

# Squeamish Translating

Evidence for a Bias Against Nudity in the NASB and NIV

By Matthew Neal

## Prologue

### My Reticence to Write This

Christianity and Naturism are seen by most Christians today as morally incompatible. Yet, I have proclaimed myself to be a [Naturist by Biblical Conviction](#). In other words, not only do I see them as morally compatible, I have found that my commitment to Biblical truth forces me to counter the lies of our culture (including Christian culture) by literally embracing naturism.

For many Christians today, that fact alone puts a bull's-eye on my forehead. Being a “target” for attack and condemnation is certainly not something I need to make worse.

But suggesting—as I will in this document—that the Bible has been translated into modern English in a way that communicates a *bias* against nudity might be like begging people to take more pot-shots at me. They might feel justified in claiming that I don't respect the Scriptures and that I'm just trying to “explain away” any negative reference to nudity; as if I were saying, *“I don't like that passage... I'll just claim that it's a bad translation.”*

I recognize that some might assume that... or want to make it appear that that's the case, but it is not.

### My View of Scripture

I have the utmost respect for the Scriptures. They are inspired by God and without error in the original documents. They are true and authoritative.

And it is precisely this commitment to the inspired text that drives me to write these articles.

The English translations are *not* “inspired” (none of them!). Only the original language text is inspired by God. Therefore, every translation must be assessed according to its accuracy to the true meaning of the original language text. Thorough study of the Bible must include an

examination of the original language words used to ensure that the process of translating the text into English neither obscures nor adds to the meaning intended by the original author communicating with his original audience.

### How I Discovered This Bias

When I first began to study the Bible's perspective on nudity, I searched the Scriptures for every place where nudity is mentioned or implied. My search was conducted primarily by finding the original Greek or Hebrew terms that reference nakedness, then examining every passage that uses those terms in multiple English translations.

To my surprise, it seemed that every time there was a passage that spoke of nakedness in a positive or neutral way, the modern translations rendered the passage in a way that would allow the reader to avoid imagining or thinking about nakedness. Conversely, whenever a passage criticized or condemned a negative expression of nakedness, the modern translations did not shrink at all from using the word "naked."

The pattern was consistent enough that I began to suspect a bias.

### Hats Off to the KJV!

I am not suggesting that *all* English translations are biased against nakedness. Where the NASB and the NIV were evidently squeamish about the N-words, the KJV was bold and accurate.

The real question is this: if the KJV translators were willing to use the word "naked" wherever the original authors of the Scriptures did, why weren't the NASB and NIV translators willing to do the same? If the KJV narratives describe contexts where nudity was possible (according to the original language text), what compelled the NASB and NIV translators to modify the meaning or add words that preclude that understanding?

### I Have to Write This

My commitment to Biblical accuracy compels me expose the evidence for this bias.

Some may dismiss the evidence as inconclusive or meaningless. Some will dismiss anything I say because I have dared to criticize the highly trained and skilled people who gave us God's Word in English. Some will declare that it is I who am unwilling to hear what the Scriptures are saying and that I am only attempting to explain away that which I don't like.

But, others will look honestly enough at the evidence to question their previous assumptions. They may find that things they've always thought the Bible taught aren't actually there after all. They may see—as I do—a squeamishness on the part of the translators that prevented them from translating the inspired text as accurately as they should have.

Either way, I write to promote the truth. If I take some shots in the process, so be it.

# Introduction

## My Choice in Scripture Translations

I was raised on the King James Version. Growing up, my father always preached from the KJV. As a child, it was the KJV that we memorized in Sunday School class.

I was never taught that the KJV was the *only* valid translation; my father correctly believed and taught that Scriptural authority is to be found in the original language texts rather than a translation into a modern language by fallible men. Consequently, he regularly read and considered the renderings of other translations as they became available.

I myself have embraced the [New American Standard Bible](#) (NASB) as my translation of choice. Like the KJV, it is intentionally translated to maintain a word-for-word alignment with the original Greek or Hebrew texts. This means that for most words I read in the English text, I can trace them back to the specific Greek or Hebrew word from which it was translated. This ability is very important to me in my effort to be a student of the Scriptures.

## My Approach to Biblical Study

I use the close connection to the Greek or Hebrew text as a springboard from which to dive into the original language words used for any passage that I'm studying. Using the amazing electronic tools available to us today, I can find the Greek/Hebrew word wherever it is used in the entire bible and use that to discern what the original term means ([blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) is a great online resource).

Often enough, the meaning of an original language term is slightly different than how we understand the English word used to translate it. When that is the case, we must lay aside any implications derived from the English which are not found in the Greek or Hebrew. Furthermore, we must expand our understanding to include any implications found in the original languages which did not survive the translation into English.

If you are brutally honest about doing this, it can be very disruptive to your current understanding of the Scriptures. You might find that things you've always believed aren't really scriptural at all. Or things you never would have found in the English are implied in the original texts... and that also will have a profound impact on how you understand God's Word.

Of course, this reality is unavoidable; it is simply the result of having to translate God’s Word into the languages that people speak. We have to recognize it, study through it to the best of our ability (not actually knowing the original language), and allow what we learn to inform our Scriptural interpretations and beliefs.

### The Challenge of Translating

I so appreciate the herculean efforts of those who have studied for years to gain the knowledge it took to translate the Bible into modern languages! Where would we all be if they had not done so?

But translating is never an exact science. The effort has surely been made to translate the original text as accurately as possible, but it is literally impossible to completely rid oneself of every pre-understanding or cultural perspective in order to get it right. The translators are human after all.

Consequently, we should not be surprised if—from time to time—we can discern a bias in the English translation that inadvertently hides a meaning that should be there in the English text or introduces a meaning that was not there in the source text. To acknowledge this possibility is not to disrespect the translators. To suggest that it has happened is not to discount all the high-quality work that has been done elsewhere in the text.

### Squeamish Translating

I already mentioned that I left the KJV behind when I transitioned to the NASB as my study version of preference. However, I still compare multiple versions—including the KJV—when I’m digging into something.

#### An Authoritative Statement on Translating

The [\*Forum for Bible Agencies International\*](#) has produced a document stating their [\*Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation\*](#).

All of the principles they present are excellent, but some of the principles that are especially worth noting for the purposes of this document (underlining mine):

1. To translate the Scriptures accurately, without loss, change, distortion or embellishment of the meaning of the original text. Accuracy in Bible translation is the faithful communication, as exactly as possible, of that meaning, determined according to sound principles of exegesis.

...

4. To represent faithfully the original historical and cultural context. *Historical facts and events should be expressed without distortion.* Due to differences of situation and culture, in some passages the receptor audience may need access to additional background information in order to adequately understand the message that the original author was seeking to communicate to the original audience.

