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of English Bible Translations?

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Does the English Standard Version Stand in the Classic Mainstream of English Bible Translations?

by L. Brigden, Senior Editorial Consultant (Linguistics)

The English Standard Version (ESV) first appeared in 2001 and since then has been revised a number of times (2007, 2011 and 2016). The ESV is intended to appeal to the more conservative Christian, being portrayed as standing in ‘the classic mainstream of English Bible translations’,¹ beginning with the Tyndale New Testament and the Authorised (King James) Version and from there to the Revised Version and the Revised Standard Version. The ESV professes to adhere to the principle of formal equivalence in translation and to reject the contrary principle of dynamic equivalence.² This supposed return to the historic principle of formal equivalence and the consequent attempt to mirror ‘the majesty of the style’³ of the original Hebrew and Greek in English translations is an important and welcome change. Where translators have a high regard for

the original Biblical languages by which the Holy Spirit conveys divine truth they no longer attempt to work out what the inspired writer ‘meant’ to say, or attempt to conform what he has in fact written to the prejudices of a contemporary society, but they simply render the original as it stands.

But while the ESV professes to stand in ‘the classic mainstream of English Bible translations’, it actually departs from that mainstream in two significant ways. Firstly it departs by abandoning the traditional and time honoured Greek Received Text in favour of a more recently devised and corrupt Critical Text, and secondly it departs from the principle of formal equivalence and conforms to the prejudices of at least some sections of modern society by adopting gender neutral⁴ language.

The First Departure: Textual Basis

While the ESV claims to build upon the Tyndale and Authorised (King James) Version tradition, it is in fact based upon the Revised Standard Version, itself a revision of the Revised Version, and neither the Revised Version nor the Revised Standard Version can be reasonably considered a continuation of the Tyndale-AV tradition, but represent on the contrary a dramatic break from that tradition.⁵ This fact was clearly recognised by some scholars at the time of the Revised Version,⁶ and since that time has been acknowledged by numerous others.⁷ But this dramatic break in the classic mainstream of English Bible translations is quietly passed over by the publishers of the ESV.

Those acquainted with the history of the Revised Version are aware that Westcott and Hort, two influential scholars on the committee convened by the Anglican Church to undertake the revision of the Authorised (King James) Version, acted quite contrary to their instructions which charged them to make no change in the textual basis of the revision except where absolutely necessary.⁸ On the contrary, they quite boldly changed it, supplanting the Received Text with their own Critical Text.

Remarkably the Anglican Church, instead of protesting the unprincipled actions of these two men, mildly acquiesced in their boldness and accepted

the work of revision.⁹ Subsequently and sadly, most other churches have also acquiesced and silently passed over the weighty and still unanswered objections raised against Westcott and Hort's work. Thus, 'truth is fallen in the street' (Isaiah 59.14) and an unsubstantiated textual theory seems to have swept all before it, displacing the time honoured Received Text of the church with a newly devised, and never before generally received, Critical Text. And thus to this day the Critical Text still holds sway, even though the premises upon which Westcott and Hort's theory relied have long since been found to be unsubstantiated.

Yet none of these things should ever have come about, the church being 'the pillar and ground of the truth' (1 Timothy 3.15). The claims of truth should be of pre-eminent concern to the church and there should never be a silent acquiescing, but rather a careful examining and a questioning, consistent with the Apostle's injunction to 'prove all things' (1 Thessalonians 5.21).

There are five fundamental premises upon which Westcott and Hort's textual theory of the New Testament stand:

1. that the transmission of the New Testament Greek text must be understood in no different way from that of the transmission of any other ancient text. Of course, behind this premise is the assumption that there are no errors in the New Testament text that have been

introduced by deliberate tampering of the text for doctrinal reasons.

2. that the extant manuscripts of the New Testament may be classified according to text types: Alexandrian, Caesarean, Western and Byzantine.

3. that the Received Text is simply the product of conflation¹⁰ of other 'text types', and hence, being of later date than those other text types, must be a corrupt text, so that we ought to return to an earlier and purer text type. This earlier and purer text type they alleged to be found in Vaticanus and Sinaiticus.

4. that from the extant texts we may construct genealogical trees so as to trace their transmission back to the original.

5. that somewhere in the third or fourth century AD there was an authoritative revision of the Greek text which produced the Received Text and accounts for the dominance of that text thereafter throughout church history.

The first premise, which is also the chief pillar of the whole edifice,¹¹ is plainly contrary to what the Scriptures themselves declare concerning themselves. Historic reformed confessions, such as the Westminster Confession of Faith,¹² summarise the teaching of Scripture¹³ regarding the transmission of the text in the following statement:

The Old Testament in Hebrew ... and the New Testament in Greek ... being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. (1.8)

Thus, according to historic reformed Confessions the Scriptures teach that their transmission and preservation is unlike that of any other work of ancient literature, for the Scriptures are in a special category, being under God's own 'singular care and providence'. By contrast there is no such promise with regard to any other work of ancient literature.

