

Introduction for the WELS Website
About the
English Standard Version (ESV) Translation Suggestions
Submitted in July 2015
By the WELS Translation Liaison Committee

In May 2015 the WELS Translation Liaison Committee (TLC) made an inquiry with Dr. Lane Dennis, the chairman of the ESV Oversight Committee, in regard to revision and publication plans of the ESV. Dr. Dennis responded cordially and invited the TLC to submit recommendations for improvement. But he mentioned that the recommendations needed to be received very quickly, because the ESV Oversight Committee was meeting in July 2015.

The TLC responded by quickly preparing and sending seven recommendations. Time was a factor in not sending more. But also the TLC knows that the ESV Oversight Committee is hesitant to make changes. They want the ESV to present a “stable text” that people can count on remaining the same.

The TLC never heard more about the July 2015 meeting, or what the future plans of the ESV Oversight Committee are. We are posting our suggestions here simply to be transparent with our constituents in WELS about what we as a committee have done.

**Translation Suggestion for the ESV
From the WELS Translation Liaison Committee
July 2015**

Bible Reference:

Genesis 49:10

Original text:

לֹא־יִסּוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה וּמִחֶקֶק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו עַד כִּי־יָבֹא שִׁילֹה וְלוֹ יִקָּהֵת עַמִּים:

ESV rendering:

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him,^a
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

^a By a slight revocalization; a slight emendation yields (compare Septuagint, Syriac, Targum) *until he comes to whom it belongs*; Hebrew *until Shiloh comes*, or *until he comes to Shiloh*

Suggestion:

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until Shiloh comes,^a
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

^a A slight emendation yields (compare Septuagint, Syriac, Targum) *until he comes to whom it belongs*; a slight revocalization yields *until tribute comes to him*

Or (our preference):

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until he comes to whom it belongs,^a
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

^a By a slight emendation (compare Septuagint, Syriac, Targum); a slight revocalization yields *until tribute comes to him*; Hebrew *until Shiloh comes*

Rationale:

We recognize that the translation in the ESV text is a legitimate option represented in a good number of modern commentaries. But we are surprised that the ESV would make it the preferred option, for these reasons:

- 1) It requires a revocalization of the Masoretic text and a different word division (the MT has “Shiloh”).
- 2) It is not the rendering of the KJV and NKJV (they have “Shiloh”).
- 3) It is not the rendering of the RSV (it has “to whom it belongs”).
- 4) It is not represented in the ancient translations (they have “to whom it belongs”).
- 5) It is not recommended in BDB or HALOT (they recommend “to whom it belongs”).

6) It takes away the notion of a personal Messiah (present in both of the other main options).

In regard to our first suggestion (“Shiloh”), it would seem to us that this would be a likely choice for the ESV since it was the rendering of the KJV, and the ESV presents itself as a translation intending to continue the “great tradition” of the KJV. This rendering does not change the Hebrew text—letting interpretation up to the reader. Granted, the proper name “Shiloh” does not appear elsewhere except as a name for a town, but this name has been competently explained in the history of Jewish and Christian interpretation (Keil *et al.* = a title for the Messiah). Maybe the ESV, following its translation philosophy, should simply transliterate the Hebrew, and then let the interpreter wrestle with what it means.

There are also good reasons why the ESV might prefer our second suggestion (“to whom it belongs”), which would be our first choice. This rendering has the strong support of the ancient translations, plus the likely allusion in Ezekiel 21:27. It is recommended by both BDB and HALOT, and it was in the RSV. It is the preferred choice of many evangelical commentators (e.g. Kaiser, Kidner, Matthews, Rydelnik, Sailhamer, Stigers, Youngblood).

Both of these translations predict the coming of a personal Messiah, which we consider an advantage. In the history of Christian interpretation, this verse has regularly been understood as a prophecy about a personal Messiah. For Christians who prefer this interpretation, the current ESV rendering is disappointing, since it does not direct attention to one future descendent of Judah in the way that other proposed renderings do.

We know that higher-critical commentators often reject notions of a personal Messiah in the book of Genesis. Perhaps for that reason, at least in part, the translation “until tribute comes” is preferred in their commentaries and translations. We assume, however, that this was not the thinking behind the ESV. Therefore, we wonder why the ESV should side with the exegetical decision that hides reference to a personal Messiah—especially when that decision requires an emendation of the Hebrew text, is notably different from the KJV and RSV, and is not supported by the ancient translations and modern lexica.

