

# An Evaluation of Gender Language in the 2011 Edition of the NIV Bible

*A report from the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*



## Introduction

According to the Christian Booksellers Association, the NIV is the best-selling Bible in English—ahead of the King James Version, the New King James Version, the New Living translation, the English Standard Version, the New American Standard, and several others.<sup>1</sup>

But now Zondervan, the publisher of the NIV, has issued a new edition, the 2011 NIV. This edition will replace the current NIV (the 1984 edition). What is this new edition like?

The last two attempts at revising the NIV were met with a great deal of controversy due to their use of a gender-neutral philosophy of translation.<sup>2</sup> The gender-neutral approach of the TNIV (*Today's New International Version*) in 2002 and 2005 became such a lightning-rod that the version never caught on with American evangelicals and has now been discontinued.

The TNIV provoked a lively discussion among evangelical scholars and Bible readers about translation philosophy in general and about gender-neutral approaches in particular. In fact, the debate actually preceded the appearance of the TNIV because of rumors in the evangelical world that the NIV was going “gender-neutral.” That debate began in 1997 and extended through the mid-2000s. Many of the contested issues in that discussion remain unresolved.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The CBA's rankings are available online at [http://www.cbaonline.org/nm/documents/BSLs/Bible\\_Translations.pdf](http://www.cbaonline.org/nm/documents/BSLs/Bible_Translations.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>The first attempt was the *New International Version - Inclusive Language Edition* (NIVI) in 1996 (released only in the UK), and the second was *Today's New International Version* (TNIV) in 2005.

<sup>3</sup>See Mark L. Strauss, *Distorting Scripture?: The Challenge of Bible Translation & Gender Accuracy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998).; Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth, eds., *The Challenge of Bible Translation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); Vern S. Poythress and WA Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God's Words* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000); D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive-Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Vern S. Poythress and WA Grudem, *The TNIV and the Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2004); Wayne Grudem and Jerry Thacker, *Why Is My Choice of a Bible Translation So Important?* (Louisville, KY: Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 2005).

It is no surprise, therefore, that many evangelicals have been anticipating the release of the 2011 NIV. Readers want to see how this latest revision has resolved (or not resolved) points of contention about gender language that are left over from these previous discussions.

Does the 2011 NIV deserve the same prominence among evangelicals that the 1984 NIV has enjoyed for so many years? Or will 2011 NIV fall into disuse and go the way of the TNIV?

Readers should realize, first, that the 2011 NIV is not a revision based on the old NIV of 1984, but is a revision based on the now-defunct TNIV of 2005. So there is an obvious question that needs answering. *Have the weaknesses of the TNIV been sufficiently overcome in the 2011 NIV?*

The following analysis explains both the commendable changes in the new NIV and the areas where we still have cause for concern.

## **Many Welcome Improvements in the 2011 NIV**

### **1. The Process**

First, a word about the translation process: We are grateful for the openness and honesty expressed by Zondervan and the NIV's Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) during the early stages of this revision. Several private conversations were held long prior to the finalization of the work of the CBT (indeed, the CBT humbly solicited input from a number of sources), and the leadership at Zondervan was very forthright about their intentions and plan. Particularly to be commended are recent Zondervan President Moe Girkins and CBT Chairman Doug Moo. Their integrity from the very beginning of this process has set the stage for a respectful discussion of substance of this new translation.

### **2. Many Noteworthy Improvements**

With regard to the actual words in the 2011 NIV, the translators have made numerous improvements that are worthy of note.<sup>4</sup>

For instance, in most cases the key Pauline term *sarx* has been changed from “sinful nature” to the more literal and precise term “flesh” in the 2011 NIV (for example, Rom. 8:4). In Romans 1:17 and related texts, “righteousness from God” becomes “righteousness of God.” In other verses, “observing the law” becomes “works of law” (see Rom. 3:20, 28). All three of these changes now leave open important interpretive options and represent a significant improvement over renderings in the 1984 NIV that closed those options.

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<sup>4</sup>The Committee on Bible Translation summarizes many improvements in a report released online in late 2010: “Updating the New International Version of the Bible: Notes from the Committee on Bible Translation” (The Committee on Bible Translation, August 2010), <http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/Translation-Notes-Final1.pdf>.

### 3. Improvements in Gender Language

Regarding gender language, the new NIV also makes numerous commendable improvements. For example, in 164 passages, “man” and “mankind” have replaced a gender-neutral equivalent such as “humanity” (as in Gen. 1:27, which now says, “God created mankind in his own image,” retaining the male-nuanced meaning of Hebrew *'adam*).<sup>5</sup>

Similar welcome changes have been made in hundreds of verses where “brother,” “father,” “son,” and “he/him/his” have been restored, replacing the gender-neutral alternatives that were used in the TNIV. In total, we have counted 933 places where gender-neutral translations in the TNIV have been changed in the 2011 NIV, and in most cases they have been replaced with more accurate, gender-specific translations.<sup>6</sup>

We are thankful for this significant improvement in nearly a thousand places in the 2011 NIV, and we recognize that the NIV’s Committee on Bible Translation expended a large amount of effort and scholarly discussion to make these changes. In fact, many of these improvements were made at verses that were highlighted in previous criticisms of the TNIV by CBMW and others. And there are numerous other improvements as well that we cannot mention here.

#### **Statistical Summary: 75% of Inaccurate Gender Language Translations from the TNIV Are Retained in the 2011 NIV**

In spite of these numerous improvements, however, there are still significant unresolved issues related to gender language.

The rest of this report considers (1) an overall summary of the changes, then (2) some verses relevant to women’s roles in the church (a concern of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood since our founding), and finally (3) specific examples of changes in gender language from the 1984 NIV to the 2011 NIV.

Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem were instrumental in cataloguing problematic renderings in the TNIV New Testament after it first appeared in 2002.<sup>7</sup> Then in a CBMW report, Wayne

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<sup>5</sup> For a full list of these and other changes listed by category and verse, see [www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org).

<sup>6</sup> See previous note for a full list of such revisions, including an annotation where each verse has been corrected from the TNIV. However, it should be noted that this total of 933 is probably a bit high, since it includes all the instances where the objectionable gender language of the TNIV has been revised, but in some of those passages one gender-neutral term has just been replaced with another, and some inaccuracy remains.

<sup>7</sup> The TNIV New Testament appeared in 2002. In response, Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem published in 2004 *The TNIV and The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy* in which they cataloged 900 New Testament examples of gender-related “translation inaccuracies” (p. 73). The TNIV Old Testament appeared in 2005 along with another revision of the TNIV New Testament.

Grudem and Jerry Thacker, catalogued some 3,686 “inaccurate translations in the TNIV” that related to gender language when the entire TNIV Bible first appeared in 2005.<sup>8</sup>

In preparation for this present report, researchers at the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood office surveyed all of these 3,686 problems in the TNIV to see how they were rendered in the 2011 NIV.<sup>9</sup> We found that although the 2011 NIV corrected many of its most controversial renderings of gender language from the TNIV, the majority (75%) of the problems identified by Poythress and Grudem still remain. In numerous cases the 2011 NIV follows the TNIV and unnecessarily removes male-oriented terminology that was present in the 1984 NIV—especially the use of generic masculine forms of expression.

The charts below show a numerical summary of our findings. The charts show how many corrections were made from the 2005 TNIV to 2011 NIV.<sup>10</sup>

*Table 1 – Summary of Revisions of 3699 Inaccurate Gender Language Translations from TNIV to NIV 2011*

<b>Testaments</b>	<b>Same as TNIV</b>	<b>Revised from TNIV</b>	<b>%Same</b>	<b>%Revised</b>
OT	2194	597	79%	21%
NT	572	336	63%	37%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2766</b>	<b>933</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>25%</b>

As this chart indicates, of the 3,699 “inaccuracies” from the TNIV that we confirmed from Grudem and Thacker, we found that three fourths of them (75%) stayed exactly as they were in the TNIV.<sup>11</sup> That means that whatever improvements have appeared, the vast majority of the “inaccuracies” identified by Grudem and Thacker persist in the 2011 NIV.

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<sup>8</sup>Wayne Grudem and Jerry Thacker, *Why Is My Choice of a Bible Translation So Important?* (Louisville, KY: Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 2005), p. 33. Grudem and Thacker’s appendix catalogued some 3,686 “inaccurate translations in the TNIV” in both Old and New Testaments. Because the 2005 TNIV included some revisions to the 2002 TNIV New Testament, Grudem and Thacker identified 10 additional problems in the TNIV New Testament and that brought the total number of “inaccuracies” for the NT up to 910 (ibid., 81-96), along with 2,776 in the Old Testament.

<sup>9</sup> Using Grudem and Thacker’s list, our researchers identified added fifteen new problem passages and deleted two, for a net increase in the base list of thirteen, giving a total of 3,699 problematic renderings in the 2005 TNIV.

<sup>10</sup>We were greatly assisted in this research by an online tool that tracks how the 2011 NIV compares to the NIV 1984 and the TNIV. The creator of this resource is Robert Slowley, a senior software engineer at the European Bioinformatics Institute in Cambridge, U.K. The data from this comparison is available in a table at the following website: [http://www.slowley.com/niv2011\\_comparison](http://www.slowley.com/niv2011_comparison).

<sup>11</sup> This chart also includes a handful of changes to the terms “the Jews” and “saints,” since those were part of the earlier study, but the vast majority of the changes were to gender language, and that is our primary concern in this analysis.

A close inspection of the 25% that were revised shows that the 2011 NIV has backed away from some of the most heavily criticized gender-neutral renderings of the TNIV, and for that we are thankful. Nevertheless, the modifications were incomplete. Here is a breakdown by category for Old Testament and New Testament:

*Table 2 – Summary of Old Testament Revisions  
from TNIV to 2011 NIV*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Same as TNIV</b>	<b>Revised from TNIV</b>	<b>%Same</b>	<b>%Revised</b>
A. Changes Made from Singular to Plural (and a Few Related Changes) to Avoid the Use of “He/Him/His”	1617	429	79%	21%
B. Changes Made to Avoid the Word “Father”	293	23	93%	7%
C. Changes to Avoid the Word “Brother”	10	17	37%	63%
D. Changes to Avoid the Word “Man”	256	117	69%	31%
E. Changes to Avoid the Word “Son”	14	11	56%	44%
F. Changes Made to Avoid the Word “Women”	4	0	100%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2194</b>	<b>597</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>21%</b>

*Table 3 – Summary of New Testament Revisions  
from TNIV to 2011 NIV*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Same as TNIV</b>	<b>Revised from TNIV</b>	<b>%Same</b>	<b>%Revised</b>
A. Changes from Singular to Plural to Avoid the Use of “He/Him/His”	385	223	63%	37%
B. Changes to Avoid the Word “Father” and Related Words	35	4	90%	10%
C. Changes to Avoid the Word “Brother” (Or to Add the Word “Sister”)	53	33	62%	38%
D. Changes to Avoid the Word “Man”	22	52	30%	70%
E. Changes to Avoid the Word “Son”	19	6	76%	24%
F. Changes to Avoid the Phrase “The Jews” <sup>12</sup>	24	0	100%	0%
G. Changes that Lose the Nuance of Holiness in “Saints”	27	14	66%	34%
H. Other Changes	7	4	64%	36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>572</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>37%</b>

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<sup>12</sup> This category (“the Jews”) and the next one (dealing with the term “saints”) are not gender-related changes but they were also of concern in the earlier Grudem-Thacker study so they are included here for completeness.

