HE, SHE, IT OR WHATEVER...

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Category: English Bibles

In a world where over a billion people don't have access to any Scripture at all, I find some of the arguments about which English Bible translation is the best to be a little infuriating. It's not that I don't think that there are important issues involved, I just think that we have enough versions now and that we should start worrying about other people.

One of the questions that I find somewhat sterile is the issue Gender inclusive language. A number of modern translations (notably the TNIV) have made the decision to use gender inclusive language wherever possible.Â An example would be from Revelation 3:20..

> *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me (ESV)*
>
> *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me. (TNIV)*

The Greek word which is translated 'he' in the ESV and 'they' in the TNIV is usually translated as 'he' in English. However, it is also the word that Greek uses when it is not specifying the gender of the person. In English we do this by saying 'he or she' or 'they'.Â The ESV has chosen to stick closely to the form of the Greek, but could give the impression in English that Jesus was excluding women. The TNIV on the other hand has not stuck so closely to the Greek form, but does carry the meaning of the Greek more accurately. Both translations are good - and translators are continually being forced to make choices like this. The problem is that there are those who complain that when translators don't stick exactly to the Greek form, they are damaging God's word. 'A masculine pronoun must always be translated by a masculine pronoun', they say. This means that the Kouya translation is pretty bad because Kouya doesn't have a male pronoun that is the equivalent of 'he'. Whoops.

Anyway, Don Carson has written a superb essay which takes a good look at this question and confronts the issue head on but ending up on a very good note.

> *...Would it not be good to recognize that there are people of good will on both sides of this debate? Both sides are trying to be true to Scripture, and to make their understandings known; and both make money in the process. (read more)*

HT: Stan McCullars