



What's the Best Bible Translation? And More Importantly, Why?

Description



This article won't be a quick read because it's an in-depth

treatment of the topic, not a gloss. Deciding on the best Bible translation to use is a very important decision, and we'll treat it as such. By the end of this article, you'll have a thorough understanding of everything you need to make an informed decision.

- We'll start by defining what makes a good Bible translation according to what **God Himself** said in the Bible. (*Most people overlook this part, and God does give His opinion indirectly*)
- Next, we'll talk about the different translation "styles" and what they mean
- Third, we'll take an in-depth look at the issue of gender in translation
- Fourth, we'll discuss how you can tell a good translation from a bad one
- Lastly, I'll do a short(*ish*) review of the most popular Bibles on the market

However, before we can answer the question of what Bible translation is best, there's another question we must answer first.

What Defines the "best" Bible Translation?

This is the most important question that almost no one ever asks. Before we can decide what translation is best, we must first know what we mean by “best”. I once had a fellow tell me he was looking for the “*least gender-neutral Bible possible*”. I also know people who wouldn’t read a non-gender-neutral Bible. That’s what defines best for them.

The real question is: “what is a good criteria for determining the best translation?”

That question is best answered by another question:

“Why do we care what the Bible says?”

It’s a good question, and an honest one from many people, especially unbelievers. Hopefully, most Christians care what the Bible says because the Bible records what God has said.

That’s certainly why I care.

If we’re going to live a life that’s pleasing to God, we need to know what kind of life God said is pleasing to Him.

This next bit will seem painfully obvious, but it’s also absolutely essential. Speech – the act of saying something – is accomplished using words. Yes this is obvious, but most people don’t stop to consider this. God designed us to use words to communicate with each other. Likewise – knowing that we have this limitation because He gave it to us – God uses words to communicate with us in the Bible.

And God is very particular about His words.

Deuteronomy 4:2

2 “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you

And few will forget the warning at the end of Revelation, which is in the same vein.

Revelation 22:18-19

18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;

19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

Remember this: adding or removing **words** from what God has written inspires His wrath. I would argue that changing what He has written is both adding and removing. That is, to change a word means to remove the original word and then add back a different word in its place. Therefore, adding and removing is bad, but changing *might* be even worse because technically you're both adding *and* subtracting.

God is very clear that we shouldn't add or subtract – which includes changing – the words that He inspired.

I've been emphasizing words on purpose.

If you scroll back and read those verses again, you'll see that God didn't say "*don't change what I said*". Obviously that idea is there, but that's not what God *actually* said. **God said not to change His words.**

Check those verses again.

God clearly says we shouldn't add or take away from His words.

That's important.

Based on what God Himself said, I would define the best Bible translation as the one that changes God's words the least in the translation process.

Obviously, it needs to be readable too, but if we want to align our priorities with God's priorities, then we must look at what God values first and foremost. God clearly places a high value on His words. As such, the best Bible translation should also.

This is so important to deciding which Bible translations are best (*and worst*) that we'll spend a bit more time to fully understand it. Without this foundational understanding, it's easy to get lost in the sea of options.

The Importance of Words

Let's say you're a detective on a case and one of your fellow officers takes a statement from an eyewitness who saw the whole crime being committed. You ask the officer for the witness's statement, and he gives you a brief summery of what the witness said.

Is that enough?

Would a paraphrase suffice? Or would you want the exact words that the witness used?

Let's consider an example in the legal sphere. Recently, a United States Supreme Court case was decided by the meaning of a single, one-letter word: the word "a". I'm not going to get political, but understanding how important a single word can be is *crucial* to understanding proper translation.

Essentially, the case revolved around what was a sufficient notice to appear in court according to a specific statute. The statute specified that the accused should be given “a notice to appear”. That should be all the context you need to make the point as it relates to Bible translation.

First, officials sent an incomplete notice of the charges against him; then, two months later, they provided the date and location of his hearing. Because these two notices, together, provided Niz-Chavez all the required information, the government argued, it could stop the clock and deny him an opportunity to contest his deportation.

On Thursday, the Supreme Court rejected this scheme by a 6–3 vote. Gorsuch’s majority opinion zeroed in on the text of a statute—specifically, the words ***a notice to appear***. To stop the clock, Gorsuch wrote, the government “must serve ‘a’ notice containing all the information Congress has specified.”

“To an ordinary reader,” Gorsuch explained, the phrase “ ‘a’ notice would seem to suggest just that: ‘a’ single document containing the required information, not a mishmash of pieces with some assembly required.”

[Source.](#)

Notice the importance of a single word in this case. And such a small word too: “a”. Small things matter in law. If the Bible is the “law” for how Christians should live their lives, why would the **words** be less important? Perhaps that’s why Jesus said:

Matthew 5:18

18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, **not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter shall pass** from the Law, until all is accomplished

The KJV renders it “jot and tittle”, and [“Got questions?” has an excellent – and short – article on what that means](#). The point is that the smallest things can have the largest impact. This is just as true in a Bible translation as it is in a court case; arguably more.

The **words** matter.

Perhaps that’s why God was clear that we shouldn’t change His **words**.

Consider another example.

When we read a book, we assume that we’re reading the **words** penned by the original author. If you wrote something, how angry would you be if someone took the **words** you wrote and changed them?

Consider Lincoln’s famous introduction to the Gettysburg address. What if someone changed it from the original:

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation,

conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

to this:

“Eighty-seven years ago, our ancestors created a nation here with the idea that all people should be free and equal.”

No one would ever say the second quote is Lincoln’s *actual* Gettysburg address because they aren’t **his words**; they are **someone else’s words**. Yes, they (*sort of*) mean the same thing, but to quote my wife: “*It’s the same information, but it comes across quite differently.*” She’s 100% correct.

That’s because the **words** are different.

One last example to drive the point home.

Consider the works of the greatest and most renowned English playwright: William Shakespeare. What if someone took the famous “to be or not to be” speech from Hamlet:

To be, or not to be—that is the question:
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles.

And re-worded it to this:

To be, or not to be; that is what really matters.
Is it nobler to accept passively
the trials and tribulations that unjust fate sends,
or to resist an ocean of troubles.

(Hamlet, a parallel text edition, by John Richetti (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 125.)

Does it say the same thing?

Sort of, but it **completely misses** the style and force of the original. At best, it’s a watered-down version. At worst, it’s a perversion of the author’s **words**. **If someone tried to present the watered-down version as authentic Shakespeare, he would be laughed out of every single literary club in the world.**

Every.

Single.

One.

Here's the important part: If someone wanted to do a deep study of Hamlet, would the watered down version be of any use at all?

No, because it's not the author's words.

Is God less concerned about His own words? (*You know, the ones He commanded us not to change*) In my mind, this is the criteria that God (*indirectly*) set forth for Bible translators:

The best Bible translation is the one that changes God's words the least in the translation process.

Based on what we've already looked at, I think that definition is in line with God's priorities. We should always be striving to align our priorities with the priorities of the almighty, all-powerful, all-wise, and eternal God.

With that in mind, we'll turn to a discussion of the two major competing "styles" of translation.

Translation "styles"

If you ask almost anyone, there are two basic styles of translation. It's typically explained the following way (*not that I necessarily agree*) The two styles are often called "Formal Equivalence" or "word-for-word", and "Dynamic Equivalence" or "thought-for-thought".

Formal equivalence, or complete equivalence, is also known as literal translation, or a word-for-word translation. **The idea behind formal equivalence is to render the text in the same form as the original.** This can also mean using the same word order as the original language. **With formal equivalence each word of the original language is represented by a word in the target or receptor language.**

[Source.](#)

Dynamic equivalence is a method of Bible translation that seeks to reproduce the original text of Scripture using modern language and expression to communicate the message of the Bible. In translating a verse, dynamic equivalent translation **is less concerned with providing an exact English word for each word of the original text as it is with communicating the basic message of that verse.**

[Source.](#)

Now, consider those two translation styles in light of what we just talked about. Think about it.

Please *really* think about it.

I'll wait.

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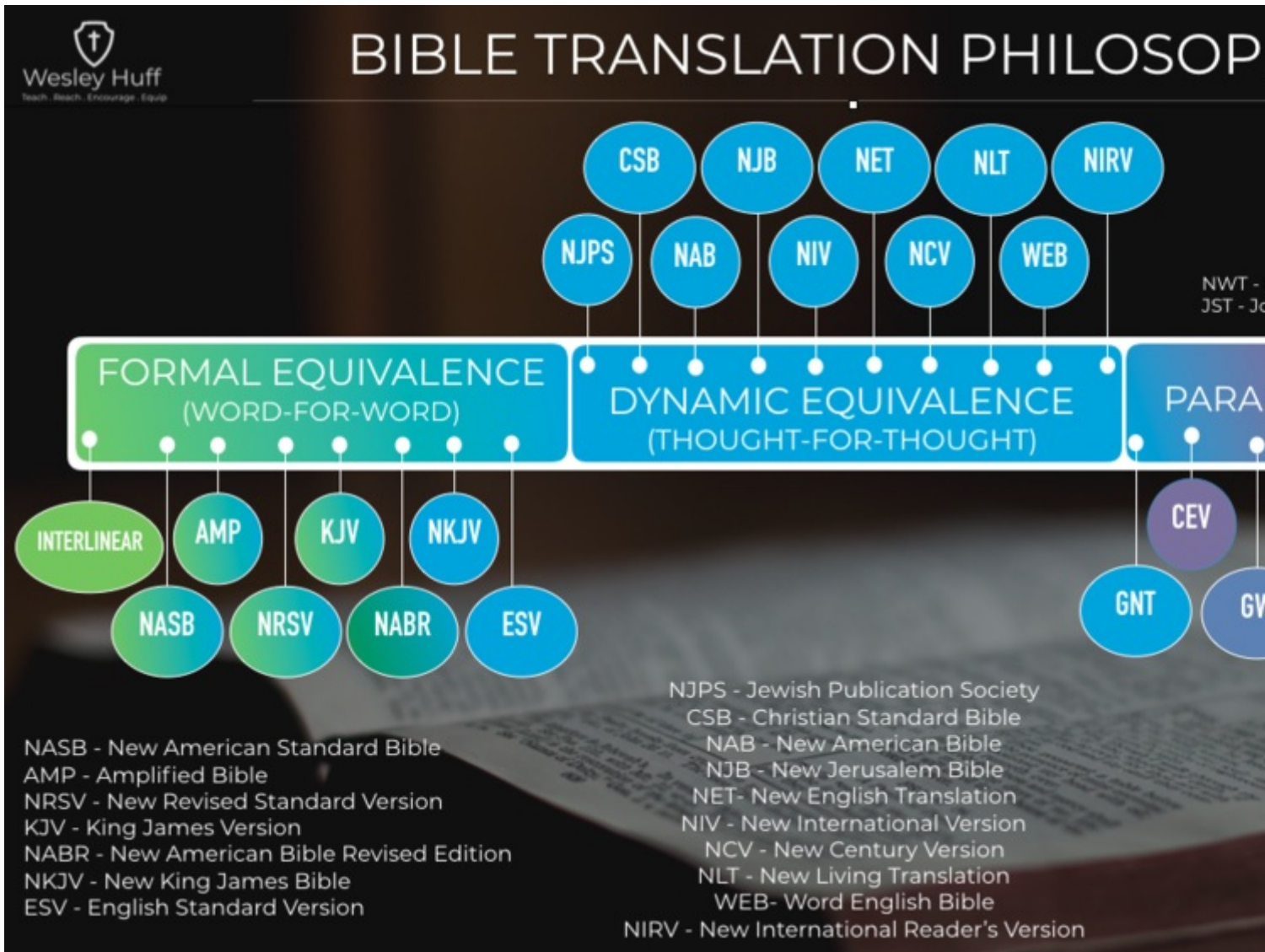
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Which translation "style" seems more in-line with God's command not to change His words?

You see the point.

Now, it should be noted that there isn't a hard line between literal (*word-for-word*) and "dynamic" (*thought-for-thought*). It's more of a spectrum than a hard line. Here's one image that shows this reasonably well. It's mostly correct, though I would say the NKJV is far more literal than they give it credit.

Please notice the divisions too.



[Image source.](#)

Now, while I agree that there is a spectrum of literalism, I would draw the line in a very different place than the image does. I would put everything in the “Dynamic Equivalence” section under “paraphrase”. While some of the “dynamic equivalence” translations don’t *always* paraphrase, they certainly paraphrase a lot.

Here’s an example, and you can double-check the literalness by looking at [Luke 9:44 in an interlinear Bible](#):

Luke 9:44

NIV: “Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.”

NASB '95: “Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.”

In the first half of the verse, the NIV paraphrases Jesus' words while the NASB '95 accurately translates His words. Notice that the NIV does accurately translate the second half of the verse. However, it gets no points for that because it paraphrased the first half.

Also, notice the stylistic difference.

Notice how it *sounds*.

It hearkens back to the example of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Shakespeare's Hamlet. While they do have the same basic meaning, the more literal one hits your ears differently. The phrase “*Let these words sink into your ears*” has a certain force that “*Listen carefully*” simply doesn't have.

Think about it for a moment.

Seriously, please do.

...

...

That's the difference between God's words and man's words; the difference between a literal and a paraphrase.

Many – perhaps most – would argue that there's a difference between “Dynamic Equivalence” and “paraphrase”. I disagree. In fact, I'd argue that there's really only one translation “style”, and deviation from that style is actually veering into paraphrase.

Here's [the definition of 'paraphrase' from the Cambridge English Dictionary](#):

to repeat something written or spoken using different words, often in a humorous form or in a simpler and shorter form that makes the original meaning clearer

Now consider, does exchanging the phrase “*Let these words sink into your ears*” for the phrase “*Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you*” fit the definition of repeating “*something written or spoken using different words*”? If so, then **by definition** it's a paraphrase.

Remember what God said about his **words**?

I realize that I'm beating this point to death, but that's because it's important.

Make no mistake, the Dynamic Equivalence/thought-for-thought approach isn't merely a different translation "style"; it's a paraphrase. It may be a more literal paraphrase (*NIV*) or a less literal paraphrase (*NLT*). However, they are all paraphrases and thus are only a human rewording of God's actual **words**. If you are happy with a paraphrase, then this article won't help you.