Detailed lists of these changes can be found at [www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org). The following section gives specific examples of these remaining translation difficulties.

### **Examples of specific changes from the 1984 NIV to the 2011 NIV**

The main question facing current NIV readers is not how much the new NIV is like the TNIV (see above), but rather, *How much has changed from the 1984 NIV that I am currently using?* Therefore the following section examines changes from the 1984 NIV to the new 2011 NIV.

#### **1. The 2011 NIV adopts feminist-leaning translations in several key verses dealing with women's role in the church**

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

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

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

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

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

Whether the verb is understood in a negative or positive way, *the focus of the verse is now on prohibiting a self-initiated action*, taking it on oneself to "assume authority" over men. And so feminists will now quickly say that they are not assuming authority on their own initiative – they

are just “accepting” it because others entrusted it to them. In any local church that uses this new NIV, no one will be able to answer their argument from this Bible.

This verse alone in the 2011 NIV gives evangelical feminists the most important advance for their cause in the last thirty years. But the translation is simply incorrect, as many writers have demonstrated in extensive scholarly discussion elsewhere,<sup>13</sup> and as all other modern English translations agree: Even the gender-neutral NRSV translates *authenteō* “have authority” here — along with the NIV, NLT, RSV, Holman CSB, and NKJV, while the NASB, NET Bible, and ESV similarly translate it as “exercise authority.” Thus, the NIV is out on a limb here over against the other main modern English translations. And it is out on a limb precisely because of its attempt to be “neutral” on a passage that even the liberal translators of the NRSV have not attempted to make more amenable to an egalitarian interpretation. The verb *authenteō* here means “exercise authority” or “have authority,” not “assume authority.”

This mistaken NIV translation of 1 Timothy 2:12 we find to be particularly unfortunate, because it might well constitute the single reason why churches decide no longer to use the NIV Bible, since apparently it will now be available only in this new 2011 edition and the 1984 NIV will be discontinued.

Several other verses have also been changed from the 1984 NIV, and all the changes have moved in the same feminist direction.

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **Romans 16:7** Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **Romans 16:7** Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. (same as TNIV, except for footnote)

This verse changes “Junias” (a man’s name) to “Junia” (a woman’s name; the Greek spelling could refer to either a man or a woman), and now says that “Andronicus and Junia” are “outstanding among the apostles,” thus making the woman “Junia” an apostle. This is a highly disputed verse, but the NIV now clearly gives more weight to the feminist argument that says there was at least one woman apostle, and if a woman could be an apostle (like Paul or Peter, presumably), surely women can be pastors and elders as well.

Some other recent evangelical translations also translate this name as “Junia” (a woman), but at least three conservative translations do not then make Junia an apostle. Based on what we at

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<sup>13</sup> See Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), pp. 304-318, especially the summaries of the studies by H. Scott Baldwin, “A Difficult Word: *Authenteō* in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas Köstenberger, Thomas Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 65–80 and 269–305, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence Structure in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church*, 81–103. Baldwin’s article provides a range of possible meanings for *authenteō*, and Köstenberger’s article argues from syntax to show that the verb cannot have a negative sense in this sentence structure.

CBMW think to be a better understanding of the Greek phrase *episēmoi en tois apostolois*,<sup>14</sup> both the ESV and the NET Bible say that Andronicus and Junia are “well known to the apostles,” and the Holman CSB says they are “noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles.” Thus, the apostles *recognized* Andronicus and Junia, but they were not themselves apostles. (The new NIV also gives a similar reading to this as an alternative in a footnote.) We recognize that there are other explanations for this contested verse, but it still should be noted that, in contrast to three other recent evangelical translations, the new NIV adopts the translation strongly favored by feminists, apparently making Junia an apostle.

Although the Greek term *apostolos* that is used here can sometimes have the weaker sense “messenger” (see John 13:16; Phil. 2:25), the new NIV does not give that as an alternative translation at Romans 16:7. Moreover, the English word “apostle” everywhere else in the new NIV refers to the absolutely authoritative messengers of Christ like Peter and Paul, and therefore readers of the new NIV will be led to conclude that women could be apostles of such stature – just like Junia.

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **1 Corinthians 14:33-34** For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **1 Corinthians 14:33-34** For God is not a God of disorder but of peace--as in all the congregations of the Lord's people.

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. (same as TNIV)

The question here is where to divide the paragraph and where to put the phrase, “as in all the congregations of the saints.” The old NIV put the phrase with what follows, so Paul said, “As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches.” There is a good reason for this: the Greek word *ekklēsia* (“church, congregation”) is repeated in both phrases, tying them together, and a statement that something is done “in all the congregations” is an appropriate way for Paul to give weight to what he says about women speaking in church.

What does Paul mean by “women should remain silent”? Many interpreters take this to mean that women should be “silent” when spoken prophecies were being judged (a governing function for the whole church). But whatever kind of silence Paul meant, the phrase “As in all the congregations of the saints” showed that Paul was not just solving some *local* problem at Corinth but was reminding them about the established practice of *all the churches*. “All the churches” had some kind of restrictions on some kinds of speech by women in the assembled congregation.

But the 2011 NIV now *disconnects* the phrase “as in all the congregations of the Lord's people” from the statement, “women should remain silent in the churches” (1 Cor. 14:33-34). They put

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<sup>14</sup> See discussion in Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, pp. 224-225, with reference to a groundbreaking semantic study by M. H. Burer and D. B. Wallace.



that phrase with the previous sentence: “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace--as in all the congregations of the Lord's people” (1 Cor. 14:33). Now Paul’s statement that “Women should remain silent in the churches” (1 Cor. 14:34) starts a new paragraph, and the feminist argument that Paul was *only addressing a local problem at Corinth* (not a problem that applies to churches today) has gained new force. Once again the new NIV has been modified in a way that favors a common feminist interpretation.

