

LINGUISTIC AND HERMENEUTICAL FALLACIES
IN THE GUIDELINES ESTABLISHED
AT THE “CONFERENCE ON GENDER-RELATED LANGUAGE
IN SCRIPTURE”

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I. PROVIDING CONTEXT TO THE GUIDELINES: THE NIVI CONTROVERSY

“The Stealth Bible: The Popular *New International Version* Bible Is Quietly Going ‘Gender-Neutral.’” So trumpeted the March 29, 1997, cover of *World* magazine. The feature article, written by assistant editor Susan Olasky, claimed that by the year 2000 or 2001 the NIV’s Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) planned to substitute a gender-neutral version for the present one. “Say goodbye to the generic *he, man, brothers, or mankind,*” Olasky wrote. “Make way for *people, person, brother and sister, and human-kind.*” She pointed out that an NIV inclusive-language edition (NIVI) had already been published in 1995 in Great Britain and would soon be introduced into the North American market.

Olasky’s description of the NIVI as the “stealth” Bible, together with her claim that the translators were “quietly going ‘gender neutral,’” gave the *World* article an air of intrigue and scandal. The article’s repeated use of the explosive term “unisex” to describe the translation, together with its link to creeping feminism in the Church, provided all the ingredients for controversy. The article created a sensation. Complaints began to pour in at the International Bible Society (IBS), which holds the NIV copyright, and Zondervan Publishing House, the NIV publisher. One man even drilled holes through several NIVs and sent them to the IBS.¹ Zondervan and the IBS moved rapidly for damage control, releasing press statements explaining the reason for the revisions. This was not an issue of a radical feminist agenda, they argued, but about keeping the NIV both accurate and contemporary. Gender-inclusive language was being introduced only when changes in the English language warranted it. Since the generic term “man” no longer meant “men and women” for many readers, more inclusive terms like “person” were being used.

These explanations did little to reassure critics. Public opposition grew as influential voices and organizations entered the fray. When the family-advocacy organization Focus on the Family learned that its own Odyssey

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¹ D. LeBlanc, “Hands Off My NIV!”, *Christianity Today* 41/6 (June 16, 1997) 53.

Bible (which uses the text of the International Children's Bible) contained gender-inclusive language, they pulled it from the market. Cook Communications Ministries similarly announced it would delete quotations from the New International Reader's Version (NIrV) from its Bible-in-Life curriculum.² The straw that broke the camel's back came when the nation's largest denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, considered dropping the NIV from its Sunday-school curriculum. In the face of impending catastrophe, the executive committee of the IBS board of directors met to discuss the matter thoroughly. On May 23, 1997, the committee approved a statement abandoning "all plans for gender-related changes in future editions of the New International Version (NIV)." They also pledged to continue publishing the present (1984) NIV, to begin immediately revising the gender-inclusive NIrV, and to enter into negotiations with Hodder and Stoughton, the British publisher of the NIV, on the matter of ceasing publication of the NIVI.

The surprise announcement by the IBS actually came shortly before another scheduled meeting arranged by James Dobson of Focus on the Family. In a move toward resolution, Dobson had invited individuals from the IBS, the CBT, Zondervan, *World* magazine, and the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) to Focus on the Family headquarters in Colorado Springs on May 27. At this meeting, later called the "Conference on Gender-Related Language in Scripture," the participants affirmed the IBS decision and drafted a series of guidelines on gender-related language in Bible translation.

This paper is an examination and critique of these guidelines. Though I am a complementarian—one who believes that the Bible affirms distinct roles for men and women in the Church and the home—it seems to me that these guidelines are linguistically and hermeneutically incomplete and misleading. My goal is to help move the gender-inclusive language debate forward by encouraging the significant revision of these guidelines, or the development of more sophisticated and objective criteria for examining and evaluating the many inclusive-language versions presently on the market.³ Much of the material in this article is drawn from a book I have written on gender-inclusive language in Bible translation (InterVarsity, 1998; see n. 45 *infra*). The original guidelines, together with later revisions, are included as an appendix at the end of this paper. The revised guidelines were published in an advertisement in the October 27, 1997, edition of *Christianity Today*.

² D. LeBlanc, "Bible Translators Deny Gender Agenda," *Christianity Today* 41/8 (July 14, 1997) 62.

³ Translations or major revisions using moderate inclusive language that have appeared since 1985 include the New Jerusalem Bible (1985), New Century Version (1987), New American Bible (revised 1988, 1990), Revised English Bible (1989), New Revised Standard Version (1990), Good News Bible (revised 1992), The Message (1993), Contemporary English Version (1995), God's Word (1995), New International Version inclusive language edition (1995; published only in Great Britain), and New Living Translation (1996). In addition there are two children's editions: the International Children's Bible (1986, 1988; an edition of the New Century Version) and the New International Reader's Version (1994, 1996).

II. THE GENERIC USE OF "MAN": GUIDELINES A.3, A.4 AND A.5

It is a basic principle of lexical semantics that words (or, better, lexemes) do not have a single, all-encompassing meaning but rather a range of potential senses (a semantic range).⁴ The literary context in which the lexeme occurs determines which sense is intended by the author. An examination of the semantic ranges of various Greek and Hebrew words traditionally translated "man" will demonstrate why the guidelines related to the generic use of "man" are deficient.

1. *Hebrew אָדָם and Greek ἄνθρωπος.* The Hebrew lexeme אָדָם and the Greek lexeme ἄνθρωπος both have semantic ranges that include various senses, including "a male human being," "a human being," "humanity," and so forth.⁵ In many OT contexts אָדָם clearly carries the sense of "a person" or "humanity." When the Lord says, "I will blot out man (אָדָם) whom I have created" (Gen 6:7 RSV), it is both males and females who will be judged. The phrase "Whoever sheds the blood of man" (9:6 RSV) means "whoever sheds the blood of a human being." A quick glance through a concordance will reveal just how common this use of אָדָם is. Similarly, in many NT contexts the Greek term ἄνθρωπος carries the sense of "human being" or "humanity" rather than "male." Matthew 12:12 in the NIV reads: "How much more valuable is a man (ἄνθρωπος) than a sheep!" The NIVI captures the sense of the Greek when it renders the sentence: "How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep!" In fact the translation "human being" is more precise, since the contrast here is between animals and people, not between men and women. Such examples could be multiplied. Romans 3:28 reads in the NIV: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith." The NIVI translates more accurately: "For we maintain that a person is justified by faith."

In light of many NT examples, one can understand why Guideline A.5 makes a positive statement about inclusive language: "In many cases, *anthrōpoi* refers to people in general, and can be translated 'people' rather than 'men.' The singular *anthrōpos* should ordinarily be translated 'man' when it refers to a male human being."

While this guideline allows for the use of inclusive renderings like "people" for the plural ἄνθρωποι, it says nothing about inclusive language for the singular ἄνθρωπος. It only affirms the exclusive use of ἄνθρωπος (that it should be translated "man" when it refers to a male). What about when ἄνθρωπος refers to a person of either gender? This rather glaring omission led many of those reading the guidelines to look to Guideline A.3, which does speak of the singular "man" in English. Guideline A.3 originally read: "Man' should ordinarily be used to designate the human race or human beings in general, for example in Genesis 1:26–27; 5:2; Ezekiel 29:11; and

⁴ See works like M. Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989).

⁵ See BDB 9; BAGD 68–69.

John 2:25.” For many readers the implication of this statement was that while the plural ἄνθρωποι may be translated “people” (Guideline A.5) the singulars ἄνθρωπος and אָדָם should be translated “man” (A.3). Yet in several of the examples cited above (and dozens more could be added) it is the singular that is functioning generically as “a human being,” “a person,” or “humanity.”