5. To make every effort to ensure that *no political, ideological, social, cultural, or theological agenda is allowed to distort the translation*

“Squeamish Translating,” as I have defined it in this *Introduction*, is a violation of these principles, particularly those specific statements that I have underlined above.

Rather unexpectedly, I found my appreciation for the KJV deepened when I began studying the issue of nakedness in the Bible. The reason for this is that by comparing the KJV, NASB, NIV and other translations to the original language texts, I found that the KJV was the most likely to “tell it like it is” whenever nakedness was mentioned or implied. In the KJV, if the word was “naked,” in the Greek, it was “naked” in English. By contrast, the NASB and NIV seemed to shy away from using the “N-word.”

This tendency is one I call “*Squeamish Translating*”... and no, I’ve never heard anyone else describe it that way. Let me define it this way:

- ***Squeamish Translating*** of the Scriptures is the phenomenon where Scripture passages which mention or imply nudity are:
  - reworded to soften the words describing the nudity
  - given additional words that slightly change the meaning which obscures the idea that nakedness may be possible or implied.
  - translated accurately, but only when the nakedness is cast in a negative light.

I do not doubt the purity of motives of those who translated the Scriptures in a squeamish manner, but I am suggesting that there exists in our culture today a bias against *nudity*. It is perceived as wrong and sinful in any but a marital or medical context. I believe that bias has made its way into the modern translations.

The KJV translators, however, did not display that sort of squeamishness! For this reason, my appreciation of their work has grown.

### **I Will Show You What I Mean...**

In the remainder of this document, I will show you where I have found evidence of this squeamishness in the NASB and the NIV. At the same time, I’ll show you how the KJV translates the Greek text more literally. In all cases, the comparison will be made to the words in the source text, for every translation stands or falls based on its fidelity to the original language meaning. For the sake of keeping the series of articles manageable in quantity, I have limited my examples to New Testament passages.

None of the passages I review here will, by themselves, prove that there is any sort of bias against nudity. In each case, the translations provided are not without justification. But collectively, they betray a subtle prejudice against any nudity that is not presented in a

negative way. In each case, the translation is such that we may not have to create any sort of mental image that someone may literally be naked... and we don't have to read the N-word, even if that's the word used in the Greek or Hebrew.

I will first present the Scripture text in Greek, KJV, NASB, and NIV, then offer some observations or comments. The texts will not be altered in any way except to highlight the words of interest in a contrasting color. There will be no dispute about the textual data. My comments, on the other hand, will likely meet with some objection. I ask my readers to hear me out... and see if you discern a bias as well. And bear in mind... the bias you discern may be your own.

## Part 1 - Naked Disciples

### Peter was Naked...

The first example might be a familiar one... it comes from [John 21:7b](#). Here are the texts... the word in red is the Greek word *gymnos* ([G1131](#)) which means “naked.”

<a href="#">Greek</a>	οὖν Πέτρος ἀκούσας ὅτι ὁ κύριός ἐστιν τὸν ἐπενδύτην διεζώσατο ἦν γὰρ γυμνός καὶ ἔβαλεν ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν
<a href="#">KJV</a>	<i>Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt [his] fisher's coat [unto him], (for he was <b>naked</b>,) and did cast himself into the sea.</i>
<a href="#">NASB</a>	<i>So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was <b>stripped</b> for work), and threw himself into the sea.</i>
<a href="#">NIV</a>	<i>As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had <b>taken it off</b>) and jumped into the water.</i>

### Comments

There are several important things to note in this passage, but let's start with that which is easiest to see.

The simple reading of the various versions demonstrates quite clearly that the KJV uses the English word “naked” because that's the word found in the Greek text. However, in both the NASB and the NIV, different words are used. They do not require the reader to face the word “naked.” Instead, the wording is such that common usage might employ either phrase to describe someone who was not, in fact, completely naked.

Was Peter fully naked? Well, that's the word used in the Greek. Perhaps the word *gymnos* could describe someone who was not completely naked, but there's no other word in Greek to describe anyone who is any *more* naked than *gymnos*.

In any case, the Greek word used by the author is not in question. It would seem that the best approach to translating it would be to use the English word that most closely matches the root Greek word that God chose to use. That way, the reader can take in the words as God inspired them, studying the passage more closely if needed to discern its true meaning.



Yet, for some reason, the modern translations do not allow us to see it that way. I suggest that this is an example of *squeamish* translating.

Allow me to discuss a few additional thoughts in support of this claim.

### Was Peter Alone?

First of all, the fact that Peter was uncritically described in the text as *gymnos* means that we have no basis in this passage to criticize him ourselves. If we ask *why* he was *gymnos*, the text itself provides the answer; he was naked to do his work... he was fishing.

But Peter was not fishing alone. There were six other disciples that went with him and the text tells us the names of all but two of them (the “sons of Zebedee” were James and John). Could Peter have been the only one who was *gymnos*? I find that highly unlikely. If Peter was naked because he was fishing, surely those who shared his task also matched his “attire.”

Peter, James and John had all been professional fishermen before they met Christ. This fishing trip was not a casual outing with a can of worms and a hook on a string to pass the time; it was a return to their previous profession, complete with a fishing boat and nets. They worked all night long, intending to catch a boatload of fish to sell, earning some money.

Fishing with nets on a boat is a dirty, wet, and smelly activity. Clothing was valuable and had to be hand washed *every time* the laundry needed to be done. Taking off clothes to avoid soiling them was a very sensible strategy to keep clothing in wearable condition. Going naked on a boat, particularly while fishing, was most likely the standard practice at the time (see the ancient stone relief image below... the men in the boat are all naked).



I found the picture above in a Bible-History book in my church library. It is a 2nd or 3rd century stone relief showing three boats and their sailors battling a rough sea. Note that all of the sailors are completely nude. [Click the picture to see it full size.](#)

I don't believe that Peter was naked alone. I suspect that the only reason we were told that *he* was naked was because he took the time to grab his garment before jumping in the water to swim ashore. The narrative focuses on Peter and he was the only who acted, so he's the only one whose attire—or lack thereof—was mentioned.

### A Boat Full of Naked Disciples?

The logical path I have just trod is not difficult to traverse, nor is the conclusion at all unlikely. But if I am correct in that conclusion, it means that there were seven naked guys in the boat... and *all disciples of Jesus* at that!

That's not a mental movie clip that plays well in the modern Christian mind. Most people—including, perhaps, the translators—would simply say, “well, surely they weren't all *naked*...” The next thought, of course... *Peter probably wasn't really naked either*...

As it turns out, the translators had the opportunity to soften the blow—to “protect” us from having to think about a boat full of naked fishermen. So... Peter was “*stripped for work*” (NASB). Or even more palatable, Peter was just putting on the “outer garment” that he had “*taken... off*” (NIV). Now we don't even have to visualize Peter naked, either.

