4 Bible Translation Basics Every Christian Should Know

Misinterpreting “Head” Can Perpetuate Abuse

4 Reasons to Use a Gender-Accurate Bible Translation
In November 2016, the Christian satire website The Babylon Bee published an article called “God Apologizes for Gendered Language in Bible.” In it, God expresses remorse for using gender-specific language, saying:

Please accept my deepest and most sincere apologies for using such offensive terminology when describing humankind and myself throughout the pages of Scripture, and feel free to edit the eternal Word of God so that it aligns more closely with your current, advanced understanding of the nature of things.

While the article is satire, it conveys a very real sentiment held by many evangelicals. (Not to mention popular misconceptions about gender-accurate Bibles.)

Evangelical tradition places a high value on the biblical text, which is a good thing. But too often, we buy into a myth that our favorite translation is God’s true Word, pure and untainted by bias. Changes are seen as a threat to God’s truth, motivated by a social or political agenda.

We may mean to protect the Bible from secular culture, but we actually protect our biases from biblical challenge. If we are really dedicated to honoring God’s Word, we need to recognize where our biases may have led us astray, and then correct them.

Bias and agenda have a long history in Bible translation. During the rule of King James I of England, the most popular English Bible was a Puritan translation called the Geneva Bible. It had margin notes that some thought downplayed divine right (that God puts kings and queens in power). So King James gladly authorized a new version, free of such notes. The resulting translation still bears his name. Is either translation bad or wrong? Not necessarily, but they both reflect their translators’ biases—which they no doubt thought were simply truths (if they were aware of them at all).

We tend not to see our own biases. But over time, we are better able to recognize how they have shaped Bible translations. This is something to be thankful for. Yes, we should be discerning, but correcting bias is an important way to honor the Scriptures and God’s revelation to us.

Patriarchy is a major bias that has shaped our Bible translations, with or without the translators’ knowledge. Why did Junia, a female apostle, become Junias (an otherwise unknown male name) in later translations? And later when everyone agreed she was actually Junia, why could she no longer be an apostle, but only esteemed by the apostles? Patriarchal bias has obscured not only the text and Junia herself, but our understanding of women in church history. This in turn informs our ideas of what the church can be today.

Patriarchal bias also prevents some from accepting more accurate language. It’s a fact that language changes, and translations should reflect those changes. Today, it is less and less common for “man” to represent humanity in general, and fewer people use masculine terms to address mixed gender groups. Correcting masculine-only language where the original texts speak about humanity or mixed-gender groups is not about changing God’s Word, but translating it accurately. It’s about making sure God’s Word is translated into the language we actually speak!

As we remove the lens of patriarchy from our Bible translations, we allow God’s Word to speak with clarity. That’s a good thing! It’s not about political correctness; it’s about correctness.

In this issue, we look at some of the ways that Bible translation has shaped (and been shaped by) our understanding of gender in the church and family. I’m proud to welcome my dad, a translation consultant with Wycliffe Bible Translators, to the pages of Mutuality for the first time. He lays a groundwork of Bible translation basics that we should all become familiar with. From there, we explore gender and Bible translation in greater depth. We’ll meet little-known women translators, dive into why gender-accurate language matters, how our understanding of a single word has justified abuse in countless marriages, and how translators have minimized women.

Whether Bible translation is something you’re thinking about for the first time or something you think about every day, there’s something for you in this issue. May we gain a greater appreciation for the work of Bible translation and for the urgency to liberate our Bibles from biases that diminish the power of God’s Word for all people, female or male.

In Christ,
Tim Krueger
An elderly woman learned of the many language groups in our world without Bibles in their languages. She had no training, but was eager to help, so she asked for a dictionary of one of the languages so she could go to work to translate the Bible herself!

If only the task were that straightforward! As well-meaning as this woman was, she was quite unaware of what she’d be getting into. The complexities and challenges are many. I’ve spent my career as a missionary and Bible translation consultant working primarily in the Philippines, and I can testify to the fact that translators spend as much time on their knees as at their desks!

Bible translation matters. Even a single word can change how we understand the Bible. Important questions, including over women’s leadership in the church and home, often hinge on translation issues. We don’t all need to be translation experts, but a basic understanding of Bible translation concepts helps us judge whether the arguments we hear are valid.

It’s my hope that these principles will help us all better appreciate the challenge of translation and approach gender (and other) debates with knowledge and humility.¹

1. The building blocks

Languages

Most Christians know the Bible was not written in English. The writings we find in our Bibles were written in a few languages—ancient Hebrew (most of the Old Testament), Aramaic (a few parts of the Old Testament, including the book of Daniel), and Greek (the New Testament). Specifically, Koine (meaning “common”) Greek. Koine Greek was spoken all over the Mediterranean and Middle East during the time of the New Testament.

Source material

A translator needs something to translate. We have none of the original documents that make up our Bible. Fortunately, though, they were copied many, many times, so we almost always know what the originals said. But not always, and not without debates. What if a scribe

Jesus would’ve known Koine Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. He probably spoke Aramaic in his daily life, and would’ve used Hebrew and Greek in particular settings.² This means that most of Jesus’ words in the Greek New Testament were themselves translated from Aramaic to Greek.

Though the Old Testament was written in Hebrew (based on oral tradition), it was translated into Koine Greek even before Jesus was born. This translation was done by seventy scholars, and is called the Septuagint (often abbreviated LXX), from the Latin word septuaginta, meaning “seventy.” New Testament writers often quote the Septuagint rather than the original Hebrew texts.
made a mistake while copying a text? Or added a comment that someone else later inserted into the text? Mark 16:9–20 is an example of text that was added to the original.

**Translation approaches**

Two major approaches to translation are called “literal” and “idiomatic” (also known by terms like “dynamic,” “dynamic equivalence,” or “meaning-based”). Literal translations try to keep the linguistic forms of the original Hebrew and Greek texts as much as possible. Idiomatic translations favor the forms of the target language. There are few, if any, translations that are completely literal or completely idiomatic. Most fall somewhere on a continuum between these two, and they all try to communicate the meaning the authors intended.

People often ask which approach is best. The answer is neither, though they have different strengths. An idiomatic approach will likely be clearer for someone encountering the Bible for the first time, but a literal approach might make it easier to do a word study.

2. **Translation can’t (and shouldn’t) always be literal**

Does the phrase, “They returned not height” mean anything to you? I’m guessing not, but it’s in the Bible. This is the literal translation of the opening phrase of Hosea 7:16.

If you were to look up this passage in your Bible, you’d see something like this:

- They do not turn to the Most High (NIV)
- They return, but not upward (ESV)
- They turn to that which does not profit (NRSV)
- They turn to Baal (RSV)

We often dream of a “pure” translation, free of the influence of a translator’s interpretation. But as examples like this show, it’s not so easy. Sometimes, in order to simply write a coherent sentence in English, much less communicate meaning, a translator has to go beyond the plain text.

Even when a literal translation is possible, it can be misleading.

**Gender Connection:**

**Source Material**

Source material connects to gender in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, where Paul says that women should be silent. Scholars debate whether this command was actually part of Paul’s letter. Some say it was, but others say that markings on the earliest manuscripts show it was added in by a scribe who was copying the letter. We may never know for sure, but it’s good to be aware that this key command might not have come from Paul! This isn’t technically a translation issue, but it impacts translation.

For more, see Philip Payne’s book, *Man and Woman, One in Christ.*
In a language of West Africa, a
highly literal translation was made
of Mark 10:38, in which Jesus asks
James and John, “Are you able to
drink the cup that I drink?” When a
speaker of this language was asked if
this expression was ever used by his
people, he replied, “Yes, it is. It is what
a drunkard would say to challenge
his fellows as to whether they could
drink as much drink or as strong a
drink, as he himself could.” So to the
readers of this translation, Jesus was
a drunkard challenging James and
John to a drinking bout! 4 In a case
like this, a non-literal translation is
the way to go.

3. It’s about
culture as well as
language

Every language comes with a culture.
A translator has to keep in mind
that different cultures categorize
the world differently, and language
reflects these differences.

A New Testament translator for
the Tausug language (Philippines),
while translating the parable of
the vineyard in Matthew 21, got to
where it says that the vineyard owner,
“went into a far country.” He and a team of
native speakers tried various words to
convey the idea of a man going on a
long journey.

Viaje, a word borrowed from
Spanish, means to take a trip for a
specific purpose—a purpose like
smuggling or carrying passengers.

This didn’t seem to fit, since the parable
didn’t mention a specific purpose for the
owner’s trip.

Layn means to change one’s residence.
The parable doesn’t say that the vineyard
owner was moving, so they looked for
another word.

The translator asked the team, “The
owner of the vineyard didn’t give his
destination, didn’t say how long he
planned to stay, or when he was coming
back. How would you say that?”

The team replied, “We would say,
‘he paddled.’”

The people live over the water in
houses on stilts, and they earn their
living from the sea. From birth, they
spend time in their boats. “But,” the
translator said, “this vineyard owner
lived in the interior, not near the shore,
and he didn’t go on a boat.”

“That doesn’t matter,” the team
replied, “This is the word we’d use even if
he went by truck or on foot.”

So in that New Testament, the owner
of the vineyard “paddled” to a far country.

If that seems odd, consider that
English does the same kind of thing. We
just don’t usually notice it because the
translation sounds natural to us.

In ancient Hebrew culture, the kidneys
were considered the center of feelings and
desires. The heart was viewed as the center
of thought.” In English, we feel with our
hearts and think with our minds, and we
don’t speak of our kidneys figuratively at
all. So when we translate a passage like
Psalm 7:9, we swap body parts: “... you
who test the minds [Hebrew: hearts] and
hearts [Hebrew: kidneys], O righteous
God!” (ESV, emphasis mine).
These kinds of differences of expression are needed to allow God’s word to speak to the reader’s hearts (or kidneys, if you prefer).

4. It’s worth doing

*If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.* —Nelson Mandela

This article barely scratches the surface of Bible translation. The challenges are many and important, but we can never give up on getting it right so that God’s Word speaks to our hearts. The Bible’s been in English for hundreds of years, but we’re still trying to make sure we’ve got it right. Whether or not we follow God faithfully depends on how we understand the Bible.

When faithfully translated, each challenge presents an opportunity to produce notes in a symphony. If the notes ring clear and true, the majesty of the music will be heard and felt the way the composer intended. God uses his translated Word to speak with a clear and powerful voice to those whom he loves—female and male—in the native languages of tribes and nations, large and small, in every corner of the globe.

Ron Krueger is a translation consultant in his 34th year of service with Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL. He provides consultant checking of Bible translations into languages of the Philippines. He is also writing a resource on the book of Hosea for use by translators worldwide. He is happily married to Joanne, his best friend of 39 years. They are proud of their two sons and three grandchildren.

1 The perspectives expressed in this article are mine, and should not be seen as representative of Wycliffe Bible Translators. Sidebars are editorial content, and not my own.
3 John Beekman and John and Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1984) 20–21. See also David Brunn, *One Bible, Many Versions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013) 35. Brunn states that every literal version uses classic dynamic equivalence principles in many contexts. He includes numerous pages of data throughout his book to support the veracity of this statement.
4 Beekman and Callow, 22.

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A Tale of Two Translators

by Bronwen Speedie

Who translated the version of the English Bible that you use? Google the answer, and there’s a strong likelihood you’ll find that all or most of the translators were men, even of very recent translations. Remarkably, two translations from the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the solo efforts of women scholars.

Let me introduce you to Julia Evelina Smith (1792–1886) and Helen Barrett Montgomery (1861–1934). Smith was the first woman to translate the entire Bible into English unaided—in fact, she is still the only woman to have ever done so. While Smith’s translation was self-published, Helen Barrett Montgomery would be the first woman to have her translation of the Greek New Testament professionally published.

Education & Influence

Smith and Montgomery had the advantage of being born to families in comfortable financial circumstances, and they had parents who valued education for their daughters. Both women benefitted from the burgeoning educational opportunities for women.

In Smith’s time, it was highly unusual for women to study Latin and Greek, but she obtained permission to study Latin (and probably also Greek) with a tutor during her secondary school years. The derision of her male fellow language students about a mere girl studying Latin only spurred her on to work all the harder. Later in life, she would teach herself Hebrew. However, despite Smith’s undoubted academic skills, girls did not have access to a university education in her youth—and it would be 1876 before an American woman would attain a bachelor of divinity.

Together with her family, Smith was involved in activism for worthy social causes, such as abolition and women’s suffrage. However, despite a brief stint teaching in a girls’ school, most of her life centered on the domestic sphere—her parents, sisters, and the family farm. Smith was the only one of her sisters to marry, tying the knot with Amos Parker when she was eighty-seven!

Born in a later generation, Montgomery was able to access new educational opportunities for women. She was one of the first students to complete a teaching degree at the all-female Wellesley College, where she was at the top of her class in Greek studies. She would later be awarded an honorary master of arts and three honorary doctorates.

Montgomery was not content to enjoy the social life of the wife of a wealthy businessman, but employed her considerable gifts in activities ranging from establishing a union to protect the rights of women workers, to writing several books on missions and advancing
the cause of mission boards, to sitting on the Rochester (New York) School Board—being elected to that position long before women themselves could vote. Despite her heavy schedule of public duties and book writing, Montgomery remained active in Bible teaching at her local church. For forty-four years, she organized and taught a Bible class for women at Lake Avenue Baptist Church in New York, which also licensed her to preach in 1892.

Recognition of her spirituality and leadership came with her 1921 election as the first ever woman president of the Northern Baptist Convention (now American Baptist Churches USA), or of any American denomination. This was a precarious time in which strong and wise governance was needed to navigate the church through the conflict caused by the rise of fundamentalism. Montgomery steered the denomination through this challenging period with a balance of her own firm convictions and skillful negotiation between strongly opposed parties.

The Julia E. Smith Translation

Baptist preacher William Miller had concluded, without a shadow of a doubt (in his mind and those of his followers), that the Bible indicated the world would end on October 22, 1844. When October 23 dawned, Smith was among those whose faith was shaken by the failure of Miller’s interpretation. How could Miller and all who believed him have been so very wrong about Scripture?

The solution, Smith concluded, was to return to the original languages and to more accurately “see the connection from Genesis to Revelation.” 1 Her four sisters and another friend were “anxious to know the literal meaning of every word God had spoken,” 2 so in 1847, Smith began translating the Bible for them, meeting weekly to discuss the progress. By 1855, she had translated the Bible twice each from Greek and Hebrew and once from Latin.

The aim of Smith’s translation was to develop the most literal version possible, in order to arrive at the correct meaning of those texts. Although she was in many respects a gifted linguist, she did not have a concept of translation theory or of interpretation (hermeneutics) to enable her to see the flaws in her woodenly literalist approach. As she had not studied at university, she did not perceive some of the errors in her understanding of Greek and Hebrew.
Smith did not believe that commentaries, or other specialist knowledge beyond the understanding of the words on the page, were needed for translation, nor did she feel the need to consult with biblical scholars for review. In the introduction to her Bible, she wrote, “It may be thought by the public in general, that I have great confidence in myself, in not conferring with the learned in so great a work, but as there is but one book in the Hebrew tongue, and I have defined it word for word, I do not see how anybody can know more about it than I do.” This towering belief in her own abilities enabled her to achieve much in some areas, but it unfortunately made her a poorer scholar than her natural ability suggested. Nevertheless, it was a remarkable achievement.

Her translation might have been lost to history if it had not been for a ruthless tax collector who raised the tax rates for properties owned by women in Smith’s home town of Glastonbury, Connecticut, but left tax rates the same for male-owned properties. Thus began a battle of wills in which Smith and her sole surviving sister, Abby, fought in the law courts and the court of public opinion for “no taxation [of women] without representation” a century after revolutionaries hurled tea chests into Boston Harbor. The sisters’ fight drew nationwide attention to the issue of women’s suffrage.

Hoping to demonstrate that women should have the vote because they were not intellectually inferior to men, Smith decided to publish her Bible translation more than two decades after she completed it. She selected a publishing house where the typesetting, operation of the printing press and editing were done by women. This Bible publication was an undeniably feminist act.

Montgomery New Testament

While Smith’s translation had arisen from her desire to understand the Bible better for herself and her inner circle, Montgomery’s was instigated by evangelistic concerns. As a young woman, prior to attending college, she had taught a Sunday School class for “a few rough street boys, [helping] them to know of the love which enfolds all loves in its bosom.” She loved her pupils and inspired them to deeper faith, but struggled with the problem of how to help them to read the Bible in the language of the King James Version—a barrier for the young and less educated.

The passage of time did not dull her concern for this obstacle to evangelism. After returning in mid-1914 from an extensive world tour of the foreign mission field, she began translating the Greek New Testament into English, a task begun over three decades after she had taught the boys’ Sunday School class, and which would take nine years to complete. Her goal was to make Scripture more accessible for the young, foreigners, and busy Sunday School teachers.

Ironically, her first foray into Greek studies at Wellesley was an unhappy one. She hated the subject and wanted

Women in Bible Translation

Marcella, Paula, and Eustochium:

Early leaders in the monastic movement and colleagues of early church father Jerome. They funded, critiqued, and encouraged Jerome with his translation into Latin, the Vulgate in the late fourth century.

Pandita Ramabai:

A Hindu convert to Christianity, who translated the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into the vernacular form of an Indian language, Marathi, in 1924.

Florence Hansen and Eunice Pike:

The first SIL (formerly Summer Institute of Linguistics) translation team to be comprised of two single women. They attended a Wycliffe camp in 1936 and went into the field in Mexico shortly after that. By 1940, there were 5 pairs of single women translators in Mexico.

Lorna Little and Vivienne Sahanna:

Two Australian Aboriginal women who instigated the 2014 translation of Luke into the Nyoongar language, and played key parts in the translation process. Women play a major role in the translation of Bible into Australian Aboriginal languages.
to drop it, but then decided to persevere. As her competence in Greek grew, she found that it helped her to find “a more intimate approach to the Savior of mankind.”6 Her New Testament translation many years later demonstrated such excellence and accuracy that noted Koine Greek scholar A.T. Robertson remarked, “It remained for a woman to translate the Greek tenses correctly.”7

In translating the New Testament passages about women, Montgomery had access to resources which were not available in Smith’s time. In particular, it seems certain she was influenced by Katharine Bushnell’s ground-breaking work, God’s Word to Women. Her translation choices regarding women were bolder than many recent Bibles, and reflected her conviction that Christianity was truly a faith of freedom and equality for women. She declared to the Baptist World Congress in 1923 that,

Jesus Christ is the great Emancipator of woman. He alone among the founders of the great religions of the world looked upon men and women with level eyes, seeing not their differences, but their oneness, their humanity.8

Montgomery combined scholarship with a concern for readability that extended beyond just her choice of wording. She pioneered the use of subject headings, moved verse numbers to the margins, and separated the text into paragraphs (traditionally, each new verse started at the left margin). Two of these three innovations are now standard in English Bibles. She used footnotes to give details on historical background, Old Testament quotations, vocabulary studies, and other helpful information, making her version an early example of a study Bible.

The new translation rolled off the presses of the American Baptist Publication Society in 1924, the publisher’s 100th year. It was therefore called the Centenary Translation, but is also known as the Montgomery New Testament and the New Testament in Modern English. Montgomery and her husband lived below their means so they could devote much of their income to the Lord’s work, so it was typical of their philanthropic commitment that Montgomery chose not to profit from the sales herself, but directed the funds back into North American Baptist missions.

A Place in Translation History

As the first Bible translation by a woman and due to its connection to the history of women’s suffrage in the US, Smith’s translation has attracted some recent interest from scholars. But as a Bible choice for the everyday reader, the peculiarities of its translation style and various inaccuracies render it a mere historical curiosity.

In contrast to the personal interests which inspired Smith’s translation, Montgomery’s was a New Testament translation made with the reader in view. Unlike Smith’s, it used the latest scholarship of the time and a deeper understanding of Greek, combined with a desire to accurately communicate meaning (rather than just transposing words). It remains a readable translation for today. Innovations in the formatting which Montgomery pioneered have had a lasting impact on how our Bibles look. Although her New Testament has been much neglected by scholars, Montgomery’s interpretation of the biblical passages about women, which were on the cutting edge for their time, should earn it a place in the history of egalitarian theology.

Bronwen Speedie is the founder of the ministry God’s Design–Perth (godsdesignperth.org), which aims to bring clarity, healing and encouragement in Christ through the message of biblical equality. She is the author of the forthcoming Men & Women: God’s Design Bible study, and president of CBE Perth.

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1 Julia E. Smith (trans.), Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1876), 1.
2 Emily Sampson, With Her Own Eyes: The Story of Julia Smith, Her Life, and Her Bible (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 42.
3 Smith, 1.
4 For those who are unfamiliar with US history, the throwing of tea chests into Boston Harbor by the Sons of Liberty was a protest against British taxes, which became a key event leading to the American Revolution. “No taxation without representation” was their well-known slogan.
6 Ibid., 128.
7 Ibid., 162.
Misinterpreting “Head” Can Perpetuate Abuse

by Becky Castle Miller

Morning sun peeked through the apartment window, lighting the steam that hovered over my cup of tea. I sipped while the roomful of women stared at me.

Finally one woman responded to my statement that had stunned them all. "Is it really not in the Bible? That a husband is the head of the home?"

I smiled at her. "I promise you, it’s not in the Bible. You can look for it, but it’s not there."

As a guest speaker, I was sharing about my journey out of depression and toward emotional health with an international group of women. They gathered weekly to encourage each other and grow healthy together. All of them had been or were still in destructive relationships. The part of my story that arrested their attention was about my discovery of biblical egalitarianism, of learning that I had equal standing with men in the church and in my home. My life changed the day I had realized that the phrases “priest of the home” and “head of the household” were not in the Bible, and now this discovery was revolutionizing theirs.

They were so interested in this comment that I set aside the rest of my prepared talk on depression recovery and instead opened the Bible to share God’s freedom from oppression with them.

"The Bible doesn’t say that men are the priests of the homes or heads of their households,” I told them. "It does say that husbands are the heads of their wives, but what does that actually mean?"

These ladies were from many different cultures, both Eastern and Western, yet somehow in spite of their many differences in biblical interpretation, they had all been told them same thing by their abusers (and sometimes their churches): “The Bible says the husband is the head of the house, which means he gets to make the decisions. A wife’s role is to support whatever he says.” Because these women desired to honor and obey God, they followed this practice, and it kept them in abusive relationships, submitting to abusive authority.

Instead of lovingly following the example of Christ, these men used the Bible as a weapon to control their wives. One specific way they did this was by interpreting the word “head” in Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 to mean “authority” or “overlord.”