The confusion caused by the wording of this guideline resulted in its revision. The phrase “or human beings in general” was dropped, so that the guideline now merely reads: “‘Man’ should ordinarily be used to designate the human race.” This is a significant revision. The guideline now appears to allow for hundreds of cases where the NIVI has replaced generic “man” with more inclusive terms like “person(s)” and “human being(s).” At the same time, a positive statement about the inclusive use of the singular ἄνθρωπος is still strikingly absent. There seems to be a marked reticence by the authors of the guidelines to affirm positively that ἄνθρωπος and אָדָם are accurately and precisely translated as “person” or “human being” in many contexts. Such an affirmation would not only improve these as fair and positive guidelines but would also confirm that much of what the NIVI did was actually an improvement in accuracy over the NIV.

As revised, Guideline A.3 now seems to apply only to those few cases where “man” is used of the human race, as in Gen 1:26–27: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image.’” Even the other examples provided in the guideline (John 2:25; Ezek 29:11) no longer seem to fit the revised version. When John says that Jesus “knew what was in man,” he means that Jesus knew what was in the hearts of people. There does not seem to be a corporate sense of “human race” here. Similarly, Ezek 29:11 is an oracle against Egypt that reads: “No foot of man shall pass through it” (RSV). This of course means, as the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) renders it, “no human foot.” It does not refer to corporate humanity.

A more difficult question is whether the remaining part of the guideline “‘Man’ should ordinarily be used to designate the human race” represents a valid principle. In a paper attacking the inclusive language of the NRSV, Wayne Grudem argues against changing “man” to “humankind” in Gen 1:27 and elsewhere:

Throughout the NRSV the human race is no longer called “man.” The majestic, noble name which God gave us as humans at the beginning of creation—the great and wonderful name “man”—is no longer our name in the Bible. . . . Feminist pressure has renamed the human race. We are now to be called “humankind,” instead of the name God gave us.⁶

While rhetorically powerful, Grudem’s statement clouds the essential issue by using an English translation (“man”) when referring to a Hebrew term (אָדָם). In the creation account in Genesis, God does not give humans the

⁶ W. Grudem, “What’s Wrong with ‘Gender Neutral’ Bible Translations?” (paper delivered at the November 1996 ETS meeting in Jackson, Mississippi) 11. This was later significantly revised and published by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (1997). I will identify these two versions as “What’s Wrong” (1996) and “What’s Wrong” (rev. 1997). An abbreviated version of the former paper was also published in *CBMW NEWS* 1/3 (June, 1996).

“wonderful” (English) “name ‘man.’” He gives them the Hebrew name אדם, which is a different lexeme in a different language with a different semantic range. If we take Grudem’s statement at face value, then we have all changed the “majestic” and “noble” Hebrew name אדם into a corrupt Anglo-Saxon name “man.”

Of course what Grudem means is that God used the same Hebrew word for the first man (“Adam”), for the male person (“man”), and for the human race (“mankind”), and so we, too, should use the same English word. Even this, however, is not an exact parallel since we transliterate אדם as “Adam” but then translate it as “man” for the other two senses.⁷

The real problem is that if the English term “man” does not carry the same inclusive sense that the Hebrew term אדם had, then it would convey the wrong sense for the passage for many readers. Grudem’s argument is something like saying that in John 2:4 Jesus addresses his mother with the noble name “woman,” so this word must be retained in English translations even if it sounds rude and disrespectful to English ears. But Jesus did not call his mother “woman” in contemporary English. He called her γυνή in Koine Greek.⁸ If the English word “woman” conveys a very different sense to the modern reader than the Greek word γυνή conveyed to first-century readers, then it represents a poor translation and should be replaced with a different term.

To be sure, there are complex issues in Gen 1:27 (cf. 5:1–2, etc.) related to representative leadership and authority, and I will not pretend to have all the answers. Translators will continue to struggle with accurately rendering אדם in 1:27, 5:1–2, and so forth because of the continuing debate about its precise sense in these passages. Whatever decision these translators make, they will probably have to include marginal notes to explain the other options.

Some might argue that there is no other appropriate English term than “man” to represent corporate humanity. Yet this sentence itself defines the less precise term “man” with the more precise term “humanity.” It seems to me that “humanity” or “humankind” captures well this sense of corporate solidarity.

2. *Hebrew אדם and Greek ἀνθρώπος.* While אדם and ἄνθρωπος often carry an inclusive sense, Hebrew אדם and Greek ἀνθρώπος appear less commonly with this sense. It is wrong to assume, however, that these terms cannot function

⁷ Of course there is an even more fundamental problem with Grudem’s claim, and this is his assumption that God was necessarily speaking Hebrew when he named the human race. How do we know what language God and Adam spoke together? The language used by the author of Genesis could well have arisen millennia after the creation of the world, and the Hebrew אדם could itself be a translation (with cultural and societal baggage) of an entirely different term. All languages arise and develop within cultures. This makes it especially dangerous to assume that the male connotations associated with one sense of אדם (= “a male human being”) should necessarily be imposed on a different sense of the same lexeme (אדם = “humanity”).

⁸ Jesus, of course, was probably speaking Aramaic, but the inspired text records his words in Greek.

generically. For example, in a context like Deut 24:16 even the very literal NKJV translates $\psi\aleph$ as “person”: “A person shall be put to death for his own sin.” In many other contexts there is little doubt that both males and females are intended. In the gathering of manna it is commanded that “each one ($\psi\aleph$) is to gather as much as he needs” (Exod 16:16 NIV). When tumors break out among the citizens of Gath, it is almost certainly the “people ($\psi\aleph$) of the city, both young and old” (NIV), rather than the “men” (RSV, NKJV, NASB) who are afflicted (1 Sam 5:9). In Ps 62:12 we learn that the Lord rewards “each person ($\psi\aleph$) according to what he has done” (NIV; cf. NKJV). Many more examples could be provided.⁹

The Greek noun $\alpha\acute{\nu}\eta\rho$ also appears much less commonly with an inclusive sense than its counterpart $\alpha\acute{\nu}\theta\rho\omega\pi\omicron\varsigma$, usually carrying the sense of either “male human being” or “husband.” In a number of contexts, however, the referent appears to include both men and women. For example, in Matt 12:41 Jesus says, “The men ($\alpha\acute{\nu}\delta\rho\epsilon\varsigma$; NRSV, NIVI: “people”) of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah” (RSV). Since females were certainly among those converted at Nineveh, the sense here appears to be “people.” Similarly in 14:35 it seems likely that it was the “people” (NRSV, NIVI) of Gennesaret, rather than the “men” (RSV, NIV), who brought their sick to Jesus. In Eph 4:13 NIV Paul speaks of the time when “we all reach unity in the faith . . . and become mature” (literally, “come . . . to a perfect man [$\alpha\acute{\nu}\eta\rho$]”). Since Paul is speaking to women as well as men (“we all”), he would seem to have human maturity, rather than specifically male maturity, in mind. James also uses $\alpha\acute{\nu}\eta\rho$ in an inclusive sense. In Jas 1:20 he points out that “the anger of man ($\delta\omicron\rho\gamma\eta\ \alpha\acute{\nu}\delta\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$) does not work the righteousness of God” (RSV). James is obviously referring to human anger (so NIVI), not male anger.¹⁰

