

The Revised NIV: A Trojan Horse of Error

by Gregory Alan Tidwell

1 Timothy 2:12, NIV 1984

with good deeds,⁹ appropriate for women who profess to worship God. ¹¹A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵But women^a will be saved^b through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love^v and holiness with propriety.

Tit 1:7
3:2 y Tit 1:6-8
z ver 12 a ver 11;
Tit 2:2 b S Ro 12:13
c 2Ti 2:24
3:3 d Tit 1:7
e 2Ti 2:24
f Lk 16:14; 1Ti 6:10
2Ti 3:2; Heb 13:5;
1Pe 5:2
3:4 g ver 12; Tit 1
3:5 h S 1Co 10:32
3:6 i 1Ti 6:4;
2Ti 3:4 / S 2Pe 2:4
3:7 k S Mk 4:11
/ 2Ti 2:26
3:8 m Php 1:1
n 1Ti 5:23; Tit 1:7;
2:3

1 Timothy 2:12, NIV 2010

rate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. ¹¹A woman^a should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man;^b she must be quiet. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵But women^c will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith, love and holiness with pro-

Until graduate school, I used the King James Version of the Bible. It was the Bible read in my home, and it was the Bible I heard preached from the pulpit. All of the memory work I did as a youth came from the KJV, and through its pages I learned the story of salvation. Although I could not deny its language is sometimes difficult and I had to grudgingly accept other problems with the translation, I bristled when anyone disparaged the KJV. It was my Bible, and I loved it.

For this reason, I can understand the defensiveness of those who use the New International Version (NIV). Although a bestseller since it was published in the 1970s, the NIV has always endured a high degree of criticism from detractors. Some of the criticism was substantive and reasonable, but much was strident and petty.

Understanding the emotional ties we form with our version of choice, I have never before written a warning about a particular translation. The latest revision of the NIV, however, so embraces the errors of current Protestant theology that it poses a threat to sound doctrine. In many ways the updated NIV is a greater danger to faith than any other major English version of Scripture.

The Original NIV

The New International Version traces its origin to a meeting in 1965 at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill., among the Christian Reformed Church, the National

Association of Evangelicals, and a group of international scholars. The New Testament was released in 1973 and the full Bible, in 1978. Some minor revisions were included in a version issued in 1984. According to Biblica.com, the transition process with the 1984 version took two years to complete. The revised NIV, released on the Web in November 2010 and in print this past March, is expected to take about the same amount of time to transition.¹

As with all major English versions since 1881 (with the sole exception of the New King James Version), the NIV uses the scholarly critical text of Scripture. That is the Greek text generally accepted by scholars. For those who insist that the KJV is the only acceptable English translation, this was a major problem.

More troubling to many scholars was the use of dynamic equivalence rather than formal equivalence in translation. Dynamic equivalence attempts to convey the thought expressed in the original text, but formal equivalence attempts to render a word-for-word translation, to the extent that a literal translation is possible.

The use of dynamic equivalence greatly increases the danger of bias in translation and often hides shades of meaning found in the original text. Further, dynamic equivalence in translation does not always produce a more readable text. The English Standard Version (a literal version) is on a grade level of 7.4, while the NIV is on a grade level of 7.8. That is to say the more literal version is, in this case, actually slightly easier to read.²

Successful marketing by its publisher, Zondervan, has produced tremendous sales for the NIV over the past three decades, most years earning it the distinction of being the most purchased English version of the Bible.

The Erosion of Faith

The translators of the NIV represented a wide variety of religious outlooks, including Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Christian Reformed, churches of Christ, Evangelical Free Church, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist,

Nazarene, Presbyterian and Wesleyan. Updating the text was committed to a self-perpetuating board, The Committee on Bible Translation. Although the doctrinal commitments of the original translators of the NIV were generally conservative, the theology of this committee has changed dramatically, reflecting the change that has taken place in American religion.

Beginning in the late 1950s, historically conservative Protestant denominations have embraced ideas associated with mainline liberalism, especially

of Christ, but that is another sad story. The scholars entrusted with revising the NIV reflect the loss of faith that has permeated their denominations.

Feminist Theology

The doctrinal shift among Protestants caused the NIV translators to revise the version in keeping with feminist theology after aborted attempts over the past several years. The current revision of the NIV shows this doctrinal bias.

The attempt to undermine the biblical basis of male spiritual leadership

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abandoning, among other truths, an insistence on the inerrancy of Scripture. As Carl F.H. Henry warned in 1976: "A growing vanguard of young graduates of evangelical colleges who hold doctorates from non-evangelical divinity centers now question or disown inerrancy and the doctrine is held less consistently by evangelical faculties. ... Some retain the term and reassure supportive constituencies but nonetheless stretch the term's meaning."³

Twenty years later, R. Albert Mohler Jr. echoed these concerns: "[E]vangelicalism in the 1990s is an amalgam of diverse and often theologically ill-defined groups, institutions, and traditions. ... The theological unity that once marked the movement has given way to a theological pluralism that was precisely what many of the founders of modern evangelicalism had rejected in Mainline Protestantism. ... Evangelicalism is not healthy in conviction or spiritual discipline. Our theological defenses have been let down, and the infusion of revisionist theologies has affected large segments of evangelicalism. Much damage has already been done, but a greater crisis yet threatens."⁴

This same erosion of faith has afflicted some members among churches

began among theological liberals and among Holiness-Pentecostal churches decades ago. This trend has become an onslaught affecting every religious group, and the feminist agenda is rampant in the revised NIV.

