

Six Translation Suggestions for Some Key “Sacramental Verses”

The doctrinal position of Lutherans differs markedly from some Protestant churches when it comes to baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It won’t surprise you, then, that in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod we are paying close attention to how the verses dealing with what we call the sacraments are rendered in the Holman Christian Standard Bible. We are giving those verses careful scrutiny.

We are happy to see how the HCSB has handled a number of the key sacramental verses. These include Matthew 28:19, Mark 1:8, Mark 16:16, Romans 6:3-6, Galatians 3:27, 1 Corinthians 10:16, and 1 Corinthians 11:27.

However, we have also noted some key “sacramental verses” where the HCSB translation causes us great concern. We find significant differences between the HCSB’s rendering of these passages and the translations we see as being appropriate. If such differences remain in the upcoming revision of the HCSB, it is less likely that our Translation Liaison Committee could recommend the HCSB for use within our church body.

We are hoping that our suggestions will meet with your approval because in large part they are simply asking you to translate these doctrinally sensitive passages in a more straightforward way. This is how the HCSB, in our opinion, will be able to serve a wide variety of Christian denominations, which is what we understand to be the goal of the HCSB.

“Sacramental Verse” Suggestion #1 of 6

Bible Reference: Matthew 3:11a

Original text:

ἐγὼ μὲν ὑμᾶς βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι εἰς μετάνοιαν,

HCSB rendering:

I baptize you with^{fn} water for repentance,^{fn}

^{fn} Or *in*

^{fn} Baptism was the means by which repentance was expressed publicly.

Suggestion:

Drop the second footnote.

Rationale:

This footnote (“Baptism was the means by which repentance was expressed publicly.”) offers an interpretation we find unacceptable. The meaning of baptism is a major point of disagreement between different denominations. This footnote gives a “believer’s baptism” interpretation of what ἐν ὕδατι means, rather than simply providing a translation. Certainly such additional instruction could be given in a denomination’s study Bible or doctrinal course. Yet in order to follow through on the HCSB’s intentions to provide an accurate translation usable for Christians of many different denominations, we ask that this footnote be omitted. At the same time we do appreciate the rendering in the main text and feel that it does justice to the Greek.

“Sacramental Verse” Suggestion #2 of 6

Bible References: Mark 1:4b and Luke 3:3b

Original text:

καὶ κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

HCSB rendering:

preaching a baptism of repentance^{fn} for the forgiveness of sins.
^{fn} Or *a baptism based on repentance*

Suggestion:

Drop this footnote.

Rationale:

If the HCSB intends to present itself as a translation to be used by all denominations, a footnote like this should be removed. It is highly interpretive. There is nothing in the Greek to compel it, and the footnote tilts heavily toward one denomination’s interpretation. In a doctrinally important passage like this one, in particular, we think the HCSB should follow its translation principle of allowing ambiguity and should present a straightforward translation of the Greek without any interpretive bias, even with its footnotes. Such an approach has been followed by other major evangelical translations:

- NIV11 – preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- ESV – proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- NASB – preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- NKJV – preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

We are grateful that the HCSB does not include this footnote when the identical expression (βάπτισμα μετανοίας) occurs in Acts 13:24 and Acts 19:4.

“Sacramental Verse” Suggestion #3 of 6

Bible Reference: Acts 8:37

Original text:

εἶπεν δὲ ὁ Φίλιππος Εἰ πιστεύεις ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας ἔξεστιν ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ εἶπεν Πιστεύω τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι τὸν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν

HCSB rendering:

[And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart you may.” And he replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”]^{fn}

^{fn} Other mss omit bracketed text

Suggestion:

Drop verse 37 from the main body of the translation and include verse 37 only in a footnote, such as:

^{fn} Some later manuscripts add verse 37, *And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart you may.” And he replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*

Or, if the HCSB feels it must retain verse 37 bracketed in the main body of the text, then kindly change the footnote to something like:

^{fn} Most early Greek manuscripts do not contain the bracketed text.

Rationale:

When it comes to the manuscripts used for the HCSB, the introduction states,

The textual base for the New Testament [NT] is the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th edition, and the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*, 4th corrected edition. The text for the Old Testament [OT] is the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5th edition.

Significant differences among Hebrew [Hb] and Aramaic [Aram] manuscripts of the OT or among Greek [Gk] manuscripts of the NT are indicated in footnotes. In a few NT cases large square brackets indicate texts that are omitted in some ancient manuscripts. The *HCSB* uses the traditional verse divisions found in most Protestant Bibles in English.