As for the other option in the current ESV footnote (*until he comes to Shiloh*), we doubt that this is even worth mentioning. It is hard for us to see what sense it would make, given what we know about the line of Judah, with David and his dynasty and the Messiah. We don’t see this rendering advocated in commentaries, either old or modern.

**Translation Suggestion for the ESV
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Bible References:

Exodus 7:13,14,22; 8:19 (H15); 9:7,35

Original text:

Exod 7:13 – וַיִּחְזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה

Exod 7:14 – כָּבַד לֵב פַּרְעֹה

Exod 7:22 – וַיִּחְזַק לֵב־פַּרְעֹה

Exod 8:19 (H15) – וַיִּחְזַק לֵב־פַּרְעֹה

Exod 9:7 – וַיִּכְבַּד לֵב פַּרְעֹה

Exod 9:35 – וַיִּחְזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה

ESV rendering:

Exod 7:13 – Still Pharaoh’s heart was hardened,

Exod 7:14 – Pharaoh’s heart is hardened;

Exod 7:22 – So Pharaoh’s heart remained hardened,

Exod 8:19 (H15) – But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened,

Exod 9:7 – But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened,

Exod 9:35 – So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened,

Suggestion:

Exod 7:13 – Still Pharaoh’s heart was hard,

Exod 7:14 – Pharaoh’s heart is hard;

Exod 7:22 – So Pharaoh’s heart remained hard,

Exod 8:19 (H15) – But Pharaoh’s heart was hard,

Exod 9:7 – But the heart of Pharaoh was hard,

Exod 9:35 – So the heart of Pharaoh was hard,

Rationale:

In Exodus 7-9 in regard to Pharaoh’s heart, the Qal of חִזַּק is used four times, the Qal of כָּבַד is used once, and the adjective (or Qal active participle) כָּבֵד is used once. In all cases, the ESV translates with a passive idea (“was hardened”). We see no reason for this passive translation, and we suggest that it be changed to a simple stative rendering (“was hard”).

The passive rendering (“was hardened”) seems inappropriate for the Qal of חִזַּק, because the Piel stem is used in Exodus for the active meaning “to harden” (see Exod 4:21; 9:12; 10:20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8,17). Therefore, to express the passive “was hardened,” the Pual stem would be expected.

Similarly, the passive rendering (“was hardened”) seems inappropriate for the Qal of **כבד**, because the Hiphil stem is used in Exodus for the active meaning “to harden” (see Exod 8:15(H11),32(H28); 9:34; 10:1). Therefore, to express the passive “was hardened,” the Hophal stem would be expected.

Our suggested change may seem like a trifle on the surface, but a lot is at stake with these verses. If a passive translation is used in the six passages noted in our recommendation, the impression could easily be given that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened by someone apart from himself during the first five plagues. In English, “harden” is a transitive verb, and the passive “was hardened” normally suggests an agent. The impression could easily be given that God was the active agent—that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart already at the beginning of his interaction with Moses. That, however, is not what the Hebrew indicates with the use of the Qal stem.

Starting with the sixth plague, the Hebrew uses the Piel of **חזק** and the Hiphil of **כבד**, with the Lord as the subject. It is clear in the Hebrew that the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart during plagues six through ten, in conjunction with Pharaoh’s continuing hardness. But during the first five plagues, the Qal is used, and not the Piel or Hiphil. This implies that God did not harden Pharaoh’s heart during the first five plagues.

In our Lutheran circles, the verbs in this section of Exodus are an important component in our teaching about unbelief and hardening. From the Hebrew of these verses, we see that a person hardens his own heart first; then God may step in and increase the hardness. So it is important for us to see the Hebrew stems clearly reflected in our English translation.

In short, our recommendation is simply that you translate the Qal verb forms in Exodus 7-9 in the way that would be expected for the Qal stem (a simple stative), and not like a Pual or Hophal (a passive of Piel or Hiphil).

We think that handling the Hebrew stems in this way—showing a difference where the Hebrew has a difference—is in keeping with the translation philosophy of the ESV. The opening paragraph of the section of the ESV preface entitled “Translation Philosophy” reads:

The ESV is an “essentially literal” translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, its emphasis is on “word-for-word” correspondence, at the same time taking into account differences of grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original languages. Thus it seeks to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original.

