

## **Question: "Should a church use the New International Version of the Bible?"**

**Clem Thurman's Answer:** There is no "official version" of the Bible which is authorized for the church to use. For a simple reason: there is no **authority** on earth to make that decision! The different versions we have in English are the results of efforts to have a reliable and easily read version which all can read and understand. Whenever a new version is brought forth, a great cry goes up from various "scholars" who examine it and declare that it is "unworthy to be called the Bible." It surprises many people to learn that such was true in 1611 when the King James Version was done! The close examination of any new version is good, for it helps to spur us to a closer examination of the ancient versions which takes us back closer to the meaning of the original text. There is no reason the New International Version should read like the King James Version. If the two versions are going to read exactly the same, then one of them is obviously unnecessary. The King James Version is an excellent version that has stood the test of time and examination. But the Lord's church, its identity and its teaching, is not dependent upon the King James Version. And to compare any version with the KJV, as though it were the standard, is to show a gross misunderstanding of all versions — including the King James. The question with any version must not be, "How close is it to the KJV?" but, "How close is it to the original?" To answer that question, one needs either to be a scholar who thoroughly understands Greek, or he must compare several different versions and read the works of scholars on the subject. But let us look at the charges being made by opponents of the NIV.

It is true that the KJV has "flesh" in Rom. 8, and the NIV has "sinful nature". But the context clearly shows that the apostle is not speaking of "meat" which is the synonym for "flesh." He is speaking of the nature of man, not his physical body. I have before me at this time twelve different English versions, and not one of them which was translated in the last eighty years has "flesh" in Rom. 8. And to say that "sinful nature" in Rom. 8 teaches "the false theory of original sin" is saying too much. Man does have a sinful nature, and the KJV speaks of that: "were by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3, KJV). Does that passage in the KJV teach a false theory? Let us be willing to apply the same yardstick, please.

The King James has Jesus as the "only begotten Son" of God (Jn. 3:16), as does the American Standard. The NIV has Jesus as the "one and only Son" of God. There has been much written by scholars, in and out of the churches of Christ, on the correct translation for the terms used here. I can add nothing to their writing. I prefer the KJV reading, because my study leads me to conclude that it is correct. But to say that the NIV denies the deity of Christ, in this passage or any other, is patently ridiculous. The term, "one and only Son," shows the unique relationship of the Father and His Son, just as the KJV does. The NIV, in Matt. 1:18-23, plainly teaches the virgin birth of Jesus, and that He was begotten by God through the Holy Spirit. Read John 1:1,14 in the NIV. Surely that does not deny the deity of Jesus!

I agree that the reading of the NIV in Eph. 1:13 can be misleading, if the verse is isolated from its context and other passages on the same subject. But so can the KJV, if other passages are ignored. How one enters into Christ is clearly taught in Rom. 6:3-4, Gal.

3:26-27 and other passages, both in the KJV and the NIV. The attempt to isolate a certain passage and claim that it teaches something has long been a favorite ploy of sectarians. Such tactics are unworthy of those who claim believe all of the Bible. When considered in its context, and with other passages, the NIV in Eph. 1:13 not misleading. I see little difference in the KJV and the NIV in Rom. 10:10. Notice: 'With the mouth confession made unto salvation' (KJV), "With your mouth you confess and are saved" (NIV). If one version teaches salvation at the point of confession, so does the other. Fact is, neither one does; both versions simply show that confession comes before salvation. I am not enamored with the NIV, nor do I use it in my regular study and teaching. I use the King James and American Standard versions. **But I also know that there is not a valid criticism of the NIV that cannot be itched with valid criticism of the KJV.** For an honest person to say that there has never been any criticism of the King James Version shows he hasn't done his homework on the subject.

There will be criticism of any version. The fact that I like the KJV and ASV does not give me the right to tell other people what version to use. And I sure don't have the right to dictate to churches what version they are to use in the pulpit and/or classrooms! Nor does anyone else have that right! My preference of versions, and your preference of versions, is not the point here. The point is that no one has the right to dictate what version is "acceptable" for churches of Christ to use. Christ did not die for a "King James Version church," but for the church which can result whenever and wherever His word is preached in whatever language in any reliable version. Let us not be guilty of dividing the church over what is basically our preference of versions. If a version has some drawbacks in it, point them out. But be honest enough to admit the drawbacks in other versions, too—even those we prefer. And above all, let us show the consideration that will allow others to choose the version they prefer without disfellowshipping them! (Gospel Minutes, Jan. 25, 1985).