In the HCSB, Acts 8:37 is one of those “few NT cases” where “large square brackets indicate texts that are omitted in some ancient texts.” In our estimation, bracketing this text and adding this potentially misleading footnote create the impression that the manuscript evidence in favor of the verse is somewhat more compelling than it actually is. Was this decision prompted by a desire to retain the Textus Receptus? Or was this decision prompted by a desire to include a verse that would support the “believer’s baptism” understanding of baptism?

Evidence for omission of this verse is ancient and widespread. With the exception of Irenaeus, all of the early Greek manuscripts omit verse 37. So do most of the early translations. We believe a strong case

could be made for a scribe having added verse 37, perhaps taking his words from an early gloss or scholium or from the commentary of Irenaeus.

A number of evangelical translations omit Acts 8:37 from the main body of the translation and place it in a footnote.

NIV 2011

^{fn} Some manuscripts include here *Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

ESV

^{fn} Some manuscripts add all or most of verse 37: *And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

GW

^{fn} Some manuscripts and translations add verse 37: *"Philip said to the official, 'If you believe with all your heart, you can be baptized.' The official answered, 'I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'"*

The NASB brackets the text in a way similar to the HCSB. But the NASB footnote more accurately describes the actual manuscript evidence.

NASB

[^{fn} And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]

^{fn} Early mss do not contain this v

The New King James Version includes Acts 8:37 in the main text without brackets. The NKJV carries a footnote, however, that is more precise than the one in the HCSB.

NKJV

^{fn} Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

^{fn} NU, M omit verse 37. It is found in Western texts, including the Latin tradition.

“Sacramental Verse” Suggestion #4 of 6

Bible Reference: Acts 22:16b

Original text:

ἀναστὰς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.

HCSB rendering:

Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name.

Suggestion:

Get up, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name.

Rationale:

Here is another doctrinally important passage where we hope the HCSB will present a more straightforward translation of the Greek. To be frank, the current rendering seems biased in favor of a “believer’s baptism” understanding of the verse. It appears to purposefully distance the washing away of sins from baptism by associating it only with calling on God’s name. The punctuation (a comma after “be baptized” and not after “Get up” or “wash away your sins”) and the instrumental shading of the participle ἐπικαλεσάμενος seem to steer the reader in that direction.

If the editors want the HCSB to be used by a variety of denominations, passages such as this one need to be presented carefully. The best solution is to present them without any interpretive additions. Such an approach has been followed by other major evangelical translations with this verse:

NIV11 – Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

ESV – Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

“Sacramental Verse” Suggestion #5 of 6

Bible Reference: Colossians 2:11c-12a

Original text:

11 ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ 12 συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε

HCSB rendering:

in the circumcision of the Messiah.^{fn cr} 12 Having been buried with Him in baptism, you were also raised with Him

^{fn} = His death

^{cr} Mt 1:17; Eph 5:2

Suggestion:

11 in the circumcision done by Christ, 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him^{fn}

^{fn} Or *in baptism and raised with Him*

There are three changes we are suggesting here:

- a) Drop the footnote and eliminate both of the cross references at the end of verse 11.
- b) Replace the period at the end of verse 11 with a comma, as verse 12 completes the thought of verse 11.
- c) Translate the phrase ἐν ᾧ in agreement with the majority of commentators, with the minority position included in a footnote.

Rationale:

Since this document concerns itself with issues that deal specifically with the sacraments, we will forego comment on the use of “Messiah” for Χριστοῦ. Instead we will briefly explain the three changes we have just suggested.

- a) With the footnote “= His death” and with the cross reference to Ephesians 5:2, the HCSB limits its readers to an interpretation of the genitive and of this phrase that we find highly unlikely. The death of Christ is nowhere else referred to as a putting off of the body of his flesh as if it were a bad thing that needed to be removed. Besides, imagery which suggests that the circumcision of Christ is his death fails immediately in that Christ took back his body in glorified form on Easter morning. Like the editors of the NIV, we do not believe τοῦ Χριστοῦ is an objective genitive here but rather that Christ is the one who carried out this circumcision (subjective genitive). How did Christ do this to Paul’s readers at Colosse, most of whom were Gentiles? With the following verse the apostle explains that this circumcision was performed by Christ when they were baptized.
- b) We see no reason to place a period at the end of verse 11. The circumstantial participle συνταφέντες (“having been buried with”) obviously modifies περιετμήθητε and thus links verse 12 to verse 11. In other words, what Paul writes about baptism in verse 12 is dependent on what he writes about circumcision in verse 11.