Now it must be said that at several of these verses the new NIV does give an alternative, more conservative reading in a footnote, and we appreciate that. But what people read in a translation are the words in the Bible text itself, far more than the footnotes. And the 2011 NIV has shifted some key verses in a gender-neutral way that supports women apostles and women elders.

The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood cannot endorse a Bible that makes these changes in an evangelical feminist direction, particularly in its incorrect translation of 1 Timothy 2:12.

## **2. Making Phoebe a deacon in Romans 16:1 will be of concern to churches where male deacons have a governing role over the church**

In a somewhat related verse, one other change should be noted that will be of concern to some churches:

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **Romans 16:1** I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **Romans 16:1** I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon [footnote: or *servant*] of the church in Cenchreae. (same as TNIV)

This verse changes Phoebe from a “servant” to a “deacon” of the church at Cenchrea, and thereby it endorses women as deacons. Both translations are possible meanings for the Greek word *diakonos*, and the decision must be made from the larger New Testament context. (In the entire New Testament, the TNIV translates *diakonos* as “deacon” only 4 times out of 29 occurrences: here in Rom. 16:1 and in three verses where no individual is named but a church office is clearly in view: Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, and 12.)

At this point the 2011 NIV adds two footnotes, one that helpfully says, “Or *servant*,” and another that says, “The word deacon refers here to a Christian designated to serve with the overseers/elders of the church in a variety of ways; similarly in Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8, 12.” The second note clearly ties the usage here to the office of “deacon” in Philippians and 1 Timothy.

CBMW has not taken a position on whether women can be deacons,<sup>15</sup> and so our comment here is more of an observation than an objection. For churches and denominations that do *not* have

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<sup>15</sup> For example, both views are represented in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Crossway, 1991).

women deacons, the new NIV will prove difficult. These churches hold that “deacon” is a governing office in the church and that 1 Tim. 3:12 requires deacons to be “the husband of one wife.” But if such churches use the 2011 NIV, the debate about women as deacons will shift: Phoebe is now named as a deacon in Rom. 16:1; therefore, it seems, women should be deacons today. This will be of concern to a number of churches.

### 3. The 2011 NIV incorrectly changes “father” to “parent” or something else

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **Proverbs 15:5** A fool spurns his father's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **Proverbs 15:5** A fool spurns a parent's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence. (same as TNIV)

But the Hebrew text has *'ab*, which means “father,” not “parent.” Fifteen other verses in the 2011 NIV make a similar change. Why seek to eliminate “father” when that is the precise meaning of the Hebrew text?

There are no cases in the Old Testament where the singular Hebrew word *'ab* means "parent" rather than "father." Hebrew lexicons define this word in singular as "father," not as "parent" (see Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 3; also Koehler-Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, pp. 1-2). But the new NIV translators in verses like this were unwilling to translate the word with the clear, simple English equivalent "father," apparently because in today's culture it is unpopular to use *an example of an individual father* to teach a general truth that applies to all parents. Even when that is what the Hebrew text does, the 2011 NIV is often unwilling to allow English readers today to see it. “Father” seems to be a "taboo" word that must be avoided in contexts that teach a more general truth.

Similar changes in other verses diminish the role of the father in Israelite society. For example,

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **1 Samuel 18:2** From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **1 Samuel 18:2** From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. (same as TNIV)

Although the Hebrew text in such verses speaks several times of a "father's house" or "father's family" and uses the ordinary Hebrew word for "father" (*'ab*), the new NIV eliminates the word "father" and substitutes "family" or some other expression. The new expressions remove any suggestion of a father's leadership role in the family. These new NIV verses are not translated accurately, but they are consistent with the new NIV's practice of removing male-oriented details of meaning from the text of the Bible.

#### 4. The 2011 NIV incorrectly changes “forefather” to “ancestor”

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **Joshua 19:47** They settled in Leshem and named it Dan after their forefather.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **Joshua 19:47** They settled in Leshem and named it Dan after their ancestor.  
(same as TNIV)

The Hebrew text has *'ab*, the ordinary word for “father,” and here the translation “forefather” is appropriate for such a reference to a male ancestor from earlier generations. But the new NIV’s word “ancestor” *eliminates* the male component of meaning that would have been evident to every Hebrew reader because this was the common word meaning “father.” This change occurs 313 times in the 2011 NIV. Why does the new NIV seek to eliminate male meaning that is present in the Hebrew or Greek text?

#### 5. The 2011 NIV incorrectly changes “mighty men” to “mighty warriors”

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **2 Samuel 23:8**: These are the names of David's mighty men: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup>: These are the names of David's mighty warriors: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter. (same as TNIV)

The Hebrew noun *gibbor* means “strong, valiant man” (Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 150; the word is related to the adjective *gibbor* which means “strong, mighty”). At least since the King James Version of the Bible (1611), the term *gibbor* has been translated as “mighty men” when referring to King David’s elite circle of “thirty mighty men” and then his even greater “three mighty men” (especially in 2 Sam. 23 and 1 Chron. 11).

The NIV had translated this word correctly as “mighty men” in these contexts, indicating both the strength of these men and their manhood. Surely in that ancient culture there were no women among David’s thirty “mighty men.” It is hard to understand then why the 2011 NIV changes and calls them “mighty warriors” (here and 20 other times). But it is consistent with the new NIV’s pattern of removing many male-oriented words from the text.

In an age when books are being written about the way men are staying away from church, it is ironic that the NIV removes David’s “mighty men.” What man who reads about David’s mighty men has not wanted to imitate their courage, their strength against evil, their faithfulness to God in serving their king? But in the new NIV they are no longer “men.”