In the kingdom of God, all people are equal in worth and in opportunity—women are not under the power of men, nor are wives specifically under the one-way authority of their husbands. Understanding this principle helps eliminate abuse.

Instead of lovingly following the example of Christ, these men used the Bible as a weapon to control their wives. One specific way they did this was by interpreting the word “head” in Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 to mean “authority” or “overlord.”
Here are the verses in question:

A husband is the head of his wife like Christ is head of the church, that is, the savior of the body. (Eph. 5:23, CEB)

Now I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Cor. 11:3, CEB)

In Greek, in both of these verses, the word translated “head” is kephale. Literally, kephale means the body part that sits on top of the neck. Translating it into English as “head” makes sense and is the closest we can get from the Greek—it’s not perfect, but it’s very close. But a word-for-word translation from language to language doesn’t always convey the range of meanings, connotations, and cultural inferences that are inseparably tied to a word.

Re-examining these verses and the range of possible meanings for kephale is important, because it helps the church understand the author’s intent and safeguards against the sinful power of intimate partner violence and domestic abuse.

First, it can help to consider the word Paul did not use in these verses. Helga and Bob Edwards, in their book The Equality Workbook, point out that Paul could have written archon (the Greek word for “ruler”) if he meant husbands or men were rulers over wives or women.

Paul didn’t use a common Greek word for ruler; he deliberately used the word for head. What are possible meanings for kephale other than ruler or authority over?

**Source**

Many egalitarians favor the translation “source” for kephale. In English we have a similar understanding, like when we say “the head of a river.” We mean the starting point, the beginning, the source. The Edwardses show how this works well in 1 Corinthians 11:3:

The human race was created through Christ (John 1:3); he is the “source” of “every man.” Adam, the first man, was the “source” of Eve, the first woman (Genesis 2:22). God was the miraculous source of Jesus’ incarnation as a human being (Luke 1:35).
Professor Alan F. Johnson published a meta-study of the history of scholarship on the range of meanings for *kephale*. You can read his entire paper to trace the linguistic discoveries and nuances of this word in the Greek Old Testament, the Greek New Testament, and other Greek literature of the period. He summarizes Gilbert Bilezikian’s work on the subject, which favors “source”:

The idea includes the meanings “derivation,” “origin,” “starting point,” and “nurture,” but not “chief,” “boss,” or “authority,” . . . in 1 Corinthians 11:3, *kephalē* means “source” or “origin,” and in Ephesians 5:23, it means “source” of life (Saviorhood), source of servanthood (gave himself), source of nurture. ²

### Physical head

*Kephale* can mean the actual head of the body, as Paul goes on to talk about later in 1 Corinthians 11, about men and women covering their physical heads.

As a metaphor, *kephale* could convey the unity between the head and the body. The body needs the head, and the head needs the body, and they cannot be separated without both dying. This is a beautiful picture of the unity of Jesus with his church as well as the unity between a wife and husband.

### Preeminent one

Johnson summarizes the perspective of Anthony C. Thistleton from his 1 Corinthians commentary: “He prefers to use three English words to express the meaning of *kephalē* in 11:3: ‘preeminent’ (of Christ), ‘foremost’ (of man), and ‘preeminent’ (of God).”

Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen use a range of meanings, and Johnson summarized their thought this way: “In the New Testament, *kephalē* is better translated ‘source of life,’ ‘top or crown,’ ‘exalted originator,’ ‘completer,’ and not by ‘authority over.’”

### Implications for Christian marriage

Jesus is both our lover and our lord. As we look at the marriage relationship representing the relationship between Jesus and the church, the analogy is between Jesus as lover—our giver of life, the one united with us, the one who loved first and loves sacrificially—rather than Jesus as lord. King Jesus is the one lord of both husband and wife—the wife does not need her husband to be another lord. Rather, they are mutual heirs of new life and mutually nurturing lovers to each other.

Scholar Ben Witherington III explains how Paul worked in the patriarchal Roman and Jewish worlds to move the churches toward equally valuing women. He points out that the passage in Ephesians 5 on marriage is not enforcing male rule but rather tempering it:

Paul is working to place the leaven of the Gospel into pre-existing relationships and change them. Similarly with the roles of husbands and wives, in Ephes. 5:21ff. Paul calls all Christians to mutual submission to each other, one form of which is wives to husbands, and then the exhortation “husbands love your wives as Christ did the church, giving himself. . . .” can be seen for what it is— a form of self-sacrificial submission and service.³

The NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible makes this important note on Ephesians 5:22, about wives submitting to husbands: “It should go without saying that this is a general principle not applicable to situations of abuse or participation in sin.” 4 All Christian ministers should remember to make this distinction when talking about these verses.

But they should go even further. Ministers should be clear that this passage requires mutual submission, and that *kephale* does not connote authority. A good translation and interpretation of this passage should rule out the kind of one-sided submission that can lead to abuse.

As a metaphor, *kephale* could convey the unity between the head and the body. The body needs the head, and the head needs the body, and they cannot be separated without both dying. This is a beautiful picture of the unity of Jesus with his church as well as the unity between a wife and husband.
In light of what we know about kephale, the verses in question could possibly be paraphrased like this:

A husband is the loving, serving supporter of his wife like Christ is the loving, serving supporter of the church, the one who goes first in sacrificing. (Eph. 5:23)

The life-giving source of every human is Christ, and the life-giving source of the first woman was the first man, and the life-giving source of Christ incarnated is God.” (1 Cor. 11:3)

Understanding kephale like this, instead of as “authoritarian overlord,” helps make Christian marriages into examples of mutual, giving, divine love, rather than hierarchy and abuse.

When I shared with my friends that morning that the Bible does not give their husbands power to control them, it freed them. The Bible brings Jesus’s message of liberation, and Christians must be careful not to allow it to be used as a tool of oppression.

King Jesus is the one lord of both husband and wife—the wife does not need her husband to be another lord. Rather, they are mutual heirs of new life and mutually nurturing lovers to each other.

Becky Castle Miller is the discipleship director at an international church in the Netherlands and blogs about emotionally healthy discipleship at medium.com/wholehearted. She conveys her five kids around town on bikes and studies theology in the middle of the night via the live streaming program at Northern Seminary.


2 This and following Johnson references are from Alan F. Johnson, “A Meta-Study of the Debate over the Meaning of “Head” (Kephalē) in Paul’s Writings,” Priscilla Papers 20, no. 4 (Autumn, 2006), 21–29, https://www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/priscilla-papers/meta-study-debate-over-meaning-%E2%80%9ChE2%80%9D%20%E2%80%9Ch%E2%80%9D-kephal%C4%93-paul%E2%80%99s-writings.


4 NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, Kindle location 268552.
I was with a group of fourth and fifth graders in a Sunday School class some years ago talking about the importance of the Bible when Kelli piped up, “The Bible is just a book about men, for men.” How does a ten-year-old girl come to such a troubling conclusion? As we explored this perception more, I realized that whenever Kelli heard or read a male pronoun in our 1984 NIV translation, she was understanding it as excluding women, even when it was meant to be used generically.

While male pronouns were once understood as sometimes referring to both men and women, that is no longer the case. When we use an English translation of the Bible that ignores this, the gospel message is distorted, pushing women to the margins. All those “man” words Kelli heard in her ten short years of church life had caused her to internalize the message that men are the main audience of the Bible and that women are not as important to God.

For several hundred years, English translators inserted masculine pronouns that aren’t present in the original text, for the purpose of making the meaning clearer to the intended audience. Jeff Miller, editor of Priscilla Papers, notes that the King James Version and the pre-2011 New International Versions include more than 1,000 instances of “man” and “men” which are not found in the Greek New Testament.