- c) All of the commentators we consulted allow that there are two possible antecedents of the relative ἐν ᾧ in verse 12. A few see it as a repetition of ἐν ᾧ καὶ of verse 11, thus referring to Christ, while the majority believe it refers to τῷ βαπτισμῷ. The footnote we have suggested allows for the possibility of the former. Nevertheless we feel that the latter is a stronger interpretation which we hope will be recognized in the HCSB. For one thing, τῷ βαπτισμῷ is in the closest proximity to ἐν ᾧ. Secondly, this baptismal death-and-resurrection with Christ is not confined to Paul's epistle to the Colossians. The apostle writes about it extensively also in Romans 6:1-13.

The approach we are suggesting for verse 12 has been followed by other major evangelical translations.

NIV11 – having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him
ESV – having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him
NASB – having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him
NKJV – buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him

None of these translations places a period at the end of verse 11.

“Sacramental” Suggestion #6 of 6

Bible References: Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20, and 1 Corinthians 11:25

The same issue is present in all four of these passages: the word “establish” has been inserted, even though it is not present in the Greek.

Original text:

Matt 26:28a – τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης
Mark 14:24a – Τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης
Luke 22:20b – Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματι μου
1 Cor 11:25b – Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι

HCSB rendering:

Matt 26:28a – For this is My blood that establishes the covenant;
Mark 14:24a – This is My blood that establishes the covenant;
Luke 22:20b – This cup is the new covenant established by My blood;
1 Cor 11:25b – This cup is the new covenant established by My blood.

Suggestions:

Matt 26:28a – For this is My blood of the covenant;
Mark 14:24a – This is My blood of the covenant;
Luke 22:20b – This cup is the new covenant in My blood;
1 Cor 11:25b – This cup is the new covenant in My blood.

Rationale:

All four of these verses have long been the source of debate between different theological camps in Christendom. In the Lutheran Church we regard them as very important for proclaiming the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. The HCSB’s addition of “establishes/established” to all four verses raises red flags for us.

Was the word “establishes” added to Matthew 26 and Mark 14 so as to unpack the genitive τῆς διαθήκης and make these verses easier for the reader to understand? If so, how does the word “establishes” accomplish that goal? What exactly does it mean?

To our way of thinking, the word “establishes” is far more of a hindrance than a help. This additional word unduly limits the broad range of meaning possible with this genitive. Do you really want to maintain that Jesus’ blood “establishes” the covenant but no more than that? We don’t see how such a limitation can be defended grammatically or from the rest of Scripture. Was this addition made to tilt these verses in favor of a particular understanding/interpretation of the Lord’s Supper? We hope not.

Then what about Luke 22 and 1 Corinthians 11? The insertion of the past tense “established” seems to shift the focus to Calvary and the blood of Christ shed there, while at the same time separating the blood of Christ from the cup of the Lord’s Supper. The net effect is to make it much harder to see the “real presence” of Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament. This we find unacceptable.

To be sure, we are convinced that the Scriptures teach that the blood of Christ shed on Calvary *established* the new covenant. But we are also convinced that the Scriptures teach that the blood of Christ *is in the cup* of the Lord's Supper (see Matt 26:28, "This *is* my blood."). Furthermore, this blood in the cup *gives* the new covenant to participants. It can be said that the cup of the Lord's Supper is the new covenant by virtue of the fact that Christ's blood *is in the cup* and that the new covenant is intimately connected with his blood.

Since Lutherans are among the many Christians who teach this "real presence" of the blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper, we find unacceptable a translation that seems to obscure, if not eliminate, the possibility of using these four verses to announce this assurance.

Finally, the addition of "establishes/established" to these four doctrinally important verses concerns us also because we note how the HCSB has handled the same phrase in the following verses:

Exodus 24:8 – This is the blood of the covenant
Zechariah 9:11 – because of the blood of your covenant
Hebrews 9:20 – This is the blood of the covenant
Hebrews 10:29 – the blood of the covenant

Why are the above four verses handled in one way but four key Lord's Supper verses in another way? This difference makes "establishes/established" jump off the page even more. Do you really want to raise these red flags in such doctrinally sensitive verses?

In these doctrinally sensitive verses we suggest that the HCSB follow the principle used elsewhere. It should present a simple, straightforward translation of the Greek. Then each denomination is free to explain it as they prefer. Then no one can accuse the HCSB of inserting an interpretive bias here.

Such an approach has been followed by the other major evangelical translations:

Matthew 26:28a and Mark 14:24a

NIV11 – This is my blood of the covenant,
ESV – [for] this is my blood of the covenant,
NASB – [for] this is My blood of the covenant,
NKJV – [For] this is My blood of the ^{fn}new covenant,
^{fn} NU omits *new*.

Luke 22:30b

NIV11 – This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
ESV – This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.
NASB – This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.
NKJV – This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

1 Cor 11:25b

NIV11 – This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
ESV – This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
NASB – This cup is the new covenant in My blood.
NKJV – This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood.