**The Advantages of the English Standard Version (ESV) Translation**

Wayne Grudem

**A. What is the English Standard Version?**

The English Standard Version (ESV) is an “essentially literal” translation that stands as today’s direct inheritor of the great King James Version (KJV) tradition. The line of descent from the KJV can be seen in the following diagram:

King James Version (1611)

↓

American Standard Version (1901)

↓

Revised Standard Version (1952)

↓

English Standard Version (2001)

[92% RSV, 8% modified, or 60,000 words]

----------------- ------------ ----------------- ---------------- --------------

**Figure 1:** **The ESV is a direct descendant**

**of the KJV tradition.**

The **King James Version** (called the Authorized Version in the UK) was first published exactly 400 years ago, in 1611. It eventually became the dominant translation in the English-speaking world for more than three centuries. It won widespread acceptance because of its intrinsic qualities: word-for-word accuracy, unparalleled literary beauty, remarkable oral readability, and an academic precision produced by the best scholarly experts of its age.

But the English language kept changing from the form it took in 1611. English-speaking people today can still read the KJV, but with difficulty, just as they can still read Shakespeare with difficulty (Shakespeare lived 1564-1616 and wrote most of his plays from 1590 to 1611, so his writings are from exactly the same period of English as the KJV.)

Eventually groups of Bible scholars began to produce revisions of the KJV, both to modernize the English and also to take advantage of scholarly advances in knowledge of Greek and Hebrew and in the discovery of older, more reliable Greek and Hebrew manuscripts of various books of the Bible.

The **American Standard Version** (ASV) appeared in 1901 as a major revision of the KJV, but many readers found it too woodenly literal, and it failed to gain widespread acceptance. (This was an American translation very similar to an earlier British revision, the English Revised Version of 1881.)

Then in 1952 the **Revised Standard Version** (RSV) appeared as a revision of the ASV, and it actually reclaimed much of the literary excellence of the KJV itself. The RSV gained much wider acceptance than the ASV and eventually it sold more Bibles than any translation before it in history (over 200 million copies), except for the KJV itself. (The NIV would later break the RSV’s record, having now sold over 400 million copies. Nobody knows how many copies of the KJV have been sold over the last 400 years, but it is probably well into the billions.)

However, despite its word-for-word accuracy and literary excellence, the RSV failed to gain widespread acceptance among evangelical Protestant readers because they detected some liberal bias that had crept into the translation committee’s work. The most notorious passage was Isaiah 7:14, a famous Messianic prophecy which in the KJV says, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” But in 1952, after conservative evangelicals had battled liberals for more than three decades over the importance of believing in the virgin birth of Christ, they opened the newly-released RSV to find that the great prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 had been changed to read, “Behold, a *young woman* shall conceive, and bear a son.”

And other problems were discovered with the RSV. The Messianic prediction in Psalm 2:12 had been changed from “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry” (KJV) to, “Kiss his feet, lest he be angry” (a translation that required changing a word in the Hebrew text to form a different word). The Messianic prediction in Psalm 45:6 had said in the KJV, “Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever,” but the RSV had removed any prediction of a divine Messiah with its new reading, “Your divine throne endures for ever and ever.”

In addition, the important theological term “propitiation” (meaning a sacrifice that bears God’s wrath and turns it to favor) had been removed from four key verses in the New Testament, Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; and 1 John 2:2 and 4:10. The RSV had replaced “propitiation” with the weaker term “expiation” (which meant some kind of sacrifice for sin but carried no sense of bearing the wrath of God). Evangelicals thought this change reflected the influence of Cambridge University professor C. H. Dodd, who had argued against the idea of propitiation in his scholarly writings, and who was a member of the RSV translation committee.

But despite these shortcomings, the RSV was in many ways an excellent translation, and a slightly modified update was published in 1971 with rather widespread acceptance. Many evangelicals (such as the present author) continued to use it for their main personal teaching and study Bible, simply correcting those mistaken verses every time we quoted them. (The RSV was the primary Bible text I quoted in my book *Systematic Theology*, for example, when it was published in 1994.)

Then RSV committee issued a new translation in 1989, called the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). I had eagerly awaited its publication, thinking I would probably change from the RSV to the NRSV as my main personal Bible. But I used it for two days and put it aside because I discovered that on nearly every page they had made “gender-neutral” changes that distorted the meaning of the Hebrew or Greek text. They did this because they were determined to try to minimize the occurrences of five masculine-meaning words: “man” (changed to “person”), “father” (changed to “parent”), “brother” (changed to “friend” or other words), “son” (changed to “child”), and “he” (changed to “they” or “you” or “we” or simply omitted).[[1]](#footnote-1) So I put the NRSV away on a shelf because I decided that it would not be helpful for my spiritual life to use a Bible that made me angry every time I read it. (The NRSV never caught on with the general public, and never even rose to 1% of sales in the Bible market.)

Would there ever be, then, a worthy descendant of the great KJV tradition?

In 1997, Crossway Books, an evangelical publisher based in Wheaton, Illinois, obtained the rights to use the 1971 RSV as the basis for a new translation in the KJV tradition, to be called the **English Standard Version** (ESV).[[2]](#footnote-2) The ESV translation committee (called the Translation Oversight Committee) consisted of twelve members, but they made use of suggested changes to the RSV that had been submitted by a wider group of 60 specialist scholars. These consulting scholars had been hired by Crossway to propose revisions to the RSV in the books where they had specialized expertise (these were mostly scholars who had already published commentaries on the various books). In addition, a wider advisory group of 60 additional pastors and Christian leaders sent in their suggestions as well.

The ESV was first published in 2001. It changed about 8% of the RSV, or about 60,000 words. The remaining 92% is the RSV, much of which is simply “the best of the best” of the KJV tradition.

The ESV translation committee removed every trace of liberal influence that had caused such criticism from evangelicals when the RSV was first published in 1952. Isaiah 7:14 was changed back to say, “Behold, the *virgin* shall conceive and bear a son.” Psalm 2:12 once again says, “Kiss *the Son*,” and Psalm 45:6 is once again a Messianic prediction that says, “Your throne, *O God*, is forever and ever.” The important theological term “propitiation” has been restored to Romans 3:25, Hebrews 2:17; and 1 John 2:2 and 4:10.

**C. Bible translations fall along a spectrum from woodenly literal to highly paraphrastic**

As the following diagram shows, modern English translations of the Bible fall along a spectrum that ranges from “woodenly literal” to “highly paraphrastic.”

Woodenly Highly

literal - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - paraphrastic

**keep Heb/ essentially mixed dynamic**

**Gk word literal equivalence**

**order translate the words translate thoughts (ideas)**

Interlinear KJV NIV NLT

NKJV TNIV CEV

NASB RSV NRSV NIV2011 NCV

ESV The Message

NET

HCSB

-------- --------- --------- --------- --------- ------- ------- ---------- ---------- ---------

**Translations fall along a spectrum**

Woodenly Highly

literal - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - paraphrastic

**1. Woodenly literal translations**

The left side of this chart illustrates that it is possible to make a “woodenly literal” translation that just consists of putting an English word below each Greek or Hebrew word in the original text and then publishing it. In fact, this has been done. It is called an “Interlinear” translation and it is sometimes used by beginning language students. But it is hardly readable or suitable for general use. Here is an example:

Thus for loved God the world, so that the son the only he gave, in order that every the believing one in him not should perish but should have life eternal. (John 3:16)

**2. Essentially literal translations**

A better decision is to make an “essentially literal” translation – one that faithfully brings the meaning of each Greek word into English, but that uses ordinary English word order and syntax. Here is how the KJV rendered the same verse, in readable English:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16 KJV)

The other translations listed under “essentially literal” in the chart above render the verse in similar ways.

What then is an “essentially literal” translation? Here is my definition:

An essentially literal translation *translates the meaning of every word in the original language*, understood correctly in its context, into its nearest English equivalent, and attempts to express the result with ordinary English word order and style, as far as that is possible without distorting the meaning of the original.

Now sometimes one word in Hebrew or Greek must be translated with two or three words in English, and other times with just a comma or a period. At still other times, two or three words in the original can best be translated with only one word in English. So “word for word” does not mean exactly one English word for each Hebrew or Greek word. But it does mean that every word in the original must be translated somehow. The goal in an essentially literal translation is to somehow bring *the meaning of every word* in the original into the resulting translation in English.

The reason for this emphasis on translating the meaning of every word is a belief in the importance that Scripture itself places on the very words of God. “*All Scripture* is breathed out by God” (2 Tim. 3:16), and “*Every word* of God proves true” (Prov. 30:5). Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). “If anyone takes away from the *words* of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Rev. 22:19).

**3. “Formal equivalence” is an inaccurate and misleading category**

The ESV translators do not find the term “formal equivalence” to be an accurate term to describe an essentially literal translation. It puts too much emphasis on the “form” of the sentences, which refers especially to the order of words. That is a low priority in essentially literal translations, for the primary goal is to represent not just the *form* but the *meaning* of every word of the original.

Therefore the first sentence about “Translation Philosophy” in the Preface to the ESV says, “The ESV is an ‘essentially literal’ translation.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The Preface only uses the phrase “formal equivalence” once in passing, and it prefers “essentially literal” as the primary description of the ESV translation philosophy.

Two major defenses of the ESV’s philosophy of translation have repeatedly used the phrase “essentially literal” and generally avoided the expression “formal equivalence.” In 2002, Leland Ryken argued for the ESV in his book, *The Word of God in English*.[[4]](#footnote-4) He wrote in the Preface, “I ended with a belief that only an *essentially literal* translation of the Bible can achieve sufficiently high standards in terms of literary criteria and fidelity to the original text.”[[5]](#footnote-5) After mentioning “essentially literal” translations several more times, he says, “I will refer to translations based on the attempt to translate the very words of the original text as *essentially literal translations*.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Then in 2005 Crossway Books published another major defense of the ESV’s translation philosophy, *Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation* .[[7]](#footnote-7) In the Foreword, J. I. Packer described the Bibles in the King James tradition as “word-for-word” or “essentially literal” translations.[[8]](#footnote-8) Then in the first chapter I wrote,

Sometimes essentially literal translations are called “formal equivalence” translations, suggesting that they try as far as possible to preserve the “form” of the original language in the translation. I do not use the phrase “formal equivalence” nor do I think it is a useful phrase for describing essentially literal translations. The reason is that the word “form” places too much emphasis on reproducing the exact word order of the original language, something that just makes for awkward translation and really has nothing to do with the goal of translating the meaning of every word in the original. (The label “formal equivalence” is often used by defenders of dynamic equivalence theory, perhaps in part because this makes it so easy to caricature and thus dismiss essentially literal translation theory as a theory that places too much emphasis on the order of words in the original language.)[[9]](#footnote-9)

But our repeated use of the term “essentially literal” and our explicit rejection of the term “formal equivalence” seems to have made no difference to some critics of the ESV. They continue to call it a “formal equivalence” translation. Then they reject the idea of “formal equivalence” because, they say, form must be subordinate to meaning in translation.

Of course, we also believe this, so the criticism of “formal equivalence” is just tearing down a straw man. But the phrase “formal equivalence” was an invention of Eugene Nida, the pioneer of “dynamic equivalence” translations, and it is not surprising that he chose a pejorative term (one that suggests ignorant translators who do not realize that meaning is more important than form) to describe a philosophy with which he did not agree.[[10]](#footnote-10)

One recent example of such a description was an article in *Christian Retailing* by marketing consultant Linda Kenney, who said, “Some prioritize understanding, while others prioritize the form of the original languages.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

At this point I would simply ask: Isn’t it polite, when you disagree with a position, to call it by the name its own advocates use for it? And in the interests of truthfulness isn’t it necessary to represent your opponent’s position accurately?