Nearly all contemporary Bible translations (NRSV, NIV2011, CEB, for example) now use gender-accurate language when scholars agree that both men and women would have been present in the original setting. (A gender-accurate translation does not add or take anything away from the Bible, it simply clarifies where generic terms for people were used in the original biblical manuscripts.)

While this was once controversial, today most biblical scholars and translation experts support the use of gender-accurate language when it is consistent with the original biblical manuscripts. Notably, this includes prominent complementarians like Craig Blomberg, Darrell Bock, Don Carson, Douglas Moo, Bill Mounce, and Mark Strauss.

Yet there continues to be resistance in some Christian circles. It is often suggested that using a gender-accurate translation is giving in to political correctness or feminism. Sometimes the resistance is based simply on personal preference, as in the case of the pastor who told me he was “too attached” to his Bible translation to make the change. Whatever the reason, we need to realize that our language choices have consequences.
If you are still on the fence about giving up your ESV or NIV1984 for a gender-accurate translation, here are some reasons to make the switch.

1. To communicate clearly in the language of our culture

Whether we like it or not, the way gendered pronouns are used in the English language has changed. The most comprehensive study of gendered terms in English to date, the Collins Report, found that between 1990 and 2000 the use of masculine pronouns as generics for both men and women had fallen from 22% to 8%. The goal of any Bible translation is to provide people with an accurate, clear translation in their own language. As conventions in the target language change, translations need to reflect those changes so the original meaning is not lost. For example, the Greek word “anthropos” most often means “person,” not “man,” as used in older translations. Since to contemporary readers “man” is usually understood to refer just to men, it is more accurate to use a gender-neutral term. This is different than replacing distinctly masculine terms with inclusive language just for the sake of inclusion. As Gordon Fee points out,

The goal is not to eliminate gender distinctions in Scripture, but to clarify them. Passages that refer exclusively to males should remain masculine, and references to females should remain feminine.

But when the context indicates that both males and females are in view, inclusive terms like “person”, “brothers and sisters”, “children”, and “ancestors” are more precise and so more accurate. This is simply good translation policy. If we are going to communicate the good news of the gospel effectively, we need to use language that will be clearly understood in our cultural contexts.

2. To facilitate spiritual growth and development in both women and men

There is a growing body of research showing that many people no longer understand masculine forms to refer to both genders equally; they interpret them in a male-centric way. Women have to take the extra step of “decoding” what applies to them and what doesn’t. For example, there are no masculine pronouns in the original Greek text of Romans 12:6–8, and yet the NIV (1984) translation reads “We have different gifts according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve, if it is teaching, let him teach” and so on. The impression is given that it is men who receive spiritual gifts. The NRSV translation more accurately reads “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to use; prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching…” When women get the impression that they aren’t included in biblical instruction, they may not be challenged to take as much responsibility for their spiritual growth as men do. Not recognizing themselves in the texts, women often self-select out of leadership, defaulting to men.

When this happens, men can develop a false sense of entitlement and privilege that devalues women. They may end up in leadership roles they are not gifted for and carry burdens they were not meant to carry, impacting their own spiritual development. Using a gender-accurate translation encourages women to “step into” discipleship and leadership, and reminds men to “stand down” so that women can be equal contributors in the mission of the church.

3. To ensure good theology

It is often said that your translation is your first commentary, because the language choices that translators make shape our theology, including our ideas about women and men. As Mimi Haddad notes,

When people hear only male metaphors for God, or masculine language in the church, or Bible translations that always render Greek words such as anthropos as

When women get the impression that they aren’t included in biblical instruction, they may not be challenged to take as much responsibility for their spiritual growth as men do. Not recognizing themselves in the texts, women often self-select out of leadership, defaulting to men.
A refusal to use gender-accurate language communicates to women that you would rather exclude and offend them than change the way you speak about them; that their sense of identity as a child of God is not important to you, and that your personal sense of comfort is more important than communicating the Bible accurately.

 men, they are led to ask whether there is something fundamentally wrong with being female, or whether God is “not a respecter of persons.”

Translations that continue to use male terms as generics for people give the impression that women are somehow “less than” men, and support a bias of inferiority that can become ingrained in our theology and church culture. This subtle bias becomes a distorted lens through which scripture is interpreted, resulting in a theology that mistakenly promotes gender hierarchy as God’s original design.

4. To help fulfill the Great Commission

We are long past the point in history where we can assume that the women in our churches will know they are included when they hear gender-exclusive language. A refusal to use gender-accurate language communicates to women that you would rather exclude and offend them than change the way you speak about them; that their sense of identity as a child of God is not important to you, and that your personal sense of comfort is more important than communicating the Bible accurately. While you may not intend to send these messages, the impact is the same.

Adopting a gender-accurate translation does not mean we are adding or taking away anything from the Bible. It means we are taking seriously our responsibility to accurately reflect the nature and intent of God, who communicates primarily with us through Scripture. Using a gender-accurate translation is a way to make sure everyone is able to see themselves at the center of God’s redemptive story rather than in the margins.

Recently I had the opportunity to view a Bible exhibition on the campus of Azusa Pacific University. As I walked around the display I looked at a Coverdale Bible from 1539, a Tyndale New Testament from 1532, a King James Bible from 1615, and other influential works, like Martin Luther’s commentary on the Psalms. Although these texts were written in English, they were nearly impossible to read, because conventions like grammar, spelling, and word usage have changed over the centuries since they were written.

God’s Word is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, but the words we use to communicate that message change from generation to generation. Let’s not hold on to obsolete language forms that are no longer useful in communicating the gospel. As “people of the Book,” let’s give our best efforts to present the truth of the Bible accurately and clearly.

Gail Wallace, PhD, is co-founder of the Junia Project, an adjunct professor at Azusa Pacific University, and an adult education consultant. A former MK from Japan, she lives in southern California with her husband of 41 years, and enjoys spending time with her family, especially her five grandkids!

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6 Ibid.

I found North Park to be both challenging and tremendously rewarding. I appreciate my professors’ care that made classes more than just lectures.

**DEAN SOULE**

There’s a deep sense of collegiality among our classmates and my call has been affirmed in the most encouraging and challenging ways.

**ABBY AUSTIN SOULE**

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Sometimes I forget to ask the right questions. And when I forget to ask and think, I end up being in places I’d rather not be. Case in point: I’ve recently been jumping at opportunities to write, and was happy to hear my devotional on Hannah would be published in a Bible for military teens! When it finally came out and I opened my complimentary copy, my heart fell. It fell hard. The translation was ESV. Now my name is associated with the gender-inaccurate ESV. I should have asked what version would be used, but in my excitement, I blew past that question and ended up with my devotional in a place I’d rather it not be.

Men comprise an overwhelming 84.5% of military personnel according to the 2015 demographics report. This male-dominated life makes it possibly even more important for military teens to read materials that depict female contributions accurately. But, alas, the ESV minimizes them.

**Phoebe**

Consider Phoebe, the one who would carry Paul’s letter to Rome. He commends her to them in Romans 16:1–2. The ESV calls her a “servant” and footnotes that “servant” may also be translated “deaconess.” Now, a brief study of Greek would reveal that this word *diakonos* may be translated either “deacon” or “servant.” In cases such as these, translators have to decide what biblical writers really mean by looking at the context.

**Don’t Minimize Us!**

How Bible Translation Shapes Our View of Women in God’s Story

*by Amy Davis Abdallah*
Phoebe is from the church at Cenchreae, a city very close to Corinth. Paul states that she is his benefactor, that she helped him greatly. Whether this help was financial, spiritual, physical, or other, we do not know. It may have been a combination of all of them. She is traveling, possibly alone, probably with her own servants. Few women would have this privilege, and Paul tells the Romans to help her with whatever she needs. This letter of Paul’s is meant to make an alliance with the church in Rome so that they would send him to Spain. It is an important letter, and he entrusts it to Phoebe.