Thus Westcott and Hort set their work upon a main premise that was contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture. What success can they hope to have and what confidence can any Christian place in their work? From the outset, Westcott and Hort set themselves in clear opposition to a doctrine of the Word of God.

Moreover, the assumption behind this first premise betrays a blindness as to the spiritual nature of the contents of divine revelation, as well as an ignorance of the testimony of the Church Fathers who plainly assert the very opposite, that is, that the text was tampered with by heretics.¹⁴

The second premise, that the extant texts may be categorised according to

the text types—Alexandrian, Caesarean, Western and Byzantine—has never been confirmed. This is because, upon careful study, all extant texts appear to be of mixed type. While the categorisation of texts might have seemed an appealing concept in theory,¹⁵ it has proved to be all but useless in practice for the simple reason that it does not match reality.¹⁶

The third premise of their work is that the Received Text is the result of a conflation of other text types. But this was never conclusively proved by Westcott and Hort themselves,¹⁷ nor has it ever been proved since their time. In fact, more recent discoveries of early papyri have revealed the inconvenient fact that the papyri, though very old, yet contain Received Text readings.¹⁸ Moreover, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are known to differ from each other in more than three thousand places in the Gospels alone,¹⁹ so how is it reasonable to suppose that they represent an older and purer text, their testimony being so discordant?

The fourth premise of Westcott and Hort's work is that we may construct genealogical trees so as to understand how the manuscripts are related to one another and hence trace their lineage back to the originals. Though Westcott and Hort claimed that this was possible, they never actually demonstrated it in any particular case. Attempts to do so since that time have also generally proved unsuccessful.²⁰

The fifth premise, that is, the supposed authoritative revision of the text in the third or fourth centuries to produce the Received Text, is entirely bereft of historical evidence. It was clearly nothing more than speculation on Westcott and Hort's part at the time; they had no solid grounds to support it, nor have any been discovered since that time.

Thus the main premises of Westcott and Hort's theory have never been proved, nor have the criticisms raised against the theory ever been satisfactorily answered. Yet the Greek textual basis of virtually all modern translations of the Bible, including the ESV, is essentially the text of Westcott and Hort.²¹ Thus the ESV stands upon an unsound foundation, and certainly not upon the same foundation as the Tyndale and AV.

So how can the publishers of the ESV portray the ESV as standing in 'the classic mainstream of English Bible translations', when the ESV is built upon the same foundation as the Revised Version and the Revised Standard Version, versions that represent a significant departure from the textual basis of the Tyndale and AV? The publishers are apparently either ignorant of the facts of the case, or else discount the significance of those facts and trust the general Christian reader to do the same.

It may be wondered how a textual theory which has long since been found wanting should nevertheless remain

the basis of all succeeding translations. If the reasons for discarding the *Textus Receptus* have been found to be invalid, why does the church not do the logical and reasonable thing and return to that from which she departed, that is, the *Textus Receptus*? One must suppose the reason to be that the *Textus Receptus* excites more or less the same antipathy in some modern scholars as it did in Westcott and Hort.²² So, although the passage of time has made it all the more evident that Westcott and Hort's textual theory is untenable, some nevertheless cling to it, apparently because the alternative of going back to the *Textus Receptus* is unthinkable.

And how do we account for the fact that a text may excite antipathy in scholars? Is not the work of the scholar supposed to be as dispassionate and objective as that of any scientist? Surely the antipathy is indicative of a spiritual warfare. If the light of divine revelation shines too clearly in the Received Text, it may be expected to excite an antipathy in men who 'loved darkness rather than light' (John 3.19), and thus will they incline more toward the Critical Text.²³

Two Significant Theological Shifts Underlying the Critical Text

Before proceeding to the second departure of the ESV from 'the classic mainstream of English Bible translations', it is worthwhile observing that there have been two significant theological shifts

since the time of the Reformation, both of which underlie the modern use of the Critical Text. The first theological shift concerns the doctrine of the divine preservation of Scripture. The second and deeper theological shift concerns the displacement of theology from its position as 'queen of the sciences'.

The Doctrine of the Divine Preservation of Scripture

There is a key theological difference behind the Authorised (King James) Version and the English Standard Version which may not be so readily apparent to many. The difference is in the stance of each version relative to the doctrine of the divine preservation of Scripture. The AV exemplifies belief in that doctrine, as evidenced by its use of the Received Text. By contrast the ESV, along with most other modern translations, by its use of the Critical Text evinces a practical denial of the doctrine. This doctrine is the core difference that leads to the two quite different outcomes.