**4. The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) fits broadly in my “essentially literal” category**

The **Holman** **Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)** was first published in 2004 by Holman Bible Publishers, which is a division of B&H (formerly Broadman and Holman), a publishing division of the Southern Baptist Convention. It is an entirely new translation and generally follows what I have called “essentially literal” philosophy of translation. However, its Introduction notes that they prefer the term “optimally literal” to describe their translation philosophy. They seek “to convey as much of the information and intention of the original text with as much clarity and readability as possible.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

As my analysis below will show, the HCSB is somewhat closer to the NIV’s “mixed” translation philosophy than the ESV, but it generally seeks to translate every word of the original faithfully.

**5. What is a “dynamic equivalence” translation? The New Living Translation as an example**

On the right side of my chart above is “dynamic equivalence.” A dynamic equivalence translation translates the thoughts or ideas of the original text into similar thoughts or ideas in English, and “attempts to have the same impact on modern readers as the original had on its own audience.” [[13]](#footnote-13)Another term for a dynamic equivalence translation is a “thought-for-thought” translation, as explained in the “Introduction” to the **New Living Translation (NLT)**: The translators say that “a dynamic-equivalence translation can also be called a thought-for-thought translation, as contrasted with a formal-equivalence or word-for-word translation.”[[14]](#footnote-14) The NLT was first published in 1996, and updated in 2004 and 2007.

Another way to describe the difference is to contrast the kind of question each translator would ask in translating a text. A dynamic equivalence translator would ask, “How would people say that *today*?” But an essentially literal translator would ask, “How did they say it *then*?” (with the words translated into English, of course).

A good illustration of this difference between essentially literal and dynamic equivalence translations is actually given in the “Introduction” to the NLT. They mention 1 Kings 2:10, which says, in the King James Version, “So David *slept with his fathers* and was buried in the city of David” (this wording is followed by the ESV, which just changes the first word to “Then”).

But the NLT translates this verse, “Then David *died* and was buried in the city of David.” The NLT translators see this as an advantage, for they say, “Only the *New Living Translation* clearly translates the real meaning of the Hebrew idiom “slept with his fathers” into contemporary English.”[[15]](#footnote-15)  The argument in favor of the NLT would be that today, when John Doe dies, English speakers don’t say that John Doe “slept with his fathers.” Today the way we would express this is simply that John Doe “died,” so that is what the NLT has done. The translation is a “thought-for-thought” translation because the main thought or idea – the idea that David died and was buried — *is expressed in a way that modern speakers would use to express the same idea today*.

However, some details are missing in the NLT’s thought-for-thought translation of 1 Kings 2:10. This dynamic equivalence translation does not include the idea of sleeping as a rich metaphor for death, a metaphor in which there is a veiled hint of some day awakening from that sleep to a new life. The expression “slept with his fathers” also includes a faint hint of a corporate relationship with David’s ancestors who had previously died and are awaiting a future resurrection. But that is also missing from the dynamic equivalence translation, “then David died.”

Yes, the NLT translated the *main idea* into contemporary English, but isn’t it more accurate to translate *all of the words* of the Hebrew original, including the word *shakab* (which means, “to lie down, rest, sleep”), and the words *’im* (which means “with”), and *’ab* (which means “father,” or in the plural, “fathers”), since these words are in the Hebrew text as well? When these words are translated, not just the main idea but also *more details of the meaning* of the Hebrew original are brought over into English.

Will modern readers understand the literal translation, “David slept with his fathers”? Yes, certainly. Even modern readers who have never heard this idiom before will understand it because the rest of the sentence says that David was buried: “Then David slept with his fathers *and was buried* in the city of David” (1 Kings 2:10, ESV). The larger context begins in verse 1, “When David’s time to die drew near...” (1 Kings 2:1). Modern readers may ponder the expression for a moment, but they will understand it, and they will then have access to much greater richness of meaning that was there in the original text.[[16]](#footnote-16)

“Slept with his fathers” is not how we would say it *today*, but it is how they said it *then*, and we should translate it that way and convey the full richness of meaning of all the Bible’s words.

**6. The NIV is a “mixed” version**

The **New International Version (NIV)** was first published in 1978. I have put it on the chart midway between “essentially literal” and “dynamic equivalence” because it has elements of both. At times it is highly literal, but then at other times it tends in the direction of dynamic paraphrase for the sake of better readability and easier understandability.

The 2011 edition of the NIV contains this statement of its goal in the Preface:

to articulate God’s unchanging Word *in the way the original authors might have said it* had they been speaking in English to the global English-speaking audience *today* (NIV Preface, p. v, italics added)

**7. The goal of translation: not understanding how the authors might say something *today*, but understanding how they actually said it *back then***

I respectfully disagree with that philosophy of translation as expressed in the NIV’s Preface. As a Bible translator, my goal should not be to try to imagine how Moses or Isaiah or Paul might say something if they were here today. I want to listen in on how exactly they said it *back then.* It seems to me that the NIV’s philosophy here leans too far in the direction of a dynamic equivalence translation.

Another way of illustrating the difference is to imagine that we had both a time machine and a language translation machine. Should our goal as translators be to use the time machine to bring David to New York City in 2011, give him the language translation machine so that he could understand and speak English, and then ask him to rewrite Psalm 23, but speaking as people would speak in New York City in 2011? Should we tell him, “David, just rewrite your psalm and use 21st century expressions”?

No, *as a translator of Psalm 23,* I would want to use the time machine to *travel back* to ancient Israel around 1000 BC where David was writing Psalm 23. I would want to use my language translation machine to translate David’s words into English and put them in ordinary English word order. It would sound something like this:

*A Psalm of David.* The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Ps. 23:1-3, ESV)

There is a lot of imagery about shepherds and sheep and pastures, common in David’s time but not too familiar today. But I have to translate it this way because I want to know how David said something *back then*, not how I imagine he might have said something if he lived here today. The job of imagining how David would write Psalm 23 today is the job of a pastor or Bible teacher, not the job of a translator.

**8. Personal comments**

Before my detailed comparison of the ESV with the HCSB, NIV, and NLT, I would like to mention that this entire discussion is a debate among friends. We are all evangelical Christians who believe in the absolute divine authority and inerrancy of the Bible. More than that, most members of the various translation teams know many members of the other translation teams and we interact frequently at professional conferences, or even on the same seminary faculties. I have counted two other contributors to this volume, Doug Moo and Ray Clendenen, as personal friends for many years, and I could say the same thing about several members of the NLT translation committee.

Moreover, I want to say that Doug Moo, the chairman of the NIV’s Committee on Bible Translation, and Zondervan, the NIV’s publisher, have continued to make extra efforts to maintain open and honest personal relationships with me and others who have disagreed publicly with the NIV, particularly on the issue of translation of gender language. For over 20 years now as an author I have worked professionally with Zondervan as a publisher, both with Stan Gundry, Zondervan’s executive vice president and editor-in-chief, and with many others on their editorial team. They have consistently exhibited the highest standards of Christian integrity and graciousness in all their dealings with me, and I continue to choose to publish books with them.

**C. The advantages of the ESV**

My assigned task in the rest of this essay is to point out the advantages of the ESV in contrast with the HCSB, the NIV, and the NLT. (See my Appendix, pages 43-46, for notes on the New King James Version and New American Standard Version, which were not included in this forum because of limitations of time and publishing space.) I will discuss six advantages of the ESV:

1. It preserves the best of the best in the KJV tradition

2. It preserves more literal accuracy in details

3. It has better literary quality

4. It preserves more of the interpretative options that were available to original readers

5. It preserves more theological terms

6. It is not gender-neutral

**1. The ESV preserves the best of the best in the King James tradition**

This year is the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible (1611). Many people have asked, will any Bible translation ever take its place?

My suggestion today is to say this: If you want a successor to the King James Version, look to the ESV Bible. It is a direct descendant of the King James Version, as I noted in section A, above.

The other three translations represented in this forum (HCSB, NIV, NLT) are all entirely new translations made by modern scholars and based on the original Hebrew and Greek texts. This was a gigantic task.

But the ESV did not start from scratch to make an entirely new translation. It was a revision of a previous excellent translation, the Revised Standard Version, which was itself a descendant of the King James Bible tradition. But even the King James Bible itself was not an entirely new translation, but was based on the best readings from 5 earlier English translations. In fact, the KJV translators said in the original preface, “truly (good Christian reader) we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation nor to make of a bad one, a good one. . .but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one. “[[17]](#footnote-17)

The benefit of depending on earlier excellent translations is that many things can be left just as they are. For example, consider Psalm 1:1:

(To make it easier for readers to follow what words and phrases I am discussing, I have underlined the words that I will discuss in the paragraphs that follow the quotation. I will follow this process throughout this essay.)

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,

nor stands in the way of sinners,

nor sits in the seat of scoffers (Ps. 1:1, ESV).

The ESV in this verse has several advantages over other translations. It seems to me that “blessed” is a better translation of the Hebrew term *’ashrē* than HCSB’s “happy,” because “blessed” indicates a special kind of happiness in connection with God. I think that “blessed” is also better than the NLT “Oh, the joys” for the same reason.

The word “man” in singular is a more accurate translation of the singular Hebrew word *’ish,* which regularly means “male human being” (apart from certain idioms) in the Old Testament. Therefore “the man” is more accurate than “the one” (NIV 2011) or the plural “those” (NLT).

The ESV literally translates the common Hebrew words for “walks,” “sits,” and “stands” in Psalm 1:1. This accurately reflects the author’s description of a process of slowing down and then staying in the place of wicked people. This is more vivid and precise than the HCSB’s “follow the advice of” and “take the path of” and “join.” It is also more literal and precise than “follow the advice of” and “join” in the NLT.

Someone may object that the ESV’s “walks not” is unnatural English and sounds strange. Why not say with the NIV “does not walk”? The answer is that this is poetry. Poetry often inverts word order for rhythm or better flow, or for emphasis. Here is where the ESV really shines, when we examine the oral sound of the translation. The ESV as a whole has better rhythm, beauty, smoothness of word flow, and ease of memorization.

When English is read aloud, what gives a piece of literature beauty and ease of readability is a regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. With this in mind, compare the number and placement of stressed syllables in the second, third and fourth lines of Psalm 1:

ESV Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man who

**walks not** in the **coun**sel of the **wick**ed, 4 stressed

**nor** **stands** in the **way** of **sin**ners, 4

**nor** **sits** in the **seat** of **scof**fers; 4

CSB Psalm 1:1 How happy is the man who

**does** **not** **fol**low the ad**vice** of the **wick**ed 5

or **take** the **path** of **sin**ners 3

or **join** a **group** of **mock**ers! 3

NIV Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the one who

**does not walk** in **step** with the **wick**ed 5

or **stand** in the **way** that **sin**ners **take** 4

or **sit** in the **com**pany of **mock**ers, 3

NLT Psalm 1:1 Oh, the joys of those who

**do not fol**low the ad**vice** of the **wick**ed, 5

or **stand** a**round** with **sin**ners, 3

or **join in** with **mock**ers. 3

The ESV has a beautiful rhythm and flow of words. The second, third, and fourth lines each start with two stressed syllables, then alternate between unstressed and stressed syllables in a regular pattern for the rest of the line. It sounds almost musical in its beauty.

The other translations do not do this. The HCSB begins the second line with a staccato rhythm of three stressed syllables in a row (“**does not fol**low”). The NIV does the same (“**does not walk**”), and so does the NLT (“**do not fol**low”).