A person who helps Paul (possibly in many ways), has the means to travel alone or with servants, should be helped with anything needed, and is entrusted with a very important letter, is likely a leader in the church at Cenchreae. It is more likely that Phoebe is a deacon than a servant. She may well have been the primary leader of the church there.

It is intentional that I call Phoebe “deacon” rather than a deaconess. In many churches, deacons deal with ministerial matters like the distribution of money, while deaconesses decorate and cook. Far be it from me to denigrate decorating and cooking—we Christians are sometimes held together because we eat together! Yet, unfortunately, in my experience, these were a woman’s only permissible work, for women shouldn’t be involved in important matters like money.

In the Bible, however, there is no distinction between male and female in the role of deacon. In fact, the word that describes the office is one word “deacon” (diakonos) whether the person filling the office was male or female. Further, it is easy to find precedent for female deacons in the first centuries of the church. Therefore, Phoebe was a deacon (leader) in the church at Cenchreae. Calling her a servant or even a deaconess minimizes her role.

Gender accurate translations tend to call Phoebe a deacon and put “servant” in the footnotes, stating that it is a possible translation. It is important to note, however, that placing an alternative translation in a footnote does not mean that they are synonymous. The word in the footnote is the rejected translation; the translators chose and preferred the word in the text.

Junia

There is another woman footnoted in the ESV in Romans 16. Her name is Junia, and the ESV footnotes her name with a male name, Junias. The ESV thus thinks Paul’s referring to a female, but leaves maleness possible. Romans 16:7 in the NIV states, “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.”
For most of us, unfamiliar names like Andronicus cause us to stumble, distracting us from the beautiful truths contained in Paul’s descriptions. Andronicus is a male name and Junia is female. Some think they were married, but we are unsure. They’ve been imprisoned with Paul, but the most amazing truth about them is in the second sentence: “They are outstanding among the apostles”! Junia was an apostle and so was Andronicus!

Apostleship is defined differently these days. For some traditions, the apostles were limited to the twelve closest to Jesus; for some, apostles are those who saw the risen Christ; while for others, apostleship is a spiritual gift that continues today. What is clear is that apostles have authority and are sent (Greek apostello) by God to perform certain tasks. It has been common to state that women cannot be apostles. This was easier when Junia was incorrectly translated as Junias, a male.

While the ESV acknowledges that Junia is a better translation, it does not acknowledge her apostleship. Rather than being outstanding apostles, the ESV states, “They are well known to the apostles,” thus minimizing the contribution of both Junia and Andronicus. For ESV translators, it does not matter that the older KJV sees them “of note among the apostles,” that fourth century John Chrysostom (and others) saw Junia as an apostle, and that the very first to know the gospel and be sent (apostello) by Jesus to tell it were the women who came to the tomb. The translators’ bias against women in such a role causes them to minimize Junia and, by inference, other women in the Bible.

It still irks me that my devotional is in a study Bible whose translation minimizes women. And not just the women in the Bible. It diminishes the importance of my work, because even as readers learn from Hannah, they don’t get a full picture of the ways God has used women over time. And it reinforces cultural beliefs that men should lead while women follow—beliefs that the Bible itself challenges!

I hope that the young military men and women who read my devotional will learn from Hannah’s example. Because the truth is, women have always been leaders and exemplars of the faith, and Scripture praises them for it. Let’s do all we can to make sure that one day, every Bible translation celebrates that reality.

Dr. Amy Davis Abdallah is passionate about life. She is a wife and mother who writes, teaches, speaks, leads, and mentors in the United States and abroad. “Woman,” the rite of passage she pioneered, and The Book of Womanhood have transformed and empowered many. In addition to journeying with women, Amy is associate professor of theology and Bible at Nyack College. Find her on the web at amyfdavisabdallah.com and on Twitter @amyfdavis.
Translation Troubles: 1 Corinthians 14 as a Test Case

by Jeff Miller

The challenging complexity of the ministry of Bible translation should spark humility, among translators themselves and among those who critique them. I pledge to keep such humility in mind as I describe four types of shortcomings that can be found in Bible translations, using 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 as a test case.

1. Translating a word poorly or imprecisely

An example is the Greek word σιγᾶ, which occurs ten times in the New Testament, including 1 Corinthians 14. The NIV uses “silent” to translate three of these ten occurrences (Luke 20:26, Acts 15:12, 1 Cor 14:34). The problem with translating σιγᾶ this way in 1 Corinthians 14 is not that the word can never mean “silent.” Most words have a range of meaning, and “silent” is indeed within that range for σιγᾶ. The problem, rather, is that “silent” does not best fit the context—and context is always the key to a word’s meaning and translation. A few verses earlier, those in Corinth with the gift of prophecy are told to σιγᾶ in certain circumstances. A theological reason is then given for this instruction: “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (NIV). Thus the nature of the “silence” of 1 Corinthians 14 is grounded in order and peace. This contextual grounding helps us navigate the word’s range of meaning toward peacefulness and away from silence. As a result, translations that use “quiet” instead of “silent” in 14:34 (e.g., CEB, CEV, NCV) are preferable.

Two other words that are at risk of being inadequately translated or understood are authentein (“to have/usurp authority”) and kephale (“head”). These words are not in 1 Corinthians 14, our test passage, but are worth mentioning because discerning their meaning is central to egalitarian concerns. See the sidebar for more on these.

Authentein and Kephale

These two words are critical to understanding what Paul says about gender. CBE has accessible and academic resources to help you learn more.

For more on authentein:
Visit cbe.today/authentein.

For more on kephale:
Check out “Misinterpreting ‘Head’ Can Perpetuate Abuse” on p. 12.
Visit cbe.today/head.
2. Leaving something out

It is sometimes true that a Hebrew or Greek word need not be represented in translation by a corresponding word. Nevertheless, a decision to omit presents risks, such as lack of clarity or shift of emphasis. An example from 1 Corinthians 14 is the definite article “the,” which begins verse 34. “The women should be quiet” is significantly different from “women should be quiet.”

Consider this example: If someone were to ask you right now what you are reading, you could answer, “a magazine.” Later, after you’re done reading, that same person would surely not ask, “Where’s a magazine you were reading?” Instead, they would say, “Where’s the magazine you were reading?” “A magazine” has become “the magazine” simply because both people in the conversation now know which magazine is meant.

In both Greek and English, this is a frequent function of the definite article (to refer to something that is known or “definite”). Similarly, Paul says “the women” because both he and his readers know who he means. Centuries later, we don’t know exactly who he means, but we can easily infer that he is referring to some women in Corinth who have been previously mentioned (most likely in a report Paul received from and/or about the Corinthian congregations).

Though the illustration above is rather simple, we must not underestimate its impact. Indeed, here in 1 Corinthians 14 the difference between “the women” and “women” is several billion people! Translations that include “the” at the beginning of verse 34 have avoided a significant pitfall. These include the CEB, CEV, CSB, ESV, NASB, and the NET Bible.

Another example of unnecessary omission is the word “own” in 1 Corinthians 14:35a: “If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home” (NIV). Admittedly, “their husbands” are the same people as “their own husbands.” But this simple fact suggests that the word “own” is present for emphasis and should therefore not be omitted. This sentence reveals a key to the passage: the type of speaking that certain women are to stop is the asking of questions. Paul is not addressing preaching or teaching. He is addressing behavior “in the pews.” . . . Not only were certain women asking questions at the wrong time, they were also asking questions of the wrong people. That is, they were publicly asking other women’s husbands rather than their own husbands—a taboo in that culture.