I'm serious.

If you are happy with a paraphrase, then you can stop reading this article now because it will be useless to you, and might offend you.

I care about **God's words** when I read the Bible; not man's words. There's no shortage of good books written by men that are worth reading, but that's not why I pick up the Bible. I pick up the Bible to read **God's words**, not man's words. A paraphrase is an "editorialized" version of the Bible, not a translation. It's a version filtered through human "editors" who have imprinted their own ideas into the sacred text.

Therefore, just as the watered-down version of Hamlet would be laughed at by Shakespeare scholars, so also a paraphrased Bible has no place in any serious theological or doctrinal discussion because **a paraphrase "translation" isn't God's words; it's a mere human paraphrase, and thus it's man's words.**

Men can have great thoughts, but they aren't God's thoughts.

I enjoy Bible commentary too; I love hearing a good perspective on God's words. But in the actual text of the Bible, it should be God's words, and **only** God's words. God Himself said this when He commanded us not to add or take away from His **words**.

When I pick up the Bible, I want to read God's words, not man's.

That leads to a major problem with the Dynamic Equivalence/thought-for-thought Bible ~~translations~~ paraphrases.

The biggest problem with paraphrase "translations"

Arguably the biggest problem with the "Dynamic Equivalence" or "thought-for-thought" translations (*i.e. a paraphrase*) is that they assume they know the author's original intent. That idea is explicitly contained in the phrase "thought-for-thought".

However, this blatantly contradicts scripture.

Isaiah 55:9

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts *higher* than your thoughts

Further, it's also written:

1 Corinthians 2:11

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so **no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.**

If we accept that God inspired the Bible, then we must accept that God's thoughts are higher than ours and only He knows them.

Wouldn't that make the idea of a "thought-for-thought" translation problematic?

Despite this obvious problem, there's another one that's arguably more serious.

To Translate, or Interpret?

As I just said, Biblical commentaries can be wonderful. But the actual text should only be God's words, just as He Himself commanded. One of the worst things that all Bible paraphrases do is include in translation what should be left to commentary.

Here are a few examples of paraphrase "translations" (*which includes the so-called dynamic/thought-for-thought "translations"*) inaccurately rendering words this way.

Matthew 7:13 ([double-check in an interlinear](#))

NLT: "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. **The highway to hell is broad**, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way.

NASB '95: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and **the way is broad that leads to destruction**, and there are many who enter through it.

The NLT ~~mistranslates~~ removes the Greek word "???????" ([apóleia](#)) which literally means "destruction" or "ruin" and ~~translates~~ adds the word "hell". That's just plain wrong. Certainly the implication is there, but remember we aren't supposed to change God's **words**. Jesus could've said "???????" ([gehenna](#) – *the word that's usually translated as "hell"*) but He didn't.

Translators should respect God's word choice, just as He commanded.

You can even argue that going to "gehenna" is what Jesus was pointing to (*which is possible from the context*), but we still need to be obedient and not change God's **words**.

Another example:

Romans 2:4 ([double-check in an interlinear](#))

NIV: Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, **not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?**

NASB '95: Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, **not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?**

Here the NIV just plain old adds to God's words. The NASB '95 has a simple declarative statement just like the Greek. However, the NIV (*and many other paraphrases*) change this to make it sound like God's kindness merely "can" lead you to repentance. (*The ESV does the same*)

Hebrews 6:1 ([double-check in an interlinear](#))

NIV: Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from **acts that lead to death**, and of faith in God,

NASB: Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from **dead works** and of faith toward God,

The change here should be obvious. The NIV changes the meaning of the word "dead" to apply to us instead of the works. Instead of saying that the works themselves are dead, the NIV changed things to say they lead to our death.

That's a very different statement.

I could go on for some time, but I think you get the point.

I have yet to see a paraphrase that can resist this temptation. Again, God's thoughts are higher than ours and no one knows His thoughts except Him. Therefore, we should focus on what he has given us: His words.

The Problem of Idioms

Now, despite everything I've said about being faithful to God's words, there is one place – and only one place – where being faithful to God's words takes on a slightly different form: idioms. According to [the Cambridge dictionary](#), an idiom is:

a group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the

meanings of each word on its own:

- To “have bitten off more than you can chew” is an idiom that means you have tried to do something which is too difficult for you.

Now, this is an obvious idiom with an obvious meaning to a native English speaker in the west. But it wouldn't be obvious to everyone. To drive the point home, I found [an article with idioms from other languages](#).

Click/tap the idiom to expand the meaning. Try to guess as many as you can.

- **'I took him to the bakery.'**
I told him off. (*Icelandic*)
- **'While diving, drink water.'**
Accomplish two things at once. (*Indonesian*)
- **'A lot of noise and no walnuts.'**
All talk and no action. (*Spanish*)
- **'Greedy eyes, full stomach.'**
To bite off more than you can chew. (*Cantonese*)
- **'Give the bread to the baker.'**
Don't give someone a task they can't do. (*Arabic*)

Now imagine that Jesus or Paul was teaching and said something like this:

Now, to the elders concerning the immature, I say “don't give bread to the baker”, and if they do I will take them to the bakery.

Do you see the problem with translating idioms literally? There's no way anyone reading that hypothetical passage would know the correct meaning without understanding the idioms. Jesus's own disciples had this problem and they knew the language!

Matthew 16:5-7

5 And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread.

6 And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

7 They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, “**He said that because we did not bring any bread.**”

(*Jesus explains Himself and they finally get it by verse 12*)

Translating the Bible literally means taking a word in the original language and picking the word (or words) in the receptor language that best fits the definition of the original word. When translating idioms, this works the same except with a **phrase** instead of a word.

Because idioms are **phrases** that **cannot** be separated without changing the meaning, **sometimes** they must be translated as a phrase, not individual words

“But isn’t that changing God’s words?”

Yes, and no. While technically God did say “don’t give bread to the baker” in our example, the definition of that particular phrase is actually different than the sum of the words that compose it. That specific phrase doesn’t mean to take some mixture of baked flour and other ingredients and give it to someone whose profession is baking bread. It means “Don’t give someone a task they can’t do.”

Translating it as the former actually conceals God’s words because the phrase means something **different** than the sum of the words. Thus, sometimes idioms can’t be translated “word-for-word”, but must be translated “phrase-for-phrase” instead.

These examples are fortunately very rare though.

Partially because of this, **it’s acceptable to translate some idioms in a non-literal way if – and only if – a literal translation would have a **different** meaning than the words that compose it.** That is, to translate them according to the meaning of the idiom instead of the words that compose the idiom.

Going back to our previous example:

Literal idioms: Now, to the elders concerning the immature I say “don’t give bread to the baker”, and if they do I will take them to the bakery.

Translated Idioms: Now, to the elders concerning the immature I say “Don’t give someone a task they can’t do”, and if they do I will tell them off.

The first one simply doesn’t accurately represent God’s words because **while the words are accurately and literally translated, the phrase as a whole isn’t.** Now, *nearly all* Biblical idioms can be translated literally without problem... *nearly*. There are relatively few that can’t be, but getting them wrong can cause significant problems.

(I know of one – which we don’t have space to get into – around which many churches/denominations have built a whole theology. They’ve even excluded some true Christians from certain areas of ministry because they didn’t know there was an idiom.)

Sentence Structure

Neither Greek nor Hebrew has the same grammar rules that English does. Because of this, some re-arranging of the words in a sentence is almost always necessary to make sense of it. For example,

here's [John 3:16 with the original Greek word order](#) and no English "linking words" (*like "of", "to" etc.*)

Thus for loved the God the world, so that the Son, the only-begotten, gave, that every the believing into Him not might perish, but might have life eternal.

As you can see, the order of the words needs to be changed to be readable in English. **Don't let this bother you.** God is very particular about His words, but the word order rules are different between languages. It's a bonus when a translation uses the original word order when possible/readable, but don't worry if they don't.

Added Words

Sometimes, Hebrew or Greek will imply words without stating them. In order to make a verse make sense, the translators must supply the implied words. However, the best translations will *italicize* these added words to let the reader know they are implied.

Here's an example where I've also made the added/*italicized* words **red**.

Matthew 1:24

24 And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary as* his wife,

Saying "and took his wife" might make sense in Greek, but not in English. In English, it sounds like they were already married, but that's not the sense from the Greek. However, "took *Mary as* his wife" does make sense and is clearly implied. Sometimes the translators go too far and veer into interpretation, but at least when the words are *italicized* you can tell what God said vs. what man thought that God implied.

This is a good feature.

Readability

For everything good about literally translated Bibles, they often have one great weakness: Readability. Because they are committed to literal, word-for-word accuracy, and because English has different grammar rules, literal translations are often a bit harder to read.

For everything wrong with the paraphrase Bibles, they do have one great strength: readability. Because they don't worry about being faithful to the original words, they have great freedom to write in very good English. Almost universally, paraphrase Bibles are easier to read and thus are probably read more often.

That's a bad thing.

Seriously.

The trouble is that people are more likely to read a poor translation that's easy to read than a good translation that's a bit harder to read. Again, that's bad. We don't have space to get into the specifics, but **this is a poison pill for the church**. While more Christians might read their Bibles, the theology present in **all** paraphrase translations (*that I've seen*) will ultimately weaken the church, not strengthen it.

We're seeing that now.

The church in the west these days is both impotent and almost irrelevant because it's so weak. I can make a good argument that watered-down translations played a very significant role in this. (*though again, there's not space for that in this article.*)

Readability is a good thing, but not at the expense of sacrificing **God's words** for **man's words**.

Unfortunately, the good, accurate, and literal translations are harder to read than the paraphrase ones. Until someone translates a literal and accurate Bible that's also easy to read, we might need to put a bit more effort into reading the Bible if we actually want God's words, not man's words.

It's unfortunate, but true.

(*I'm working on a solution to that; more details at the end of the article.*)

Textual Basis

Both the Old and New Testaments each have two possible options to translate from. The Old Testament is much easier to solve, as the differences mostly come from extra books. I have a whole article on this entitled [The Bible: 66 books vs 73 and Why \(the "Apocrypha" Explained\)](#). Spoiler alert; it should be 66 books, as all Protestant Bibles have.

Almost every non-Catholic Bible translates the Old Testament from the same Hebrew text. So as long as you're looking at a Bible with 39 books in the Old Testament (*66 total*), you're good to go. If it has more books, it'll almost always have "Catholic Edition" in the title.

The New Testament is more complicated.

In fact, I have a whole article on that topic entitled [Majority Text vs. Critical Text vs. Textus Receptus – Textual Criticism 101](#). (*"Textual Criticism" is the art of reconstructing a lost manuscript from multiple surviving copies of the original manuscript.*) There are essentially three major competing theories, but one is so dominant that all but 2 two modern Bibles use the dominant theory.

The two translations that don't are the KJV and NKJV, which are translated from a slightly different Greek text. We won't wade into the discussion of which is better here, as I already spent 18k words

unpacking that in [my Article on Textual Criticism](#). You'll notice the KJV and NKJV have some verses that all other translations don't. Some definitely belong, others probably not. It's a complicated issue, so please see my article on Textual Criticism if you want to learn more.

Long story short: either textual basis is acceptable because there are good arguments for both and the differences are small.

Don't snub **any** translation because of the textual basis. While there are differences, again most of them are small. Basically every other modern translation except the KJV/NKJV is based on the same Greek text, so it's truly "apples to apples" there.

The "Most Updated Manuscripts" Fallacy

One important thing:

When it comes to the New Testament, some people prefer "newer" translations because they think the translators have access to the "most updated manuscripts" and thus are the most accurate.

They don't know it, but the older and newer versions are virtually identical.

Let me explain.

The text from which nearly all modern New Testaments are translated is the Nestle-Aland "Novum Testamentum Graece" ("*New Testament in Greek*"). It was first published in 1898 and was primarily based on Westcott & Hort's 1881 Greek New Testament. It's been updated through the years, and now is in its 28th edition (*the "NA28"*).

They haven't changed much at all in 130 years.

None of the currently popular hand-editions of the Greek NT takes us beyond Westcott-Hort **in any substantive way** as far as textual character is concerned.

...

The thing to see is that **the text of 100 years ago** (i.e., in 1980, the text of 1881, Hort's compilation) **is barely different from the text being published as the 28th edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece*.**

[Source.](#)

There were only 34 changes between the 27th edition and 28th edition. Changes between other versions have been larger, but nothing particularly substantive as the quotes indicate. Also, the changes were already marked as possible readings in the previous editions. These aren't "new readings".

Further, the changes are almost without exception quite minor. **Many of the variants are so small they can't even be translated into English**

(like word order changes). Seriously, many are that small. Most of the rest have little or no effect on meaning. Suffice it to say the differences between the older and newer Greek New Testaments are so small, that they are **completely subsumed** by the quality of translation.

So don't worry about the tiny differences.

Don't worry at all.

The "based on newer manuscripts" fallacy is basically marketing fluff.

The Question of Gender

There is a huge debate raging in the Church today about how to handle gender in translation. The basic question is this:

When the Bible uses a masculine pronoun or word in a context that could refer to both men and women, should it be translated in a gender-neutral way?

That question makes an assumption that colors the debate, but we'll get to that later. This debate usually centers around the translation of several words, which we'll look at in detail.

"Anthrópos" & "adam" = "Man" or "Human/Person"

There are two analogous words – one in Hebrew and one in Greek – that are at the forefront of this debate.

The Hebrew word is "?????" ([adam](#)), which is the 'normal' noun form of the proper noun "Adam", the name of the first man. (Yes, *the first man's name was essentially "man"*) Here is the definition, which is shared by every lexicon I've seen.

Definition: man, mankind

The Greek word is "?????????" ([anthrópos](#)) which means "man", exactly like the English word "man" and also like the Hebrew word "adam" that we just looked at. It can refer to a specific man as in "he's a man" or to the human race in general, as in "man knows not his time".

444 *ánthr?pos* – *man*, also the generic term for "*mankind*"; the human race; *people*, including *women and men*

[444 /*ánthr?pos* ("man") answers to the Hebrew term, *?adam* – and 435 (*an?r*) answers to the Hebrew term *?ish*.

Here's an example of both words translated according to the two different positions.

