Although the ESV is in general more literal and reliable than most English versions published in recent years, it does need correction or improvement in a few places, and in some places the changes from the RSV are not for the better. Here I offer some criticism of weak renderings and other problems I have noticed here and there in the version.

In Genesis 3:6 the ESV follows the example of the [NIV](http://www.bible-researcher.com/niv.html) with “she also gave some to her husband *who was with her*, and he ate,” where the RSV had “she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.” The RSV rendering is to be preferred here, because the Hebrew (lit. “she also gave some to her husband with her,” as in the KJV, ASV and NASB) does not say or imply that Adam was with Eve at the time and place of her temptation. The ordinary way of expressing “who was with her” would be אשר־עמה, not merely עמה. There is nothing corresponding to the words “who was” in the Hebrew, and the word עמה (“with her”) in 3:6 has an adverbial force, according to a common usage of the preposition (see [עם](http://books.google.com/books?id=dxCBQLh9-9kC&output=html&pg=PA799) in the lexicons). This sentence should be interpreted “she gave some to her husband *as well*, or *also*.” This is the interpretation of the [Vulgate](http://www.bible-researcher.com/vulgate.html), [RSV](http://www.bible-researcher.com/rsv.html), [Berkeley](http://www.bible-researcher.com/berkeley.html), [NEB](http://www.bible-researcher.com/neb.html), [REB](http://www.bible-researcher.com/reb.html), [TEV](http://www.bible-researcher.com/tev.html) and [NJPS](http://www.bible-researcher.com/njps.html) translations, and of most of the commentators. Gordon J. Wenham in his recent commentary (*Genesis 1-15*, in the Word Biblical Commentary series, published in 1987) ignores the NIV rendering, explains that the phrase “emphasizes the man’s association with the woman in the eating,” and points to the similar phrases in Genesis 6:18, 7:7, and 13:1. Clearly the narrative, which represents the Serpent talking only with Eve and not Adam, presupposes a situation where the serpent has caught Eve alone. It was the serpent’s clever plan to mislead the woman when she was alone, because she could be more easily led astray in the absence of her husband. He targets the more vulnerable woman first, and through her he eventually gets the man as well. The fact that later God blames Adam not for listening to the serpent but for “listening to the voice of your wife” (3:17) also indicates that Adam was not present to hear the serpent’s words; it was through *Eve’s* persuasion that he ate the fruit. Evidently he did not hear the serpent’s words directly. This, at any rate, is the ancient Jewish understanding of what happened, and it is also the view presupposed by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:14, where the prohibition of female leadership in the church is based on the fact that Eve (and *not Adam*) was deceived by the serpent. If the ESV revisers meant to convey the idea here that Adam was at the tree with Eve while she was being tempted, watching silently while the serpent tells lies to his wife, it indicates a certain lack of exegetical sobriety and conservatism; but unfortunately it does seem that this was their intention. Several people who were involved in the production of the ESV have quoted this rendering in support of the idea that the root cause of the Fall (i.e. the “original sin”) was Adam’s passivity, his failure to take charge of the situation and control his wife’s behavior at this critical moment. [3](http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html" \l "note3) This is a pretty serious misuse of the text, enabled by a misleading translation of one Hebrew word.

In Genesis 41:8 the ESV translators were less careful than the RSV to indicate a departure from the Masoretic text. The RSV has here “Pharaoh told them his dream, but there was none who could interpret it,” and gives a footnote telling readers that the Hebrew actually says “there was none who could interpret *them*.” The ESV regularizes the grammar differently: “Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them,” but without indicating that the Hebrew says “dream,” not “dreams.”

In Genesis 41:56 the ESV footnote reads “Hebrew, *all that was in them*” where the RSV note said “Gk Vg Compare Syr: Heb *all that was in them*.” The RSV note is much more informative, and we cannot understand why the ESV revisers deleted the references to the ancient versions supporting the emendation.