3. Making an unwarranted insertion

An example from our test passage is the word “remain” in verse 34: “Women should remain silent in the churches” (NIV). To be clear, no word in the Greek text of this verse corresponds to “remain.” BibleGateway.com makes available fifty-seven English translations. Only five of them include the word “remain” here, and three of these five are in the NIV family (NIV, NIrV, NIVUK). To add “remain” is to strengthen the already strong word “silent” (which all five translations use instead of “quiet”). The insertion serves to expand the command beyond the context the chapter is addressing, suggesting that women had been silent before and should remain silent after.

Sometimes the form of a Greek word (its tense, voice, or mood), requires that an additional word be added to its translation. But the addition of “remain” is not such a case, for the three occurrences of sigao in 1 Corinthians 14 are identical.

The type of speaking that certain women are to stop is the asking of questions. Paul is not addressing preaching or teaching. He is addressing behavior “in the pews.” . . . Not only were certain women asking questions at the wrong time, they were also asking questions of the wrong people. That is, they were publicly asking other women’s husbands rather than their own husbands—a taboo in that culture.
Bible translation is challenging and complex, and it therefore calls for humility on the part of those who undertake it and those who critique it.

Only one of the five translations which add "remain" regarding women in verse 34 also adds "remain" to the corresponding commands to tongue speakers in verse 28, and none of the five do so regarding prophets in verse 30. The biased inconsistency is palpable: tongue speakers and prophets should be quiet in certain circumstances, but women must "remain silent in the churches" regardless of circumstances.

4. Misuse of punctuation, paragraph divisions, subheadings, quotation marks, and capitalization.

Consider, for example, the second half of 1 Corinthians 14:34, "They [the women] are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says" (NIV). Several translations capitalize the word "Law" at the end of this verse, including the CEB, ESV, and NASB. To do so implies strongly that "law" here refers to the Torah. (Whether that is the intent, it is certainly the effect.) A few translations, such as the CEV, go even further and print "the Law of Moses." The problem is that nothing in the Law of Moses says women must be in submission. Various theories about this difficulty exist, and all interpreters are of course free to hold to a theory. But translators should not do something to the text (in this case, capitalize "Law") that obscures even the fact that there is a difficulty to grapple with.

Outside our test passage, another example of a paratextual feature obscuring the text is the forced separation of two inseparable verses, Ephesians 5:21 and 5:22. Verse 21 is about mutual submission; verse 22 is about wives submitting to their husbands. The two verses are inseparable, because in the Greek text there is no verb "submit" in verse 22; it is inferred from the word "submit" in verse 21. To use one translation as an example,

The NIV [1984] . . . has done everything typographically possible to distance 5:21 from 5:22. A period, a double-spaced line, an italicized subheading, a second double-spaced line, a paragraph indentation, a verse number, and a capital letter all stand between these verses. 2

Conclusion

Two verses of Scripture, 1 Corinthians 14:34—35, have provided sufficient data to illustrate four categories of translation difficulties. In addition, these illustrations together serve to demonstrate two overarching points.

First, there is no English Bible that avoids all pitfalls. This is true in general, and also with regard to egalitarian concerns. It is surely the case that certain translations (notably, the NRSV, CEB, and NIV 2011) have made significant strides toward unbiased and accurate rendering of key texts. And it is also true that certain translations have not (notably, the ESV and CSB). Nevertheless, no single translation can be fairly called either "the egalitarian Bible" or "the complementarian Bible."

Second, the illustrations above have demonstrated the point made at the beginning of this article: Bible translation is challenging and complex, and it therefore calls for humility on the part of those who undertake it and those who critique it. With this in mind, I close with Colossians 3:12, "Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, gentleness and patience" (NIV).

Jeff Miller is editor of CBE’s academic journal, Priscilla Papers, and teaches Bible at Milligan College, a Christian liberal arts college in eastern Tennessee. He formerly held youth and music ministries in Nebraska, Tennessee, and Colorado. He has attended several CBE conferences and has written for Priscilla Papers and Mutuality. He is active in worship ministry in his congregation. He and his wife Dana have two adult daughters and two grandchildren.


Enough

Here it is: the English echo of your word upon which my soul feeds.

Preprocessed food, to be sure, but liberally salted with the Spirit; it builds my muscles and bones and tames the growling in my gut.

Until I can feast at your table, it is what you give me, and it is enough.
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Marriage certificates don’t come with how-to-manuals, and marriage is full of tough questions like “How do we manage our money?” “How do we build a healthy sex life?” or “How do we handle serious arguments?” While an actual how-to-manual may not exist, we’re here to help.

CBE is proud to announce the release of our new marriage book, Mutual by Design!

Mutual by Design lays a theological foundation for egalitarian marriage; provides practical help on issues like communication, sex, and money; and doesn’t shy away from thorny topics like abuse, divorce, and “male headship.”

With exercises and discussion questions, Mutual by Design is great for individuals, couples, or small groups.

In Other News . . .

CBE had a strong presence at this year’s meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. We had great attendance at our community meal and a coffee hour for women scholars to network and fellowship.

Dr. Gwenfair Walters Adams became the second woman to deliver a plenary lecture at ETS since 1986 (the first was in 2015).

Finally, CBE supporter Craig Keener was elected vice-president of ETS. He will become president in three years. He’ll be the first egalitarian president of ETS in decades!

What readers are saying . . .

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Tracking Errors in Bible Translation

In his New York Times Best Seller, Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking, Malcolm Gladwell notes the damage that results when experts do not trust their first (and often accurate) impressions. Ignoring their informed instincts is how curators at the Getty Museum purchased a statue many now believe is a fake! If they’d followed their instincts, they could’ve avoided a costly error.

In Christianity, many of us intuitively recognize a disturbing connection between the treatment of women and some difficult verses and words in the Bible. While some Christians rationalize sexism and patriarchy by appealing to the “plain reading” of Scripture, others instinctively question whether what they see on the pages of Scripture is a faithful and consistent translation of the original text. At stake is something much more costly than a statue; we risk living our lives based on distortions of Scripture, which, in turn, justify a Christianity centered not on Christ but on male rule.

Thankfully we have examples of leaders whose informed instincts challenged bias in Bible translation.

Consider Katharine Bushnell (1856–1946), a medical missionary turned Bible scholar. Her first “blink” came while working as a doctor in China. Bushnell noticed that Chinese Bibles omitted the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11). Digging deeper, she later discovered that Paul’s female coworkers in Philippians 4:2–3, Euodia and Syntyche, were changed into male coworkers in those Bibles! This reinforced prejudice against women leaders. Working with trafficked girls for over twenty years, she believed that flawed Bible translations that devalued girls and women did little to challenge perpetrators who rationalize their abuse.

Bushnell was rightly convinced that mistranslations and misinterpretations of the Bible gave men what belonged to God alone—authority over women. She recognized that this would never change until translation errors were corrected. Then all could see what the Bible truly teaches: women and men are equally responsible for sin, equally redeemed by Christ and given equal authority to serve Christ.

Determined to correct the misrepresentation of females by distorted Bible translations, Bushnell wrote God’s Word to Women, an exhaustive analysis of gender in Scripture. No longer would men alone have the right to convey the meaning of God’s Word. What follows are examples of translation distortions Bushnell identified, first in Genesis, then the New Testament and finally in her critique of textual and interpretive issues as it obscures the clear teachings of Scripture. Each is explored in depth in Bushnell’s book, God’s Word to Women (free online, at www.godswordtowomen.org) and analyzed in Kristin Kobes Du Mez’s A New Gospel for Women: Katharine Bushnell and the Challenge of Christian Feminism.