When the AV was translated, the doctrine of the divine preservation of Scripture was a generally acknowledged Biblical doctrine,²⁴ whereas today it appears to be all but lost from the church. Yet the doctrine may still be seen in the historic reformed confessions of the era—Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), The Savoy Declaration (1658), Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675), London Baptist Confession (1689)—so it was

evidently well-known at the time of the Reformation. But dark indeed must be the times when a doctrine once so plainly recognised and professed as a Scriptural doctrine is now become so generally unknown or, worse still, flatly denied,²⁵ and a new and unscriptural doctrine, that of the human restoration of the text of Scripture, substituted in its place.²⁶

It is entirely probable that the rise of the Critical Text is directly linked to the decline in adherence to the doctrine of the divine preservation of the Scriptures. Westcott and Hort were Anglicans and the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion, though excellent in other respects, contain no express statement of the doctrine of the divine preservation of Scripture.²⁷ By contrast, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1.8), the Savoy Declaration (1.8) and the London Baptist Confession (1.8) all contain an express statement of the doctrine:²⁸

The Old Testament in Hebrew ... and the New Testament in Greek ... being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.

It may be observed from this statement that the Scriptures in the original Hebrew and Greek are spoken of as a rule to be appealed unto 'in all controversies of religion' and that these Scriptures are

not conceived of as being 'afar off', but are those very Scriptures which are close at hand and of which the church is already possessed.

These statements of the doctrine of the divine preservation of the Scriptures in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Savoy Declaration and the London Baptist Confession of Faith are consistent with adherence to the Received Text of Scripture. The Received Text is that text which has been in the possession of the church throughout the ages, and to which the church has confidently made its final appeal.²⁹ The Critical Text, on the other hand, being a text under construction, a 'work in progress' and not any stable text ready at hand to which the church may make a final appeal,³⁰ is inconsistent with the concept of the Scriptures as expressed in the historic reformed standards.

Theology as 'Queen of the Sciences'

From the Middle Ages through to the time of the Reformation and the Puritans, theology held a pre-eminent place above all other sciences. It was therefore called the 'queen of the sciences' and every other field of study was subordinate to it.³¹ As this view waned during the nineteenth century, it is hardly surprising that Darwin's theory of evolution arose, as well as the application of the scientific method to textual criticism which inevitably resulted in the Critical Text. The relative success of the physical sciences

in the natural world so inflated men's estimation of the worth of those sciences and of the scientific method in general that, in the thinking of many, science began to supplant theology. Thus there came about a change in the intellectual climate, a change that would bear corrupt fruit in theology.

The Puritans would never have accepted a purely scientific approach to textual questions, for that would be to give to the methodology of the natural sciences a position it could never rightly occupy, a position that was above theology. Textual questions are not properly part of the natural world; they are part of divine revelation and subject to a divine promise, that is, the promise of divine preservation, and therefore a branch of theology.

The Puritans were of course thinking Biblically, for the Scriptures themselves portray theology, that is, the knowledge of the one true God, as pre-eminent. Natural science has its proper place, but that place is subordinate to theology. The natural sciences pertain only to the creation, whereas theology pertains to the Creator. The broad principles of the natural sciences are therefore to be derived from theology³² but the principles of theology cannot be derived from the natural sciences, for those principles belong to a different and higher realm.

Clearly science and theology cannot both be pre-eminent. Only one can rule.

But our age is pervaded by the notion that it must be science that rules and not theology, whereas in a previous age, when men thought more Biblically, it was theology that ruled and not science. Hence we see in this age the fruits of displacing theology from its rightful place of pre-eminence, and one of those fruits is the Critical Text. Westcott and Hort's first premise, which treats the transmission of the text of the New Testament like that of any other work of ancient literature, is a practical denying of the legitimacy of any appeal to theology, specifically the appeal to the doctrine of the divine preservation of Scripture.

The Second Departure: Formal Equivalence and Gender Neutral Language

The ESV claims that it is 'an "essentially literal" translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer'.³³ This is, of course, to claim to follow the principle of formal equivalence. But on closer examination it becomes evident that there are a significant number of times when the ESV does not 'capture the precise wording of the original text', but clearly departs from that wording and from the principle of formal equivalence. The reason is to be found in the ESV's compliance with 'gender neutral' language.

Translation of *anthropos*

We begin by examining how the Greek word *ἄνθρωπος* (*anthropos*)

is translated in the ESV. The word is frequently translated in the ESV as the gender neutral word 'person', whereas the AV translates it as 'man'. For example, at 1 Corinthians 2.11:

AV: For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?

