

A Critical Analysis of the *English Standard Version* of 2001

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Introduction

The Preacher told his son, “of making many books there is no end.”¹ The factualness of this statement is certainly corroborated by the volumes of commentaries and textbooks that fill the average seminary library. No other volume has provoked so much written discussion as the Bible, and this is rightly the case, for the written Word of God is an infinite book in the hands of finite men. It is only natural that the God-breathed Word of God would compel men to spend their lives considering its truths and putting these considerations into writing.

Unfortunately, there is not only a seemingly endless stream of books about the Bible being produced, but over the course of the last century, and especially the last several decades, there appears to be a glut of English Bible versions being produced and marketed upon the English-speaking world, particularly in North America. A recent count lists at least 102 English versions of the Bible currently in print.² Each subsequent version is marketed as being both more readable and more accurate than the previous ones, and earlier English versions, though still available, are disused and finally deserted in favor of the latest ones.

One of the most recent examples of this is the *English Standard Version* (ESV) of 2001. At the present time it appears that the ESV is being promoted and accepted by popular Christianity and by many within popular Fundamentalism.³ A recent (2005) survey⁴ among “young Fundamentalists” found that 14% of those who planned to start a church would do so with the ESV. This is more than three times as many as those who would use the New International Version (NIV) and nearly as many as those who would use the New King James Version (NKJV). This is striking considering that the ESV has only been on the market since 2001. Therefore, a critical analysis of this version is necessary at this time because of the apparent acceptance of the ESV within popular Fundamentalism.

¹ Cf. Ecclesiastes 12:12, “*And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*”

² This was the author’s count upon visiting several retail bookstore chains.

³ On a recent visit to the campus of Bob Jones University, this author witnessed the ESV on a prominent display in the bookstore and heard the ESV highly spoken of by the campus tour guide. The ESV is also available for purchase on the BJU Bookstore web site.

⁴ This survey is available at www.sharperiron.org and at www.wayoflife.org.

Analysis of the History behind the *English Standard Version*

The history of the ESV cannot be fully discussed in an article of this size. However, there are two historical facts that are necessary in order to understand the significance of this new version. These historical facts concern the relation of the ESV to the RSV and the reactionary motivations behind the ESV.

The first historical fact is that the ESV is a revision of the RSV of 1952 and 1971. This information is not clandestine, but is readily available in the preface of the ESV, which will be examined in the next section. For years, fundamentalists viewed the RSV as being synonymous with liberalism, modernism, and unbelief. This may be evidenced in any number of ways, one of which is the fundamentalist document, "Position of the Bible Department of Bob Jones University on the Scripture" by Stewart Custer and Marshall Neal. An excerpt from this document states:

"When we teach the content of the Bible, we naturally study a passage in the Greek Testament. To aid the students in understanding that passage, we will take to class the King James Bible, which often gives an exact rendering of the Greek. Sometimes we will consult some other conservative translation, such as the American Standard Version of 1901 or the New American Standard Bible (**not the liberal R[evised] S[tandard] V[ersion]**), which at times gives the most accurate rendering of the Greek." (emphasis added)⁵

Many men have ably examined the history of the RSV. One such example is David Cloud's book *Myths About the Modern Bible Versions*.⁶ In this work, Cloud observes the ecumenical nature behind the RSV when he cites Evangelist Billy Graham, who in 1952 received a copy of the RSV and told a listening crowd of 20,000:

"These scholars have probably given us the most nearly perfect translation in English. While there may be room for disagreement in certain areas of the translation, yet this new version should supplement the King James Version and make Bible reading a habit throughout America."⁷

Cloud goes on to list fourteen translators behind the RSV and gives quotations from their own writings to reveal their modernistic beliefs and unbiblical doctrinal positions. He cites eight lengthy statements by Walter Russell Bowie, one of which says,

⁵ This document is cited in Daniel L. Turner, *Standing Without Apology: The History of Bob Jones University* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1997), Appendix D, pp. 322-323.

⁶ Cf. David Cloud, *Myths About the Modern Bible Versions* (Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1999). Lesser works on this subject include Sakae Kubo and Walter Specht, *So Many Versions?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975) and Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981).

⁷ Billy Graham, cited by Perry Rockwood, *God's Inspired Preserved Bible*, n.d., p. 15), quoted in David Cloud, *Myths About the Modern Bible Versions*, p. 258.

“The imprecatory psalms and other utterances like them reflect a God who is dead and ought to be dead – and never was alive except in unredeemed imagination.”⁸ Also, he cites Henry Joel Cadbury who states, “Jesus Christ was given to overstatements, in his (sic) case, not a personal idiosyncrasy, but a characteristic of the oriental world.”⁹ And he cites James Moffatt who says, “Once the translator of the New Testament is freed from the influence of the theory of verbal inspiration, these difficulties cease to be so formidable.”¹⁰

Furthermore, the preface of the RSV should be reread before reading the ESV or the preface to the ESV, for the ESV is built upon the RSV. In the RSV preface the following statements are made, (along with many others that cannot be cited here for reasons of space):

“Yet the King James Version has grave defects. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the development of Biblical studies and the discovery of many manuscripts more ancient than those upon which the King James Version was based, made it manifest that these defects are so many and so serious as to call for revision of the English translation.

The problem of establishing the correct Hebrew and Aramaic text of the Old Testament is very different from the corresponding problem in the New Testament. For the New Testament we have a large number of Greek manuscripts, preserving many variant forms of the text. Some of them were made only two or three centuries later than the original composition of the books. For the Old Testament only late manuscripts survive, all (with the exception of the Dead Sea texts of Isaiah and Habakkuk and some fragments of other books) based on a standardized form of the text established many centuries after the books were written.

The present revision is based on the consonantal Hebrew and Aramaic texts as fixed early in the era and revised by Jewish scholars (the “Masoretes”) of the sixth to ninth centuries. The vowel signs, which were added by the Masoretes, are accepted also in the main, but where a more probable and convincing reading can be obtained by assuming different vowels, this has been done. No notes are given in such cases, because the vowel points are less ancient and reliable than the consonants.

The King James Version of the New Testament was based upon a Greek text that was marred by mistakes, containing the accumulated errors of fourteen centuries of manuscript copying...”¹¹

The ESV claims that the RSV is its “starting point”¹² and that it is a revision of the RSV. It is not a new translation in the strictest sense. Therefore, the entire preface of

⁸ Cloud, *Myths*, p. 206.

⁹ Cloud, *Myths*, p. 208.

¹⁰ Cloud, *Myths*, p. 212.

¹¹ Cited from pages iii, iv, and v of the RSV.

¹² The copyright page of the ESV says, “The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV) is adapted from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright Division of Christian

the RSV should be reread if one hopes to understand the historical background to the ESV.

The second historical fact is that the ESV was motivated by a reactionary effort aimed at opposing the inclusive-language version movement that was being widely discussed in the 1990s. World magazine dealt with the circumstances behind the ESV in an article in the June 5, 1999, issue:

The English Standard Version (ESV), announced in February by Crossway Books, had its roots in discussions that took place before the May 1997 meeting called by James Dobson at Focus on the Family headquarters to resolve the inclusive language NIV issue.

The night prior to the meeting, critics of regendered language gathered in a Colorado Springs hotel room to discuss the next day's strategy. During the course of the evening it became clear their concerns with the NIV extended beyond gender issues. The group discussed the merits of the Revised Standard Version, first published in 1952 by the National Council of Churches and recently replaced by the New Revised Standard Version, a regendered update.

Some months later, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School professor Wayne Grudem and Crossway President Lane Dennis entered into negotiations with the National Council of Churches to use the 1971 revision of the Revised Standard Version as the basis for a new translation. An agreement was reached in September 1998 allowing translators freedom to modify the original text of the RSV as necessary to rid it of **de-Christianing** translation choices (bold editor's).¹³

If this reactionary effort against the gender-neutral Bible version movement is the uniting and driving force behind the ESV, then it will no doubt continue to be promoted, for the gender-neutral movement does not appear to be subsiding. One recent example of this fact is the October 7, 2002, issue of Christianity Today (CT), which featured a cover story on "The TNIV Debate." In this issue, CT featured a debate between Mark Strauss, a proponent of gender-neutral Bible versions, and Vern Poythress, an opponent of gender-neutral Bible versions who also happens to be on the fourteen-member Translation Oversight Committee behind the ESV.

Those present at the aforementioned meeting at Focus on the Family headquarters then developed and signed an agreement known as the Colorado Springs Guidelines. These guidelines give approximately thirteen principles dealing with the handling of gender in an English translation. At some point after this resolution, the efforts were put in motion to gather the fourteen members of the Translation Oversight Committee, the

Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A." Page vii of the ESV preface states, "the words and phrases themselves grow out of the Tyndale-King James legacy, and most recently out of the RSV, with **the 1971 RSV text providing the starting point for our work**" (emphasis added).

¹³ World magazine, June 5, 1999, Vol. 14, No. 22.

fifty members of the ESV Translation Review Board, and the fifty-four members of the Advisory Council. By the fall of 2001, the ESV was completed and released to the public in several subsequent editions.¹⁴

It is clear, then, that there are two important links in the history of the ESV. The first is that the ESV is a revision of the RSV. The history of the RSV is part of the history of the ESV. The second link is that the ESV was prompted by the gender-neutral Bible-version movement and is a reaction to it.

Analysis of the Preface

The preface of the ESV provides much helpful information in understanding and analyzing the efforts that went into producing this latest English version of the Bible. Under several subheadings these introductory pages discuss the copyright, the translation legacy, the translation philosophy, the translation style, the textual basis, and the publishing team, as well as the dedication of the ESV.

Copyright Page

The copyright page, after giving the legal requirements for citing, quoting, or printing excerpts of the ESV, makes the following statement: “The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV) is adapted from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. All rights reserved.”

It should not be missed that the ESV is not an entirely new translation, but is a revision of the notorious RSV of 1952 and 1971, and could have (and should have) been named the Revised Revised Standard Version (RRSV). (There already exists a New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), so RRSV would have been a possibility.) Again, the history of the RSV is essential to understanding the significance of the ESV.

Translation Legacy

The section on the translation legacy appears to be an attempt to contextualize the ESV within the history of the English Bible. However, the premise to this section is at best deeply flawed and at worst dishonest and misleading.

The authors of this section claim that the ESV “stands in the classic mainstream of English Bible translations over the past half-millennium. The fountainhead of that stream was William Tyndale’s New Testament of 1526; marking its course were the King James Version of 1611 (KJV), the English Revised Version of 1885 (RV), the American Standard Version of 1901 (ASV), and the Revised Standard Version of 1952 and 1971

¹⁴ Some have pointed out that the ESV was completed in a shorter span of time (approximately three years) than almost any of the other popular versions available today. For instance, the time to produce the RSV took from 1937-1952, and the time to produce the NIV took from 1967-1973. This short span is because the ESV is a revision of the RSV and not a new translation.