Is that squeamish translating? Maybe... it sure smells fishy to me (pardon the pun). But for sure, the words the NASB and NIV translators used are *different* than the natural meaning of the Greek word. I would prefer that they gave us the real word, then trusted us to seek God's enlightenment as to its true meaning.

### But There's More...

My study of this passage has revealed a couple of other oddities that bear examination. The first has to do with the garment that Peter grabbed before he jumped into the water.

The Greek word is ἐπενδύτην (*ependytēs* - [G1903](#)).

- This is the only place this word is used in the Bible.
- It is *not* the same word used in the NT to describe the tunic or robe typically worn in that day.
- The KJV translators acknowledged this by calling it a “fisher's coat,” but evidently this was something of a guess, since other translations do not render it that way.

- The precise type of garment Peter had is not known for sure. Extrabiblical sources mention the garment, but generally as something of an ornamental garment worn over other clothes (and it has no specific relation to fishing).
- Consequently, while it is probably accurate to call it an “outer garment” of some sort, it would be a mistake to conclude from that translation that it was just a robe.

These observations have more significance when we also look at the verb used to describe how Peter put on the garment.

The Greek word is διαζώννυμι (*diazōnnymi*- [G1241](#)).

This is one of the only two places this word is used in the Bible, the other being when Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. It is not the same word typically used for “girding” oneself, which is περιζώννυμι (*perizōnnymi* - [G4024](#)).

I will address this word more fully in Part 2, but for now, suffice it to observe that not only was the garment Peter put on an unusual garment, the word used to describe *how* he put it on is unusual. This means that the precise definitions of *diazōnnymi* is impossible to determine from its contextual usage alone.

### Summary

My points here are these:

- The original text describes Peter as *gymnos*, “naked.”
- Simple reason concludes that he was probably not the only one.
- There is no compelling textual or historical reason to avoid the the word “naked” in the modern translations.
- Our knowledge of the garment Peter had and how he put it on is very minimal, so even this provides no justification for altering the English rendering of the Greek word, *gymnos*.

This may be evidence of an intentional avoidance of the word “naked” in a Scripture text where the nakedness was normal, natural, and not condemned.

## Part 2 - An Unclothed Savior

### Jesus Took His Clothes Off

The next passage is a familiar story: Jesus washes His disciples' feet. It comes from [John 13:4-5](#). Here is exactly what the texts say. The word in green is the Greek word, *himatia* (G2440) which refers to Jesus' garments. The words in red are two forms of the same Greek verb, *diazōnnyμι* (G1241), which tells us how Jesus "put on" the towel which He used to dry the disciples' feet.

<a href="#">Greek</a>	[Ἰησοῦς]... ἐγείρεται ἐκ τοῦ δείπνου καὶ τίθησιν τὰ ἱμάτια καὶ λαβὼν λέντιον διέζωσεν ἑαυτόν. εἶτα βάλλει ὕδωρ εἰς τὸν νιπτῆρα καὶ ἤρξατο νίπτειν τοὺς πόδας τῶν μαθητῶν καὶ ἐκμάσσειν τῷ λεντίῳ ᾧ ἦν διεζωσμένος
<a href="#">KJV</a>	He [Jesus] riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.
<a href="#">NASB</a>	[Jesus]... got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.
<a href="#">NIV</a>	...so he [Jesus] got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

### Comments

The questions that I would like to raise with this passage are these:

1. How much clothing did Jesus take off?
2. How did Jesus wear the towel?

Interestingly, if we look at the NIV, we get a very different answer than the other two English translations. The NIV tells us that Jesus only took off His outer clothing, and the towel was worn specifically "around His waist."

The other two translations are in agreement that it was His “garments” and that He used the towel to “gird” Himself. Without much question the KJV and NASB are more faithful to the Greek, but even there, I believe there are important things to look at as we consider our understanding of the passage.

### Was It All His Clothes, or Just His Outer Garments?

The Greek word used for “garments” is actually the plural form of the word used for the outer garment common at the time. I assume that this is the reason that the NIV translators rendered it “outer” clothing. However, a wider review of the scriptural usage of that term in plural shows conclusively that the term when used in plural can (and may always) refer to the outer garment as well as the tunic worn beneath it.

- A comparison of the four gospels’ description of Jesus at the cross shows that one of the writers ([John, 19:23](#)) tells us that the soldiers stripped Jesus of both His outer garment and His tunic (*chiton* [G5509](#)). But in all four gospels ([Matthew 27:25](#), [Mark 15:24](#), [Luke 23:34](#), [John 19:24](#)), we are told that that they took His *himatia* - the same word used to describe what Jesus took off to wash the disciples’ feet.
- Since we know from history that the Romans crucified criminals naked ([How Did Jesus Die?](#)), it can be understood that the use of the “outer garment” in plural can refer to all the clothing being worn.

This does not prove that Jesus stripped naked when He washed the disciples’ feet, but it certainly shows that it is a possibility, given the Greek word used. The English rendering by both the KJV and NASB correctly allows this understanding while the NIV clearly leads us away from it. This may be evidence of some squeamishness on the part of the NIV translators.

### Was the Towel Around Jesus’ Waist?

This question requires a more detailed analysis to answer.

The English word, “gird”—used by both the KJV and the NASB—leaves us with the impression that Jesus wrapped the towel around His waist. However, upon further examination of the Greek word used in this passage, there is evidence that calls that understanding into question.

I'd like to call your attention to three different Greek terms which refer to putting on clothing.

1. ζώννυμι (*zōnnymi* - [G2224](#))
2. περιζώννυμι (*perizōnnymi* - [G4024](#))
3. διαζώννυμι (*diazōnnymi*- [G1241](#))

All three terms are related... The first term, *zōnnymi*, is the root word upon which the other two words are based, each including a prefix.

When they appear in the NT text, all three words are translated the same way (“gird”) by both the KJV and the NASB. But if all three words really mean the same thing, we have to wonder why they are different in the Greek. We should instead expect that the root word means one thing, and the added prefix modifies the root meaning in some way.

Let's look at the words one at a time.

#1 - *Zōnnymi* is only found in one verse in the NT, [John 21:18](#), where Jesus tells Peter that a time is coming when others will “dress” (NIV) or “gird” (NASB/KJV) him. From Jesus' words to Peter, there's nothing to indicate in what manner the “girding” or “dressing” would be done. Notably, the NIV does *not* use the same word as the other translations, but rather selects a neutral word that simply denotes the act of putting on clothes.

- Because it is a root word and...
- There is no indication in its NT usage as to how one is dressing...
- I suggest that *zōnnymi* does *not* communicate any specific *manner* of dress. This means that the English word “gird”—which denotes the wrapping of clothing *around* a person—may actually communicate *more* than the Greek word actually means.