## 6. The 2011 NIV incorrectly changes “son” to “child”

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **Proverbs 13:24** He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **Proverbs 13:24** Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.

The Hebrew word here is *ben* (singular), and it means “son,” not “child” and certainly not “children.” The pronoun connected to “son” is masculine singular and means “his” not “their.” The Bible often teaches by giving a specific, concrete example (such as a specific father who is disciplining a specific son) and then expecting the readers to apply this vivid example more generally as appropriate. But in 33 places the new NIV finds such a specific masculine example of a “son” objectionable and changes it to a broader, gender-neutral truth about “whoever” and “their children” generally, all in the interest of removing the masculine specificity that is there in the Hebrew text of Scripture.

This tendency to avoid the word “son” also affects the phrase “son of man” in some verses:

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **Psalms 8:4** what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **Psalms 8:4** what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

The phrase in Hebrew is *ben-’adam*, and *ben* (which is singular) means “son” and *’adam* means “man.” The translation “son of man” is correct, and this verse is understood that way in Hebrews 2:6. There is a clear possibility that Jesus thought of himself as fulfilling this passage (as well as Dan. 7:13) when he referred to himself frequently as “the Son of Man.” But the connection to the New Testament and to Christ is obscured with the new NIV, as it removes male components of meaning from the phrase “son of man” in this and four other OT verses.

## 7. The 2011 NIV incorrectly changes “man” to a gender-neutral term

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **1 Kings 9:5** I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **1 Kings 9:5** I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.' (same as TNIV)

What can be the objection to letting readers know that God promised David that his descendants would never lack a *man* on the throne of Israel? (Hebrew *’ish* in this verse means “man,” not “successor.”)

Several Hebrew words that mean "man" and not "person" (unless they appear in certain recognized idioms) are changed and made gender-neutral in 278 places in the new NIV. This is not because the meanings of these male-oriented Hebrew words have changed (the meanings have been known for centuries), but because the new NIV found these male-oriented words offensive to our modern culture, so it eliminated the most accurate translation "man" and substituted various other gender-neutral words. In each case this makes the translation less accurate because it eliminates male-specific meaning that is there in the Hebrew text.

1984 NIV **Proverbs 27:17** As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

2011 NIV **Proverbs 27:17** As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. (same as TNIV)

Proverbs 27:17 is also troubling, not least because it is used today as a theme verse for so many men's ministries. But the new NIV removes the men from this verse, even though the Hebrew word *'ish* clearly means "man"! With hundreds of male-oriented words expunged, we doubt that the new NIV is a Bible that will appeal strongly to men.

### **8. The 2011 NIV incorrectly changes "brother" to "brother or sister" or to other non-family words**

1984 NIV **Luke 17:3** So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

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

Why did the NIV make this change? Jesus gave a specific example of a brother who sins. He could have said "brother or sister" if he had wanted to, because elsewhere the New Testament says "brother or sister" in James 2:15, "Suppose a brother or sister (Greek *adelphos ē adelphē*) is without clothes and daily food". But Jesus did not say "brother or sister" in Luke 17:3. He gave a specific example of a brother. Should we feel free to "correct" what Jesus said?

Yet the new NIV does this 63 times, changing "brother" to "brother or sister," or to some other gender-neutral expression.<sup>16</sup> Of course, we agree that these verses *apply* to sisters as well as brothers. But the question is whether we should mix *application* into the *translation* and change what Jesus said.

Here is an Old Testament example:

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<sup>16</sup> We do not object when the 2011 NIV regularly translates the plural Greek term *adelphoi* as "brothers and sisters" rather than merely "brothers," because masculine plural nouns in Greek (as in many languages) can be used to refer to mixed groups of men and women, and the plural word *adelphoi* is one example. But the singular word *adelphos* means "brother" just as the singular word *adelphē* means "sister," and it is not legitimate to translate singular *adelphos* as "brother or sister."

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **Deuteronomy 22:1** If you see your brother's ox or sheep straying, do not ignore it but be sure to take it back to him.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **Deuteronomy 22:1** If you see your fellow Israelite's ox or sheep straying, do not ignore it but be sure to take it back to its owner.

The Hebrew word *'ah* means “brother,” not “fellow Israelite.” Why not translate this common word according to its ordinary meaning, including the rich family imagery of “brother,” unless you are trying to eliminate much of the male-oriented language from the Bible?

At this point some NIV supporters claim that they are only using definitions of the Greek and Hebrew words for “brother” that are found in the standard lexicons. But they are not reading those lexicons carefully enough, for the lexical entries show that the *singular* uses of those terms always apply to a singular male human being, never to a singular female human being, who would be called a “sister,” using Greek *adelphē* and Hebrew *'akhot*. (We realize that because of the way these languages function, masculine plurals such as *adelphoi* can refer to groups of both men and women, but not masculine singulars such as *adelphos*.)

For example, in the Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich *Lexicon*, the word *adelphos* means (1) “a male from the same womb . . . brother” or (2) “a person viewed as a brother in terms of a close affinity, brother, fellow member, member, associate figurative extension of (1)” (p. 18). So the meanings “fellow member, associate” are to be understood not as stand-alone definitions that lose all male reference, but as “figurative extensions” of the meaning “male from the same womb.” And that is why all the singular examples cited for *adelphos* refer to individual men, and any singular examples that speak of an individual woman refer to her as an *adelphē*, “sister.” The lexicons do not support the gender-neutering of “brother” that the new NIV has done 63 times.

## 9. The 2011 NIV incorrectly changes “he” and “him” to “they” and “them”

This is the largest category of changes in the new NIV, and it makes a significant difference in meaning. This is because changing singulars to plurals removes the emphasis on an individual, personal relationship with God and on specific individual responsibility for one’s choices and actions.