The relative rarity of these inclusive senses for $\psi\aleph$ and $\alpha\acute{\nu}\eta\rho$ makes it understandable why Guideline A.4 reads: “Hebrew *’ish* should ordinarily be translated ‘man’ and ‘men’ and *anēr* should almost always be so translated.” From a linguistic and hermeneutical perspective, however, this is still a strange principle. To be more precise, the principle should be worded something like this: “ $\psi\aleph$ and $\alpha\acute{\nu}\eta\rho$ should be translated ‘man’ or ‘men’ when they carry the sense ‘male(s)’ and may be translated ‘person(s)’ or ‘human being(s)’ when they carry the sense ‘human being(s).’” Of course to state the principle this way eliminates the need for having a principle at all, since this is the way every word in Hebrew or Greek should be treated. Whatever the word means in context is how it should be translated. When $\alpha\acute{\nu}\theta\rho\omega\pi\omicron\varsigma$ refers to human beings, it may be translated “human being.” When $\alpha\acute{\nu}\eta\rho$ refers to human beings, it may be translated “human being.” The imposition

⁹ See Exod 12:4; 30:33, 38; Lev 17:10 (in parallel with “soul”); 18:27; 22:3; Num 13:32; 36:8; Deut 27:14; 1 Sam 5:9; 8:22; 11:15; 1 Kgs 8:38; 13:25; 2 Chr 6:29; Ezra 2:1; Neh 4:13; 8:16; Esth 9:2; Jer 5:1; 18:11; 22:8; 23:14, 27; 29:32; 36:3, 31; 51:45; Zech 11:6. These passages, like those in the following note, are open to interpretation, and a translation decision must be made on a case-by-case basis.

¹⁰ For other examples see Rom 4:8; Jas 1:12; 3:2.

of a particular translation without consideration of context smacks of a social agenda beyond the accurate interpretation of Scripture.

One objection to introducing “persons” or “human beings” in these contexts might be that “man” and “men” are perfectly acceptable generic terms and so should be retained in translation. The acceptability of these terms, however, is not a decisive reason for retaining them. If inclusive terms reproduce more precisely and accurately the sense of the Greek or Hebrew words in context, then they should be adopted. This question remains, however: “Is ‘man’ still perfectly acceptable as a generic term?” We will deal with this issue briefly at the end of this paper.

3. *More accuracy and precision from inclusive translations.* In numerous cases the introduction of a gender-inclusive term actually results in more accuracy and precision in translation. For example, in Jas 5:17 the original NIV reads: “Elijah was a man (ἄνθρωπος) just like us.” The NIVI translates: “Elijah was human just as we are.” While at first glance someone might argue that there was no reason to change the NIV since Elijah was indeed a man, a moment’s reflection will confirm that the NIVI is a better rendering. The point is not that Elijah was a “male” like we are (many of James’ readers were not) but that he was subject to the same human weaknesses that we are. While the referent in this case happens to be a male, the sense of ἄνθρωπος intended in this context is “a human being.” An inclusive rendering more accurately conveys this sense.

Similar examples could be multiplied. In Acts 10:26 Cornelius falls down to worship Peter, whereupon Peter responds: “Stand up; I too am a man” (RSV). The NRSV changes “man” to “mortal”: “Stand up; I am only a mortal.” Grudem argues that the NRSV is a poor translation since the term “mortal” shifts the emphasis from one’s humanity to one’s mortality—that is, one’s liability to death.¹¹ Here, however, Grudem has identified the wrong lexical form. It is true that the English adjective “mortal” focuses on one’s mortality (the first definition in my dictionary is “subject to death”).¹² But the NRSV uses the noun, not the adjective. The only definition of the noun “(a) mortal” in my dictionary is “a human being,” and this is exactly what ἄνθρωπος means in Acts 10:26. The NIVI appropriately translates: “I am only human myself,” and the New Living Translation (NLT) reads: “I’m a human being like you!” All of these versions are more precise than the RSV’s “a man” since they bring out more clearly the contrast in context between a human being and a god. Again, a clear and inclusive translation more accurately reflects the author’s intent.

Another area where more precision has been achieved through inclusive renderings is in passages related to the humanity of Christ. In John 10:33 NIV, for example, the Jews accuse Jesus of blasphemy, “because you, a mere man (ἄνθρωπος), claim to be God.” The NIVI reads “a mere human being.” Andreas Köstenberger criticizes this rendering, claiming that it downplays

¹¹ Grudem, “What’s Wrong” 11; cf. “What’s Wrong” (rev. 1997) 8.

¹² *American Heritage Electronic Dictionary* (3d ed.; Houghton Mifflin, 1992).

Jesus' maleness.¹³ Yet in this context ἄνθρωπος clearly carries the sense "human being" rather than "male." The contrast Jesus' opponents are making is not between his maleness and his deity but between his humanity and his deity.

A similar case appears in 1 Tim 2:5, where the NIV has "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men (ἄνθρωποι), the man (ἄνθρωπος) Christ Jesus." The NIVI reads "between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human." Again Köstenberger argues that "this rendering dilutes the maleness of Jesus during his incarnate state."¹⁴ Grudem, too, criticizes the NIVI for translating in 1 Tim 2:5 "human" instead of "man."¹⁵ Yet the primary point Paul is making is not that Jesus is the mediator between God and men (= males) but between God and human beings. Jesus is able to be our mediator because he himself is human. It is significant that in his excellent *Systematic Theology* Grudem himself deals with this passage under the heading "The Humanity of Christ."¹⁶

Köstenberger also recognizes that Jesus' humanity is at issue here but still argues for the translation "man":

The translators are correct in observing that part of Paul's point here is the *humanness* of Jesus. . . . But Paul is also clearly thinking of Jesus' earthly life and sacrifice on the cross which he made as a man, a male. Thus *both* truths are emphasized here by Paul, that Jesus was a *human being* and that Jesus, in his incarnate state, was a *man*.¹⁷

Yet is it really accurate to say that Paul intends to "emphasize" Jesus' maleness, as though maleness and humanity were of equal importance here? Surely Jesus' humanity is not just a "part of Paul's point" but is his central point. It is the sense intended for ἄνθρωπος in this context.

The same criticism can be leveled at Köstenberger's handling of Phil 2:8. Where the NIV has "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death," the NIVI translates "And being found in appearance as a human being." Köstenberger argues that Jesus suffered "not merely as an undifferentiated human being, but specifically and concretely as a *man*."¹⁸ This again appears to be special pleading. The masculine pronoun "he" (like "himself" in 1 Tim 2:5) confirms that Jesus was a man, not an "undifferentiated human being." But what is Paul's primary point? Is it not that at the *kenōsis* Jesus took on our humanity? The original NIV had already recognized this by translating v. 7 "being made in human likeness (ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων)." The NIVI captures the verbal connection in the Greek more clearly by translating ἄνθρωπος in the next verse as "human being." I was again surprised to find support for the NIVI translation in an

¹³ A. J. Köstenberger, "The Neutering of 'Man' in the NIVI," *CBMW NEWS* 2/3 (June, 1997) 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 10.

¹⁵ W. Grudem, "Do Inclusive-Language Bibles Distort Scripture?," *Christianity Today* 41/12 (October 27, 1997) 29.

¹⁶ W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 541.