In their revision of the RSV, the ESV editors tend to substitute numerals for words expressing quantities; for example, the ESV has “16,000” instead of the RSV’s “sixteen thousand” in Numbers 31:46. In this the ESV editors were merely using a convention of style used in modern books. But this usage of *numerals* carries with it an implication of precise enumeration which is obviously not intended by the biblical authors. For us, there is a difference between writing “1,000” and “a thousand.” It would have been better to leave the RSV’s old-fashioned “thousands” and “hundreds” alone.

In Exodus 20:19 we find that the RSV’s “but let not God speak to us” has been changed to “but do not let God speak to us,” as if the people thought that God needed Moses’ permission to speak. But this is not at all the meaning of the Hebrew jussive tense here, which expresses a command or plea, and not any idea of permission. Apparently an ESV style editor who knew neither Hebrew nor English very well thought that the RSV’s use of the English jussive form “Let not …” was just some stilted way of saying “Do not let.”

In Deuteronomy 15:4-5 the RSV punctuation is much better than the ESV’s. The ESV has obscured the meaning of the sentence with its revised punctuation, and there does not seem to be any good reason for it.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| RSV: But there will be no poor among you (for the LORD will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance to possess), if only you will obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all this commandment which I command you this day. | ESV: But there will be no poor among you; for the LORD will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess— if only you will strictly obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all this commandment that I command you today. |

For the mishandling of the textual issue in Deuteronomy 32:43 see the comments above under “Text-Critical Treatment of the Old Testament.” We really must question the wisdom of eliminating a line found in the Masoretic text and the Septuagint, and also quoted in Romans 15:10. But in addition to that, here we also must wonder why they have rendered כפר *kipper* as “cleanses” instead of the RSV’s “makes expiation.” The word כפר is full of cultic significance, being the word used when the priest makes atonement for sins at the altar of sacrifice. The BDB Lexicon explains that when God is the subject of this verb, “It is conceived that God in his sovereignty may himself provide an atonement or covering for men and their sins which could not be provided by men” (p. 497). The Christian meaning of this phrase leaps off the page at us in the RSV and other versions. But with the ESV’s rendering “cleanses” (a sense unsupported by either BDB or Koehler-Baumgartner) it is quite hidden from us. Where did this weak rendering come from? It seems that the ESV revisers have borrowed it from the NRSV (which also contains the same text-critical emendation of the verse). The NRSV had borrowed it from a Jewish version—the [New JPS version of 1982](http://www.bible-researcher.com/njps.html), which in a note claimed that “the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain” here. But the meaning of the Hebrew is quite clear: God himself *makes atonement* for his people.

The ESV rendering of 2 Kings 5:13 is peculiar. “My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it?” The Hebrew here is better understood along the lines of the RSV’s “My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?”

The RSV’s rendering of the words עִם־חָסִיד תִּתְחַסָּד in Psalm 18:25, “With the loyal thou dost show thyself loyal,” is better than the ESV’s “With the merciful you show yourself merciful.” Probably the best rendering here would be “faithful.”

The ESV editors have added a footnote to Psalm 42:5, explaining that the Hebrew words which they have rendered “my salvation and my God” (RSV “my help and my God”) are literally “the salvation of my face and my God.” But the Masoretic text printed in the standard editions (e.g. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*) says “the salvation of *his*face [i.e. his presence]. My God ....” (cf. the KJV, ASV, NASB, etc.) The RSV and ESV translators have employed an emendation here, which ought to have been mentioned in this note.

In Isaiah 31:5 the ESV leaves unrevised the RSV’s “he will spare,” a rather weak translation of the Hebrew פסח, lit. “pass over.” As R.B.Y. Scott observes, the KJV’s “**passing over** is better than **he will spare**, because it preserves the allusion to the deliverance commemorated by the Pesach (Passover) festival; the verb appears in the O.T. only here and in Exod. 12.” [4](http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html" \l "note4)

In Isaiah 48:10 the ESV revisers have added a footnote indicating that the word translated “I have tried” (בחר) may be understood as “I have chosen,” and this is a step in the right direction. But “I have chosen” should be in the text itself. The RSV’s rendering “I have tried” is so poorly supported that it should not even be mentioned in a note. (For more on this, see the discussion in chapter 8 of my essay [*Against the Theory of Dynamic Equivalence*](http://www.bible-researcher.com/dynamic-equivalence.html).)