Proverbs 27:17 (*adam = Hebrew/OT*)

NIV: As iron sharpens iron, so one **person** sharpens another.

NASB '95: Iron sharpens iron, So one **man** sharpens another.

Matthew 4:19 (*anthrōpos= Greek/NT*)

NASB 2020: And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of **people**."

NASB '95: And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of **men**."

That is the controversy.

Now, most people don't realize this, but God has already weighed in on this debate.

In His infinite wisdom, He apparently foresaw this becoming contentious and included a passage in the Bible that gives us His opinion. (*He's good that way. ?*)

God's Opinion on "man" vs "human/person"

In this debate, I've never heard anyone weigh in on God's opinion, which He actually gave us way back in Genesis.

Genesis 5:1-2

1 This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created **man**, He made him in the likeness of God.

2 He created them **male and female**, and He blessed them and **named them Man** in the day when **they** were created.

The Hebrew word there translated "man" in both verses 1 and 2 is "?????" ([adam](#)), which which we've just talked about. It's used over a dozen times in Genesis chapter 2 to refer to Adam, the first man.

Notice: God "created **them** male and female" and then "**named them man**".

God named "them" – which means both men and women – He named "them" "man".

That's what God Himself did.

Therefore, **the proper name of our race – given to us by God Himself – is "man"**. The name "man" –

which includes both human males and human females when used in a general way – was God’s choice. As our creator, He has the right to name us, and He named us “man”.

Therefore, translating it “fishers of men” shows respect to God’s choice in naming *His creation*, and being obedient by not changing God’s **words**. Translating it “fishers of people” or something similar isn’t respecting God. It’s ignoring the name that *God Himself* gave to our race, and also disobeying God’s command not to change His **words**.

If you don’t like the name that God gave us, please complain to Him, not me. (*And perhaps read Romans 9:20*)

God Himself named our race “man”.

Therefore, to rename it as “human” or “person” in the Bible is changing God’s **words**. You’re essentially saying that either God made a poor choice that you must “fix”, or that you don’t care what God named us; you’ll use whatever name you want.

Neither position is safe before God.

Besides, there is a Greek word that means “human”.

It’s true.

It’s the word “?????????” ([anthrópinos](#)) and it literally means “human”. It doesn’t mean “man”, it means “human”.

Definition: human

Usage: belonging to human beings (especially as contrasted with God), human (as contrasted with divine).

It’s not used often in the New Testament – only 7 times – but it **is** used. God certainly could have chosen to inspire the men who wrote the New Testament to use anthrópinos (*human*), but God chose to have them use anthrópos (*man*) instead. Again, that’s probably because God Himself named our race “man”.

And again, we shouldn’t change God’s words.

EDIT: A woman left a comment saying that this masculine focus seems to be a rejection of women, leaving them out and making everything about men. I completely understand why it looks that way at first glance, but nothing could be farther from the truth. ? In fact, **this is actually good news for women.** (*No joke.*) I wrote an article detailing why, and I recommend reading it if the gendered language bothers you. Link here: [How Crucial are Women to a Biblical Household? Very!](#)

Jesus and Gendered Pronouns

This is often missed. We'll look at a passage where Jesus is speaking to a single woman with no other males present and yet uses masculine pronouns in a general way anyway. In fact, the scripture is very clear that there were only two people involved in this conversation: Jesus and the woman.

John 4:7-8 and 13-14 (*The woman at the well*)

7 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."

8 For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

...

13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again;

14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

Jesus and this woman were alone with no one else present, and yet Jesus *still* used masculine pronouns when speaking to a woman. You can double-check [John 4:14 in an interlinear Bible](#) if you like. Therefore, it seems that God's choice of masculine pronouns was intentional.

Since God intentionally used masculine pronouns here when He was only speaking to a woman, then why wouldn't it be intentional everywhere else too?

God is very particular about His **words**. Even when we don't understand why – *especially* when we don't understand why – we should respect His word choice and obey His command not to change His **words**.

"But we don't talk that way anymore."

One of the most common arguments for translating *anthrōpos* and *adam* as human/people goes like this:

Among other things, for instance, the study showed that, between 1990 and 2009, instances of masculine generic pronouns and determiners, expressed as a percentage of total generic pronoun usage in general written English, fell from 22% to 8%. In other words, most English speakers today no longer say "If anyone wants to see me, he should make an appointment." The pronoun "he" has become strongly masculine rather than generic. People today say, rather, "If anyone wants to see me, they should make an appointment."

The CBT has followed these guidelines to make clear when the Biblical text is referring to both men and women.

[Source.](#)

However, man has never spoken the way that God speaks. Never. Nor can we, as it is written:

Isaiah 55:9

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So **My are ways higher than your ways And My thoughts *higher* than your thoughts.**

God inspired the Biblical authors to write “man” (*anthrōpos/adam*). Further, He could’ve inspired “human” (*anthrōpinos*) instead, at least in the New Testament. No argument will change this fact. God’s thoughts are higher than ours, therefore we should respect His decision.

Even more important than respecting God’s decision is obeying His explicit commands. He explicitly commanded us not to change His **words**. I don’t think I need to remind you of God’s opinion of rebellion.

“Brothers” or “Brothers and sisters”

Another significant word on the gender battleground is the translation of the Greek word “???????” ([adelphos](#)), and especially its plural form “???????” (*adelphoi*). It’s the Greek word that means “brother”, but some say that in the plural form “adelphoi” it can mean “brothers and sisters”.

However, the definition according to every lexicon I’ve seen is “brother”. Even in the plural form, it still means “brothers”, not “brothers and sisters”. You can double-check the lexicon entry for adelphos/adelfhoi with the link above. All say “brother/brothers”, none say “brothers and sisters”.

All of them.

All without exception.

In order to present the discussion fairly, I’m going to quote from someone who believes that adelpoi – the plural form – can be translated as “brothers and sisters”. To be clear: **this following quote is incorrect in it’s treatment of Greek** – it’s flat-out wrong – which I’ll prove in a moment. I’m only quoting it so you can see the other side of the argument, because again the following quote is **incorrect**.

I minister full-time in Spanish, and here it helps me to understand the Greek. **The Spanish hermano means “brother”, while hermana, with the feminine ending, means “sister”. But hermanos, plural, is generic. As in the Greek, the Spanish plural can refer to “male siblings only” or it could refer to “siblings.”** So in Spanish, if someone asks me, “Do you have any

hermanos?” the proper response in my case would be “Yes, I have two brothers. I have one brother and one sister.” But in English, if someone asks me, “Do you have any brothers?” my response would be to tell you how many male siblings I have: “Yes, I have one brother.” And maybe I would add: “Oh, and I also have a sister.” Do you see the difference? If I ask you if you have brothers and you start in by saying, “Yes, I have three sisters,” then **it should be evident to all that the English doesn't work the same way as the Greek does.**

So, the plural adelphoi in Greek can mean “male siblings” or “siblings,” depending on the context. **Since Paul addresses male and female adelphoi in his letters, then a perfectly proper and literal translation in English is siblings or, less clunkily, brothers and sisters.**

[Source.](#)

Again, while his understanding of Spanish is perfect, **that quote's understanding of Greek is 100% incorrect.** No lexicon that I've seen offers “brothers and sisters” for the plural of adelphos, which is “adelphoi”.

None.

Further, there is a Greek word that means “sister”. It's the word “???????” ([adelphé](#)) and one of its plural forms is used with the plural form of adelphos several times. Since the plural forms are used together, it makes zero sense to say that adelphoi means “siblings” instead of “brothers”.

(Note: unlike English, Greek nouns have multiple plural forms. For simplicity and clarity, I will use the Nominative (subject case) plurals “adelphoi” for “brothers”, and “adelphai” for “sisters” in the verses below.)

Matthew 19:29

And everyone who has left houses or **brothers (adelphoi) or sisters (adelphai)** or father or mother or children or farms on account of My name, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.

Mark 10:29-30

29 Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or **brothers (adelphoi) or sisters (adelphai)** or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake,

30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and **brothers (adelphoi) and sisters (adelphai)** and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

Luke 14:26

“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children

and **brothers (*adelphoi*) and sisters (*adelphai*)**, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

Notice, the plural *adelphoi* (*brothers*) is paired with the plural *adelphai* (*sisters*). If *adelphoi* means “siblings”, then why would it be paired with *adelphai* (*sisters*)? Additionally, no lexicon I’ve seen has “brothers and sisters” as a definition for the plural *adelphoi*.

There’s good reason to think that when the Bible says “brothers”, it actually means brothers (men).

We’ll look at those verses in a moment, but some context is needed first. We looked at *anthrōpos* which means “man”, but there’s another Greek word that means “male”. That word is “????” ([anér](#)) and it only means a male, and never refers to any female. Ever.

Thayer’s Greek Lexicon:

1. **with a reference to sex**, and so to distinguish a man from a woman; either a. **as a male** : Acts 8:12; Acts 17:12; 1 Timothy 2:12; or b. **as a husband**:

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance:

A primary word (compare *anthropos*); **a man (properly as an individual male)** — fellow, husband, man, sir.

Now, this is important because sometimes God uses language in the Bible that is clearly and specifically directed at men, even when women are present. Specifically, in the following passages, *anér* – which refers only to males – is used when we know women are present.

However, most translations obscure this fact, though the LSB, NKJV, and KJV don’t. (*And feel free to double-check it by looking at [Acts 1 in an interlinear Bible](#).*)

Acts 1:13-16 (LSB)

13 And when they had entered *the city*, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas *the son* of James.

14 **These all with one accord were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus**, and His brothers.

15 And in those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers (a crowd of about 120 persons was there together), and said,

16 “**Men (anér), brothers (adelphoi)**, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

Notice, verse 14 specifically says the women were present, but Peter only addressed the “men” (*anér = male, there in the plural form “andres”*). However, many paraphrase translations intentionally obscure this fact. Here’s the NIV’s rendering:

Acts 1:16 – NIV

and said, “**Brothers and sisters**, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.

They dropped the word *anér (male)* and mistranslated “adelphoi” as “brothers and sisters” to make it gender inclusive.

They changed God’s words.

This verse isn’t the only place either. This same “men, brothers” construction is also used in Acts 2:29, Acts 6:3, Acts 13:26, Acts, 13:38, Acts 15:7, and Acts 15:13; though without specifically saying that women are present. (*Unfortunately, most translations drop “men”, even the good ones.*)

Several times, Jesus uses both *adelphoi (brothers)* and *adelphai (sisters)*, indicating that “adelphoi” (*brothers*) isn’t generic. Plus Acts 1:16 seems conclusive proof that *adelphoi (brothers)* should be translated “brothers”, not “brothers and sisters”. Plus, no lexicon that I’ve seen has “brothers and sisters” as a possible translation for *adelphoi*.

Therefore, “adelphoi” means “brothers”, not “brothers and sisters”.

A fairly important side note:

To open with an example, **the epistles were written for modern Christians, but not addressed to modern Christians**. Ephesians was addressed to the church in Ephesus, Colossians to the church at Colossae, etc. They were obviously intended for all Christians for all time, but they were only addressed to a specific group of Christians.

It's the same with gender in the Bible.

You can read the relevant section of my article: [The Biggest Mistakes Most People Make When Studying the Bible](#) for the evidence – and there's a lot of evidence for this – but here's the conclusion: **The Bible is addressed to men; it was written for both men and women, but it isn't addressed to women; it's addressed to men, and this is for the benefit of women**. No, I'm not joking, especially about that last part. The evidence is very strong, and see the link above if you want to examine it. If you want to see why this benefits women, please see my article: [How Crucial are Women to a Biblical Household? Very!](#)

There are exceptions of course, and the Bible does address women directly in rare cases. However, those are only a handful of verses and quite rare, even in the New Testament.

Here's the important part:

If you don't understand that the Bible is written to men (*it's for both men and women, but to men*), you are liable to misinterpret many passages.

I give some examples in my article: [The Biggest Mistakes Most People Make When Studying the Bible](#), so we won't look at them here. However, one of them does touch on translation, and I didn't cover it in that article.

We'll look at that next.

“Sons of Israel” vs “people of Israel”

I feel like we're beating this gender issue to death, but there's a reason for that. Any translation that is willing to alter the gender of a word is – by definition – changing God's **words**. Another place this often happens is with the common Old Testament phrase “sons of Israel” being changed to the more gender-inclusive “people of Israel”.

- The Hebrew word for “son” is “????” ([ben](#)), which means “son/sons”. It doesn't have “people” as a possible definition.
- The Hebrew word for “people” is “????” ([am](#)), which means “people” and nothing else. It's worth noting that it's used 1800+ times in the Old testament and usually refers to the people of Israel.

Here are both words used in the same verse, with examples of both mistranslation (*ESV*) and accurate translation (*NASB '95*).

Exodus 12:27

ESV: you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over **the houses of the people (ben) of Israel** in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the **people (am)** bowed their heads and worshiped.

NASB '95: you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over **the houses of the sons (ben) of Israel** in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'" And the **people (am)** bowed low and worshiped.

This verse is just one of many examples where unfaithful translators have changed God's **words** to suit their preferences. The Hebrew words "ben" (*son*) and "am" (*people*) are different words and thus should be translated according to their meaning, thus respecting the words that God Himself chose to use.

Most translations don't.

Most translations show no reverence nor fear of God when they change His words like this.

This gender change might seem like a small thing, but it's an indication of larger problems present within every single translation that uses more "gender neutral" language: they NEVER stop at gender, they always change other things too. (even the *ESV*, which we'll talk about in detail further down.)

If a translation isn't concerned about accurately translating God's words, I'm not interested.

(Note: the word "ben" in certain rare cases can mean "children", possibly of both genders. Because it's a possible – though rare – usage, a translation that uses "children of Israel" might not be changing God's words. It's not the ideal translation, but it's not blatantly changing God's words either.)

As a side note, part of the reason this matters is because the phrase "sons of ____" is used all over the Old and New Testaments. So for example, the "sons of Israel" are the (*male*) Israelites, the "sons of Ammon" are the (*male*) Ammonites, etc. **So when Jesus calls the Pharisees the "sons of those who murdered the prophets" in Matthew 23:31, He means...** Or how about the phrase "the sons of disobedience" used in Ephesians 2:2 and Colossians 3:6?

