

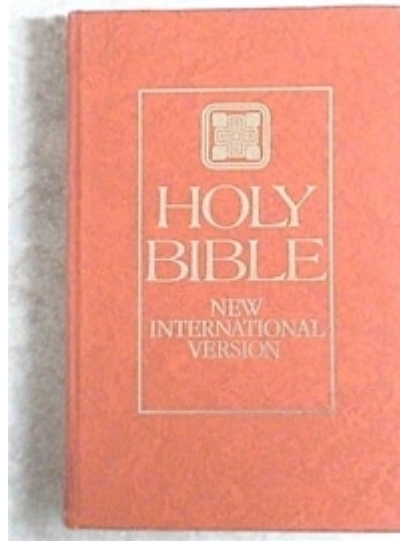


Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 6, 2010

NIV Bible Update Comes Under Fire

The world's best-selling Bible has been revised, but its critics remain unimpressed with the editors' efforts to address what many scholars say are significant problems.

The New International Version (NIV), which has been the world's most popular Scripture translation since it was first introduced in 1978, drew some major flack in 2002 when scholars commissioned to update the NIV New Testament inserted "gender-neutral" language in many passages where masculine forms of words were used in original manuscripts. The updated translation, known as Today's New International Version (TNIV), received so much criticism that after the 2005 release of the entire TNIV Bible its publisher, Zondervan, quietly backed off aggressively marketing the Bible until it announced the release of the 2011 NIV, which was updated from the previous TNIV efforts.



While the latest update, which Zondervan released online in November and which will come out in print version in early 2011, has generally received positive feedback from the Christian community, its most vocal critic over the past ten years, the group [Christians for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#) (CBMW) continues to object to gender issues it says remain in the NIV.

In a [statement on its website](#), the group acknowledged that the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), the group of biblical scholars charged with the task of hammering out the updated translation, had made "some significant improvements in various areas" of the updated NIV. "For instance," the statement notes, "in many passages 'man' and 'mankind' replace a gender-neutral equivalent" that had been present in the TNIV, "resulting in greater accuracy in translating the Hebrew or Greek text. This is also true in many cases for the words, 'he,' 'him,' 'his,' 'brother,' 'father,' and 'son.' "

The group was referring to Scripture passages in which masculine pronouns were replaced in the 2002 and 2005 versions with such gender-neutral "equivalents" as "they," "then," and "their," to list a few.

One "improvement" that the CBMW cites, which is instructive of the problems that yet lurk within the latest NIV, is found in Revelation 3:20. Commending the translation committee for its efforts to "dial down the one-size-fits-all gender-inclusive approach of the TNIV," the group shows how the translation has evolved from the 1984 NIV, to the 2002 TNIV, to what CBMW considers at least to be a middle-ground improvement in the 2011 NIV:

NIV (1984) — 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 **him**, and **he** with me.



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TNIV (2005) — 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 **them**, and **they** with me.

NIV (2011) — 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.

While acknowledging the committee's attempts to repair damage done when previous translators used "generic plurals (them/they) in place of singular pronouns (him/he) in the interest of deploying gender-neutral language," the CBMW nonetheless takes the committee to task for attempting to remedy the issue "without reverting to masculine singulars, but by mixing gender-unspecific singulars and plurals (that person/they)."

The CBMW critics note that the "remedy" employed by the translation committee still leaves a huge problem in translation, one that pastors and teachers will be forced to deal with as they explain to parishioners that the words "they" and "them" actually refer to singular individuals, not plural.

One "significant problematic" issue the CBMW found in the NIV update was the translation committee's decision to render 1 Timothy 2:12 to read that the apostle Paul did not permit a woman to "assume authority" over a man, rather than "have authority," which it said was more true to the original Greek. While the translation committee explained that it had sought to retain an openness in translating such traditionally controversial passages so that either "egalitarian" or "complementarian" interpretations could be embraced, the CBMW critics charged that the change served instead to intentionally introduce "a crucial ambiguity that is not found in the original NIV."

While commending the translation committee on "many good changes" to the updated NIV, the CBMW said that its initial analysis of the work "shows that the new NIV(2011) retains many of the problems that were present in the TNIV, on which it is based, especially with regard to the over 3,600 gender-related problems we previously identified."

The CBMW did not confine its criticism to just gender issues, noting that there are problems in other areas, such as the rendering of the phrase "valley of the shadow of death" in Psalm 23 as "darkest valley."

Dr. Douglas Moo, a Bible professor at Wheaton College Graduate School and chair of the CBT, insists that the updated NIV is a sound translation, representing the "optimum combination of transparency to the original documents and comprehensibility" required to be effective for a lay audience.

Moo explained that the Bible as originally penned "captured exactly what God wanted to say in the languages and idioms used by the ordinary people of the time. The NIV seeks to recover these priorities, allowing readers to perceive the structure of the original and the meaning of the original at the same time."

He said that the changes made to the most recent NIV reflect "progress in biblical scholarship, developments in English usage, and an ongoing concern for clarity." He added that the scholars who worked on the translation made use of the latest technology, "drawing on state-of-the-art computational linguistic research to guide us in our decision-making and to ensure that the words we choose maximize comprehension of the original meaning."

The CBMW scholars disagreed with Moo's assessment. Despite expressing their thankfulness "that the CBT made some significant improvements in various areas" and "revised many of the most egregious [TNIV] passages that concerned us previously," the group ultimately found that too many problems



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were retained in the 2011 version of the NIV, and they could not recommend the new Bible as a reliable and accurate version of Scripture.

While the NIV accounts for well over 25 percent of Bibles sold in Christian bookstores nationwide, and the translation continues to enjoy widespread popularity both in the U.S. and abroad, observers predict the ongoing marketing nightmare that the NIV publishers have faced since first introducing the gender-neutral version nearly ten years ago could ultimately take its toll on the Bible's status, as faithful students of Scripture entertain doubts concerning the veracity of the latest NIV Bible.



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