Translation Suggestion for the ESV
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Bible Reference:

Joshua 10:6

Original text:

אַל־תִּרְךָ יָדֶיךָ מֵעַבְדֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ אֲלֵינוּ מְהֵרָה וְהוֹשִׁיעָה לָנוּ וְעֲזָרְנוּ

ESV rendering:

Do not relax your hand from your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us and help us,

Suggestion:

Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us and help us.

Rationale:

The ESV's translation philosophy states: "We have sought to be 'as literal as possible' while maintaining clarity of expression and literary excellence" (*Preface*). We suggest that in this instance, "clarity of expression" has been lost in order to preserve a Hebrew idiom that is not at all common, and therefore, not very illuminating for detailed Scripture study. The expression הִרְפָּה יָדֶיךָ מִן (with רַפָּה in the Hiphil) occurs only in this verse. The closest equivalent comes in 1 Samuel 11:3 and 1 Chronicles 21:15, both of which the ESV renders as "stay your hand." "Relax" is not in any way the ESV's standard translation of רַפָּה, so we cannot see that any "one to one" correspondence has been maintained with this word. So we don't see anything in the ESV's translation philosophy that would necessitate the translation "relax your hand from your servants," which we do not believe communicates anything clearly in English.

We note the ESV's commitment to a translation legacy going back to Tyndale and the 1611 KJV. But within that legacy, the KJV and the ASV translate this verse as "Slack not thy hand from thy servants." The RSV seems to be the source of the change to "do not relax your hand." We understand the desire to continue within that tradition, but we would submit that the RSV was already making a change here from an even more unclear older translation and that the ESV would be justified in going further. The NRSV ("do not abandon your servants") and the NKJV ("do not forsake your servants") certainly thought so.

Translation Suggestion for the ESV
From the WELS Translation Liaison Committee
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Bible Reference:

Amos 4:6

Original text:

וְגַם־אֲנִי נָתַתִּי לְכֶם נִקְיוֹן שִׁנַּיִם בְּכָל־עָרֵיכֶם וְחֶסֶר לֶחֶם בְּכָל מְקוֹמֵיכֶם וְלֹא־שָׁבַתֶם עָרֵי נְאֻם־יְהוָה:

ESV rendering:

“I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities,
and lack of bread in all your places,
yet you did not return to me,”
declares the LORD.

Suggestion:

“I gave you cleanness of teeth^a in all your cities,
and lack of bread in all your places,
yet you did not return to me,”
declares the LORD.

^a That is, hunger

Rationale:

It would be very easy for the modern reader to go wrong with the expression “cleanness of teeth.” We notice that the ESV puts in explanatory footnotes in other similar places, where the reading in the text could cause confusion. We suggest a footnote similar in format to the following:

- Amos 4:11 – and you were as a brand^a plucked out of the burning;
^a That is, a burning stick
- Micah 5:1 – Now muster your troops, O daughter^a of troops;
^a That is, city
- Zechariah 14:8 – On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea^a and half of them to the western sea.^b
^a That is, the Dead Sea
^b That is, the Mediterranean Sea

**Translation Suggestion for the ESV
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Acceptability of the word *whore* and related words

Bible References:

Passages with the word *whore* and related words (*whored, whores, whoredom, whoring, whorings*)

Suggestion:

We suggest dropping the use of *whore* and related words, and substituting forms of *prostitute* (or *harlot* if the ESV translators wish to retain a word with KJV roots).

Rationale:

Words related to sexual activity usually have a certain level of acceptability in terms of their usage in everyday speech. Some are acceptable, while others are not. Sometimes, the precise dividing line might be blurry. In the way we talk as Christians, we are sensitive to the distinctions of acceptability within our culture and wish to be even more careful in our speech than the world in which we live (Eph 5:3,4).

It seems that the ESV has made a conscious effort to continue the KJV use of *whore* and related words. The following chart compares the two translations.

	KJV	ESV
whore	14	37
whore's	1	0
whoredom	22	13
whoredoms	32	0
whoremonger	1	0
whoremongers	4	0
whored	0	4
whores	2	1
whoring	19	26
whorings	0	10
whorish	3	0

Interestingly, the ESV has chosen to use *whore* even more than the KJV, while eliminating the almost incomprehensible word *whoredoms*. Yet the ESV uses *whorings* without KJV precedent, even though, in our view, the word *whorings* sounds just as incomprehensible and unusual.