#2 - Of the three words, *Perizōnnymi* is the most commonly found in the Greek NT. Of the 7 times the word appears, three times the specific location of the clothing is mentioned. Two mention the loins ([Luke 12:35](#) & [Eph. 6:4](#)) while one indicates that the wrapping happens around the chest ([Rev. 1:13](#) - [NIV](#) and [NASB](#)). More precisely, however, the sash is around the “paps” ([KJV](#)) which actually refers to the nipples, albeit those of a man.

- The prefix is *peri-*, and it is a prefix which we are familiar with in English. It means “around” and we see it with that meaning in the word “*perimeter*.”

- The contextual usage of the word in the Scriptures point to a meaning that indicates the wrapping of a garment *around* a person’s body.
- I suggest that of the three terms, *perizōnnyimi* has the best evidence that it really means “gird” as we think about it in English.

#3 - Finally, διαζώννυμι appears in only two verses in the NT. One instance ([John 21:7](#))—already noted in Part 1—describes the manner in which Peter put on the his *ependytēs*. The other instance is the one we are looking at now.

- The prefix is *dia-*, and it is also a prefix which we are familiar with in English. It means “through” and we see it with that meaning in the word “*diameter*.”
- Both verses in which this word appears in the NT offer little or no indication as to *how* a garment is put on since both verses describe the wearing of an uncommon garment.
- Because the prefix *dia-* means something very different than the prefix *peri-* we should expect that *diazōnnyimi* describes a *different* manner of dressing oneself as compared to *perizōnnyimi*.
- Based on the meaning of the prefix, I suggest that the we should consider this Greek word as describing the act of putting on clothing by passing a body part *through* an opening in the garment, much like we put on a sweater or T-shirt today.

### But Does it Fit?

If the etymology of the word *diazōnnyimi* leads us to consider a different manner of dressing oneself than “wrapping” with a garment, can we find that it makes sense with the context?

Looking first at Peters dressing himself with the *ependytēs*, we can’t really tell if he passed his head “through” the garment simply because we don’t know much about that type of garment. Still, it is certainly *possible* that it is a garment with a hole for the head; therefore, we cannot rule out this understanding of *diazōnnyimi* idea based on its usage in [John 21:7](#).

Looking at Jesus and his towel, let’s start with this question: how is a towel generally worn? Well, many times we take a towel and wrap it “around” us. But if that’s what Christ did, why didn’t the author of the text use *perizōnnyimi* (*peri-* = “around”) instead of *diazōnnyimi*? Couldn’t it be that Jesus didn’t actually wrap the towel “around” Himself?

Wrapping a towel around the body is not the only way that a towel may be worn; it also may be draped across the shoulder, or behind the neck and across both shoulders. We’ve all done

this ourselves... if you grab a towel by its ends to flip it over your head, you would literally be creating a loop of the towel **through** (*dia-*) which you would pass your head. If this is what Jesus did, it would explain why *diazōnnyimi* is used instead of *perizōnnyimi*.

In other words, judging from the Greek text, it is conceivable—even *probable*—that Jesus did *not* wear the towel around his waist, but rather draped on His neck/shoulders.

### Where Would You Keep a Towel for Drying Feet?

Thinking about it further, if you intend to wash someone’s feet and you want to keep a towel handy *for the purpose of drying those feet*, you would not wrap that towel around your waist... rather, you would drape it over your neck so that it is literally hanging inches from the feet you were washing.

I remember having a Sunday School teacher tell this story when I was a kid. She suggested that it “must have been a very long towel.” Why? Well, because a short towel would not have been long enough to keep Jesus “girded” when He used it to dry His disciples’ feet. But that’s just an assumption about the story that is simply not found in the text.

### The Towel Wasn’t Around His Waist.

The Greek term used to describe how Jesus wore the towel was *not* the Greek word that describes “wrapping” or “girding.” The word used in this passage, *diazōnnyimi*, actually supports the idea that the towel was worn across the shoulders instead of around the waist. Simple reason and practicality says that the best place to “wear” that towel is across the shoulders.

I don’t believe Jesus wore the towel around His waist at all.

### In Review...

I’ve examined two questions in reference to [John 13:4-5](#).

1. Did Jesus take off all of His clothes to wash the disciples’ feet?
2. Did Jesus wear the towel around His waist?

Neither of these questions can be conclusively answered from the Greek text. However, the textual evidence actually points to a “yes” for question #1, and a “no” for question #2.



However, if we answer the questions that way, it leaves the story wide open for us to imagine the scene with Jesus completely naked, save a towel across His shoulders... and the thought of a voluntarily naked Savior is not one that we are very willing to entertain today.

What do we find in the English translations, though? NASB and KJV both do well with Question #1, but with the use of the word “gird,” they tend to lead us away from the answer “no” on Question #2.

The NIV is another story altogether. On both questions, we are clearly led *away* from the answers that I have suggested are the most accurate.

### Was Jesus Actually Naked While Washing the Disciples’ Feet?

There is evidence that, in ancient times, those who did manual labor as slaves/servants often performed their work unclothed. If that is true, then being unclothed was literally one of the signs of servant status. Within such a cultural context, Jesus’ act of stripping naked would have very poignantly communicated His intent to take the role of a servant before His disciples.

While the Scriptural text does not lead us to a firm conclusion that Jesus was naked, it absolutely *does not* contradict the idea. Instead, it actually leans *towards* it.

### Squeamish Translating?

The words we find in the English translations definitely leads us *away* from the understanding that Jesus may have been naked before His disciples. This is most clearly in evidence in the NIV’s rendering. There simply is no textual reason to slant the English rendering that way.

Is this a reflection of our cultural squeamishness about nakedness?

*Perhaps it is.* One passage cannot make that case by itself. However, as we continue to examine other examples, the combined weight of evidence from several different passages may make the case more compelling than one passage can.

## Part 3 - Writing Scripture Naked

The Bible does mention nakedness at times when it is not condemned or criticized. In such passages, I have observed that we are typically shielded from the real meaning of the original text in modern translations. This allows us (or even *leads* us) to form conclusions that are in direct opposition to the meaning of the inspired text.

Such is the case in this next passage that I want to highlight.

### The Apostle Paul was *Naked* While Writing to the Church at Corinth.

The passage in [1 Cor. 4:11](#) is not one that we hear about much. Paul writes these words almost in passing as he details to the Corinthians the hardships that he and his companions have suffered in their service to Christ.

Here is exactly what the texts say. The word in red is the Greek word, *gymnēteuō* ([G1130](#)) which is based on the Greek word, *gymnos* (“naked” [G1131](#)).

<a href="#">Greek</a>	ἄχρι τῆς ἄρτι ὥρας καὶ πεινῶμεν καὶ διψῶμεν καὶ γυμνητεύομεν, καὶ κολαφιζόμεθα καὶ ἀστατοῦμεν
<a href="#">KJV</a>	<i>Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are <b>naked</b>, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace;</i>
<a href="#">NASB</a>	<i>To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are <b>poorly clothed</b>, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;</i>
<a href="#">NIV</a>	<i>To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are <b>in rags</b>, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.</i>

### Comments

The disparity between the various translations is easy to see. The Greek word is a derivative of the word *gymnos* which we have already noted means “naked.”

