

Zondervan’s Perspective on the TNIV

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to correct misinformation currently circulating around the new Bible translation, Today’s New International Version (TNIV). After 70 years we’re still committed to publishing resources that glorify Jesus Christ and promote biblical principles.

We recognize that this message is quite lengthy, but it’s filled with information you need to be aware of in order for you to make a proper and informed decision regarding the TNIV. Please take a few moments now to fully understand the issues involved. As you do, please remember that the TNIV is not meant for everyone. People of various age levels peak and understand English differently. The TNIV is God’s Word clearly communicated to the next generation—just as the NIV was 30 years ago. Please be sure to regularly visit the TNIV website at <http://www.tniv.info>.

The TNIV, whose copyright owner is the International Bible Society, was developed by the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), the same group that produced the trusted NIV. The CBT includes renowned, conservative linguists and biblical scholars from the most trusted institutions in the world. They come from a variety of denominational affiliations and theological backgrounds, including the Southern Baptist Convention, the Christian Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church in America. This diversity creates a system of checks and balances, ensuring absolute accuracy. The CBT’s sole mission is to accurately communicate the meaning of the original text in contemporary English. For more information, see <http://www.tniv.info/story/cbtmembers.php>.

The CBT’s work can’t be influenced by any special interest group or ideology—liberal, conservative, or otherwise. Much of what is being reported in the news and on websites can only be described as agenda-driven misinformation. One group in particular clearly has an agenda specifically to advance its perspective about the roles of men and women in church life. It’s important to understand that the “no-tniv” website was developed by that group. Before making a reasonable decision about the TNIV, It only makes sense for you to get information from additional resources. To get you started, we’re offering more information at www.tniv.info.

The critic’s views are not shared by the scholarly translation community.

We realize criticism of the TNIV has come from well-known Christian leaders, but equally well-respected scholars of the translation community are coming forward with specific objections to the critics’ attack on the TNIV. While the translators may not be media personalities or household names, their Christian commitment and biblical scholarship are deeply rooted. Here are some examples of comments made by translation scholars:

“Having spent nearly 30 years studying biblical language, translation theory and the history of Bible translation, I am amazed and disturbed by the campaign against the TNIV. The claims made by CBMW reflect some lack of awareness for the fundamentals of translation and for what has been acceptable throughout the history of Bible

translation. Assertions that the TNIV distorts Scripture or caters to a particular agenda are absolutely false.”

John Kohlenberger, author of
The Exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament

“No one should make a decision about the TNIV based on information distributed by CBMW. Their claims are not based on sound translational or hermeneutical principles.”

Mark Strauss, associate professor of
New Testament, Bethel Seminary San Diego

“The group that objects to the TNIV does not reflect a majority of evangelical, New Testament scholars. In fact, most of these individuals have no translation experience. I honestly believe the critics’ efforts—however well intentioned—will prove counterproductive to the larger cause of communicating the Gospel effectively in an increasingly post-Christian, English-speaking world. I have read every verse of the TNIV, and I believe the TNIV’s treatment of gender-inclusive language with respect to humanity is in every case defensible. Claims that the gender of God or Jesus is somehow tampered with are simply false.”

Craig Blomberg, professor of
New Testament, Denver Seminary

The TNIV replaces masculine nouns and pronouns, when they are used generically, with more precise language.

Much criticism about the TNIV revolves around perceived mistranslation of masculine-oriented words. The words “men,” “fathers,” “sons” and “brothers” never appear in the New Testament—not once! That’s because these are English words, and the New Testament was written in Greek. The real question we must ask is, “What do the Greek words *anthropoi*, *pateres*, *huiioi*, and *adelphoi* mean in context?” The answer in many cases is “people,” “ancestors,” “children,” and “brothers and sisters,” respectively. In translating them this way, the TNIV is following sound translation principles—principles recognized and followed by Bible translators around the world.

