



By: J. PAUL RENO

The NIV and Evangelism

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Pastor and Author

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and abideth for ever” (**I Pet. 1:23**).

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The NIV and Evangelism

(Delivered at the 1997 Dean Burgon Conference in
Kingston, Tennessee)

The International Bible Society claims to be ‘a non-profit evangelical ministry whose purpose is: To serve the Church in evangelism and discipleship by providing God’s Word so that people around the world may come to faith and life in Jesus Christ.’¹ They are responsible for and hold the copyrights on the “New International Version” of the Bible, better known as the NIV. Their views of inspiration, preservation, and translation are obviously faulty. Their end product never attempted to give us God’s Words, but rather a reflection of “the thought of the biblical writers.”²

The issue to be examined here is whether the NIV is usable for evangelism. The lofty purpose of the International Bible Society should be checked

¹ Holy Bible – New International Versions (Colorado: International Bible Society, 1973, 1978, 1984) Preface p. IV.

² Ibid., Preface p. VIII

against the version of the Bible they have produced.

For the sake of preciseness, the third edition (or 2nd revision), copyrighted 1973, 1978, 1984 was used. Previous or further revisions may vary in detail but not likely in substance. During the past two years (since the message on “The Scriptures and Evangelism” at the 1995 Dean Burgon Conference in Brampton, Ontario), a number of possible approaches to the subject have been considered. Finally, it was decided to use a practical approach. While this may be rather subjective, it strikes to the heart of the issue. In four consecutive days, four different areas of evangelism were faced. On Sunday, a message from a series on “The Gospel” was preached; on Monday, a lady asked for direction to find if she had Biblical evidence of conversion; on Tuesday, a young couple who were lost asked for counsel; and on Wednesday an Orthodox Jewish rabbi came with questions about Jesus and Christian teaching. The Scriptures used in each of these four cases have since been studied in the 1984 revision of the NIV, not for accuracy, but to see if the needed ‘truths’ for each case had

remained undamaged. Did the 1984 NIV even “contain” the Word of God for evangelism on these points? Would it have been safe to use in these areas of evangelism?

THE GOSPEL

The word “Gospel” occurs 104 times in the Authorized Version (1611). It is a commonly known word and Biblically important in a study of the doctrine of salvation. Three uses of the word are in the possessive (Gospel’s) and one is in italics.

How does the NIV treat the “Gospel”?

1. Six times the word is totally removed. (**Rom. 15:29; I Cor. 9:17, 18, 18; Gal. 2:7; I Pet. 1:25**).
2. Three times or more it is added into the text. (**Rom. 1:2; Gal. 1:7; Col. 1:23**)
3. Twelve times the word “Gospel” is changed to “Good News”. (**Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 11:5; Mark 1:14, 15; Mark 16:15; Luke 4:18; Luke 7:22; Acts 14:7, 21; Rom. 10:15, 16**).

4. Three times the possessive “Gospel’s” was expressed “Gospel”.
5. Five (or more) times the term “preaching” was removed or changed.
6. Two times the term “preaching” was added to the text.
7. Thirteen times the Biblical action towards or with the Gospel was changed.
8. Fourteen times the titles of the Gospel were changed: Gospel of Christ; Gospel of God; Gospel of Peace; Gospel of the Kingdom; Word of the Gospel; Glorious Gospel.
9. Nineteen or more times the details surrounding the term “Gospel” had been altered.

Changes of text by additions, deletions, adjustments, and alteration were clear in 77 or more cases. Prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, and articles were changed or removed. The identification of the Gospel with Christ was occasionally damaged by leaving “Christ” out (**Rom. 1:16; I Cor. 9:18; II Cor. 2:4; II Thess. 1:8**). In **Phil. 1:17** the verse is moved to **vs. 16** and **vs. 16** is removed to **verse 17** – quite confusing if

you should be witnessing. The more you examine, the more frustrated you become trying to find even the same message. With such uncertainty, how could we with calm assurance witness or preach “the Gospel” to a needy world?” This all adds up to making the NIV undependable in presenting “the Gospel”.

EVIDENCES OF ETERNAL LIFE

Using the book of **I John**, one can find a number of signs or tests of true conversion. These have brought great comfort to the saved and often an awakening to the lost. Here, for the sake of application, they are divided into twelve separate but occasionally overlapping areas. The Holy Spirit has been observed, over a period of nearly 30-years, as He applies these verses to search hearts. The standard of measurement here is the question, does the NIV say it clearer or stronger, similarly, weaker, or terribly?

Similarly does not mean the same, but rather, that one might come to a similar conclusion when examining. There still may be damage to the text, change of pronouns for nouns or vice versa,

addition or deletion of words, changed tense of verbs, etc. and thus be unusable by the Holy Spirit.

Weaker means the power is gone, the cutting edge dulled. That which has helped souls in the past has been lessened or watered down.

Terrible means it is unusable. Sometimes it says the opposite or deletes key thoughts.

Some texts were used several times and were analyzed in the light of the test being applied.