¹⁷ Köstenberger, "Neutering" 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 9.

unlikely place. In his *Systematic Theology* Grudem follows the RSV in translating Phil 2:8 “being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.”¹⁹

In these passages the theological truth Paul is stressing concerns first and foremost the humanity of Jesus, not his maleness. Accusations that the NIVI “de-genderizes” or “neuters” males are both inflammatory and inaccurate.²⁰ Would any reader become confused in these passages over whether Jesus was a man or woman? Of course not. All masculine pronouns are retained. Yet when Paul is speaking about the incarnation—the taking on of true human flesh—an inclusive term captures this theological truth more clearly. This is what ἄνθρωπος means in these contexts. I have surveyed various works of systematic theology written by evangelicals and have yet to find any section devoted to the maleness of Jesus. Even Grudem’s theology text devotes fifteen pages to the humanity of Christ but nothing that I could find to his maleness.²¹ One would think that if Christ’s maleness was a doctrine of such crucial theological importance in these contexts it would merit at least a footnote in a 1261-page work on systematic theology. Grudem actually moves in the opposite direction by repeatedly drawing a feminine analogy with reference to Jesus. He draws a connection between the authoritative role of the husband over the wife in marriage to that of the Father over the Son in the Trinity. He writes: “The husband’s role is parallel to that of God the Father and the wife’s role is parallel to that of God the Son.”²² Grudem of course is drawing an analogy and so should not be criticized for “de-genderizing” or “feminizing” Jesus. Yet neither should the NIVI be criticized for stressing the humanity of Christ when that is obviously the author’s point in context. The NIVI once again enhances the accuracy of the translation.

III. REPLACING MASCULINE SINGULAR PRONOUNS: GUIDELINES A.1 AND A.2

Guidelines A.1 and A.2 concern the translation of masculine generic singular pronouns (he, him, his). Both Hebrew and Greek use masculine pronouns in a generic sense (meaning “he or she”). When Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44 NIV), the Greek term for “him” (αὐτός) is clearly functioning generically, referring to both men and women. The issue that pervades the inclusive-language debate is whether the English personal pronouns “he,” “him” and “his” carry this same inclusive sense. Should translators use masculine “he” in a generic sense, or should they use more inclusive expressions? Those opposed to inclusive language say emphatically that “he” is a perfectly legitimate generic term. Those supporting inclusive language respond that generic “he” is in

¹⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 550.

²⁰ Note the provocative title of Köstenberger’s article: “The Neutering of ‘Man’ in the NIVI.”

²¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 529–543.

²² *Ibid.* 257; cf. 460–461.

decline in contemporary English and sounds exclusive to many ears. It thus obscures the sense intended by the author.

Even supporters of generic “he” tacitly admit that there are problems with its use. Grudem writes: “Everyone seems to agree that gender-neutral terms are preferable to ‘he, him, his’ when they can be used without awkwardness and without loss of meaning (and I too would agree).”²³ He argues, however, that the commonly used techniques for avoiding masculine pronouns result in inaccurate translations.

1. *Common techniques for avoiding masculine singular pronouns.* A number of conventions have been adopted for avoiding masculine singular pronouns, including using plurals instead of singulars, replacing third-person pronouns with first- or second-person constructions, using the singular “they” (e.g. “Everyone likes pizza, don’t they?”), and using passive instead of active constructions. The first two of these are the most common. For example, while Mark 4:9 in the NIV reads “He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” the NIVI introduces a plural construction: “Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.” Similarly the third-person construction in Matt 15:11, “What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’” becomes in the NIVI “What goes into your mouth does not make you ‘unclean.’”

The first two guidelines reject the use of such techniques. Guideline A.1 is a positive one, affirming the use of masculine singular pronouns: “The generic use of ‘he, him, his, himself’ should be employed to translate generic 3rd person masculine singular pronouns in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.” Guideline A.2 is a negative one, rejecting the two main techniques for replacing masculine pronouns: “Person and number should be retained in translation so that singulars are not changed to plurals and third-person statements are not changed to second-person or first-person statements, with only rare exceptions required in unusual cases.”

2. *Confusing form and meaning.* Fundamental to this issue is the distinction between form and meaning. There is a common conception among many Bible readers that the more “literal” (i.e. “word for word”) a translation is, the more accurate it is. Yet this is a misunderstanding of the nature of language. No two languages consistently use the same forms to express the same meaning. For example, the Spanish expression *¿Cómo se llama?* may “literally” be translated something like “How do you call yourself?” But in most contexts it means (in good English) “What is your name?” The grammatical form in Spanish does not coincide with the meaning in English. This is easily illustrated in Greek or Hebrew. The Greek phrase ἔτι λαλοῦντος τοῦ Πέτρου (Acts 10:44) translated “literally” comes out something like “yet of speaking of Peter.” But the genitive absolute construction actually means “while Peter was speaking.” Form in Greek seldom corresponds exactly to meaning in English. The important point for Bible translation is that mean-

²³ Grudem, “What’s Wrong” (1996) 8. He does not repeat this statement in his revised version.

ing must always be given precedence over form. If a plural construction in English captures accurately the meaning of a singular construction in Greek or Hebrew, it represents an accurate translation. For example, neuter plural nouns often take singular verbs in Greek but must be translated with plural verbs in English. The opposite is also true. In many contexts Hebrew plurals like אלהים and שמים (actually a dual form) must be translated with singulars in English: “God” and “heaven.” In these cases, to retain the form at the expense of the meaning is to mistranslate God’s Word. This point must be kept in mind when considering formal changes introduced by gender-inclusive versions.

3. *Translating Greek or Hebrew singulars as English plurals.* Gender-inclusive Bible versions often use plural constructions to replace masculine singular generics in instructional, legal and proverbial material. This is because this kind of material—though couched in singular forms—is notionally plural, referring to people in general. The RSV’s “Fret not yourself over him who prospers in his way” (Ps 37:7) becomes in the NRSV “Do not fret over those who prosper in their way.” “He who spares the rod hates his son” (Prov 13:24 NIV) becomes in the NIVI “Those who spare the rod hate their children” (NIVI). These verses are not about a specific individual but about people or classes of people.

Grudem repeatedly rejects this method of attaining gender inclusion, claiming that it distorts the meaning of the text. For example, he criticizes the NRSV at Jas 5:14–15 for changing the RSV’s singular reference to a plural. The RSV reads: “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church.” The NRSV revises: “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church.” Grudem claims that “James wrote about a private home with one person sick, but now it looks like a hospital ward!”²⁴ While one can appreciate Grudem’s sense of humor, his conclusion represents an extremely woodenly-literal approach. Any normal reader would recognize that the NRSV is not speaking about an epidemic but about individual cases of sickness. If I said to a congregation of believers, “Those in need of encouragement should stay after the service for prayer,” no one would misunderstand my statement, thinking I was referring to groups rather than individuals. James is not referring to a single specific individual who is sick but to individuals (note the plural) who are sick. As in the examples above, the instruction is generic and therefore notionally plural. There is no loss of meaning by introducing a plural pronoun.

This same overly woodenly-literal approach applies to many of Grudem’s criticisms. Is the individual application really lost, as he claims, when the NRSV translates John 15:5 “Those who abide in me and I in them” instead of “He who abides in me and I in him” (RSV)?²⁵ The substantival participle ὁ μένων is clearly functioning generically in the sense of “those individuals.” Grudem complains that the NRSV translation results in a “loss of a sense

²⁴ Ibid. 3; cf. Grudem, “What’s Wrong” (rev. 1997) 4.

²⁵ Grudem, “What’s Wrong” (1996) 3; cf. “What’s Wrong” (rev. 1997) 3.

of individual application,” but this is special pleading. If I say to my class, “Those who fail this exam will fail the course,” it would be obvious to all that I am speaking about individuals failing (rather than groups failing). No one would complain that by using the word “those” I am threatening to fail the class *en masse*. No normal reader approaches the English language in this way.

Evidence that the use of plurals for singulars is not inherently inaccurate is the fact that the Biblical writers themselves translate in this way. On a number of occasions Paul changes singulars to plurals when quoting from the OT.

OT Text

Isa 52:7: How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news.

Ps 36:1b: There is no fear of God before his eyes.