Genesis

Bushnell was horrified that translators demeaned the creation of Eve from Adam by using the word “rib,” when the same Hebrew word is most often translated as “side.” “Rib” fails to represent how Eve was created as one whole being from another whole being—Adam. The more accurate and dignified word choice should be “side” not “rib.”

Why, she asked, was the Hebrew word chayil translated as “strength,” “force,” or “capacity” when referring to men, but as “virtue” or “chastity” when referring to a female? Why alter the original meaning when it concerned women?

Likewise, Bushnell challenged rendering the Hebrew word teshuqah as “lust” rather than “desire” in Genesis 3:16: “Your lust will be for your husband and he will rule over you” (emphasis mine). This choice insinuates that women’s nature is corrupt.

Katharine Bushnell (1856–1946) was a doctor, missionary, Bible scholar, and social activist. She established a hospital in Shanghai and a shelter for homeless women in Chicago. She combatted slavery and sex trafficking from India to the lumber camps of Wisconsin. Her groundbreaking work on Bible translation is compiled in her book, God’s Word to Women, published in 1921.
New Testament

Turning to the New Testament, Bushnell found similar challenges.

The Greek word *kosmios* is translated as “well-ordered” when referring to men, but “modest” or “pure” when it concerned females. First Timothy 2:9 reads, in the NIV “I also want the women to dress modestly...”

Likewise, *hagnos* is translated as “holy” when used of men but “pure” when used of females. The NIV translates Titus 2:4–5 as: “. . . urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.”

Further distortions include the mishandling of *exousia* when referring to women. The word is most often interpreted as “power,” “authority,” “right,” “liberty,” “jurisdiction,” and “strength.” But when used of women in 1 Corinthians 11:10, it is translated as “veil,” which serves to give men authority over women. When translated correctly, Paul teaches women have authority over their own heads, thus reversing male rule, which is a consequence of sin.

Textual and interpretive issues

Bushnell identified several other concerns that, while not translation issues, contribute to a distorted understanding of the biblical text concerning females.

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Perceptively, Bushnell observed that though Paul speaks of husband as head of his wife in Ephesians 5:23, the passage directs husbands to imitate Christ’s headship. That is, by giving up his life for her. Only as a husband imitates Christ’s character and conduct are they the head of their wives and included in the body of Christ. The passage advances the mutual submission of all Christians, not the rights of husbands.

First Corinthians 14:34–35 teaches that women should not speak in the church, but should be subordinate as the law teaches. Bushnell is perhaps the first to note that Paul is actually speaking against this “law.” She points out that there is no Old Testament law forbidding women to speak! Women, from Genesis onward, were far from silent. The health of God’s people depended on it! Thus, she concluded (as later scholars have agreed) that Paul is quoting the teachings of “Judaizers” who were trying to force extra-biblical cultural traditions on the church.

In assessing 1 Timothy 2:11–15, Bushnell considered all of Paul’s writings and ministry, observing that Paul allowed women to lead so long as their leadership was not domineering and provided they taught a true gospel (1 Tim. 2:11–12).

The following century, Augustine said,

Enemies of the true faith, fearing, I suppose, lest their wives should be given impunity in sinning, removed from their manuscripts the Lord’s act of forgiveness toward the adulteress, as if He who had said “sin no more” had granted permission to sin.3

This passage, read on the feast day of Saint Pelagia—a prostitute turned Christian ascetic—shows Jesus directly challenging the sexual double standards of his day!

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In assessing 1 Timothy 2:11–15, Bushnell considered all of Paul’s writings and ministry, observing that Paul allowed women to lead so long as their leadership was not domineering and provided they taught a true gospel (1 Tim. 2:11–12). She insisted that we not judge women according to the Eve’s sin while we value men through Christ’s atonement for their sins. “[W]e cannot, for women, put the ‘new wine’ of the Gospel into the old wine-skins of ‘condemnation.’”4

While translations and interpreters had misrepresented women as morally weak and promiscuous, women’s emancipation was, for Bushnell, central to the gospel. And their strength, taught on the pages of Scripture, was needed in giving the gospel not only credibility but also social teeth to dismantle abuse.

Bushnell’s legacy

Though egalitarians today are often framed as secular feminists, this is far from the truth. We proudly stand with Katharine Bushnell and other first-wave feminists who exposed patriarchy’s shallow appeal to “the plain reading” of Scripture. The problem, they realized, was neither the gospel nor the original text, but translator bias!

What began as solidarity with women enslaved in the global sex trade ended with Bushnell condemning flawed Bible translations. Throughout, she demonstrated that a high view of Calvary, to which all of Scripture points, redeems and sanctifies men and women equally. It is at the foot of the cross that both sexes acquire newness of life—a Christ-given identity—with a Christ-centered purpose: to share spiritual authority in Christ’s new creation community as Adam and Eve did in Eden. Woman’s emancipator, like man’s, is and always will be Christ. For this reason, we press for more accurate translations of Scripture that make clearer, rather than obscure, the power of Calvary in men and women alike.

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2 Cyprian as quoted in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Academia Litterarum Vindobonensis*, vol. iii, 638.

3 Augustine in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Academia Litterarum Vindobonensis*, vol. xxxx, 387.

Praise

• Thanks to generous donors, we met our Giving Tuesday fundraising goal!
• Our marriage book, Mutual by Design, is finished and available for purchase (see p. 28 for more).
• Egalitarian influence is growing at ETS. For the second time in three years (and second time since 1986) a plenary was delivered by a woman. And Craig Keener was elected vice-president. In three years, he’ll become the first egalitarian ETS president in decades! (See p. 28 for more.)

Prayer

• Pray for the planning for our Finland conference, “Created for Partnership,” hosted by our Finnish partner organization, RaTas.
• The end of the year is a critical time for every nonprofit to make its budget goals. Pray that our donors will give generously so we can continue to meet the need for the egalitarian message globally.
• As sexual abuse is increasingly exposed around the world, pray for the egalitarian message to take hold in the church!

CBE INTERNATIONAL

Mission Statement
CBE International (CBE) exists to promote biblical justice and community by educating Christians that the Bible calls women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world.

Statement of Faith
• We believe in one God, creator and sustainer of the universe, eternally existing as three persons in equal power and glory.
• We believe in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
• We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are only possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
• We believe the Holy Spirit equips us for service and sanctifies us from sin.
• We believe that men and women are equally created in God’s image and given equal authority and stewardship of God’s creation.
• We believe that men and women are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.

Core Values
• Scripture is our authoritative guide for faith, life, and practice.
• Patriarchy (male dominance) is not a biblical ideal but a result of sin.
• Patriarchy is an abuse of power, taking from females what God has given them: their dignity, and freedom, their leadership, and often their very lives.
• While the Bible reflects patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy in human relationships.
• Christ’s redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership.
• God’s design for relationships includes faithful marriage between a man and a woman, celibate singleness and mutual submission in Christian community.
• The unrestricted use of women’s gifts is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel in the world.
• Followers of Christ are to oppose injustice and patriarchal teachings and practices that marginalize and abuse females and males.

To learn more about CBE’s values, history, and ministry, visit cbe.today/info.

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New Resource from CBE!

Mutual by Design
A Better Model of Christian Marriage

Marriage. It’s been around for millennia, so what more can be said that hasn’t already been said? Many books on Christian marriage have been written, but most assume that the Bible puts men in a leadership role, while women are to be submissive. But there’s a better way, and not only is it healthier for families, but it’s more faithful to the Bible. The Bible casts a vision of marriage where men and women co-lead and co-serve as equal partners. This book explores that vision.

This book is for those considering marriage, those already engaged, newlyweds, and any couple seeking to improve their relationship. Written for individual couples or groups, chapters include discussion questions, exercises, and suggestions for further reading.