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **John 14:23** Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **John 14:23** Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. (same as TNIV)

The “If” that Jesus said (Greek *ean*) is omitted, and three masculine singular pronouns (Greek *autos*) are incorrectly translated with “them,” removing the amazing emphasis on the Father and Son dwelling with an individual person. In the 2011 NIV, maybe “them” refers the whole group of those who obey. How can we know? Though some of these changes have been corrected from

the TNIV, such changes from singular to plural (or from “he” to “you” or “we” or no word at all) still occur 2,002 times in the new NIV.

### 10. The 2011 NIV loses many more masculine singular pronouns than the “Translators’ Notes” suggest

We were initially pleased to see that the “Translators’ Notes” explaining the 2011 NIV said,

In general, much more often than not:

Using plurals instead of singulars to deal with generic forms was avoided . . . .

Using second person forms instead of third person forms to deal with generics was avoided.<sup>17</sup>

But when we did an analysis of the 2011 NIV, we found that such changes were still quite frequent. For example, the TNIV had changed 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular pronouns from singular (“he/him/his”) to plural (“they/them/their” used in plural, not singular sense) 1166 times in the Old Testament and 395 times in the New Testament (where the underlying Hebrew or Greek wording was masculine singular).<sup>18</sup> This was a total of 1561 changes. In the 2011 NIV, 454 of these were corrected, but 1107 (or 71%) remained the same as in the TNIV. We are not sure what is meant then when the “Translators’ Notes” say, “In general, much more often than not: Using plurals instead of singulars to deal with generic forms was avoided.”

Here is an example:

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **Proverbs 28:19** He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **Proverbs 28:19** Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty. (same as TNIV)

The individual focus is gone and now readers will think about *groups* who work their land or chase fantasies. This is not what God’s Word said.

Another example is in the New Testament:

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **John 6:40** For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

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<sup>17</sup> Committee on Bible Translation, “Notes,” p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> This includes categories A.1, A.1a, and A.1b in the Old Testament and categories A.1, A.3, A.4., A.9, A.10, A.11, A.12, and A.13 in the New Testament, according to the categories in Grudem and Thacker, *Why Is My Choice of a Bible Translation So Important?*, pp. 97 and 82-96, and the updated tallies prepared by researchers in the CBMW office as noted at [www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org).

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **John 6:40** For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." (same as TNIV)

The focus shifts from assurance for an individual person ("him") to assurance for a group ("them"). But the underlying Greek pronoun (*auton*) is masculine singular, not plural.

The other category mentioned in the "Translators' Notes" is "Using second person forms instead of third person forms to deal with generics was avoided." In the TNIV, there were 66 of such changes in the Old Testament and 87 such changes in the New Testament, for a total of 153 changes from "he/him/himself" to "you/yourself."<sup>19</sup> In the 2011 NIV, 65 were corrected and 88 (or 58%) remained the same as the TNIV. Once again, we are not sure what is meant by saying that "In general, much more often than not: . . . Using second person forms instead of third person forms to deal with generics was avoided."

One example is this verse:

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **John 15:6** If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **John 15:6** If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. (same as TNIV)

Jesus was speaking directly and intimately to his disciples on his last night before his crucifixion, and this was after Judas had left the room (at John 13:30). Jesus gave many wonderful promises to his disciples in John 14 and 15, such as, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (14:3). Then he told his disciples, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you" (15:3).

But in John 15:6, Jesus does not address his disciples directly and say, "If you do not remain in me," implying that even some of these disciples could fall away. In the Greek text, he clearly uses *third person* speech to shift the focus to someone "out there," a hypothetical person who is not part of these eleven disciples, and says, "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (1984 NIV). But the 2011 NIV misses this and makes Jesus address his disciples directly, implying that even some of these eleven might fall away: "If you do not remain in me." That is not what Jesus said.

An Old Testament example is in Proverbs, in a section of a father speaking to a son:

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **Proverbs 5:21** For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths.

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<sup>19</sup> This includes Old Testament category A.3 and New Testament category A.4, corrected (see note above).



<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **Proverbs 5:21** For your ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all your paths. (same as TNIV)

Here the focus is wrongly shifted from a general statement that applies to all people (“a man’s ways”) to a specific focus on the Israelite son that the father is talking to (“your ways”). With the 2011 NIV, readers will not be sure if it is legitimate to apply this important verse to all people or not. But the 2011 NIV is not accurate, because the Hebrew text explicitly talks about a “man” (Heb. *’ish*) and the pronominal suffix in Hebrew is 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular (“his”). Why change what the Word of God says from “his” to “your”?

### 11. Which pronouns can you really trust in the 2011 NIV?

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

How many pronouns are thrown into doubt?

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

### 12. Awkward and confusing sentences with “singular them”

At times the desire to avoid the words “he” and “him” in the 2011 NIV leads to English sentences that highlight the awkwardness of politically correct speech:

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **Romans 4:8** Blessed is the man (Greek *’anēr*, “man”) whose sin the Lord will never count against him.

2011 NIV **Romans 4:8** Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them." (same as TNIV)

This is an example of hundreds of places where the new NIV uses “they” and “them” in a “singular” sense, but many times it is confusing. Readers will wonder if “them” is plural and will look for a group that “them” can refer to.

We agree that the use of “them” in a singular sense is heard in popular speech and seen in some writing today. And the NIV’s Committee on Bible Translation defends this usage with an appeal to the Collins Bank of English, a massive database that shows numerous examples of such usage in current English usage.

But what that database cannot answer is how to *accurately translate* into English from another language when that original language uses masculine singular nouns and pronouns to speak of *a specific male person as an example that teaches a general truth*. For example, “Blessed is the man (Greek *’anēr*, “man”) whose sin the Lord will never count against him” (Rom. 4:8). That is what the Bible does hundreds of times, and that is what the 2011 NIV regularly avoids doing. There is no mental picture of an individual man as an example in “Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them” (2011 NIV).