Do you see the point?

Do you see why literal translation matters so much?

Those are only two examples of connections that a Christian would never make without a literally translated Bible. The Bible is like a genius composer's masterpiece, balancing a thousand different elements at once and orchestrating them into a harmonious whole. And like a brilliant musical composition, changing a single note (*word*) can have repercussions for the entire piece.

We shouldn't change God's words.

Ever.

3rd Person Verbs, The Definite Article, and Gender

One accurate criticism leveled against translations that use the original Greek genders is that they sometimes insert male pronouns where they aren't original. This is partly true and partly untrue. We'll look at a passage in a literal translation that does it both correctly and incorrectly in the same few verses.

Romans 12:6-8

6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of **his** faith;

7 if service, in **his** serving; or **he** who teaches, in his teaching;

8 or **he** who exhorts, in his exhortation; **he** who gives, with liberality; **he** who leads, with diligence; **he** who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Now, the two instances of "his" are incorrect insertions of masculine pronouns, while the 5 instances of "he" are correct.

Let me explain.

In Greek, verbs have "person". However, while English has "person", we don't have it in verbs. In English we have:

- "I" which is first Person
- "You" which is second person
- "He/she/it" which are third person

Greek verbs have this feature in them, unlike English verbs which don't. In English, we must add another word to indicate "person". For example, you would say:

- "I run" in first person
- "You run" in second person
- "he/she/it runs" in third person.

However, **in Greek the form of the verb tells you the person, but not gender**. That's a problem in English because we can't do this. We must insert he/she/it to indicate 3rd person.

This can result in incorrectly gendered language because English verbs want a subject. (*Greek is a bit different.*)

In the verse we just saw, this happened with the two instances of "his". The translators inserted "his" because English 3rd person verbs want a subject (*he/she/it*). In Greek, there is no "his" there. It simply says (*for example*) "if service, in service". That's slightly improper English, but isn't gendered.

However, the five instances of "he" are correct.

In Greek, you can use the definite article (*"the" in English*) as a pronoun. I talk about this in my article [A Complete, 100% English Introduction to Koine Greek \(with Examples in English\)](#). Consider Matthew 1:6, which is part of Jesus' genealogy. It literally says "And David fathered Solomon from **the** of Uriah". The highlighted word is the definite article (*"the" in English*) in the feminine form being used as a feminine pronoun.

So while the Greek definite article can function as a pronoun and convey gender, Greek verbs don't (*except participles*). Such is the case in Romans 12, which we'll look at again with this understanding. All of the instances of the word "he" are the definite article being used as a pronoun

Romans 12:6-8

6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of **his** faith;

7 if service, in **his** serving; or **he** who teaches, in his teaching;

8 or **he** who exhorts, in his exhortation; **he** who gives, with liberality; **he** who leads, with diligence; **he** who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

By the way, there's an easy way to tell when the Greek definite article is being used as a pronoun, even without knowing Greek. If you see the phrase "he who ___" or the phrase "those who ___", and the "___" is a verb of some kind, odds are 98%+ that it's the Greek definite article being used as a masculine pronoun. In such cases, a masculine gendering is correct.

So when you see "those who ___" in the New Testament, it more accurately means "the (men) who ___". It's not gender-neutral; it's masculine almost every time.

So while the criticism is valid, it's **vastly** overstated by those who don't know that the Greek definite article also functions as a pronoun. In fact, the Greek definite article being used this way is **extremely** common when combined with a participle.

Gendered language is more so.

Almost every time you see the word "who", or "whoever", or "all", or "every", or "each", or "those", or "one another", they are typically masculine words and refer to men

(when they refer to people and not objects).

(Further, Greek participles can convey gender and are almost always masculine when referring to a person. Not only that, but substantives can also convey gender in many cases and are almost always masculine, but not translated that way. Frankly, the New Testament uses masculine words far more often than even the best translations indicate, though this is because of limitations in the English language, not translator bias.)

EDIT: and again, [if this masculine language bothers you, then I recommend you read my article How Crucial are Women to a Biblical Household? Very!](#) It should help.

How to Tell A Good Bible Translation From a Bad One

We started by examining what makes a Bible translation “best”. After seeing that God Himself is very particular about His words, we arrived at this criteria:

The best Bible translation is the one that changes God’s **words** the least in the translation process.

Now based on that criteria, plus everything else we’ve talked about, here’s how to tell a good Bible translation from a bad one.

The Criteria:

Literal, Word-for-Word Translation Style

God clearly places a high value on His **words**, so a translation should also place a high value on God’s words. Just a single word can make a huge difference, as we saw. As far as this goes, a literal, word-for-word style translation most closely replicates God’s own priorities as revealed in Scripture.

By contrast, the “dynamic Equivalence” / thought-for-thought paraphrases expressly don’t. They claim to be translating God’s thoughts, which is impossible according to several verses, as we’ve seen.

It should also be noted that sometimes a Greek word can’t be entirely captured by a single English word. In these cases, translating it into more than one English word is 100% acceptable, and even preferable. So while “word-for-word” is the terminology, understand that often a single Greek word might end up being more than one English word. That’s a good thing.

Leave Interpretation to Commentary, Not Translation

The best Bible translations don't include the translators' opinions and biases in the finished work. They will work very hard to keep them out of the text. **Thus, if you see a translation that inserts doctrinal positions where it shouldn't or alters passages to fit a certain doctrinal position: beware.** (*the ESV does this a lot; see the mini-review lower down*)

No Changing God's Words to be Gender Neutral

God commanded that we respect His words. Therefore when God uses gendered language, the translation should too, at least as much as reasonably possible. (*Greek and Hebrew both express gender more often than English*) That means that anthropos and adam should be translated "man", the word "human" should be rare, and adelphoi should be translated "brothers" instead of "brothers and sisters".

Now, a word of caution. The translators of gender-neutral Bibles have co-opted the phrase "gender accurate" to mean "gender neutral". So if you see a Bible proclaiming itself to be "gender accurate", it most likely is actually "gender neutral."

Please be aware of this.

Readability

This is admittedly somewhat subjective, which is why we haven't spent a lot of time on it. All other things being equal, more readable is better. However, if the most important thing about the Bible is accurately translating God's **words**, then it's better to focus on accuracy than readability. Most of the best translations are readable enough, though sadly they don't tend to shine in this area.

The Things That Don't Matter

You'll notice that this entire time we haven't talked about translation teams. I personally don't care about who translated a Bible or how many people did. I don't care about their theological background, I don't care if there was only one translator or a thousand translators.

I **only** care about the finished result.

The rest doesn't matter.

Flashy terms like "newest manuscripts" and the "best scholars" and especially "most recent scholarship" are useless. Frankly, the more I see those things advertised instead of accuracy, the more skeptical I become. It doesn't matter who translated it as long as the result is accurate.

That's what matters.

If the finished text faithfully translates God's words, I couldn't care less about the rest.

Ignored the marketing and instead focus on the text of the translation. The only question that matters in Bible translation is how well/accurately they handled God's words. Nothing else matters by comparison. Don't get distracted by fluff. 60,932 footnotes are useless unless the text itself is excellent.

Some pastor's seal of approval is meaningless unless God's words are accurately translated into English.

Focus on God's words.

When I pick up the Bible, all I care about is reading the words that God inspired. Focus on that and let the rest fade.

The "Litmus Test" Verse

(Okay, it's three verses, not one)

As we spent the first part of this article discussing, we care about the Bible because it contains God's words. God commanded us not to change His words. Therefore, any translation that intentionally mistranslates even a single verse automatically gets a failing grade from me for two reasons:

1. Intentionally mistranslating a verse means the translators cared more about their doctrine than God's words
2. If they intentionally mistranslated a verse once, they're likely to intentionally mistranslate other places too.

Fortunately, there's a verse we can use to quickly and easily sort out the wheat from the chaff; the good from the bad.

Is this verse more important than any other verse? No. Everything God said is important. However, this verse is mistranslated perverted more often than any other verse in the Bible. This verse is my favorite "litmus test" verse for this reason:

If a translation faithfully translates this verse, they usually translate everything else faithfully too. If a translation mistranslates this verse, they always mistranslate other verses too.

No exceptions (*that I've seen*).

This specific verse is convenient because of two things:

1. The meaning is obvious in Greek, and therefore mistranslating it is **always** intentional.
2. Almost no unfaithful translator can resist changing this verse.

Here's the verse in the NASB '95, which translates it accurately. We'll also look at the following two verses to make the context clearer. The "Litmus Test" verses are 36-38, but verse 38 is enough all by itself. You do need the context of verses 36-38 though.

1 Corinthians 7:36-38

36 But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin *daughter*, if she is past her youth, and if *it* must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.

37 But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin *daughter*, he will do well.

38 So then both he who **gives his own virgin *daughter* in marriage** does well, and he who does not **give her in marriage** will do better.

The word translated "gives... ..in marriage" (*used twice in verse 38*) is "???????" ([gamisko](#)) and it only has one definition/meaning:

give in marriage.

From gamos; **to espouse (a daughter to a husband) — give in marriage.**

That Greek word is only ever used this way, and it's the easiest way to prove that this passage is about a father allowing or not allowing his daughters to marry. This is **patently obvious** in Greek. Other things make this passage's meaning obvious in Greek, but they would all take a bit longer to explain and you probably aren't reading this article for a Greek lesson.

Now, some think this was limited to Roman fathers back then, and some think fathers today still have this authority. We won't get into the debate today, but I will say this: **That debate should take place in commentary, not translation.** God commanded us not to change His **words**. However, most ~~translations~~ paraphrases these days can't resist changing this verse/passage to be more culturally acceptable.

Here's an example from the NIV:

1 Corinthians 7:36 (NIV)

36 If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married.

37 But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing.

38 So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.

(Note: the NIV translators obviously knew the correct translation because their footnote has it.)

The NIV showcases a pretty typical perversion of this passage. A few translations leave it ambiguous in verse 36 and then go off the rails in verse 38. So if verse 36 looks correct, then check verse 38 next. If verse 38 doesn't say "give in marriage" or something substantially similar, it's flat-out wrong.

Whenever someone asks me about a Bible translation that I haven't read, I immediately flip to this verse. If it gets this verse right, I look deeper. If it gets this verse/passage wrong, I discard it as having been done by unfaithful translators, or at least translators that I can't trust.

If the translators intentionally changed a verse once, why should we trust them on other verses?

That's why 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 makes a great "Litmus Test" verse. It allows you to know if the translators changed the text with reasonable certainty.

To be 100% clear: **any** translation that makes 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 about an engaged couple is intentionally ~~changing~~ **perverting** God's **words**, and thus it should be **discarded**.

No exceptions.

Not because this verse is more important than any other, (*it's not*) but because unfaithful translators can't resist changing it. And if they're willing to change one verse...

The Top 10 Best Selling Bible Translations: a short(*ish*) review

We'll go through each one individually, (*except the Spanish "Reina Valera" translation because I speak almost no Spanish*) and evaluate them based on the criteria we've discussed. The list is from [here](#).

1. New International Version (NIV)
2. King James Version (KJV)
3. New Living Translation (NLT)
4. English Standard Version (ESV)
5. New King James Version (NKJV)

-
6. Christian Standard Bible (CSB)
 7. Reina Valera (RV)
 8. New International Reader's Version (NIRV)
 9. The Message (Message)
 10. New American Standard Bible (NASB) – 1995 edition

We'll also briefly look at:

- New American Standard Bible (NASB) – 2020 edition
- The New English Translation (NET)
- Good News Bible (GNT)
- Holman Christian Standard Bible (HSCB)

The “New International Version” (NIV)

Many have jokingly called the NIV the “Nearly Inspired Version”, or even more derogatorily the “Not Inspired Version”. I understand why. There's a reason that I used the NIV as an example of bad translation so many times throughout this article.

- **Translation type:** Mostly Paraphrase
- **Gender neutral:** Yes – high
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** No
- **Readability:** High
- **Worth using:** No

The first full NIV was released in 1978. However, the 1984 revision became the most popular edition, but it's now out of print. Now, to fully understand the modern NIV, we need to talk about the TNIV (*Today's New International Version*).

In 2005, the NIV's publisher (*Zondervan*) released an updated and “improved” version of the NIV called the TNIV. The TNIV was very nearly an abomination. It took gender-neutral language so far that even some liberal pastors pushed back and it was eventually discontinued.

Then they got sneaky.

On September 1, 2009, a press conference held by CBT, Biblica (the new name for IBS), and Zondervan announced that the 1984 NIV would be revised and the 2005 TNIV discontinued. Some interpreted this to mean the TNIV was a failed experiment and the old NIV would just be freshened a bit. **What was actually stated was that the CBT would reconsider every change that the TNIV introduced to the NIV, in light of external feedback, so that the 2011 revision of the NIV would actually be a revised TNIV.**

[Source.](#)

While I'm not a fan of the 1984 NIV, it was certainly far better than the TNIV or post-2011 NIV. **The post-2011 NIV is also very nearly an abomination**

. It's so bad that I've used it as an example of bad translation throughout this article, so we won't re-quote and re-examine all of those verses.

Essentially what the translators did was to take all the obvious gender changes in the TNIV that everyone complained about and discard them. Then they took all the less obvious gender changes and added them to the 2011 NIV. As a result, the post-2011 NIV is extremely similar to the TNIV, as the numbers show:

Outcome	Num verses	Percent
No changes in any	18859	60.7%
Uses NIV1984 text	171	0.6%
Uses TNIV text	9736	31.3%
New text in NIV2011	2320	7.5%

That graph came from [slowly.com's article on the differences between the NIV 1984, TNIV, and NIV 2011](#). There's a lot of good information about the changes and similarities between the three versions. Especially illuminating is the page that shows the gender changes on a single table. There are literally thousands of places where they've changed the gender from the 1984 NIV, which was much less problematic (*from a gender standpoint*).

Obviously, the NIV gets a failing grade.

It should be avoided like the plague.

The "King James Version" (KJV)

No other translation is so revered, hated, lauded, and criticized than the world's oldest continually printed English Bible: the King James Version. It's also known as the "Authorized Version" or AV. It's 400+ years old and has a cult following... but is it good?