Ps 32:1: Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

NT Citation

Rom 10:15b: As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Rom 3:10, 18: As it is written . . . , “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Rom 4:6–7: David says the same thing . . . : “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.”

In all three cases the apostle Paul translates Hebrew singulars with Greek plurals, thus breaking Guideline A.2. Someone might argue that here Paul is not translating the OT but merely applying singular OT references to groups of people in the NT. But an examination of the contexts of these OT passages confirms that they are indeed generic, referring to people in general. Psalm 36, for example, is an oracle against the sinfulness of wicked people (see the plurals in vv. 10–12). Psalm 32 concerns those who have received forgiveness from God. It is significant that in this passage Paul is citing from the LXX, which itself had introduced the plural construction. The LXX translators evidently recognized that though the verse was singular in form, its generic message was accurately conveyed with a plural construction (cf. also 33:20–21 LXX [= 34:19–20]).²⁶ It is also significant that in Isa 52:7 the original NIV had already translated the Hebrew singular with a plural: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news.” Again, with no inclusive agenda the translators recognized the generic nature of the Hebrew singular.

One point of clarification is necessary: I am not advocating uncritical or wholesale changes from singulars to plurals. But such changes are not

²⁶ This is assuming that the MT is the original reading and that the LXX translators altered the Hebrew. It is possible, of course, that the original Hebrew text had a plural and that it is the Masoretes rather than the LXX translators who altered the reading. I am grateful to D. Hays for pointing out this possibility to me.

inherently inaccurate. The question that must be asked is this: “Does the replacement of masculine generics in Hebrew or Greek with other forms in English enhance or hinder the transfer of the sense of the original?” This question cannot be answered by simply mandating the retention of a form.

Critics have tended to find a few examples of poor translation in a particular version (like the NRSV) and to draw sweeping conclusions about the inaccuracy of inclusive language. The simple fact is that all translations involve interpretation, and all versions, whether inclusive or not, contain inaccuracies. This is why continual critique and revision are necessary. The important question that must be answered is not “Is gender-inclusive language inherently inaccurate?” but “In each individual case does an inclusive translation capture better the author’s intended meaning?” The guidelines are inherently flawed because they fail to address this central issue.

4. *Translating Greek or Hebrew third persons as English first or second persons.* Another common technique used to avoid both generic “man” and “he” is to switch from a third-person construction to a first- or second-person construction. This works because neither first- nor second-person pronouns carry gender distinctions in English. For example, the RSV’s “A man’s steps are ordered by the Lord” (Prov 20:24) becomes in the NRSV “All our steps are ordered by the Lord” (first person for third). The NIV renders Matt 15:11 “What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’” while the NIVI has “What goes into your mouth does not make you ‘unclean.’”

As with the other techniques, Grudem rejects this one, claiming that it results in inaccurate readings. He criticizes the second-person rendering of the NRSV in Jas 1:19–20. While the RSV has “Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God,” the NRSV reads “You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness.” Grudem writes:

With the NRSV, readers might well think that James is speaking only about the anger of Christians, those within the believing community whom he is addressing. But in fact James is making a more general statement about the anger of human beings. James did not say “your anger”; he said “the anger of man.”²⁷

Grudem levels the same criticism at 2:14. While the RSV reads “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works?”, the NRSV has “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works?” Grudem claims the NRSV promotes a misinterpretation: “Readers will probably think that Paul is speaking only of something that is true of Christians. . . . But in fact Paul is making a much more general statement about human conduct, and about people generally.”²⁸

²⁷ Grudem, “What’s Wrong” (1996) 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

While one can appreciate Grudem's concern for misinterpretation, he appears not to be taking into account the generic sense of "you" intended by the NRSV translators (cf. Contemporary English Version [CEV]; NLT). While the first definition of "you" in my dictionary is "Used to refer to the one or ones being addressed," the second is "Used to refer to an indefinitely specified person; one."²⁹ Consider the contemporary proverb: "You get what you pay for." If I opened a sermon with this statement nobody would think I was saying that only the Christians present in the audience get what they pay for. Like plural forms, the second-person pronoun can function well in proverbial and instructional statements. This kind of indefinite and general reference appears to be what James intended in these passages.

It is of course possible that a reader approaching the NRSV in a very literal manner would completely miss the indefinite sense intended by the translators. (This is perhaps why this method of achieving gender inclusion is among the least utilized today.) It is equally possible, however, that someone approaching the RSV in the same literal manner might miss the generic sense of "man" and "he." When James wrote ὀργὴ ἀνθρώπου ("the anger of man") in 1:20 he did not mean the anger of "males" but the anger of "human beings." Surely all would agree that, to avoid such literalist confusion on either side, one might best translate the phrase "human anger." In fact, this is how the NIVI renders the verse: "For human anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." Any literalist misunderstanding in the NRSV's "you" and the RSV's "man" is avoided with a clear, accurate and inclusive translation. This example again makes it clear that in some cases a gender-inclusive translation more accurately renders the original than a noninclusive one.

5. *Why bother with inclusive language?* The question might be raised: "Why risk the potential loss of meaning by changing the form?" Yet it must be stressed again that good translation will always involve changes in form. Meaning must always be given precedence over form. The important issue is not whether person or number should universally be retained (a question of form) but whether in each individual case their replacement or retention will result in a loss of meaning. By mandating the retention of form (third-person pronouns) without considering meaning, Guidelines A.1 and A.2 are inherently flawed, failing to address the essential hermeneutical and linguistic question: "Does this translation convey the same sense to the contemporary English reader that it conveyed to the first-century Greek reader?"

Indeed, the literalist argument of mandating form can be turned on its head and used against traditional translations. I surveyed various Bible versions and found that in hundreds of cases English versions add the words "man" or "men" where there is no corresponding Greek or Hebrew term. For example, in the NIV there are 1,357 verses where the English words "man"

²⁹ *American Heritage Electronic Dictionary.*

or “men” appear with no corresponding term in the Greek or Hebrew text.³⁰ Similarly, in the RSV there are 1,032 such verses and in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) 917. The NRSV is by far the most “accurate” in this regard, since there are only 344 verses where English “man” or “men” appear with no equivalent word in Greek or Hebrew. Those who are so concerned about retaining the form of the original Greek or Hebrew should be outraged at such “additions” to God’s Word. Of course in reality there is no problem at all with adding the English terms “man” or “men” when these words accurately convey the sense of the original Greek or Hebrew. It is the meaning rather than the form that must be retained in translation.

IV. “BROTHERS” OR “BROTHERS AND SISTERS”? GUIDELINE B.1

The Greek masculine noun ἀδελφός can carry the sense of a physical brother but is more often used in the NT figuratively of the kinship between believers. Traditional English translations have rendered the Greek singular as “brother” and the plural (ἀδελφοί) as “brothers” (NIV) or “brethren” (NASB, RSV, KJV, NKJV). In many contexts, however, the author is clearly addressing both men and women.³¹ An example of this is Phil 4:1–2 where Paul, after addressing the Philippian congregation as ἀδελφοί (v. 1), encourages two women to live in harmony with each other (v. 2). When ἀδελφοί carries this inclusive sense, it seems that the most accurate translation would be “brothers and sisters.” This is not a concession to a feminist agenda. Rather, it is exactly what the term meant in its first-century context.

Several objections might be raised against this conclusion. First, it might be said that the English term “brothers” is just as inclusive as Greek ἀδελφοί and so is a perfectly legitimate translation. Yet this does not seem to be the case. If a pastor stood up in my church and said to the congregation, “Brothers, please attend a meeting with the elders immediately following the service,” I suspect that only the males present would feel welcome. When Paul addressed his congregations as ἀδελφοί, however, the women surely felt included.

