

In Defense of the Textus Receptus

God's Preserved Word to
Every Generation

*Are all Bibles
Created Equal?*

*Does it matter
which Bible I use?*

*If it does matter,
then Why??*

**Dr. Jim Taylor,
D.R.E.**

IN DEFENSE OF THE TEXTUS RECEPTUS

In Defense of the Textus Receptus, Second Edition

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IN DEFENSE OF THE TEXTUS RECEPTUS

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the LORD first of all. If He had not saved me in 1984, I would never have developed such a love for His Word, not to mention that fact that He has made me a child of the King and I am no longer on my way to an eternal hell. I have to say that since the day I was born again, nothing has ever thrilled my soul like the precious scriptures.

Secondly, I want to dedicate this work to my wonderful wife. She has quietly sacrificed many hours that would have been spent with her in order that I could do the proper research for this project. She has always been a great source of encouragement to me.

Thirdly, I want to also dedicate this book to Earl Hodges. He was perhaps the most knowledgeable and humble man I have ever known. He not only taught the scriptures, but he exemplified the Christian life like none I have ever seen. Aside from his extensive knowledge in the scriptures, he gave me a great deal of his own personal time, teaching me so much about the great doctrines of the faith. But the greatest thing that he ever taught me was how to think for myself. And this is the reason for this book.

There have been many others who were great encouragers as well – Bill Stewart, Steve Zeinner, S.E. Hyde – to name a few. I owe you all a great debt of gratitude for making this work possible. These men have all been greatly used of God to challenge me in my walk and personal growth in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. To all of these men I owe a heart-felt thanks - But to God be the glory!

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PREFACE

As I began to write this book, I have to tell you that I honestly thought that I had a good grasp on the subject at hand. But the more I read, researched, wrote, and re-wrote, I found out that there is so much information concerning the issue that it is almost impossible to treat it fully.

Admittedly, I began doing the very things that I was charging some of my brethren of doing – the academic error of repeating information that I had not thoroughly researched for myself.¹ As I began to read literature from other viewpoints on the issue, I found that some of the charges by both sides against their opponents were accurate. I also found out that many of those who would hold to the same position as myself were not presenting the full truth on some points. I believe it is because they were guilty of regurgitating information that they had learned from others without validating it. And in some cases, I think that it is entirely possible that information was withheld simply because a particular piece of information challenged their position.

I found this to be especially true when it came to the number of manuscripts, what families each manuscript belonged to, and the age of each manuscript. It seemed to me that the age of some of the manuscripts is disputed simply because of personal bias. I have also found that some of the charts concerning the numbers of existing manuscripts have just been repeated over and over without any real attempt at updating. In as much as it was possible, I have researched each manuscript. Obviously, I don't have the manuscripts at my fingertips but much of what has been discovered has been photocopied and put online for all to see. I have been able to examine photos and other resources that were available to me, making it possible to validate the claims made by others.

I have read many books on the issue. I think I have probably read an equal amount of books on all sides of the issue. I can honestly tell you that some of the books were absolutely ludicrous in their approach and allegations. Others contained helpful and balanced information. And still others were down-right inflammatory! I have seen good men called heretics. And I have seen bad men exalted beyond measure. And it is shameful.

As a result, I have tried as much as possible to state positions without mentioning names. I know that some people would disagree with that approach.

¹ I have honestly tried not to commit the same critical mistake in this book. However, I already know from the proofing process that this is extremely difficult. It is very difficult to spot bias in yourself!

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Some people would say that my sources need to be cited so that proper research can be done in order to validate the claims. But I would simply say this. It is possible to research the factual information presented in this book without my citing the source. And I highly recommend that the reader do so. That would be honest and academically wise.

In some cases I do cite my sources. And at first glance it would appear that I am inconsistent with this. But the main reason I am careful with this is because I am not “on the attack” against anyone in particular. The reason why I am not “naming names” is because I have absolutely no desire to get into a rock-throwing contest with others who do not agree with me. In a few cases, I have named sources for various reasons, but when I found the need to do so, I tried to be as respectful to that source’s character and reputation as possible.