At this point the perceptive reader may be wondering, how did the ESV Translation Committee do such a fantastic job with Psalm 1:1?

The answer is, we didn’t. We didn’t touch it. We inherited it almost unchanged from the King James Version:

1611 KJV Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. (Psa 1:1 KJV)

1901 ASV Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers:

1971 RSV Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

2001 ESV Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

The KJV translators in 1611 could easily have said, “Blessed that **doth not walk** in the counsel of the ungodly.” That would have been ordinary word order for them. But the staccato rhythm sounded all wrong so they put “walketh not.”

In 1901 the ASV hardly touched the KJV. They only changed the word “ungodly” for the word “wicked.” And so by 1901, the work of the ESV translators was nearly done, though none of us had yet been born. When the RSV came along in 1971 it just changed “walketh” to “walks,” and “standeth” to “stand” and “sitteth” to “sits.” They retained the best of the best in the great KJV tradition, and its poetic beauty was preserved.

Then when we came along in 2001 with the ESV, we realized that the verse was already perfect. It was accurate and the English was beautiful. All we had to do was not to touch it. The ESV preserves the “best of the best” in the great KJV tradition.

**2. The ESV preserves more literal accuracy in details**

In the chart above in a spectrum of translations, the stands ESV farthest to the left of the four translations represented in this forum in terms of literalness. This often means that it will preserve more literal accuracy in the details of the translation.

**a. The omission of “hands” in other versions**

One example is found in the way “hands” is omitted in some translations.

ESV Mark 6:2, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “. . . . How are such mighty works done by his hands (Greek *tōn cheirōn autou*) ?

HCSB Mark 6:2 “and how are these miracles performed by His hands?”

NIV Mark 6:2. “What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?

NLT Mark 6:2 "Where did he get all this wisdom and the power to perform such miracles?"

ESV Acts 5:12 Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands (Greek *tōn cheirōn*) of the apostles.

HCSB Acts 5:12 Many signs and wonders were being done among the people through the hands of the apostles.

NIV Acts 5:12 The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people.

NLT Acts 5:12 The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people

When I teach a theology class on the doctrine of the church, I use verses such as these to show that both Jesus and the apostles frequently laid hands on people when they prayed for healing for them. There also seems to be a pattern of laying on of hands when establishing someone in a church office or sending people out on missionary trips (see Matt. 9:18; Luke 4:40; Acts 6:6; 13:3 and 28:8). And the Greek word for “hands” (plural of Greek *cheir,* “hand”) is clearly found in Mark 6:2 and Acts 5:12. But I cannot use these verses to teach on that topic from the NIV or the NLT, because the “hands” have simply disappeared.

I do not think that “hands” in these verses is merely a figure of speech meaning “person.” Certainly the original readers of these verses would have thought of hands when they saw the Greek word for “hands” right there in the text. Why should we not let English readers also see what is literally there? This is the benefit of an essentially literal translation (and the ESV and HCSB agree on these verses).

**b. The retention of “behold”**

Another example regarding accuracy in details has to do with the word “behold.” In earlier translations (KJV, ASV, RSV), the word “behold” was found many times. It was the common translation used for the Hebrew word *hinneh* in the Old Testament and the Greek word *idou* in the New Testament. Both words simply meant something like “Pay attention!” or, “What follows is especially important.”

Early in our translation work on the ESV, our committee discussed what to do about “behold.” We realized that in some cases there was an alternative such as “look!” or “listen!” and in a few cases that was what we used. But in hundreds of other cases, neither “look” nor “listen” seemed quite suitable. We also found that some modern translations had just decided to leave Hebrew *hinneh* and Greek *idou* untranslated in many places where “look” or “listen” did not seem to fit. We did not want to leave these words untranslated.

After a lot of discussion, we concluded that there simply was no other English word that meant, “Pay attention to what follows because it is important.” But the word “behold” still carried that meaning in English.

We realized that people didn’t often use the word “behold” in conversation today, but we also recognized that almost everyone knew what it meant. It was in people’s “passive” vocabulary more than in their “active” vocabulary. So we decided to retain “behold” as the common translation that we would use for *hinneh* in the Old Testament and for *idou* in the New Testament. We were striving for literal accuracy in the details, and we recognized that these words conveyed meaning for the original reader, meaning that we did not want today’s readers to miss.

Therefore readers will find “behold” 1,102 times in the ESV. Often it seems to me to add dignity and strength to important verses in the Bible, such as the following:

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isa. 7:14 ESV)

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29 ESV)

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. (1Cor. 15:51-52 ESV)

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (Rev. 3:20 ESV)

I have come to really enjoy the “beholds” in the ESV. They make me pay attention to what follows and ask why the author put emphasis here. And they seem to me much stronger than the great variety of alternatives that other translations use when they do translate *hinneh* or *idou* at all. For instance in Revelation 3:20 (see above) there is a variety: “Listen!” (HCSB). “Here I am!” (NIV). “Look!” (NLT). It seems to me that “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” is much stronger, and more consistent.

In addition, now I actually notice “behold” from time to time in contemporary English, whether it be in a shop window with a sign that says “Behold: New low prices!” or an ad on TV that says something like, “Behold! The new Honda sedan!”

That is why I don’t put too much stock in statistical counts of word frequency such as the Collins Word Bank that was used by the NIV translators. No doubt it would show “behold” to be uncommon in modern English. But if we ask, “How did they say it back then?” we find the need to use the “behold” quite frequently, because there is no other single word in English today that means, “Pay attention—what follows is important.”

**c. More consistency in translating key terms with the same English word**

One final example of more literal accuracy in details is found in an attempt to be consistent in translating key terms, especially within a single author. Of course this cannot be done 100% of the time, because the range of meanings that a Hebrew or Greek word will take in different contexts frequently does not exactly match the range of meanings that a single English word would have. But often using the same word in English is possible and beneficial, because the author wanted the reader to see the connection in his frequent repetition.

For instance, the word “abide” represents an important concept in 1 John. It translates the Greek word *menō*, which can mean “remain, stay, abide, persist, continue to live, await.” The ESV decided to retain “abide” 23 out of 24 times where *menō* occurs in 1 John (the exception is 2:19, with “continued”). For example, “Whoever says he *abides* in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6). An English reader can easily trace the uses of “abide” through the entire epistle of 1 John.[[18]](#footnote-18)

But in the NIV, *menō* is translated 5 different ways, “live,” “remain,” “continue,” “reside,” and “be.” English readers cannot see the connection in John’s frequent use of this important word. The NLT similarly uses 5 different words: live, remain, continue, stay, be.

Under this category of “more literal accuracy,” I will also consider a few more of the assigned texts for this essay:

**d. Matthew 5:1-3:**

ESV Matthew 5:1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

HCSB Matthew 5:1 When He saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 Then He began to teach them, saying: 3 "The poor in spirit are blessed, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

NIV Matthew 5:1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them. He said: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

NLT Matthew 5:1 One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, 2 and he began to teach them. 3 "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

“Seeing the crowds” in the ESV is both a more literal rendering of the Greek participial phrase and opens the possibility that is was not just “when” he saw the crowds, but because he saw the crowds that he went up on the mountain to teach. In verse 2, “he opened his mouth” again is a literal translation of the Greek text which is preserved in the ESV.

The question of literary excellence comes up again in verse 3. The traditional wording, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” goes directly back to the KJV. It is beautiful and accurate, and neither the ASV (1901) nor the RSV (1952) nor the ESV (2001) saw any reason to tamper with what they had received from the KJV tradition. Its sound is both aphoristic and memorable, and it readily connects with several other Old Testament and New Testament statements that began with “blessed are” or blessed is” (such as Ps. 1:1; 2:12; 32:1; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4, 5; 112:1; 119:1, 2; 128:1; 144:15; Prov. 3:13; 8:32; 28:14; John 20:29; Rom. 4:7; James 1:12; Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 19:9; 22:14). The NIV similarly sticks with the tradition here, but the renderings, “The poor in spirit are blessed” (HCSB) and “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him” (NLT) lose something of the richness and beauty of this verse.

**e. Should we capitalize pronouns that refer to God or Christ?**

Matthew 5:1-3 is one of many examples where the HCSB capitalizes “He” and other pronouns referring to Jesus or to God or the Holy Spirit:

When He saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him (Matt. 5:1, HCSB).

Such capitalization was not done in the King James Version or the RSV, or the ESV, NIV or NLT. But some readers prefer this style.

The question of capitalizing pronouns that refer to God is simply a matter of stylistic preference in English. There is nothing in the original Hebrew or Greek texts that represents such a practice, for those texts did not make any distinction between capital letters and lowercase letters—all the letters were the same.

Some readers may feel that it helps them to know when a pronoun refers to God rather than somebody else in the context, but there are actually not many cases where the context doesn’t immediately make it clear. (For example, no reader doubts that Matt. 5:1 is talking about Jesus.) Other readers may feel that it attaches a level of reverence to these pronouns, but it may be said on the other side that the original authors did not do this, and they probably felt that the content of the Bible itself honored God appropriately.

One reason against capitalizing these pronouns is that there are so many thousands of them that refer to God in the Bible that this practice makes for a very cluttered-looking text (see the HCSB of Matt. 5:1 above, for example.) It does not seem to me that meaning is affected in any significant way, whichever decision is made. On this question, the ESV has stuck with the practice of the primary translations in the great KJV tradition.

**f. John 1:3-4, 14-18**

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:3-4 ESV)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 ESV)

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (John 1:18 ESV)

In verse 4, the translation “In him was life” (ESV), is literal and accurate while the NLT’s translation, “The Word gave life to everything that was created,” is an extensive interpretation and paraphrase that has been added to the text. The ESV’s translation “of men” in verse 4 is a direct and literal translation of the Greek text (plural genitive of *anthrōpos*). It seems to me that the ESV here is more accurate than “everyone” (NLT) or “all mankind” (NIV), both of which include the idea of “all” which is not in John’s Greek text. The NIV and NLT expand the meaning to say explicitly that Jesus enlightens *all people*, not just believers (this idea is in vs. 9, but not in vs.4).

In verse14 “grace” and “truth” in the ESV are direct and literal translations of Greek *charis* and *alētheia,* and I think they are more accurate than the NLT’s “unfailing love” and “faithfulness.”

In verse 18 the difference between calling the Son of God “the only God” (ESV), and “The One and Only Son” (HCSB) or “the one and only Son” (NIV) is based on a difference in Greek manuscripts, but more recently discovered early papyrus manuscripts favor the remarkable reading, “the only God,” adopted by the ESV. The NLT’s translation “the one and only Son is himself God” is an expanded paraphrase that seems to want to translate both of the differing manuscripts rather than just one or the other.

**g. John 2:25-31:**

[Jesus] . . . needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man (Gk. *anthrōpos*). Now there was a man (Gk. *anthrōpos*) of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. (John 2:25-3:1 ESV)

The ESV rightly picks up the intentional connection between the use of “man” (Greek *anthrōpos*) in John 2:25 and John’s use of the same Greek word just three words later in the Greek text (John 3:1) to refer to Nicodemus, “a man of the Pharisees.” (The HCSB also does this.)

John is telling us that Jesus knew what was in every human being (every “man”) and therefore certainly Jesus knows the heart of this “man” named Nicodemus who was coming to see him. But the NIV partially obscures the connection because they translate the first occurrence as “mankind,” and the second occurrence as “man.” The NLT is even more troubling, because it completely fails to translate the entire Greek phrase which is rendered in English, “for he himself knew what was in man.” Perhaps they thought it was redundant, but the additional statement is there in Greek and it should be included in English as well.