Another possible objection is that the Greeks had a word for “sister” (ἀδελφή), so the NT writers could have written “brother or sister” or “brothers and sisters” if that is what they meant (see Jas 2:15; 1 Cor 7:15).³² This argument is not valid. If the single word ἀδελφοί in context carries the sense “brothers and sisters,” economy of language will dictate that the writer will normally choose the shorthand expression ἀδελφοί over the more cumbersome ἀδελφοί καὶ ἀδελφαί. The fact that Greek allows for a fuller expression does

³⁰ This search was conducted with Accordance. I searched for all of the verses in these versions that contain the words “man” or “men.” From this database I searched for verses that did not contain the Hebrew words אִישׁ, אָדָם, אָנָשׁ, or אִנְר, or the Greek terms ἄνθρωπος, ἀνὴρ, or ἄρσιν.

³¹ See BAGD 16.

³² W. Grudem, “NIV Controversy: Participants Sign Landmark Agreement,” *CBMW NEWS* 2/3 (June 1997) 5.

not mean that a writer will necessarily use it, especially if the shorter expression carries the same sense.

A third objection might be that the term brothers should be retained because—in light of the patriarchal culture—Paul is really only addressing the men of the church. The women would receive the message through their husbands or fathers. I find this hard to believe, especially in light of Phil 4:1–2 and the broader context of Paul’s missionary activity. Whatever one thinks of the leadership role of women in the early Church, there is no doubt that Paul proclaimed the gospel to women, taught them, established churches with them, and viewed them as his fellow workers (4:3; Rom 16:1–3, 6–7; Acts 16:15). It seems very unlikely that he would refrain from addressing them in his letters.

As with the problems associated with Guideline A.3, the difficulties with this one eventually resulted in its revision. Daniel Wallace sent Wayne Grudem examples from secular Greek where ἀδελφοί clearly meant “brothers and sisters.” For example, a passage from the Oxyrhynchus Papyri (713, 20–23; AD 97) reads: “My father died leaving me and my ἀδελφοί Diodorus and Theis, his heirs, and his property devolved upon us.” While Diodorus is a man’s name, Theis is a woman’s name. The Greek term is thus fully inclusive in this context, meaning “brother and sister” or “siblings.” The English term “brothers” does not have this same sense. We would never say “my brothers Bob and Kathy.” The guideline was therefore changed to read: “‘Brother’ (*adelphos*) should not be changed to ‘brother or sister’; however, the plural *adelphoi* can be translated ‘brothers and sisters’ where the context makes clear that the author is referring to both men and women.”

Again, this is a significant concession. It is essentially saying that the NIVI and other gender-inclusive versions were perfectly legitimate and accurate in translating ἀδελφοί as “brothers and sisters” in these contexts. Indeed, Grudem now writes that “in the case of *adelphoi* these more recent translations seem to have made a genuine improvement in accuracy.”³³

While this is an important clarification, the first half of the guideline is still questionable. When the singular ἀδελφός clearly refers to any believer, whether male or female, should it not be translated “brother or sister”? In Matt 5:22 NIV Jesus says, “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother (ἀδελφός) will be subject to judgment.” The sense here is clearly anger toward any fellow believer, not just a male. The NIVI appropriately translates “brother or sister.”

V. “SONS” AND “CHILDREN”: GUIDELINE B.2

Even before the inclusive-language debate, Bible versions often introduced terms like “child(ren)” or “descendant(s)” for the Hebrew and Greek terms traditionally rendered “son(s)” (Hebrew: בן, בנים; Greek: υἱός, υἱοί). Isaiah 1:2 NIV reads: “I reared children (בנים) and brought them up, but they have

³³ Grudem, “What’s Wrong” (rev. 1997) 17.

rebelled against me” (cf. 1:4).³⁴ Isaiah 49:15 NIV reads: “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child (ἄβρ) she has borne?”³⁵ In parallel with the inclusive term “baby” (literally “suckling”), ἄβρ appears to mean “child.” The same phenomenon occurs in the NT, where the KJV often translated υἱοί as “children.” Matthew 5:9 KJV reads: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children (υἱοί) of God.” Matthew 5:44–45 KJV reads: “Love your enemies . . . that ye may be the children (υἱοί) of your Father which is in heaven” (cf. Luke 6:35; 20:36; Rom 9:26; Gal 3:26; Heb 2:10; 12:7–8). In all of these a good case can be made that υἱοί carries the sense “children.”

In light of these examples, it is surprising that Guideline B.2 reads: “‘Son’ (*huios*, *ben*) should not be changed to ‘child,’ or ‘sons’ (*huioi*) to ‘children’ or ‘sons and daughters.’ (However, Hebrew *banim* often means ‘children.’)” (Note that the KJV repeatedly breaks this guideline by translating υἱοί as “children.”)

Grudem defends this guideline, claiming that υἱοί should be translated “sons” rather than “children” because of a clear distinction in meaning between υἱοί and τέκνα:

The New Testament authors were able to speak of “children” (*tekna*) when they wanted to do so (as in Jn. 1:12, “He gave them power to become *children* of God,” and Rom. 8:16–17, “bearing witness with our spirit that we are *children* of God.”) But in other verses the Bible spoke of us as “sons,” and faithful translations should not change this to “sons and daughters” or “children” as the NIVI did in Galatians 4:7.³⁶

He goes on to note that the translation “children” in Gal 4:7 “obscures the fact that we all (men *and* women) gain standing as ‘sons’ and therefore the inheritance rights that belong to sons in the Biblical world.”³⁷

Yet the very verses Grudem cites contradict his own argument. He seems to be claiming (1) that the Greek term τέκνα has a different sense in these passages than υἱοί (υἱοί emphasizing maleness while τέκνα refers more neutrally to children) and (2) that υἱοί is used because it stresses heirship. Yet in Rom 8:14–22 Paul himself moves back and forth between τέκνα and υἱοί, using them synonymously:

Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are υἱοί of God . . . The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s τέκνα. Now if we are τέκνα, then we are heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ. . . . The creation waits in eager expectation for the υἱοί of God to be revealed. . . . The creation itself will be . . . brought into the glorious freedom of the τέκνα of God.

Not only are the terms used interchangeably here, but τέκνα is used in the statement of heirship. It is as “children” (τέκνα), not just “sons,” that we are heirs of God and coheirs with Christ.

³⁴ Cf. Lev 10:15; Ezek 5:10; 18:20; Hos 9:13; 11:10.

³⁵ Cf. Deut 1:31; 6:2.

³⁶ Grudem, “NIV Controversy” 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Nor does Grudem's claim that NT authors choose υἱοί over τέκνα when they are stressing heirship hold up elsewhere in the NT. In Mark 12:19 the Sadducees question Jesus concerning the Mosaic law of levirate marriage, where a man dies leaving no "child" (τέκνον) to carry on his name. Inheritance and carrying on the family name is the crucial issue here. The older brother in the parable of the prodigal son is addressed by his father as τέκνον in the same sentence where the father points out his inheritance: "My son (τέκνον), . . . you are always with me, and everything I have is yours" (Luke 15:31 NIV). Elizabeth and Zechariah long for a τέκνον to carry on the family name (1:7), and in Acts 7:5 we learn that God promised Abraham the land "even though he had no child (τέκνον)." The word τέκνον here is practically synonymous with "heir."³⁸ Both τέκνα and υἱοί can carry the sense of "children," and both can be related to heirship. Again, case-by-case exegesis is necessary to determine whether υἱοί means "sons" or "children." Guideline B.2 is fallacious.