ESV: For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him?

The translators of the ESV would doubtless argue that the Greek word ἄνθρωπος (*anthropos*) is a generic word which does not specify any particular sex but may be applied generally to men or women, and that by rendering the word as 'man' a misunderstanding may arise that women are excluded. But the argument is incorrect. The Greek word ἄνθρωπος is a masculine noun and properly does mean 'man'. The word is generally thought to be derived from two other Greek words: ἀνήρ (*aner*), a specifically male word meaning 'man' or 'husband', and ὤψ (*ops*) which means 'face'.³⁴ Thus the meaning of the compound word ἄνθρωπος is literally 'man faced'. Moreover, evidence from the usage of the word in the New Testament makes it plain that the word always refers to a male human being, a 'man', there being no clear instance of the word where the reference is to a woman.³⁵

So the argument for ἄνθρωπος being a gender neutral word and equally appli-

cable to men or women is without foundation. It is not gender neutral like the English 'person', and consequently 'person' is not a fit translation of ἄνθρωπος. Certainly ἄνθρωπος should not be rendered as 'person' merely to eclipse the distinctively male character of the Greek word simply because by translating it as 'man' some may take offence.

It is true that its plural form, ἄνθρωποι (*anthropoi*), may be used in reference to people generally, but in that case it is still a masculine plural noun and the group is being denominated by the males within it. The females are not specifically noticed, only the males, no doubt because the man is regarded as the representative head of the woman. But because the females are not specifically noticed does not mean that they are excluded. They are simply included under the males. Thus, the correct translation will still be 'men', not 'people'.³⁶

It is evident in 1 Corinthians 11.28 how the ESV gets into trouble by pursuing this policy of translating *anthropos* as 'person':

AV: But let a man [*anthropos*] examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup.

ESV: Let a person [*anthropos*] examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Notice how the reflexive object of the verb 'examine' is the masculine noun

'himself'. This clearly indicates that the subject of the verb should also be masculine and that the correct translation of the first part of the verse is, as in the AV, 'let a man ...'. The ESV however shies away from the literal translation of *anthropos* as the distinctly masculine 'man' and uses the gender neutral 'person' instead. But the incongruity in gender between the subject of the verb and its reflexive object is apparent. Thus, the ESV's gender neutral policy results in an obvious problem with the resulting translation of the verse.

Does this mean that Paul gave no injunction to women to examine themselves before partaking of the Lord's Supper? Or are we to conclude that women are not permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper? By no means. We simply have to correctly understand the use of the Greek word *ἄνθρωπος*. The word is quite properly translated as 'man' in this verse, but under the 'man', as representative head, is included the woman as well. The woman is not specifically addressed, but she is certainly included in the injunction.

When the ESV uses the word 'person' in its translation it imports a gender neutral concept into the text, a concept at variance with the meaning of the original Greek. The Greek word *ἄνθρωπος* has a distinctly male meaning and is not gender neutral. The word means 'man' not 'person', and 'man' as the representative head under whom the woman is sub-

sumed. The woman does not have to be particularly addressed. Only the man, as representative head, need be addressed for the woman to also be included.

Greek and Hebrew know nothing of the modern need to address each group separately, male and female, as if each were a separate race of human beings. For the Biblical languages it is normally sufficient to address the man as representative head to also address the woman. This is consistent with Biblical thinking which represents the woman as not independent of the man, but always bound to him in some way or other, for example as wife or daughter.³⁷

But this Biblical concept of the relation between male and female, deeply embedded in the original languages of Scripture themselves, is strongly disliked by modern feminists who have consequently exerted as much pressure as they are able to efface it. The ESV has evidently given way to this pressure and complied, at least in part, with the push for gender neutral language.

Masculine Adjectives and Participles

Another example of where the ESV departs from formal equivalence by its compliance with gender neutral language is in its translation of masculine adjectives and masculine participles. Romans 14.22–23 is a convenient example since it contains both a masculine adjective and masculine participle. We

compare the translation of the AV with the ESV:

AV: Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because *he eateth* not of faith:

ESV: Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgement on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith.

Surely the masculine reflexive object ‘himself’ of the verb (condemn) in the first part of the verse makes it evident that the subject of that verb must be the masculine ‘he’, and not the gender neutral ‘one’. And that is exactly how it stands in the Greek: both the adjective ‘happy’ (μακάριος) and the verb ‘condemneth’ (the participle κρίνων) are masculine. Hence the AV, following the principle of formal equivalence, translates: ‘Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself ...’. The ESV, on the other hand, departs from formal equivalence and needlessly introduces an incongruity into the translation by employing the gender neutral ‘one’ as the subject, simply to avoid using the masculine pronoun ‘he’.³⁸ Once again the ESV’s pursuit of gender neutral language forces it to depart from formal equivalence.