**3. The ESV has better literary qualities**

I want to mention three sub-categories under the discussion of the better literary quality of the ESV: (a) diversity of style, (b) concrete expressions, and (c) using the vast resources of English.

**a. The ESV allows a greater diversity of style**

Following the King James Version tradition, the goal of the ESV was not to simplify every Bible passage so that it would sound like the easy readability of *USA Today.* The target audience the for ESV was “adult Christian readers.” We were not trying to make every part of the Bible so simple that it could immediately be understood at a seventh grade reading level. We were aiming rather at adult Christian readers because it was our belief that most of the Bible in its original documents was aimed primarily at an audience of adult believers.

This means that we were free to let poetry sound like poetry (“. . . who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,” Ps. 1:1). We were free to let Paul’s long sentences be long sentences if at all possible in English (see Eph. 1:15-21). We were able to let the complex reasoning of Hebrews show in the conjunctions and interconnected sentences that the author used. We were free to preserve the lofty prophetic speeches of Isaiah as well as the simple vocabulary and sentence structure of John’s Gospel.

I encourage people to read whole chapters of the ESV aloud. It has a diversity of style that is well-suited to each genre of literature found within the Bible.

To take another example, the ESV is free to let proverbs sound like proverbs, aphoristic statements that are striking in their memorable quality just because they are a bit unusual in their word order. For example:[[19]](#footnote-19)

ESV Prov. 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

HCSB Prov. 27:6 The wounds of a friend are trustworthy, but the kisses of an enemy are excessive.

NIV Prov. 27:6 Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

NLT Prov. 27:6 Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

The ESV alone preserves the sound of a proverbial saying that is readily memorized and memorable as read aloud. The other sentences sound ordinary, more like what we might read in *USA Today* or hear in a conversation at work.

**b. The ESV uses more vivid, concrete expressions instead of vague abstractions**

Consider the way the ESV translates Psalms 35:10.[[20]](#footnote-20)

ESV Ps. 35:10: All my bones shall say, "O LORD, who is like you, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him, the poor and needy from him who robs him?"

In the first phrase, the word translated “bones” is the plural form of the Hebrew word *’etsem*, which means “bones.” Now someone might object, “How can readers understand this? Bones can’t speak! What could David mean?”

But this is what David says and our goal in translation should be to convey to English readers today exactly what David said “back then,” so long as it can be understood. In fact the original readers of David’s psalm had the same problem as readers have today. They also knew that bones could not speak. So they had to pause for a moment and think about it.

After a moment’s reflection, the reader understands that David’s distress is so great and his prayer to God is so intense that it feels like it is coming from deep within him, from his very bones that seem to be crying out to God. And it is not only *part* of David that is crying out, because we have bones in every part of our body. Therefore the deepest part of David’s *whole being* is crying out to God in prayer and worship, and by reflection on David’s words, “All my *bones* shall say,” we get a vivid, concrete expression that brings us to close to hearing just what David intended us to hear.

The HCSB captures this with, “My very bones will say.” And interestingly, the NLT also does this “With every bone in my body I will praise him”—somewhat of an expanded paraphrase, but bones are still there.

But the NIV goes to a vague abstraction: “My whole being will exclaim.” They captured the general sense of the text but the vividness and concreteness of the expression “all my bones” was lost.

The same thing happens in Psalm 78:33:[[21]](#footnote-21)

ESV Psalm 78:33 So he made their days vanish like a breath (Heb. *hebel*, “vapor, breath”), and their years in terror.

HCSBPsalm 78:33 He made their days end in futility, their years in sudden disaster.

NIV Psalm 78:33 So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror.

NLT Psalm 78:33 So he ended their lives in failure, their years in terror.

The Hebrew word *hebel*, which the ESV translates as “breath,” means “breath” or “vapor.” Translating the psalmist’s image literally gives a vivid picture of breathing out mist on a cold day when it suddenly vanishes into the air. That is how quickly God made the lives of the sinful Israelites come to an end, with nothing to show for them. The image is striking and even disturbing.

But other translations remove this vivid, concrete image from English readers: “He made their days end in futility” (HCSB). “So he ended their days in futility” (NIV). “So he ended their lives in failure” (NLT).

One aspect of the literary quality of a work is its ability to retain in translation the vivid, concrete images that were used by the original author, and the ESV does this more frequently than other translations.

**c. The ESV employs the vast richness of the English language**

Over its history, the English language has accumulated to itself vast quantities of terms from many other languages, so that the English language today is probably the richest, most versatile language that has ever existed in human history.

Therefore the ESV does not hesitate to use words that might be somewhat uncommon in English but that are still understandable, useful English words that help to make a translation more accurate. One example is the use of “behold,” as I explained above. Another example is the use of the less common but theologically accurate word “propitiation” at Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; and 1 John 2:2 and 4:10.

Another example is the ESV’s willingness to use an unusual word like “enslavers” to give a more accurate rendering of the Greek term *andrapodistēs* in 1 Timothy 1:10. The term refers both to people who capture others for slavery and to those who deal in the slave trade.[[22]](#footnote-22) The expression “slave traders” (NIV, NLT) is too narrow to capture that. Other translations such as “kidnappers” (HCSB, NKJV, NASB) or “menstealers” (KJV) are even less accurate in conveying the meaning.

The ESV committee thought the word “enslavers” was not commonly known, but the word “enslave” certainly is, and so we decided that “enslavers” would be understandable to English readers as well. How history might have changed if the KJV in 1611 would have listed “enslavers” along with other kinds of sinners in 1 Timothy 1:10, so that capturing people for involuntary slavery would have been seen as sinful in the Bible from the very time of the New Testament. Accurate translation of a single word in the Bible can at times change history.

The ESV committee also decided (at our last meeting, in July, 2011) to use the word “bondservant” instead of “slave” or “servant” at several places in the New Testament where the literal institution of a first-century Greek *doulos* was in view. For example, in printings from 2011 onward, Colossians 3:22 says this in the ESV:

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters . . . (Col. 3:22, ESV).

Previous editions of the ESV had said, “Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters.” The footnote had said, “Or *Servants*; Greek *Bondservants*. But many on our committee were troubled by this, because telling “slaves” to be obedient to their earthly masters seemed to many readers to imply that the New Testament approved of “slavery,” and that word brought to mind the horrible abuses that characterized much slavery in 18th and 19th century America.

As biblical scholars, we had researched the first-century institution of a *doulos* (the Greek term used in the New Testament). While the institution was the most common form of employment and therefore actual experiences were diverse, in general the first-century institution of a *doulos* differed from American slavery in several important ways: (1) it was not racially based; (2) it was often entered into voluntarily, to gain job security, education, and social and economic advancement; (3) it was not permanent, for a *doulos* could own property and many would earn their freedom by about age 30;[[23]](#footnote-23) and (4) there was an extensive system of legal protections for a *doulos*. Frequently a *doulos* was entrusted with significant responsibility, as a teacher, physician, estate manager, or civil government administrator.

For example, in Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25, the master entrusted the “servants” or “slaves” (plural of Greek *doulos;* Matt. 25:14) with phenomenal amounts of money: He gave one five talents (about $3,000,000 today), another two talents (about $1,200,000) and another one talent (about $600,000) (Matt. 25:15). Then he went away for a long time, leaving these “servants” or “slaves” in charge – a picture of significant trust, freedom of action, and responsibility. This is not a picture of early 19th century “slavery” in America.

Where the RSV and ESV already had “servants” (as in Matt. 25), we decided to leave it unchanged. But where the ESV had used “slave” not as a metaphor (such as “slaves of sin” in Rom. 6:17) but to refer to the first-century institution (as in Col. 3:22), we recognized that “slave” was too strong a term, and “servant” seemed too weak. So we settled on “bondservant” in these verses, not a common English term but one that would be immediately understandable to readers as indicating both a “servant” role and being “bound” to the person’s master. In addition, its lack of familiarity (we don’t have “bondservants” today) would indicate an institution that no longer has an exact equivalent today, but that existed in the first century. We saw this as an advantage, one that gave a better glimpse of a foreign world.

The richness and versatility of the English language allowed us to use a word such as “bondservant” to give a more accurate understanding of verses like Colossians 3:22, “Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters.”

**4. The ESV preserves more of the interpretive options that were available to the original readers.**

**a. 1 Thessalonians 1:3**

One example of preserving interpretative options is seen in 1 Thessalonians 1:3:[[24]](#footnote-24)

ESV 1 Thessalonians 1:3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

HCSB 1 Thessalonians 1:3 We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ,

NIV 1 Thessalonians 1:3 We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

NLT As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1Th 1:3 NLT)

The Greek phrases in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 are simple genitive constructions that might have a variety of meanings. The range of meanings is quite similar to the possible meanings in our English phrases “work of faith,” “labor of love,” and “steadfastness of hope.” Therefore the ESV and the HCSB, by retaining these phrases quite literally, preserve for modern readers the opportunity to think through the question, “Just what kind of ‘work of faith’ did Paul mean?” Just as the original readers would have wondered that, so modern readers have to ponder that question and think about the phrase in its context and in light of what else Paul has said about work and faith.

But the NIV has taken away the options and decided that only one of them is the correct one: “Your work produced by faith.” So in this case the readers are not even aware that other options are available. They just think that Paul is talking about work that resulted from the faith that the Thessalonians had.

But then they turn to the NLT and they find that it says something completely different: “Your faithful work.” This is not work “produced by faith” but work done faithfully, reliably, dependably, obediently. This is also a possible meaning, but it too might not be the correct one. In any case, the readers of the NLT only have one interpretative option available to them as well.

And so it is with many genitive phrases and with dozens of other examples in the NIV and NLT. In the interests of making the translation immediately understandable to modern readers, the translators of the NIV and NLT have not merely translated but they have decided on the correct interpretation of expressions which have many possible legitimate interpretations in Greek.

**b. Every translation removes some possible options, but the ESV does it much less often**

I’m not saying the ESV and HCSB never do this kind of thing. It is certainly is a judgment call. Sometimes translators agree that only one of the options really has legitimate claim as a possible interpretation, and then that is what they will put in the text. But my point is that the ESV has the advantage of doing this less often than other translations. Our translation committee consciously attempted to leave open the legitimate interpretative options that would have been available to the first readers, whenever we thought there were legitimate alternatives that could be justified from the Greek or Hebrew text.

**c. Colossians 2:11**

These same considerations apply to Colossians 2:11. The ESV simply translates the genitive phrase, “by the circumcision of Christ.” But the NIV decides for the reader that one of the possible meanings is correct, and so it says, “you were circumcised by Christ” (Col. 2:11 NIV). The NLT goes even further with a detailed explanation: “Christ performed a spiritual circumcision-- the cutting away of your sinful nature” (Col 2:11 NLT), all this to translate a brief Greek expression that literally says, “the circumcision of Christ.”

**d. Is “Messiah” a better translation than “Christ”?**

At this point I could also say something about the term “Messiah” as used in the HCSB. Here in Colossians 2:11 the HCSB talks of “the circumcision of the Messiah” rather than using the word “Christ” to translate Greek *christos*.

The HCSB promotional material indicates that the HCSB committee considers it an advantage to have translated the Greek word *christos* as “Messiah” rather than “Christ” in contexts where a Jewish background is particularly in view. And so the HCSB translates the same Greek word *christos* as “Messiah” 116 times in the New Testament, but as “Christ” 405 times in the New Testament.

Is this helpful? It does highlight the Messianic background to the Greek word for “Christ,” and “anointed one” (or therefore, “Messiah”) is one legitimate meaning of the word *christos.* But the disadvantage of this translation is that readers don’t evidentially see that “Messiah” and “Christ” are representing the same Greek word, where two different English names are used. And how do we know when a specifically “Jewish background” is in view, especially since, by the time the epistles were written, most of the churches had mixed backgrounds of both Jews and Gentiles that had come into the church and become Christians? So the translation seems inconsistent.