VI. "FATHERS," "PARENTS" AND "ANCESTORS": GUIDELINE B.3

The Greek and Hebrew terms usually translated "fathers" (אבות, πατέρες) have a significantly wider semantic range than their parallel terms in English, including not only "fathers" (male parents) but also "parents," "ancestors" and even "predecessors." When it is clear that former generations rather than immediate parents are in view, most inclusive versions translate these terms as "ancestors." In 1 Sam 12:6 NRSV, for example, Samuel says to the people, "The Lord is witness, who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors (אבות) up out of the land of Egypt." Since Samuel is speaking of many generations past, and since it was both men and women who came out of Egypt, it would seem that "ancestors" represents the clearest, most accurate translation. While most traditional versions continue to render אבות as "fathers," this is very archaic English. Though we might speak of "our pilgrim fathers" (who usually are not our relatives), I have never said, "My fathers are from Germany." I rather say, "My ancestors are from Germany." In light of this it is surprising that Guideline B.3 rejects the use of "ancestors" for אבות and πατέρες: "Father' (*patēr*, 'ab) should not be changed to 'parent,' or 'fathers' to 'parents' or 'ancestors.'" But the translation "fathers" for ancestors is not contemporary English. It is imitation Hebrew.

Once again the introduction of inclusive language—perhaps incidentally—has sharpened the precision of Bible translation. This is because translators of the past have often followed a simplistic one-to-one correspondence, choosing a single English word for a particular Hebrew or Greek term, rather than examining the meaning of the Greek or Hebrew term in context. Hebrew אבות, even when used of ancestors, was automatically translated "fathers" even though this represented very poor English. The call for inclu-

³⁸ Cf. John 1:12; Rom 9:7–8; 2 Cor 12:14; Gal 4:28; 1 John 3:1–2.

sive language has forced a greater consideration of the meaning of words and phrases, not just their forms. While great caution must continue to be used whenever changes are proposed for a particular passage, it can hardly be denied that inclusive language can and is being used to achieve greater accuracy and precision in Bible translation.

It should be added that while אבות can refer to ancestors in general, in other contexts it carries patriarchal implications. In such cases a masculine word should probably be retained. For example, in Exod 3:15 NIV Moses is told to say to the Israelites, “The Lord, the God of your fathers (אבות)—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.” Since the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are specifically named, the reference to “fathers” probably refers to these patriarchal heads of households. On the other hand, the verse could be interpreted to mean something like “the God of your ancestors—more specifically, the God of the patriarchs—has sent me to you.” The question the exegete must answer is whether אבות here refers only to these three patriarchs or to all Israelites of the past. My impression in this passage is that it is the former, and that a masculine term best captures this sense. Yet there is still the problem that “fathers” represents very awkward and archaic English. A translation like “forefathers” is probably best here since it retains something of the patriarchal sense. The important point is that careful exegesis must determine in each case which is the more precise translation.

The question of when to translate אבות and πατέρες as “parents” is another difficult issue. If the context suggests that both parents are in view, then of course “parents” is to be preferred to “fathers.” On the other hand, if the cultural context of the passage indicates that male heads of households are intended, then “father” or “fathers” should be retained. Hebrews 12:9 is a difficult case in point. While the RSV reads “Besides this, we have had earthly fathers (πατέρες) to discipline us,” the NRSV renders “Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us.” While in our contemporary context both mothers and fathers discipline, it is not unlikely that the author of Hebrews is thinking of the father as the primary disciplinarian of the family. But this is far from certain. Further complicating the issue is the fact that the more common NT term for parents is γονεῖς, not πατέρες. Someone might argue from this that if the writer to the Hebrews meant “parents” instead of “fathers” he would have used γονεῖς. This is not valid, however, since πατέρες can and does mean “parents” in some contexts. In 11:23 we learn that “by faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents (πατέρες)” (RSV). Unless Moses had two fathers, πατέρες here must mean “parents.” All of this confirms that a decision between “parents” and “fathers” must be made on a case-by-case basis through sound exegesis—not through mandating ahead of time that “fathers” should not be changed to “parents.”

VII. “SON OF MAN”: GUIDELINE A.9

In most of its OT occurrences the Hebrew phrase בן אדם carries the sense of “human being,” often referring to the lowliness of human beings in contrast

to the transcendence of God.³⁹ Viewing “sons of men” as archaic in English, the original NIV often rendered the phrase as “men”⁴⁰ or “mankind.”⁴¹ Psalm 107:8 NIV speaks of “his wonderful deeds for men.” The NIVI rendered the phrase “his wonderful deeds for human beings.” The NRSV often translates using “mortal(s).” There should be few objections to these translations since the Hebrew idiom clearly carries the sense “person(s)” or “human being(s).” (Indeed, בן אדם is the ordinary way of saying “human being” in modern Hebrew.)

Difficulty arises, however, from the use of the Greek phrase ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (“the Son of Man”) in the NT as a messianic title for Jesus. All of the gender-inclusive versions identified in n. 3 *supra*, including the NRSV, retain the traditional Son of Man title in the NT. The problem is that retaining the phrase in the NT but not in the OT obscures the OT background to the term. In Dan 7:13–14, for example, the RSV reads “and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man,” while the NRSV uses the more inclusive (and less archaic) language “one like a human being.” On the face of it, this translation is perfectly valid. Even the most conservative commentators admit that the Hebrew phrase means that this exalted messianic figure had the appearance of a human being (cf. 10:16).⁴² The problem comes when Jesus refers back to this passage at his trial. He says to the high priest, “You will see the Son of Man . . . coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62 NRSV). The OT allusion may be lost to the reader when the NRSV translates as “a human being” in Dan 7:13 but retains the title “Son of Man” throughout the NT.

There are various directions translators can go. The most radical is to translate the passage in Daniel as “like a human” and then translate the Greek phrase similarly as something like “the Human One.” This, however, seems to be an unnecessary change. While it is true that the title “the Son of Man” is very unusual English, it was also very unusual Greek. I. Howard Marshall writes: “The phrase *ho huios tou anthrōpou*, literally ‘the son of the man’, is something of an oddity in Greek, and we can be certain that it owes its origin to a Semitic phrase.”⁴³ The strangeness of the idiom to English ears actually helps to capture the sense of the original, because the phrase sounded equally strange to first-century Greek ears. There seems no

³⁹ See *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody, 1980) 1.114. A special use of the phrase appears in Ezekiel, where it occurs 93 times as a designation for the prophet.

⁴⁰ Gen 11:5; Pss 12:1, 8; 31:19; 45:2; 58:1; 89:47; 107:8, 15, 21, 31; 145:12; Eccl 1:13; 2:3; 3:10, 18–19; 8:11; 9:12; Jer 50:40; Mark 3:28; Eph 3:5. “Son of man” is retained in Ps 53:2 and throughout Ezekiel, perhaps because of the titular sense it achieves there.

⁴¹ Pss 21:10; 33:13; Prov 8:31; Dan 2:38; Joel 1:12. The NIV retains “son of man” when it occurs in poetic parallelism with other terms for “man”: Job 25:6; 35:8; Ps 8:4; 144:3; Isa 51:12 (but see 56:2 and Jer 51:43 where “man” is used in parallelism).

⁴² E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 154; C. F. Keil, *The Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1955) 234; J. F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) 168.

⁴³ I. H. Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976) 63–64.

reason, therefore, to find a more idiomatic alternative for the traditional NT title. In order to retain the OT allusion, translators might retain the phrase “like a son of man” in Daniel 7 with a marginal note explaining that this means “having the appearance of a human being.” Alternatively, the Daniel passage could be translated “like a human being” with a marginal note explaining that the Hebrew idiom reads literally “like a son of man” and including cross-references to the relevant NT passages.