(RSV).” Therefore the writers of the preface believe that there is one stream of the Word of God. They then go on to give five keystones in that stream: the Tyndale New Testament of 1526, the King James Version (KJV) of 1611, the Revised Version (RV) of 1885, the American Standard Version (ASV, of which the NASV is a revision) of 1901, and the Revised Standard Version (RSV) of 1952 and 1971. After presenting this theory, the authors state: “In that stream, faithfulness to the text and vigorous pursuit of accuracy were combined with simplicity, beauty, and dignity of expression. Our goal has been to carry forward this legacy for a new century.”¹⁵

The lack of precision in the preface of the ESV should cause the reader to have concern for the accuracy of the translation as a whole. First, it is disingenuous to place the Tyndale and KJV in the same stream as the RV, ASV, and RSV. From a purely historical standpoint, the Tyndale and KJV stand apart from the modern versions that came some two hundred and fifty to three hundred and fifty years after them. These five English Bibles form two separate streams, not one stream. By repeating this popular theory of one stream of Bible versions, the ESV further links itself with the Critical Text mindset and with the other modern versions rather than in some way distinguishing itself. Second, the phrase “faithfulness to the text” is misleading. The Tyndale and KJV were indeed translated faithfully, but from a different text than the text underlying the RV, ASV, and RSV. To make it seem as though there were one text under each and all of these five English Bibles is both incorrect and deceptive. Third, to refer to all five of these English Bibles with the description of having the “vigorous pursuit of accuracy” is to commend the RSV as being accurate with all of its dangerous translations, such as “young woman” for “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14. Does the RSV of Isaiah 7:14 demonstrate vigorous accuracy, or does it demonstrate something less than vigorous accuracy?¹⁶ Therefore, there is great imprecision in the ESV’s opening section on translation legacy.

The final paragraph in the section on the translation legacy has several problems as well. First, it makes reference to “each word and phrase in the ESV (being) carefully weighed against the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.” The phrase “the original” in one form or another appears in the preface eighteen times, yet this phrase is never defined. Though the texts which the ESV committee employed are identified under the section that deals with the textual basis, those texts are not identified in that section as being “the original.” Therefore, the forms of the phrase “the original” appear to be used ambiguously. Furthermore, the ESV will make it its practice to appeal to extra-biblical sources. Second, the ESV preface states: “The words and phrases themselves grow out of the Tyndale-King James legacy, and most recently out of the RSV, with the 1971 RSV text providing the starting point for our work.” Again, there is a vast expanse between the Tyndale-King James legacy and the RSV. Furthermore, the admission that the ESV is really the RRSV should not be missed. The ESV is not a new version of the Bible. It is a revision of one of the most notorious modern versions. Third, the ESV committee

¹⁵ As of the time of this writing, the KJV has been the word of God in English for four centuries. The ESV’s modest goal is to influence one century.

¹⁶ The ESV has corrected the RSV’s translation of this verse at this point.

states: “Archaic language has been brought to current usage and significant corrections have been made in the translation of key texts.” This is an incredibly weighty statement which the ESV makes, for it is very serious to speak of significant corrections being made. This statement implies, rather, demands, the presence of significant errors. Yet these significant, corrected errors are not identified. Were the significant errors in the KJV? Were the significant errors in the RSV? And why would the ESV be proud to stand in a legacy of significant errors?

Translation Philosophy

The next heading in the preface concerns translation philosophy. This section opens with the claim that “the ESV is an “essentially literal” translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer.” The phrase “essentially literal” appears three times in this section and at least five times in the entire preface. It is defined in this section as being a “word-for-word” correspondence to “the original text,” and this philosophy of translation is contrasted with “some Bible versions (which) have followed a “thought-for-thought” philosophy, called later a philosophy of “dynamic equivalence.”

There are several problems with this section on translation philosophy and with the ESV’s translation philosophy as a whole. First, the phrase “essentially literal,” which appears quite frequently in the preface, is not adequately defined. The first two times the phrase is used it appears with quotation marks, but the source of the quotation is not given. The overall tone of the preface seems to imply that the phrase is used to mean something less than literal. Furthermore, it would have been helpful for the writers to supply examples from their translation, especially to define such phrases as “as literal as possible.”¹⁷

A second problem with the ESV’s translation philosophy is that it simply does not do what it claims it seeks to do. The ESV philosophy claims 1) that it “seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text,” 2) that “it seeks to be transparent to the original text,” 3) that it has “sought to be “as literal as possible” while maintaining clarity of expression and literary excellence,” 4) that it has “sought to capture the echoes and overtones of meaning that are so abundantly present in the original texts,” and 5) that it “seeks to carry over every possible nuance of meaning in the original words of Scripture into our own language.” The reasons why these claims fail are that 1) the “original texts” which the ESV uses are not adequately defined,¹⁸ 2) the texts from which the ESV does translate are texts which do not claim to be the original,¹⁹ and 3) the

¹⁷ This phrase also appears in quotes in the preface but with no source given.

¹⁸ In other words, it is clear that the editors of the ESV are not claiming that they possess the autographa. But are they claiming to have accurate copies of the autographa, or apographa, from which to translate? Or, when pressed, would they purport that the texts are something less than accurate copies of the original?

¹⁹ The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (2nd ed., 1983), the *Greek New Testament* (4th corrected ed.) published by the United Bible Societies, and the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed.), edited by Nestle and Aland do not claim to be “the original,” “the original text,” “the

“integral” footnotes throughout the ESV translation show that the original texts are abandoned at times when extrabiblical authorities necessitate such an abandonment.²⁰

A final point to be brought out on the section on the ESV’s translation philosophy is that the writers take the practice of dynamic equivalence to task. This ought to be done, and this position has been ably handled by writers previous to the ESV.²¹ Therefore, the editors of the ESV have pointed out a problem with many of the modern versions that employ dynamic equivalency, such as the *New International Version* (NIV) and the *New Living Translation* (NLT). As the writers of the ESV’s preface admit, “A “thought-for-thought” translation is of necessity more inclined to reflect the interpretive opinions of the translator and the influences of contemporary culture.” The only negative with this section is that the ESV does not name the dynamic translations for the reader’s benefit.

Translation Style

The next heading in the preface concerns translation style. The ESV claims that its translation style “carries forward classic translation principles in its literary style.” It lists these classic translation principles as being 1) the retaining of theological terminology, 2) the full expression of the stylistic variety of the biblical writers, 3) following the path that seems to make the ongoing flow of thought clear in English in matters of punctuation, paragraphing, sentence dividing, and connective rendering, and 4) literal rendition of original gender language. Each of these principles will be examined briefly.

First, the ESV does “retain” certain theological terminology such as “grace, faith, justification, sanctification, redemption, regeneration, reconciliation, and propitiation.” The preface claims to retain these terms “because of their central importance for Christian doctrine and also because the underlying Greek words were already becoming key words and technical terms in New Testament times.” Note that the first reason given for retaining these terms is that they are “central” (or fundamental, essential) to Christian doctrine. The first reason for retaining them (if they are to be retained) should be that they accurately reflect the underlying Greek or Hebrew word in the text. Note also that other modern English versions retain some of these terms, even the most notorious translations such as the RSV²² and the *New World Translation* (NWT).²³ Therefore, the presence of these theological terms does not indicate that a Bible version is trustworthy. And finally, note that the ESV is missing some very significant theological terms that

original words of Scripture” or even to be accurate copies of the preserved original. Therefore, the foundation under the ESV’s translation philosophy is faulty.

²⁰ This will be dealt with in the section on the analysis of the ESV’s features.

²¹ One such example is David Cloud, *Dynamic Equivalency: Death Knell of Pure Scripture* (Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature). Cloud also deals with this subject at length in chapter eight of *Myths*.

²² The RSV has present every one of the above theological terms at least one time.

²³ The NWT has several, though not all, of the above theological terms present.

were not listed in the preface. These include words such as “only-begotten,” “unction,” and “Godhead.”²⁴

Second, the claim of the preface that the ESV “lets the stylistic variety of the biblical writers fully express itself” is not anything that should be considered unusual. Any good translation of the Bible should reflect the styles of the human penmen in their various books, so that the sentences of John are short and simple and the sentences of Paul are long and complex, etc.

Third, regarding the subject of punctuation, rendering connectives, etc., the ESV is to be commended whenever it accurately and formally translates in a style that reflects the underlying text. The preface claims, “The biblical languages regularly connect sentences by frequent repetition of words such as “and,” “but,” and “for,” in a way that goes beyond the conventions of literary English. Effective translation, however, requires that these links in the original be reproduced so that the flow of the argument will be transparent to the reader. We have therefore normally translated these connectives, though occasionally we have varied the rendering by using alternatives (such as “also,” “however,” “now,” “so,” “then,” or “thus”) when they better capture the sense in specific instances.” Much could be analyzed in these statements. It is certain the KJV does not translate the Hebrew ו conjunction or the Greek καὶ connective every single time as “and.” Obviously context plays a role in translation. However, the implied claim of the preface that the practice of the ESV in this area somehow distinguishes it from the other available versions does not hold true. The ESV’s practice here is not sufficient to warrant its existence. Beyond this, a simple survey of the first chapter of Matthew reveals that the ESV does not always handle repetitive connectives literally in a consistent manner. For instance, the KJV of Matthew 1:7 reads, “And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa.” The ESV, however, follows the RSV’s and NIV’s loose handling of the verse and reads, “And Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph.”²⁵ However, for Abraham, David, and Jechoniah, the phrase “was the father of” is used instead. The word underneath “the father” and “was the father” is the verb γεννω, which appears as an aorist active. Certainly the phrase “was the father” better reflects the verbal idea than merely “the father,” though “begat” is more accurate than them both for it reflects the active voice of the verb as well, but these examples are merely cited here to illustrate that the ESV does not truly distinguish itself from other versions in its handling of conjunctions.

Fourth, the translation style section in the preface has a lengthy paragraph on the ESV’s commitment to literal gender language. While the ESV does stand in contrast to

²⁴ In the three passages which the KJV reads “Godhead” (Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20, Colossians 2:9), the ESV follows the NIV’s lead by inserting “divine being,” “divine nature,” and “deity” respectively. The only difference is that the NIV capitalizes “Deity” while the ESV does not.

²⁵ The NASB actually chooses to omit the verb translated as “begat,” and reads as, “And to Solomon was born Rehoboam; and to Rehoboam, Abijah; and to Abijah, Asa.”

the gender inclusive language of versions such as the TNIV, it nevertheless admits that it does change words such as “any man” and replaces it with “any one” “where there is no word corresponding to “man” in the original languages.” Also, many of the ESV footnotes mention that “brothers and sisters” is a possible translation for the word translated as “brethren” in the KJV.

Textual Basis

The next section in the preface deals with the Textual Basis of the ESV. This section gives the names of three original language texts that were used in the production of the ESV, and refers to several unnamed textual sources as well.