In Isaiah 55:1 the interjection הוי *hoy* at the beginning of the verse receives no proper equivalent in the ESV. The RSV, following the KJV, had interpreted it as a mere exclamation to attract attention: “Ho, every one who thirsts, come ...” But in the ESV (as in the NIV) it disappears completely: “Come, everyone who thirsts ...” Probably the ESV revisers felt that the RSV’s “Ho” was too archaic, but could not think of something more appropriate. “Oh!” would have served the purpose quite well. In Hebrew the interjection הוי is not just a meaningless shout like “hey!” — it is a cry of poignant emotion (usually translated “Alas”), and the ESV should not have stifled it. Also, the last sentence in this verse probably should have been revised along the lines of the rendering of the [New JPS](http://www.bible-researcher.com/njps.html) version: “Buy food without money, / Wine and milk without cost.” The verb שׁבר means “buy grain” or “buy food” when used intransitively, as may be seen in the immediately preceding clause (“buy *food* and eat”); and the conventions of parallelism in Hebrew poetry should lead us to expect separate objects for the two prepositional phrases “without money” and “without cost.”

In Jonah 3:3 the Hebrew states that Nineveh was a city “of three days’ walk” (מהלך שלשת ימים). The RSV interpreted this to mean that the city was “three days’ journey in breadth,” which implies that the biblical author thought that Nineveh was at least sixty miles across. This is obviously impossible, and the expression need not be interpreted this way. It may refer to the circumference of greater Nineveh, taking in the suburbs (this interpretation is supported by Genesis 10:11-12, in which Nineveh and its suburbs are collectively called the “great city”), or it may be interpreted as saying that it would take a man three days to walk through all of its streets, without attributing any error to the author. But the ESV revisers have not changed the RSV rendering here. They have added a footnote saying that it may mean “a visit was a three days’ journey” (a clumsy rendering borrowed from the NIV); but in the text they should have just gone back to the literal rendering of the KJV, “of three days’ journey.”

In Luke 17:21 the RSV rendering of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν, “the kingdom of God is in the midst of you,” is left unchanged. This very questionable interpretation is also found in other modern versions. But ἐντὸςdoes not mean “in the midst,” it means “within” (same word translated “inside of” in Matt. 23:26), as in the KJV and NKJV. [5](http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html" \l "note5)

In John’s Gospel the ESV (following most other modern versions) translates the word μονογενής *monogenes* as “only,” rather than “only-begotten.” Although most commentators of the present day have argued that “only” is an adequate translation of this word, others maintain that this is an undertranslation of an important theological term. The ESV revisers would do well to include a footnote informing readers of the traditional rendering, “only begotten.” For a full discussion of this matter see my recent article, [The Only Begotten Son](http://www.bible-researcher.com/only-begotten.html).

In John 3:31 the RSV’s rendering of καὶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς λαλεῖ “and of the earth he speaks” is more literal and more accurate than the ESV’s “and speaks in an earthly way.” But better than both would be “and speaks from the earth.”

We are dismayed to find that in John 8:42 the ESV revisers have changed the RSV’s “I proceeded and came forth from God” to “I came from God and I am here,” in imitation of the NIV. This fails to indicate the true sense of the words. In the Greek text we read here ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἥκω, in which the combination of ἐκ andἐξῆλθον is most naturally understood as a “proceeding out from” the Father. As Alford observes, “**and come** [καὶ ἥκω] conveys the result of **proceeded forth** [ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον] ... mere *sending* will not exhaust the term**proceded forth**, which must be taken in its deeper theological meaning, of the proceeding forth of the Eternal Son from the essence of the Father.” [6](http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html" \l "note6)

In the next verse, John 8:43, the ESV carries over the RSV’s “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.” This presents the verse as if Christ were saying that the unbelieving Jews could not understand his meaning because their minds were too stubborn to receive it. That may be true, but it is not what Jesus is saying here. The verse should be translated more literally: “Why do you not understand *my speech*[λαλια]? It is because you *cannot hear* my word [λογος].” The word λογος here is not just another way of sayingλαλια; it refers to the *mental concepts* expressed by his figurative λαλια.

