

A Word About Gender Inclusive Language in Translating the Bible by Jimmy Gentry February 2010

Some translators take a “gender inclusive language” approach to biblical translation. I’ll refer to this, henceforth, as GIL. The motivation behind these versions is primarily a concern for clearness. To dodge the mistaken belief that “*man*” and “*mankind*” or “*he*” and “*him*” are exclusively masculine when they literally are being used in a broad sense, these translators have elected to use less ambiguous language, such as “*people*,” “*humans*,” “*human beings*,” “*humankind*,” or “*friends*” when appropriate. There are times when use of such language is not fitting.

These works honestly have sought to choose gender language that would accurately communicate the meaning of the original writers. Specific and exclusive masculine and feminine references in the text are retained. Jesus is still “*Son*,” for example, and God is still referenced as “*Father*.” A king is still a man and a queen is still a woman.

One of the problems in translating the Bible from the Hebrew (Old Testament), Biblical Aramaic (some passages in the Old Testament), and Greek (New Testament) is that there is rarely a precise equivalent from one language to another. It is difficult at best.

I am very much an evangelical who is staunchly committed to the inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures. I believe we are to constantly strive for accuracy that reflects a dedication to the intent of the original text. The Holy Bible, which can literally mean, “the book that is different,” is the living word of God and is always relevant in changing cultures. The Holy God and Father of all believers in Jesus Christ desires, I believe, to communicate today, by way of the Scriptures, with all people. GIL takes this into consideration.

I am well aware that some take issue with the GIL approach to translation and I humbly respect their viewpoint. There is nothing wrong with translations, such as the English Standard Version (ESV), Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New International Version (NIV), and Revised Standard Version (RSV) that are not GIL.

A friend, who lives outside Georgia, was one of 19 Pastors with whom I journeyed to Israel in June 2007. ***She*** uses the New American Standard Bible. Notice I said, “*She!*” She is a woman and a Senior Pastor. Many conservative and moderate scholars, in addition to pastors, take the approach that is not GIL.

By the same token, there is nothing inherently amiss with translations, such as the Contemporary English Version (CEV), Good News Translation (GNB), New Century Version (NCV), New Living Translation (NLT), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and Today’s New International Version (TNIV), that are GIL. Likewise, many conservative and moderate scholars and pastors take and revere this method.

If the biblical writers were actually writing in the twenty-first century of our Lord, they would use language that conveyed the true meaning of the text regarding gender. From my perspective, this has nothing to do with radical “feminism”, but with the inclusive nature of God. As the baptismal confession of Galatians 3:28 notes, “***There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.***” And that translation is the New American Standard Bible, which is not GIL.

When it comes to language, let us not forget that in Christ we are all one. Hallelujah!

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