This is not an analysis of accuracy of translation but of usability for evangelism.

1. Fellowship with the Father and the Son

1:3 weaker; 1:6 weaker; 1:7 weaker;

4:19 terrible; 5:2 weaker; 2:6 terrible;

4:17 weaker

Total: 5 weaker, 2 terrible

2. Recognition that we are sinners

1:8 similar; 1:9 similar; 1:10 weaker;

2:1 weaker; 2:2 similar

Total: 3 similar, 2 weaker

3. Keep His commandments

2:3 weaker; 2:4 weaker; 2:5 weaker;
2:6 terrible; 2:17 weaker; 3:24 terrible;
5:2 weaker; 5:3 weaker

Total: 6 weaker, 2 terrible

4. Righteous Life

2:29 weaker; 3:2 weaker; 3:3 weaker;
3:7 weaker; 3:10 weaker; 4:17 weaker

Total: 6 weaker

5. Love other Christians

3:14 weaker; 3:15 weaker; 3:16 weaker;
3:17 weaker; 3:18 similar; 3:19 weaker;
3:23 similar; 2:9 weaker; 2:10 weaker;
2:11 similar; 4:7 weaker; 4:8 weaker;
4:11 similar; 4:12 weaker; 4:20 weaker;
4:21 weaker; 5:1 terrible; 5:2 weaker;
5:3 weaker

Total: 4 similar, 14 weaker, 1 terrible

6. Lack of a condemning heart/prayer answered

3:20 terrible; 3:21 weaker; 3:22 weaker;
5:14 terrible; 5:15 weaker

Total: 3 weaker, 2 terrible

7. Indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit

3:24 similar; 5:6 similar; 5:7 TERRIBLE
(verse is missing); 5:8 terrible; 4:1 similar;
4:2 terrible; 4:3 terrible; 4:4 terrible;
4:13 weaker

Total: 3 similar, 1 weaker, 5 terrible

8. Confess that Jesus is the Son of God

4:15 terrible; 2:22 terrible; 2:23 weaker

Total: 1 weaker, 2 terrible

9. Overcome the world

5:4 weaker; 5:5 weaker; 2:15 similar;
2:16 terrible; 2:17 terrible; 3:1 terrible;
3:13 similar; 4:4 weaker; 4:5 terrible;
4:6 terrible; 5:19 terrible

Total: 2 similar, 3 weaker, 6 terrible

10. Witness within

5:10 terrible (unusable); 5:8 terrible;
5:9 terrible

Total: 3 terrible

11. Have the Son

5:12 similar

Total: 1 similar

12. Lack of continual sinning

5:18 weaker; 3:4 terrible; 3:5 weaker;
3:6 weaker; 3:7 weaker; 3:8 weaker;
3:9 similar; 3:10 terrible

Total: 1 similar, 5 weaker, 2 terrible

Total of 85 texts for the 12 tests:

0 = clearer or stronger

14 = similar

46 = weaker

25 = terrible

Thus, the NIV renders these tests or evidences invalid as a way of comforting the saints and convicting the lost. Instead of improving our evangelism, it has devastated it.

COUNSEL WITH AN UNCONVERTED COUPLE

Previously this couple had been spoken to separately and the same has occurred since. The night in question was a question and answer time rather than direct instruction. The following verses were used and NIV difficulties noted.

John 3:15 – “should not perish” is removed, thus removing the warning to the sinner. “Believes” is substituted for “believeth”, thus leaving open the question of pattern of faith (progressive) vs. past act but never followed through.

John 3:16 – “only begotten” is out and “one and only” is in. The loss of Jesus being the firstborn among many brethren is evident, and confusing to the lost. Will they become “sons of God” when saved if Jesus is the “one and only Son”? Thus, our best loved text is mangled in the NIV, being in conflict with other scripture.

John 3:17 – This has all the appearance of teaching either:

- a) a Universal salvation of all, or
- b) a weak Saviour who failed to do the will of the Father each time someone dies lost.

John 3:18 – The textual flow leaves the sinner determining the success or failure of God. This is hardly the teaching of the Bible but rather, humanism.

John 3:36 – “believeth not the Son” is changed drastically to “rejects the Son”. This key truth that has helped bring conviction and light to many lost is removed without a trace. One of the themes of the **Gospel of John** is believing Jesus. He is believable, trustworthy. Many accept facts but cannot without reservation trust Jesus. Not only is this key to a theme lost, but the guilt of passive inactivity is no longer addressed. In its place is an act of rejection. Many lost have not “rejected” Jesus, but neither have they “believed” Him.

I Cor. 15:1 – “the Gospel ... wherein ye stand” has been changed to “the Gospel ... on which you have taken your stand”. This turns the reality of identification with Jesus into a standing on certain facts or truths. No longer is the experience of the new birth needed as we join the crucified, buried, and risen Christ. We need only defend certain truths, which even the Devil knows are so.

Isa. 14:17 – “...would not let his captives go home” is substituted for “...opened not the house of his prisoners.” This changes the view and condition of the lost. It further makes it most difficult to compare with Jesus’ teaching on this subject in the Gospels.