The Indefinite Pronoun τις (*tis*)

A further example of where the ESV departs from formal equivalence by com-

plying with gender neutral language is in its translation of the Greek indefinite pronoun τις (*tis*). For example, John 14.23:

AV: If a man [*tis*] love me, he will keep my words ...

ESV: If anyone [*tis*] loves me, he will keep my word ...

The AV has ‘a man’ whereas the ESV has ‘anyone’. So which is the correct translation of the Greek word τις: ‘a man’ or ‘anyone’? The ESV translators would doubtless argue that no particular gender is specified by the Greek word τις since it is an indefinite generic pronoun, and therefore ‘anyone’ is the correct translation. But while the Greek word τις is an indefinite pronoun and generic, it still does have a quite definite gender, and that gender is masculine. The word is not gender neutral as the ESV’s translation would seem to indicate.

If τις were indeed gender neutral, we might expect it to be used in reference to both sexes, so that there should be at least some instances of the word’s use where it clearly had the meaning ‘any woman’. But no such instances of the use of τις are to be found anywhere in the New Testament. In every instance the reference is to a male.

Further, there are numerous instances where τις is followed by some form of the masculine pronoun such as αὐτὸν (him) or ἑαυτὸν (himself), but no instances where it is followed by forms of

the feminine pronoun αὐτήν (her) or ἑαυτήν (herself), clearly indicating that τις is masculine and not gender neutral.

For example, John 12.26:

AV: if any man [*tis*] serve me, him will *my* Father honour.

ESV: If anyone [*tis*] serves me, the Father will honour him.

It is evident from the masculine pronoun object 'him' in the second part of the quoted portion of the verse that the subject in the first part must be masculine. Thus the AV correctly begins with 'if any man'. The ESV, on the other hand, wishing to avoid the use of 'man', begins with the gender neutral 'anyone'.

Another example is Galatians 6.3:

AV: For if a man [*tis*] think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself [ἑαυτὸν].

ESV: For if anyone [*tis*] thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Again it is evident from the masculine reflexive pronoun 'himself' (ἑαυτὸν) at the end of the verse that the subject of the verse is in fact masculine. Therefore the AV correctly begins the verse 'if any man ...' while the ESV, wishing to avoid the use of 'man', begins with the gender neutral 'anyone'.

We may pertinently ask, whose understanding of the meaning of the Greek word τις is more likely to be correct? Either we must suppose that the AV translators were inferior in their understanding of the ancient Greek language in comparison with the modern ESV translators, or else that the AV translators had a perfectly competent grasp of Greek and that the only reason the ESV translators obscured the masculinity of the Greek word τις was because their judgement was affected by the push toward gender neutral language. The latter seems the more probable explanation.

Even the 1950s RSV, upon which the twenty-first century ESV is based, has 'any man' in John 14.23, in agreement with the AV. So what changed in the interval between the RSV and the ESV? Did our knowledge of ancient Greek advance so much further that the ESV translators understood something more about the Greek word τις than had been known up until that time? Did the ESV translators come to understand that, while all scholars before their time had thought τις to have a male reference, they were mistaken and that the Greek word was in fact gender neutral? Or was it simply that the ESV translators were influenced by a feminism far more prominent now than at the time of the RSV which skewed their judgment regarding the meaning of the word? Again, the latter seems by far the more probable explanation.

Translation of ἀδελφοί

A final example of where the ESV departs from formal equivalence by complying with the push for gender neutral language is the recurring footnote that the Greek word ἀδελφοί (*adelphoi*) may mean 'brothers and sisters'.³⁹ But the footnote is quite incorrect because the Greek word is masculine and properly does mean 'brethren' or 'brothers'. It does not mean 'sisters'. There is a separate Greek word for 'sister' which is ἀδελφή (*adelphe*), the plural being ἀδελφαί (*adelpchai*). The Greek text does not say ἀδελφοί και ἀδελφαι meaning 'brothers and sisters', as the note in the ESV would imply, but the text simply has ἀδελφοί meaning 'brethren' or 'brothers'. The ESV's note is evidently only inserted to comply with the push for gender neutral language in the Bible. It does not give the correct explanation of the Greek word ἀδελφοί but an explanation adjusted to conform to modern feminist thinking.

The correct explanation of the Greek word ἀδελφοί is an explanation distasteful to modern feminism. Only the male 'brethren' are addressed because this is consistent with the pattern throughout Scripture: normally only the males are addressed because the females are subsumed under the males. The females are not generally separately addressed because they are included in the address to the males. Thus, the Greek word ἀδελφοί is not an 'inclusive' term applying equally to both men and women as the ESV's note implies. It is a distinctively mascu-

line word, because the address is to the males as representative heads over the females connected with them.