The KJV faithfully and accurately translates it according to the real meaning of the Greek word.

However, I find no justification for the other two translations. The meaning of the English translation is actually the *opposite* of the Greek word’s meaning:

- In the Greek, Paul said, “*we are naked.*”
- NASB says, “*we are ... clothed*”
- NIV says, “*we are in rags.*”

In both translations, a very different mental picture is painted than Paul (and God!) intended for us to have!

### Even If They Weren't Naked...

Were Paul and his companion(s) literally naked as he penned these words? That's certainly reasonable to consider. But even if they were *not* naked, do we really need the translators to insulate us from *hyperbole* for fear that we just might take Paul's words at face value?

Evidently, the translators of the KJV felt no such need to modify Paul's writing. If they were willing to translate Paul's words exactly as they were written, why are the NASB and NIV translators evidently unwilling to do so?

Maybe Paul was *not* actually naked as he wrote, but at the same time, it's entirely possible that he really *was* naked! Either way, that *IS* what Paul really *said* in the Greek. That's what the English rendering *should* say!

Could they have literally been naked? *Yes*. There is no reason in the inspired text to assume otherwise.

Consider the situation they were in: they were being persecuted! Their persecutors were not concerned at all for their “dignity” nor did they care for their welfare. Paul and the others were being mistreated and clothing was an item of value that could have been—and evidently *was*—taken from them. The idea that they may have been genuinely naked certainly is not contrary to the context or the plain meaning of Paul's words.

### We Don't Need a Censor.

Even if Paul was not completely naked, he chose a word to describe himself that way on purpose. It is not the place of translators to “filter” the text to make it more palatable to the contemporary mind.

We are followers of Christ. We are students of the Bible. *Let us read the Word as God inspired it!*

To me, this is one of the clearest examples of squeamish translating that I have run across. It is made all the more evident by the fact that the KJV translators did *not* shrink from translating Paul's words directly and accurately. For some reason the NASB and NIV translators intentionally avoided the word "naked" and translated it in a way that actually contradicts the inspired text.

## Part 4 - Unclothed Servants

Sometimes it is not the Greek word *gymnos* (“naked” [G1131](#)) itself that is mistranslated, but a different word or phrase describes a context where nudity might have been present. In such cases, once again, I find that words or phrases have been chosen to mask or hide that possibility. Rather than translate the text as it appears in the Greek, we are given a modified translation that leads us to a mental image that does *not* include nudity.

If it were just a matter of my lack of knowledge of the Greek language, then this could be dismissed as only an unlearned man (me) spouting his linguistic ignorance. But the fact is that the KJV is *not* squeamish about the text and translates the Greek exactly as it is in the original text. If I am mistaken, then the KJV translators must be mistaken also.

### Servants Coming In from the Field.

Jesus is giving a variety of instructions for life in Luke 17. I want to draw our attention to [Luke 17:7-8](#) where Jesus is teaching about faithful service to our Master. Verse 7 sets up the scenario, but it is verse 8 that I want to focus upon. Rather than quote verse 7 four times, I’m going to quote it once from the KJV, then examine the different renderings in the other translations in verse 8 only.

*But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, “Go and sit down to meat?” - [Luke 17:7](#) (KJV)*

This rhetorical question is clearly meant to indicate that none would say this to their servant. Jesus’ next words describe how his listeners—in the role of the master—would respond instead:

<a href="#">Greek</a>	ἀλλ’ οὐχὶ ἐρεῖ αὐτῷ Ἐτοίμασον τί δειπνήσω καὶ περιζωσάμενος διακόνει μοι ἕως φάγω καὶ πίω καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα φάγεσαι καὶ πίεσαι σύ
<a href="#">KJV</a>	<i>And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?;</i>
<a href="#">NASB</a>	<i>“But will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and [properly] clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink?’”</i>

NIV

“Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, **get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink?**’”

## Comments

As you can see from the Greek text above, Luke used the word *perizōnnyimi* for the command a Master would give to his servant. As we saw in Part 2 of this document, this word is best translated “gird” in English; *zōnnyimi* indicates dressing oneself, and *peri-* means “around.”

- **KJV** – The KJV translates the word correctly. But consider the mental picture created by this rendering...
  - If the master needed to tell his servant to gird himself, it implies that a servant has been plowing or tending animals unclothed.
  - When his duties now required handling the master’s food, he was expected—and ordered—to get dressed.
- **NASB** – The NASB *almost* translates the word adequately, but they actually added a word to change the meaning.
  - The word “properly” does not appear in the Greek text. To their credit, the translators acknowledge that fact by rendering that word in italics in printed or online versions of the text (I’ve placed it in brackets for the same reason).
  - If the word “properly” were removed from this translation, then the implication would be essentially the same as found in the KJV, that is, that the servants were *not* clothed out in the field.
  - The addition of the word “properly” specifically *denies* that implication and leads us to a mental image that matches our *own cultural experience*... we today have one set of clothes for working with dirt and animals, and a different set of clothes for serving meals.
- **NIV** – The NIV doesn’t even come close to an accurate rendering of the passage.
  - The Greek word *perizōnnyimi* is a word about getting dressed. This is indisputable. Yet the translators instead rendered the word in a very general sense of “getting ready.”
  - This leaves us with absolutely no mental image that the servant might have been unclothed and leads us to think of all sorts of *other* ways we might “get ready” for the task of serving a meal.

- I'm not saying that other preparations would not have been required in this scenario; I'm just saying that this is *not* a faithful rendering of the original text! Isn't that the first priority of translators?

The KJV translators exhibit no squeamishness at all. The other two, however, seem to very intentionally render the passage so that we can imagine the scene as we would experience it today... *with no nudity*.

### Did Servants in the Field Really Work Naked?

Clearly, the Greek text itself—and the KJV's rendering—imply (or at least allow) that the workers were unclothed while working in the field. But is that culturally accurate? Does the Bible ever imply that any other time?

- **Cultural Practice of Working Nude**
  - Proving a cultural practice is pretty difficult, especially when the practice is so common and unremarkable that it never bears mentioning in historical accounts written at that time. I believe that is the case here, but I cannot prove it.
  - Some ancient art displays workers in the nude, but not much art focused on the common people. Such evidence is weak, however, and only shows that it is possible or likely.
  - Those that deny that workers worked nude have only historical silence to build their case upon, which is weaker yet.
  - Consequently, I will not try to “make the case” here.
- **Scriptural Evidence of Working Nude**
  - I can point to three or four passages in the New Testament that reflect the likelihood that workers with dirt and animals worked in the nude. The most logical reason for doing so would have been to keep the few garments they had from becoming soiled and smelly.
    1. As I already addressed in Part 1 of this document, [John 21:7](#) strongly suggests that fishermen worked nude. Surely Peter was not the only naked fisherman in the boat.
    2. **“And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment.”** [Mark 13:16](#) (KJV) confirms that, in an emergency, one of the things a person working in the field would wish to return to the

house for would be a garment (the Greek is *himation* which could refer to a garment {[KJV](#)} or the coat {[NASB](#)}).