- **Masoretic Text**

First, the section on Textual Basis states that, “the ESV is based on the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible as found in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (2nd ed., 1983).” This Hebrew text is a different Masoretic Text than the Jacob ben Chayim text published in 1524-25 by Daniel Bomberg upon which the OT of the KJV was based.²⁶ Therefore, the phrase “Masoretic Text” should have been defined in the preface for purposes of clarity. Furthermore, the preface states that, “the currently renewed respect among Old Testament scholars for the Masoretic text is reflected in the ESV’s attempt, wherever possible, to translate difficult Hebrew passages as they stand in the Masoretic text rather than resorting to emendations or to finding an alternative reading in the ancient versions.” The ESV’s reason for using the “Masoretic text” is based upon the current, renewed respect among present-day scholarship. Should this renewed (i.e. rehabilitated) respect once again fall into decay, would the Revised ESV (RRRSV) resort to a different textual basis? Further still, the preface on the OT continues by admitting, “In exceptional, difficult cases, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, and other sources were consulted to shed possible light on the text, or, if necessary, to support a divergence from the Masoretic text.” Again, this is a weighty admission. The “exceptional, difficult cases” are not listed in the preface, but they must be plentiful judging by the number of times these extra-Biblical sources are cited to give a “divergence”²⁷ meaning from the “Masoretic text.” For instance, I Samuel contains at least thirty-six references in the footnotes to these extra-Biblical sources, while even a shorter OT book such as Ecclesiastes contains four references in the footnotes to these works.

- **Greek Text**

Second, this section refers to “the Greek text in the 1993 editions of the *Greek New Testament* (4th corrected ed.), published by the United Bible Societies (UBS), and *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed.), edited by Nestle and Aland.” These texts are

²⁶ This Masoretic Text has been rightly referred to as the *Textus Receptus* of the OT.

²⁷ The word has the idea of disagreement. It comes from a Latin root meaning “to turn aside.” The verb form of “apostasy” could be a possible synonym.

collectively and individually known as the Critical Text, and it is this text that underlies most every modern version of the Bible in print today. Concerning the ESV's use of these texts, the preface admits, "Similarly, in a few difficult cases in the New Testament, the ESV has followed a Greek text different from the text given preference in the UBS/Nestle-Aland 27th edition." Again, the "few" difficult cases are not given, and the "Greek text different from the text given preference" is not identified.

- **Footnotes**

Third, this section makes the following stipulation: "In this regard the footnotes that accompany the ESV text are an integral part of the ESV translation, informing the reader of textual variations and difficulties and showing how these have been resolved by the ESV translation team. In addition to this, the footnotes indicate significant alternative readings and occasionally provide an explanation for technical terms or for a difficult reading in the text. Throughout, the translation team has benefited greatly from the massive textual resources that have become readily available recently, from new insights into biblical laws and culture, and from current advances in Hebrew and Greek lexicography and grammatical understanding." Due to their great weightiness, the above three sentences must be examined.

- **Integral footnotes**

The first sentence states that the footnotes of the ESV are "an integral part of the ESV translation." The word integral has the idea of fundamental or essential. It would seem that the translators of the ESV would not want someone to read a copy of this version that had been printed without the footnotes. This first sentence goes on to state that these difficulties "have been resolved by the ESV translation team."

- **Significant alternative readings**

The second sentence refers to the "significant alternative readings"²⁸ which are brought out by the ESV footnotes. This betrays a Bibliology wherein the text of Scripture is still in flux and is not settled. How can the text and the alternative reading in the footnote below the text both be the word of God? And how can both the text and the footnote carry equal authority, especially if they disagree? It is important to point out here that an alternative reading is not the same as an alternate way to translate a particular passage. There are several legitimate ways to translate a word in a text, but there is only one word in the text at each point.²⁹

²⁸ This phrase is another name for textual variants, none of which can truly be called "insignificant."

²⁹ In other words, there may be more than one way to translate the twenty-two words in I John 5:7, but there are only those specific twenty-two words in that verse.

➤ **Textual resources**

The third sentence refers to “the massive textual resources that have become readily available **recently**, from **new** insights into biblical laws and culture, and from **current** advances in Hebrew and Greek lexicography and grammatical understanding” (emphasis added). This statement implies an evolutionary view of the truth as well as a disparagement toward classic translators such as the men behind the KJV. Recently discovered “truth” is given as much authoritative weight as the old text of Scripture, while true linguistic scholars such as William Tyndale and John Bois (to name but two) are viewed with pity or disdain for not having access to the current advances in Hebrew and Greek understanding.³⁰

Translation Team

The final sections in the preface deal with the ESV publishing team and the dedication of the ESV to the praise of God. The publishing team and translators of the ESV are not included by name in the preface. This information is available online.³¹ A survey of the men involved reveals a who’s who among modern-day evangelicalism. The fourteen member Translation Oversight Committee is comprised of Clifford John Collins, Covenant Theological Seminary; Lane T. Dennis, President of Good New Publishers-Crossway Books; Wayne A. Grudem, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Paul R. House, Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry; R. Kent Hughes, Pastor of College Church in Wheaton; Robert H. Mounce, President Emeritus of Whitworth College; William D. Mounce, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; J.I. Packer, Regent College; Leland Ryken, Wheaton College; Vern Poythress, Westminster Theological Seminary; Gordon Wenham, The College of St. Paul and St. Mary; and Bruce Winter, Tyndale House. Adjunct members include David Jones and E. Marvin Padgett of Good New Publishers-Crossway Books.

The ESV Translation Review Scholars include fifty persons. Some of the more familiar names are Darrell Bock, Irvin Busenitz, Michael Grisanti, Harold Hoehner, Gordon Hugenberger (Park Street Church of Boston), Walter A. Maier, III, Leon Morris, Allen Ross, Thomas Schreiner, Moises Silva, Willem VanGemeren, and Robert W. Yarborough. Some of the schools, organizations or churches represented include Talbot School of Theology, The Master’s Seminary, Covenant Seminary, Wheaton College, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Denver Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, Concordia Theological Seminary, Union University, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Park Street Church of Boston, Reformed Theological Seminary, Tokyo Christian University, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Regent College, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Concordia Publishing House, First Presbyterian Church of Augusta, Capital Christian Center of Salt Lake City, Wesley Biblical Seminary, Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and Beeson

³⁰ The reader is encouraged to consult such works as Alexander McClure’s 1858 work *The Translators Revived* (Litchfield, MI: Maranatha Bible Society, n.d.).

³¹ This material is also available upon request from the publishers: Good New Publishers, Crossway Books and Bibles, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, IL, 60187.

Divinity School. Also, many members of the Oversight Committee and Review Scholars have degrees from the above schools, as well as from other schools including Catholic University of America, Notre Dame, Fuller Theological Seminary, University of Tubingen, and Bob Jones University, as well as others.³²

There are an additional fifty-four persons on the ESV Advisory Council. Some of the more familiar names include Harold O.J. Brown of Reformed Theological Seminary, Bryan Chapell of Covenant Theological Seminary, Jon M. Dennisi of Holy Trinity Church of Chicago, Carl F.H. Henry, Todd Hunter of the National Association of Vineyard Churches, Kenneth Kantzer, Erwin Lutzer of Moody Church, Joel Nederhood of the Back to God Hour, Paige Patterson, John Piper, R.C. Sproul, Joseph M. Stowell, and John F. Walvoord, among many others.

The preface states “this hundred-member team, which shares a common commitment to the truth of God’s Word and to historic Christian orthodoxy, is international in scope and includes leaders of many denominations.” The reader should note that a commitment to something is not necessarily the same as belief. The Bible exhorts men to believe Christ’s words³³ but it makes no requirement to “commit to the truth of God’s Word.” Furthermore, to be committed to “the truth of God’s word” is a weaker statement than to claim commitment to God’s Word itself. The LORD Jesus said, “Thy word is truth,”³⁴ and “the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”³⁵ And the Apostle Peter confessed, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”³⁶ The phrase “the truth of God’s word” is at once too broad and too weak.

Dedication

The section on the dedication of the ESV to the glory of God states, “we know that no Bible translation is perfect or final; but we also know that God uses imperfect and inadequate things to his (sic) honor and praise.” Without further clarification, it is difficult to know what the writers expect the full implication of this statement to be. Are they saying that every translation is imperfect, that is, has errors or mistranslations in it? Or are they simply arguing for language limitations? Based on the preface of the ESV, it is probably the former. Furthermore, it is certain that God does use imperfect and inadequate things to His honor and praise, but nowhere in Scripture does God refer to His word as “imperfect” or “inadequate.” Rather, the LORD has magnified His word above all His Name, and all Scripture is given by inspiration of God that the man of God may be perfect. The use of the word “inadequate,” which has the idea of insufficiency, is an

³² Of all the schools listed above, the only one that has any connection to Fundamentalism is Bob Jones University.

³³ Cf. John 5:47.

³⁴ Cf. John 17:17.

³⁵ Cf. John 6:63.

³⁶ Cf. John 6:68.

unscriptural way to describe the Holy Scriptures which are able to make men wise unto salvation.

The dedication in the preface also goes on to speak about “our triune God.” (One wonders what verse of Scripture the ESV translators would use to prove that God is triune.) Finally, the translators themselves mention how they “wonder that our God should ever have entrusted to us so momentous a task.” In contrast to this, the LORD’s NT churches do not have to wonder at their being entrusted with the stewardship of God’s words. They simply can obey the church-planting commission of Matthew 28:19-20 which includes stewardship of the words of the text.

To summarize, the preface of the ESV makes inaccurate statements regarding its own translation legacy, is ambiguous regarding its own translation philosophy, and is erroneous in its textual basis. The preface alone should cause a great sense of wariness concerning the ESV.

Analysis of the Features

The ESV lists five features which it has to aid the reader. These include introductions to each book of the Bible, section headings, center-column cross-reference system, footnotes, and maps.

Book Introductions

The introductions to each book of the Bible are designed “to provide basic background information needed to begin to read and understand the books of the Bible on one’s own.” The introductions contain various helpful background facts to each book. A cursory reading seems to indicate that the dates ascribed to each book are mainly conservative and that the traditional human authorship of each book is not denied vehemently. There are some exceptions to this.

For example, for Ezra the introduction says that this book was “perhaps written by Ezra.” It also credits Ezra with being the author of Nehemiah. In the introduction to Job it says, “the unknown author was probably an Israelite writing sometime between 2000 and 500 B.C.” It states, “many scholars regard (Song of Solomon) as anonymous.” Notes such as these could do more to minister questions than to aid the reader and build up his faith.³⁷ Another problem with the introductions is that the one to II Peter states, “Peter probably wrote this letter from a Roman prison about A.D. 67-68, shortly before his death.” This, of course, is the Roman Catholic position, which is contradicted by the book of Romans wherein Paul writes to several Roman churches and never one time mentions Peter as being in that city or area.

Section Headings

The section headings are found throughout all of the books of the Bible in the ESV. They function as commentaries within the text to guide the reader. The ESV

³⁷ Cf. I Timothy 1:4.

states, “While the headings are not part of the Bible text itself, they have been provided to help identify and locate important themes and topics throughout the Bible.”

Cross-reference System

The ESV also contains a center-column cross-reference guide. According to the explanation of features, “The ESV cross-reference system is based on a comprehensive system developed more than a hundred years ago by a team of Bible scholars from Oxford and Cambridge Universities. As far as possible this system also included cross-references used in the original King James Version of 1611. The resulting cross-reference system was first used in the English Revised Version (RV) and has been highly regarded around the world for its effectiveness in showing the internal interrelationship of the text throughout the Bible.” Obviously no cross-reference section is perfect since man is the author, but the ESV’s center column does have some helpful cross-references. Many Bible versions (the Cambridge edition of the KJV is no exception) put a cross-reference with John 3:5 (“born of water”) that speaks of baptism, such as Mark 16:16. In this particular instance, the ESV cross-reference to John 3:5 puts brackets around Mark 16:16, which according to the explanation of the ESV features indicates it is “a passage with the same theme.”