- Translation type: **Literal**
- Gender neutral: **Very Low**
- Pass Litmus Test verse: **Yes**
- Readability: **Low**
- Worth using: **Maybe (special case)**

The KJV had a lot to recommend it 400 years ago. It was a work of near-unparalleled beauty and is quite faithful in translation most of the time. I really don't have much bad to say about the KJV's translation work.

There are certainly some problems (*like translating “sheol” and “Hades” as “hell” more often than not*) but overall it’s certainly of acceptable quality. Often in controversial passages, it shows a tendency to be less swayed by culture than *any* other translation, which is wonderful. That last sentence is ironic, considering what I’m about to say.

Surprisingly, the KJV sometimes veers **very slightly** into gender-neutral language territory.

Not badly and probably not with an agenda, but it does. For example, it translates “sons of Israel” as “children of Israel”. As we said before, that’s not *technically* ‘wrong’, but certainly isn’t ideal either. They do the same thing in the New Testament also, with even less reason.

Galatians 3:26

KJV: For ye are all the **children** of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

NKJV: For you are all **sons** of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

The Greek word there is “?????” (**huios**), and it means “son”, so “children” is wrong. Perhaps the KJV translators thought that huios was analogous to “ben” in Hebrew? I’m honestly not sure what to make of this mistranslation because they accurately handled gendered language everywhere else.

Since it’s only gender inclusive in these two examples – one of which isn’t *technically* wrong – and because there’s clearly no agenda given the KJV’s translation of other passages, I’m willing to extend a bit of grace. I marked it blue and “very low” on gender neutrality because it’s on the edge, but still acceptable.

Proving there’s no gender-based agenda, the KJV properly translates Ephesians 5:31, saying that wives must “reverence” their husbands instead of the more modern translation of “respect”, which misses the force of the Greek there. (*It’s the same word that’s usually translated “fear” in the phrase “fear of the lord”, and properly means to “reverently fear” or “revere” depending on the context.*) That’s just one example, but it consistently translates controversial passages a bit more faithfully than other translations.

Again, that’s a huge strength.

The biggest problem with the KJV has nothing to do with the translation work and is entirely beyond the KJV translator’s control. That problem is this:

The English language has changed a lot in 400 years.

I’m not only talking about the “ye” “thee” and “thou” though. Those are actually quite useful and communicate something that modern Bibles can’t if you know a bit about old English. I’m talking about the definition of words. **Some words change meaning over time**. Thus, some words don’t mean the same thing now that they meant 400 years ago.

Here’s an example from the KJV:

1 Peter 3:1-2

1 Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, **if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;**

2 **While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.**

Hmm...

Won without a word by conversation? In verse 2, how do you observe “chaste conversation”? The answer is you can’t... if you define “conversation” the way we do now. **However, 400 years ago “conversation” meant the same thing that “conduct” means today.** If you read that verse without knowing this, you’d come to the wrong conclusion about what should be done.

This is just one example.

Another good example is the commandment which the KJV translates as “Thou shalt not kill”. However, 400 years ago “kill” meant what “murder” means today. This alone has caused significant confusion. (*I’ve had to explain this to more than one Christian who heard the KJV version.*)

Or 1 Corinthians 16:15 where the KJV reads “...*they have **addicted** themselves to the ministry of the saints*“, while most other good translations have “...*they have **devoted** themselves to the ministry of the saints*“. The meaning of the word “addicted” has changed in 400 years. I know of a pastor who taught on this verse from the KJV without knowing this, and therefore he came to an... ‘interesting’ conclusion.

Not good.

There are **dozens** of other words that have changed meaning over time. Unfortunately, the KJV has fallen victim to this change. I don’t recommend it because of this, unless “the King’s English” is second nature to you and you’re fully aware of the original meanings. Even then, you’ll have a hard time having a serious doctrinal discussion with many Christians if you use the KJV. You might understand it, but they probably won’t. At least, they’ll probably have a hard time with the Old English.

I don’t recommend the KJV, but mostly because the English language has changed underneath it.

It does often shine in faithfulness to controversial passages though.

The “New Living Translation” (NLT)

The NLT is in many ways the “Stealth Bomber” of Bible translations. It doesn’t get much publicity but always seems to be climbing the sales charts anyway. This would be wonderful if it was an excellent translation. It’s not.

- **Translation type: True Paraphrase**

- **Gender neutral:** Yes – High
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** No
- **Readability:** High
- **Worth using:** No

The New Living Translation started as a project to revise “The Living Bible” (TLB). The TLB was a paraphrase done by [Kenneth N. Taylor](#) for his children. The original goal was merely to revise it, but it eventually grew into a whole new translation project.

More than any other Bible on this list, the NLT veers into interpretation instead of translation. Here are but a few examples of so, so many. (*And we’ve already seen one above.*)

Matthew 7:1-2

NLT: “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. **For you will be treated as you treat others.** The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.

NASB ’95: “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. **“For in the way you judge, you will be judged;** and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

The NLT takes this verse to mean “judged by men”. However, that’s not stated in the context. In context, it could be argued that God is doing the judging. The NLT closes that as a possibility, even though the footnote says “Or ‘*For God will judge you as you judge others.*’”

Another example:

Isaiah 7:9

NLT: Israel is no stronger than its capital, Samaria, and Samaria is no stronger than its king, Pekah son of Remaliah. **Unless your faith is firm, I cannot make you stand firm.”**

NASB ’95: and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. **If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.””**

Ignoring the first part of the verse – which certainly has problems – it sounds like the NLT took a swipe at God’s sovereignty there. There are many other passages like this and some are worse. I’d list them, but there are just so many badly translated verses in the NLT.

Another huge problem is their lack of faithfulness on gender. From their website:

The NLT is also sensitive to passages where the text applies generally to human beings or to the human condition. In many instances, **the NLT uses plural pronouns (they, them) in place of the masculine singular (he, him).**

[Source.](#)

“At least they don’t make God gender neutral.” ← **That’s the most positive statement I can make about the accuracy of the NLT, and it basically boils down to “at least they didn’t mess that up”.**

Now, the NLT is incredibly readable. It might be the most readable “translation” on this list. However, it’s certainly not the best Bible translation when it comes to being faithful to God’s **words**. Not even close. It’s not even in the ballpark. In fact, the NLT can’t even see the ballpark it’s so far back.

The NLT gets a hard pass.

Readable doesn’t equal good.

The “English Standard Version” (ESV)

Many Christians seem to view the ESV as an ideal translation that combines a high degree of literalism with good readability to produce a superior Bible. I will never understand how the publishers and marketing team so thoroughly deceived so many Christians into believing this.

- **Translation type:** Somewhat Literal
- **Gender neutral:** Yes – Medium
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** No
- **Readability:** Medium
- **Worth using:** No

I’ll skip straight to the point with the ESV: it has a real problem with changing God’s **words** to fit the translator’s doctrinal biases. The ESV fails the Litmus Test verse rather spectacularly, and other verses are intentionally mistranslated as well.

The ESV even completely flips the meaning of a very significant verse!

It’s true.

Leviticus 5:17

ESV: “If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the LORD’s commandments ought not to be done, **though he did not know it, then realizes his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity.**

NASB ’95: “Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, **though he was unaware, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment.**

The ESV is utterly alone in its rendering of this verse. The ESV makes it sound like you aren’t guilty of sin unless you know you sinned. That’s the **complete opposite** of what this verse teaches. It’s exactly, 100% opposite to what God said.

Further, this is intentional.

It's 100% intentional.

There's simply no way to get the ESV's rendering from the Hebrew text. There just isn't. Please, check [Leviticus 5:17 in an interlinear](#) if you don't believe me. Or check literally any other translation of the verse. **This "translation" doesn't just blatantly and intentionally change God's words, it intentionally reverses God's words here.**

It's not the only place either.

Hebrews 9:7

ESV: but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, **which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.**

NASB '95: but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, **which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.**

Again, the ESV breaks with other translations to fit the translators' doctrinal biases. Clearly, they believed you couldn't sin without knowing it and had no problem changing God's words to make other people believe it too.

And we're not done.

Romans 2:4

ESV: Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, **not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?**

NASB '95: Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, **not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?**

The ESV has a **very** different statement than the NASB and the Greek. (*It's surprising to me that so many Calvinists like the ESV given its translation of verses like this.*)

Keep in mind that when you include the Litmus Test verse, that's at least 4 verses that the ESV has intentionally mistranslated, mostly to push their particular doctrinal biases. (*Plus there's more that we'll get to in a minute.*)

Because of that, I don't trust the ESV.

Not one bit.

Further, the ESV often veers into commentary in the translation. Not as much as the NIV and NLT, but certainly often enough.

Matthew 16:18

ESV: And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of **hell** shall not prevail against it.

NASB '95: "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of **Hades** will not overpower it.

Hell is not Hades. Hades is not hell. They are completely different Greek words. (*The difference is actually quite significant.*) This is including commentary in translation again. Granted, this verse raises a yellow flag not a red flag like the first three verses and the Litmus test verse. Still, that's 4x red flags and a yellow flags for the ESV.

So we'll add yet another red flag to the ESV: gender issues

Now, the ESV isn't as bad as other gender-neutral translations. It doesn't usually render "brothers" as "brothers and sisters" or anything that obvious. It also doesn't make gender-neutral language a focus like the NIV, NLT, and other paraphrases.

However it does change things, it's just more... sneaky about it.

For instance, the word "man, men" is "neutered" in the ESV 968 times. The masculine pronoun, "he, him, his" is neutered 1832 times! And the new-age, evolutionist, neuter buzzword "human" is employed 63 times.

[Source](#). (*that's compared to the KJV*)

The quote above is from a KJV-only website, and so that's compared to the KJV. Even so, the ESV plays with gender hundreds of times. **Again, this isn't showing preference to God's words, nor His command not to change his words.** (*Even if we pretend the gender issues are overstated by double, that still over a thousand times that they changed God's words.*)

Another place where the ESV intentionally uses gender-neutral language is in the Old Testament phrase "the sons of Israel". It appears 78 times in the book of Exodus (*and many times in other books*) but the ESV has it... *drum roll please* ...one time. It appears hundreds of times in the Old Testament, most of which the ESV neuters into the "people of Israel".

That's not what God wrote.

Now, they could possibly have translated it as "children of Israel" like the KJV, because the Hebrew word "ben" is occasionally used in a way that *could* mean "children". It's a rare usage, but possible. But the ESV didn't. That makes me think it was changed for gender neutrality reasons, just like all the instances of man/men and he/him/his which the ESV also changed.

As we already covered, God is very particular about his words. Unfortunately, where gender is concerned, the ESV isn't. It's more careful than some others, but not nearly enough for serious

use/study.

Not by a long shot.

At the intersection of “gender issues” and “changing text to suit your biases”, there’s the ESV’s treatment of Malachi 2. For space/time’s sake, we’ll only deal with verse 16, but verses 14 and 15 also have problems and I recommend you look them up.

Malachi 2:16

ESV: “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”

NASB '95: “For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

Notice that in the correctly translated NASB '95, God says He hates two things:

1. Divorce
2. “and him who covers his garment with violence”

However, the ESV says that divorce *itself* “covers his garment with violence.” Worse, you can read it so a man who merely “does not love his wife” actually “covers his garment with violence”.

Wow.

You might think that the ESV translators have no problem adding to/changing the Bible because they do it so often. But it gets worse: they **knew** this translation is flat-out wrong. Here’s the footnote:

Probable meaning (compare Septuagint and Deuteronomy 24:1 – 4); or “*The LORD, the God of Israel, says that he hates divorce, and him who covers*”

The footnote version says almost exactly what the NASB '95 says, with just a slight change in word order (*which is 100% fine*). So the ESV translators knew about the correct meaning, but put the correct meaning in the footnotes and put their own words in the main text. They literally relegated God’s words to a footnote in favor of their own words.

Wow.

Just wow.

Oh, and the ESV also mistranslates “do not deal treacherously” into “do not be faithless”. The Hebrew word is “?????” ([bagad](#)) and means “to act or deal treacherously”.

How about another? This time on a gender issue verse that even the NIV 2011 gets right!

1 Timothy 4:7

ESV: Have nothing to do with irreverent, **silly myths**. Rather train yourself for godliness;

NIV 2011: Have nothing to do with godless myths and **old wives' tales**; rather, train yourself to be godly.

NKJV: But reject profane and **old wives' fables**, and exercise yourself toward godliness.

The phrase there is two Greek words. The first is “???????” ([graódes](#)), which means “*characteristic of old women*“. The second is “?????” ([muthos](#)), which is the root of our English word “myth”, and means “*an idle tale, fable, fanciful story*“. Again, even the NIV 2011 got this right, but the ESV intentionally mistranslated it.

One last one, because there isn't space to keep listing them forever. (*There are plenty more*)

Genesis 3:16

ESV: To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. **Your desire shall be contrary to your husband**, but he shall rule over you.”

NASB '95: To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; **Yet your desire will be for your husband**, And he will rule over you.”

Again, the ESV is completely alone in this translation and – not surprisingly – it's simply wrong.

I could go on, but I hope you get the point: the ESV is not a reliable translation, seemingly especially where gender issues are concerned.

(It's interesting that many of the ESV's issues seem connected to gender issues. It makes me wonder if the translators had an agenda... It almost seems sneaky how they only used the less obvious gender-neutral language and changed gender-related passages so consistently.)

EDIT: Here's another one I just recently found, and it's important enough (*and disturbing enough*) for an edit:

1 Corinthians 6:9

NASB '95: Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, **nor effeminate**, nor homosexuals,

ESV: Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not

be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,

Notice what's missing from the ESV?

The NASB correctly translated “??????”, ([malakos](#)) as “effeminate”, though it's masculine there and so means “effeminate men”. This word likely refers to transgender and/or cross-dressing men... and the ESV translators apparently decided to delete it from their translation.

Hmm.

Why?

The fact that the ESV translators made a choice to completely erase – to take away from – God's words is **highly** concerning to me. That choice looks like a concession to certain ideologies to me. Further, we know it was a choice because the Greek word is present in every single Greek text that modern Bibles are translated from, and you can double-check me in the [NA28](#), the [Majority Text](#), and the [Textus Receptus](#). You're looking for the nominative masculine plural form of “??????”, (malakos) which is “??????” (malakoi).