3. ***“Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed [is] he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.”*** [Rev 16:15](#) (KJV). This passage is about Jesus’ return and our need to be ready for it.
  - This instruction to be watchful and “keep our garments” makes no sense if people were never anywhere without their garments. The implication is that there are tasks performed naked, with no clothing nearby.
  - This is not a command to stay clothed while working, it is a warning to keep clothes close at hand rather than leaving them back at the house (this is in agreement with the implication of [Mark 13:16](#) made in the point above).
  - Notably, none of the three English translations I’m reviewing were “squeamish” about translating *gymnos* as “naked” in this passage. I submit to you that this is because the nakedness *seems* to be associated with shame (I believe it this not the shame of *nakedness*, but of *un-readiness*. Another article would be needed to demonstrate that).
4. ***“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away...’”*** [John 20:15](#) (NASB) is a resurrection appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. It is a mystery why she mistook Jesus for a gardener. However, the most reasonable explanation is that Jesus was “dressed” like a gardener at the moment.
  - Unless God supernaturally created garments for Jesus at His resurrection, He came out of the tomb naked.
    - We know that Jesus’ garments were taken from Him at the cross ([John 19:23-24](#)).
    - We know that Jesus left all of the grave clothes in the tomb ([John 20:6-7](#)).



- If Jesus had been given supernatural clothing by God at His resurrection, they most assuredly would *not* have looked like “gardener’s” clothing... worn and soiled. Instead, they would have been fresh and clean!
- This surprising event—if we really think it through—leads us to conclusion that gardeners actually *did* work naked. This is the *only* explanation which makes any sense of Mary’s failure to identify Jesus.



While not conclusive, there certainly is both cultural and biblical evidence that support the idea that servants worked in the fields without clothing. This means that the rendering of Scripture texts in ways that obscure that fact—or indicate that it was *not* the case—is inaccurate.

(The picture above-right was painted by [Agnolo Bronzino](#) in 1561. While it does not portray Christ as completely naked, it’s clear that the artist knew that He had left His grave clothes behind in the tomb. [Click the picture to see it full size.](#))

### Squeamish Translating?

Why would the NASB and NIV translators be reticent to render [Luke 17:8](#) as the [KJV translators did](#)? Could it be that they were uneasy with the mental image suggested by the Greek text?

I fear that it is.

There are a variety of passages where non-sexual, practical, or incidental nudity are evident (or possible) in the inspired Greek text. Yet, in each case, they are rendered to hide the idea of any nudity that is not shameful, unwarranted, or condemned.

Once again, no one passage is evidence enough of a bias against nakedness on the part of the translators, but there is a pattern here. Collectively, they betray that the bias exists.

## Part 5 - Speaking of Genitals

### “Uncomely” Body Parts...

The next example doesn't mention nakedness at all, but it does reference the genitals. Here, the words selected to translate the KJV seem to be very accurate to the original Greek text. However, the newer translations render the text differently, using words that—in my opinion—betray a bias against the genitals being seen. I see no evidence of that sort of squeamishness in the Greek, nor in the KJV.

The text is [1 Cor. 12:23-24a](#) and the context is Paul's instructions to the Corinthian believers about diversity in the “body” of Christ, the church. His illustration using the physical human body declares that there are different roles performed by different body parts, yet all are important and all are needed. In the same way, every believer is a part of the body of Christ, and every one is important and needed.

Here is the text as it appears in the Scriptures... the orange word is the Greek word, *aschēmōn* ([G809](#)). The red words are both derivatives of *eschēmōn* ([G2158](#)).

<a href="#">Greek</a>	<i>23 και ἃ δοκοῦμεν ἀτιμότερα εἶναι τοῦ σώματος τούτοις τιμὴν περισσοτέραν περιτίθεμεν και τὰ ἀσχήμονα ἡμῶν εὐσχημοσύνην περισσοτέραν ἔχει 24 τὰ δὲ εὐσχήμονα ἡμῶν οὐ χρειάν ἔχει ἀλλ' ...</i>
<a href="#">KJV</a>	<i>23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. 24 For our comely parts have no need...</i>
<a href="#">NASB</a>	<i>23 and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, 24 whereas our more presentable members have no need of it...</i>
<a href="#">NIV</a>	<i>23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment.</i>

### Comments

- *This passage is not primarily about human body parts...*

To start with, it's important to note that Paul's discussion of the body parts is really for the purpose drawing a parallel to the Body of Christ, the church; our view of and response to different body parts and their functions correspond to how we view and respond to different people and their roles in the church. This is an important point to make because it means that however we interpret the physical body parts, we must be able to apply it to people within the body of Christ, or else our interpretation of the physical references will be suspect.

In other words, if we misunderstand Paul's statements about the human body, we will not correctly understand Paul's teaching about the church. And if we cannot discern an application that makes sense in the Body of Christ, then it should alert us that our perception of Paul's words about the physical body is askew.

- ***Paul is talking about the genitals...***

Paul does not actually name the "less honorable" or "uncomely" body parts. However, my take from digging in to the Greek and reading the KJV is that Paul is referencing the genitals. Also, as I read the NASB and NIV, I surmise that they both have reached the same conclusion. Consequently, I'm going to take this for granted for the sake of this article, even though some people may suggest alternative meanings.

- ***The Greek words used...***

We need to examine the Greek words here to start with. I see no dispute over the words in verse 23a translated "honorable," as all the versions agree. But in verses 23b-24a, there are two other words of interest.

- *aschēmōn*. (a - schemon) [G809](#)
- *euschēmōn*. (eu - schemon) [G2158](#)
- The words are the same except for the prefix.
  - "schemon" ([G4976](#)) has to do with form, structure, or design; we get the English words "scheme," "schema," and "schematic" from it.
  - "a-" is a negative prefix
  - "eu-" is a prefix that means "good."
- Because of the prefixes used, these two words have essentially opposite meanings:
  - *aschēmōn* is "bad form."
  - *euschēmōn* is "good form."

- Within this specific context, it seems that the KJV's rendering of "uncomely" and "comely" is very appropriate, since it is only by the external visual appraisal of human body parts by which we might assess some to be of "good" design and others of a negative or "bad" design.
- The other two translations usage of "presentable" seems also to confirm a consensus that Paul is really talking about the external visible form of the body parts.

