

Why I'm For the TNIV

In the spring of 2002, Zondervan and the International Bible Society released the Today's New International Version (TNIV) of the New Testament. Approximately 7 percent of the text is changed from the last American revision of the NIV, published in 1984. A little less than 30 percent of these changes involve inclusive language for humanity—using “brothers and sisters” for “brothers” when a mixed audience is clearly meant by the biblical terms, or “human beings” for “men,” or shifting to a third-person plural (“they”) or a second-person pronoun (“you”) to avoid the generic “he,” and so on.

Virtually no notice has been paid to the majority of the changes, which are unrelated to gender-inclusive language. Much more heat has been generated in controversy over the gender-inclusive language.

The controversy intensified this year when *World* magazine, *Focus on the Family*, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and the Southern Baptist leadership began issuing strong protests. An anti-TNIV advertisement was circulated, containing the signatures of 100 well-known Christian leaders condemning the new translation, though few are bona fide New Testament scholars. On the other side, careful studies by New Testament scholars from institutions including Dallas Seminary and Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary have shown that much of the criticism is misguided.

Unfortunately, the new translation's critics have so politicized the issue, convincing bookstore owners not to carry the translation and persuading entire denominations to issue statements against it, that the average churchgoer simply has little access to accurate information about the TNIV. On the one hand, the statement criticizing the translation claims that “the TNIV has gone beyond acceptable translation standards in several important respects.”

Conversely, the Forum of Bible Agencies, which represents roughly 90 percent of all contemporary Bible translation work, has gone on record stating that the TNIV "falls within the forum's translation principles and procedures."

Who should we believe? One wonders how many of the high-profile signatories critical of the TNIV have actually had the time to read substantial portions of the New Testament in the new translation. It is often easier just to trust a respected friend and scholar, do a little bit of firsthand examination, and come to a conclusion.

On the other hand, I have read every word of the TNIV, rereading my old NIV at the same time, noting and evaluating every change in light of the Greek New Testament so that the generalizations that I make may be as accurate as possible. (For more detailed analyses, see the TNIV Web site at .)

First, it must be noted that approximately two-thirds of the changes in the TNIV follow the Colorado Springs Guidelines (CSG) for translation. These are guidelines that were adopted by a group of leaders who met at Focus on the Family headquarters in 1997 to protest changes in the NIV and to limit the number of contexts in which inclusive language can refer to human beings.

The CSG permits the plurals *anthropoi* ("men"), *huioi* ("sons") and *adelphoi* ("brothers") to be rendered with expressions such as "people," "children," and "brothers and sisters," when the context indicates that mixed company is intended. Similarly, numerous uses of *tis* ("someone" or "anyone"), *pas* ("all" or "everyone"), generic masculine singular participles ("he who") and even a limited number of singular forms of *anthropos* ("man") may be rendered gender-inclusively when the context supports this.

Despite the claims of some of its critics, the TNIV retains gender-exclusive language in numerous places in which a case

could have been made for a more inclusive rendering. I counted about two dozen such places, including Romans 8:15b: "The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship," and Colossians 3:21: "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

Sometimes the word "man" is used to mean a human being in contrast to God. To continue to use this word "man" risks leading the contemporary reader astray by suggesting that the inspired author's point is one of gender when it is not. For example, the NIV says in 1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." The TNIV says : "For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human."

These kinds of changes had already been made in a handful of cases in the NIV, and for years caused no alarm or misunderstanding. So it is odd that critics of the TNIV suddenly object to it.

I believe that the use of consistently inclusive-language translations of the Bible can help us avoid problems that arise when individuals attempt to apply the Scriptures to their own lives. This was brought home to me dramatically a number of years ago when we had an evangelistic service at our church that included a performance by our children's choir. My older daughter, who was 10 years old at the time, invited an unsaved girlfriend to come. The girl seemed to enjoy the concert and followed our (now retired) children's ministry director as she concluded the service with a very tasteful appeal to trust Christ.

As part of the appeal, the director quoted 2 Corinthians 5:17 out of the KJV (the translation she had used almost all her life): "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." At that point, my daughter's friend leaned over to my wife and asked with disgust, "Does your church always

use language like that?"

The moment of spiritual openness was gone. This girl knew that such language was neither common nor necessary, and therefore smacked of chauvinism. Unlike their friend, my girls, now 15 and 11, understand the gender-inclusive debate and can recognize gender-inclusive masculines in the NIV, but it continues to sound both odd and exclusive to them.

I don't want to give the impression that the TNIV is above criticism. But none of the texts I contend with have anything to do with the inclusive-language debate. If we really want an authoritative, accurate English translation of the Bible, we must throw our support behind ventures such as this one and not establish such adversarial stances that we can't help in future revisions of parts we think can be improved.

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