The Colorado Springs Guidelines

The adoption of gender neutral language in the ESV can be traced to its adherence to the Colorado Springs Guidelines,⁴⁰ which were drawn up in 1997 in response to such gender neutral translations as the New International Version Inclusive (NIVI) which first appeared in 1995. While the Colorado Springs Guidelines objected to the more extreme implementation of the feminist philosophy in Bible translation, they still complied with feminist philosophy so far as to allow the translator, at least on occasions, to avoid gender specific terms such as 'man' and 'he' even though such terms were literal translations of the Greek. This was done on the grounds that the modern English language tended to avoid generic 'man' and 'he' and it was felt that by continuing to use such words some misunderstanding might arise. But this was simply a partial compliance with feminism and an acceptance of the advances which that un-biblical philosophy had already made on modern society.

This compliance is evident from guidelines 5, 6 and 7 in part A of the Colorado Springs Guidelines which are as follows.

5. In many cases, *anthropoi* refers to people in general, and can be translated as "people" rather than

“men”. The singular *anthropos* should ordinarily be translated “man” when it refers to a male human being.

6. Indefinite pronouns such as *tis* can be translated “anyone” rather than “any man”.

7. In many cases, pronouns such as *oudeis* can be translated “no one” rather than “no man”.

The allowance given by these guidelines to the use of the more gender neutral terms ‘people’, ‘anyone’ and ‘no one’ instead of the distinctively masculine terms ‘men’, ‘any man’ and ‘no man’ cannot be justified on linguistic grounds alone. The influence of feminism upon the wording of these guidelines is therefore quite evident. As we have already remarked, there is no warrant for ἄνθρωποι (*anthropoi*) being translated as ‘people’. The correct translation is ‘men’. The indefinite pronoun τις (*tis*) is masculine and it is quite incorrect to deliberately attempt to mute that masculinity by translating the word with the gender neutral ‘anyone’. Pronouns such as οὐδεις (*oudeis*) and μηδεις (*medeis*) are also definitely masculine and there is, once again, no warrant for deliberately muting their masculinity by translating as ‘no one’ rather than ‘no man’.

The only warrant for adjusting the translation of any of these words to mute their masculinity must be derived from a source outside of the languages

themselves. This is evident from the fact that no such guidelines as those in the Colorado Springs Guidelines for the translation of these particular words were ever proposed before the rise of feminism. In other words, no competent scholar in times past ever felt the need to frame such guidelines from the linguistic evidence alone.

It is true that when significant changes take place in a language **naturally** over time, there is warrant to at least consider revising a translation. But what if the change does not take place naturally, but is rather imposed upon the language by a philosophy alien to the Scriptures themselves, such as feminism? Are we then bound to revise the translation? By no means. On the contrary, we are bound to resist such a revision. The change is not a natural one, but an entirely unnatural one; it is a change that has been forced upon the language by an ungodly philosophy. We have no warrant in such a case to revise the translation. But this is exactly what the ESV has done. It is a revision of the RSV, but a revision that uses more gender neutral language than the RSV.⁴¹

Conclusion

We conclude that the claim of the ESV to stand in ‘the classic mainstream of English Bible translations’ does not match the reality. The ESV departs from the classic mainstream both in its choice of textual basis, adopting the Critical Text rather than the Received Text, and

in its abandonment of the principle of formal equivalence when it comes in conflict with the push for gender neutral language.

While the ESV may attempt to portray itself as a Bible for the more conservative Christian, it ultimately cannot escape the same fate as other modern versions. Being built upon the same foundation of the practical denial of the doctrine of the divine preservation of the Scriptures, a denial which inevitably leads to the adoption of the Critical Text, the ESV cannot maintain a stable text. Thus, quite predictably, after the publishers of the ESV initially announced that the text would remain unchanged, they quickly retracted the promise.⁴² It apparently did not take them long to realise that their desire, on the one hand, to appeal to the more conservative Christian by promising a stable, unchanging text, and their commitment, on the other, to the Critical text were ultimately incompatible.

There can be no assurance that the ESV will track any different course in the future from the NIV, with its numerous

gender neutral and 'gender inclusive' revisions.⁴³ The groundwork is already in place with the ESV having followed the Colorado Springs Guidelines, even though some of those guidelines clearly show a concession to feminism. What prevents further concessions in time? The ESV may lag somewhat behind the NIV, but as the fundamental principles behind both versions are the same, one may reasonably predict that they will eventually end up at the same destination. The ESV is therefore no safe haven for the conservative Christian.