However, there is a major problem with the cross-reference system of the ESV. Included alongside the citations of Scripture references are citations of passages in the Septuagint which the ESV alleges that the writers of inspired Scripture employed instead of the Hebrew OT. For instance, the cross-reference to Romans 3:14 (“their mouth is full of curses and bitterness”) says, “Cited from Ps. 10:7 (Gk.)” This forces upon the reading and reader the philosophy that the writers of inspired NT Scripture cited and quoted the uninspired, fallible, and questionable LXX. In fact, the section in the ESV on its features says on page xii, “These references indicate the source for verses or phrases quoted from other places in the Bible, e.g., “Cited from Ps. 51:4.”” The ESV then goes on to say about this particular reference, “(In this example the reference includes the abbreviation “Gk.,” indicating that in this specific case the source of the quote is the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was often used by the New Testament writers instead of the original Hebrew Old Testament.)” Therefore, cross-references such as these are subjective, unscriptural assumptions, being based on popular scholarly myths and not on the words of God.

Footnotes

The fourth feature of the ESV is its footnotes. There are four different categories of footnotes that appear throughout the ESV. These are “Alternative Translations,” “Explanation of Greek and Hebrew Terms,” “Other Explanatory Notes,” and “Technical Translation Notes.” In the introductory paragraph to the section on the footnotes, the ESV says, “The footnotes included in the ESV Bible are an integral part of the text and provide important information concerning the understanding and translation of the text.” The word “integral” has the idea of essential, central, fundamental, and necessary for completeness. In other words, according to the features of the ESV, to have a copy of the ESV that did not contain the footnotes would be to possess an incomplete ESV. The

editors would not want someone to produce an ESV that did not also contain the footnotes, for the footnotes are integral (necessary for completeness, essential, fundamental) to reading the ESV. This affirmation by the ESV features section will provide understanding into four categories of footnotes that appear throughout this version.

Lest the reader of this critical analysis miss the significance of this, let these words be reiterated: By its own admission, to possess the words of the text of the translation of the ESV is to possess something less than that which is enough or sufficient. The words of the text of the translation are not enough. The reader of the ESV must also possess the footnotes to the words of the translation in order to have a complete translation. And these essential, integral, wholly necessary footnotes cover four different categories which will each be examined briefly.

- **Alternative Translations**

The first category of footnotes is “Alternative Translations.” The writers of this section state that, “Footnotes of this kind provide alternative translations for specific words or phrases when there is a strong possibility that such words or phrases could be translated in another way.” The two examples given are “keep awake” given as an alternate translation for “watch with me” in Matthew 26:38, and “down payment” as an alternate translation for “guarantee” in Ephesians 1:14. The principle of providing alternate translations is nothing new, and there is nothing inherently wrong with the practice either. The KJV translators provided alternate translations for certain words in certain verses, and many of these notes are present in Cambridge editions of the KJV.³⁸ Furthermore, those who defend the KJV from a Biblical position do not argue that there is never an alternate way to translate a word from the way it is translated in the KJV. However, there is a problem with the “Alternative Translations” of the ESV, particularly with the alternate translations that the ESV does not mention as possibilities for certain passages. For instance, for Daniel 3:25 there is no indication that the ESV’s text “a son of the gods” could be translated as the KJV’s “the Son of God.” No allowance is given for the KJV’s translation. In Psalm 56:5, the ESV has the translation “they injure my cause,” instead of the more normative, expected translation of “they wrest (or twist) my words,”³⁹ which is relegated to a footnote. Finally, in Micah 5:2, the ESV makes no mention in the footnotes of the possible alternate translation of “from everlasting” (as in the KJV)⁴⁰ for “from ancient days” (which is the reading of the ESV).

³⁸ Compilations of the KJV translators’ notes are available in such works as Ward S. Allen and Edward C. Jacobs, *The Coming of the King James Gospels: A Collation of the Translators’ Work in Progress* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1995).

³⁹ The ESV, RSV, and NWT are the only popular versions that have this reading. The KJV, NIV, NASB, etc., have the reading of “they twist my words.”

⁴⁰ The KJV of Micah 5:2 says, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

- **Explanation of Greek and Hebrew Terms**

The second category of footnotes is “Explanation of Greek and Hebrew Terms.” The footnotes fall into four different categories. First, there are footnotes “about the meaning of names in the original languages.” These footnotes function basically as a proper noun dictionary. The second category of explanatory footnotes is referred to as, “notes that give the literal translation of a Greek or Hebrew word or phrase deemed too awkward to be used in the English text.” The editors do not give the criteria for a Greek or Hebrew word or phrase being “deemed too awkward to be used in the English text.” The only example given of a phrase that is “too awkward to be used in the English text” is “girding up the loins of your mind” from I Peter 1:13. This “awkward” phrase, of course, is from the KJV and from the Tyndale version of 1534 before that. The reason for claiming this phrase is “too awkward” for an English translation which has been in use for nearly five hundred years is not given by the ESV translation team. The third category of explanatory footnotes in the ESV relative to Greek and Hebrew terms are those that indicate “that absolute certainty of the meaning of a word or phrase is not possible given our best understanding of the original language.” The note goes on to refer to these as, “Hebrew words occurring so infrequently in the Old Testament that their meaning cannot be determined with certainty.” This leads to the oft-repeated footnote, “The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.” Statements such as this do not do anything to help the Bible reader, and in fact cause him to question the translation he is reading, and perhaps cause him to question every translation of the Bible. Why the phrase appears so frequently is mysterious, and it seems to be a feature especial to the ESV among the modern versions. By this author’s count, the phrase appears nine times from Genesis 1:1 to Deuteronomy 34:12, sixty times from Joshua 1:1 to Song of Solomon 8:14, and forty-two times from Isaiah 1:1 to Malachi 4:6, as well as once in the book of Acts.

Furthermore, one must wonder how a footnote such as this can be “integral” to the text of the ESV. What manner of edification is served by telling the reader some one hundred and twelve times that the translators of the version in which he is to put his faith were unable to ascertain, discern, or receive the meaning of the text? Does not an “integral” footnote such as “the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain” leave the saint in the pew with more questions than answers? In fact, the footnote to the five verses of Job 34:29-33 states, “the meaning of the Hebrew in verses 29-33 is uncertain.” Here, then, is an entire discourse in the word of God which the Bible reader must accept as having an uncertain meaning. The fourth category of these language footnotes is identified as, “notes that indicate the specialized use of a Greek word.” The only examples given concern the word *adelphoi*, which the authors say, can be translated as “brothers and sisters,” and *huiioi*, which the authors argue, should be translated as “sons” in specific instances.

- **Other Explanatory Notes**

The third category of footnotes concerns “Other Explanatory Notes.” These notes are divided into four sections. The first section is “notes clarifying additional meanings that may not otherwise be apparent in the text.” The one example given is that “leprosy was a term for several skin diseases.” The second section concerns notes “clarifying

important grammatical points that would not otherwise be apparent in English.” Again, only one example is given. The authors state, “such as, ‘In Hebrew *you* is plural in verses 1-5.’” Proponents of the KJV, of course, will immediately recognize that this supposed strength of the ESV is actually a weakness. The KJV needs no footnotes such as these to alert the reader of pronominal numbers, for the KJV employs Biblical English, wherein singular pronouns are translated one way (thee, thou, thy, etc.) and plural pronouns are translated another way (you, ye, etc.). The verses 1-5 to which the ESV authors refer come from Genesis chapter three. In this passage, the KJV consistently treats the imbedded pronouns as “ye” (seven times), whereas the ESV handles them with the imprecise and ambiguous “you.” In fact, the ESV, like all modern versions that forsake Biblical English, obscure the very points that certain passages seek to make by employing pronouns of differing numbers.

A classic example of this is John 3:7. In this verse the LORD Jesus Christ is speaking to one man, Nicodemus, and says to him, “Marvel not that I said unto thee.” But His statement to follow has a far broader audience in view than merely this one man, so He says, “ye must be born again.” There are two distinct Greek words underneath the corresponding English pronouns. Behind “thee” is the singular pronoun σοι, and behind “ye” is the plural pronoun υμεις. The KJV consistently enables the English speaking reader to recognize this distinction by refraining from translating the different Greek pronouns with the one English pronoun “you,” which is the practice of the modern English versions. Furthermore, this feature of the ESV is employed arbitrarily, with several instances of “you” not being clarified with a footnote. The third section under the heading of other explanatory notes concerns “notes clarifying when the referent for a pronoun has been supplied in the English text.” The one example given is Mark 1:43, wherein the ESV translates the participle εμβοιμησαμενος as “Jesus sternly charged,” whereas the KJV translates it as “he straitly charged.” The proper Name “Jesus” does not occur in the text, but the ESV (and other modern versions such as the NIV) supplies “Jesus” for purposes of clarity. This practice is not without precedent, however, for two verses later in Mark 1:45 the KJV, following the Tyndale, supplies “Jesus” for the emphatic pronoun αυτον. This is obviously an effort on the part of the translators to ensure that the reader not mistakenly read the “he” who “could no more openly enter into the city” (Jesus) with the “he” who “went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter.” Again, the ESV’s practice in Mark 1:43 is not without precedent, but neither is it something that distinguishes it from other translations already available, both good and bad.

Furthermore however, there may be instances of this practice in the ESV that overstep the bounds of good translation practice. The ESV seems regularly to insert the Name of Jesus into the text where the Greek only has the need to translate as “he.” This could be a potentially dangerous practice if it causes an erroneous interpretation of what the text is saying, or if it forces one interpretation upon the reader where the Holy Spirit has allowed there to be a purposeful ambiguity.⁴¹ The fourth and final section of other

⁴¹ A possible example of this is the ESV’s handling of Matthew 27:3.

explanatory notes concerns the “giving of English equivalents for weights, measures, and monetary values.”

- **Technical Translation Notes**

The fourth and final category of footnotes in the ESV is identified as “Technical Translation Notes.” According to the authors, “footnotes of this kind indicate how decisions have been made in the translation of difficult Hebrew and Greek passages.” Unfortunately, no examples are given in this section. The authors encourage the reader to take two actions relative to this subject. First, he is encouraged to refer “to standard Bible study reference works.” Second, he is told to refer back to “the section in the preface on “Textual Basis” for an explanation of the original-language texts used in the translation of the ESV Bible and how the translation of difficult passages has been resolved.” This last category of footnotes, then, would seem to include all of the footnotes throughout the ESV which do not fit into one of the first three categories as well as the footnotes that refer the reader to the Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta, Vulgate and Old Latin (which are not defined for purposes of differentiation, cf. Judges 2:3), Jerome (who produced the Vulgate; how he is cited [Psalm 19:1, 31:1, etc.] in differentiation to the citing of the Vulgate is unclear), Targums, “a few Targums” (II Samuel 7:23), Samaritan Pentateuch, Dead Sea Scrolls, Theodotian (Exodus 34:19, Job 35:15), Josephus (I Samuel 17:4), “the margins of some Hebrew manuscripts” (Nehemiah 7:68), Aquila (Job 5:5 and Psalm 144:2), Symmachus (Job 5:5, 35:15) and other uninvited strangers.