The RSV’s weak rendering “together” for ὁμοθυμαδον in Acts 2:46, 4:24, 5:12, 7:57, 19:29 and Romans 15:6 should have been changed to “with one accord” (as in the ASV and other literal versions).

In Acts 3:26 the RSV had, “God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness.” The problem here is that “every one of you” is too strong a rendering ofἕκαστον, which means nothing more than “each.” Many of those who heard Peter were blessed with such repentance, but not *every one of them*. The exaggerated translation was noticed by the NRSV revisers, who changed “every one of you” to “each of you.” the ESV revisers changed “in turning” to “by turning” (a mere stylistic change), but the more important problem escaped their attention.

In Romans 3:23 the ESV revisers should have at least added a footnote indicating that the word translated “fall short” may be understood as “are deprived,” in agreement with the Vulgate, Luther, Calvin, Geneva Bible, Revised English Bible, New American Bible, and several modern commentators.

The RSV’s punctuation of Romans 4:16-17 should have been changed back to that of the ASV and KJV. The dashes here should be replaced with commas, and the clause “as it is written, I have made you the father of many nations” should be put in marks of parenthesis.

In Romans 8:20-21 the ESV’s “in hope that the creation” is clumsy, and likely to be misunderstood by readers.

The ESV revisers have omitted the RSV footnote at 1 Corinthians 7:21, which indicated that Paul may be telling slaves to “make use of your present condition instead” of setting their hearts on emancipation. (See a full discussion of the interpretation of this verse [here](http://www.bible-researcher.com/slavery.html).) This interpretation not only deserves a note, it should have been put in the text.

The ESV gives the word “betrothed” as a rendering for παρθένος in 1 Cor. 7:25, 34, 36, 37, 38. But παρθένοςdoes not mean “betrothed,” it means “virgin.” The ESV rendering is an interpretation rather than a translation of the Greek.

What is meant by “baptized into Moses” in 1 Corinthians 10:2? This rendering of εἰς τὸν Μωϋσῆν ἐβαπτίσθησαν is carried over from the RSV, but it makes no sense. The ASV’s “unto Moses” was much better. It is likely that when Paul speaks of baptism εις Χριστον he has in mind the idea of incorporation, and so “into” may be best in Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27, and 1 Corinthians 12:13. But in places where the mystical union or incorporation into the body of Christ is not in view (e.g. Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 1:15 and 10:2), εις after the verb βαπτιζω should ordinarily be understood “unto” or “for,” not “into” or “in.”

In 1 Corinthians 10:11 the ESV revisers give a more accurate translation of the adverb τυπικῶς by substituting “as an example” for the RSV’s “as a warning,” but they overlooked the fact that this changes the thought in such a way that the δὲ in the following clause must be rendered “and” instead of “but.”

The ESV’s use of “wife” as a translation of γυνή in 1 Corinthians 11 is very questionable. This passage is about the status and behavior suitable to womankind, not just of wives. And there is no indication here that Paul viewed headcoverings as a symbol of the married state. But Wayne Grudem (who played a major role in the production of the ESV) has already used the ESV rendering to support his idea that “Today we obey the head covering commands for women in 1 Corinthians 11 by encouraging married women to wear whatever symbolizes being married in their own cultures ... married women today should not hide their wedding rings.” [7](http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html" \l "note7) The ESV rendering looks like an attempt to provide support for Grudem’s notion about the appropriate modern application in advance. (See Grudem’s discussion of the passage [here](http://www.bible-researcher.com/headcoverings2.html), and a refutation of it [here](http://www.bible-researcher.com/headcoverings.html).)

