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.