The footnotes in the ESV are filled with “Probable readings”, “revocalizations” and “slight revocalizations” (Psalm 69:22), as well as the occasional “revocalization based on Dead Sea Scroll, Septuagint, Vulgate,” “emendations” and “slight emendations” (Proverbs 27:13), “one Hebrew manuscript” (Psalm 143:9), “two Hebrew manuscripts” (II Samuel 21:8), “some Hebrew manuscripts” (Psalm 36:1), “many Hebrew manuscripts” (Psalm 115:90), “most Hebrew manuscripts,” “slight changes” that would yield different readings (Exodus 17:16), “another reading (compare Jerome, Syriac),” words that a certain text “lacks” (such as, “Dead Sea Scroll lacks verses 4-5” for II Samuel 5:4-5), words that “may have dropped out” (I Samuel 13:1), times when it is a matter of “Text uncertain” (Ezekiel 40:14), times when “the meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain,” when “the meaning of the Hebrew term is unknown,” and when “the meaning of the Hebrew word is unknown.” Furthermore, there are even instances when the Bible is pitted against itself, such as in the footnote to II Samuel 21:19, which states, “Contrast I Chronicles 20:5, which may preserve the original reading,” and there are instances when the footnotes out and out deny the preservation and integrity of the text, such as in Ezra 8:26 which states, “revocalization; the number is missing in the Masoretic Text.” The footnotes provide few certainties, but do bring up probabilities, possibilities, and uncertainties galore.

Maps

The final feature of the ESV is its section of maps at the back. These maps are fairly standard, with four Old Testament maps (The Biblical World of the Patriarchs, The

Route of the Exodus, The Twelve Tribes of Israel, Kingdoms of Saul, David and Solomon) and three New Testament maps (New Testament Jerusalem, The Ministry of Jesus, The Missionary Journeys of Paul).

There is at least one inaccuracy in the ESV maps. Since the ESV is a Critical Text version, it reads “in Bethany” in John 1:28, whereas the KJV and other TR versions read “in Bethabara.”⁴² To correspond with this, the ESV puts “Bethany beyond Jordan” on the map just south of the Sea of Galilee in the region of Decapolis. At best this is mere conjecture. John 1:28 corresponds to the early part of John the Baptist’s ministry when he was “preaching in the wilderness of Judea.” This would place Perea as the area across the river from Judea. Therefore, the ESV maps, in following the erroneous reading of the CT, have had to create a second Bethany and have created confusion concerning the ministry of John the Baptist.

The features of the ESV do not prove to be conducive to the Godly edifying of which I Timothy 1:4 speaks. The introductions to the books of the Bible often call into question matters of authorship and dating. The section headings are not a vast improvement over anything already available today and over the last several centuries. The center-column reference guide has some valuable cross references (which are available in many other Bible versions as well), but it also refers the reader to extra-Biblical sources which hold no authority. The footnotes of the ESV prove to be a major problem with this version. This is partly because they are promoted as being “essential” to the reading of the ESV, but also because they consistently question the text, appeal to extra-Biblical authorities, and do little to edify the Bible reader. Therefore, the features of the ESV prove to be another reason to avoid this new version despite its apparent promotion among Fundamentalism.

Analysis of the Promotion

As with all modern English versions, the ESV is being promoted as an effort to supplant the King James Version of the Bible which has held sway in the English speaking world for four-hundred years. The clearest evidence of this is the very title of “English Standard Version.” Without having earned it, as the KJV has, this latest modern version has dubbed itself the standard version of the English-speaking people. Whether or not this self-proclaimed title comes to fulfillment will remain to be seen. Nevertheless, the fact that this version has had this title chosen for it reveals the aspirations of the men who are behind it.

⁴² Of the multitudes of erroneous readings in the CT, this variant is one of the most obvious. Many commentators have answered the CT’s inaccurate reading. One example is Matthew Poole who has observed, “Some ancient writers will have the place to have been Bethany; but they seem not to have so well considered John 11:18, where Bethany is said to have been but fifteen furlongs from Jerusalem, and consequently on this side Jordan; whereas the evangelist saith, that this place was περὸν.” Matthew Poole, *Matthew Poole’s Commentary on the Holy Bible*, Vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, reprint).

The bias against the KJV and the efforts to supplant it with a modern version have been in effect for years and can be evidenced by a few statements of men behind the Critical Text and the modern English versions. One such example is Eugene Nida, the famed translator who is credited with being the father of dynamic equivalence. He has been cited as making several disparaging remarks about the KJV as well as about the integrity of the Bible in general. Recently, Christianity Today asked Nida, “What is the impact of multiple translations?” Nida’s response was, “It makes people begin to think. As long as all people had the King James Version, they didn’t think. It’s terribly important to have different translations to get a good argument started.”⁴³

Another example of this bias against the KJV and for the modern versions is Daniel Wallace, currently a professor of Greek at Dallas Theological Seminary. He has authored at least one entire article dedicated to the defamation and replacement of the KJV.⁴⁴ His Greek grammar book also takes several opportunities to cast doubt on the reliability of the KJV. He certainly would be one who would desire and be delighted to see the KJV supplanted by modern versions such as the ESV.

Other authors, such as D.A. Carson, James White, and Stewart Custer, have written books specifically aimed at those who hold to the superiority of the KJV. These books are efforts to dislodge the KJV from its place of supremacy and to legitimize the modern English versions. It cannot be denied, then, that there are books and articles published for the express purposes of casting doubt on the integrity of the KJV and lifting up the modern English versions as reliable substitutes.

The ESV is being especially promoted as a good replacement to the KJV. In this promotion the typical anti-KJV arguments are used to sway the Bible reader to switch to the ESV. These contentions would include the theory that the Critical Text is superior to the Textus Receptus, as well as the notion that the KJV contains archaic language. Both of these arguments have been shown to be unscriptural and have been ably answered time and again by many authors. Nevertheless, the following quotations illustrate how these fatigued theories have been dragged out again to prop up the ESV. They also illustrate how one of the direct aims of the ESV is to replace the KJV specifically.

“It may turn out to be the best modern alternative to the King James translation of four centuries ago, better even than the revered ASV of 1901 – now that this latter version is almost extinct.”⁴⁵

“The ESV could substitute almost transparently for the KJV when reading to the public, while the ESV also has the benefit of omitting KJV words, phrases, and even entire verses that clearly were not part of the original texts, as best represented in the United Bible Society’s (UBS) Hebrew and Greek texts.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Christianity Today, October 7, 2002, page 49.

⁴⁴ The reader is encouraged to consult Thomas M. Strouse, “Refutation of Dr. Daniel Wallace’s Rejection of the KJV as the Best Translation,” *Emmanuel Baptist Theological Seminary*, 2005).

⁴⁵ Wayne Jackson, *The English Standard Version* (Christian Courier, December 1, 2002).

⁴⁶ Robert Nguyen Cramer, *Review of the English Standard Version* (Bibletexts.com).

“The conclusion regarding the ESV: The ESV is a very solid translation with a very solid text-basis. Wherever it has removed wording that was bracketed in UBS4, there is sound scholarly justification for doing so. Having carefully examined (1) every instance where the UBS4 bracketed some wording, (2) every instance where the ESV removed UBS4-bracketed wording, and (3) all of the manuscript evidence for and against the omitting of bracketed wording, I can state without hesitation that the ESV is a very reliable translation, has exercised its editorial role very responsibly, and is more word-for-word literal than either the NAB or the NRSV. Though no translation is without its flaws, the ESV is an outstanding word-for-word Bible translation and an excellent substitute for the KJV.”⁴⁷

In this above quote, the reader should notice how the ESV is promoted as a direct replacement for the KJV. The intent of these ESV-promoters is clearly to put this version into the hands of those who previously had been holding onto the KJV. There is nothing conspiratorial about this assessment. This is the way the ESV is being promoted: as a replacement for the KJV.

The ESV is also being promoted as a replacement for both the NIV and the NASB. It is being argued more and more that the NIV is too loose of a translation while the NASB is too literal of a translation. This argument appears to be the current trend. Therefore, the ESV is being promoted in two ways. The first way is as a legitimate replacement for the KJV. The second way is as a superior translation to the modern versions currently available such as the NIV and the NASB. If this is an accurate assessment of the ESV’s promotion, it is clear then as to why those Bible believers who would defend the preserved words of God need to be made aware of this new version.

One example of the ESV being promoted as a replacement for the other modern versions is the ministry of John Piper. John Piper is a member of the ESV Advisory Council and is pastor of the Bethlehem Baptist Church of Minneapolis. He is also a widely read author. This excerpt from Piper’s sermon entitled, “Good English with minimal Interpretation: Why Bethlehem Uses the ESV” illustrates how the ESV is being promoted as a replacement for the other popular modern versions. The sermon is subtitled “Why I would like to see the English Standard Version become the most common Bible of the English-speaking church, for preaching, teaching, memorizing, and study.”

“I have preached form (sic) the NASB for over 20 years. But I groaned that it was never going to be the common reading, memorizing Bible of the people. It is too awkward and unnatural in the way it flows.

Key question: the NIV appeared in 1978. I read it. Why didn’t I use it? The reason I didn’t use it is the reason I am here tonight. The NIV is the best-selling modern translation of the Bible. There are about 150 million copies in print. The NIV makes up about 30% of all Bible sales. Among evangelicals the percentage would be far above 30% and is probably the Bible most evangelicals read most often. And the one most pastors use in preaching. Why am I not on board?

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Not only am I not on board. I would be happy to see the NIV sail into the sunset if it could be replaced by the ESV as the standard preaching, reading, memorizing Bible of the English-speaking church. I feel so strongly about this that I volunteered to do this tonight before I was asked. There is no coercion here. I feel what I am about to say with a passion built up over 25 years. I have longed that there be something more readable than the NASB and more literal than the NIV. The NIV is a paraphrase with so much unnecessary rewording and so much interpretation that I could not preach from it.

Now let me say again that the NIV is the precious Word of God. Oh, how careful we must be not to belittle the Word of God. And yet we must not put any human translation above criticism. God has used the NIV to bring millions of people to faith in Christ. But at the same time I believe there have been negative effects that could be avoided. My biggest concern has to do with preaching. When a paraphrase becomes the standard preaching, reading, memorizing Bible of the church, preaching is weakened – robust expository exultation in the pulpit is made more difficult. Preaching that gives clear explanations and arguments from the wording of specific Biblical texts tends to be undermined when a Bible paraphrases instead of preserving the original wording on good English. And when that kind of preaching is undermined, the whole level of Christian thinking in the church goes down, and a Bible-saturated worldview is weakened, and the ability of the people – and even the pastors themselves – to root their thoughts and affections in firm Biblical ground diminishes.

