

Gender Accuracy
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3 John 3a

(NA 28th ed.)

(NCV)

ἐχάρην γὰρ λίαν	I was very happy
ἐρχομένων ἀδελφῶν	when some brothers and sisters came
καὶ μαρτυρούντων	and told me about
σου τῆ ἀληθείᾳ	the truth in your life

“Told” is from *martureo*, as in “martyr;” i.e. “witness.” The NCV is dynamic-equivalent; its translation philosophy is “thought for thought,” not “word for word.” Look at how they glossed *adelphōn*, “brothers” (as in Philadelphia). They added, “and sisters”—which patently is *not* in the Greek. Or is it? Look for yourself!

ESV has “brothers” with a footnote explaining that the Greek can include sisters. (Why then do translations leave them out? Think about it.) Check out other versions and their notes. GNT says “Christians,” NIV has “believers,” CEV, “the Lord’s followers,” NLT, “traveling teachers,” and NRSV has “friends.” These last five skirt the gender issue by sacrificing Paul’s family terminology.

Proponents of “gender-inclusive” (“gender-neutral”) translations claim that the term is misleading. “Gender-inclusiveness” (“neutrality”) implies that the translators imposed their own feminist agenda on the text. As if John wrote “brothers” but they think he should have been more inclusive, so they put words in his mouth by adding “and sisters.” Proponents say that is *not* what is going on, and they prefer the term, “gender-accurate.” In other words, they claim that even though John wrote “brothers,” his audience understood that he meant “brothers and sisters.” So in English today we should make that explicit. (See, for example, what Paul does to 2 Sam 7:14 in 2 Cor 6:18.)

By this argument, we can say that in some contexts *adelphoi literally* means “brothers and sisters,” and to gloss it “brothers” is inaccurate. (In our 2018 GA we recited Phil 3:13 out loud, using “brothers and sisters.”)

Look at 2 Tim 4:21. Look closely. Do you see it?

At the NIV’s 50th anniversary dinner, one Zondervan speaker urged the translators and commentators to cease using the word “literally,” as in, “it literally says ‘brothers.’” Consider that “father” in Greek is *pater*. In Heb 11:23, “fathers” (*paterōn*) is *literally* translated, “father and mother,” or “parents.” (Moses didn’t have two daddies.) It is *wrong* to say it “literally” means “fathers.”

I was paid to read through a large portion of the NCV, to find features like this and propose revisions. Usually it is obvious when both sexes are intended. Sometimes we had to choose a single one anyway, like in Proverbs 7 where a particular sexual temptation befalls a youth.

How about Psa 8:4? Obviously this is not limited to men only, right? Hence NIV, “what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?” Or NCV, “But why are people even important to you?” NLT, “what are mere mortals that you should think about them?”

These are accurate. But rigorous accuracy has a downside: the New Testament sometimes quotes verses like these and applies them directly to Jesus. Heb 2:6 treats Psa 8:4 as if it refers not to humanity—but to a single man. It is to Jesus that all things were put in subjection. He was made lower than the angels for a little while and he now is crowned with glory and honor.

The gender accurate translations sometimes obscure the very language that vibrantly points to Jesus. Of course this isn’t wrong, but pastors ought to be aware, since the masculine singular terms may wonderfully point to Jesus.

As for 3 John 3, we all should be mindful of our attitudes and biases toward gender—especially when we translate and exegete. We handle texts with our own (unexamined?) preconceptions.

Some (in not-to-be-named denominations) seem to embrace the secular culture on issues of gender, in tension with Scripture. But merely reacting against the culture can be as unbiblical as embracing it. Some in other denominations rightly contextualize texts like 1 Cor 11:6 or 14:34 – 35, but then turn around and stridently make universalizing 1 Tim 2:12 an essential condition of fellowship (while downplaying Scripture’s witness to female leadership). Most Complementarians esteem women. But when some give inordinate importance to exclusive male power—making it a litmus test of orthodoxy—I suspect ego drives their exegesis. (And since the EPC tolerates hermeneutical consistency, they gratuitously claim we undermine inerrancy!)¹

Women don’t always thrive in that sort of environment. The Evangelical Theological Society consists of inerrantist scholars, arguably the intellectual leaders of Evangelicalism. Yet [here](#) is how some women in 2014 described their experience there. And see Beth Moore’s more recent [post](#) in addition.

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Sobering, isn’t it?

3 John commends witnessing to the truth in our lives. Why, *really*, do we hold the views that we do? Are we as accurately biblical as we think we are? Or have we inadvertently internalized this or that toxic influence?

Something the *adelphoi* can ponder.

¹ Search for “EPC” [here](#) (page 28). 43% of their GA voted for the underlined part of #7.