on the throne of the universe; that the sceptre is in His hands; that He is directing all things "after the counsel of His own will." They affirm... that God is ruling and reigning over all the works of His hands. They affirm that God is the "Almighty," that His will is irreversible, that He is absolute Sovereign in every realm of all His vast dominions. —Arthur W. Pink (1949)

> Scripture teaches that, as King, He orders and controls all things, human actions among them, in accordance with His own eternal purpose. —J.I. Packer (1961)

Given what the Scriptures say regarding the supremacy of God over all things, Buchanan is correct when he reminds us that our job is not to protect God or try to help him take care of what is his own:

> God is not safe. God is not a household deity, kept in our safekeeping. And—be warned—God's safety is not our business. **Our role on this earth... is not to keep the Almighty from mishap or embarrassment. He takes care of Himself**.[39]

Regardless of reality, it may feel that making biblical content available under open licenses is risky. Piper observes that in some things, risk is unavoidable and (paraphrasing Dietrich Bonhoeffer) must be overcome in love:

> The futility of finding a risk-free place to stand has paralyzed many of us... **Risk is the only way forward**... Risk avoidance may be more sinful—more unloving—than taking the risk in faith and love and making a wrong decision.[40]

Piper goes on to observe that risk avoidance is often based on a false sense of security:

> There is sometimes a subtle selfishness behind our avoidance of risk taking. There is a hypocrisy that lets us take risks every day for *ourselves* but paralyzes us from taking risks for *others* on the Calvary road of love. We are deluded and think that such risk may jeopardize a security that in fact does not even exist.[41]

The Bible tells us of many who, believing in the sovereignty of God, risked everything on the proposition that God is sovereign, and all his purposes are good and invariably come to pass.

- Caleb voluntarily chose the mountains that had giants in them: "*It may be* that the LORD will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the LORD said" (Jo 14:6-10).

- Jonathan voluntarily went up against the Philistines with only his sword and his armor bearer: "*It may be* that the LORD will work for us, for **nothing can hinder the LORD** from saving by many or by few" (1Sa 14:6-7).

- David voluntarily went up against Goliath: "I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel... *that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel*, and that all this assembly may know that **the LORD saves not with sword and spear**. For the battle is the LORD's" (1Sa 17:45-47).[42]

None of these knew beforehand the outcome of their actions and each one was keenly aware of the risk involved. Making biblical content available in digital formats under an open license is also not without risk, as the author of a book about biblical principles for freedom from addictions observed:

> When I released my book under an Attribution-ShareAlike License, I felt a little bit like Moses' mother. Put your baby out there, and he will either be eaten by crocodiles or will save millions of people from slavery.[43]

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[39]   Buchanan, *Your God is Too Safe,* 30, Emphasis added.

[40]   Piper, *Risk is Right,* 20-21. Emphasis added. This is a partial paraphrase of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote to Henry Louis Henriod in 1934 pleading for support for the pastors and Christians in Germany, "A decision must be made at some point, and it's no good waiting indefinitely for a sign from heaven that will solve the difficulty without further trouble... But to procrastinate and prevaricate simply because you're afraid of erring, when others—I mean our brethren in Germany—must make infinitely more difficult decisions every day, seems to me almost to run counter to love. To delay or fail to make decisions may be more sinful than to make wrong decisions out of faith and love" (Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 218).

[41]   Piper, *Risk is Right*, 22.

[42]   There are many more examples of biblical risk-taking, including: Joab facing the Amalekites ("May the Lord do what seems good to him" 2Sa 10:12), Esther standing up for her people ("If I perish, I perish" Es 4:15-16), Daniel's friends ("Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us... and he will deliver us... But if not... we will not serve your gods" Da 3:16-18), etc.

[43]   Personal communication, 2011.

The risk of bad things happening to good biblical content is real, regardless of the license. Copyright restrictions do not overcome this risk.

4.2. Reluctance to Give Sacrificially

Setting aside this hindrance involves loving the global church to the point of being willing to give generously and irrevocably for the building of the kingdom of God, even if someone else takes advantage of it by taking the credit or getting for free what they might have paid for.

The essential reason for making biblical content available under an open license is to proactively enable everyone to freely share in the benefit of the resource. It is a voluntary choice, motivated by love and compassion, that removes barriers to access, fosters equality across the entire body of Christ, and provides from the abundance of those who have to meet the needs of those who do not. It is a tangible application of the biblical principle of fairness in the church, taught by Paul to the Corinthians:

> For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness **your abundance at the present time should supply their need**, so that their abundance may supply your need, **that there may be fairness** (2Co 8:13-14).[44]

This principle of voluntary giving by those who have in order to provide for those who do not has been part of the church from the beginning:

> Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common... **there was not a needy person among them** because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of what was sold... this was then distributed to each person as any had need (Ac 4:32–35).

Generosity, by definition, requires a willingness to sacrifice for the good of others. Releasing biblical content under an open license for the good of the global church gives for free what might otherwise be sold for greater profit.[45] Doing so requires humility, because it makes it easier for others to take advantage of one's generosity by increasing their own ministry. Here we look to the example of Paul in prison, who was taken advantage of by those who preached Christ out of "envy and rivalry... out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, thinking they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment" (Php 1:15-18). Paul was not concerned that he was decreasing in name recognition and that others were gaining at his expense, because he remained focused on the true objective: "Whether from false motives or true, **Christ is proclaimed**, and in this I rejoice." Paul cared more that the kingdom of God advance, than that he be recognized as the one who advanced it.[46]

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[44]   Those who "have" are the only ones who can choose to act in order to meet the need of those who "have not." Kruse observes, "As they gathered according to their needs, 'He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack' (cf. Ex 16:18). The needs of all were met, no-one suffered want, no-one had an over-supply. This model illustrates the ideal which Paul sets before his readers. They too should ensure that there is an equality of needs being met among the Christian communities. And for this to occur those enjoying an abundance should meet the needs of those in want" (*2 Corinthians*, 154). Harris points out that this generosity should not be surprising, given the unity in the church that is to exist across cultural and national boundaries, "...when Paul appeals to the need for equality, he presupposes the Corinthians' commitment to the well-known principle of equality and fair dealing (cf. Co 4:1) and in particular their awareness of the commonality, friendship, and solidarity in Christ that bound Gentile and Jewish Christians together" (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 590).

[45]   It must be noted here (and is addressed in greater detail later in this document) that open-licensed resources are not the same as "not for sale." The open license only removes *exclusivity* and *requirement* of monetization (i.e., only one seller of the resource and the only access to the resource is by paying for it). This distinction is particularly important when the resource is being made available in formats that require physical media (e.g., printed books, DVDs, MicroSD cards, etc.) with associated hard costs for production and distribution.

[46]   Unless someone is willing to accept the risk of someone else gaining at their expense for the sake of Christ and his church, they are unlikely to release biblical content that they own under an open license. The irony, however, is that if they do, the

Paul's attitude is reminiscent of John the Baptist ("He must increase, I must decrease" Jn 3:30), as well as Paul's endorsement of Timothy who was not like others, because "they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (Php 2:21). These examples of a selfless, humble, and "Christ-first" mindset stand in stark contrast to the attitude of some today, who evidently have the good of their commercial enterprise before the good of the global church, like this executive at a Christian publishing company:

> The thought of releasing some of our biblical content under an open license makes me full of compassion for the poor man in Papua New Guinea who doesn't have two nickels to rub together. **But when I think of people who could afford to pay for it now able to get it for free, it gives me a rash.**[47]

The point is not to suggest an obligation on the part of those who have biblical resources needed by the global church. As Peter told Ananias, "The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away (Ac 5:4)." Instead, the point is to show that if those who own biblical resources are willing to give sacrificially, those resources can be used to their fullest for the glory of God and the good of *all* His church.

4.3. Content-dependent Monetization Models

Setting aside this hindrance requires designing models of funding ministry that are not built on restricting the global church from access to and use of biblical resources, but that maximize freedom instead.

Before considering this topic, it is important to recognize at the outset that many (perhaps most) people for whom this topic of "content-dependent monetization models" applies are in this predicament innocently. Their intent was never to limit the availability of what they created—quite the opposite! They created it in order to bless and build up as many as possible with the insights God has given them. Thus it is with great respect for them and sincere appreciation for the work they have done that I attempt to address the dilemma in which they find themselves.

The new era of abundance ushered in by Gutenberg's movable type printing press in the 15th century brought with it considerable financial risk. Printers (who traditionally printed low-risk content like Bibles and the writings of philosophers or celebrities like Luther) started to become publishers who would foot the cost of printing up front and make decisions about what to publish based on perceived economic viability of the work.[48] Over time, the model became standardized: authors create content, the publisher acquires the rights to the content from the author, then produces the content and markets it to their customer base. Because of their exclusive distribution rights (which eventually came to be enforced by copyright law), all revenues from the sale of access to the content go to the publisher and are divided with the author according to the terms of the contract.

The intent of this virtuous cycle—largely the same since the days of Gutenberg, and virtually identical whether in publishing or media production—is to incentivize the creation of content that people are willing to pay to consume. The model is also the default in the non-profit world of Christian ministry, even with "free of charge" biblical resources. Instead of direct sales of the content, however, the owner of the content (as the

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increased availability of the resource tends to result in greater use of the resource by more people, which results in an *increase* in their influence and recognition, not a decrease. This is a well-known (but frequently misunderstood) reality of licenses that require attribution of the original.

[47]   Personal communication, 2012.

[48]   Shirky observes "This radical solution to spare capacity—produce books that no one had ever read before—created new problems, chiefly financial risk. If a printer produced copies of a new book and no one wanted to read it, he'd lose the resources that went into creating it. If he did that enough times, he'd be out of business" (*Cognitive Surplus*, 44).

exclusive distributor) may receive donations from philanthropically-motivated benefactors who desire to extend the reach of the content. Effectively, the essential difference is who is paying to provide access to the content. This model is inherently neither unbiblical nor unethical, but it has unavoidable and consequential implications.

