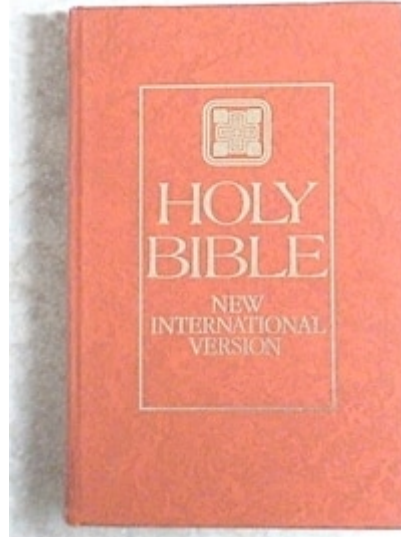




Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 23, 2011

Print Version of NIV Bible Retains Gender Problems, Say Critics

“Come, follow me ... and I will send you out to fish for people.” (Emphasis added.) Thus does the latest updating of the New International Version (NIV) offer a somewhat flaccid rendering of Jesus’ powerful command to the Church’s future apostles: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19: King James Version).



After much fanfare, a misstep or two, and more than a little criticism of its effort to make the Bible relevant to 21 century readers, Christian book and Bible publisher [Zondervan has finally released the re-edited NIV](#), which for the last 30 years has been the world’s most popular English Scripture translation. Unfortunately, controversy over gender-neutral language inserted by translators where original manuscripts used masculine forms of words has threatened to cut into what the publisher hoped would be brisk sales of the new Bible.

In an attempt to overcome several years of heated debate and negative press over the updated translation, beginning last November Zondervan cranked up an aggressive marketing campaign when it debuted the new NIV in an online form only, and has continued with its recent announcement that demand for the Bible has prompted the publisher to increase its original print run of 1.4 million copies to 1.9 million.

“This laydown of the NIV update is bigger than we imagined,” Chip Brown, senior vice president of Bibles at Zondervan, told the [Christian Post](#). “A couple of retailers came in a little higher after seeing the marketing and products.”

Zondervan is promoting the new Bible as the NIV’s first update in 25 years. However, work on the revised translation actually began back in 2002 with the release of the New Testament version of what Zondervan called Today’s New International Version (TNIV), followed by the 2005 release of an entire TNIV Bible. That translation, from which the recent NIV edition is taken, met with a firestorm of controversy over the use of “gender inclusive” language meant to neutralize key words that appear in original manuscripts as masculine. The ongoing controversy prompted Zondervan to quietly close up shop on the TNIV project, and after further editing remarketed it as the latest NIV update.

As reported by [The New American](#) in December 2010 when Zondervan began sending out feelers with its initial online release of the updated NIV, much of the criticism over the translation effort came from



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a conservative evangelical group called [Christians for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#) (CBMW), which since the introduction of the TNIV New Testament had been pointing out flaws in the translation. While CBMW conceded that the NIV's Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) had made some improvements over its original TNIV efforts, its analysis still showed "that the new NIV(2011) retains many of the problems that were present in the TNIV, on which it is based, especially with regard to the over 3,600 gender-related problems we previously identified."

Nor did the CBMW focus its criticism of the CBT's efforts on gender issues alone, noting such problems as the rendering of the well-known phrase "valley of the shadow of death" in Psalm 23 to the puzzling and vague "darkest valley." The group promised a full review of the printed version of the updated NIV in the next several months.

Such issues actually raise a second obstacle with those who prefer the earlier version of the NIV. Because Zondervan is phasing out the older edition of the popular Bible and will eventually only offer the 2011 update, churches and others who have grown accustomed to the NIV over the past three decades will be forced either to switch to the updated version — with all its perceived flaws — or move to another Bible altogether. Trevin Wax, a Southern Baptist pastor and writer, criticized Zondervan's approach to the update process, noting that while translation updates are inevitable, "they must be done with great care. People read, study, and memorize the Scriptures. Why not keep both in circulation? Goodness, we can still read translations like the King James which are hundreds of years old."

While CBMW scholars insist their exhaustive study of the NIV reveals cause for alarm about how the popular Bible may weaken an already challenged theology in western evangelical Christendom, Dr. Douglas Moo, a Bible professor at Wheaton College Graduate School and chair of the CBT, argues that the updated NIV is a sound translation, representing the "optimum combination of transparency to the original documents and comprehensibility" required to be effective for a lay audience.

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

He insisted that the most recent updates to the NIV reflect "progress in biblical scholarship, developments in English usage, and an ongoing concern for clarity." He recalled that the committee working on the translation used of the latest technology, "drawing on state-of-the-art computational linguistic research to guide us in our decision-making and to ensure that the words we choose maximize comprehension of the original meaning."

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



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