What then should be done? Clearly the church ought to return to the point from which she first departed: that is, she should return to the Received Text, acknowledging her blindness and folly in turning aside to the Critical Text and the ill fruit which that departure has borne. But in order that she may intelligently do so the doctrine of the divine preservation of Scripture, as taught in the historic reformed confessions, must first be revived. The church needs once again to be thoroughly persuaded that that doctrine is indeed a most certain doctrine of the Word of God.



Endnotes

1. 'Preface', *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway Bibles, 2001), p. vii.
2. Ibid.
3. The Westminster Confession of Faith and the London Baptist Confession list 'the majesty of the style' among those evidences of the Scriptures being the 'word of God' (1.5).
4. 'Gender neutral' is used to describe such words as 'person', 'anyone', etc., which are neuter in gender.
5. This is evident from the Preface to the 1971 Revised Standard Version itself which describes the AV as having 'grave defects' which are 'so many and so serious as to call for revision' (*Bible Research*, www.bible-researcher.com/rsvpreface.html). From these words it may be wondered whether the translators of the RSV would indeed have regarded their work as a continuation of the Tyndale-AV tradition.
6. Most notably by Dean Burgon and F. H. A. Scrivener.
7. Hills, Pickering, van Bruggen, Theodore Letis, David Otis Fuller, etc.
8. Dean John Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (Collingswood, NJ, USA: Dean Burgon Society Press, 2000), pp. 2–7.
9. Though there were some, like Dean Burgon, who vigorously opposed it.
10. 'Conflation' means that the resultant text has been obtained by joining together other texts.
11. W. N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson, 1977), note 9, p. 215.
12. Also the Savoy Declaration and London Baptist Confession.
13. As taught, for example, in Matthew 5.18
14. See Sturtz's discussion of examples of tampering noted by Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian and Eusebius in *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism*, Second Syllabus Edition (La Mirada, CA, USA: Biola College Bookstore, 1972), pp. 115–120.
15. It was, in fact, devised to facilitate the fourth premise, that is, the genealogical method.
16. Thus A. F. J. Klijn states that 'It is still customary to divide manuscripts into the four well known families: the Alexandrian, the Caesarean, the Western and the Byzantine. This classical division can no longer be maintained'. *A Survey of the Researches into the Western Text of the Gospels and Acts; part two: 1949–1969* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1969), p. 36.
17. Westcott and Hort cited only eight instances out of the whole of the New Testament: a rather sparse number if conflation was really responsible for the Received Text. But even those eight instances are very questionable (see Dean Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, pp. 257–265).
18. Sturtz, pp. 61–62, 145–149.
19. "Comparison of codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus", *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_codices_Sinaiticus_and_Vaticanus, accessed 28 November 2017.
20. Thus Colwell summarily declares in regard to the application of the genealogical method to the New Testament 'that it cannot be so applied'. 'External Evidence and New Testament Criticism' in *Studies in the History and Text of the New Testament*, eds. B. L. Daniels and M. J. Suggs (Salt Lake City, UT, USA: University of Utah Press, 1967), p. 4.
21. Some may be inclined to dispute this point on the basis that the Greek textual basis of modern translations is not identical to Westcott and Hort's. But they are not said to be 'identical', only to be 'essentially' the same.

