



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 1, 2012

Petition Asks Bible Translators to Return “Father” and “Son” to Arabic Scriptures

In a petition launched on [Change.org](#) January 4, the missions group explained that among other issues:

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- Wycliffe and SIL produced an Arabic Bible translation, published as *Stories of the Prophets*, that substitutes “Lord” for “Father” and “Messiah” for “Son.”

- Frontiers worked with an SIL consultant to publish *True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*, an Arabic translation “which removes ‘Father’ in reference to God, and removes or redefines ‘Son.’ ” For example, the group pointed out, the Arabic translation of Matthew 28:19 reads, “... Cleanse them by water in the name of God, his Messiah and his Holy Spirit,” rather than (as is rendered in the King James Version), “... baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

- Frontiers published a Turkish translation of the gospel of Matthew that uses the word “guardian” for “Father” and “representative” or “proxy” for “Son.”

- SIL consulted on a Bengali Scripture translation that changed “Son” to “Messiah” and “Son of God” to the cumbersome “God’s Uniquely Intimate Beloved Chosen One.”

In its petition, Biblical Missiology explained that by changing or removing words in Scripture that would supposedly offend Muslims, “these translations fail to portray God as who he is: the familial, eternal, loving God the Father, Son and Spirit.” Further, the group argued, the changes obscure the all-important deity of Jesus Christ, “and thus the self-sacrifice of God on our behalf.”

The strongly worded petition letter addressed to the translation groups cites Deuteronomy 4:2, which declares: “You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.”

Reads the petition: “Taking away ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ from God’s own words changes our understanding of God and his ways. In particular, doing so obscures the eternal Sonship of Jesus and the good news that ‘the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world’ (1 John 4:14).”

The petition goes on to charge that the translations in question “compromise the essence of the gospel itself: the self-sacrifice of God the Son on our behalf, and the offer of an eternal relationship with God. 1 John 4:15 says, ‘whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.’ How can those in need of the gospel respond to the promises of God, if they don’t know him as Father, Son





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and Spirit?”

Finally, the petition recalls that when he was faced “with obstacles to the gospel as great as any Christians face today, the apostle Paul declared [2 Corinthians 4:2], ‘We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God’.... Translations that remove ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ from the text tamper with God’s word.”

The petition concludes by asking Wycliffe, SIL, and Frontier “to explicitly pledge not to produce such translations. And thus may the truth of God’s word continue to be an ‘open statement’ to all in need of the gospel.”

The petition sponsors explained that they took the route of a public petition only as a last resort, after the translators had ignored or minimized the concerns expressed by many theologians, missionaries, and national pastors from the countries and cultures affected. “If this were a minor issue,” they explained, “then we would at this point simply have to ‘agree to disagree.’ But this is not minor. It is hard to imagine anything more significant. Our understanding of God himself, Scripture, redemption and our adoption are all affected by removing ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ from Bible translations.”

They added that the petition drive was launched “with great sadness, prayer, and a desire to honor God’s name.... It is our sincere desire that agency leaders would commit to retain ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ in the text of the Bible....”

For their part, Wycliffe and SIL have defended the Scripture translations, arguing that in some cultures — such as those where Islam is the majority religious faith — literal scriptural translations would fail to portray the relationship between God and Jesus Christ correctly.

According to [Yahoo News](#), SIL issued a public response to the petition with a statement insisting that all its personnel “subscribe to a statement of faith which affirms the [Trinity, Christ’s deity](#), and the inspiration of Scripture.” However, it argued that “word-for-word translation of these titles would [communicate an incorrect meaning](#) (i.e. that God had physical, sexual relationships with Mary)” — a consideration both agencies insisted offered justification for changing the words “Father” and “Son” in their Muslim-targeted translations.

Similarly, [Wycliffe issued a statement](#) that read, in part: “We, along with all other Wycliffe organizations worldwide, strongly affirm the eternal deity of Jesus Christ and require that it be preserved in all translations. Scripture translations should promote understanding of the term ‘Son of God’ in all its richness, including His filial relationship with God the Father, while avoiding any possible implication of sexual activity by the Father.”

Biblical Missiology reported that in response to the petition, “Wycliffe sent a document to their staff, as well as to some of the signatories of the petition, rejecting the assertions of the petition.” In turn, the missions group posted a 16-page [“Fact Check” response](#) to Wycliffe’s comments and defense of its work, explaining in detail the theological objections its members have with the translations.



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