Eph. 2:1-3 – The emphasis is changed from the personal individual to general grouping; from experience and guilt in sin to association with such; from controlled by sin to “when you followed.” This is similar but not the same. The strength of guilt is blunted and the sword loses its edge. In its place is a

possible gentle indictment. The truth of quickening is totally removed.

Jesus often used three criteria in teaching and evangelizing: deny self, take up your cross daily, and follow Me. These are found in part or whole, nine times in the Gospels. Three times the NIV has something similar: **Matt. 10:37, 38; 19:21; Luke 18:22**. Four times, there are such alterations that the power is weakened: **Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; Luke 14:27**. Twice there are terrible changes: **Mark 10:21** – “cross bearing” is left out; **Mark 10:24** – “them that trust in riches” is left out. Seemingly, small changes can affect the lost in important ways. The word “bear” speaks of burdens, while “carry” implies a lighter load comparatively. “Must” is an absolute demand of one upon another, while “let” implies both personal responsibility to do and responsibility of others to permit, give opportunity, make possible, show the way, and enable them. The NIV made changes that lessened responsibilities and lightened the load.

ORTHODOX JEWISH RABBI

His mind was sharp, his questions were extremely intelligent, and his grasp of the Old Testament was excellent. He had a PhD in Hebrew, read Greek, and spoke several other languages. He had been given a New Testament (KJV), and read it through seven times. He was wrestling mentally as to whether Jesus was the promised Messiah. What was read to him of Old Testament passages he usually could quote in Hebrew from the Masoretic text and then translate into English. One of the problems he pondered was, "Why must Messiah die?" What would have happened if the NIV had been used?

Studying the subject of blood in Hebrews would reveal ten verses similar, but not as God spoke, nine weaker, and two devastated. Looking at the issue of God having something "better" in Hebrews, nine verses were similar and three weaker.

On the question of divorce and remarriage, the NIV was at variance in meaning and less comprehensive.

As to Jesus quoting **Psm. 110:1** in **Matt. 22:43, 44**, the NIV would lead one to believe that Jesus did not accurately give even the substance of the prophecy. Fortunately, the rabbi had recognized **Psm. 110:1** (Hebrew Masoretic) in **Matt. 22:43-44** (KJV).

It was a blessing that he had not used the NIV in the Old Testament as it obscured prophecies in **Gen. 22:8; 3:15; 22:18** (compare **Gal. 3:16**); and **Zech. 13:6**. Word studies, prophecies, and special terms were abused. **Psm. 51** had two changes that might have confused the discussion on genuine repentance. **Deut. 6:4, 5** is a bit weaker and would have been offensive to him. **Isa. 53** is from non-Masoretic sources including the Dead Sea scrolls, and would have cast doubts in his mind on areas that he was considering. **Psm. 22** had eight prophecies altered.

His reading of the Authorized Version (KJV) New Testament had matched with the passages of his Masoretic Hebrew Old Testament. It had brought him to question the Talmud, rabbinical sayings, Jewish traditional interpretations, etc. It is rather obvious that the NIV would have failed to stir him.

When looking at these four situations it is rather obvious that the NIV ranges from inferior to useless in even conveying evangelistic truths. It is sadly deficient on the Gospel (77 alterations); devastating on the marks of the converted (71 times in 85 texts); diluting evangelistic passages (**John 3; I Cor. 15; Eph. 2** etc.); and darkening any hope by alterations both in Old and New Testaments.

The perceived goal of writing “novel style” makes it read more like fiction than fact. It lacks authority and leaves the reader observing rather than submitting. This in itself makes it useless for evangelism.

The scholars who put this together “were from many denominations – Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Christian Reformed, Church of Christ, Evangelical Free, Lutheran, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Wesleyan and other churches ...”³. Scholars who could remain in several of the above denominations should not be expected to have correct views of evangelism. Anything they produced would be suspect because of who produced it.

“The first concern of the translators has been the accuracy of the translation and its fidelity to the thought of the Biblical writer.”⁴ One would wonder if their mind-reading abilities of men dead in excess of 1900 years were any better than their accuracy. How could reading the thoughts of dead men allow such changes of texts? Did they think that the writers’ thoughts were so different from what God gave in His Word? Whatever the conclusion, it certainly doesn’t recommend the NIV for evangelism.

That only the “thought” of the writer was sought after leaves it a useless volume for evangelism. Consider, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (**I Pet. 1:23**). “But the Word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you” (**I Pet. 1:25**). “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (**I Thess. 2:13**).

God only uses His Word, the Scriptures, to save sinners. Men's thoughts or words will never work "effectually" in the lost. Scriptures that are corrupted are also valueless. One must look long and hard to find verses in the NIV that are not only similar in content but also uncorrupted in form. This makes it most untrustworthy for evangelism.

³ Holy Bible – New International Versions (Colorado: International Bible Society, 1973, 1978, 1984) Preface p. VII

⁴ Ibid., Preface p. VIII



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