First, it **decreases the availability of content**. The model constrains the means of distribution to a single channel and reduces the reach of the content to the institutional capacity of the publisher. The use of a legal mechanism that is designed to decrease availability of content in order to increase profit is antithetical to the objective of making the content as broadly available as possible. Is it not counterproductive to fervently work toward "ending Bible poverty" by employing a licensing model that perpetuates scarcity?
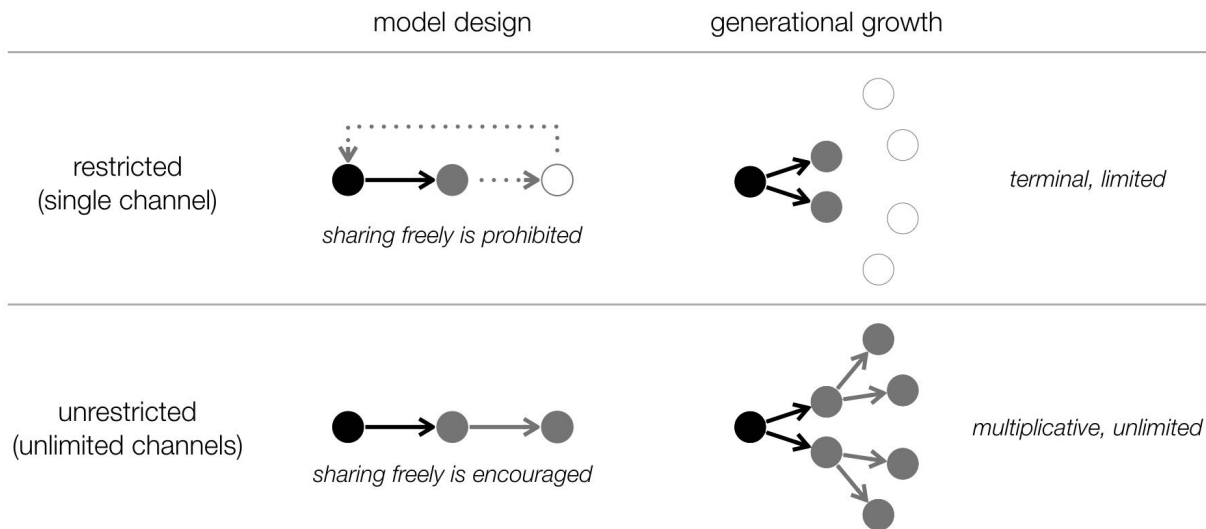

Diagram 7: Restricted vs. unrestricted distribution models

Given that this model was not designed to make the content available in thousands of languages as swiftly as possible, but to maximize revenue from the relatively few languages where there is sufficient market to justify the investment of a translation, it **decreases the usability of content** by the global church. As we have seen, the right to use the content—including translation, adaptation, and revision—is reserved exclusively for the owner. Given the thousands of languages spoken by the global church and the effort required to translate and distribute a resource, this drastically limits the reach of the content. It is antithetical, therefore, to simultaneously state (or imply) that a biblical resource is of immense theological importance to Christians while simultaneously employing a licensing model that practically restricts its availability to those who speak a relatively small handful of languages. This may not be the intent of the owner of the content, but *it is the default of the model itself:* no one gets access to the content in a language they understand well unless the owner provides it for them.

Finally, this restrictive model **conflicts with the abundance of the digital age**. The new technologies of the digital era provide highly scalable models of content creation and distribution at vastly lower costs, but they cannot be effectively employed in a context of restrictions on biblical content. Increasingly, the global church has the technology and desire to provide biblical abundance in every language but is hindered by the lack of legal freedom.

In light of these limitations, it seems clear that the exclusive use of the "all rights reserved" monetization model constitutes an obstacle for the Gospel, as it hinders the global church from accessing and

understanding the Word of God in every language. The apostle Paul recognized that "the worker is worthy of their wages" and that ministers who "sow spiritual things among you" have a rightful claim to "reap material things" (1Co 9:11) as a result. But he also refused to claim this right if it became a hindrance:

> Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything **rather than put an obstacle in the way** of the gospel of Christ... What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may **present the gospel free of charge**, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel (1Co 9:12, 18 ESV).

Luther modeled the same pattern of "you received without paying; give without pay" (Mt 10:8 ESV)[49]:

> Luther received no income from his torrential publications because even though the publishers made a mint from them, Luther refused to take a penny, nor did he take money for all of his preaching. **He simply wanted to spread the Word and trust God would provide**.[50]

Today, there is an urgent need to adopt a similarly gracious mindset and collaborate in the creation of biblical resources that are unencumbered by monetization models that critically hinder the global church.[51] This is a known need, but too few in the church have yet understood the implications and helped bring it to pass.

> It is high time that the Christian community awaken itself to the situation and dispatch a loud and strong cry in order to reclaim the biblical text from those who have made it into proprietary merchandise. It is not the "purity of the text" which has to be protected, but the liberation of that text from those non-church entities who desire to profit unjustly from marketing God's word back to God's people, who should own and control the dissemination of that word in the first place. **Our ministry to a dying world requires sanctuary from the profit motive in regard to our sacred texts**.[52]

As we shall see below, what is needed goes far beyond merely making biblical content available "free of charge." It requires granting the entire global church—all of us—freedom to use the content in whatever way is needed, as though it belongs to us all, without a wall separating the "haves" from the "have nots."

4.4. Incomplete Missiology

Setting aside this hindrance involves the implementation of a missiology that grants the rights to the global church to meet their own needs and equips the global church to not merely meet their own needs but to become equippers of others as well.

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[49] Luther was not the only Reformer who gave sacrificially for the good of the church. When Pope Pius IV heard of John Calvin's death he paid him this tribute: "The strength of that heretic consisted in this,—that money never had the slightest charm for him. If I had such servants, my dominions would extend from sea to sea." Schaff observes that, in this respect all the Reformers were true successors of the Apostles. They were poor, but made many rich ("Luther's Translation of the Bible," 839).

[50] Metaxas, *Martin Luther,* 353.

[51] This paper does not attempt to describe alternative monetization models, though I have considered several in Appendix D of *The Christian Commons* (Jore, 294). Other books such as *The Content Trap* (Anand, 2016) and *Free* (Anderson, 2009) provide helpful insights into the role of content in the digital era, as well as practical considerations for developing effective monetization models in an age of abundance. It may be helpful to adopt a "both/and" approach, rather than "all or nothing." That is, a content owner may continue to monetize some resources while exploring effective means of thriving in the "free and open" world by open-licensing other resources.

[52] Robinson, "The Bondage of the Word," 13. The rationale for using copyright to safeguard a text is traced by Robinson back to the copyright statement of the American Standard Version published in 1901 that bore the inscription: "To insure purity of text."

4.4.1. The Right to Meet the Needs

> The emergence of the modern mission movement in the early nineteenth century cannot be understood apart from the rise of technocratic society.[53]

A technocratic society is one in which experts have the power and resources to solve problems and meet needs, as opposed to the people themselves.[54] Some patterns and strategies of missionary work since the early 19th century have (often unknowingly) been deeply influenced by their contemporary political contexts. The technocratic predisposition of such strategies has often resulted in outside "experts" maintaining the rights to control the church, sometimes until forced to leave the country by political opposition (e.g., China, Vietnam, some Middle Eastern countries).

This pattern is quite different from Paul's model in the New Testament. He committed new churches to God's care early (Ac 14:23), continued in relationship with the churches (1Co 4:15; 1Th 2:11), taught them as needed (Ac 20:17-35, every epistle), visited them when possible (1Co 16:5), urged them in the right direction (Ep 4:1; 1Th 5:14), encouraged them to imitate the pattern of those who were faithful (Php 3:17), but resisted leveraging the power of his apostleship to control them (2Co 11:9; 1Th 2:6-7). Banks observes:

> **Their freedom is a reality to be appropriated, not a possibility to which they must be gradually introduced.** For this reason, his instructions to his converts are generally couched in terms of appeal and exhortation rather than command and decree.[55]

The contrast between missiological patterns that reflect technocratic, control-wielding predispositions and the model we see in the New Testament has been observed by many, including Roland Allen, in his critique of missionary strategies of the early 20th century:

> If anyone suggests giving to the natives any freedom of action the first thought that arises in our minds is not one of eager interest to see how they will act, but one of anxious questioning; **if we allow that, how shall we prevent some horrible disaster, how shall we avoid some danger, how shall we provide safeguards against some possible mistake?** Our attitude in such cases is naturally negative.[56]

We rightly cringe at the paternalistic overtones in this statement. And yet, is it not this same fear—granting "freedom of action" to the global church—that motivates some owners of biblical content to use the fulcrum of copyright law and restrictive licenses as leverage over the church? Whether it is to protect their paradigm of ministry or to "safeguard" the Word of God against "horrible disaster," "some danger," and "possible mistake", it is deceptively easy for owners of biblical content to inadvertently undermine the responsibility of the church in each people group and unwittingly perpetuate their spiritual malnourishment.[57] It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the continued undermining of the church's responsibility, as evidenced by

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[53]   Neely, Alan, H. Wayne Pipkin, Wilbert R. Shenk. Preface to Hiebert, "The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World."

[54]   Easterly (*The Tyranny of Experts,* 6-7) argues that the cause of poverty is a matter of rights, not expertise: "The technocratic approach ignores... the real cause of poverty—the unchecked power of the state against poor people without rights... The technocratic illusion is that poverty results from a shortage of expertise, whereas poverty is really about a shortage of rights." Odugbemi describes the prevalence of this mindset: "In international development, the belief that experts know best and should shape public policy in developing countries is as difficult to kick as an addiction to cocaine" ("The Enduring Allurement of Technocratic Competence"). Along similar lines (but from a Christian perspective), in *When Helping Hurts*, Corbett rightly advises those who seek to help the poor: "Avoid paternalism. Do not do things for people that they can do for themselves... Relief efforts applied inappropriately often cause the beneficiaries to abstain from work, thereby limiting their relationship with God through distorted worship or through no worship at all" (109).

[55]   Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 181.

[56]   Allen, *Missionary Methods,* 112-113.

[57]   Allen goes on to say, "It would be better, far better, that our converts should make many mistakes, and fall into many errors, and commit many offenses, than that their sense of responsibility should be undermined. The Holy Ghost is given to

withholding from them the rights to provide themselves with the best theological resources, is fostering (or at least failing to prevent) widespread theological problems by creating a truth vacuum that is being filled by false teachers with doctrinal garbage (1Ti 4:1-2; 2Ti 4:3).

The solution to the problem of "Bible poverty", however, is *not* for "experts" to develop a plan and build technologies that they then administrate on behalf of the global church, complete with custom licensing and governance structures. It does not involve building better mobile apps around an even bigger silo of restricted biblical resources, thus inadvertently blurring the lines between providing the Bible to the global church and presiding over their use of it.[58] Instead, it is for the entire global church to be irrevocably granted the legal rights—in terms of the unhindered freedom to make full use the best biblical texts and hermeneutical resources—to solve their own theological problems and meet their own Bible translation needs. It requires tearing down the wall of separation between "us" (the "haves") and "them" (the "have nots") by granting everyone the legal right to "have", without exception.

4.4.2. Equipping to Equip

There are several models that can be used to accomplish a missional objective (e.g., translating the Bible, developing an evangelistic strategy, training leaders, etc.). One could do it *for* the church, *with* the church, or equip the church to do it *for themselves*. This progression increases in effectiveness, but it remains linear in scale. It is only when a model crosses the line to the decisively different model of *equipping others to equip others* that a compounding, non-linear growth process becomes possible.
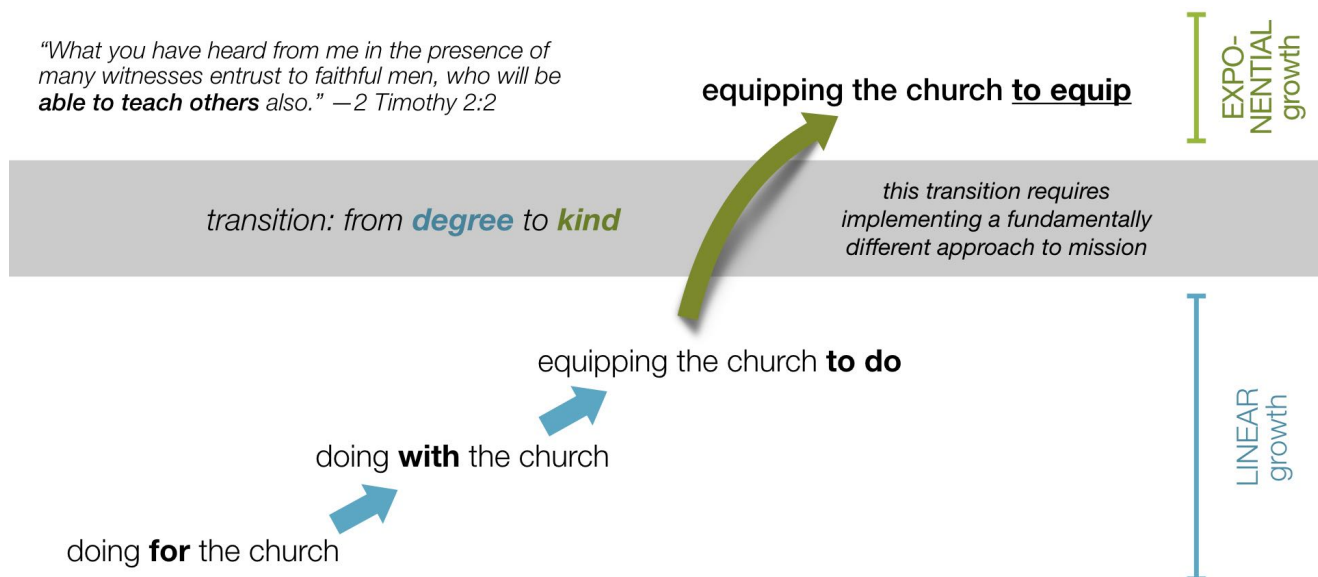
*"What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be **able to teach others** also." —2 Timothy 2:2*

equipping the church to equip

EXPO-NENTIAL growth

*transition: from **degree** to **kind***

this transition requires implementing a fundamentally different approach to mission

equipping the church to do

doing **with** the church

LINEAR growth

doing **for** the church

Diagram 8: Different models of mission

This is one of the central aspects of the pattern we see in the New Testament, particularly with regard to how Paul approached the task of accomplishing the Great Commission:

Christians that He may guide them, and that they may learn His power to guide them, not that they may be stupidly obedient to the voice of authority" (*Missionary Methods,* 113).

[58]   Those who control the content and the tools by which it is accessed have the opportunity to analyze just about anything, including what content is used, by whom, where they used it, when, and for how long.

What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2Ti 2:2).[59]

The licensing of biblical content is of critical importance in this progression, because **"all rights reserved" licenses tend to create a centralized model that only scales in a linear progression**. If each and every element of the global church that desires to translate, adapt, or redistribute a resource must be granted explicit permission by the owner of the resource, the friction in the process inevitably slows it to a crawl, despite all good intent to the contrary.

By contrast, **open-licensed resources lead to a decentralized model that can scale in a non-linear progression** by removing all legal friction from the process. Anyone who needs to use the content in any way for the building up of the church is pre-cleared do so immediately, subject to the conditions of the license. This enables the entire church to collaborate together in the translation, redistribution, and use of the content, in whatever way needed, without hindrance.
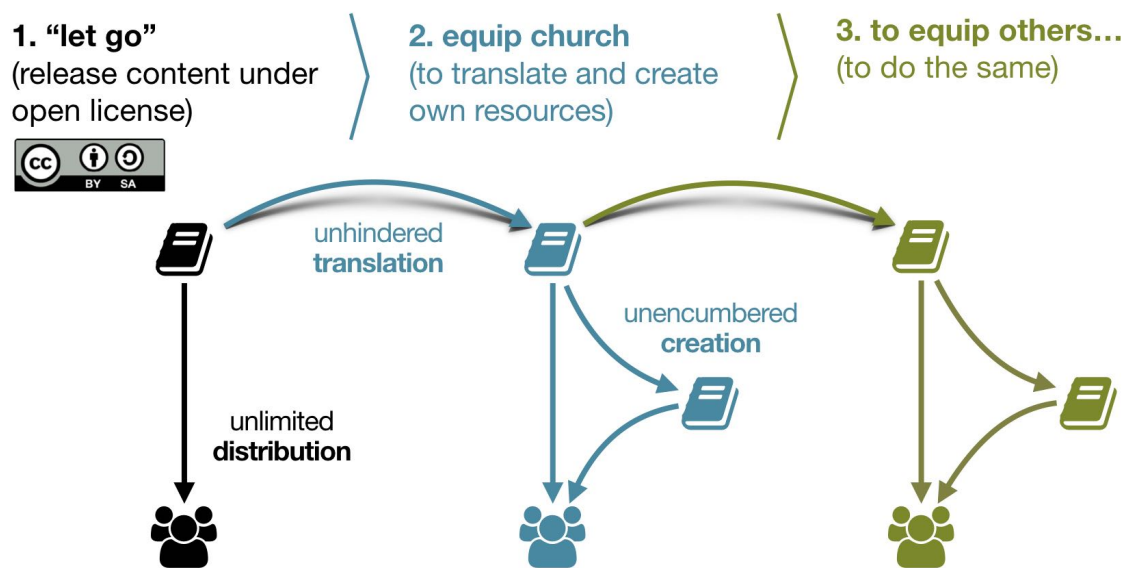

Diagram 9: Open-licensing removes legal constraints to exponential growth

4.5. Confusing Copyright and Trademark

Setting aside this hindrance involves understanding how copyright law works and how it differs from other branches of intellectual property law, namely trademark.

One of the most common concerns about making biblical content available under open licenses is articulated in this statement by a well-known American pastor:

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[59] In exponential growth patterns, the starting point has relatively little impact on the overall effectiveness of the process, compared to the rate of compounding. The net result of a compounding process is more impacted by the degree to which students become teachers than by the number of teachers at the outset. The difference between 2 out of 10 students becoming teachers as opposed to 5 out of 10 students becoming teachers results in drastically different outcomes. The relatively small change in net numbers of new teachers each generation creates an immense change in the rate at which the growth process compounds over generations. This is how twelve disciples of one Teacher—who each became teachers of other teachers—wound up changing the entire world.

...You don't want anybody taking... the ESV, and then changing the words to wrong translations. **The safeguard we have in our culture to prevent such distortion is to copyright things.** If you want to produce another translation of the Bible you have to **call it something else**. You can't call it the ESV, NIV, RSV, or NASB. You have to **call it your own thing**, so people know that **you're taking responsibility**.

The conclusion that "copyrights (i.e. 'all rights reserved' licenses) protect against distortion by others" is founded on several false assumptions in this statement.

Assumption 1: "Anybody" can take the ESV and change the words – Even if the ESV were made available under an open license, the only way others could actually change the ESV itself would be if they had access to the publishing process such that they could publish an updated version that contains the distortions. *This has nothing to do with licensing* and everything to do with the editorial team and the process of publishing an updated text.

Assumption 2: If they create a distorted derivative, it will be indistinguishable from the ESV – As we saw above, if any Bible is made available under an open license, the most that other parties could do would be to create their own derivative based on it that includes their changes in their own copy. But they would be legally obligated to change the name, indicate the provenance of the original, that they have made their own modifications, and what those modifications are.

Assumption 3: Copyright *actually* safeguards against distortions – In an age when all content is digital, and anyone can effectively do whatever they want with content on any computing device to which they have access, introducing distortions into copies of original content is much easier to do. Copyrights cannot and do not prevent distortion. They merely provide the owner of the copyright with a legal platform from which to sue infringers, and then only after the fact. The fear of a lawsuit may, in some situations, be a deterrent.[60] But apart from the irony of attempting to build a missional movement on the implicit threat of a lawsuit by Christians who assert they are defending the Word of the sovereign God, this line of reasoning is overly optimistic. Just because a copyright owner does not know of bad things happening to their copyrighted content does not mean they are not happening—especially if the content is in high demand! Every owner of digital content in the Internet age should assume their copyright-restricted content is being used in all kinds of ways of which they would not approve—if they knew about it. The people who really *are* hindered by the "all rights reserved" are those who understand what it means, fear God, and desire to do what is right.

Assumption 4: Copyright is the best legal tool to use – It *is* important that if someone creates a derivative of any open-licensed Bible that they "call it something else... call it [their] own thing, so that people know [they] are taking responsibility." But this speaks to the *identity* of the derivative and the one who created it—and identity is not the point of copyright. Copyright law grants the creator of an original work exclusive rights for its use and distribution.

Trademark is the branch of intellectual property law that deals with identity. The United States Patent and Trademark Office defines trademark as:

> a word, phrase, symbol, or design, or a combination thereof, that identifies and distinguishes the source of the goods of one party from those of others.

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[60] But it frequently is not an effective deterrent. In some parts of the world, Bible societies are faced with the reality that the threat of legal action is a very weak deterrent for those who are motivated to abuse copyright. In some situations, the local mafia has reportedly removed the covers of copyrighted Bibles, rebranded them, and sold them for profit, thereby abusing the legitimate use of copyright law—reserving all commercial proceeds for the owner.

In 1836, Cotton Smith, the president of the American Bible Society remarked in his address at the Annual Meeting of the Society:

> The Society is *charged with the preservation*, not only of the truths of the English Bible but of its precise language… An interdenominational Society only can properly secure the text against alteration; it being a body trusted by all denominations, it watches over the inviolability of the text. A copy **bearing the imprint of such a Society is of guaranteed authenticity**.[61]

This suggests that imprints—which identify the publisher—were the means by which the early Bible societies watched over "the inviolability of the text" and ensured that it was of "guaranteed authenticity." The first known use of copyright to "insure purity of the text" (according to the statement on the copyright page) came many decades later, when the New Testament of the American Standard Version was published in 1901.[62]

All of this suggests that there is widespread and historical agreement regarding the need to preserve and clarify the *identity* of who has done the work—both in terms of original works, and for derivative works created from them.[63] In recent history, publishers have used copyright law combined with restrictive licenses to forbid all uses of content without their explicit approval. The use of a different branch of intellectual property law—trademark law—may provide an effective and less stifling framework for ensuring that the identity (and consequently, the reputation) of the creator of a work is always clear. We will consider this in more detail later.

4.6. Misunderstanding "Open" Licenses

Setting aside this hindrance involves not only understanding what an "open" license is, but also understanding what it is not and what it does not imply.

4.6.1. What "Open" Means

With regard to the licensing of content, the term "open" means:

> **Anyone** can **freely access, use, modify, and share** for **any purpose** (subject, at most, to requirements that preserve provenance and openness).[64]

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[61]   Quoted in Dwight, *The Centennial History of the American Bible Society*. This address took place fifty years *before* the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (1886) would establish a legal framework for international honoring of copyright among signatory states.

[62]   One of the earliest copyright statements on a Bible text was applied to the Greek New Testament by Westcott and Hort, published in 1882. The irony is that one of the most important factors determining whether or not a work enjoys copyright protection is that of originality and creativity. Every Greek New Testament is, by definition, attempting to produce the least creative text possible. Ideally, it would recreate the autographs perfectly, which would mean there is nothing original in it at all. This, of course, would make it completely void of any claim to copyright on the grounds of creativity.

[63]   We already use identity in this way in order to distinguish between works of the same title. Various identifiers are used to tell them apart (e.g., subtitles, publishers, date published, etc.) but ultimately, it comes down to one: *authorship*. Thus, for the very popular title *Systematic Theology* we can easily find dozens of different works, and we tell them apart by the identity of the author, e.g., Berkhof, Brown, Chafer, Cheung, Dabney, Fiorenza and Galvin, Frame, Garrett, Geisler, Grudem, Gulley, Hodge, Horton, Jenson, Kelly, McCune, Miley, Oden, Pannenberg, Rausch, Smith, Sobrino and Ellacuria, Sonderegger, Strong, Thiselton, Tillich, etc.

[64]   This is the generally-accepted definition, as expressed by the Open Knowledge Foundation (see "Open Definition" at **opencontent.org/definition/**). There are at least 50 uses of the term "open" in the English language (Pomerantz and Peek 2016). Tan observes the synergy that is made possible by openness across multiple domains, particularly with regard to scholarship: "Open scholarship combines open access texts, open data, and open-source software to provide openness at every stage of a research project and enables replication, confirmation, revision, falsification, and further building on it" ("Linguistics Applied").

The specific freedoms contained in this concise definition can be summarized by the "5 Rs" of freedom:

1. **Retain** – The right to make, own, and control copies of the content (e.g., download, duplicate, store, and manage).

2. **Reuse** – The right to use the content in a wide range of ways (e.g., in a class, in a study group, on a website, in a video).

3. **Revise** – The right to adapt, adjust, modify, or alter the content itself (e.g., translate the content into another language).

4. **Remix** – The right to combine the original or revised content with other material to create something new (e.g., incorporate the content into a mashup, or to repurpose it for another use).

5. **Redistribute** – The right to share copies of the original content, your revisions, or your remixes with others (e.g., give a copy of the content to a friend).[65]

An open license is necessarily **irrevocable**, granting the stated freedoms perpetually. This is critically important, as these freedoms are not merely addressing distribution of finished content. They are intended to create a stable foundation for creation of other resources from them. An unstoppable movement of interlinked and interdependent biblical content in every language must necessarily be built on a foundation that can never be shifted or removed.

4.6.2. Creative Commons: Globally-effective, Standardized Licenses

Creative Commons is a non-profit organization that provides royalty-free public licenses that make it easy to release restrictions on content, subject to certain conditions. They are designed to be internationally valid— essentially jurisdiction-neutral while remaining effective globally.[66] This makes it possible to easily and legally combine and remix content across languages and domains using standardized licenses. Not all the licenses they provide constitute "open" licenses, however.[67] There are only two Creative Commons licenses that qualify as open licenses:

- **Creative Commons Attribution** (CC BY) – this license waives all rights other than the preservation of the provenance of the original (Attribution).

- **Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike** (CC BY-SA) – this license waives all rights other than the preservation of the provenance of the original (Attribution) and the perpetuation of openness in derivatives (ShareAlike).

In addition to these two licenses, Creative Commons provides a tool to dedicate a work to the public domain:

- **Creative Commons Zero** (CC0) – this waives all rights, effectively making the content equivalent to the public domain (PD).

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[65]   These coincide with the four essential freedoms that must exist for "Free Cultural Works", namely: the freedom to use, to study, to redistribute copies of, and to make changes to the work ("Definition of Free Cultural Works" n.d.).

[66]   Creative Commons licenses also provide a standardized means of delineating the freedoms granted to others, making the legal reuse and remixing of content much simpler to do, compared to attempting to parse the legal terms of custom licenses. The licenses also provide a human-readable overview that makes it possible for people with no legal experience to understand exactly what the license permits. Creative Commons licenses also provide a machine-readable form of the license that makes it possible to semantically search for and identify content by license type (whereas lexical search only looks for matches of the query terms).

[67]   Thus, saying "a Creative Commons license" is not the same as saying "an open license."

Creative Commons licenses are irrevocable and perpetual, but they terminate automatically if the conditions are violated.[68]

It is important to understand that "Creative Commons license" **is not a synonym for "open license"**. Some people mistakenly use a phrase like "release under a Creative Commons license" to mean "release under an open license." These do *not* mean the same thing! There are six Creative Commons licenses, and only two of them are "open" licenses (CC BY and CC BY-SA). The other four all include restrictions that limit how a work can be used, thus failing to meet the industry standard definition for an "open" license, as explained above. The diagram below contrasts "Creative Commons licenses" with "open licenses."
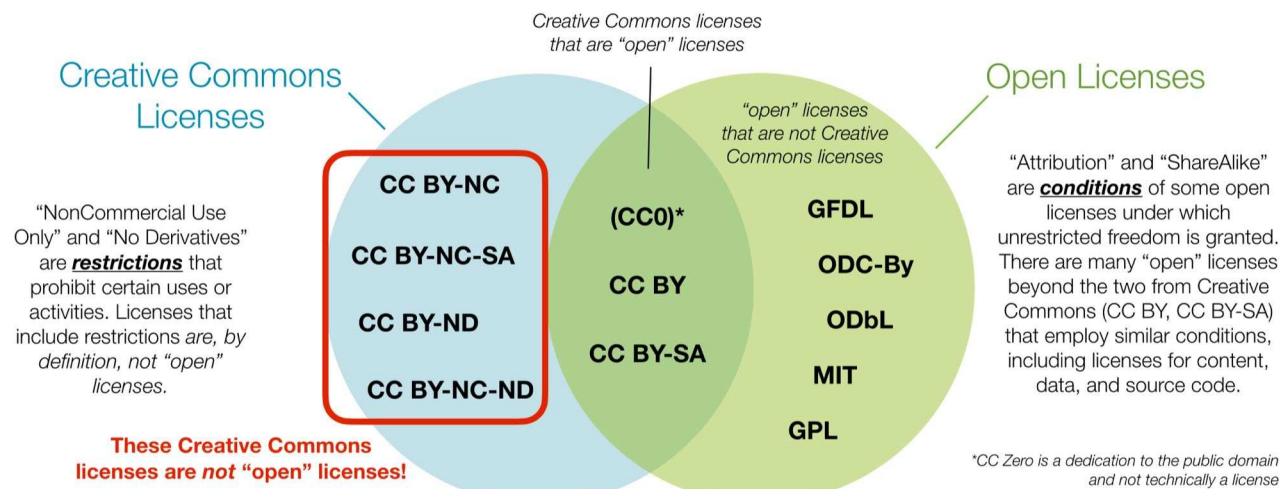

Diagram 10: Not all Creative Commons Licenses are "Open" Licenses

4.6.3. What "Open-licensed" Does *Not* Mean

Understanding what "open-licensed" means is important, but it is also necessary to understand what it does *not* mean, particularly with regard to ownership, derivative works, quality control, and monetization of the content.

Regarding Ownership

- "Open-licensed" **does not mean "copyright free" or "in the public domain."** When the term of copyright protection expires, a resource enters the public domain, where copyright restrictions no longer apply. *An open license is not the same thing as the public domain!* The open license defines the freedoms granted to others by the owner of the content but does not transfer the content to the public domain or nullify ownership of the content.[69]

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[68] "Creative Commons licenses do provide several mechanisms that allow licensors to choose not to be associated with their material or to uses of their material with which they disagree. First, all CC licenses prohibit using the attribution requirement to suggest that the licensor endorses or supports a particular use. Second, licensors may waive the attribution requirement, choosing not to be identified as the licensor, if they wish. Third, if the licensor does not like how the material has been modified or used, CC licenses require that the licensee remove the attribution information upon request" (Creative Commons "Frequently Asked Questions"). In the 4.0 version of the Creative Commons licenses, a 30-day window is provided for correction of license violations (see **https://creativecommons.org/version4/**).