(Note: the NKJV translates it “homosexuals” here, likely thinking that it refers to pederasty. That's certainly possible, though not the primary meaning.)

As we've seen, the ESV seems to have no trouble changing significant verses like Malachi 2, Leviticus 5:17, Hebrews 9:7, etc. **Even more troubling, no one seems to know that the ESV made all these changes!** While many will critique the smallest splinter in the eye of other translations, they seemingly ignore the massive log in the ESV's eye. Seriously, no one talks about them! It took forever to find these mistranslations (*once I found the first, I went looking for more*) and I stumbled onto a couple by accident while researching other translations.

BTW, the ESV is only “somewhat literal”

I want to cringe when someone says that the ESV is a literal translation. Not because they're wrong, but because there's more to the story. It's “somewhat literal”, but much less than most people think. It veers into dynamic/paraphrase more often than it should. I lost a lot of respect for the ESV pretty quickly when I started going through the New Testament in Greek.

That's not the hallmark of a faithful translation...

Despite the enormous number of people who love the ESV, it does have three **huge** problems:

1. The ESV **intentionally** changes God's words to fit the translators' doctrinal biases in many theologically significant passages. That's a **serious** problem; a **massive** problem. That alone **completely disqualifies the ESV** from my perspective. I trust the ESV so little that I always double-check whenever someone quotes from the ESV.
2. Another major strike against the ESV is their use of gender-neutral language. While not as bad as some, it's still very serious and changing God's words, ultimately pleasing man rather than

God.

3. The translators decided to delete “effeminate [men]” from 1 Cor 6:9. That’s nigh unforgivable, especially because the word they deleted hints at the frightening possibility that there’s an agenda there.

These three things together demonstrate a lack of commitment to accurately translating God’s **words**. I have no interest in a Bible which doesn’t accurately translate God’s words. Further, I have a sense of revulsion for a translation that actively and intentionally perverts God’s words, especially when they know better, and even more especially when they go about it in such a ‘sneaky’ manner.

ESV Verdict: It’s poison but tasty. Run – don’t walk – away.

It might taste sweet, but...

The “New King James Version” (NKJV)

Our first translation that’s good across the board is also one of the most ignored in the best Bible translation debate. It’s still ranked in the middle of the top 10 by sales, but in my humble opinion, it’s worthy of being # 2.

- **Translation type:** [Literal](#)
- **Gender neutral:** [Essentially No](#)
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** [Yes](#)
- **Readability:** [Medium](#)
- **Worth using:** [Yes](#)

The NKJV started its life in 1975 and was finished/published in 1982. While the NASB is often cited as the most literal of the modern English Bible translations, but the NKJV edges it out in many places. Not all, and overall I think the NASB is a better translation, but the NKJV is highly literal. (*It’s definitely far more literal than the ESV.*)

The NKJV wasn’t even on my radar until I started going through the New Testament in Greek. I was comparing what I was reading in Greek with various translations to see which was the most accurate. I lost all respect for several translations almost immediately, and the ESV started to lose my respect not long after.

I wasn’t even looking at the NKJV.

Then one day I checked it on impulse and was shocked to discover that it was even more literal than the NASB in that verse. The longer I read, the more impressive its literalism was when compared to the Greek. It’s by no means perfect, but it’s certainly up there with the NASB ’95. It’s the first translation in several decades that seriously made me consider switching. (*I didn’t though.*)

Going back to its history, the goal of the NKJV translators was to update the KJV to modern English, eliminating the archaic language while keeping the literary style intact. By all accounts, they succeeded. Since the KJV is already a good translation, the NKJV inherited that same accuracy and

arguably improved on it. Having compared much of it to the Greek, I can attest to that accuracy firsthand.

The biggest flaw of the NKJV is: (*and I can't believe I'm about to say this, but...*): It's too literal in some places.

By "too literal", I mean there are places where they've stuck so closely to the Greek that the verse becomes confusing to read in English. (*Think of the example of word order in John 3:16 above.*) Once in a while, it reads more like an interlinear than a translation. As far as flaws go, there are certainly worse ones to have.

Fortunately, these places are somewhat rare. Further, it reads very well in most places.

I'd rather have a translation that's slightly confusing at times than one that intentionally mistranslates. **cough**ESV**cough** Further, the NKJV tends to read very well in verses that aren't this way.

The NKJV also has one feature that I really like: The NKJV *italicizes* words added by translators for clarity.

Sometimes translators need to add a word to make the meaning of the sentence clear because of the differing grammar rules between Greek/Hebrew and English. All translations do this (*and need to do this*), but the NKJV makes it very transparent by *italicizing* those words so the readers know that they are added.

This a wonderful feature.

I love it.

Now, there's a slight downside to the NKJV in the gender arena, but it's better than the KJV. The KJV and NKJV both translate the "sons of Israel" as the "children of Israel". The Hebrew word there does mean "son", but in a few rare cases it *might* refer to "children". As such it gets a pass because it's not *technically* wrong, though it's less than ideal. Significantly, there are no other gender issues I've found. (*And unlike the original KJV, it translates "sons" correctly in the New Testament.*)

Now, it should be noted that the NKJV uses a different textual basis in the New Testament. I actually think this is a good thing, and I go into incredible detail about the different textual basis of the NT in my article: [Majority Text vs. Critical Text vs. Textus Receptus: Textual Criticism 101](#). The NKJV and KJV are both based on the Textus Receptus, while every other translation on this list uses the Critical text.

I slightly prefer the textual basis of the NKJV/KJV, but neither is perfect and both are acceptable. (see the article for details.)

You will notice that the NKJV has some verses that other translations don't, again because of the different textual basis. One of the major differences is the [Johannine Comma of 1 John 5:7-8](#), which is the strongest Trinitarian passage in the entire Bible... but it's sadly missing from most Bibles. (*See the link to read my article on the topic*)

The NKJV also capitalizes pronouns that refer to God, which I prefer.

All said and done, I think the NKJV the second best Bible translation on the market. There is one I slightly prefer and it's on this list so we'll get to it eventually.

The "Christian Standard Bible" (CSB)

The Christian Standard Bible has gotten a lot of traction lately. It began life as a revision of the Holman Christian Standard Bible (*HCSB, review lower down*) but it's definitely not an upgrade.

- Translation type: **paraphrase**
- Gender neutral: **Yes – High**
- Pass Litmus Test verse: **No**
- Readability: **High**
- Worth using: **No**

So, let's start with gender. The CSB translates "adelphoi" as "brothers and sisters". The CSB is so committed to gender-neutral language that they translate "aner" (*which means "male"*) as "person" in Romans 4:8. Needless to say, they translate "anthropos" ("man") as person or human a lot.

The CSB now translates the term *anthropos*, a Greek word for "man," in a gender-neutral form 151 times, rendering it "human," "people," and "ones." The previous edition had done this on occasion; the new revision adds almost 100 more instances. "Men of Israel" becomes "fellow Israelites;" when discussing Jesus's incarnation the "likeness of men" becomes "likeness of humanity." The CSB translates the term *adelphoi*, a Greek word for "brother" in a gender-neutral form 106 times, often adding "sister." "Brotherly love" is translated "love as brothers and sisters."

[Source.](#)

The translators even go so far as to translate adelphos ("*brother*") – in the *singular* – as "brother or sister" in Matthew 5:22 and Romans 14:10. I'm completely unaware of even a single lexicon or Greek scholar who supports that.

As far as literalism goes, the translators [admit right up front that it's not as literal as the ESV](#). That's a problem, as the ESV is right at the very edge of what I would consider "acceptable" for translation in terms of literalism. The ESV isn't nearly literal enough in many places, which makes the CSB problematic because God is concerned with His words.

For example:

1 Corinthians 7:1

CSB: Now in response to the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to **have sexual relations with** a woman.”

NASB '95: Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to **touch** a woman.

Several translations including the NIV, NLT, and ESV also paraphrase/mistranslate this verse. However, The Greek word “???????” ([haptomai](#)) does actually mean “touch” and the NASB is correct. **This verse is probably the single most important verse for deciding what is and isn't acceptable touch before marriage... unless you mistranslate it like the CSB, NLT, NIV, ESV, etc. mistranslate it.**

In fact, there's a whole article here on Berean Patriot entitled: [Biblically, How Far Can Christians Go Physically/Sexually Before Marriage?](#) The article goes through that verse and the relevant words in detail. (*Spoiler: I would translate it: “It's noble for a man not to touch a woman sexually”.*)

The CSB (*and NIV, NLT, and ESV, etc.*) completely miss this by mistranslating haptomai as “have sexual relations”. There's a whole range of inappropriate sexual behaviors that “touch” addresses, but “have sexual relations” doesn't. The original Greek word can include groping or heavy petting too, which the CSB's rendering can't. (*See the article link above for details.*)

Another example:

Psalm 1:1

CSB: How **happy** is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway **with sinners or sit in the company of mockers!**

NASB '95: How **blessed** is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path **of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!**

There are two bad things and one good here:

- Happy does not mean blessed; blessed does not mean happy. The word “bless” is used all over the Bible and the CSB obscures that fact here. Further, not being wicked doesn't guarantee happiness. I know some good people who are blessed, but not always happy.
- The CSB did well translating it “stand in the pathway **with** sinners” instead of the NASB's “stand in the path **of** sinners”, because the latter is unclear due to an English idiom.
- The CSB makes it clear that the man is merely “in the company” of scoffers. However, the NASB and Hebrew allow for him to be a scoffer because he sits “in the seat of scoffers”. There's a natural progression of: “*take their council > stand with them > be one of them*“. The CSB destroys this possibility.

These are some of the problems encountered when you don't translate literally; when you don't show reverence for God's **words**. The CSB has these sorts of problems all over, I just picked a couple of verses to showcase them. (*Actually, I picked verses that [they themselves showcase on their website](#) as examples of good translation. If this is what they're proud of...*)

In summary, even if the CSB didn't get gender issues wrong – and intentionally pervert our “Litmus Test” verse – it simply takes too many liberties in translation to be tolerable

. While most would say it's "pretty accurate", I would disagree on gender issues and further add that "pretty accurate" isn't good enough.

You saw how a real Supreme Court Case we mentioned earlier as an example was decided by a single, one-letter word ("a"). We should take just as much care – preferably much more – with God's **words**, just as He commanded us to.

The "New International Reader's Version" (NirV)

The NirV is basically the NIV written at a 3rd grade reading level. As such, it suffers from all the problems that the NIV suffers from, plus one additional one: it's written for 3rd graders.

- **Translation type:** **paraphrase**
- **Gender neutral:** **Yes – High**
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** **No**
- **Readability:** **High**
- **Worth using:** **No**

Now, I don't want to be too hard on the NirV for what they're trying to do. The idea was to make a Bible that children and new English speakers could easily read and understand. Sadly, this requires a very non-literal approach which includes chopping up verses into small sentences to make it work.

Here's an example:

Ephesians 2:8-10 – NirV

8 God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift.

9 It is not based on anything you have done. No one can brag about earning it.

10 We are God's creation. He created us to belong to Christ Jesus. Now we can do good works. Long ago God prepared these works for us to do.

I'm sure you see the problem.

The NirV has (*not inaccurately*) paraphrased the verse, but that's the problem: it's a paraphrase. It paraphrases God's **words** which He warned us not to change.

"But what about the kids? Shouldn't they have something to read?"

Yes.

The same Bible you do; as it is written:

Deuteronomy 11:18-19

18 “You shall therefore impress **these words** of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.

19 “**You shall teach them to your sons**, talking of **them** when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.

God seems to think that children can handle the adult version. He commanded the Israelites to teach their sons the same thing the men learned.

Who are we to disagree?

Further, that’s what my parents did. As my siblings and I finished learning to read, my mother took us each of us to the local Christian Book Store (*remember those?*) to get us our first Bible. I still have the NASB she bought for me that day. I finally had to retire it in my 20s because it was falling apart **from nearly two decades of use.**

While I understand the desire to bring things down to a child’s level, that’s the wrong focus. The Bible doesn’t command us to “bring things down to a child’s level” but rather to “raise up” a child in the way he should go. God said the kids could handle the adult version.

Trust Him on that.

(Further, it says something to a child when they use “adult things”. That’s a vote of confidence you can’t replicate another way; it was nearly a badge of honor in my house growing up. I got an NASB because that’s what my dad used and I felt immensely proud to be using the same Bible that my dad was using. It made me more interested, not less.)

Additionally, as it concerns the Nlrv, there’s also something... odd things happening in the translation that I noticed when I went to check the Litmus Test verse.

1 Corinthians 7:1

Nlrv: Now I want to deal with the things you wrote me about. **Some of you say, “It is good for a man not to sleep with a woman.”**

NASB ’95: Now concerning the things about which you wrote, **it is good for a man not to touch a woman.**

We already discussed the mistranslation of “touch” to mean “have sex” in the CSB, but the Nlrv adds another problem. The Nlrv makes it sound like the Corinthians – not Paul himself – said it. **That’s a problem; a big problem.** It appears the Nlrv is about as faithful as the NIV, which isn’t a compliment.

I had never heard of this translation until I started writing this article. There's probably a reason for that. I give the NIV a "hard pass" rating, even for children. Especially for children. Why would you fill a young child's mind with a corrupted version of God's words?

"The Message" (*Message/MSG*)

The Message is the "translation" of the late Eugene H. Peterson, who wrote and published it in segments from 1993 to 2002. Now, I have no problem with a translation that was done by a single man as long as it was done well. The Message wasn't.

- **Translation type:** hyper paraphrase
- **Gender neutral:** Yes
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** No
- **Readability:** It's painful to read it because it's so unfaithful to Scripture, (*high otherwise*)
- **Worth using:** Never

Saying that the Message was translated poorly would be an insult to poorly translated Bibles. Yes it's that bad.

Now, it wouldn't be so bad if it was presented as a commentary.

That is, if they were upfront that this is one man's partisan, biased interpretation of what the Bible means. I would still vehemently disagree with the content, but he's entitled to his opinion and anyone can publish a commentary/interpretation of the Bible. My problem is that they called it a translation.

And they do on the official website:

Peterson's work has been thoroughly reviewed by a team of recognized Old and New Testament scholars to ensure that it is accurate and faithful to the original languages.