In 2 Corinthians 4:16 we find another example of a weak RSV rendering which should have been improved in the ESV: “Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.” The phrase “outer nature” does not convey the meaning of the Greek here, which says “outward man.” Paul means by this the same thing that he means when he speaks of the sin-prone “body of flesh.” So probably the best way to render it would be, “Though our outward body is wasting away, our inner man is being renewed ...” (Note: After 2007, printings of the ESV have “outer self” and “inner self.”)

There is a tendency in the ESV to substitute the singular “man” for the plural “men” in various places, and so we find the very odd expression “the children of man” instead of the familiar “children of men” or “sons of men” in some places. “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man” (υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, Mark 3:28). Apparently the ESV editors decided that they would use the collective singular “man” inclusively, but not “men.” This editorial policy is arbitrary and artificial. People who are used to the all-inclusive use of “man” can also understand “men” when it is used in this sense. We also see that the ESV revisers often avoid translating the singular ανθρωπος as “man,” despite the fact that it means just that in Greek. This looks like a sop for those who have been demanding “inclusive language” revisions of the Bible. But there is no point in trying to please that crowd with half-measures like this.

In Galatians 1:15 “reveal his Son to me” should have been revised to “reveal his Son in me.” The preposition ενdoes not mean “to,” and as Raymond Stamm rightly points out, the RSV’s “*to me* ... does not express the mystical fellowship described in 2:20; cf. II Cor. 13:3.” [8](http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html" \l "note8) It should also be noted that Paul’s use of “in me” (εν εμοι) was likely prompted by “from the womb” in the preceding clause.

In Philippians 3:16 “hold true to” is a poor rendering for στοιχεῖν (*stoichein*). The rendering is sanctioned by Bauer’s *Wörterbuch*, but this is one of many weakened senses proposed in that lexicon with no real warrant. The word means “walk in line with others according to a rule” (see Vine, Vincent, Moule).

In Colossians 1:16 ἐν αὐτῷ, which in the RSV was “in him,” has been changed to “by him” by the ESV revisers. This is the old rendering of the KJV, which in the past has caused people to think the apostle is saying the Son was actually the Creator. To prevent that misinterpretation the ESV revisers have added a note here, “That is, by means of; or *in*.” But why not simply put “by means of” in the text? We also note that in the following verse the RSV’s translation of ἐν αὐτῷ as “in him” has been left unrevised. Surely the rendering of the phrase should be the same in both places.

The RSV renderings for the adjective ατακτος in 1 Thess. 5:14, the adverb ατακτως in 2 Thess 3:6 and 3:11, and the verb ατακτεω in 2 Thess. 3:7 should have been revised. In these places, the RSV renderings (“idlers,” “in idleness,” and “were idle”) were retained, despite the fact that most scholars now agree that the old renderings of the KJV and ASV (“unruly/disorderly,” “disorderly,” and “behaved disorderly”) were more accurate. See the remarks on this subject in my review of the [RSV](http://www.bible-researcher.com/rsv.html). The difference here is not merely academic. If the words do not have the specific meaning of “idle” or “lazy,” and Paul is commanding the Thessalonians to “withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh **disorderly**, and not after the tradition which they received of us” (2 Thess. 3:6, ASV), then the command has a much broader scope. For those who are seeking Scriptural guidance in matters of church discipline, the possibilities of application are different.