Other translations with roots in the KJV have differing approaches. The NRSV retains *whore* (39) and related words *whoredom* (10), *whoredoms* (1), *whores* (3), *whoring* (8) and *whorings* (13). The NKJV translators (perhaps with sensitivities to the acceptability of *whore*) chose to drop the word altogether and opt toward *harlot* and related words.

We have reservations about the presence of the word *whore* and related words in the ESV. The tone of the word strikes us as questionable for communication in worship and Bible class settings. Some of us on our Translation Liaison Committee have expressed our unwillingness to use the word in a sermon. While lines of acceptability seem to change constantly in our American culture, the word *whore* still appears to

be somewhat unacceptable for everyday speech. Wiktionary.org identifies it as a vulgar term. We speculate that perhaps *whore* did not sound as vulgar in Elizabethan times as today (at least to our ears).

We know that a translation like the ESV tries to reproduce as many features of the original as possible, and one could argue that if the original is earthy, then the English translation should be earthy as well. However, a modern English Bible translation has to keep in mind the language register that is appropriate for modern Bible use in worship and other settings. It is not an automatic that an earthy term in the original must sound equally earthy in the target text. We notice that the ESV makes adjustments out of a concern for language register in other places. For example “one who pisses against the wall” is “male” in the ESV (1 Sam 25:22 and other places), and “penis” is “male organ” (Deut 23:2 [H1]). According to our sensibilities, *prostitute* would work better than *whore* for similar reasons.

Perhaps the ESV translators decided to use *whore* with the argument that the word better fits the contexts where it appears, since God is severely reprimanding his people for their spiritual unfaithfulness, and a more shocking word in English better conveys that sense. Yet we contend that the thought of his reprimand comes out as strongly with other English words that tend not to strike our ears so harshly. The ESV does occasionally use the word *prostitute* in these same contexts (Isa 23:17; Eze 16:30,31,35; and Hos 4:14).

Also, we notice that the ESV limits the use of the word *whore* to contexts that speak about spiritual apostasy. It does not use the word *whore* for Rahab and similar contexts that speak of human sexual promiscuousness. We wonder if this is wise. The English reader in the ESV is not able to see that the same Hebrew words are used for both, and something is lost in making the connection between the two.

**Translation Suggestion for the ESV
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Bible Reference:

1 Corinthians 11:3,5,6,10,13

Original text:

²Ἐπαινῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς ὅτι πάντα μου μέμνησθε καὶ καθὼς παρέδωκα ὑμῖν τὰς παραδόσεις κατέχετε. ³θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστίν, κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ, κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός. ⁴πᾶς ἀνὴρ προσευχόμενος ἢ προφητεύων κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ· ⁵πᾶσα δὲ γυνὴ προσευχομένη ἢ προφητεύουσα ἀκατακαλύπτῳ τῇ κεφαλῇ καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς, ἐν γάρ ἐστιν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῇ ἐξυρημένῃ. ⁶εἰ γὰρ οὐ κατακαλύπτεται γυνή, καὶ κειράσθω· εἰ δὲ αἰσχρὸν γυναικὶ τὸ κείρασθαι ἢ ξυρᾶσθαι, κατακαλυπτέσθω. ⁷ἀνὴρ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν, εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων· ἡ γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρὸς ἐστίν. ⁸οὐ γὰρ ἐστίν ἀνὴρ ἐκ γυναικός, ἀλλὰ γυνὴ ἐξ ἀνδρός· ⁹καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἐκτίσθη ἀνὴρ διὰ τὴν γυναῖκα, ἀλλὰ γυνὴ διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα. ¹⁰διὰ τοῦτο ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους. ¹¹πλὴν οὔτε γυνὴ χωρὶς ἀνδρὸς οὔτε ἀνὴρ χωρὶς γυναικὸς ἐν κυρίῳ· ¹²ὥσπερ γὰρ ἡ γυνὴ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός, οὕτως καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ διὰ τῆς γυναικός· τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. ¹³ἐν ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς κρίνατε· πρέπον ἐστίν γυναῖκα ἀκατακάλυπτον τῷ θεῷ προσεύχεσθαι; ¹⁴οὐδὲ ἡ φύσις αὐτῆ διδάσκει ὑμᾶς ὅτι ἀνὴρ μὲν ἐὰν κομᾶ, ἀτιμία αὐτῷ ἐστίν, ¹⁵γυνὴ δὲ ἐὰν κομᾶ, δόξα αὐτῇ ἐστίν; ὅτι ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ περιβολαίου δέδοται. ¹⁶εἰ δὲ τις δοκεῖ φιλόνηκος εἶναι, ἡμεῖς τοιαύτην συνήθειαν οὐκ ἔχομεν, οὐδὲ αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ θεοῦ.