In addition, it seems that at some point in the early New Testament church the name *christos* came to be used more as a name or title of Christ than simply meaning “anointed one.” Therefore it does not seem to me wrong to follow the majority of English translations today and to translate the word *christos* consistently as “Christ.”

**5. The ESV preserves more theological terms**

**a. Propitiation**

The willingness of the ESV to use more theological terms is seen, for example, in Romans 3:25:

ESV Rom. 3:25: [Christ Jesus] whom God put forward as a propitiation (Gk *hilastērion*) by his blood, to be received by faith.

HCSB Rom. 3:25 God presented Him as a propitiation through faith in His blood,

NIV Rom 3:25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood--to be received by faith.

NLT Rom. 3:25 For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.

The Greek word *hilastērion* means “a sacrifice that bears God’s wrath and turns it to favor.” This was a common term in the ancient world where, even in pagan religions, people were familiar with the concept of sacrifices that would turn away the wrath of an offended deity. This was the term the New Testament writers used in several key verses (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; and 1 John 2:2 and 4:10) to speak of Jesus’ death as a “propitiation.”

There is no other English word than “propitiation” that means “a sacrifice that bears the wrath of a deity.” But the word “propitiation” has that meaning. This presents us with two choices. We can simply abandon the word and thereby give up (or make much more difficult) the idea of teaching people this important concept, central to the doctrine of Christ’s atoning death for us. Or we can retain the word and thereby retain this important concept in the New Testament. It is very difficult to teach the concept to people who do not even have this word in their Bibles.

For this reason, the ESV and the HCSB have retained the word “propitiation” and thereby retained the ability of pastors to explain this doctrine that is at the heart of our understanding of salvation.

But the NIV has given up the term “propitiation” and has substituted the more vague expression, “sacrifice of atonement.” The NLT has used the phrase “sacrifice for sin.” Both of them are devoid of the concept of bearing the wrath of God against sin, a concept that is being challenged by a number of writers today, and one that is crucial for a correct understanding of salvation in the New Testament.

One advantage of the ESV is that it retains such theological terms.

**b. “Soul” and “spirit”**

Another example concerns the terms “soul” and “spirit.” These terms, I believe, are used somewhat interchangeably in the Bible to refer to the immaterial part of our human nature.

In connection with teaching theology classes about the nature of our human spirits, I have used various verses to show that in the Bible, our spirits can be troubled, as in Acts 17:16: “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit (Greek *pneuma*, “spirit”) was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.” Or I might refer to 2 Corinthians 2:13 where Paul says “My spirit (Greek *pneuma*) was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there.”

But I could not use those verses to teach about a person’s spirit being troubled from the NIV or the NLT because the NIV leaves out the word “spirit” and just says, “He was greatly distressed” in Acts 17:16, and the NLT simply says, “He was deeply troubled.” Both the NIV and the NLT in 2 Corinthians 2:13 just say that Paul “had no peace of mind” (2 Cor. 2:13). The important term “spirit” is gone.

I find the ESV preferable for teaching theology because I can count on it to be reliable with a theological term like “spirit.”

**c. “Saints”**

Another term that has been removed from the 2011 NIV has been “saints” as a designation for God’s people in the New Testament. The term “saints” occurred 45 times in the 1984 NIV in the New Testament, usually as a translation of *hagioi*, the plural form of *hagios*, meaning “saint” or “holy person.”

The benefit the term “saint” is that it has a double function of designating God’s people both as *already* “holy” in God’s sight and also as *called* by God to be more purely holy in their conduct of life, to live up to what God’s name for them was. Sometimes the 2011 NIV uses “holy people,” which still preserves the connotation of holiness that is found in the Greek term. But too often the 2011 NIV replaces “saints” with either “God’s people” or the “Lord’s people,” both of which completely lose the nuance of holiness or saintliness that is found in the Greek word.

Once again, this seems to me to be an important theological term in the New Testament which is retained in the ESV (and the HCSB).

**6. The ESV is not gender-neutral but more accurately translates gender language**

A final advantage of the ESV (and the HCSB as well) is that the ESV accurately translates words with masculine meaning in Greek and Hebrew into words with masculine meaning in English.

**a. What is the heart of the issue in translating gender language?**

In the discussion over the translation of gender language in the Bible today, the question is not whether a translation has *more* or *fewer* male-specific words, nor is the questions whether we *want* more or fewer male-specific words in the Bible. What we *want* should have nothing to do with a translation!

The proper question, rather, is this: When the original Greek or Hebrew word *meant a* male person, do we faithfully show that meaning in English?

**b. Some changes in gender language are appropriate**

There are some very appropriate changes to gender language that should be made when older versions are updated. If there is no male meaning in the original Greek or Hebrew, then we should not use a male-oriented term in English to translate it. Here is one example of a good change that was made from the 1971 RSV to the 2001 ESV:

RSV Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any man (Greek *tis*, “anyone”) would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

ESV Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

It was right for the ESV to change “any man” to “anyone,” because the Greek word *tis* did not mean “any man” and did not have a masculine meaning but simply meant “anyone.” (This is an example where a word had a *gramatically* masculine gender but not a masculine *meaning* in Greek.)

**c. But the 2011 NIV has gone too far**

Recent gender-neutral Bibles, however, have gone too far with this process and have removed thousands of examples of the words “man,” “father,” “son,” “brother” and “he/him/his” in places where the original Hebrew or Greek meant a male human being or meant a single individual person. They have replaced these words with “gender-neutral” terms that the original Greek or Hebrew simply did not mean, as shown on the following chart:

man 🡪 person

father 🡪 parent

son 🡪 child

brother 🡪 friend, brother or sister

he/ him/ his 🡪 they, them, their; you; we

------------ --------------- ------------------ ---------------- ----------------- ------------**Figure 3: The 2011 NIV replaces male-specific words with "gender-neutral" term in many cases where the original Hebrew or Greek *meant* a male human being.**

Detailed information about such changes in the 2011 NIV can be found at [www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org). A study published by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood claims that the 2011 NIV still has 2,766 inappropriate translations of gender language that do not accurately render the meaning of the original Hebrew or Greek text.

I at first want to acknowledge that this is a significant improvement over the TNIV of 2005. The TNIV, according to CBMW’s earlier study, had 3,699 “inaccuracies,” mostly in gender language. This was what led the general evangelical public to reject the 2005 TNIV translation, which was discontinued according to an announcement on September 1, 2009.

Now the 2011 NIV has corrected the most objectionable examples of these inaccurate translations, and has in fact revised 933 of them. Therefore 25% of the objectionable translations have been revised. Unfortunately, that still leaves 2,766 (or 75%) that CBMW still does not think are accurate renderings of the original gender language.

I should also note that the HCSB and the ESV agree on the translation of gender language, so I will not generally include the HCSB in my discussion in this section.

**d. Luke 17:3**

One example of such a change is found in Luke 17:3:

ESV Luke 17:3 If your brother (Gk. *adelphos*) sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,

BGT Luke 17:3 Ἐὰν ἁμάρτῃ ὁ ἀδελφός σου ἐπιτίμησον αὐτῷ, καὶ ἐὰν μετανοήσῃ ἄφες αὐτῷ.

HCSB Luke 17:3 If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

NIV 1984 Luke 17:3 If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

NIV 2011 Luke 17:3 If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.

NLT Luke 17:3 If another believer sins, rebuke that person; then if there is repentance, forgive.

The Greek here is not difficult or controversial, and the translations of the ESV, the HCSB, and the 1984 NIV were exactly the same in every word: “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.” But in the 2011 NIV, the verse has been changed to say,

If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.

The problem with the translation “brother or sister” is that the Greek word *adelphos* in singular means “brother.” It does not mean “sister” and it does not mean “brother or sister.” There is a different Greek word that means “sister,” the word *adelphē*, and it does not occur in this verse. It was not part of what Jesus said.

Now at this point someone might object, saying, “But the masculine *plural* form *adelphoi* often means ‘brother and sister.’” And I agree that is correct. But that does not affect the meaning of the singular *adelphos*.

The plural form can mean “brothers and sisters” because of the way singulars and plurals function in many languages that have grammatical genders for nouns and adjectives. Anyone who has studied a common foreign language will probably realize that this occurs in many languages. If you are speaking about a group of *male human beings*, you use a masculine plural noun to refer to them. If you are speaking of a group of *female human beings*, then you use a feminine plural noun to refer to them. But if you are speaking about a *mixed group* of both male and female people, then you use the *masculine plural form* of the noun or adjective. This is just the way plurals work when you have to make a choice. And it happens that way in Greek too, so that the *plural* form *adelphoi* often will mean “brother and sister.”

But you never use a masculine *singular* noun to mean a “male or a female person.” Never in the Greek world would you see a woman walking down the road and say, “There goes an *adelphos*” (using the masculine singular form of the word). And that is the form that Jesus uses in Luke 17:3. It does not mean “brother or sister.” In fact there is a very easy way to say “brother or sister” in Greek. There is an example of it in James 2:5, “If a *brother or sister* is poorly clothed.” The Greek phrase is *adelphos ē adelphē*, “brother or sister.” But Jesus did not say that in Luke 17:3.

Another objection might be that the Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich *Greek-English* *Lexicon* *of the New Testament* defines *adelphos* to mean not only “brother” but also in meaning (2), “fellow member, member, associate” (p. 18). Doesn’t this give justification for translating it “brother or sister”? Or “another believer” (as in the NLT)?

My response is to say that the person who makes this objection is not reading the Bauer *Lexicon* carefully enough, because that second meaning is described as a “figurative extension of meaning 1” (which is “brother”). And therefore, for the original readers, the masculine singular sense of “brother” was always present even with this additional figurative meaning, “member.”

At any rate the NIV did not translate this word as “fellow member” or anything like that. They translated it more specifically as “brother or sister” which is equivalent to something like “male or female fellow member” which is something that *adelphos* never means.

Anybody can also do a word study to demonstrate this. The singular Greek term *adelphos* appears 428 times in the Greek New Testament together with the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), and 428 out of 428 times it refers to a male human being, a “brother.” If *adelphos* can mean “brother or sister,” then I wonder if someone would please show me one place in the Bible where this singular form is used to speak of a female person. I do not think it exists.

And if you are doing a word study on a particular word in the Bible, and 428 times out of 428 examples it has the same meaning, I think you are quite safe in saying that it takes this meaning 100% of the time. The singular word *adelphos* simply means “brother.” It does not mean “brother or sister.”

Therefore Jesus did not say “brother or sister” in Luke 17:3. But the NIV says “brother or sister.” It seems to me they are adding words to the Bible that Jesus did not say.

**e. Application is different from translation**

At this point someone might object, “But the verse also certainly *applies* to a sister who sins!”

Of course it does. The Bible has many gender-specific examples that *apply* to both genders. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), for example, also *applies* to prodigal daughters. But we don’t translate it as the parable of the prodigal “son or daughter” because the words don’t mean prodigal “son or daughter.” Readers understand that the parable also *applies* to prodigal daughters. They understand that easily from an accurate translation that simply speaks of the prodigal “son.”[[25]](#footnote-25) *Translation* is different from *application.*

The parable of the persistent “widow” (Luke 18:1-8) also *applies* to teaching men to be persistent in prayer, but we don’t translate it by saying, “And there was a widow or widower in that city.” People can read a story about a person of one gender and easily make the application to someone of the other gender. People get it.

Here is another example, this one from the Ten Commandments:

You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife (Exod. 20:17).