[69] In addition to the six Creative Commons licenses, Creative Commons Zero (CC0) is a public domain dedication tool which allows creators to give up their copyright in a work and declare "no rights reserved." This enables a copyright owner to place the work as completely as possible in the public domain, so that others may freely build upon, enhance and reuse it for any

- "Open-licensed" **does not mean "copyright assignment"**. An open license does not transfer the rights in the content to anyone else—it merely states what freedoms others have with regard to the use of the content. This is why open-licensed resources generally include the copyright statement (who owns the rights to the resource) and the license statement (what others are pre-authorized to do with the content under the terms of the license).

Regarding Derivatives

- "Open-licensed" **does not mean others are free to change the original**. Releasing content under an open license does not make it editable by others, nor does it mean that someone can change a copy of the content and say that it is the original. This is explicitly forbidden by open licenses, and it effectively does not happen: there is *always* a way to identify derivatives.

- "Open-licensed" **does not mean that the owner of the original has responsibility for or endorsement of derivatives** created from it. Open licenses do not permit others to do something with a copy of the content and suggest that the owner of the original approves of it. The owner of the original is never liable for what others do with their copy of the content—the one who does the work bears that responsibility alone.[70]

Regarding Quality

- "Open-licensed" **does not mean "open workflow"** or that the content is created using a crowd-sourced, open process (e.g., Wikipedia) where anyone can make changes to the content. The means by which the content is created has nothing to do with the license under which the content is made available for others to use.

- "Open-licensed" **does not mean low quality**. The value and trustworthiness of the content is intrinsic to the content itself (and possibly suggested by the identity of the creator) and has nothing to do with the license under which the content is made available.[71]

Regarding Money

- "Open-licensed" **does not mean "free to download"** (and, conversely, "free to download" does not mean "open-licensed.") Making content available free-of-charge is an important first step to equipping the entire global church, but it does not address freedom to translate, adapt, build on, redistribute, and use as desired.

- "Open-licensed" **does not mean "not for sale"**. Open-licensed resources absolutely *can* be sold for profit. The open nature of the license merely prevents the use of monopoly to contrive an artificial scarcity of the

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purpose without restriction under copyright or database law. (See: **creativecommons.org/share-your-work/public-domain/cc0/**.)

[70] Copyright is a human construct, governed by arbitrary laws, and *it expires at some point*. Whether it is fifty or seventy years after the author dies, the term of copyright restrictions eventually comes to an end. This raises the question: is the author still responsible for what others do with their copy of the original content at that point, when it is in the public domain and there are *no* restrictions on how it is used? By extension, who is responsible for the content already in the public domain? It is absurd to hold John Newton responsible for the countless disrespectful (and worse) derivatives of "Amazing Grace." Perhaps it is for this reason that, approximately 1,800 years before the invention of modern copyright, the warnings about "adding to" or "taking away from" the book of Revelation (22:18-19) make it clear that those who do the work (i.e. create the derivative) bear the responsibility for what they have done.

[71] To the extent that we view the value of content from a scarcity-driven, commercial perspective, this may not be immediately obvious. In recent history, the general pattern has involved the monetization of access to content and more valuable content tends to cost more. This suggests that the opposite is also true: free content is less valuable (and thus of lesser quality). It is important to recognize that this has everything to do with the commercial model employed (i.e. "Gutenberg economics") and that the degree to which content is freely available is not necessarily correlated with the quality of the content itself. Some of the best and most useful content is available under open licenses, and much content of low quality is also governed by restrictive "all rights reserved" licenses.

resource so as to drive up the price. This simultaneously ensures that digital versions of the resource can always be (and inevitably are) made freely available, while also incentivizing anyone who with the means to do so to legally make the resource available in physical formats (e.g., printed books, MicroSD cards) at fair prices.

4.6.4. From "Private + Closed" to "Public + Open"

When a content owner licenses their content for others to use, they need to address two distinct aspects of licensing. First, they need to address the scope of the license, whether it is "public" or "private".

- **Private** licenses are contractual in nature, made between two parties, and are usually term-limited, defaulting back to "all rights reserved" after the term expires, and until a renewal is signed.
- **Public** licenses are licenses where the owner of the content grants pre-approved and perpetual permission for use of the content by anyone who encounters the content by any means and at any time in the future, provided they comply with the terms and conditions of the license.

Second, they need to determine whether the license will be "closed" or "open".

- **Closed** licenses include restrictions that specifically disallow some uses of the content, notably the creation of derivatives and the use of commercial means to extend the reach of the content. (Examples included Creative Commons licenses that contain "NoDerivs" or "NonCommercial" clauses, respectively).
- **Open** licenses are always public licenses, and they do not hinder how the content is used, with the optional conditions of preserving the source and identity of the original, and perpetuating the openness of derivatives.

Within the realm of biblical content, virtually all licenses today are "private" and "closed" (in the lower left quadrant of this diagram):

	Private	Public
Open	*logical impossibility*	**unrestricted** *(with optional conditions):* (i) Attribution required (↻) "ShareAlike" required
Closed	*contractual, between two specific parties, time-limited, revocable, forbid everything that is not explicitly permitted*	*licenses that include* **restrictions**: (S) Non-Commercial use only (=) No Derivatives (includes: no translations)

All "open" licenses provide irrevocable + perpetual freedom to Retain, Reuse, Revise, Remix, Redistribute content.

this transition requires implementing a fundamentally different approach to licensing

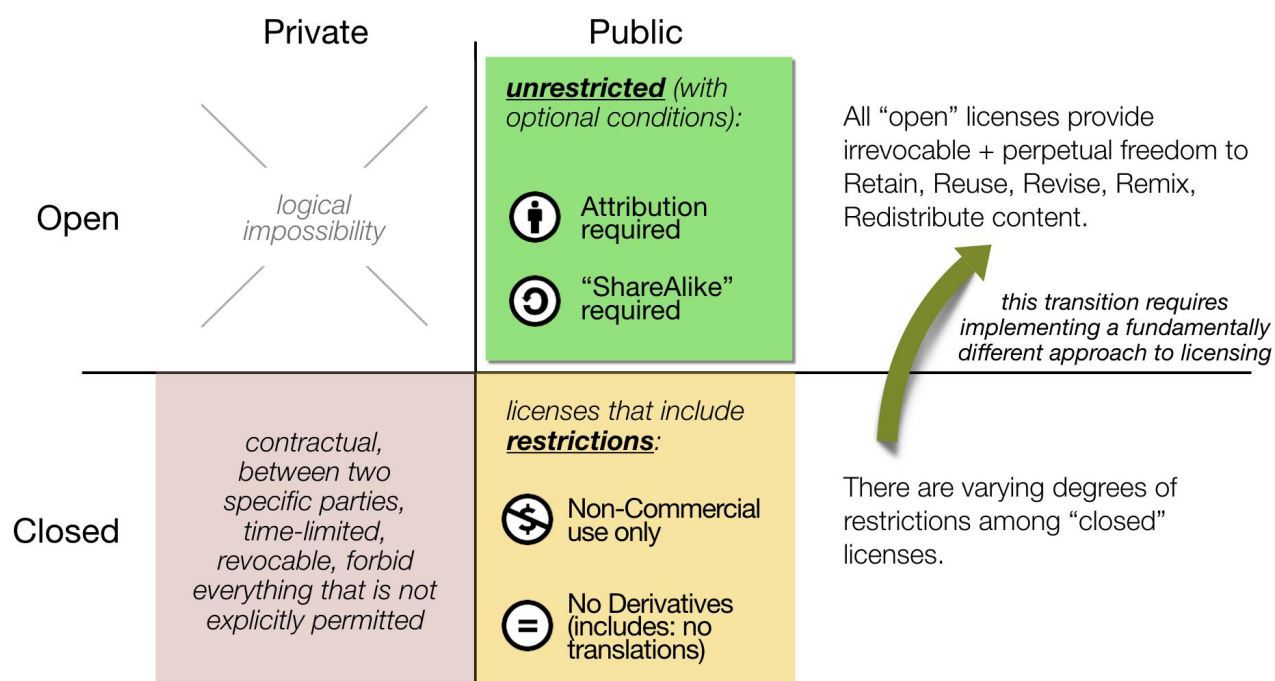There are varying degrees of restrictions among "closed" licenses.

Diagram 11: Different kinds of licenses

Often, when an owner of biblical content desires to make it more broadly available, they try to "go open" by means of a contractual, private license (the top left quadrant), which is a logical impossibility—intrinsically, a private license cannot be an open license. So, in an effort to prevent distortion of the content and disallow someone else from monetizing it, they may make the jump to a "public license" that disallows the creation of derivatives or use of commercial means to extend the distribution (the lower right quadrant). These restrictions are understandable, but they are problematic for the global church. The whole point of releasing "theological building blocks" under an open license is *so that* the global church can create derivatives from them. Furthermore, the notion that "free means free" (and therefore warrants the use of a "non-commercial use only" restriction) is short-sighted and unnecessarily hinders the reach and usefulness of the content. (This will be addressed in more detail below.)

The essential step for the content owner to take is from "closed" to "open" by releasing their content under a truly open license, for the glory of God and the good of His church (top right quadrant). Here, the global church is able to participate with equality in the translation and adaptation of the content for effective use in every people group and language that desires it.

5. What the Future Could Look Like

In short, the future could look remarkably like the past. About 400 years before the first known use of copyright to restrict access to a Bible translation, a German monk named Martin Luther accidentally changed the course of history. Luther's pamphlets and books could not be restricted by copyright law, because that would not be invented for another two centuries.[72] The success of the Reformation—the rapid spread of ideas

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[72]   The earliest restrictions on printing tended to be ecclesiastical in nature and were intended to prevent the spread of ideas with which the state did not agree (see Elkink 2013:110).

that changed the world forever—was accelerated by the "free and open" nature of the publishing environment of that time.