ESV rendering:

²Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. ³But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife^a is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, ⁵but every wife^b who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. ⁶For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. ⁷For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹²for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. ¹³Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, ¹⁵but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

^a Greek *gunē*. This term may refer to a *woman* or a *wife*, depending on the context

^b In verses 5-13, the Greek word *gunē* is translated *wife* in verses that deal with wearing a veil, a sign of being married in first-century culture

Suggestion:

- In verse 3 replace “the head of a wife is her husband” either with “the head of the woman is the man” (as in KJV) or “woman’s head is man” (as we prefer in order to bring out the generic understanding of the Greek),

- replace “wife” with “woman” in the subsequent verses of this section (vv. 5, 6 [twice], 10, and 13), and
- eliminate the footnotes attached to verses 3 and 5.

Rationale:

The KJV consistently translated ἀνὴρ and γυνή as “man” and “woman” in this section, as the logic and rhetoric of the Greek text require. A failure to translate consistently here makes Paul’s argument incoherent and creates linguistic distinctions where Paul has none. In fact, Paul here has chosen to maximize continuity of usage, and wherever he can he highlights rhetorically the balance between statements about “man” and statements about “woman” (not “wife”). We recommend that ESV return to the pattern followed by KJV in this matter.

Already the RSV and NRSV had departed from KJV and limited κεφαλή δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ in verse 3 to marriage (while using “man” and “woman” rather than “husband” and “wife” everywhere else in verses 3-15). We know of no sufficient reasons for that departure. Granted, Ephesians 5:23, ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλή τῆς γυναικός, speaks of a *husband* as his *wife’s* head, because the preceding verse made that limitation clear with a possessive adjective (5:22, Αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν). But Paul’s thinking is that the specific relationship between husband and wife is rooted in the creation of woman from man and for man, as he indicates in 1 Corinthians 11, and so it is perfectly consistent for him to say here that on the basis of creation, man (in a generic sense: the adult male as a type of being first embodied in Adam) is the head of woman (in a generic sense: the adult female as a type of being first embodied in Eve), and to indicate elsewhere (Eph. 5) that this created difference between man and woman is realized in a focused way in the marriage of a particular man and a particular woman, so that a married woman’s head is specifically her husband.

Furthermore, when RSV and NRSV limited κεφαλή δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ to marriage, they made a poor choice grammatically. While it is theoretically possible for the article used with ἀνὴρ to have possessive force (“and a woman’s head is *her* man,” i.e., her husband), such a translation suits neither Paul’s style nor the immediate context. Normally Paul provides a much clearer indication when he wants ἀνὴρ and γυνή to be understood as “husband” and “wife” instead of the default (unmarked) meanings “man” and “woman”: for example, he uses an *unambiguous* possessive expression, such as the adjective ἰδίοις in Ephesians 5:22, or a verb meaning *have*, or some other word referring to marriage or divorce. None of those unambiguous indicators occur in 1 Corinthians 11:3ff. That is all the more remarkable because in this context there is a higher than usual need for such an indicator if the RSV/NRSV understanding of verse 3 is to be vindicated as Paul’s intention. After all, Paul has just begun his series of “head” statements by saying that Christ is the head of παντὸς ἀνδρός, which clearly means “of every man,” not “of every husband.” If Paul wanted to proceed by shifting his meaning from “man” to “husband,” he would have every reason to make the shift plain, at the very least by adding an unambiguous word for “her/her own” (e.g., κεφαλή δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἰδῖος ἀνὴρ), but he does not do that. The article he uses with ἀνὴρ in verse 3 is best understood as generic in line with the usage of ἡ γυνή and ὁ ἀνὴρ in verses 7, 10, and 12, and so there is no need to take it as having possessive force.