I am thankful the 2011 NIV did not change this verse, but on the same principle they used to change “brother” to “brother or sister,” shouldn’t they also change this commandment to say, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or husband”? After all, maybe somebody will read that verse and think “Well, I guess it’s OK then to covet my neighbor’s husband.” Will that happen?

No, of course not. Bible readers are not that foolish. Readers understand that when the Bible uses a specific female example to teach a general truth, that it naturally *applies* to men as well. And when it uses a specific male example to teach a general truth, it naturally *applies* to women as well. That is not difficult for readers to understand.

**f. Are we willing to let the Bible use specific male examples to teach a general truth?**

Here is the heart of the dispute over gender language in the Bible: The Bible uses both male and female individual examples to teach a general truth, but it has many more male-specific examples than female ones, examples where the author holds up one male individual to teach a general truth. Should we just go ahead and change all of these male-specific examples to be gender-inclusive when we translate the words of Scripture? If Jesus said, “brother,” should we just go ahead and change it to “brother or sister”?

No, we should not. Translators should not change Jesus’ words and tamper with what he said.

This same procedure affects thousands of verses in the 2011 NIV. “Brother” wrongly becomes “brother or sister” or some other gender-neutral expression 63 times.

Then there are many other verses where “man” is incorrectly is changed to “person,” or “father” is changed to “parent,” and “son” is changed to “child.” In addition, there are a large number of changes from singular to plural simply to avoid the unacceptable words “he/him/his.” I will mention just a few other examples.

**g. 1 Samuel 18:2: No more “father’s house”**

One example is 1 Samuel 18:2:

ESV 1 Samuel 18:2 And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's (Heb. *’ab*, “father”) house (Heb. *bayit*, “house”).

NIV 1984 Samuel 18:2 From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his father’s house.

The ESV and the 1984 NIV have translated the Hebrew correctly, “his father’s house.”

But apparently it is now thought unacceptable to speak of a “father’s house.” Maybe it is thought of too patriarchal. So the 2011 NIV has removed “his father’s house”:

NIV 2011 From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family.

The problem is that this is not what the Hebrew text says. The Hebrew word *’ab* in singular occurs 720 times in the Old Testament. It is extremely common. It is the ordinary word for “father.” And it never means “parent” or “family” rather than “father.”[[26]](#footnote-26) The words “father” and “house” have completely disappeared – not to make a more accurate translation, but to make it more gender-neutral.

**h. John 14:23: The loss of emphasis on individual, personal relationship with God**

One serious consequence of such gender-neutral changes is seen in John14:23:

ESV John 14:23 "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Greek: John 14:23 ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ἀγαπήσει αὐτὸν καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐλευσόμεθα καὶ μονὴν παρ᾽ αὐτῷ ποιησόμεθα.

HCSB John 14:23 If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

NIV 1984: John 14:23 "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

NIV 2011: John 14:23 "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

The verse has simple Greek words with profound meaning. The NIV translated it simply and correctly in 1984. The verse speaks of a personal relationship between an individual believer and God the Father and God the Son, who promise to come to a person who believes and to “love him” and “come to him” and “make our home with him.” This is a marvelous teaching about the heart of a Christian life, that is, the relationship between God and an individual person.

But the NIV has lost that meaning in its 2011 edition because it was determined to avoid the offensive word “him.” However, the word clearly appears three times in the second part of the verse, because there are three masculine singular pronouns in the Greek text (*auton, auton, autō*). The correct translation of these three masculine singular pronouns is, “My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

But what will the reader do with the NIV 2011 and its statement, “my Father will love them”? He will look back in the previous sentence and see that “them” refers to “anyone who loves me”—certainly a large group of people. The number of people referred to by this generalizing pronoun is perhaps millions of people, and so the reader will naturally take “them” as a plural, and the sense of *individual* fellowship between the Father, the Son, and the believer is lost from this verse.

**i. A broader loss of emphasis on an individual’s relationship with God**

Does this kind of change from “him” to “them” make any difference? Of course it does. The Bible’s emphasis on an individual’s personal relationship with God and personal responsibility to God is of great importance. but in the 2011 NIV the singular words “he/him/his” in such verses were found to be objectionable, because they were too “masculine” sounding. And so they were changed to plurals such as “they,” “them,” or to “you,” or to something else over 2,000 times. (This does not count the times when the NIV was using “them” in a “singular” sense in specific contexts.)[[27]](#footnote-27)

When a translation makes this many changes, the Bible’s emphasis on the relationship between the individual person and God is significantly blunted. This is distorting one strand of the Bible’s teaching—the strand that uses a lot of individual male examples to teach a general truth. The 2011 NIV found that kind of teaching to be objectionable and it has removed it over 2,000 times from the Bible.

It is interesting and somewhat baffling, however, that the 2011 NIV still used “he” occasionally in sentences like this:

Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves (Rom. 14:22).

Psalm 34:19, which was widely criticized in the TNIV because of the loss of the singular in a Messianic prophecy, has now been corrected in the 2011 NIV:

The righteous person may have many troubles but the Lord delivers him from them all (Ps. 34:19, NIV 2011).

This is a change from the 2005 TNIV. That edition removed, as far as I know, every instance of “he” used in a generic sense in statements like this where a singular male example is used to teach a general truth. But now in the 2011 NIV they have used it occasionally, but rarely. The apparent reason is that the Collins Bank of English, a database of more than 4.4 billion words, showed that this construction was still used about 8% of the time.[[28]](#footnote-28)

This indicates to me the weakness of simply depending on the Collins Bank ofEnglishand their perception of frequency of English usage. Even if this construction only occurs 8% of the time in English, what if the use of such masculine singular pronouns in Greek and Hebrew occurs 100% of the time in this kind of construction in the Bible? Shouldn’t we then translate it accurately 100% of the time in verses like John 14:23?

A construction that occurs 8% of the time is still quite frequent in English. It means that people can still understand such an expression quite well. And it is the most accurate representation of the original statement in Greek in verses like John 14:23.

**j. Some respected authorities consider singular “they” unacceptable in formal English**

In addition, a use of “they” in a singular sense is still considered by many experts and many ordinary readers to be unacceptable in written English today. For example, the 2010 edition of *The* *Chicago Manual of Style,* the most authoritative guide to English usage today, says,

Many people substitute the plural *they* and *their* for the singular *he* or *she*. Although *they* and *their* have become common in informal usage, neither is considered acceptable in formal writing, so unless you are given guidelines to the contrary, do not use them in a singular sense.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The latest edition (2009) of the *Associated Press Stylebook* says,

Use the pronoun *his* when an indefinite antecedent may be male or female: *A reporter tries to protect his sources.* (Not *his or her* sources . . .)[[30]](#footnote-30)

I mention these authorities to say that the NIV has clearly taken one side of a disputed matter in English today. It certainly was not a necessary matter of modern English usage that led them to decide to use “they” in a “singular” sense when translating masculine singular pronouns in Hebrew or Greek in the Bible. And when the context makes it clear (as in John 14:23) that “they” should be understood in a plural sense, the translation wrongly loses the focus on the individual person that was there in the original Hebrew or Greek text.

**k. Which pronouns can you now trust?**

The statistical analysis of the 2011 NIV published by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood points out yet a more serious problem that comes with changing over 2,000 examples of “he/him/his” to something like “you” or “they.” The problem is not only the 2,000 versus that were changed, but the lack of confidence that readers now will have in every example of “you” and “they” in this new NIV. Here is the conclusion in the CBMW analysis:

These verses also illustrate another serious result of frequently changing singulars to plurals and 3rd person to 2nd person in many hundreds of cases: The 2011 NIV will ultimately lead to *a loss of confidence in tens of thousands* of plural pronouns in the Bible. Preachers and Bible teachers cannot rightly use the 2011 NIV to make a point based on the plurals “they/them/their/those” or the second person pronouns “you/your/yours” because they can no longer have confidence that those represent accurately the meaning of the original. Maybe the original was plural (“them”) but then again maybe “them” is a gender-neutral substitute for a singular (“him”). Maybe the original was second person (“your”) but then again maybe the original was a gender-neutral substitute for a third person singular (“his”). How can ordinary English readers know? They can’t. So no weight can be put on those pronouns. “He” in the NIV has become “they” or “you” in the 2011 NIV many hundreds of times.

How many pronouns are thrown into doubt?

The forms of “they/them/their/themselves/those” occur 18,999 times in the 2011 NIV. The words “you/your/yours/yourself/yourselves” occur 21,166 times. That is a total of 40,165 pronouns that are potential replacements for “he/him/his/himself.” How can we know which of these 40,165 pronouns are trustworthy, and which are the 2011 NIV’s gender-neutral substitutes for the correct translation “he/him/his”? The only way is to check the Hebrew and Greek text in each case, and who is going to do that? Can you really study, or memorize, or teach or preach from such a Bible where you can’t trust this many pronouns?[[31]](#footnote-31)

**l. Nahum 3:13: “Women” changed to “weaklings”**

Another example of an inappropriate change in gender language in the 2011 NIV comes from Nahum, where the prophet is pronouncing God’s judgment on Nineveh and even mocking them for the weakness of their military defenses:

ESV Nahum 3:13 Behold, your troops are women in your midst. The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies; fire has devoured your bars. (Nah 3:13 ESV)

NIV 1984: Nahum 3:13 Look at your troops-- they are all women! The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies; fire has consumed their bars.

I am not sure whether Nahum is saying that the male soldiers are all dead so only women are left to defend the city, or whether he is speaking figuratively and mocking them by calling their troops “women,” something like what a group of high school football players today might yell to the opposing team, “We’re going to beat you girls!” But in either case, it is clear that the Hebrew word is *nashîm*, the ordinary Hebrew word meaning “women.”

But apparently the NIV translators though it was unacceptable today to speak that way about women soldiers. So they decided to change what Nahum says:

NIV 2011 Nahum 3:13 “Look at your troops—they are all weaklings.”

The problem is that this is not what the Bible says. It clearly says “women.” But the NIV’s changes are part of the process of making the Bible more gender-neutral, more acceptable to modern readers today.

**m. Revelation 3:20:**

ESV Rev. 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20 ESV)

BGT Rev. 3:20 Ἰδοὺ ἕστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ. (Rev 3:20 BGT)

NIV Rev. 3:20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

NLT Rev. 3:20 "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.

This is another example of the damage that is done to a translation when it is trying every way possible to avoid the unacceptable words “he,” and “him.” The ESV has translated the verse accurately, because the three words “him,” “him” and “he” accurately represent the three occurrences of the masculine singular Greek pronoun *autos* (“he, him”) in the Greek text.

But if you are trying to avoid “he” and “him” because they are thought to be objectionable today, then changes have to be made. So the NIV changes “him” to the awkward expression, “that person” which sounds distant and impersonal, and simply draws attention to itself as a sort of “gender-neutral,” politically correct terminology. In addition, they have to say, “and they with me,” and the reader wonders if it’s a personal relationship with Jesus anymore, or if it includes the whole group of all the people included in “if anyone hears my voice” in the earlier part of the sentence. The idea of personal relationship with Jesus is obscured.

Furthermore, part of the verse is left out. In the Greek text, Jesus clearly says, “I will come in to him.” But the new NIV just decides to leave out “to him” altogether (it is *pros autōn* in Greek).

The NLT also wanted to avoid the words “him” and “he” so they changed it to “if you hear my voice.” But the reader does not know if the “you” is singular or plural. Once again personal relationship with Jesus and the individual believer is obscured. And once again, “to him” is completely omitted. The NLT’s idea of sharing a meal “as friends” is a nice thought, but there is nothing in the Greek text that speaks about friendship. This is just the NLT’s attempt to recover some personal nuance to the verse even though the idea of Jesus eating with an individual person is no longer found.