Perhaps the most blatant assault on male spiritual leadership found in the revised NIV is its attempt to insinuate women into church leadership roles such as deacons. The text of Romans 16:1 in this version reads, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae." Just in case we miss the point, the translators include a footnote: "The word deacon refers here to a Christian designated to serve with the overseers/elders of the church in a variety of ways; similarly in Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8, 12."

In the qualifications for deacons that Paul wrote to Timothy, the revised NIV makes the text read as if some of the deacons were women: "In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything" (1 Timothy 3:11). In the footnote the translators add: "Possibly deacons' wives or women who are deacons."

More subtle, but in some ways more dangerous, is the feminist twisting

found in 1 Timothy 2:12 where the revised NIV reads: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet." All other major versions render the prohibition in some form of "to have authority over a man." By using the words "assume authority," the revised NIV is parroting theories advocated by feminist theologians. According to this line of thought, a woman may lead in worship, serve as a deacon, be a preacher or do anything else in the church as long as she is asked to accept this authority and does not "assume" to have this authority on her own.

In keeping with this agenda, the revised NIV aims to be gender-inclusive in its language. Current usage in English struggles with gender use, especially with the lack of a gender-neutral singular pronoun. But the attempts of the revised NIV to avoid using masculine references in texts where both genders could be intended produce many troubling results.

The Greek word *adelphoi* means "brothers." Sometimes it is used when both men and women are intended, but other times it means only men. The revised NIV consistently translates the term "brothers and sisters," removing even the possibility that only men are intended. For example, in Acts 6:3 we read, "Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them." By using the phrase "brothers and sisters" rather than "brothers," the revised NIV is claiming beyond any doubt that women were tasked by the apostles in the selection of the first deacons.

Many texts in which the revised NIV uses "brothers and sisters," could just as easily intend men only. In Acts 12:17, for example, we read, "Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. 'Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,' he said, and then he left for another place." Although it is possible Peter intended for this message to go to the "brothers and sisters," the specific reference to James would make it more likely Peter was sending

word to the men who led the church.

Likewise in Acts 18:27 we read, "When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him." Once more it is possible the sisters were involved in writing the letter of instruction, but the more certain understanding would be that this was done by men.

In the same way, when Paul greeted others in an epistle, the revised NIV says "brothers and sisters," where a legitimate understanding would be that men who are church leaders are intended (cf. Galatians 1:1-3; Philippians 4:21).

Bowing to feminist sensitivities, the translators of the NIV often use plural pronouns in the place of singular pronouns in the original text. Sometimes the effect produces stilted and bad English, such as in Revelation 3:20: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." This awkward construction is ironic for a dynamic-equivalence version, which places ease of understanding ahead of accuracy of translation.

Replacing singular pronouns with plural at other times corrupts the teaching of the text as in 1 John 4:16: "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." The use of the plural pronoun changes our fellowship with God from a personal reality into a collective abstraction. This same corruption of personal meaning comes through in many passages (cf. Luke 9:26; 1 John 3:3 and 4:20).

The Destruction of Foundations

As damaging as the feminist agenda may be, equally troubling is the attempt to destroy a literal reading of the creation account. In the preface to the revised NIV, the translators write, "Basic formatting of the text, such as lining the poetry ... has been the work of the Committee." When you read Genesis 1:1-2:3, therefore, the formatting imposed by the NIV translators indicates the creation narrative is to be read as poetry.

Because secular opinion believes the earth is much older than would be indicated by a straightforward reading of Genesis, many people have proposed theories to harmonize the teachings of Scripture with those of an old earth. The translators of the NIV brush aside a literal understanding of creation and reduce all difficulties to poetic incidentals. You don't want to believe in six days of creation with God specially calling everything into existence? No problem. The opening section of the revised NIV lends itself to theistic evolution or any other theory you might want to embrace.

As my review indicates, I believe the revised NIV is a Trojan horse of error that will destroy the faith of many. The old NIV, which many have used for decades, will be completely replaced by the current translation in short order. Faithful Christians must be aware of the problems caused by this revision. Although there are no perfect translations, no other major English version presents the threat to biblical truth posed by the revised NIV. □

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Endnotes

1 Because the NIV is in transition, Bible reference websites are having to distinguish between the 1984 and revised version. YouVersion.com and BibleGateway.com are annotating the 1984 version as NIV84 or New International Version 1984, respectively. The revised NIV is simply called NIV or New International Version. BibleStudyTools.com and BlueLetterBible.org do not yet have the revised NIV.

2 Information on the readability of Bible versions can be found at their respective publisher's websites: www.crossway.org/blog/2005/08/readability-grade-levels/ (ESV) and [www.zondervan.com/Cultures/en-US/Product/Bible/Translations/NIV.htm?QueryString=Zondervan\(NIV\)](http://www.zondervan.com/Cultures/en-US/Product/Bible/Translations/NIV.htm?QueryString=Zondervan(NIV)).

3 Carl F.H. Henry, "Conflict Over Biblical Inerrancy," *Christianity Today* (May 7, 1976) 24.

4 R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Evangelical: What's in a Name?" *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, Ed. John H. Armstrong (Chicago: Moody, 1996) 32-33, 36.