The words "wicked," "wickedness" occur 24 times in the AV of the English Bible. The passages are Matthew 12:45, 13:49, 16:4, 18:32, 22:18, 25:26; Mark 7:22; Luke 11:26, 39, 19:22; Acts 2: 23, 8:22, 18:14, 25:5; Romans 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:8, 13; Ephesians 6:12, 16; Colossians 1:21; 2 Thessalonians 2:8, 3:2; 2 Peter 2:7, 3:17; 1 John 5:19. In eight of these RV has substituted some other reading: "evil" in Matthew 12:45; Luke 11:26; Ephesians 6:16; Colossians 1:21; 1 John 5:19, "lawless" in Acts 2:23 (on the basis of a different reading: δια χειρος ανομων instead of TR δια χειρων ανομων); 2 Thessalonians 2:8, "amiss" in Acts 25:5. In four of these instances the change from "wicked" to "evil" is due to the fact that evil spirits are referred to; in Acts 2:23, where, with the changed text, ανομος ceases to be an attribute of hands and becomes a characterization of persons, it naturally resumes its literal meaning of "lawless"; in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 "the lawless one" is preferable, because ανομος probably rests on pre-Pauline Jewish tradition which represented the Antichrist as an enemy to the Law, so that "wicked" would be too vague a translation; in Acts 25:5 "amiss" reproduces ατοπον more closely than "wicked." The change in Colossians 1:21 from "wicked works" to "evil works" has nothing in the context to recommend it.

The prevailing Greek equivalent for "wicked," "wickedness" is πονηρος, πονηρια. κακια occurs only once (Acts 8:22), αθεσμος twice (2 Peter 2:7, 3:17). The αθεσμος is one who transgresses fundamental Divine ordinances for moral conduct (from α + τιθεναι). In regard to the specific force of πονηρος and its difference from κακος the following should be noted: πονηρος is derived from πονος and usually explained as "qui πονους facit," "who causes trouble." But according to others (Schmidt, Cremer) the connection between it and πονος would be of a different nature, the poor being called πονηροι because their life is laborious, full of πονοι, and then, by a not unusual transition, through what Trench calls "the aristocratic tendencies of the language," the word for "poor" becoming also the word for "wicked." But, whether etymologically correct or not, the former explanation strikingly illustrates the specific meaning of πονηρος and its difference from κακος. While κακος describes a thing or person as inherently lacking that which is required by its idea, nature, or purpose, either in a physical or in a moral sense, πονηρος expresses the positive tendency to do harm in things, and the conscious pursuit of the injury of others in persons. The opposite of κακος is αγαθος (see art. "Goodness"); of πονηρος it is χρηστος (see art. "Kindness"). This difference between the two words can best be felt in passages where both are combined (1 Corinthians 5:8, Revelation 16:2, Matthew 15:19; cf. with Mark 7:21) In Matthew 7:18 "evil fruits" = "unwholesome, injurious fruits"; Acts 28:21, "evil words" are "harmful words"; 1 Corinthians 5:13, "the wicked" fornicator is so called because his uncleanness infects the whole Church (v. 6). "Evil times" are dangerous times (Galatians 1:4, Ephesians 5:16, 6:13). Sometimes the word is used in a less serious sense of the harmfulness of inefficiency (Matthew 25:26, "wicked and slothful servant"; cf. the κακος δουλος of 24:48, who is lacking in fidelity and diligence). Especially of Satan and other evil spirits the word πονηρος is appropriately used, because they are intent upon doing evil and working harm (Ephesians 6:16), but for the same reason it applies to men who seek to injure others (Acts 17:5, 18:14, 25:18). In Colossians 1:21 the works of paganism are called εργα πονηρα because they establish enmity between God and men: the rendering "wicked works" of AV expresses this better than "evil works" of RV. Cf., further, 2 Thessalonians 3:2 of the maliciously persecuting Jews, 2 Timothy 3:13, 3 John 10.

From the connotation of evil intent it is to be explained that το πονηρον, τα πονηρα are never used of the physical evil of Divine retribution. κακον and κακα are the words for this, because, even when God finds it necessary to punish, no evil intent can be predicated of Him. This applies to both the LXX and the N.T. It is no exception when occasionally the adjective is used with such things as ελκος, νοσος in the sense of "malignant," for here the evil intent is metaphorically attributed to the disease (Deuteronomy 6:22).

In Matthew 6:13, John 17:15, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, 1 John 5:19, expositors differ on the question whether the inflected forms are from the masculine ο πονηρος or the neuter το πονηρον. Only in regard to the last-mentioned passage is the personal reference to Satan placed beyond doubt by v. 18; hence the rendering of RV, "in the evil one," is to be preferred to the "in wickedness" of AV. In the other cases where the two versions differ in the same manner no certain contextual indications to decide the question are present.