In addition, such a use of singular “they” is still considered by many to be unacceptable in written English today. For example, the 2010 edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style* says,

Many people substitute the plural *they* and *their* for the singular *he* or *she*. Although *they* and *their* have become common in informal usage, neither is considered acceptable in formal writing, so unless you are given guidelines to the contrary, do not use them in a singular sense.<sup>20</sup>

The *American Heritage Dictionary* polled a Usage Panel of experts on various questions of English usage. Regarding the use of “they” as a singular (common in the 2011 NIV), they report that 82% of their experts consider this unacceptable in written English:

Most of the Usage Panelists reject the use of *they* with singular antecedents. Eighty-two percent find the sentence *The typical student in the program takes about six years to complete their course work* unacceptable.<sup>21</sup>

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

Use the pronoun *his* when an indefinite antecedent may be male or female: *A reporter tries to protect his sources*. (Not *his or her sources* . . . )<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16<sup>th</sup> edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 5.227, p. 303.

<sup>21</sup> *American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th edition (2006), p. 1796. They also note, however, that many on the panel found the words *they* and *their* acceptable in some cases of informal speech.

<sup>22</sup> *Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), p. 131.

What is a bit puzzling is that the 2011 NIV at times does use “he/him/his” in a generic sense, thereby admitting that its use is still acceptable and understandable in English today. Consider these sentences, where the TNIV had “their” or “them” but the 2011 NIV switched back to the “his” and “him” that were in the 1984 NIV:

1984 NIV **Matthew 10:24** "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

2005 TNIV **Matthew 10:24** "Students are not above their teacher, nor servants above their master.

2011 NIV **Matthew 10:24** "The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master.

Here is another example:

1984 NIV **Matthew 12:35** The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

2005 TNIV **Matthew 12:35** Good people bring good things out of the good stored up in them, and evil people bring evil things out of the evil stored up in them.

2011 NIV **Matthew 12:35** A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

If such a “generic” use of “he” and “him” is acceptable in some verses, and if it more accurately represents the underlying Hebrew or Greek, then why not use it in all such verses? Why did the 2011 NIV decide to use singular “they/them” in most but not all of these verses?

Of course, the NIV committee is free to use “they,” “them,” and “their” in a singular sense if they wish to do so. But many readers will think it a grammatical mistake, inappropriate in a Bible which readers expect to exemplify a high standard of correct English. And many others will find the result awkward and artificial, as in this well-known verse:

1984 NIV **Matthew 18:15** "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

2011 NIV **Matthew 18:15** "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.

Many readers will ask, “Who are ‘they’ and ‘them’? Might Jesus be switching to a plural and implying that other people are involved?”

Or consider this verse, where readers will wonder if Jesus is speaking of eating with an individual or a group, designated by “they”:

<sup>1984 NIV</sup> **Revelation 3:20** Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **Revelation 3:20** Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

This awkward sentence sounds like modern politically correct speech written by a committee. And the expression “that person” has a cold, impersonal feel in comparison to both “them” and “him.” That is not how we speak when we want to maximize the warmth and intimacy of our relationship with someone in English. “That person” is how we speak about someone we don’t know. In order to avoid the word “him,” the new NIV struggles with sentence awkwardness and with such impersonal connotations regularly.

But more important than acceptable grammar in modern English is the question of accuracy in translation. Translating the Bible is not a process of composing one’s own new ideas, but a process of *faithfully translating* what someone else has said in another language. And so the question is, *did the original Greek and Hebrew texts use masculine singular pronouns in such sentences as these?* Yes, they did, many hundreds of times. Therefore the new NIV’s pattern of removing “he” and “him” and “his” does not produce a more accurate translation of the Greek or Hebrew text, because such verses use masculine singular pronouns in Greek and Hebrew. Why not translate them with masculine singular pronouns in English?

### 13. The 2011 NIV incorrectly changes “women” to “weaklings”

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

<sup>2011 NIV</sup> **Nahum 3:13** Look at your troops-- they are all weaklings. The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies; fire has consumed the bars of your gates. (same as TNIV)

The same change is also made in Isa. 19:16; Jer. 50:37; and Jer. 51:30.

Some Old Testament verses show judgment or shame on a nation when its soldiers are women or have become “like women.” In recent years, several Christian writers have appealed to these verses to argue that women should not serve in combat functions in our military forces, for the Bible views it as shameful and a mark of disgrace to a nation – it is the responsibility of the men of a nation to bear the burden of protecting it in time of war.

In each of these four verses the Hebrew word is *nashim*, the plural of *'ishshah* and the ordinary, common word for “women” (it is not a rare word, and there is no debate or uncertainty over its meaning, for *'ishshah* occurs 847 times in the Old Testament).

But in these verses related to military combat, the new NIV has removed the correct translation “women” and replaced it with “weaklings.” The word does not mean that. Perhaps some people

think that is what these verses *imply*, but that is not what they say. Perhaps the verses also suggest shame that any people would allow their women to serve in combat, or shame that all the men have been defeated and only women are left to defend a nation. In any case, the point is that even the original Hebrew readers would have had to ponder for a moment what the verse meant when it said the troops had become women. It is not proper translation to hide from the English readers the fact that the Bible said in these verses that some troops had become women.

**The real controversy is whether to water down or  
omit details of meaning that modern  
culture finds offensive**

For all that we appreciate about the improvements over the TNIV, the 2011 NIV still retains gender-neutral translations that we consider unnecessarily inaccurate at over 2,700 places.

The deepest difference over gender-neutral translations is not really about whether people will be able to *understand* the Bible today. Rather, it is about whether translators should *exclude details* that seem offensive in the contemporary culture.

After all, the main words in dispute are only five: “father,” “son,” “brother,” “man,” and “he/him/his.” *What English-speaking person today cannot understand these words?* The ultimate reason for deleting these words thousands of times is *not* that people cannot understand them, for they are extraordinarily simple and common words. The ultimate reason is that the translators decided it was objectionable today to translate literally the Bible’s uses of an individual male example to teach a general truth in thousands of passages.

For example, it is not that English readers today – even the younger generation of adults age 18 to 34 – cannot understand, “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked” (Psalm 1:1). It is that gender-neutral Bible translators find it objectionable that the Bible used *an individual male example* to teach a general truth, so they changed the meaning to “Blessed is the *one* ...”. It is not that readers today cannot understand the words, “If your *brother* sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). Nor would even young adults today have any difficulty in realizing that the verse also *applies* to a sister who sins, any more than they would have difficulty understanding that “you shall not covet your neighbor’s *wife*” (Exodus 20:17) also *applies* to not coveting your neighbor’s husband!

For centuries people have easily understood that when the Bible uses a specific *example* of an individual man or woman to teach a general principle, the principle also applies to people of the opposite sex. The parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) teaches both men and women about persistence in prayer. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) also applies to prodigal daughters.<sup>23</sup> We do not have to change the words of the Bible for such general applications to be understood. The Bible frequently teaches by using a concrete, specific examples, not merely by using vague principles or groups.

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<sup>23</sup> The 2011 NIV does not change these parables to anything gender-neutral.

So the controversy is not really about whether people today can understand that "If your brother sins, rebuke him" also *applies* to a sister who sins. Rather, the problem is that the 2011 NIV translators found it objectionable that Jesus used an individual example of a male human being ("If your brother sins...") to teach a general truth. Therefore the 2011 NIV changed Jesus' words to "If your *brother or sister* sins against you . . .," adding "or sister" (which are words that Jesus did not say), and in doing so they failed to translate Jesus' words accurately.

The bottom line issue, then, is not whether the Bible should be understandable today. Nobody is arguing for the preservation of archaic words like "thee" or "thou." The bottom line issue is that gender-neutral translations such as the 2011 NIV omit details of meaning in many hundreds of verses because of the translators' objections to the male-specific meaning of those verses. They found the Bible's frequent use of male-specific examples to be offensive in the modern culture, and they decided not to translate them accurately as a result.

It is good to remind ourselves at this point that all of the words of God are important:

*All Scripture* is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, (2Tim. 3:16)

*Every word* of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. (Prov. 30:5)

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on *every word* that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matt. 4:4)

Even when we might not understand fully why one word is there instead of another, we should realize that Scripture is the product of the infinite wisdom of God himself. Jesus and Paul were willing to depend on the tiniest details of God's words in the Old Testament (see Matt. 22:42-45; Gal. 3:16). They knew that God had planned his Word in such a way that it would give sufficient guidance for all of his people throughout all cultures and societies for all time.

God's Word is the product of his infinite wisdom, and all the details of meaning are there for a purpose, and often for multiple purposes, that only God knew and understood. The connections between words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, and the relationships between the various parts of Scripture, are more complex than any one human being will ever understand.

Therefore if a Bible translation unnecessarily omits or adds details to the text of Scripture, even if the translators act from good motives, they change the meaning and the application of the text in ways that they may not intend or even realize. That is why God warns against changing his Word (Rev. 22:18-19).

And what future changes will be made? The deepest danger in adopting gender-neutral policies such as those by which the 2011 NIV was translated is that hundreds of other details that modern culture finds offensive may be watered down in future translations. More and more, we will have a Bible that does not accurately represent in English what the original Hebrew and Greek languages said. Rather these Bibles will represent something that the translators think will be a

little more acceptable in contemporary culture. But then we no longer have the Word of God in all its wisdom and richness. Instead, we have the Word of God mixed with the words of man.

### **Conclusion**

The 2011 NIV makes several noteworthy improvements over the 1984 NIV and the 2005 TNIV, including 933 improvements in accuracy in translating gender language in places where CBMW had criticized the TNIV in 2002 and 2005. And the entire translation process was carried on in a commendable spirit of transparency and openness, for which Zondervan and the NIV's Committee on Bible Translation are to be appreciated.

However, the 2011 NIV was based not on the current NIV (1984) but on the TNIV (2005). The 2011 NIV retains 2,766 (or 75%) of the TNIV's problematic gender-related translations that led CBMW, and eventually the larger evangelical world, to reject the TNIV in 2002 and 2005. We still consider these 2,766 examples to be inaccurate translations of terms that have male meaning in the original Hebrew or Greek, male meaning that is lost in this new NIV. Therefore, this translation cannot be considered sufficiently trustworthy in its translation of gender language or in its translation of singular and plural pronouns generally. We consider this too high a price to pay for attaining gender-inclusiveness in a translation.

In addition, the 2011 NIV changes some key verses on women's role in the church so that they favor an evangelical feminist position, especially in translating 1 Timothy 2:12 in a way that differs with all other commonly-used modern English translations and that gives women a wide open door to serve as pastors and elders in churches, contrary to the actual teaching of the New Testament.

We regret, therefore, that we cannot recommend the 2011 NIV as a sufficiently reliable English translation. And unless Zondervan changes its mind and keeps the current edition of the 1984 NIV in print, the 2011 NIV will soon be the only edition of the NIV that is available. Therefore, unless Zondervan changes its mind, we cannot recommend the NIV itself.



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The detailed research on the 2011 NIV that formed the basis for this report was carried out by several researchers working for CBMW, under the leadership of professors Denny Burk, Ph.D., and Randy Stinson, Ph.D. Student researchers from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, included Mitch Chase, Daniel Diffey, Adam Howell, Ben Montoya, Nick Moore, Jason Motte, and Josh Philpot.