In 1 Timothy 1:10 the ESV’s “enslavers” is a less accurate rendering of ανδραποδισταις than the RSV’s “kidnappers.” With this inaccurate rendering (and with the deletion of the RSV footnote at 1 Corinthians 7:21) the ESV seems to be providing ammunition for Wayne Grudem’s recent arguments against liberals who like to equate the Bible’s statements about the place of woman with its statements about slavery. In response to one recent book that makes this comparison (William Webb’s *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*), Grudem writes that the Bible “gives principles that would modify and ultimately lead to the abolition of slavery (1 Cor. 7:21-22; Gal. 3:28; Philem. 16, 21; and note the condemnation of ‘enslavers’ at 1 Tim. 1:10, ESV, a verse that was previously overlooked in this regard because it was often translated ‘kidnappers’).” [9](http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html" \l "note9)

In Titus 1:1 the ESV renders the preposition κατα “for the sake of,” when it should be “in accordance with,” as in 2 Tim 1:1 and elsewhere. “For the sake of” is a rendering with little or no support in biblical Greek. Bauer cites only John 2:6 and 2 Cor 11:21 for this proposed meaning (enumerated as II.4 in his *Wörterbuch*), but in those places it is just as questionable, and with respect to Titus 1:1 he adds, “doch ist auch d. Bedeutung ‘entsprechend,’ ‘nach,’ ‘gemäß’ möglich.” (“though the meaning ‘correspond to,’ ‘according to,’ ‘suitable for’ is also possible.”) The translation “for the sake of” is employed here only because some commentators have objected to the idea that Paul would have described his apostleship as one which *corresponds* to or is in *accordance* with “the faith of God’s elect,” because this would imply that Paul’s authority receives its validity from his doctrinal agreement with “the faith” of the elect (Huther, followed by Alford and many others). But that is precisely what he is saying here! Compare Galatians 1:8. Calvin remarks, “It is as if he had said, ‘There is a mutual agreement between my apostleship and the faith of the elect of God; and therefore, it will not be rejected by any man who is not a reprobate and opposed to the true faith.’”

In Hebrews 11:1 the ESV leaves the RSV’s rendering unchanged, translating the words Εστιν δε πιστις ελπιζομενων υποστασις with “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for.” But Bauer states that the proposed sense “confidence, assurance” (*Zutrauen, Zuversicht*) for the word υποστασις “must be eliminated, since examples of it cannot be found,” and prefers the meaning “realization, materialization” (*Verwirklichung*). Helmut Köster in the *TDNT* (vol. 8, pp. 572-89) also rejects “assurance” is an “untenable” sense, and argues that in the Epistle to the Hebrews υποστασις is a developed theological term referring to the invisible, transcendent “reality” of God contrasted with the shadowy and insubstantial phenomena of this corruptible world. Günther Harder in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (1975) also rejects the proposed sense “assurance” and favors “realization.” According to Harder, the “realization” of things hoped for means that “the thing hoped for works through faith and produces action and attitudes. Thus Abraham hoped for a future city and therefore chose the life of a sojourner” (vol. 1, p. 714). The revised *BDAG* lexicon of 2000 continues to warn translators that the sense given in the RSV “must be eliminated” from consideration, but, citing now the usage of the word in non-literary papyri, suggests that “guarantee of ownership/entitlement, title deed” may be the sense of υποστασις in Hebrews 11:1. This concerns no minor point of exegesis: it makes a real difference in our understanding of an often-quoted verse which appears to set forth a definition of “faith,” and discussions of it may be found in any exegetical commentary. The original fault here was that of the RSV translators, who unwisely eliminated the footnote of the ASV (“or, *the giving substance to*” things hoped for), but the ESV revisers should at least have restored the ASV’s footnote here, or in some other way indicated that many (perhaps most) scholars who have carefully considered the matter have preferred other interpretations.

In 2 Peter 1:1 and Titus 2:13 the ESV revisers have eliminated the RSV footnotes. But the marginal renderings “our God and *the* Saviour Jesus Christ” and “the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (which appear in the text of the KJV and ASV) should continue to be acknowledged as viable alternatives to the renderings adopted in the ESV text. See further comments on these verses in my review of the [NET Bible](http://www.bible-researcher.com/net.html).

I might add many other things to this collection of criticisms. Some of the faults are quite annoying. But mostly they are the kind of minor faults that may be observed in any version.