My aim tonight is to help you be persuaded that exposing millions of people (pastors, teachers, students, laypeople) to the ESV would undo the dominance of the NIV and put in its place a more literal, and yet a beautifully readable, memorizable Bible – the English Standard Version. And this would be a good thing.

In the following examples of NIV paraphrasing compared to the more literal ESV there are four convictions at stake.

1. A more literal translation respects the original author's way of writing. It is a way of honoring the inspired writers.
2. Translators are fallible and they may mislead the English reader if they use unnecessary paraphrases to bring out one possible meaning and conceal others.
3. A more literal translation gives preachers more confidence that they can preach what the English text says with authority that it reflects what the original Greek or Hebrew text says.

4. A more literal translation which preserves ambiguities that are really there in the original keeps open the possibility of new insight by future Bible readers.

I do not claim that the ESV is without its own level of “paraphrasing.” Some will always be necessary. And there will always be disagreements about how much is necessary. I am simply arguing that the ESV is the best balance available of readability and literalness. I hope that it becomes the standard for the church.”⁴⁸

Piper’s statements and arguments in favor of the ESV are confusing. How can he say of the NIV that he would be happy to see it “sail off into the sunset” and that he longs to see its “dominance” undone, but then go on to say that that same NIV “is the precious Word of God.” Furthermore, he claims to be concerned that the NIV weakens the authority with which a preacher “can preach what the English text says with authority that it reflects what the original Greek or Hebrew text says.” Yet this brief critical analysis has already shown that the “integral” footnotes of the ESV do nothing other than undercut and destabilize the authority of the Hebrew text upon which the English versions are built. Piper’s concerns with the NIV’s ailments are warranted, but he shall find no healing balm for them in the ESV. The ESV and the NIV with it, as will be shown in the following sections, are both bags with the same holes.

To summarize, the ESV is being promoted within popular Christendom today. Those who promote the ESV desire it to be a replacement for the KJV, but also for the most popular modern English versions currently in print. Should this promotion prove to be successful, it would affect Fundamentalists (KJV and some NASB), Evangelicals (NASB, NIV and some RSV) and Liberals (RSV).

Problems the ESV has in Common with the other Modern Versions

It can easily be demonstrated that the ESV has the same problems that are found in all of the modern English versions. In fact, there is really nothing truthful about promoting and advertising the ESV as “new,” for very little of it, if anything at all, is not already available in the RSV upon which it is based, as well as the other modern versions which have been available for quite some time.⁴⁹ Some of the problems which the ESV has that are found in the other modern versions include the following:

⁴⁸ This sermon was apparently preached at the Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis. It has been printed online at the Desiring God website (www.desiringgod.org).

⁴⁹ Allan Chapple has written the article “The English Standard Version: A Review,” which originally appeared in *The Reformed Theological Review*, August 2003 issue. Mr. Chapple writes from the perspective of a proponent of the NIV and of the translation philosophy of dynamic equivalence, and he takes issue with the ESV’s implied claims of being a superior translation to the NIV on the basis of its being “essentially literal.” Chapple concludes that there really is nothing different about the ESV from the other modern versions. In his review, he gives a detailed examination of the ESV in I Corinthians 1 and deduces the following: “There is another

Critical Text

First, The ESV employs the same Critical Text that underlies most every modern English version of the Bible. Because of this, the ESV will have all of the textual variants, missing words and verses, and strange additions that the NIV, NASB, RSV, NWT, et al. will have. It should be noted that in the preface the translators of the ESV have admitted that on occasion they have departed from the typical Critical Text to employ another, unidentified text(s). For instance, in defense of the ESV, Vern Poythress has written, “(The) ESV endeavors to represent the autographic text as accurately as can be determined by textual criticism. It usually follows the MT in the OT and the standard Greek text of UBS in the NT, but there are a few exceptions in difficult cases.”⁵⁰ Whatever texts the ESV employs, it can be certain that the Textus Receptus and the traditional Masoretic Text have been rejected in favor of the Critical Text(s). This identifies the ESV as a Critical Text version.

Non-Biblical English

Second, the ESV, like the other modern English versions, employs non-Biblical English. This was demonstrated earlier relative to John 3:7. By using “you” instead of “thee” and “ye,” as well as other Biblical English words, the ESV shows itself to be just as inaccurate as any of the modern English versions.

Lost Beauty

Third, the ESV loses much of the beauty that is present in the KJV and the other Reformation era Bibles. The English of 2001, which has found its way into the ESV, is greatly inferior to the English of the Authorized Version. Consider the following examples:

John 14:2 in the KJV: “In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”

important point to be made about this chapter before we leave it. Of the specific renderings considered above, only two – the second in verse 12 and the first in verse 17 – differ from the RSV. Indeed, the ESV is virtually identical to the RSV throughout this chapter.” In his examination of the ESV in Acts 8 relative to the verb *ευαγγελιζω*, he concludes, “the ESV has simply retained the RSV wording in each case,” and his overall conclusion of the ESV’s handling of difficult vocabulary is that, “the dominant pattern in the ESV is that the wording of the RSV is seldom altered.” Chapple states that, “the ESV is a slightly modified version of the RSV.” He states, “it is not uncommon to find ESV verses that are pure KJV, or KJV filtered through the RSV with little change.” Finally, in Chapple’s list of eight conclusions concerning the ESV, the first is, “The ESV is essentially the RSV, with only minor changes overall.” This review is one of many examples that could illustrate that the ESV has more in common with the already existing modern versions, especially the RSV, than it has anything new or uncommon with which to promote itself.

⁵⁰ Vern S. Poythress, *The English Standard Version* (Westminster Theological Seminary website). Note that Mr. Poythress was one of the fourteen Translation Oversight Committee members.

John 14:2 in the ESV: “In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”⁵¹

Hebrews 11:3 in the KJV: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

Hebrews 11:3 in the ESV: “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”

Notice how in Hebrews 11:3 the KJV employs parallelism of structure by its dual use of “things” (being translated from the twice occurring neuter article in the text.) The ESV employs “that” with “things,” obscuring this English literary device.

More examples could be cited. These two illustrate how the ESV, like the other modern versions, lacks the beauty of the KJV.

It should also be noted, however, that there are times when the ESV follows the practice of the other modern versions in sounding very much like the KJV in some of the more popular passages such as Genesis 1:1, Matthew 5:3-10, etc. In the most familiar Bible verses it is common for the modern versions to sound more like the KJV.

Fourth, the ESV follows the other modern versions by translating *πασχα* as “Passover” in Acts 12:4. The KJV gives the translation of “Easter,” which is not only legitimate, but also is in fact the correct translation of this word based on the context of the passage. In this area, the ESV has followed the errors of the other modern versions and can hardly be considered a new version.⁵²

Lack of Italics

Fifth, the ESV does not supply italics to indicate to the English reader when words have been supplied by the translators. The lack of italics coupled with the ESV's claim to be “essentially literal” would leave the reader with the impression that every word of the ESV translates an underlying word in the original language text. This, of course, is not the case. Actually, the ESV contains some English words which are found as italics in the KJV.

In contrast to this poor practice of the ESV and the modern English versions, the KJV contains italics which are an effort on the translators' part to keep the reader informed of when an English word was supplied in order to smooth or clarify the translation. Cloud cites Lupton's *A History of the Geneva Bible*, which credits Robert Stephanus (1503-1559) as inventing this practice, “still to be seen in our King James

⁵¹ The reading of John 14:2 in the ESV is a word for word copy of the reading of John 14:2 in the RSV.

⁵² Many authors have dealt with the error of reading “passover” into the text of Acts 12:4. Cf. this author's article, “Is *Easter* an Error in the KJV of Acts 12:4?”

Bible, of printing the words not in the original tongue in italic.”⁵³ The ESV and the modern English versions are weak on this point.

Copycat imprecision

Sixth, the ESV follows some of the modern English versions in being imprecise, ambiguous and confusing in its handling of the word πορνεία. The KJV translates this word in each of its twenty-six instances as “fornication.” The ESV, like the other popular modern versions, abandons this old Bible word. In its place the ESV typically reads “sexual immorality.”⁵⁴ The American Heritage Dictionary defines “fornication” as “sexual intercourse between a man and woman not married to each other.” More modern dictionaries give similar definitions, but often change “man and woman” to “partners.” It is admitted that lexical definitions of the Greek word can be broader and go beyond the meaning of the English word. However, it is averred here that the phrase “sexual immorality” is a mistranslation of the word because it is far too nebulous. First, the phrase can be understood to be too specific. For instance, does not lust qualify as sexual immorality? So when the ESV of Matthew 5:32 states, “But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery,” the “sexual immorality” could refer to almost anything, and the wife could be divorced for simply coveting after another man. Secondly, the phrase can be too general. Could not an unmarried though “committed couple” read the phrase “sexual immorality” and conclude that it does not apply to them since they live together in a monogamous relationship? Therefore, the phrase “sexual immorality” is a poor substitute for “fornication.” By omitting the word “fornication,” the ESV follows the bad translation practices of the other modern versions and fails to distinguish itself from them.

Hell

Seventh, the ESV often replaces the Bible word “hell” with “Sheol” or “Hades.” This of course is something that was prevalent throughout the RSV and is present in many of the other popular modern versions. Just like the RSV and the NWT, the ESV removes the word “hell” from the Old Testament. However, in the New Testament the ESV fluctuates between “hell” and “Hades.” In Matthew 11:23, Luke 10:15, 16:23, Acts 2:27, 2:31, and Revelation 1:18, 6:8, 20:13-14, the modern versions typically translate ᾠδης as “Hades.” By following this trend, the ESV contributes to the removal of “hell” as a word and concept from the English-speaking people. Should the English-speaking world adopt the ESV as the standard version, they would not have to read much about “hell.” In doing this, the ESV has not distinguished itself from the other modern versions such as the RSV and NWT.

⁵³ Cloud, *Myths*, p. 66.

⁵⁴ The CT omits the word in Romans 1:29, and the ESV only translates one of the occurrences in I Corinthians 5:1, and one of the occurrences in Revelation 18:3 is translated only as “immorality.” This is also the case for the occurrence in Revelation 19:2.

Micah 5:2

Eighth, the ESV follows the RSV, NWT, NIV, etc. in removing “from everlasting” as a translation in Micah 5:2. In fact, the ESV does not even footnote this as a possible, alternate translation. The ESV seems to be following the lead of the previous modern versions which have already done much to de-emphasize the Person of the LORD Jesus Christ. In this regard, the ESV has done nothing to distinguish itself from the other modern versions, in this case relative to the doctrine of Christology.

Yahweh

Ninth, the ESV promotes the unbiblical name of “Yahweh.” This is evidenced by the “integral” footnote on Ex. 3:15, wherein the ESV states, “The word *LORD*, when spelled with capital letters, stands for the divine name, *YHWH*, which is here connected with the verb *hayah*, “to be” in verse 14.” The “name” *YHWH* is based on the assumption that the Hebrew text originally contained no vowels. This assumption was earlier cited in the preface to the RSV. Also, this “name” is based upon the legend that the Jews never pronounced the Name of God.⁵⁵ Furthermore, like the RSV, NIV, NASB, etc., the ESV removes the personal Name of God from Ex. 6:3, Psalm 83:18, Isa. 12:2 and 26:4. Therefore, those who accept the ESV as their standard English version will never get to read or hear the Name “Jehovah.” This practice is not unique to the ESV, but actually exemplifies the fact that the ESV is following the other modern English versions including the RSV and contains their same problems.