**n. 1 Timothy 2:12**

I now want to consider one final verse that shows the “gender-neutral” tendencies of the 2011 NIV. To my mind this is the most objectionable verse of all because it is a key text that has been under much scrutiny for the last 30 years in the debate over whether women can be pastors and elders in churches. The NIV in 1 Timothy 2:12 has followed the 2005 TNIV and adopted a translation (“assume authority”) that has never before been seen in any major English translation of the Bible. I will quote here from the analysis of this verse published by CBMW:

We expect that evangelical feminists who claim that women can be pastors and elders will eagerly adopt this 2011 NIV because it tilts the scales in favor of their view at several key verses. This is especially true because the new NIV changes the primary verse in the debate over women’s roles in the church.

1984 NIV **1 Timothy 2:12** I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

2011 NIV **1 Timothy 2:12** I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. (same as TNIV, but with modified footnotes)

Evangelical feminists will love this translation because in one stroke it removes the Bible’s main barrier to women pastors and elders. As soon as a church adopts the 2011 NIV, the debate over women’s roles in that church will be over, because women pastors and elders can just say, “I’m not *assuming* authority on my own initiative; it was *given* to me by the other pastors and elders.” Therefore any woman could be a pastor or elder so long as she does not take it upon herself to “assume authority.”

The NIV’s translation committee says that the translation “assume authority” is a particularly nice English rendering because it leaves the question open.” In other words, “assume authority” could be understood in two different ways: a negative way (meaning “wrongly assume authority on one’s own initiative”) or a positive way (meaning “begin to use authority in a rightful way”). But in saying this the NIV translators fail to understand the full force of what they have done: *They have given legitimacy to a feminist interpretation that did not have legitimacy from any other modern English translation* (except the discontinued TNIV).

Whether the verb is understood in a negative or positive way, *the focus of the verse is now on prohibiting a self-initiated action*, taking it on oneself to “assume authority” over men. And so feminists will now quickly say that they are not assuming authority on their own initiative – they are just “accepting” it because others entrusted it to them. In any local church that uses this new NIV, no one will be able to answer their argument from this Bible.

This verse alone in the 2011 NIV gives evangelical feminists the most important advance for their cause in the last thirty years. But the translation is simply incorrect, as many writers have demonstrated in extensive scholarly discussion elsewhere,[[32]](#footnote-32) and as all other modern English translations agree: Even the gender-neutral NRSV translates *authenteō* “have authority” here —along with the NIV, NLT, RSV, Holman CSB, and NKJV, while the NASB, NET Bible, and ESV similarly translate it as “exercise authority.” Thus, the NIV is out on a limb here over against the other main modern English translations. And it is out on a limb precisely because of its attempt to be “neutral” on a passage that even the liberal translators of the NRSV have not attempted to make more amenable to an egalitarian interpretation. The verb *authenteō* here means “exercise authority” or “have authority,” not “assume authority.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

I realize that the verse still says that Paul does not permit a woman to “teach” men, and that alone should prevent women from seeking the role of a teaching pastor. But I also recognize that egalitarian interpreters are quick to claim that Paul is only prohibiting one thing, “assuming authority in order to teach,” and so they will soon claim that both verbs are only prohibiting teaching or having authority that has been wrongly self-assumed, not teaching or having authority that has been given by the church or the elders. (I think these are incorrect interpretations, but my point is that the 2011 NIV has made it much more difficult to argue against them from the English text.)

Because of these changes in gender language is not surprising that in June, 2011, the Southern Baptist Convention overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling the 2011 “an inaccurate translation” and said, “We cannot commend the 2011 NIV to Southern Baptists or to the larger Christian community.”[[34]](#footnote-34)

**D. Analysis of other assigned texts for this forum**

In the material above, I have discussed many of the assigned texts for this forum, but there are a few remaining texts to discuss here, texts which did not fall clearly in any one of the previous categories.

**1. Exodus 2:5-6:**

Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." (Exodus 2:5-6 ESV)

In verse 6, the ESV correctly translates “behold” which the HCSB, NIV and NLT all omit. I also understand “child” and “children” to be more accurate translations of the Hebrew term (plural of *yeled*, “child”) than “babies” (NIV) or “boys” (HCSB).

**2. Ezekiel 18:5-9 and 21-24:**

I will not quote this long passage here, but I think the ESV is correct to begin the section with “If a man is righteous . . .” The Hebrew word *’ish* ordinarily in the Old Testament means “man” and not just “person.” The HCSB, NIV, and NLT all correctly translate this as “man” in Ezekiel 18:5.

Then I think the ESV correctly switches to a non-male oriented word in verse 21, when it says, “But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed . . .” This is because the Hebrew text has no word here meaning “man” but just an adjective, “a wicked one” or a “wicked person.”

But it seems to me that the 2011 NIV then unnecessarily switches to what they call a “singular they” when they translate it this way: “But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed . . .” I realize that some readers might prefer this kind of construction today, even to refer back to a specific single example such as a “wicked person” and not just a generalizing pronoun such as “everyone” or “anyone” or “whoever.” But it seems to me a rather unnecessary step simply to try to avoid the offensive word “he.” And it sounds so strange in formal, written English that it calls attention to itself. Many readers will simply ask “who are the ‘they’ that the reader is speaking about?”

The New Living Translation incorrectly makes this plural, diminishing the emphasis on the individual responsibility in the Bible: “But if wicked people turn away from all their sins . . .”

**3. Mark 1:40-45:**

And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." 41 Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." 42 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43 And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, 44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them." 45 But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter. (Mark 1:40-45 ESV)

The difference between “Moved with pity” (ESV) and “was indignant” (NIV) is based on a close judgment call between two different sets of Greek manuscripts, but it seems to me that the Greek manuscript evidence supporting “Moved with pity” is more diverse and substantial than that supporting “was indignant.” While some might argue that the words “leper” and “leprosy” found in the ESV represent too narrow a range of skin diseases, on the other hand, the translation “a serious skin disease” is so broad and vague as to be unhelpful to the reader. There is much to be said for the ESV’s decision to keep the term “leprosy” (as the NIV did and the NLT).[[35]](#footnote-35) WG: Did I goof by adding footnote 9?

In verse 44, it seems to me that the ESV’s translation “desolate places” for the plural of the Greek word e*rēmos,* “isolated, desolate, deserted” is preferable to the HCSB’s, “deserted places,” because the places had not been deserted by former inhabitants, but never had any significant number of inhabitants. It also seems preferable to the NIV’s “lonely places” because the places were not exactly “lonely” since Jesus had his disciples with him. And seems preferable to the NLT’s “secluded places,” because the point is not that these places were hidden but that they were barren, desolate of traces of civilization or human settlement.

Finally, the ESV’s, “people were coming to him,” seems preferable as a rendering of the imperfect tense of the Greek verb, indicating continual but uncompleted action over a period time.

**4. Endings to Mark’s Gospel:**

It seems to me that the ESV and the NIV have made the best decision on a very difficult question, how to treat Mark 16:9-20.

I believe that New Testament scholars on all sides of this question will admit that a decision about Mark 16:9-20 is not an easy decision. In fact, when I taught New Testament Greek exegesis (second year Greek) at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, I would require students to write a term paper evaluating the evidence for and against these verses. It is not an easy decision because there is evidence on both sides.

Many ancient Greek manuscripts include these verses. But a significant number of very early and very reliable manuscripts of Mark’s Gospel do not include them, and a number of other early copies of Mark either quote special marks(?) indicating that the verses are doubtful or else say that the verses are not found in the copies in Mark that they are using. In addition, the vocabulary, grammar, and style of these verses seem significantly different from the Gospel of Mark, particularly in Greek, but even to some extent in English.

Therefore the ESV translation committee decided to enclose these verses in double brackets, and to precede them with a note that says, “[Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9-20.]” this seems to me to be a fair decision that does not exclude these Gospel verses but also shows that there is considerable question about them.

The HCSB expresses a bit less doubt about these verses, simply enclosing them in single square brackets and putting a footnote after the last verse that says “Other mss [manuscripts] omit bracketed text.”

This seems to me to not give enough weight to the significant evidence that these verses were not originally part of what Mark wrote.

I do not differ strongly with the decision of the NLT. They print the verses as if they were part of the biblical text, but then they include a footnote at 16:8 which says, “The most reliable early manuscript concludes the Gospel of Mark at verse 8. Other manuscripts include various endings to the Gospel. Two of the more noteworthy endings are printed here.” It does not seem wise to me to reprint the “shorter ending,” of Mark which has much less evidence in support of it. And I would prefer that verses 9-20 be put in brackets somehow, so as to indicate the questionable nature of their documentary history.

It should be noted that no significant point of doctrine is affected by either including or excluding these verses. Everything that is taught in them can be deduced from other places in the New Testament as well, and the verses do not contradict anything that is taught elsewhere in the New Testament.

**5. 1 Corinthians 2:1, 13:**

I do not object to the NIV’s translation of 1 Corinthians 2:1, “And so it was with me, brothers and sisters.” This is an acceptable sense of the plural Greek word *adelphoi*. But it seems to me another acceptable solution is the one taken by the ESV using “brothers” in the text and adding a footnote that says, “Or *brothers and sisters*.”

In this passage, the difference between “testimony” (ESV, HCSB, NIV) and “God’s secret plan” (NLT), is just a difference in Greek manuscripts, again where some manuscripts read *mystērion,* “mystery” and others read *martyrion*, “testimony.” This is just a judgment call made by different committees.

**6. Galatians 5:2-6:**

I will not quote the entire long passage here, but in this passage it seems to me that the expression “faith working through love” (ESV, HCSB) is more literal and precise than “faith expressing itself through love” (NIV) or “faith expressing itself in love” (NLT). The Greek verb *inergeō* simply means “work, be at work, be active, operate, be effective.” Perhaps Paul means that faith “expressing itself through love” but maybe his thought is not that faith is expressing itself at all, but is remaining hidden, and is simply energizing and empowering love. The ESV and the HCSB are less interpretative and leave open to the reader more of the interpretative options that were available to the original reader.

Add to section 7:

**7. Jude 1:4-5:**

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. 5 Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. (Jude 1:4-5 ESV)

The surprising translation, “that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe” (ESV), is also adopted by the NLT (“Jesus first rescued the nation of Israel from Egypt”). This is based on a judgment about different Greek manuscripts. The HCSB and NIV, instead of the word “Jesus” have the phrase “the Lord.”

I think that the ESV and NLT have made the right decision in this case. The Greek manuscripts that have the reading “Jesus” are older, more reliable, and more diverse. In addition, this is a “more difficult” reading, (that is, it is more likely to have been changed by scribes who puzzled about it), and it is the reading that best explains the other manuscripts (because scribes would easily switch “the Lord” for “Jesus,” but it is hard to understand why they would switch in the other direction). Therefore, this reading meets the criteria usually used to decide such questions among Greek manuscripts. Theologically, it reminds us that the same Jesus who walked the earth during the period of the Gospels is also the eternal Son of God who was actively at work in the world during the time of the Old Testament as well.