There is still another problem with the RSV/NRSV understanding of κεφαλή δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ, and that is that it makes Paul unnecessarily incoherent as he proceeds from verse 3 to verses 4 and 5. The only way to see a coherent line of thought continuing from verse 3 into 4 and 5 is to recognize that in verse 4, the “head” shamed by a man praying or prophesying with his head covered is the metaphorical “head” of man mentioned in verse 3, namely Christ, and that in verse 5, the “head” shamed by a woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered is the metaphorical “head” of woman mentioned in verse 3, namely man. That link, however, is destroyed in RSV and NRSV because of the disparity between verse 3, where there is no mention of unmarried women and only a married woman has a metaphorical “head,” and verse

5, where “every woman” praying or prophesying with uncovered head shames her “head.” Since readers of RSV and NRSV have no way of identifying a metaphorical “head” for the unmarried women included in “every woman,” they are likely to infer that the “head” being shamed is the woman’s own anatomical head. That in turn implies that the “head” being shamed by an improperly attired man in verse 4 was the man’s own anatomical head. Thus the link in thought connecting verse 3 with verses 4 and 5 in Greek is severed. In RSV and NRSV, Paul’s statement in verse 3 seems to go nowhere and only confuses matters by pointlessly using “head” metaphorically when the rest of the section uses “head” only in the literal sense. A reader of RSV or NRSV might conclude that Paul would have done better to omit verse 3 entirely.

ESV wants to retain the RSV/NRSV understanding of κεφαλή δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ (verse 3) and tries to eliminate the RSV/NRSV incoherence by limiting πᾶσα γυνή in verse 5 to “every wife” and continuing that limitation of γυνή every time there is a reference to the head-covering issue. Unfortunately, by attempting to fix one problem, ESV creates a number of others. In the ESV, Paul seems to flip-flop erratically between “wife” and “woman.” Not only are there no linguistic cues in Greek marking any of the occurrences of γυνή as meaning “wife” so as to support ESV’s differentiation between “wife” and “woman” in verses 4-15, but the ESV makes Paul’s content and rhetoric puzzling again and again:

- The rhetoric of verses 4 and 5 is impressively balanced in Greek, which makes good sense when Paul is pairing concepts that make natural counterparts (“every man...every woman...”), but it seems odd for him to set up an elaborate pairing of “every man” and “every wife.”
- Those who prayed or prophesied were not just the married, so it makes good sense to say “every man” (not “every husband”); but if in the next verse Paul were to be understood as saying “every wife,” the virgins and widows in Corinth would be left wondering, “What about us? Does Paul equate us with the men? If not, are we dishonoring our ‘head’ (Christ? ourselves?) if we pray or prophesy with uncovered head?” When Paul is understood as saying “every man...every woman...,” all the necessary bases are covered, but if he means “every man...every wife...,” he leaves out the unmarried women, and a number of awkward questions arise.
- In verse 6, ESV says, “But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.” However, it was also disgraceful for an unmarried woman to cut off her hair or shave her head, and so the logic of the verse would tell the unmarried woman to cover her head, too. If so, the ESV effort to limit the head-covering practice (and Paul’s rationale for it) to the wives proves unsustainable. That problem turns up in the next two points as well.
- Paul bases his directive in part on the creation of woman as described in Genesis 2. But the wives were not the only ones to whom that could be applied; the virgins of marriageable age and the widows were women patterned after Eve just as much as the wives were. Why would Paul use an argument that applies to all of the women if he really only wants it to apply to the married among them?
- Paul bases his directive in part on “nature.” Nature has provided woman with long hair as a covering, and by implication, the women would do well to take their cue from nature and further cover themselves. Again, that applies just as much to the unmarried women as to the married ones.

ESV tries to justify its choices with a footnote explaining that in first century culture, a woman wore a veil as a sign of being married. That is problematical for two reasons. First, even if we had decisive information indicating that Christian women in the first century wore veils (head coverings) *only* if they