- ***What Paul means...***

Now, if I consider the passage in the attempt to understand Paul's references to these body parts, here's what I believe it means:

- (vs. 23a) Body parts that we might be tempted to look down upon (dishonor), we instead give great honor to because of their role in our lives.
  - Our sexual virility is housed in our genitals, therefore, they are very important to us. Consider how we view them today:
    - Think how protective men are of "the family jewels."
    - We even refer to a man's genitals as his "manhood."
- (vs 23b-24a) There are body parts that are not that "lovely," yet because of the role they play, we pay special attention to them.
  - Human genitals are not very pretty... male or female, but this is not the reality that determines their value to us.
  - My wife's vulva is not visually "attractive" in reference to objective beauty. Yet, because of its role in our sexual relationship, I am very attracted to it and I am delighted to see it (it has more abundant "comeliness").
  - My penis is nothing special to look at. Penises are not pretty. But to my wife, it's another matter altogether. She's attracted to it for reasons completely other than how it looks.
  - This exactly matches Paul's teaching about certain body parts and how we respond to them.
- ***To apply this understanding to the Body of Christ, Paul is saying that there are people in the church that do not necessarily attract the attention and praise of the rest of the church for their obvious gifting and outward ministry involvement, but who perform functions and serve in ways that***

*are indispensable to the health of the body. Consequently, they are honored and appreciated for very different reasons. This is (or should be!) true in the church.*

- Are Genitals really “unpresentable”?

When we look at the rendering of *aschēmōn* in the NASB or the NIV, we read the words “less presentable” or “unpresentable.” But is this a good rendering?

The KJV renders it “uncomely” which implies (in English) that the passage only speaks of how visually appealing the body parts are. However, the English word “unpresentable” adds the idea that this part is something that *should be hidden*. “Presentable” things we readily put on display; *un-presentable* things we hide away so no one sees them... we don’t even publicly acknowledge their presence.

I submit to you that this is *not* implicit in the Greek word *aschēmōn*.

In other words, I sense that the words “presentable” or “unpresentable” represent—in some measure—a *hostility* towards nakedness in general, and the genitals in particular. These words introduce a concept of *response* to the genitals that is *not* conveyed by the Greek text itself.

- What Paul *doesn’t* mean...

Some may disagree with my assertion that “presentable” and “unpresentable” are not the meaning in the Greek, and not intended by Paul. The real test, however, is in determining if the NASB or NIV’s renderings actually fit with what Paul was trying to communicate about the Body of Christ.

*If Paul were trying to say that there are body parts that are rightly hidden and unfit to be seen, can we also conclude that there are people in the church that are rightly hidden from view? Can it be that their presence in the body should be concealed and their function within the church never publicly acknowledged?*

That would be ludicrous to suggest. But is there any *palatable* way to apply the notion of “unpresentable” members of Christ’s church?

I don’t think there is.

Correctly understood, Paul is actually saying something very positive about the genitals... and—by application—the people in the church whose role and function do not naturally attract attention. Paul would rather that we publicly acknowledge and thank those in the body of Christ who serve in important yet un-celebrated roles. He absolutely is not telling us to hide them.

- Is *ugly* “unpresentable”?

Some might suggest that the difference between “uncomely” and “unpresentable” is not important... that both indicate that there is a need to keep that body part covered.

But if a body part is *ugly*—that is, if it is “uncomely”—does that really mean it should be considered “unpresentable”? Should unattractive physical attributes be hidden from view?

What if a child is born with a cleft palate? Or a man has a birthmark on his face? What about the sags, wrinkles, veins, and moles on the faces, arms, and hands of the aged?

The Academic Dean of the Bible College that I attended had a deep red birthmark that covered the left side of his face (middle right). Such a mark is certainly not pretty... but would anyone suggest that he should have worn a mask to hide the deformity as the “phantom” did in *Phantom of the Opera* (lower right)?

The Academic Dean was a great man and he was highly honored by the school. He never made any effort to cover the birthmarks on his face. We all accepted and honored him exactly as he looked. His value as a man and as a leader had nothing at all to do with the fact that he had an ugly mark on his face.

*Ugly Does Not Equal “Unpresentable.”*

The Apostle Paul does acknowledge that some body parts are not as pretty as others. But the notion that some body parts must be *hidden* because they are “unpresentable” is foreign to



Paul's teaching. That is *not* what he meant and therefore it cannot be how we should understand it.

Without question, this passage should not have been translated that way by the NASB and NIV translators. The use of the words "presentable" and "unpresentable" is in direct conflict with Paul's teaching about the Body of Christ in [1 Cor. 12](#).

### Squeamishness... (and Subtle Hostility)

By translating *aschēmōn* as "less/un-presentable" and *euschēmōn* as "presentable" (or "with special modesty"?), I believe that the NASB and the NIV betray two elements of bias against the human body:

- There is an assumption that certain body parts must be covered at all times. There is a reticence to even *talk about* the human form unless there is an implication that it really should not be seen fully naked.
- There is a bias particularly *against* the genitals (What other body parts might be considered "unpresentable"? What part of the human anatomy must be hidden?).

*Does the Greek text really justify even a small measure of hostility towards any body part?*

*Does Paul's teaching here justify denigrating any member of the Body of Christ?*

No body part is "unpresentable," and neither is any Christian.

### The Price of Protecting the Bias...

One of the tragic consequences of the NASB and NIV rendering of this passage is the implication that there are some people in the church that are best hidden. The squeamishness about the human body has resulted in a translation that introduces a foreign concept into the Scriptures, leading to a false application of that Scripture.

In truth, I have never heard anyone expound the application that I suggested above... that some people should be "hidden" in the church. But how else can we make application of this passage to the Body of Christ when we say that certain physical body parts are "unpresentable" and must be hidden?

*It is as if they sacrificed the meaning that Paul intended in order to insert an antagonism towards human genitals... making the passage teach something that is actually foreign to Greek text.*

As I said at the beginning of this *Comment* section, Paul's intent is not to teach about the human body or genitals; he's teaching about the *church*. This body-part analogy is core to what Paul is trying to teach... we can't just ignore the implications of our understanding of the physical when applying the truth to the ecclesiastical. If our understanding of first element of the analogy is incorrect, it will lead to a false application to the second element. The "squeamish" rendering leads to that false application... therefore, *it must be incorrect*.

Thankfully (once again), the KJV demonstrates both an accurate rendering of the Greek, and a willingness for us to read it in English precisely (or as precisely as possible...) as it was given by God in the Greek.



# Summary

## Do You See What I See?

So... have the translators of the NASB and the NIV been squeamish when it comes to the word “naked”... or the *concept* of nakedness?

As I’ve said along the way, no one passage can “prove” that such a bias really was affecting the translating work. However, The cumulative impact of multiple passages betrays its presence.

Some may well discount every example that I’ve given, finding reasonable justification for the translations as rendered in each case. To be sure, none of the examples that I’ve given are completely and utterly unreasonable.