> Of course, in this new era of printing, **before there were copyright laws**, a single copy [of Luther's writings] could quickly beget others—which begat others, which begat others—and before anyone knew it, they would be fanning out across the landscape like Abraham's descendants and would become as numerous as the stars in the heavens.[73]

The way the information contained in Luther's writings spread through the decentralized network of publishers, consumers, and (re)distributors of his day is remarkably similar to the networked world of today.[74]

> The media environment that Luther had shown himself so adept at managing had much in common with today's online ecosystem of blogs, social networks and discussion threads. **It was a decentralised system whose participants took care of distribution**... Luther would pass the text of a new pamphlet to a friendly printer (no money changed hands) and then wait for it to ripple through the network of printing centres across Germany... Copies of the initial edition, which cost about the same as a chicken, would first spread throughout the town where it was printed. Luther's sympathisers recommended it to their friends. Booksellers promoted it and itinerant colporteurs hawked it. Traveling merchants, traders and preachers would then carry copies to other towns, and if they sparked sufficient interest, local printers would quickly produce their own editions... **A popular pamphlet would thus spread quickly without its author's involvement**.[75]

Today, we have the opportunity to experience the same kind of "going viral" with regard to the spread of the Word of God and the biblical resources that facilitate its study and application. The technology already exists, and the church in many parts of the world is highly motivated to meet their own needs for Bible distribution and Scripture Engagement. Billions of people have already equipped themselves with digital devices that could be used to read, listen to, and study the Word of God in their own language, and *to legally give unlimited copies to everyone they meet.*

Think of your favorite Bible study program and all the resources in it, but available in every language of the world, with text and multimedia content, and with the freedom to print, stream, broadcast, and give away copies to everyone, by any means desired. And consider that this freedom extends beyond merely giving "consume only" access—it provides freedom to reuse the content for the creation of new theological resources that are deeply connected to and interlinked with the Bible and other resources.

All of this is possible and within reach of the global church. But we will continue to be plagued by inefficiencies until we release the Word of God from the legal restrictions with which we, the church, have bound it. By letting go and making biblical content available under open licenses, the global church can make the most of every opportunity that the internet and mobile technology affords for advancing the Word of God. The full capacity of the rapidly expanding, educated, connected, and motivated global church can then be unleashed to translate, distribute and use the Word of God in every one of their spheres of influence.

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[73]   Metaxas, *Martin Luther,* 126.

[74]   It is interesting to note the role of multimedia in the Reformation. "It was not just words that travelled along the social networks of the Reformation era, but music and images too. The news ballad, like the pamphlet, was a relatively new form of media. It set a poetic and often exaggerated description of contemporary events to a familiar tune so that it could be easily learned, sung and taught to others" (The Economist, "Social Media in the 16th Century").

[75]   Ibid. Note that because copyright laws to prevent it had not yet been invented, *anyone* was able to print and redistribute the content using commercial means. The net result was that the content got to everyone who wanted it, in the shortest amount of time possible, and at a cost that was either free or reasonable (since no one printer could monopolize it and inflate the price).

So how do we get there? In the next section, we will consider a strategic approach that achieves the objective of a world where everyone can share equally in access to and study of the Word of God in any language.

5.1. A Strategy for Freedom: Restrict Identifiers + Release Content

Now that all of these hindrances have been addressed, we are able to describe a strategy for interdependent and unrestricted creation, translation, distribution, and use of biblical resources by believers in every people group and in any language. Before we do, it is important to declare upfront that **nothing here constitutes legal advice!** You should consult with a licensed attorney and make your own decisions before creating your licensing strategy.[76] The strategy described here is in use by unfoldingWord (**www.unfoldingword.org**) and is working remarkably well as we continue to make biblical content available under open licenses in many languages. The strategy comes down to two basic steps: Protect the identifiers of the content and remove restrictions on the use of the content.[77]

1. Preserve & restrict the **identifiers** of biblical content

2. Remove unnecessary copyright restrictions on the **content** itself

Diagram 12: A strategy for freedom

5.1.1. Protect the identifiers of the content

To the greatest degree possible, **restrict the use of the *identifiers* of the content**. This may involve registering trademarks and carefully securing the domain names to be used for **distribution** of the content and to which **attribution** of the original is to be made for any derivative works created from them.[78]

A publisher may use an imprint and only make open-licensed content available under a separate "open-licensed" brand, which may help minimize licensing confusion. A content owner may also choose to maintain the name and identifiers of the original, "all rights reserved" resource, but also release the same content under an open license using a different name that indicates the open nature of the license.[79]

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[76]   In general, attorneys are well-versed in how to use the law to preserve, protect, and restrict access to all assets belonging to the firm. Accordingly, some have found it helpful to also consult with attorneys who understand the overarching missional objective of their organization and are familiar with Creative Commons licenses.

[77]   Since the first version of this paper, the Every Tribe Every Nation Alliance of Bible translation organizations has adopted this same strategy to create the Bible Aquifer Project (**https://aquifer.bible**) in order to equip Bible translators through the global church with high-value biblical resources in the most strategic languages needed for Bible translation.

[78]   It is important to be aware that the international rules for trademark are different than for copyright, so content owners should carefully consider the legal implications in light of their strategic intent. For an overview of protecting a trademark under the Madrid Protocol, see "Protecting Your Trademark" (United States Patent and Trademark Office, 21).

[79]   This sets up the possibility of dual-licensing content, where the publisher may negotiate contractual, private licenses for those who prefer that approach, but the content is also available to the global church under the terms and conditions of an open license.

5.1.2. Remove restrictions from the content

In terms of availability to biblical content, the objective toward which unfoldingWord Project is working is a world in which excellent Bible translations and resources for studying the Bible thoroughly are available to everyone without restriction, in a language they understand well. In order for this to occur, we recognize that, from a legal perspective, *the license that governs the use of the content will be either the enabling or limiting factor*. Our objective regarding licensing of biblical content is to make possible an unstoppable global movement. Consequently, we use a license for the resources we create that does not merely lower the wall around the metaphorical "walled garden" of biblical content, but removes it completely and forever. To that end, the license we use does three specific things:

- **It permits the creation of translations and other derivative works based on the originals.** A "No Derivatives" restriction would be antithetical to a movement that is built around the worldwide collaboration of the global church in the translation and adaptation of biblical content for effective use in every people group and language. Our intent is to provide "theological building blocks" on which the entire global church can create their own, theologically-sound and culturally-relevant biblical resources. The objective, in this context, is to *encourage* the creation of as many derivatives as the global church desires, of any kind and in any language.

- **It encourages distribution of the content by any means available, including commercial.** A "Non-Commercial Use Only" restriction would create unnecessary hindrances to the global accessibility and usability of the content, especially when anyone in the global church needs to make the content available in physical forms with associated hard costs (e.g., printed books, DVDs, MicroSD cards, etc.). Rather than attempt to scale up a global, centralized distribution framework that we control (a critically limited approach, in light of our global objective), we intentionally enable the entire global church to legally use commercial means whenever needed to distribute the resources, wherever and in whatever way needed. The resources are irrevocably "free and open" and always available free-of-charge in digital formats. Consequently, anyone can legally sell the means of accessing the content, but no one is able to monopolize the distribution of the content itself. Market economics (self-regulating prices) and human nature (people tend to prefer partnership with benevolent publishers to meet their content needs) combine to ensure that each biblical resource gets as far as possible, either free or at a fair price, without ever compromising the freedoms granted to the global church.[80]

- **It ensures that all derivatives remain "free and open".** We are working toward the creation of a new generation of biblical content in every language—content that is perpetually open and never again subject to copyright restrictions that hinder or harm the church. To that end, we employ a license that ensures all derivatives do not ever become the exclusive property of any one entity (including ourselves), no matter how well-intended they may be today. In this way, and until Jesus returns, these biblical resources will be, in effect, the common property of the global church.

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[80]   In this scenario, access to the bits-and-bytes of the digital file is free of charge, but hard costs may be incurred when physical media are used to transfer the digital file. For example, a PDF is a "non-rival good" as it can be duplicated without affecting the original. A MicroSD card on which it is made available, however, is a "rival good" that has a tangible existence—if I have it, you cannot (and vice versa). The physical media is where the cost is incurred, not the digital content. Thus, the open-licensed content itself (preserved in digital formats) is free-of-charge, while access to it (particularly when provided by physical media) may have costs associated with it. I have addressed this complex issue in "Appendix B: The 'Non-Commercial Use Only' Problem" of *The Christian Commons* (263).

The license we use to accomplish these objectives is the **Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License** (**creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0**).[81] The "human readable" form of the license (which is not a substitute for the actual license) states the following:

You are free to:

- **Share** — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format.

- **Adapt** — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

- **Attribution** — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

- **ShareAlike** — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.

No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

The difference between this license and several others is shown in the following diagram:

license	distribution model	distribution network	distribution potential	translation potential	derivatives potential	perpetual freedom of derivatives
"all rights reserved"	TERMINAL "word of mouth"	CENTRALIZED single generation	RESTRICTED constrained by institutional capacity	RESTRICTED translation not permitted	RESTRICTED derivatives not permitted	N/A derivatives not permitted
NonCommercial + NoDerivs	MULTIPLICATIVE freedom to share	DECENTRALIZED multi-generational	UNRESTRICTED same language only	RESTRICTED translation not permitted	RESTRICTED derivatives not permitted	N/A derivatives not permitted
NonCommercial + NoDerivs + Free Translate	MULTIPLICATIVE freedom to share	DECENTRALIZED multi-generational	UNRESTRICTED same + all other languages (w/ translation)	UNRESTRICTED translation permitted	RESTRICTED derivatives not permitted	N/A derivatives not permitted
Public Domain/CC0 Attribution	MULTIPLICATIVE freedom to share	DECENTRALIZED multi-generational	UNRESTRICTED same + all other languages (w/ translation)	UNRESTRICTED translation permitted	UNRESTRICTED derivatives permitted	RESTRICTED BY DEFAULT derivatives not "locked open"
Attribution + ShareAlike	MULTIPLICATIVE freedom to share	DECENTRALIZED multi-generational	UNRESTRICTED same + all other languages (w/ translation)	UNRESTRICTED translation permitted	UNRESTRICTED derivatives permitted	NEVER RESTRICTED derivatives "locked open"

Diagram 13: Strategic limitations of various licenses

How do we enforce this 2-part licensing model (protect the identifiers + open-license the content)? The identifiers are enforced using the same legal mechanisms that any other entity uses to protect their identity. The license is enforced by the same copyright laws that govern "all rights reserved" licenses. Thus, if it works

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[81]   The specific conditions of the license we use in the unfoldingWord Project is online at **unfoldingword.bible/license**.

for the latter, then it works for this approach as well. But if it does not work for the latter, then the real question is: How will *anyone* protect their content in a world where people do not honor copyright restrictions?[82]

5.2. Collaboration with the Global Church

The licensing model described here addresses the obstacle of licensing restrictions. In order to make the resources useful to the entire global church, we collaborate with global church leaders to translate biblical resources into the "Gateway Languages" of the world—the ~50 languages of wider communication through which the entire global church can gain access to the content through existing (and developing) patterns of multilingualism.[83]
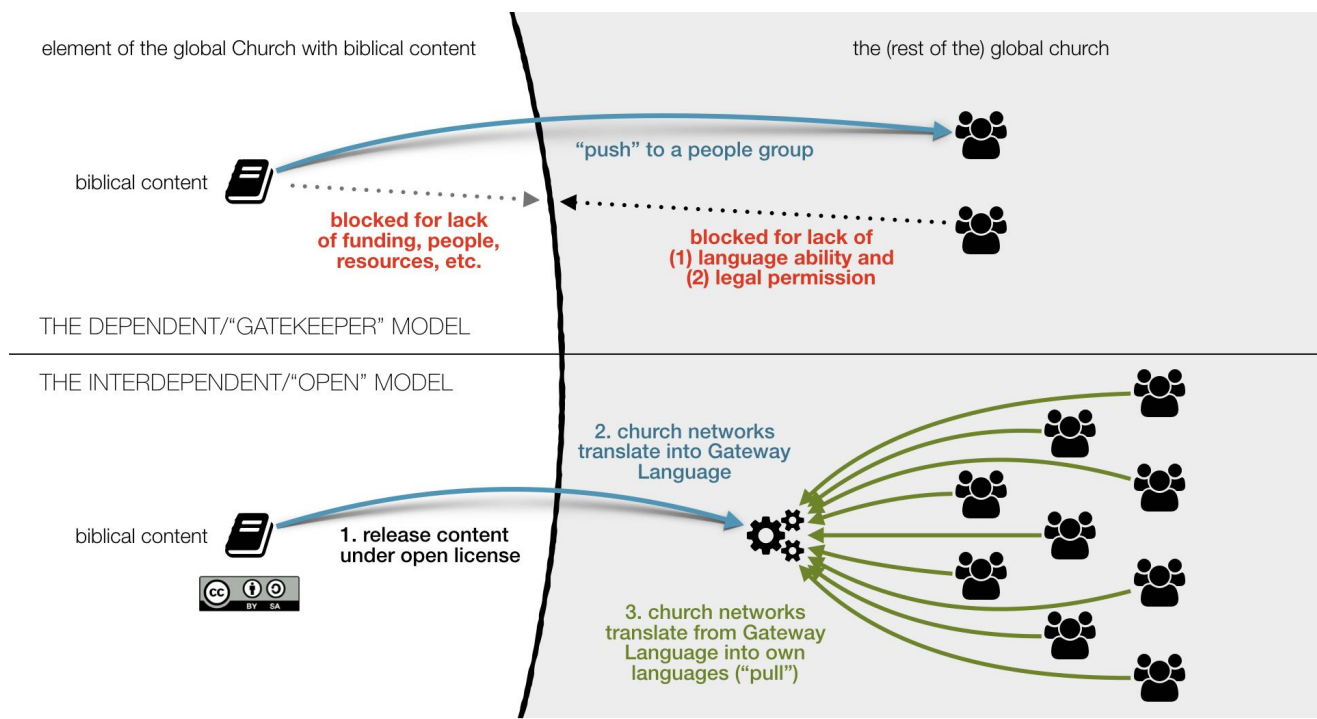

Diagram 14: The "gatekeeper" model and the "open" model (the Gateway Languages strategy)

5.3. Solving a Digital Problem with Technology

Modern technology provides more effective measures of ensuring authenticity of digital content than copyrights do.

What if your Bible could alert you if it had been corrupted? Instead of blindly presenting it for consumption, what if a Bible app could notify you that a translation is unreliable and refuse to display it until an uncorrupted version has been loaded?

This is possible today, through the use of the same cryptographic technology that protects online banking and e-commerce. Using this technology, a Bible app can verify the identity and integrity of a digital Bible (whether text or audio) by securely comparing it to a known standard. The screenshots below show a Bible

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[82]   We will consider a more reliable measure that utilizes modern technology to authenticate and verify content in section 5.3.

[83]   The strategy is described in detail in Jore, "The Gateway Languages Strategy."

app alerting the user that the digital Bible they are attempting to load has been tampered with and should not be used (image on the left). In the image on the right, the app is loading the authentic and verified version of the content.[84]
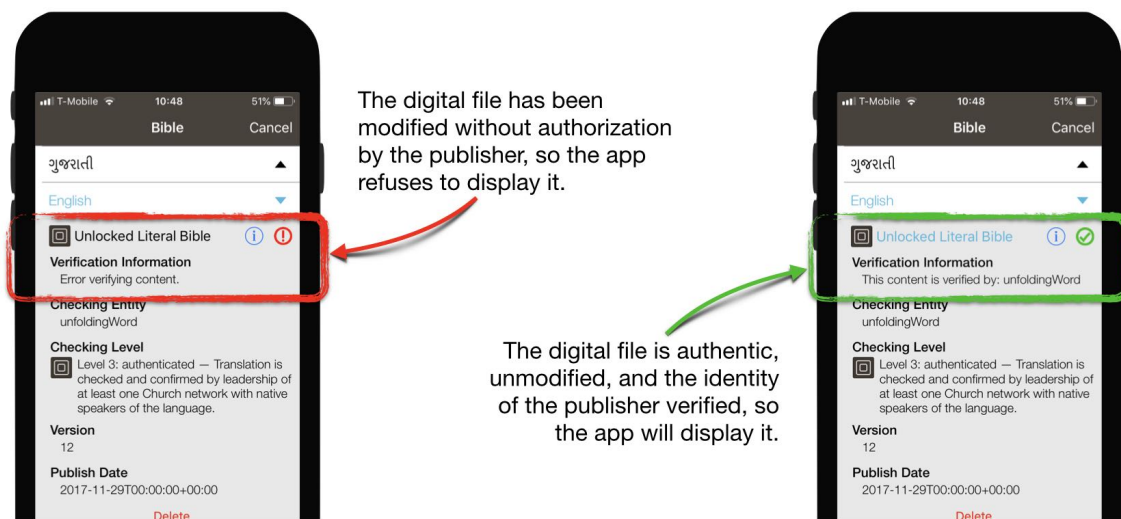

Diagram 15: Cryptographic signatures verifying identity and authenticity of content

The implications of cryptography for accelerating and expanding Bible distribution are significant. Distribution of digital Bibles has historically relied on a centralized, tightly-controlled "library" model that provides limited access and depends on print-era legal restrictions to ensure authenticity. In this ecosystem, the consumer's app connects to a server that is controlled by the maker of the app in order to download data. It often depends on a trusted third party intermediating between the publisher and the user of the Bible to ensure the authenticity of the content. Accordingly, side-loading of Bibles (sharing from phone to phone using Bluetooth or flash memory cards) and other means of widespread redistribution are usually forbidden.[85]

A second distribution model implements offline distribution for digital Bibles and other biblical content (e.g., audio Bibles or evangelistic media) by copying the digital files to flash memory cards or wireless broadcast devices, whereby the content can be accessed and used by mobile devices. This approach can extend the reach of the content much farther, beyond the confines (and risk) of the Internet, to where Bible poverty is often greatest. It is often limited, however, by legal restrictions that hinder widespread, offline redistribution.[86]

The model proposed here is one that proactively welcomes the entire global church as equal players in the distribution of digital Bibles and other biblical content, using whatever means is available to them—with verifiable integrity and authenticity of the content. In this ecosystem, all published content is "signed" and

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84   The app is an early version of the unfoldingWord Mobile App (see "unfoldingWord Mobile App").

85   The reasons for this vary, but often center on two points: analytics (the distributor desires to count how many of each resource is downloaded and used) and licensing (the owner of the Bible translation does not want it to be made broadly available without their knowledge).

86   This often leads to the "wink and nod" approach of blurring (or transgressing) the legal lines in an effort to achieve the distribution objective. While this approach ("Here, copyright means 'right to copy'") to licensing is understandable, it is a treacherous foundation on which to build a global movement of Bible distribution, as it fractures the unity of the church and cannot stand the test of time. It is far better to address the matters of ownership and licensing up front and transparently, rather than requiring others to break the laws of men in order to build the kingdom of God.

mobile apps for any platform are designed to cryptographically verify all content before presenting it for use. For example, flash memory cards with unrestricted biblical content in any language and media format could be sold in markets all over the world, copied, and shared with others. Regardless of who receives the content, or the means by which they received it, the app they use to consume it would only present it if each bit of the data was a verbatim copy of the data made available by the publisher. In such a context, there would be no limit to the reach of digital Bibles (in text, audio, and video formats) and it could scale at a cost that would be too cheap to meter—all in a completely decentralized context and with verified authenticity of all the content.[87]

6. Three Appeals

So far, we have considered the need of the global church for biblical content in every language and different approaches to meeting that need. We have considered each obstacle that stands in the way of equipping the global church with open-licensed biblical content that they can use in whatever way needed to meet their own needs. Finally, we have described a model that strengthens identification of the provenance of biblical content while also removing restrictions on how the content is used by others. In this section, we appeal to those who could help meet the need.

6.1. To Owners and Publishers of Biblical Content

The global church is increasingly shifting from a "push" model for acquisition of biblical content to a "pull" model. In the former, those who own the content seek to push it out to others. In the latter, those who need biblical content for evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and leadership development among their own people and those around them seek to locate the content—translating and adapting it where needed—and then effectively using it to meet their own spiritual needs. Making biblical resources available under an open license removes the significant legal hindrances to this model.

No one is obligated to join the "free and open" movement by making biblical content available under open licenses, but we are appealing for generosity on the part of those who own Bible translations and biblical resources. A short, incomplete, but potentially helpful list of the kinds of "theological building blocks" that are most urgently needed includes:

- Faithful **Bible translations** in contemporary forms of every language, in text (digital and print) and audio formats.

- **Bible study notes** that illuminate the historical, cultural, social, geographic, economic, linguistic, and ecological context of the Old and New Testaments.

- **Bible dictionaries**, **encyclopedias**, **charts**, and **maps**.

- **Original language resources**, including Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic grammars, lexicons, and training materials.

- **Church planting**, **evangelism**, and **discipleship resources**.

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[87]   This document makes no attempt to describe the technical details of the public key cryptographic infrastructure and "web of trust" that could make all this possible. Early prototypes suggest that all of this is possible with technology that exists today, but that implementing it would require a significant change from how publishers of Bible translations and biblical content have historically operated. The use of a blockchain or other form of distributed ledger could provide an elegant means of persisting cryptographic identities of Bible publishers and the hashes of published (and revised) content, as well as key revocations. For more on this, see unfoldingWord, "Overview for the Bible Blockchain."

- **Leadership development resources** that implement a cost-effective, scale-unlimited, decentralized approach to theological training and character formation.

If you own these kinds of resources, please consider making them available to the global church under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Doing so will immediately make it possible for church network leaders to begin translating them into the Gateway Languages, where they will be accessible to the entire global church for use and translation as needed into any other language.[88]

This is much more than merely an appeal for charity on behalf of the entire global church. It is an invitation to far greater global influence than would otherwise be possible. One of the most significant limitations that prevents exponential scale is the desire to control. Rather than attempting to protect content by restricting and controlling how widely it is made available, you have an opportunity to change things entirely—by (open-)licensing your content for global impact.

With regard to giving generously, Paul's words to the Corinthians about giving to meet the needs of the church in Jerusalem are fitting:

> Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But **the one who plants generously will get a generous crop**. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." And **God will generously provide all you need.** Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As the Scriptures say,
>
> > "They share freely and give generously to the poor.
> > Their good deeds will be remembered forever."
>
> For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, **he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.** Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For **your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ.** And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words! (2Co 9:6–15 NLT)

Organizations that exist to create and distribute content may soon find themselves at a point where they need to make significant decisions about their model for ministry. This was made apparent in a recent conversation with a major donor about the rise of the global church and the emerging "free and open" movement. After a long silence he observed, "I think there are a *lot* of people who, like me, are going to be astonished that the world is not already as 'free and open' as you are saying it could be." The number of similar conversations with funders since then suggests his observation is accurate.

This implies that *the assumption that donors will fund the creation of content by organizations who then restrict access to it is becoming decreasingly safe*. If the transition to a "free and open" paradigm is, in fact, rapidly picking up speed, then it is in the best interest of content-creating organizations to learn how to thrive in this new paradigm now, before it is required of them by donors who suddenly realize that they only *thought* they

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[88]   Due to pre-existing license agreements, not everyone who owns such resources is legally able to make them available under an open license, even if they have the disposition to do so. This should serve as a warning to those who desire to be part of the new thing God is doing... don't unwittingly sign away your inheritance! Many creators of biblical resources have lost the right to bless the global church with what God has given them, by giving those rights to a publisher who does not share their vision for blessing every people group—not just the ones that can pay for it.

were funding "free and open" biblical content all along. This may turn out to be the kind of paradigm shift that appears to not be happening at all, until suddenly everything changes. Leaders who see this coming have an opportunity to get ahead of the curve by aligning their organizations with the world of the future before it arrives, rather than attempting in vain to hold on to legacy funding models of the past.[89]

6.2. To Scholars and Academic Institutions

Every year, seminary and Bible college professors (particularly in the parts of the world where biblical knowledge is abundant) create and use excellent teaching guides, study aids, and vast quantities of other theological education materials. Students at these institutions have, in the aggregate, immense content creation potential. Leaders of these institutions could harness both to provide immensely helpful biblical resources under open licenses for use by the global church. These could include:

- **Interlinked Bible study notes** for every book of the Bible, tagged to the original languages, and of immense depth, breadth, and quality. If designed well, such a resource—considered by many to be the most needed biblical resource in the global church today—could become the *de facto* standard for students of the Bible all over the world.

- **General theological training resources** that provide high-level instruction, e.g., New Testament Surveys, the message of the minor prophets, etc.

- **Advanced theological training resources** that go into detail on particular topics, e.g., the Jewish concept of the Sabbath, the Pauline understanding of the role and function of church elders, etc.

6.3. To Donors and Funders of Ministry

In recent years, the attitude of donors toward the funding of content has started to change. In the past, donors were content to fund the creation of content and usually left it up to the organizations to sort out the details of publishing, marketing, and distribution—an approach which often led to undesirable outcomes. For example, many publishers of critically important educational resources (e.g., university textbooks) would solicit funding to create the resources and would then sell them at exorbitant prices to students—effectively monetizing the resource twice. The harm this caused to students was eventually brought to light and, understandably, deemed by those who funded the creation of the resources to be unacceptable. This helped give rise to "Open Educational Resources" (OER)—textbooks and other educational resources made available under open licenses. It also gave rise to policy changes by very influential grant-makers that mandated the open-licensing of content created with grant money.

6.3.1. Funding Open-licensed Content

In 2017, one of the largest grant-makers for public education made a pivotal change in their funding policy. The U.S. Department of Education mandated that, by default, recipients of competitive grants must make them available under an open license (usually Creative Commons Attribution) and have a plan to publicly disseminate educational resources and other works created with grant funds.[90] This, predictably, created

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[89] Gladwell observes, "These three characteristics—one, contagiousness; two, the fact that little causes can have big effects; and three, that change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment —are the same three principles that define how measles moves through a grade-school classroom or the flu attacks every winter" (*The Tipping Point,* 9). These characteristics all apply to the "free and open" movement, suggesting that the arrival of the tipping point—when the assumption of the entire global church is that all Bibles and essential biblical content is (and should be) free and unrestricted—could be as unheralded as it is dramatic in impact.

[90] Office of the Secretary, Department of Education, "Open Licensing Requirement for Competitive Grant Programs."

considerable angst on the part of publishers who now needed to release the restrictions on the content they had been paid to create. On the homepage of the #GoOpen initiative, the reason for this change is explained:

> We believe that **educational opportunities should be available to all learners**. Creating an open education ecosystem involves making learning materials, data, and educational opportunities available without restrictions imposed by copyright laws, access barriers, or exclusive proprietary systems that lack interoperability and limit the free exchange of information.[91]

These same kinds of policy changes are needed in the domain of biblical content.

6.3.2. Serving the Entire Church

More than twenty years ago, Maurice Robinson alerted the evangelical world to the problem posed to the church by copyright restrictions:

> Once the ASV 1901 had been successfully copyrighted in this country with no apparent legal challenge, the gate was opened, and nearly all subsequent Bible texts and translations followed suit. Permissions and royalty fees became the norm, since these were regularly required of all secular writings. But somewhere a great evil is involved whenever the people of God permit commercial publishers to hold hostage their sacred texts by copyright and licensing restrictions; **for far too long the Christian community has been distracted from seeing the full implications of this matter**...[92]

In light of the clear strategic advantages of the "open-licensed" model, and the eternally more important objective of making disciples of every people group, it is not at all surprising that Christian funders are starting to make the same transition with regard to the funding of biblical content. In some ways, this resembles the time-tested benefactor model. This model was in widespread use long before copyright restrictions had even been invented (creating a *de facto* funding of open-licensed content).[93] The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University studied the use of open licenses by private foundations and concluded:

> Based on the information and findings from our survey and the powerful lessons of the open access and OER experiences reviewed above, we conclude that **the use of open content licenses for works created by foundation grantees**, as well as foundations' own work products and those of their consultants, **would provide substantial benefits to foundations in achieving their charitable goals and missions**.[94]

Those who fund the creation of Bible translations and biblical resources have the opportunity to graciously but decisively create the context for change with regard to the licensing of these resources for the blessing

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[91]   Ibid. They describe four distinct ways that making resources available under open licenses benefits schools: **Increase Equity** (All students have access to high quality learning materials that have the most up-to-date and relevant content because openly licensed educational resources can be freely distributed to anyone); **Keep Content Relevant and High Quality** (Traditional textbooks are perpetually outdated, forcing districts to re-invest significant portions of their budgets on replacing them. The terms of use of openly licensed educational resources allows educators to maintain the quality and relevance of their materials through continuous updates); **Empower Teachers** (Openly licensed educational resources empower teachers as creative professionals by giving them the ability to adapt and customize learning materials to meet the needs of their students without breaking copyright laws); **Save Money** (Switching to educational materials that are openly licensed enables schools to repurpose funding spent on textbooks for other pressing needs, such as investing in the transition to digital learning. In some districts, replacing just one textbook has made tens of thousands of dollars available for other purposes).

[92]   Robinson, "The Bondage of the Word," 12.

[93]   Poythress observes: "One possible aid to intellectual work could come from foundations, charities, and private benefactors. In fact, in previous centuries composers and musicians were often encouraged and financed by patrons ("Copyrights and Copying," 8)." Luther's livelihood was provided by his university post (and largely funded by a benefactor), not the monetization of the content he created.

[94]   Malone, "An Evaluation of Private Foundation Copyright Licensing Policies, Practices and Opportunities," 26.

and strengthening of the *entire* global church. There is likely to be concern on the part of those who have received such funds in the past, as they will no longer be able to control and limit the use of the content. This is an expected and normal part of the transition process. Institutional inertia is such that things will not change decisively until the context requires such change, but this does not constitute the destruction of these organizations. As secular publishers are discovering (contrary to their worst fears), releasing content they create under open licenses does not necessarily result in their demise or loss of influence. To the contrary (and somewhat ironically), those who give away their best content, tend to greatly *increase* their influence, though they may need to adjust their business model in the process.

7. Conclusion

We began this paper by describing the vision of a world where the entire global church shares equally of a commons of the very best biblical and theological tools, provided without restriction so that anyone can study the Word of God, in any language they please, and with the freedom to give unlimited copies of everything to others, as freely as it has been given to them. While this vision may seem to be far removed from the world of today, all the pieces are in place for it to become a reality with the exception of one. The global church is on the rise, the technology of the 21st century makes it all supremely feasible, but what is lacking is the legal freedom to use Bible translations and other biblical resources without restriction.

This need can be met by making Bible translations and other biblical resources available under open licenses. This requires overcoming various obstacles pertaining to theology, missiology, intellectual property law, and technology. Once these are overcome, the global church is no longer hindered from collaborating together to make the content available in every language where it is desired.

The "free and open" movement is already happening in several parts of the world. We are in the midst of an urgently-needed transition, as biblical knowledge and the ability to study the Bible in detail and in the original languages ceases to be the exclusive privilege of the few (and often the affluent). Those who are the legal owners of these resources have an incredible opportunity to bless the global church in every people group and language. The way forward requires trusting that God will continue to protect his Word and then letting go of the legal right to control how others use it.

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