

KIRBSTONES

ALONG THE NARROW WAY

11.2025 | #271

“ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATE. FOR WIDE IS THE GATE AND BROAD IS THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION, AND MANY ENTER THROUGH IT. BUT SMALL IS THE GATE AND NARROW THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO LIFE, AND ONLY A FEW FIND IT.” - MATTHEW 7:13-14 - NIV



In this era of smartphones, tablets, and endless apps, it is natural that so many of us open our favorite biblical translations on a screen rather than thumbing through a printed volume. Electronic presentations are undeniably convenient—but these also raise serious concerns about (1) the integrity of Scripture, (2) the stability of language, and (3) our ability to trust what we read as God’s truth.

1. The erosion of grammatically correct writing and the slide toward *fluid* truth: When we open an electronic Bible, we welcome the ease of searching by keyword, access to instant cross-references, and other tools such as dynamic highlighting. Yet the convenience can mask subtle shifts—particularly when politically correct, inclusive-language proposals, or stylistic improvements creep in. One of the most profound changes is the recent substitution of older, gender-specific language with gender-neutral or inclusive alternatives. Reading in older editions of the New International Version *Blessed is the man...* *Psalm 1:1* gave way in later printings to *Blessed is the one...* Such changes seem harmless or even desirable from the vantage of contemporary sensitivities—but the cost is more than grammar. We lose subtle meaning, metaphorical force, and the rhythm of biblical language preserved across centuries. *The acceptance of fluid wording for the sake of perceived fairness ushers in the risk of eroding the idea that Scripture is fixed, reliable, anchored in historical, grammatical form.*

2. Unannounced changes in wording to suit a feel-good age: Electronic biblical editions offer publishers the capability to revise and republish instantly, often without clear notices that the wording has changed. The latest electronic editions of the NIV incorporated numerous revisions since 2011 that reflect shifting philosophies on translation, including inclusive language and changed renderings of *man*, *brother*, or *sons of God*. While many of these may reflect improved scholarship or clearer English, the fact remains that we have less transparency about what has changed. If wording can shift quietly to align with contemporary culture, what will we read five years or ten years from now? Will we still be reading the same text we memorized, quoted, taught, and believed? When our primary Bible access is electronic, the risk grows that we are embracing, not just a text, but a platform, subject to modification without our knowledge.

3. The loss of the ancient concept of truth as fixed, as we spiral into *who’s truth?* In print form, the Bible sits in our hands as a tangible witness with many centuries of lineage, translation, notation, and printing. Its physical

curb-stone (kûrb'stôñ') - noun - one of the stones or a range of stones forming a curb, as along a sidewalk or roadway. Historically, the curbstones were placed vertically along the edges of the roadbed, and the paving material was backfilled against the row of curbstones. The curbstones served ¹to hold the material in the roadbed, ²to prevent the scattering of the material along the edges, and ³to define the road itself from all the adjoining areas.

presence reminds us that the Word is something handed down, preserved, and stable. Electronic presentation invites constant change and version-shifting—even *auto-updates*. The danger is subtle but profound. If I open my phone and the wording of a verse has changed, what or whom do I trust? The Word of God risks becoming the *words of the moment*. Consider the following piece: *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away...* *Mark 13:31*. We are to trust fixed words, not shifting ones. *Hebrews 13:8 declares: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* *2 Timothy 3:16-17 reads: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful...* The underpinning of Biblical faith is that the text is reliable, authoritative, and stable—not subject to the tides of culture. When editors adjust wording to accommodate the latest sensibility, without transparent notice, we begin to drift from truth into preference, from Scripture into suggestion. Note the following examples:

Galatians 6:1-5: older editions of the NIV emphasized *restore him gently* and *carry each other’s burdens*—but critics argue later versions shift tone or wording around *burden-bearing* and *responsibility*.

Psalm 1:1: a change from *man* to *one* appears inclusive, but one commentator notes it also removes the singular metaphor of the godly man contrasted with the many sinners.

Numerous theological analyses note that the 2011 NIV changed renderings based more on a *contemporary English usage* or *gender-language policy* than on new manuscript discovery!

In short, far more than subject-verb agreement is at stake when we move our primary Bible reading to electronic screens and rely on continually updated translations. We risk sacrificing the conservation of grammatical precision, the transparency of translation changes, and the foundational concept of unchanging truth. The church must not simply *embrace* convenience at the expense of fidelity. Let us honor the Word of God (1) by preserving a fixed text we can trust, (2) by teaching the younger generation the value of a printed, bound Bible alongside apps, and (3) by asking tough questions when biblical versions change unannounced. Our faith and eternity depend more than on *what* we read. These depend on *whom* we read: the living, unchanging Christ, and the Word he gave to God’s people for all time.

Copyright © - 2025
Robert Wingfield Kirby III, D.Min.