Critics have talked a lot about “sex markings.” It’s true that all Greek and Hebrew nouns have a gender association, but these are grammatical categories that have nothing to do with biological gender. For example, the Hebrew word for the Holy Spirit is feminine, but the Greek word for the Holy Spirit is neuter. In neither case, however, does the grammatical gender determine the gender of the Holy Spirit.

The TNIV reflects advances in biblical scholarship and a better understanding of the original Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. The TNIV uses inclusive language only where the original text refers to both men and women. If the text specifically refers to men, the TNIV uses masculine language. When a Greek word means “a person,” rather than “a man,” that is how the TNIV translates it.

Use of inclusive language is not new.

There have been at least 20 new translations and revisions since the mid-1980s, and all of them, except the 1995 revision of the New American Standard (NASB), use inclusive language to a greater degree than the NIV—including the New Living Translation (NLT), English Standard Version (ESV), and the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB). Even the original King James Version (KJV) used inclusive language to a degree.

Translators are not changing the Word of God.

The original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic text will never change, but the English language is constantly changing. That’s why the translation of the Bible into English has been an evolving process since the 1300s. The KJV was revised eight times.

The goal of translation is to accurately render the meaning of the original language into the receptor language. No two languages are the same, so simply replacing Greek words with English words will not produce an accurate translation—it only produces gibberish. For example, if you say in Spanish, “Como se llama?” the literal English translation is, “How do you call yourself?” However, that’s not what you’d say in English. You’d translate that as, “What is your name?” To further explain this concept, translators often note that Revelation 22: 18-19 contains 65 words in the original Greek text, but the text of those two verses in the KJV contains 85 words.

The KJV is full of idiomatic renderings, such as “God forbid,” which occurs 24 times (e.g., Rom. 6:2). In none of those 24 instances do the words “God” and “forbid” appear in the original text. “God forbid” is an idiomatic rendering of one Hebrew word or two Greek words that mean, “this should never happen.” In King James English, “God forbid” captured the same meaning, but it was not a word-for-word translation.

When translating the TNIV, the CBT followed a translation philosophy called functional equivalent translation, which means the translation combines two styles—word-for-word wherever possible and thought-for-thought wherever necessary to capture the precise meaning of the original text. While both translation styles have been in use since the 14th century, no translation exclusively uses one style or the other.

More information

Posted on the www.tniv.info website are several papers that will provide more perspectives on the issues. There are also two books we strongly recommend that you take time to read.

Mark Strauss’ *“Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender-Accuracy”* (InterVarsity Press, 1998)

D.A. Carson’s *“The Inclusive-Language Debate: A Plea for Reason”* (Baker Book House, 1998)

The TNIV is being widely embraced by the evangelical community.

Support continues to grow among respected linguists, translators, biblical scholars, pastors and other church leaders as they carefully review this new translation. For a continually growing list of supporters, please visit www.tniv.info.

The Colorado Springs Guidelines (CSG)

Some people have criticized Zondervan for publishing the TNIV, saying we've reneged on a contract we signed five years ago. Known as the Colorado Springs Guidelines, it set forth certain restrictions on Bible translation. We have not reneged on that contract. The president of Zondervan signed it in 1997 with the clear understanding of everyone in attendance that his signature was meant only to support Zondervan's commitment to continue publishing the NIV text without changes or updates (a commitment to which we are adhering). Zondervan clearly stated we could not adopt the guidelines beyond that because we already published two translations that conflicted with the guidelines (e.g., the New Revised Standard Version and the original New International Reader's Version). There is no basis for Zondervan to be criticized now for lack of integrity.

Our promise

We remain firmly dedicated to the cause of Christ. The Christian faith is meant to be shared! We believe that TNIV can be a torch to light the way for the next generation, drawing millions of our young people back to the Word and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, into God's Kingdom.

Please take a few moments to look at the TNIV text for yourself to experience its power and accuracy. You can download a free copy of the TNIV at www.tniv.info.