[Source](#). (*And they list the names of the "scholars" too*)

Don't take my word that it's an abomination though, here are a few verses to prove the point:

Matthew 5:3

MSG: "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

NASB '95: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

I...

What...

How did...

(Insert your favorite facepalm meme/emoji here.)

But it gets worse...

Matthew 5:3

MSG: “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

NASB '95: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Need I go on?

Avoid this perversion of God’s words like the plague.

The “New America Standard Bible” (NASB) – 1995 edition

Sharp-eyed readers have probably already noticed that the translation that I’ve used all throughout this article as an example of a good translation is the NASB ’95. There’s a reason for that.

*(Note: the following only applies to the 1995 edition, **not** the newer 2020 edition, which uses gender-neutral language and is far less literal. **Important:** these days, if you see “NASB” without a specific year cited on major bible aggregator websites like BibleHub, then it’s almost certainly the NASB 2020, not the **far** better NASB ’95.)*

- **Translation type:** **Literal**
- **Gender neutral:** **No**
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** **Yes**
- **Readability:** **Medium**
- **Worth using:** **Yes**

The greatest strength of the NASB is its literalism. The NASB is almost universally regarded as the most literal Bible translation and there’s a good reason for that. Having gone through a large portion of the New Testament in Greek, I can attest to its literalism. I would ordinarily quote some verses to show you how well-translated it is, but I’ve been doing that throughout this article.

While the NKJV is arguably slightly more literal, the NASB has several features that – at least in my opinion – put it over the top by a hair. One of which is that it has fewer passages that are so literal that they don’t make sense. While the NASB can be wordy, it’s usually understandable.

Like the NKJV, the NASB *italicizes* words added by the translators for clarity. All translations need to

add a few “linking” words because of differing grammar rules. (*Which is fine; Greek uses different methods to associate words that English doesn't have, so the Greek meaning must be conveyed with additional words.*) The NASB is very transparent about this, whereas most translations aren't.

The NASB also puts Old Testament quotations in SMALL CAPS so the reader instantly knows it's an OT quotation. Seeing the Old Testament quotations can be very important to understanding certain passages, and the NASB makes this obvious in a way that almost no other translation does.

Gender-wise, there are zero complaints. (*with the 1995 version anyway*)

The NASB '95 accurately renders the original genders of the Greek and Hebrew words the overwhelming vast majority of the time. I've found the odd verse that could be more accurate to the original genders, but never one that alters meaning. (*It's usually a readability thing.*)

The NASB '95 is a great Bible translation.

Honestly, it's the best one I currently know of. Only the NKJV is a contender, and overall the NASB 95 is better. The difference isn't huge, but it's there. As of right now, the only other translation even in the race is the LSB (*covered later*).

The NASB's downside: Readability.

There's no sugar coating it, the NASB reads less smoothly than the other translations on this list. (*except possibly the NKJV depending on the verse*) However, that doesn't mean it's hard to read. I got along with the NASB just fine at age 7 or 8.

It might be a bit harder to read, but the payoff is worth it.

Time and again I've had people read from other translations and thought: “that doesn't sound right to me.” So I'd look it up in the NASB and the original language. Near universally, the NASB had a better/more literal/more accurate translation.

That's not to say the NASB is perfect.

The NASB 95 does occasionally have a verse that I don't think is translated well. Not often, but it happens. In such cases, rarely does another version have a superior translation of the passage. It happens, it's just extremely rare. **That's the reason it's my primary Bible translation: It's extremely faithful to translate God's words. I don't think I can pay a higher compliment to a Bible translation than that.**

Verdict: One of the best, and the best the majority of the time.

It's well worth using, if slightly harder to read.

Other Notable/Popular Translations

While not top sellers, there are several other translations that we'll look at. None are contenders for the

best Bible translation but they bear a look anyway because unfortunately, most of them aren't good. I added a few of them after comments from readers, so if you see a comment asking about one that's covered in this section, that's probably because that section was added later.

The “New America Standard Bible” (NASB) – 2020 edition

Sadly, the Lockman Foundation (*publishers of the NASB*) have caved to the gender-neutral crowd in their most recent revision. I was grieved to hear this, but thankfully they will still keep printing the '95 version alongside the 2020 version.

- **Translation type:** mostly literal
- **Gender neutral:** Yes – low
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** Barely
- **Readability:** Medium
- **Worth using:** No

~~Everything I said about the NASB '95 applies to the NASB 2020 except where it concerns gender.~~ I struck through that sentence because since writing this article, I've seen more of it. The NASB 2020 not only ruins gender, but it's also significantly less literal. They decided to put culture and man's approval ahead of faithfulness to God's words. In many ways, they did this similar to the ESV, but in some ways worse.

Here's one example:

James 5:16

NASB 2020: Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. **A prayer of a righteous person, when it is brought about, can accomplish much.**

NASB '95: Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. **The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**

They added a whole clause to make the gender-neutral language fit and it just doesn't read very well. There are other examples of wordier passages that do the same to accomplish the gender-neutral agenda.

You can read [their complete rationalization on the website](#), but here are the highlights lowlights:

1. Adephoi (brothers) is translated as “brothers *and sisters*“, though the “and sisters” part is at least *italicized* to indicate it's added.
2. “Anthropos” (man) and “adam” (man) are now often translated as “person”, “people”, “human” or occasionally “mankind”. Not always, but often.
3. The Greek phrase which was correctly translated “he who ____” (*It could also be translated “the man who ____”*) is also neutered into “the one who”.

4. Completely at odds with the above, they retain generic masculine pronouns, as in Matthew 13:9 “The **one** who has ears, let **him** hear”. They admit they couldn’t make it work gender-neutral, which is why they kept it masculine. I give them no points for it since that’s their reasoning.

That 3rd point above bears more looking at. On the rationalization page, they say this:

The new phrase, “**the one who**”, is not only gender-accurate, but also closer to the original sentence structure because **it directly translates the Greek and Hebrew articles (“the”), when present, instead of simply replacing them with a pronoun.**

This is a strange statement because the Greek definite article can function as a pronoun!

To repeat something we looked at earlier in the article:

In Greek, **you can use the definite article (“the” in English) as a pronoun**. I talk about this in my article: [A Complete, 100% English Introduction to Koine Greek \(with Examples in English\)](#). This is also the case in Jesus’s genealogy in Matthew 1:6, where it literally says “*And David fathered Solomon from **the** of Uriah*”. The highlighted word is the definite article (“the” in English) being used as a feminine pronoun, as it’s in the feminine form there.

The NASB 2020 translators made a strange choice as they obviously knew this, they just chose to ignore it for the sake of political correctness.

Shame.

The NASB 2020 also deletes the word “effeminate [men]” from 1 Cor 6:9, just like the ESV. See the ESV section for details, and in both translations this at least looks like caving to certain political ideologies.

The NASB 2020 is also far less literal.

Take John 18:38 for example.

John 18:38

NASB 1995: Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, “**I find no guilt in Him.**”

NASB 2020: Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And after saying this, he came out again to the Jews and said to them, “**I find no grounds at all for charges in His case.**”

You can check [John 18:38 in an interlinear Bible](#) to see that the NASB 1995 nails it. The NASB 2020... not so much. That’s quite a change, and veering into NLT level paraphrase. The NASB 2020 doesn’t do this everywhere, but it does do it.

Regardless, the 2020 NASB isn’t worth using for gender reasons alone. Add the significantly decreased literalism, and it’s even worse. The NASB ’95 is a much better choice because it more

accurately represents God's **words**, especially when it comes to gender. The NASB 2020 took itself out of the running when the translators decided that caving to political pressure was more important than accurately translating God's **words**.

The Legacy Standard Bible (LSB)

The LSB is another offshoot of the NASB 1995, and I have high hopes for it. I say *hopes* because it's new enough that I haven't spent enough time with it to be sure.

- **Translation type:** [Literal](#)
- **Gender neutral:** [No](#)
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** [Yes](#)
- **Readability:** [Medium](#)
- **Worth using:** [Almost certainly \(not sure yet, details below\)](#)

The LSB was put together as an edit of the NASB 1995 by the Master's Seminary and University. For those who don't know, the Master's Seminary is associated with John MacArthur

It aims to be a window into the original languages and thus cites consistent translation of words as one of the goals. For example, the word "seed" is often used to indicate descendants, and many translations translate it "descendants". The LSB translates it "seed", which is more literal and a good thing. (*Especially in the book of Hebrews*)

Another example: it always translates the Greek word "?????" ([doulos](#)) as slave, which is great. It doesn't mean servant as many/most translations render it; it means slave, which can be important as Paul calls himself a 'slave' (doulos) of Christ. It tends to take this same highly literal approach everywhere, yet it doesn't seem harder to read than the NASB 95.

Big positive check mark there.

The biggest change that many people will notice is in the Old Testament, where they use "Yahweh" instead of LORD in all caps. I love this. While the exact pronunciation of God's name is unknown (*though I have an article about my theory on its pronunciation*), any scholarly accepted possible pronunciation is better than LORD in all caps.

It passes the litmus test verse, and has the same fidelity to gender that the NASB 95 does too, including "sons of Israel" being used in the OT instead of translating it "children of Israel", or *mis* translating it "people of Israel".

I haven't spent enough time with it to be sure, but I think the LSB will *likely* end up in the ranks of the NKJV and NASB 95. I haven't seen anything in it that's worse than the NASB 95 yet, and some things are better. (*like Yahweh instead of LORD in the OT.*) Given time, it will *likely* supplant my NASB 95 as my primary physical Bible... but I'm not sure.

Again, I'd like to qualify this mini-review by saying I haven't spent enough time with it to be sure. So I have high hopes and it's looking good, but it's possible that it has some fatal flaws. It's unlikely, but

possible.

EDIT on Jan 8 of 2023: I had a brainwave many months ago and switched my daily Bible reading from the NASB 95 to the LSB to get more experience with it and compare it. (*You can [read the LSB free online](#)*). I'm doing a chronological reading this time, and I've covered about half of the Old Testament starting in Ruth, which was when I had the brainwave.

Here are my impressions:

First, it seems slightly easier to read than the NASB 95. The difference isn't huge, but it seems to be there.

Second, *it's more literal **most of the time...** but only **most of the time***. I did a verse-by-verse comparison in Isaiah chapter 40 using a text comparison tool and simply checked all the differences against Hebrew. I've also been checked whenever I noticed a difference from my NASB 95 while reading. By and large, the LSB was more literal overall. Where it wasn't, I usually scratched my head a bit at the changes. They weren't necessarily wrong, but they were odd.

Here's one example in a well known verse:

Isaiah 40:31 – NASB 95

31 Yet those who **wait for** the LORD
Will gain new **strength**;
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary.

Versus

Isaiah 40:31 – LSB

31 Yet those who **hope** in Yahweh
Will gain new **power**;
They will mount up with wings like eagles;
They will run and not get tired;
They will walk and not become weary.

The Hebrew in the first line means “wait”, but virtually every translation renders it “hope” in Job 6:19, so that's not entirely outside the range of the word's meaning. Still, that translation is... odd. Not necessarily wrong, but odd and less correct than the NASB 95. “Wait” is definitely more correct, and I don't understand why they changed it to “hope”.

*It's the same with **strength vs power on the second line***. Strength is a more proper meaning and makes *far* more sense given the context. “new power” sounds like someone is going to gain new

abilities, not be renewed/refreshed. Now, “power” isn’t wrong since the Hebrew word can mean that, but “strength” is a much better choice here given the context. Again, I struggle to understand this choice/change, and it isn’t a good one.

Overall – and despite the example above – I usually found the LSB to be more literal.

Not always, but more often than not.

For example, the common phrase “made a covenant” is more literally rendered “cut a covenant”. If you remember from Abraham, cutting the animals was necessary to make a covenant and I appreciate the change. Many of the differences were like this. Another change that jumped out at me is in 1 Sam 9:17, which is when Saul is chosen as king.

Notice the difference:

- **1 Sam 9:17 NASB95:** When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said to him, “Behold, the man of whom I spoke to you! This one shall **rule over** My people.
- **1 Sam 9:17 LSB:** Now Samuel saw Saul, and Yahweh answered him, “Behold, the man of whom I spoke to you! This one shall **restrict** My people.”

That really stuck out to me and it’s a case where the LSB definitely gets it more correct. The Hebrew word there isn’t the usual one for “rule”, which is “??????” ([mashal](#)). Instead it’s “?????” ([atsar](#)), which does indeed mean to restrain or restrict. That lends a very interesting nuance to this verse, and I’m glad the LSB got it right.

Often the changes in the LSB are like this... but not always.

Sometimes they’re like the Isaiah example.

But more often than not, they are good changes.

I like the LSB enough that I ordered a nice leather one because I want to have it in the house. I don’t know if it’ll be my primary Bible yet instead of the NASB 95 though. I want to go through the New Testament since I know Greek better than Hebrew before I make that decision... but I liked it enough to buy one and I’m considering it.

I’ll have more to say when I’ve finished reading through it.

(NOTE: Keep in mind that this is only based on half the OT and none of the NT. I’ll update this portion when I finish the New Testament and have had some time to think about it.)

The “Modern English Version” (MEV)

This translation was finished less than a decade ago and many people seem to like it because it’s based on the same text as the KJV and markets itself as an easier-to-read alternative to the NKJV. It’s not actually bad, but there are a few concerning things you should be aware of.

- **Translation type:** [Literal](#)
- **Gender neutral:** [Low](#)
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** [Yes... sort of \(special case\)](#)
- **Readability:** [Medium](#)
- **Worth using:** [Maybe \(special case\)](#)

So, let's start with the good... sort of. It passes the litmus test... sort of. We covered the definition of the word that makes this verse clear earlier and I think you'll agree that it's absolutely conclusive. That's why it's the litmus test; it's impossible to misunderstand what the Greek means.

However, here is the MEV's footnote on verse 36:

1 Corinthians 7:36 Some versions translate this word as "virgin daughters," others translate it as "fiancée." Since the Greek text itself remains unclear, the editors have chosen to keep the literal translation.

Hmm.

That's... interesting.