For the one who believes that nakedness really is morally offensive to God, there would be little or no motivation to find fault with the passages as they are translated by the NASB and NIV.

By the same token, however, those of us who believe that nakedness is *not* morally offensive to God will be motivated to look more critically at the texts to see if there really might be a bias at play.

But regardless of which side of the issue we each start on, our deepest concern should be that our English translation accurately renders the *meaning* found in the original text. I hope that all of my readers (on either side) will place that priority above their current or preferred perspective.

## A Review of the Evidence

In the table that follows, I give a summary of each of the five passages I’ve presented as evidence of squeamishness about nudity in the new translations. For each passage, I’ve given the translations one of four “grades” reflecting their fidelity to the original Greek text. Here’s what I mean by the four words I used:

- **Transparent** - There is no evidence of any squeamishness towards nudity; the Greek text is translated very directly with no attempt to hide the possibility that literal nakedness was possible.

- **Unclear** - The translation is reasonable and may not indicate any squeamishness, but the English words chosen are not generally associated with nudity and the plain reading would not produce a mental picture that includes nudity for most people today.
- **Obscured** - The English translation is such that would definitely *preclude* the formation of a mental picture that included nudity. Squeamishness is strongly suspected.
- **Misleading** - Words and/or ideas not found at all in the original Greek text have been added to the English translation, resulting in a meaning that is actually in conflict with what the author wrote. In these cases, the squeamishness about human nudity led to an intentional alteration of the inspired text.

Passage	Synopsis	KJV	NASB	NIV
<a href="#">John 21:7b</a>	Peter fishing naked	<b>Transparent</b>	<b>Unclear</b>	<b>Obscured</b>
<a href="#">John 13:4-5</a>	Jesus washing feet	<b>Unclear</b>	<b>Unclear</b>	<b>Misleading</b>
<a href="#">1 Cor. 4:11</a>	Writing Scripture naked	<b>Transparent</b>	<b>Obscured</b>	<b>Misleading</b>
<a href="#">Luke 17:7-8</a>	Servants coming in from the field	<b>Transparent</b>	<b>Misleading</b>	<b>Obscured</b>
<a href="#">1 Cor. 12:23-24a</a>	Referring to the Genitals	<b>Transparent</b>	<b>Misleading</b>	<b>Misleading</b>

Some may disagree with the severity of the squeamishness that I have assessed on the NASB and the NIV in these passages. But there is no denying the trend that is in evidence here.

### Additional Evidence

In addition to the data above, a simple search for the word “naked” or “nakedness” in the English translations also gives evidence that the “N-word” is taboo to some extent in the NASB and NIV.

Instances of “naked” or “nakedness in the English New Testament:

- [KJV](#) - 18 times.
- [NASB](#) - 13 times.
- [NIV](#) - 9 times.

The trend is obvious. A closer examination of the specific passages will reveal that where the nakedness was “bad,” the NASB and NIV did not hesitate to translate the Greek word *gymnos* by its English equivalent, “naked.” But if the incidence of nakedness was not associated with

a negative context, different English words were used, several of which I have highlighted in this document.

Many who read the New Testament in modern translations claim that the Bible always speaks of nakedness in a negative way. However, the NIV used the N-words only half as many times as the KJV. If my analysis is correct, that means that for all the times that *gymnos* or a related word appears in the Greek but *not* in the NIV, the NIV translators did not consider the context *negative enough* to use the English word, “naked”!

### Negative Nakedness

To demonstrate how the NIV does not shrink away from the “N-word” when the context is negative, let me quote from [Rev. 3:17-18](#)...

*“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.”* (NIV)

A passage like this gives apparent credence to the belief that nakedness is offensive to God... that nakedness is always shameful and sinful. But how can we know that is really true if non-shameful and righteous instances of nakedness which appear in the original language Scripture text have been consistently excised from the English translations of the Bible?

The very same Greek word, *gymnos*, which appears here in [Rev. 3:17-18](#) is used to describe the fishing disciple Peter in [John 21:7b](#). It is the root word for the term that Paul uses to describe himself while writing to the Corinthians in [1 Cor. 4:11](#). Was Peter or Paul “shameful”?

From the perspective of the inspired text, shamefulfulness cannot be the inescapable result of nakedness. Sadly, however, a survey of the English Bible in NASB or NIV would not correct that mistaken notion, for only the negative citations of nakedness are found there.

The error is then compounded because too many people have failed to show the same diligence of examination and study on the issue of nakedness that they typically do studying any other topic in the Bible (see [The Unchallenged Belief](#)).

### This is Not Just an Oversight

The evidence that I have presented here is not simply a matter of translators making little mistakes in the translation or their inability to determine the most accurate words to use. The trend is too consistent to be an accident or oversight.

Nakedness is taboo in our culture today. It is thought to be wrong in all cases except for marriage or medical necessity. That taboo is *not* found in the Scriptures as they were originally inspired. Despite that fact, the taboo *is* apparent in the NASB and (even more so) the NIV.

*The only possible source for the taboo found in the modern English translations is the bias of the translators themselves!*

### I Wasn't Looking For It...

I didn't just invent the bias I've called "squeamish translating" out of the blue. I didn't start studying God's word intent on snooping around to see if I could find a reason to discount the Bible's real teaching on nakedness. All I did was study the Bible diligently... reviewing every passage where nakedness is mentioned or implied. I didn't study from just one English translation... or even three; I also looked at the original language words in the Greek (and Hebrew) texts.

I was amazed to see that not just once or twice, but *every time* the Bible mentioned nudity in a neutral or positive way, the nudity was difficult or impossible to discern in English... *unless I was reading the KJV.*

In other words, I wasn't looking for it; I simply discerned it in the course of my investigation. I read the KJV and I read the other translations. They were different. I had to ask, "Why?" The answer I found was that the KJV was more faithful to the Greek than the NASB or NIV. Hence, the evidence of squeamishness.

### Final Words

The NASB is still my favorite translation. I read it daily and it's my preferred version for memorization. I recognize and respect the place of the NIV in Christendom today, but I have always depended more on other translations... more so now than before. While I've always been a little irritated by the archaic "King James" English, my appreciation and respect for the KJV have grown as a result of this study.

Like each of us, the translators are human. They—and we—live in a culture quite foreign to the one from which sprang the inspired biblical texts. It should come as no surprise that some measure of cultural bias would creep undetected into their translation work... nor is it any condemnation upon them that it should. They meant no deception and I hold no animosity toward them for having that bias (the fact is that we all have biases... most of which we are utterly oblivious to). I genuinely Praise the Lord for their work. Where would we be without it?

Whether you see what I see or not, I hope that I have caused you to rethink the Scriptural basis for your understanding of the biblical position on nudity. I hope that you will be willing to reexamine your own perspective... to ensure that you are fighting against any bias that will discolor your perception of God's Word. To that best of my ability, that is my own aim as well.