22. Hort refers to the Textus Receptus as 'villainous' and 'vile'. A. F. Hort, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort*, 2 vols. (New York, NY, USA: Macmillan and Co., 1896), 1.211.
23. It is a notable fact that modern day Arians such as the Jehovah's Witnesses incline toward the Critical Text. Their New World Translation is based upon the Critical Text and regarded by them as superior to the AV for that very reason. 'Is the *New World Translation* Accurate?', *JW.org*, www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/new-world-translation-accurate, accessed 28 November 2017.
24. The Westminster Confession of Faith 1.8 explains: 'The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek(which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by his singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authenticall' and gives as Scripture proofs: Matthew 5.18: 'For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled'; Psalm 119.89: 'For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven'.
The Confession states that as a result of this singular care: 'in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them', and gives as Scripture proofs Isaiah 8.20: 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them'; Matthew 15.3, 6: 'But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? ... and honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free*. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition'; Acts 15.15: 'And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written ... '. See also Luke 16.31.
25. Daniel Wallace, for example, would be one of those today who deny the doctrine (see 'Inspiration, Preservation and New Testament Textual Criticism', *Grace Theological Journal*, 12.1[1992] 21–50). It reminds one of the denial of the doctrine of the resurrection by the Sadducees in the time of Christ. The Sadducees were also quite confident in their denial of the doctrine of the resurrection until Christ exposed their utter ignorance by His cogent reasoning from a single text of Scripture (see Mark 12.26–27), whereby they are proved to 'greatly err'.
26. This is exactly the 'doctrine' underlying Westcott and Hort's work, that is, that the true text of Scripture has been lost for centuries and that we must solely rely upon the work of human hands to restore it.
27. The Anglican Catechism of 1553 does, however, contain a statement concerning the preservation of Scripture. Concerning the Law and the promises of the Gospel it states: 'These things, first written by Moses and other men of God, have been preserved whole and uncorrupted even to our age'. (J. T. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, p.16)
28. So does the Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675):
Canon 1: God, the Supreme Judge, not only took care to have his word, which is the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believes" (Rom 1:16), committed to writing by Moses, the Prophets and the Apostles, but has also watched and cherished it with paternal care from the time it was written up to the present, so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man. Therefore the Church justly ascribes to it his singular grace and goodness that she has, and will have to the end of the world (2 Pet 1:19), a "sure word of prophecy" and "Holy Scriptures" (2 Tim 3:15), from which though heaven and earth pass away, "the smallest letter or the least stroke of a pen will not disappear by any means" (Matt 5:18). Translated by Martin I. Klauber, *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990): 103–23.
29. That adherence to the Received Text is consistent with the statement of the confessions is also evident from the fact that the confessions quote verses such as 1 John 5.7 as proof texts (WCF, Savoy and LBCF 2.3), a verse only to be found in its entirety in the Received Text.
30. For example, Crossway, the publisher of the ESV, states that 'Our goal at Crossway remains as strong as ever to serve future generations with a stable ESV text. But the means to that goal, we now see, is not to

establish a permanent text but rather to allow for ongoing periodic updating of the text to reflect the realities of biblical scholarship such as textual discoveries or changes in English over time'. ('Crossway Statement on the ESV Bible Text', *Crossway*, www.crossway.org/articles/crossway-statement-on-the-esv-bible-text, accessed 27 March 2018).

31. See, for example, J. Owen in *Biblical Theology* (Pittsburgh, PA, USA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), pp. 14–19.
32. For the strong connection between the Reformation and the rise of modern science, see R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Vancouver, BC, Canada: Regent College Publishing, 2000).
33. Preface to the ESV, p. vii.
34. See, for example, 'G444 for ἄνθρωπος – Strong's Greek Lexicon Number', *Study Bible*, studybible.info/strongs/G444, accessed 28 November 2017.
35. It is true that there are instances in Classical Greek where *anthropos* is used of a woman, but in those cases the word is used in a genuinely generic way, the male term being applied to the female, though not thereby losing any of its 'maleness'. This is quite different from being a gender neutral term. In such cases, as Barrett remarks (W. H. Barrett, *Euripides: Hippolytos* [Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1964], note on 1102–5) it is, '... not masculine used as feminine, but masculine used as *masculine* with reference to a woman'.
36. Similarly, the English word 'mankind'. The race is denominated by the men of the race. The word is 'mankind', not 'person kind' or 'human kind'.
37. Marlowe accurately observes that the Bible 'presents from beginning to end a thoroughly "androcentric" perspective, and it often leaves it to the reader to decide what application to women or what inclusion of women is implied'. He also perceptively remarks that 'the tendency today among conservative Christian writers is to deny that the Bible is primarily addressed to men'. Michael Marlowe, 'The Gender Neutral Controversy', *Bible Research*, www.bible-researcher.com/inclusive.html, accessed 28 November 2017.
38. It also departs when it supplies the words 'has no reason to', to which there is nothing corresponding in the Greek.
39. See, for example, Romans 1.11, 7.1, 8.12, etc.
40. Michael Marlowe, 'Colorado Springs Guidelines', *Bible Research*, www.bible-researcher.com/csguidelines1.html, accessed 28 November 2017.
41. If any were inclined to doubt the gender neutral character of the ESV on the grounds that the ESV was conceived, at least in part, as a conservative response to gender neutral translations such as the NIV1, the doubt is easily resolved by the simple fact that the ESV has more gender neutral language than the RSV upon which it is based.
42. Jeremy Weber, 'Crossway Reverses Decision to Make ESV Bible Text Permanent', *Christianity Today*, www.christianitytoday.com/news/2016/september/crossway-reverses-decision-esv-bible-text-permanent-mistake.html, accessed 28 November 2017.
43. The 2011 NIV closely resembles the TNIV, a version that attracted much criticism when it first appeared because of its gender neutral language. See Si Cochran, 'A fair analysis of the new NIV', *World*, world.wng.org/2013/12/a_fair_analysis_of_the_new_niv, accessed 28 November 2017.

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