These problems illustrate that the ESV is not an improvement over the other modern English versions. Fundamentalists who were wary of the RSV should continue to be wary of it even though it is now being promoted as the ESV.

Problems Especial to the ESV

There are also some problems that are especial (notable, marked, outstanding) to the ESV. This does not mean that these problems are not found in any other modern English version. Rather, these are passages that the ESV handles in a particularly curious, erroneous, or problematic way.

Genesis 49:10

KJV: The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until **Shiloh** come; and unto him *shall* the gathering of the people *be*.

ESV: The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until **tribute** comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

⁵⁵ This legend has been answered by several writers. The reader is encouraged to consult Thomas M. Strouse, *Who Is This Deity Named “Yahweh?”* Emmanuel Baptist Theological Seminary.

The “integral” footnote on this verse in the ESV states, “By a slight revocalization; a slight emendation yields (compare Septuagint, Syriac, Targum) *until he comes to whom it belongs*; Hebrew *until Shiloh comes* or *until he comes to Shiloh*.” The reading of Genesis 49:10 in the ESV is dependent upon the vowels of the Hebrew text being rearranged in order to yield the word “tribute.” The reading of, “until Shiloh come,” which the KJV has, is given in the footnote as only the third possible option. The ESV reading is actually from the NRSV and is fairly close to the NEB. The KJV reading clearly preserves the messianic nature of the verse. The reading found in the ESV is at best a less messianic translation. At worst it tampers with the Hebrew text of Scripture in order to remove Christ from the OT.

Deuteronomy 30:16

KJV: In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

ESV: **If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God** that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

The ESV adds ten words to the beginning of Deuteronomy 30:16 which are not found in the KJV. The “integral” ESV footnote admits that these words are not found in the Hebrew, but that they have entered the text of the ESV because of their presence in the Septuagint. Beyond the fact that these ten words of men have no divine authority is the matter that they completely alter the meaning of the verse, thereby changing Bible doctrine in this passage. The KJV verse reads as a plain statement. The same verse in the ESV has become a conditional statement. The ESV has shown itself to be willing to change the doctrine of a passage, and it has shown itself willing to add ten words to a verse, all on the basis of the testimony of the Septuagint.⁵⁶

Deuteronomy 32:8

KJV: When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to **the number of the children of Israel**.

⁵⁶ The NIV and the NASB do not do this in this verse. However, the RSV and the NWT both do this.

ESV: When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to **the number of the sons of God**.

The ESV has another different reading that ultimately has an impact upon doctrine. Nowhere in the OT does the KJV use the phrase “sons of God” to refer to the children of Israel. The ESV apparently does this here, thereby adding confusion and blurring the distinctions between these terms. The ESV reading was first found in the RSV, and both the RSV and ESV seem to be following the Septuagint reading which has the phrase, “according to the number of the angels of God.” The ESV footnote indicates that the Dead Sea Scrolls were cited to justify the reading.

Deuteronomy 32:43

KJV: Rejoice, **O ye nations**, *with* his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and **will be merciful unto his land**, *and* to his people.

ESV: "Rejoice with him, **O heavens; bow down to him, all gods**, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. **He repays those who hate him** and cleanses his people's land."

The ESV of Deuteronomy 32:43 has several differences from the KJV, but it actually has far fewer than it could, for the Septuagint, which the ESV often follows in divergence from the OT, contains more than double the number of words that are found in the Hebrew text or the KJV. The Septuagint of Deuteronomy 32:43 reads as follows:

“Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him; rejoice ye Gentiles, with his people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in him; for he will avenge the blood of his sons, and he will render vengeance, and recompense justice to his enemies, and will reward them that hate him; and the Lord shall purge the land of his people.”

Why the ESV editors chose to be selective in their use of the LXX in this verse is not stated. The ESV instead follows the RSV very closely in this verse, and that may ultimately explain the reason for their reading in Deuteronomy 32:43. It may also be because the full reading of the Septuagint in this verse contains doctrine even too strange for any present modern version (i.e. “the Lord shall purge the land of his people”).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ This last phrase in the LXX of Deuteronomy 32:43 has the appearance of anti-Semitism.

Judges 16:13

KJV: And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.

ESV: Then Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web **and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.**"

This is another instance of words being added to the OT. The added phrase "fasten it tight with the pin" is nonsensical, the antecedent of "it" not being clear.

I Samuel 6:19

KJV: And he smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even **he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men:** and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten *many* of the people with a great slaughter.

ESV: And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon the ark of the LORD. **He struck seventy men of them,** and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great blow.

The ESV reading of this verse is another example of unbelief toward the numbers of the Bible. The ESV follows the reading found in the RSV (and the NIV), however the Septuagint in this instance follows the reading of the OT that is preserved in the KJV. Why the ESV chose to ignore the Septuagint at this point is not explained. Regardless, the ESV reading expresses unbelief toward the word of God and in the end casts doubt on the integrity of the God of the Bible.⁵⁸

I Samuel 9:25

KJV: And when they were come down from the high place into the city, *Samuel* communed with Saul upon the top of the house.

⁵⁸ Regarding this numeric controversy, Dr. Chester Kulus has given the following Scriptural solution: "The Hebrew text splits the number 50,070 into two groups: (1) seventy men; and (2) fifty thousand men. This provides for the possibility that instead of all 50,070 dying Bethshemesh, two groups died in different places." Chester W. Kulus, *Those So-Called Errors: Debunking the Liberal, New Evangelical, and Fundamentalist Myth that You Should Not Hear, Receive, and Believe All the Numbers of Scripture* (Newington, CT: Emmanuel Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), p. 220.

ESV: And when they came down from the high place into the city, **a bed was spread for Saul on the roof, and he lay down to sleep.**

In this passage, the ESV follows the RSV word for word, and comes fairly close to the reading of the Septuagint. Whatever the reasons may be which were behind the perversion of the OT text in this passage, one thing is certain: the ESV teaches something completely different from what the KJV teaches. The KJV teaches that Saul communed with Samuel. The ESV teaches that Saul got into bed and lay down to sleep. It is unclear if the ESV reading implies that Samuel slept there with Saul.

I Samuel 10:1

KJV: Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured *it* upon his head, and kissed him, and said, *Is it* not because the LORD hath anointed thee *to be* captain over his inheritance?

ESV: Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said, "Has not the LORD anointed you to be prince over his people Israel? **And you shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies. And this shall be the sign to you that the LORD has anointed you to be prince over his heritage.**

This is another instance of a verse in the ESV having nearly double the number of words as the verse in the KJV. The ESV footnote indicates that the Hebrew lacks these words and that they have been inserted upon the authority of the LXX. The ESV adds words that the Jews did not have in their Hebrew Bibles and that the Lord's churches did not have in their English Bibles until these words first appeared in the RSV.

I Samuel 13:1

KJV: Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel,

ESV: Saul was... years old when he began to reign, and he reigned... and two years over Israel.

This is one of the most notorious alleged discrepancies in the OT. The various modern Bible versions disagree with themselves concerning this verse. For instance, the NIV has the two numbers as "thirty" and "forty-two," whereas the NASB has the two numbers as "forty" and "thirty-two." The ESV follows the RSV's practice of simply omitting the numbers altogether.⁵⁹ However, for the first omission, the ESV has the "integral" footnote: "The number is lacking in Hebrew and Septuagint." And for the second omission, the ESV's "integral" footnote reads: "*Two* may not be the entire

⁵⁹ The RSV gained notoriety for doing this.

number; something may have dropped out.” Obviously, to the editors of the ESV the real problem is that the number is missing in the Septuagint, for if it were present in the Septuagint it could then be added to the English. Furthermore, the capitulation to the accusation that “something may have dropped out” of the word of God is to blatantly deny Bible’s own statements regarding its own preservation. Even the ESV of Matthew 5:18 states, “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”⁶⁰ And further still, there is a legitimate, possible explanation to this apparent discrepancy in I Samuel 13:1.⁶¹

I Samuel 13:15

KJV: And Samuel arose, and gat him up from Gilgal unto Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people *that were* present with him, about six hundred men.

ESV: And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. **The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up from** Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men.

Again, the Septuagint adds words that are not in the Hebrew Scriptures nor are they in the English Bibles that the Lord’s churches have used for the past four centuries. The “integral” footnote in the ESV admits that these words were inserted into the Bible on the basis of their presence in the LXX and that the Hebrew lacks them.

I Samuel 14:41

KJV: “Therefore Saul said unto the LORD God of Israel, **Give a perfect lot.** And Saul and Jonathan were taken: but the people escaped.”

ESV: “Therefore Saul said, “O LORD God of Israel, **why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O LORD, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim.**” And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped.”

This verse is nearly three times as large in the RSV and ESV as it is in the KJV. The ESV reading both adds and omits words. This, of course, is due to the inflation that has taken place in the LXX. The “integral” ESV footnote admits, however, that these

⁶⁰ This author spoke with a student at Dallas Theological Seminary in the fall of 1998 who claimed that Matthew 5:18 could only be applied to the Law, i.e. the Torah / Pentateuch, and not to the whole OT. It is this author’s suspicion that the editors of the ESV might use the same reasoning to explain away Matthew 5:18 relative to I Samuel 13:1.

⁶¹ Cf. Kulus, *Those So-Called Errors*, p. 222.

words were added to the ESV not only on the basis of the LXX but also because of their presence in the Vulgate.

II Samuel 15:7

KJV: “And it came to pass after **forty years**, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron.”

ESV: “And at the end of **four years** Absalom said to the king, “Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron.’

This is another change from the Hebrew text based upon the Septuagint as well as the Syriac. This alleged discrepancy has been dealt with in Kulus’ work, pp. 245-247.

Job 4:6

KJV: “*Is not this* thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways?”

ESV: “Is not your fear **of God** your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope?”

The ESV supplies the words “of God,” which are not found in the Hebrew text and which were added previously by the RSV. The footnote admits that these words were added. Whether or not this is the correct interpretation is not the point. The point is that the ESV has forced this interpretation on the reader.

Psalms 24:6

KJV: “This *is* the generation of them that seek him, that **seek thy face, O Jacob**. Selah.”

ESV: “Such is the generation of those who seek him, who **seek the face of the God of Jacob**. Selah”

The ESV changes the words and meaning and doctrine of this verse by (according to the “integral” footnote) appealing to the “Septuagint, Syriac, and two Hebrew manuscripts.” The Hebrew OT is forsaken in this verse to make room for strange and sickly readings.

Proverbs 5:19

KJV: “*Let her be as* the loving hind and pleasant roe; **let her breasts satisfy thee at all times**; and be thou ravished always with her love.”

ESV: “a lovely deer, a graceful doe. **Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight**; be intoxicated always in her love.”