They say that a verse that's absolutely clear in meaning "remains unclear". **That's concerning because it indicates that either they didn't know the important Greek word(s) used in these verses (and also didn't look them up), or else they intentionally left open the possibility of a translation that they knew to be wrong.**

Either one is concerning.

I suspect it's the former (*and not malicious*) because of another concerning translation in another verse.

Is 58:8 (MEV)

Then your light shall break forth as the morning,
and your healing shall spring forth quickly,
and your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your **reward**.

Here's the problem, the Hebrew word "?????" ([asaph](#)) used there doesn't mean "reward". Click the link and use your browser's "find/search in page" feature to look. (*CTRL+F* on Windows). The word "reward" doesn't appear. Now, you might find the archaic word "rereward" under the list of things it's translated as; we'll get to that in a moment.

Definition #3 in the Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon:

3 bring up the rear of Isaiah 58:8 ?????????????? ?????????? ? i.e. be thy rear-guard (" ?????? ?????????? ??????????) — Isaiah 52:12 has Pi`el ?????????????? q. v.

The MEV gets it right in Isaiah 52:12, but not in 58:8 above, as you saw. Basically every other common/popular translation has something like “rear guard” here and for good reason; that’s what the word means in this context. The MEV stands completely alone in its error here. The lexicon is clear and yet they still got it wrong.

Why?

I have a guess. We’ll have to look at “rereward” for a moment to explain, and to do that we’ll look at the verse in the KJV.

Is 58:8 (MEV)

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy **rereward**.

“rereward” is pronounced “rearward” and is an archaic word with this meaning:

rereward noun
 rere-?ward
 obsolete
 : REAR GUARD

Source: [Merriam-Webster's Dictionary](#)

How did the MEV get this wrong?

Here’s my theory.

To be clear, this is just a theory and I have no proof, but it’s the only way I can think of. Perhaps the translators looked at the KJV’s “rereward” and instead of thinking “rere-ward” as in “rearward”, they thought “re-reward”, as in “to reward again”? Maybe? And then perhaps – this is just a guess – but perhaps they assumed the word’s meaning from the KJV and went with it... without checking the original Hebrew.

That’s just a guess.

I don’t see how they could’ve possibly looked up the Hebrew word and still translated it “reward”.

When I don’t like how something is translated I can usually see why it was translated that way, even if I disagree. That’s not the case here. I simply don’t understand how they got there.

Regardless, it seems apparent that they didn’t check the original language and possibly weren’t familiar enough with old English to know what rereward meant, which might’ve caused the confusion. That’s disturbing for two reasons. First, because it claims to be based on the KJV and yet the translators apparently weren’t familiar with Old English. Second and **more importantly, they apparently didn’t check the original language.**

That's a real problem...

...but.

Despite errors like that, it seems overall "okay". I wouldn't trust it because there was *at minimum* a lack of care by the rather large team of translators. Perhaps that lack of care spilled over to other verses, perhaps it didn't. I can't know without spending way more time than I currently have to investigate further. **Because I can't trust it, I have no intention of using it.**

Oh, and it has two other things against it.

First, it translates "sons of Israel" as "children of Israel" in the Old Testament. The NKJV and KJV do this too and only the NASB 1995 gets this right (*part of the reason I prefer it*), but it should be mentioned.

Second, it technically italicizes words that were added by the translators, but effectively it doesn't. It only does this with large changes and not smaller ones. This leads to being outright misleading in some places, like:

1 Cor 11:10

MEV For this reason the woman ought to have **a veil of** authority over her head, because of the angels.

NKJV For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on *her* head, because of the angels.

NASB 95 Therefore the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on her head, because of the angels.

Notice that the phrase "a symbol of" is italicized in the NASB 95 and NKJV while it isn't in the MEV. That's just one example of the many, many places where you have no idea which words belong to the translators and which words were inspired by God. There's simply no way to tell in the MEV.

That's a problem.

Honestly, that alone is enough for me to take a hard pass. Translators need to add words sometimes because that's just the nature of translating. However, they should be transparent about it and the commonly accepted way is to *italicize* added words. The MEV doesn't and that leads to a lack of transparency that the NASB 95 and NKJV don't suffer from.

Conclusion: I don't trust it so I won't use it... but it doesn't seem truly bad.

The NASB 95 is still the best option, and the NKJV is often a bit easier than the NASB and is based on the same source text as the MEV and NKJV. There's no reason to use the MEV when more accurate and more transparent options exist.

The “New English Translation” (NET)

The “NET” Bible has gained a lot of acclaim lately but I can’t understand why. One of the things that a lot of people like about it are the footnotes, but again I haven’t found them to be very worthwhile. Occasionally, but not often.

- Translation type: **Paraphrase**
- Gender neutral: **Yes – high**
- Pass Litmus Test verse: **No**
- Readability: **High**
- Worth using: **No**

As usual, a large problem is paraphrasing God’s words.

Psalm 8:5-6

NET: and make them a little less than the heavenly beings? You grant mankind honor and majesty; you appoint them **to rule over your creation; you have placed everything under their authority,**

NASB ’95: Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him **to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,**

Notice the complete lack of literalness = complete lack of respect for God’s **words**. This is especially important in this verse because the writer of Hebrews uses it in his argument for the deity of Christ in Hebrews 2. They actually needed to change both verses to make it fit, but it doesn’t fit well.

Even more worrying is the intentional changes to the text to fit their doctrinal biases.

John 1:1

NET: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was **fully** God.

NASB ’95: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Now, I’m as ardent a defender of the deity of Christ as anyone. I have a few articles proving Jesus’ deity on this website. It’s an important doctrine that’s worth defending to the death if necessary.

However, **Adding to God’s words is still wrong.**

It directly violates the command of God and that’s **exactly** what the NET Bible translators have done. It

doesn't matter if we support the doctrinal position that they changed God's **words** to support; it matters that they changed/added to God's **words**.

Their desire to support the deity of Christ isn't an excuse. The story of Uzzah touching the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Samuel 6:3-6 makes it clear that right motives don't justify wrong actions. Changing God's **words** is wrong, no matter the motive.

Period.

The NET Bible changes God's words for several reasons. Gender being one, but also to support the translators' doctrinal biases. It fails both the Litmus Test verse and John 1:1 (*no matter how good the motives*), and doesn't translate literally in many, many places.

Therefore, the NET Bible gets a failing grade.

Further, I've found the footnotes in the NET Bible – which many people love – to not be useful. Or to put it as bible-researcher.com put it:

The version contains a very full margin of **footnotes**, which, like the translation, **are of uneven character and value**.

Most are labeled "tn" for "translator note," and these are sometimes highly technical, using grammatical terms which few readers will understand. They may be compared to the notes in Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament* or in Rienecker's *Linguistic Key to the New Testament*. They will be helpful to advanced students, **but many of these "tn" notes are tiresome and tendentious (e.g. informing the reader over and over again that ????????? needs to be translated "people" because it is inclusive of women) or merely trivial, and clutter the page to no purpose.**

Some of the "tn" notes show an annoying tendency to defend the translation by associating other interpretations with mere ignorance of the languages, or with theological agendas.

...

But the "tn" and "sn" notes **cannot be relied upon** to inform the reader where scholars differ on important points of interpretation. **When they do notice other interpretations, they tend to be dismissive, defensive, and sometimes misleading.** These notes are in need of some careful revision.

[Source](#). (*the whole article is worth a read if you are considering the NET Bible, as it's scholarly and should disabuse you of that notion.*)

A footnote example occurs in Ephesians, where the note on 1:1 blatantly calls into question Paul's authorship. Thereafter, the footnotes refer to "the author" of Ephesians, never calling him "Paul". Ironically, the same phrasing of "the author" also occurs in 1, 2, and 3 John, John's gospel, and 1 and 2 Peter. It seems they doubt the authorship of those books too. I'm not sure why, as they are near universally agreed upon.

So the NET Bible usually isn't even worth it for the footnotes.

The “Good News Translation” (GNT)

Also known as the “Good News Bible” (GNB), the GNT was originally published as “Today’s English Version” (TEV). It’s also extremely similar to the “Contemporary English Version” (CEV), which is an offshoot of it. With only minor differences, everything you can say about the GNT can also be said of the CEV.

- **Translation type:** Paraphrase
- **Gender neutral:** Yes – high
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** No
- **Readability:** medium (*sloppy translation*)
- **Worth using:** No

The usual suspects are at fault in the GNT. It uses gender-neutral language, is mostly a paraphrase, and intentionally perverts our “Litmus Test” verse. Intentional perversion in one verse is enough to cast suspicion on all others.

Additionally:

In addition to being a Dynamic Equivalence version, the Good News Bible is also what some translation theorists call a “Common Language” version. “Common Language” is defined as the language which is “common to the usage of both educated and uneducated” in any given language, ⁽³⁾ or, to put it more bluntly, it is the level of language used by uneducated people and children. Bratcher says that the version was originally conceived as one which would be suitable for people who speak English as a second language. ⁽⁴⁾ But the main “market niche” of the Good News Bible was from the beginning the mainline Protestant churches in America and Great Britain, where copies were bought by the box for use in Sunday-school classes. The version was promoted as one which was suitable for children.

[Source.](#)

Therefore, much of the commentary on the NIV above applies, at least as it relates to writing for children. Further, some of the translation work is... there’s no other way to put it: “sloppy.” The sloppy renderings are why I gave it only a “medium” in readability, even though the actual text isn’t hard to read.

Romans 8:3

GNT: What the Law could not do, because human nature was weak, God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like our sinful nature

, to do away with sin.

NASB '95: For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son **in the likeness of sinful flesh** and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,

The GNT makes it sound like Jesus had a sinful nature. Now, I don't think this is intentional; it seems like just a sloppy translation. There are other examples, but I think that suffices given the GNT's other problems.

Long story short: hard pass on the GNT

There are much better options.

The "Holman Christian Standard Bible" (HCSB)

The HCSB has been overshadowed by its successor the CSB, but don't apply the sins of the CSB to the HCSB. It's much better than the CSB, though still not a good choice.

- **Translation type:** **paraphrase with some literalism**
- **Gender neutral:** **Yes – medium**
- **Pass Litmus Test verse:** **No**
- **Readability:** **good**
- **Worth using:** **No**

Ultimately, the HCSB is a middle-of-the-road translation. It's not nearly as bad as most on this list, but not nearly good enough to use either.

In general, the **HCSB translation is slightly more literal than the New International Version, but much less literal than the New American Standard Bible or the English Standard Version.** In various ways the text is simplified (long and complex Greek sentences are broken up into smaller and simpler ones) and made easy to understand by interpretive renderings. The style is on a level much lower than the NKJV, RSV and ESV.

[Source.](#)

Likewise, its treatment of gender is also middle-of-the-road. It's not as horrific as some, but also not good.

The translation of generic masculine nouns and pronouns in this version is conservative — that is, the version does not aim to conceal the fact that the authors of Scripture regularly use what modern feminists have called "sexist" language. **But the plural of the Greek word ????????? ("man") is regularly translated "people" instead of "men," and occasionally we also see a gender-neutral rendering of the singular ?????????.** For example, in Romans 3:4 ????????? ? ? ????? ???????, ??? ?? ????????? ????????

is translated “God must be true, even if everyone is a liar.” Masculine forms are also avoided where the Greek or Hebrew texts have participles, substantial adjectives, and pronouns which may be rendered with gender-neutral equivalents such as “someone,” “one,” “no one,” “another,” etc. The HCSB is more gender-neutral than the NASB, the NKJV, and the 1984 NIV.

[Source](#).

It occasionally makes some strange translation decisions too. For example:

Psalm 23:4

HCSB: *Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.*

NASB '95: *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

Obviously the HCSB’s translation is neither accurate nor literal – so it’s not usable – but it usually doesn’t veer into total paraphrase either.

The HCSB does contain a lot of footnotes, which many find helpful. However, it fails our “Litmus Test” verse – meaning they intentionally mistranslated God’s words – it isn’t very literal, and it engages in gender-neutral language perversions.

The HCSB’s Verdict: pass

There are better options.

Conclusion

Basically, there are only two translations that are worth using: the NASB 1995 edition and the NKJV (*and maybe the LSB*). I wish the list was longer, but it’s not. Both can be slightly harder to read than other translations. However, that’s a small price to pay for accuracy. That is, for knowing that you’re actually reading God’s words.

I double check all other translations, especially the ESV.

(Admittedly, I often double-check the NASB and NKJV too, but I almost always find that they are correct in their translation.)

I actually consider the ESV to be among the most dangerous of all Bible translations.

Not because it’s the worst translation – it’s not – but because it’s subtle, almost sneaky, about being bad. *It’s just literal enough and just gender-accurate enough to escape detection as being mistranslated*. This is especially bad because all the passages where they intentionally mistranslated God’s words also

go undetected. (*And there are more besides the half dozen we looked at.*) In my opinion, that makes it more dangerous than something obviously mistranslated like the NIV and NLT. Plus, there's that word it deleted in 1 Cor 6:9...

If there's a Bible translation you're interested in that I didn't cover, go ahead and mention it in the comments **after checking the litmus test verse**. I might add it. No promises though.

Also, **please check the comments before asking about a specific version**.

You can do this on a desktop by hitting CTRL+F (for "find"), which will search the whole page for specific text, comments included. On mobile, there should be a "find in page" option on your browser's menu; different name, same function.

You might also be interested in [my article on Textual Criticism](#), which explains the underlying Greek texts from which our New Testaments are translated. Or perhaps [my article where I explain the structure of the Greek language](#), *entirely in English*; no Greek words/letters at all. This becomes practical at the end, since you can use this knowledge to look up the Greek in a free online interlinear Bible... all without knowing a single Greek letter.

No joke. ?

(P.S. Wow, you stuck with me for ~23,500 words. I commend you on your tenacity and commitment to finding a good Bible translation. Well done, and may God bless your desire to understand scripture better.)

(P.P.S. A while back, I started translating the New Testament from Greek to English for myself/my benefit. It's online with a forum attached so anyone can critique the translation work and help improve it. In my (biased) opinion, I think it's more literal than the NASB '95 and NKJV yet also much easier to read. It's definitely less gender-neutral than either. It's incomplete, but available online completely for free [here](#) if you want to take a look, and you can view its translation philosophy and principles [here](#).)