were married, that would at most provide a non-linguistic basis for deciding in a context like this when to translate *γυνή* as “woman” and when as “wife,” but it would not explain away all of the inconsistencies that emerge here in ESV as noted above, and Paul would still come off as a sloppy thinker and teacher. Second, our information about Christian attire in the first century and its background in Jewish practice is all too meager. Some of the key bits of evidence scholars work with come from rabbinic writings of a considerably later date. We also need to make allowances for the complexity of the issues. For example, if a rabbi asserts that it is grounds for divorce if a Jewish wife goes out into public bare-headed, that is evidence for the special interest a rabbi would have in upholding high standards for marriage, but it does not mean that the only Jewish women who wore head-coverings were the married women. Similarly, indications that a Jewish virgin could go out in public bare-headed might not tell us much at all in a society where females remained virgins while they were girls but typically got married in their early teens, so that most virgins were girls and most women were married. The bareheadedness that was appropriate for girls might not seem so later in life regardless of marital status. Furthermore, while the tradition Paul passed on to the Corinthians undoubtedly came from a Jewish background and thus attached particular importance to the modest apparel of the married woman, it is certainly possible that Paul applied the Jewish standard for matronly modesty to all Christian women (married, divorced, widows, virgins of marriageable age) so as to give the church an unassailable reputation for propriety, particularly on Gentile soil where extra effort was needed to combat licentious behavior. What Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11 is one of the few direct pieces of evidence we have for Christian attire in the first century, and so we do well to exegete it in a way that does full justice to its wording and argumentation instead of forcing it into the mold of a predetermined limitation of the head-covering practice to wives.

**Translation Suggestion for the ESV
From the WELS Translation Liaison Committee
July 2015**

Bible Reference:

1 Peter 2:8

Original text:

οἱ προσκόπτουσιν τῷ λόγῳ ἀπειθοῦντες εἰς ὃ καὶ ἐτέθησαν.

ESV rendering:

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Suggestion:

They stumble because they disobey the word; this is also what they were destined for.

Rationale:

This is a doctrinally important verse, and we regret that the ESV has chosen to insert some interpretative words that are not in the Greek. A straightforward rendering of the Greek (εἰς ὃ καὶ ἐτέθησαν) would be: “to which they were also destined” or “which they were also destined for.” The ESV adds the words “to do.”

The problem with the ESV rendering, in our opinion, is that it seems to skew the verse subtly in the direction of reprobation with the addition of the words “to do”—words that are not in the Greek. What will the average ESV reader imagine to be the antecedent of “to do?” That is: what were the people destined “to do?” We suspect that when the average English reader reads the ESV: “they disobey the word, as they were destined to do,” the natural conclusion will be that God destined these people to “disobey the word.”

This conclusion will be natural because the most recent verbal expression is: “they disobey the word.” The verbal expression “they stumble” is farther removed, and for that reason will be less likely to be understood as the antecedent. Word order in English is very important for sharing meaning—more important than in Greek. Also the verbal concept of “doing” seems to fit better with “disobeying” rather than with “stumbling.” “Disobeying” is something that people consciously “do;” “stumbling” is something that “happens” and is not consciously “done.”

The Greek, however, does not need to be understood this way. The Greek literally says that the people were destined *for something* (εἰς ὃ). It does not say that they were destined *to do something*. The antecedent for εἰς ὃ is not made explicit. It could be the “stumbling” just as well as the “disobeying.” And of course, there have been many Christians interpreters who have understood the *stumbling* as the thing that they were destined for—stumbling brought by God as a result of their disobedience.

The *ESV Study Bible* recognizes this alternate line of interpretation (which is the way that we as Lutherans understand the verse): “Some understand this to teach that God has predestined not *who* will disobey but only what the *result* of disobedience will be for those who disobey (i.e., that those who

disobey will stumble)” (p. 2408). However, the ESV translation hides this legitimate interpretive possibility by inserting words that are not represented in the Greek.

Because this is a doctrinally sensitive verse where Christians from different denominations prefer different interpretations, it is a verse that Christians will look at closely. If the ESV intends to be a translation used by Christians from a wide variety of denominations, we think it is wise for the ESV to present a straightforward rendering of the original text that would allow interpreters to explain the passage as they want. In this way, the translation will avoid the impression of doctrinal bias. Our suggestion seeks to do that. With the insertion of a semi-colon and “this is,” the interpreter is free to find the antecedent that he prefers. And in our suggestion, it is clear that the disobedient person is destined *for something*, not *to do something*, as is clear in the Greek.

Our concern here is similar to the hardening passages of Exodus. There as here, we fear that the ESV could be accused of a doctrinal bias toward reprobation, since interpretive elements in that direction are added without a linguistic basis.

The Word of God in English states that the goal of an essentially literal translation like the ESV is to present a “straightforward linguistic translation” that is “unburdened by anxiety about making sure that the overall interpretation of the passage will accord with the translators’ preferences” (p. 88). We recommend that the ESV follow this goal in these passages.