By changing the verb “satisfy” to “fill with delight,” the ESV (following the RSV) misses the context of the chapter, wherein Solomon is teaching his son to find satisfaction in his one, true wife. A man may be filled with delight by many women, but only the wife of his youth can satisfy.

Daniel 9:26

KJV: “And after threescore and two weeks **shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself**: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof *shall be* with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.”

ESV: “And after the sixty-two weeks, **an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing**. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.”

This ESV translation, which is another carryover from the RSV, is yet one more example of an anti-Christ bias present in the modern versions of the OT. The ESV changes “the Messiah” to “an anointed one,” thereby obscuring a clear Messianic reference. Furthermore, there is a vast difference between being cut off but not for oneself, i.e., for others, and being cut off and “having nothing.” The ESV has successfully removed the Messiah from this key OT passage.

Matthew 1:7

KJV: “And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa;”

ESV: “and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,”

In Matthew 1:7, the CT reads “Asaph” for “Asa.” This is a historical error. In recognition of this, modern English versions have departed from the CT at this point and have kept the correct, TR/KJV reading. This is the case in the NIV, NASB, and even the RSV and the NWT. The ESV becomes perhaps the first English version to insist on following the historical error found in the CT. This shows the ESV’s dedication to the CT, as well as the fact that it contains readings to which the English-speaking people have never yet been subjected.

John 1:18

KJV: “No man hath seen God at any time; **the only begotten Son**, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.”

ESV: “No one has ever seen God; **the only God**, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.”

John 1:18 will forever be a stumbling block to Fundamentalists who desire to have both a translation of the Critical Text and a doctrine of Christology that is not heretical. This is a watershed that should alert Bible believers away from the CT and all CT versions such as the ESV. The ESV refers to Jesus as “the only God.” Though the ESV avoids the NASB’s heresy of calling Jesus “the only begotten God,” it nonetheless creates a major doctrinal confusion. What is the implication of calling Jesus “the only God?” Would some use this verse to support the doctrine that there is only Jesus and that He sometimes manifests Himself as the Father and sometimes as the Spirit?⁶² And if “the only God” is at the Father’s side, what does that make the Father? The Father must be something less or something different from “the only God.” Is this the doctrine of “Fundamentalists” or is this the teaching of anti-Christian heretics? It is incredible that any so-called Fundamentalist could use a translation such as the ESV, which does such great damage to the Biblical doctrine of the Triune Godhead by omitting verses such as I John 5:7 and by causing confusion through the use of terms as “the only God” in reference to Christ.

Acts 26:28

KJV: “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, **Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.**”

ESV: “And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time **would you persuade me to be a Christian?**”

By turning Agrippa’s declaration into an interrogative, the ESV completely changes the tenor of this passage of Scripture. Is Agrippa agreeing with Paul, or rejecting him outright, or mocking him? Confusion abounds due to the ESV’s translation of this verse.

⁶² This doctrinal heresy supported by the ESV is known as “modalism” and is held to by such groups as the “Oneness Pentecostal” movement. Books by Oneness Pentecostals such as David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God* (Hazlewood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1983) defend this false doctrine and use phrases such as “Jesus is the one God” (pp. 321-322).

I Corinthians 11:3

KJV: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman *is* the man; and the head of Christ *is* God.”

ESV: “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”

In this verse, the ESV has given the words “wife” and “husband” for “woman” and man.” While these words are legitimate translations of the underlying Greek, the ESV seems to be creating a new precedent by employing them in its text.

Galatians 3:16

KJV: “Now to Abraham and **his seed** were the promises made. He saith not, And to **seeds**, as of many; but as of one, And to **thy seed**, which is Christ.

ESV: “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to **his offspring**. It does not say, “And to **offsprings**,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to **your offspring**,” who is Christ.”

The ESV follows the RSV at this point, avoiding the word “seed” to speak of Christ. This is also the case in Genesis 3:15.

Philippians 2:6

KJV: “Who, **being in the form of God**, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:”

ESV: “who, though he **was in the form of God**, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,”

The ESV translation of Philippians 2:6 opens up another Christological heresy. The KJV correctly translates the present tense participle with the present tense English word “being.” The ESV departs from this and chooses to use a past tense verb instead. This opens up the possibility that the LORD Jesus Christ somehow lost His deity when He came to earth. The ESV translation could allow those who oppose Christ to purport that He once was God but that He was not God once on earth.

Colossians 3:19

KJV: “Husbands, love *your* wives, and **be not bitter** against them.”

ESV: “Husbands, love your wives, and **do not be harsh** with them.”

This is another issue of translation. Harshness and bitterness describe two different characteristics. It is possible that one could be perceived as being harsh without being bitter. The ESV translation changes the meaning of the verse.

I Timothy 3:16

KJV: “And **without controversy** great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

ESV: “Great indeed, **we confess**, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”

The ESV treats the adverb “without controversy” as though it were a verb by giving the translation “we confess.” This, of course, was the practice of the RSV. The ESV reading greatly minimizes the intensity of what Paul is saying. It is one thing to confess something. It is something quite different to state that something is without controversy. Therefore, the ESV of I Timothy 3:16 makes two attacks upon the deity of Christ, giving the popular reading of “he was manifested in the flesh” as well as minimizing the “without controversy” statement of Paul into merely “we confess.”

Hebrews 13:4

KJV: “**Marriage is** honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”

ESV: “**Let marriage be** held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

The ESV follows the RSV in making this verse into an exhortation (hortatory subjunctive) rather than a plain statement. The need to supply a verb makes this a possibility, but to exhort that marriage be held in honor “among all” is a weaker statement than to assert that marriage is honorable in all. The KJV translation has certain parameters in view (“marriage is”) while the RSV / ESV translation opens up the door to various interpretations of marriage.⁶³

⁶³ The Tyndale translation of “Let wedlocke be had in pryce in all poyntes and let the chamber be vndefiled: for whore keepers and advoutrars god will iudge,” though it does use the hortatory construction, is not saying the same thing as the RSV / ESV.

II Peter 3:10

KJV: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein **shall be burned up.**”

ESV: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it **will be exposed.**”

The ESV translates the verb κατακαίω as “will be exposed” instead of the KJV’s “shall be burned up.” This is a departure from the RSV, but it is very close to the NWT. The ESV’s translation here opens up the door to the teaching of the Jehovah’s Witnesses cult that the earth will not be destroyed but rather that it will be inhabited forever in a rehabilitated form.

Revelation 22:21

KJV: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ **be with you all.** Amen.”

ESV: “The grace of the Lord Jesus **be with all.** Amen.”

Revelation 22:21 has two major problems. First, the content of the translation is an untruth, for the Apostle John is not saying that the Lord’s grace is to be with all people, but rather that it is to be with those who read and hear and keep the words of the book, as 1:3 instructs. This, of course, would refer to the members of the LORD’s churches. Even the RSV had the translation as “with all the saints.” Secondly, the integral footnote on this verse acknowledges that some manuscripts have the TR reading of “you all.” This would give two and only two possibilities. Either the manuscripts that have the reading have had it added, which is a direct violation of verse eighteen, or that the manuscripts that do not have it have had it removed, which is a direct violation of verse nineteen. In either case both readings cannot be right, and the one that is wrong is under the condemnation of God.

There are also many examples of dangerous footnotes in the ESV relative to specific translations of specific passages. Aside from all of the footnotes involving extra-biblical authorities, emendations to the text and revocalizations to the text, some of the dangerous footnotes include the following:

In Job 40:15, the ESV footnotes the word “Behemoth” as being “possibly the hippopotamus.” While there may be some debate as to the identity of this animal, the description which follows in the next several verses removes the hippopotamus from

being a possibility.⁶⁴ Furthermore, why would the ESV footnote not also mention the dinosaur as a possibility?

In Psalm 2:9, the footnote gives the alternate translation of “you shall rule” instead of the KJV’s “thou shalt break.” This is a doctrinal difference relative to the doctrine of eschatology.

In Psalm 22:16, the ESV footnote states that “most Hebrew manuscripts (read) *like a lion [they are at] my hands and feet.*” This, of course, is an anti-Messianic translation based upon the notion that the vowels of the Hebrew text are not inspired. Groups opposed to the LORD Jesus Christ have used this retranslation to “deChristianize” the OT. The NWT translates the verse this way, while many anti-Christian Jewish apologists also appeal to this non-Christian alternate translation. The ESV footnote joins hands with these opposers of the LORD.

In Proverbs 8:22, the ESV footnotes the phrase “the LORD possessed me” with the phrase “or *fathered*; Septuagint *created.*” This heretical teaching of the Septuagint endorses the Gnostic philosophy that the LORD Jesus Christ is a creature. By means of a footnote, the ESV allows this anti-Christian heresy to creep into the translation and the hearts and minds of the Christians who use it.

Conclusion

The Preacher also told his son that there was a time to every purpose under heaven.⁶⁵ Using several verbs in connection with this truth, he taught that there was a time to laugh, to cast away, to speak, and to hate. With the advent of the ESV, it is time for Bible believing church members to laugh at those who attack God’s words much the way Elijah mocked the false prophets of Baal who opposed the LORD,⁶⁶ but it is also time for Bible believing church members to cast away this dangerous version of the Bible, to speak out against this dangerous “new” version, and to hate every false way, just as the Psalmist admonished.⁶⁷

The analogy of a wolf in sheep’s clothing came from none other than the LORD Jesus Christ.⁶⁸ Many applications have been made and can be made from that verse. Certainly the modern versions, and especially the ESV, can be likened to a pack of wolves that would appear to be harmless on the outside, but inwardly would cause great harm to the doctrines of Scripture and to the LORD’s New Testament churches.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this examination of the ESV:

⁶⁴ The ESV translates “he moveth his tail like a cedar” to “he makes his tail stiff like a cedar.”

⁶⁵ Cf. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

⁶⁶ Cf. I Kings 18:27.

⁶⁷ Cf. Psalm 119:104 and 128.

⁶⁸ Cf. Matthew 7:15.

- 1) The ESV claims to stand in the same stream of Bible translations as the Tyndale and the KJV, but in reality it stands separate from these, being found in the stream of the Critical Text and liberal versions. All the bad things that have been said about the RSV can and should, for the most part, be said about the ESV. The ESV promotes itself as yet another new, more accurate, more readable version, and yet it is not new, but is in reality the RSV revised to some measure.
- 2) Because of this, some Fundamentalists have now accepted the RSV under new nomenclature. Though they have been taught that the RSV is liberal, they have nonetheless accepted it under the name ESV. The ESV has all of the problems of the modern versions as well as some problems especial to itself.
- 3) The preface to the ESV reveals that it not only has an inaccurate view of translation legacy, but that it also has a less than excellent translation philosophy and a faulty textual basis coupled with dangerous “integral” footnotes. These “integral” footnotes are promoted as features to the ESV, but they do nothing to edify the Bible believer.
- 4) Many of the ESV’s major problems are present in all and any Critical Text-based English version.
- 5) The ESV, in a more forward manner than other modern versions before it, introduces extra-biblical authorities to the reader through the presence of “integral” footnotes, attempting to convince him that the OT text is no longer enough.

May the LORD’s churches see the ESV for what it really is: a subtle attack upon the words of God by an enemy who knows what he is doing.