**E**. **Conclusion**

Out of several good translations today I prefer the ESV because

1. It preserves the best of the best in the KJV tradition

2. It preserves more literal accuracy in details

3. It has better literary quality

4. It preserves more of the interpretative options that were available to original readers

5. It preserves more theological terms

6. It is not gender-neutral

I believe that the ESV has these advantages because it is an excellent example of an “essentially literal” translation. It takes seriously the responsibility to translate faithfully every word of God that he gave us in the Bible. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

**Appendix: A brief note on two other “essentially literal” translations, the NASB and the NKJV**

Two other recent translations are not represented in this forum, but I wish to comment on them briefly in this appendix. Both have a connection to the KJV tradition, but neither of them builds on the scholarly and literary excellence of the 1952 RSV. One went back to the 1901 ASV, and one went back to the KJV itself. In general, they are both good and reliable translations.

In 1971, the **New American Standard Bible** (NASB) was published by the Lockman Foundation. It was precise and accurate in its word-for-word literalness, and for that reason it became especially popular among pastors who did verse-by-verse and word-by-word expository preaching. But it had been based on the American Standard Version of 1901, and too often it continued the ASV’s practice of duplicating the word order found in the original Hebrew or Greek text, resulting in English that sounded lumpy and lacked a natural flow and oral readability.

Early in my teaching career, I personally tried for a few weeks to switch to the NASB for teaching and memorizing, but I soon found the English unnatural and hard to memorize compared to the RSV, so I stuck with the RSV. One scholar summarized it to me this way, “Reading the NASB is like driving somewhere on a bumpy road – you will reach your destination, but the journey won’t be very pleasant.” And so the NASB, widely respected for its accuracy, continues to capture only about 4% of the Bible Market in the US, and less in other countries. (The term “American” its title partially hinders its acceptance in other English-speaking countries.)

The **New King James Version** (NKJV) of 1982 took a different approach. Rather than trying to correct the RSV of 1952/1971 or even the ASV of 1901, it went all the way back to the KJV itself of 1611 and updated the archaic language. It stuck to a word-for-word translation philosophy and produced a readable, accurate translation that continues to be quite popular, capturing around 18% - 20% of the Bible Market in the US. I have written notes based on the NKJV for individual New Testament books in two different study Bibles, and I found it to be a translation that is for the most part both readable and accurate.

But the NKJV has one serious shortcoming that, in my opinion, makes it incapable of ever capturing the allegiance of the majority of seminary-trained pastors in the English-speaking world. The shortcoming is this: *The NKJV is based on inferior Greek manuscripts for the New Testament.* This is because the NKJV translators decided they would base their New Testament translation *only* on the published Greek text that was used by the original KJV translators back in 1611. That Greek text is called the *Textus Receptus* (Latin for “received text”).

The *Textus Receptus* was the first Greek New Testament ever published. It was edited and published by the Dutch scholar Erasmus in Basel, Switzerland, in 1516, then updated in later editions. His third edition (1522) contained the text used by the King James Version translators. But Erasmus only had six Greek manuscripts to use, and the copies he depended on most dated were not very old.

Why would that be a problem? Erasmus’s Greek manuscripts were copies of copies of copies, and they were all derived from one standardized source, what is called the “Byzantine text tradition.” Erasmus’s copies were all made in the 11th or 12th centuries.

But archaeological discoveries of manuscripts did not end when Erasmus published his Greek New Testament in 1516, or when the KJV was published in 1611. For the past 400 years, experts in ancient manuscripts have continued to explore archaeological digs, ancient museums, and old European and Middle Eastern libraries, and they have discovered over 5,000 additional copies of parts or all of the New Testament in Greek. By analyzing the kind of papyrus or animal skin that these manuscripts are written on, and analyzing the kind of ink and style of handwriting, experts in such manuscripts have concluded that many of these newly discovered manuscripts are *much older* and *more reliable* than the six\* that Erasmus had available in 1516. Many of these manuscripts are hundreds of years older, since they were copied by scribes in the 4th, 3rd, and even 2nd centuries AD.

Nobody has yet discovered the actual “original copy” of Matthew or Romans or any other New Testament book, but we now have thousands of *very reliable* copies, many of them going back to the early years of the Christian church.

Therefore the translators of the American Standard Version in 1901 made use of many of these older and better Greek manuscripts (depending especially on the expert conclusions about the most reliable ancient manuscripts that were published by two Cambridge professors named B. Westcott and F. Hort). And the RSV similarly made use of the most reliable ancient manuscripts that had become available by 1952, and then by 1971.

But if you had asked the New King James Version translators in 1982, “Would you like to make use of these older and more reliable Greek manuscripts that we have now discovered?” they would have said, “No thank you! We think that the Greek manuscripts that had already been discovered by 1611, the manuscripts that the remarkable KJV translators used, are good enough. We really aren’t interested in basing our translation on the manuscripts that you say are older and better. The ones they had in 1611 are good enough for us.”

And so the NKJV is based on what I think to be inferior Greek manuscripts.

A few New Testament scholars still defend these manuscripts that were known in 1611 as superior, but they are a tiny minority, probably less than 1% of scholars with a Ph.D. in New Testament today. And they have to defend the unlikely position that after the KJV was published in 1611, no Greek manuscripts have ever been discovered that are more reliable and that get us closer to the New Testament books as originally written than the Byzantine text tradition on which the KJV was based.

(It should be noted that defenders of the KJV texts today do not defend the actual Erasmus editions themselves, what is known as the *Textus Receptus*. Instead, they defend the best readings that they can determine from the wider Byzantine text tradition, of which the Textus *Receptus* is only one representative. But they still defend the form of the Greek text as it was stabilized in the churches in the 5th century AD and then copied and recopied after that. Defenders of this Byzantine text call their Greek text the “Majority Text” because most of the later copies of the Greek New Testament were copies of this “Byzantine text type.” Therefore the “majority” of old Greek manuscripts are based on this text tradition. But this “majority” consists of copies made mostly in the 10th to 15th centuries AD. There are many hundreds of such copies that exist, but that is just because it was the text type used and repeatedly recopied in the Greek Orthodox churches and in Roman Catholic churches during those centuries. These copies are far from the earliest or most reliable forms of the Greek text.)

Does this different Greek text make any difference? Most of the time the differences are small. The Byzantine text tradition generally includes many *additions and explanatory comments* that had been added by scribes who hand-copied the Greek manuscripts over the years between the 1st century and the 5th century AD. For example, often where the oldest and best manuscripts will say simply “Jesus,” the Byzantine text will say “the Lord Jesus Christ.” And in the book of Acts many little explanatory comments are added that some scribe thought would help the reader, such as (\*need example).

In a few places, the differences are significant, as in 1 John 5:7, which in the NKJV reads, “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.” This makes a nice verse to prove the Trinity, but the problem is that this wording is not in any early Greek manuscript and it is not what John wrote. It was a later addition by a well-meaning scribe. Other passages that are in the KJV and NKJV but not in the best Greek manuscripts are John 7:53 – 8:11 and Mark 16:9-20.\*

It is easy for any English reader of the NKJV to discover where all the differences are. In the margin of the NKJV, the translators have put a footnote that says “NU-Text reads [or omits, or adds] …” wherever the Greek manuscripts accepted by the majority of New Testament scholars today contain a different Greek word or phrase from the word or phrase that the NKJV is based on. (NU stands for “Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies,” which are the names of the publishers of the two most widely-accepted editions of the Greek New Testament today.)

The differences between the NKJV and all other modern English translations do not change any point of doctrine, and most of them are fairly minor, but they are still differences. In fact, the footnote that begins with “NU-Text …” is found 846 times in the NKJV. That is 846 times where the NKJV is not based on the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The NKJV stands alone among modern translations in its decision to use the *Textus Receptus* rather than the oldest and best Greek manuscripts (in my own judgment and in the judgment of 99% of New Testament experts today). All other modern English translations today (and, so far as I know, all other translations into all other modern languages) are based not on the *Textus Receptus,* but on the Greek text found in the two major published editions of the New Testament in Greek, the Nestle-Aland edition and the United Bible Societies edition. These represent the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts for each section of the New Testament, but they are not the basis for the New Testament in the NKJV.

1. See my detailed analysis of the NRSV in my 1997? ETS paper, “need title” and Internet access info) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Crossway Books made a one-time payment to the owner of the RSV copyright, the National Council of Churches of Christ, to obtain the rights to use the RSV as a basis for the ESV. No additional payment is ever due, and no funds from sales of ESV Bibles go to the National Council of Churches. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ESV Bible, Preface, p. vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., p. 10, italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Wayne Grudem, Leland Ryken, C. John Collins, Vern S. Poythress, and Bruce Winter, *Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid, pp. 10, 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. I discuss Eugene Nida’s translation theory on pp. 50-55 of *Translating Truth*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. need exact page number from *Christian Retailing*, date, page no. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Introduction to the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, p. vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Introduction,” *New Living Translation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1996), p. xli. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., p. xlii. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Someone might object that in today’s culture, “slept with his fathers” might suggest a homosexual relationship. But no reasonable reader will settle on that meaning, because David’s forefathers had been dead for decades, and the immediate context talks about David dying and being buried. The highly unlikely possibility of a foolish interpretation by a careless reader should not deter translators from making the most accurate translation possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The Translators to the Reader: The Original Preface of the King James Version of 1611 Revisited, edited by Erroll Rhodes and Liana Lupas (New York: American Bible Society, 1997), p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. I found this example of *menō* in 1 John and several other examples in this essay from an insightful booklet by Kevin D. Young, *Why Our Church Switched to the ESV* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. I got the idea of the proverbial sound of Proverbs 27:6 from DeYoung, *Why Our Church Switched to the ESV,* pp. 23-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. I found the example of “bones” in Psalm 35:10 in DeYoung, *Why Our Church Switched to the ESV,* pp. 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. I got the example of “breath” in Psalm 78:33 from DeYoung, *Why Our Church Switched to the ESV,* p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, gives the senses “one who acquires persons for use by others; slave-dealer, kidnapper” (p. 76). Liddell-Scott, Greek-English Lexicon (ninth edition with supplement; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), give the meanings, “slave-dealer” or “kidnapper,” and the corresponding verb *andrapodizō* means, “enslave, sell the free men . . . into slavery” (pp. 127-128). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. S. S. Bartchy, “Slavery,” in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (1988(, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 4:545. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. I got the idea for mentioning 1 Thessalonians 1:3 from Kevin DeYoung, *Why Our Church Switched to the ESV* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), pp. 12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The word “prodigal” is not actually found in the text of Luke 15:11-32 but is used as a common summary of the story, which just refers to the “younger son.”. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 3. The examples given under meaning for (b) “of people,” are all referring to male individuals such as Abraham or Moab. Sometimes the word can refer to a grandfather or great grandfather, but always (in singular) to a male individual. See also Kohler-Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), I, pp.1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See the detailed list of verses at [www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. “Summary of Collins Corpus Report,” available at [www.NIV-cbt.org](http://www.niv-cbt.org), p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), section 5.227, p. 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *An Evaluation of Gender Language in the 2011 Edition of the NIV Bible* (Louisville, KY: Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, n.d.), p. 17. (available at cbmw.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), pp. 304-318, especially the summaries of the studies by H. Scott Baldwin, “A Difficult Word: *Authenteō* in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas Köstenberger, Thomas Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 65–80 and 269–305, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence Structure in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church,* 81–103. Baldwin’s article provides a range of possible meanings for *authenteō*, and Köstenberger’s article argues from syntax to show that the verb cannot have a negative sense in this sentence structure. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, *An Evaluation of Gender Language in the 2011 Edition of the NIV Bible,* pp. 6-7 (found at www.cbmw.org). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=35565>. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. As the ESV has at Mark 1:40: “L*eprosy* was a term for several skin diseases; see Leviticus 13.” [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. I wish to thank Charlie Gibson of Covenant Seminary for figuring out how to search the NKJV database in Bible Works to perform a search on “NU-Text” in the notes to the NKJV, and then providing me with this count. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)