It is because of the potential loss of this allusion that Guideline A.9 reads as follows: “The phrase ‘son of man’ should ordinarily be preserved to retain intracanonial connections.” To be more precise, this guideline should probably read something like this: “In the New Testament the phrase ‘Son of Man’ should be retained because of its titular nature. In Old Testament passages related to Jesus’ messianic use of the title, translators should seek to preserve the allusion by retaining the phrase ‘son of man’ or by including marginal notes.”

VIII. GUIDELINES AFFIRMING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE: A.1, A.6, A.7, A.8

Several of the guidelines affirm the use of inclusive language and so will be touched on only briefly. These relate to the use of indefinite pronouns, substantival adjectives and substantival participles. The second half of Guideline A.1 reads: “Substantival participles such as *ho pisteuōn* can often be rendered in inclusive ways, such as ‘the one who believes’ rather than ‘he who believes.’” Guidelines A.6, A.7 and A.8 similarly read:

“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.’ 8. When *pas* is used as a substantive, it can be translated with terms such as ‘all people’ or ‘everyone.’”

While these are all valid statements, it should be noted that the sense of these masculine generic terms is really no different than the sense of masculine generic terms like *ἄνθρωπος* and *אָדָם*. In the phrase “If someone (*ἄνθρωπος*) is caught in a sin” (Gal 6:1 NIV), *ἄνθρωπος* carries precisely the same semantic content as *τις* in the phrase “If anyone (*τις*) would come after me” (Matt 16:24 NIV). To claim that *ἄνθρωπος* must be translated “man” but *τις* may be translated “anyone” or “someone” would be another classic confusion of form and meaning. When *ἄνθρωπος* means “anyone,” why not translate it that way? As we have seen, the guidelines in general demonstrate this confusion of form and meaning.

IX. GOD-LANGUAGE: GUIDELINE A.10

Guideline A.10 reads: “Masculine references to God should be retained.” All the gender-inclusive versions in n. 3 *supra* retain masculine references to God, and so this guideline need not be dealt with here. It is certainly true that some feminists continue to call for the elimination of masculine God-language in translation and that several radical-feminist Bible versions do

just that.⁴⁴ In my book I deal with these feminist versions and with the broader issue of masculine God-language.

X. CONCLUSION

In summary, the guidelines as a whole suffer from a misrepresentation of lexical semantics, from confusion of form and meaning, and from a failure to encourage case-by-case exegesis. To argue that a Greek word like υἱοί means “sons” and so should be translated with the English term “sons” is both simplistic and (in some cases) inaccurate. English “sons” and Greek υἱοί are different lexemes in different languages with different semantic ranges. Good translations will always translate first and foremost according to sense rather than form. Gender-inclusive translations should be viewed as acceptable when (and only when) they accurately reproduce the author’s intended meaning.

1. *What is wrong with masculine generics?* It is necessary also to clarify that there is nothing inherently wrong, evil or inappropriate in the use of masculine generic terms. Biblical Hebrew and Greek both use such terms. The important question is whether English masculine generics like “man,” “he” and “brother” convey the same inclusive sense as their Hebrew and Greek counterparts and so represent the best translation in these inclusive contexts. This question must be answered based on contemporary English usage.

2. *Contemporary English usage.* There can be little doubt that the English language has changed significantly in the last twenty years and that masculine generic terms are used today with much less frequency than in the past. Empirical studies have demonstrated quite conclusively that a large percentage of the population now perceives masculine generic terms as exclusive rather than inclusive.⁴⁵ Opponents of inclusive language have attempted to answer this argument by pointing to numerous examples of masculine generics in the popular press and contemporary literature.⁴⁶ But this is not the point. No one denies that masculine generics are still present in contemporary English. What must be asked, however, is this: “Are these terms in significant decline in contemporary English? Are they perceived as exclusive by many people?” If an inclusive term (1) captures the sense of the original accurately and also (2) brings out more clearly and precisely the

⁴⁴ See *An Inclusive Language Lectionary, Readings for Year A* (Atlanta/New York/Philadelphia: John Knox/Pilgrim/Westminster, 1983); *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (New York: Oxford University, 1995); *The Inclusive New Testament* (Hyattsville: Priests for Equality, 1994).

⁴⁵ I discuss these studies in an excursus in *Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender Accuracy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998) 140–146.

⁴⁶ See Grudem, “What’s Wrong” (rev. 1997) 18–22.

inclusive sense intended by the author, then it represents a more accurate translation.

3. *The gospel is for all people.* In this article I have dealt almost exclusively with hermeneutical and linguistic issues rather than social or theological ones. Yet in closing I must add that another important reason for introducing inclusive language—when it accurately conveys the sense of the original—is the nature of the gospel itself. In Gal 3:28 Paul writes that in Christ there is neither “Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.” While complementarians and egalitarians may disagree over whether this verse is intended to eliminate distinct roles for men or women in the Church and the home, there is one point on which we can all certainly agree. This is that Paul is here stressing the full inclusion of men and women in the gift of salvation provided through Jesus Christ. If we ask which translation—“a man is justified by faith” (Rom 3:28 NIV) or “a person is justified by faith” (NIVI)—brings out better the inclusive sense so central to this apostolic gospel, the answer appears to me to be obvious.

XI. APPENDIX: THE ORIGINAL GUIDELINES ESTABLISHED
AT THE “CONFERENCE ON GENDER-RELATED LANGUAGE
IN SCRIPTURE” (MAY 27, 1997)

A. Gender-related renderings of Biblical language which we affirm:

1. The generic use of “he, him, his, himself” should be employed to translate generic 3rd person masculine singular pronouns in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. However, substantival participles such as *ho pisteuōn* can often be rendered in inclusive ways, such as “the one who believes” rather than “he who believes.”

2. Person and number should be retained in translation so that singulars are not changed to plurals and third-person statements are not changed to second-person or first-person statements, with only rare exceptions required in unusual cases.

3. “Man” should ordinarily be used to designate the human race or human beings in general,⁴⁷ for example in Genesis 1:26–27; 5:2; Ezekiel 29:11; and John 2:25.

4. Hebrew *ʾish* should ordinarily be translated “man” and “men” and Greek *anēr* should almost always be so translated.

5. In many cases, *anthrōpoi* refers to people in general, and can be translated “people” rather than “men.” The singular *anthrōpos* 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.”

⁴⁷ The phrase “or human beings in general” was subsequently dropped.

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

8. When *pas* is used as a substantive, it can be translated with terms such as “all people” or “everyone.”

9. The phrase “son of man” should ordinarily be preserved to retain intracanonical connections.

10. Masculine references to God should be retained.

B. Gender-related renderings which we will generally avoid, though there may be unusual exceptions in certain contexts:

1. “Brother” (*adelphos*) and “brothers” (*adelphoi*)⁴⁸ should not be changed to “brother(s) and sister(s).”

2. “Son” (*huios, ben*) should not be changed to “child,” or “sons” (*huioi*) to “children” or “sons and daughters.” (However, Hebrew *banim* often means “children.”)

3. “Father” (*patēr, ’ab*) should not be changed to “parent,” or “fathers” to “parents” or “ancestors.”

C. We understand these guidelines to be representative and not exhaustive.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The phrase “and brothers” was dropped from Guideline B.1 and the following sentence added: “However, the plural *adelphoi* can be translated ‘brothers and sisters’ where the context makes clear that the author is referring to both men and women.”

⁴⁹ Added to Guideline C is the clause “and that some details may need further refinement.”