I have found in the past that citing a source does nothing more than shift the responsibility from the writer to the source anyway. It does not validate the truthfulness of the statement made unless the source is the Word of God Himself. On one occasion, when I cited the source, I was bluntly informed that just because my source made a statement to the fact, it was not necessarily true. I was then asked to reference my source’s source! So in the words of a statement made famous by President Harry S. Truman, “The buck stops here.”

In the course of writing this book, I have shared a few quotes and information gleaned from many various sources. I would like to offer a *carte blanche* statement that just because I quote from a particular source, I don’t necessarily agree with all that the source believes. However, the information provided has been researched and validated insofar as I was able.

Throughout this book, I use the term “King James Version” as versus “King James Bible”. I do not mean any offense and I certainly do believe that the King James Version is the Word of God. However, “King James Version” is the correct name and it seems to me that so many writers and preachers have taken to using the term “King James Bible” as a means of declaring that any other translation is not the Bible.

To this I would have to say that any translation, in any language, must be able to stand on its own merits before the original Greek and Hebrew texts. It really doesn’t matter to me what the name of a translation is, if it does not pass the test of formal-equivalency to the Textus Receptus, then it will inevitably fall short.

Keep in mind that I am limiting this book to a discussion of the New Testament Manuscripts. Thus, I don’t address the translation of the Old Testament very often throughout this book. But for the curious reader, I also would state the

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same thing concerning the Old Testament. It needs to be a formal equivalent translation of the Masoretic text.

Throughout the book I have tried to keep things at a level that all saved believers in Jesus Christ, regardless of position (pastor or laymen) could understand. I will use the following five terms when referring to scriptural manuscripts - Byzantine, Textus Receptus, Alexandrian, Critical text, and mixed.

Throughout the book I tried to be fairly consistent in the way I used the terms “Textus Receptus” and “Byzantine text”. I have sought to use the phrase “Textus Receptus” when the context of the discussion concerns the Greek text after the time of Erasmus’ first Greek text in AD 1516 while trying to use the name “Byzantine” when discussing the Greek texts before the time of Erasmus. My reason for this is because so many people make an unrealistic fuss over the names. For instance, if I were to say that early translations from the 3rd century match the Textus Receptus, someone would reply that in the 3rd century, there was no Textus Receptus. And technically, he would be right, though he would be missing the whole point of the original statement. So, to avoid unnecessary conflict, I have tried to use the terms in their historical contexts.

I have also tried to be consistent with the use of “Alexandrian” and “Critical” Text for the same basic reasons. I would admit that there may be places where I may not be totally consistent but for the most part, the reader should not have any problems understanding the way the terms are used.

The fifth term used throughout the book is the term “mixed text”. This is used to refer to Greek manuscripts that do not really fit in either category of Byzantine or Alexandrian texts.

In summary, although I am aware there are five differing categories of manuscripts used by Aland’s method of grouping, I have purposely decided to use a more simplified set of five terms that I think bring greater understanding and clarity to the subject.

Admittedly, there are places where certain facts, figures, quotations, and general information are repeated, but only when I feel it necessary to allow the information in those sections to stand on its own and be fully understood. In other words, sometimes I felt it necessary in order to provide clarity of the information and thoughts being discussed at the time, and also because it is my desire that this book be as much a reference work as it is a treatise on the topic.

Initially, I had given some thought to including discussion of Old Testament texts, but decided against it since most Hebrew scholars consider both Old Testament manuscripts, available to us today, to be nearly identical making such discussion fruitless and not germane to the scope of the book.

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One last note. This book is not scripture and therefore is fallible. If my readers look long enough, I am sure that they can, and most likely, will find mistakes. I am not presenting this as the definitive work on the subject but I am seeking to put forth the subject as a fresh look from a biblical perspective. It is my hope that it will increase your knowledge of the issue as well as deepen your trust in the biblical texts that we have available to us today.

SAMPLE

PAGES

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INTRODUCTION

The discussion of the relevancy of the King James and its superiority to other written translations of the Bible continues to be an issue in many of our churches today.² It takes its name from the King James Version of the Bible upon which the bulk of the controversy rests. If there were any questions as to whether this is a “hot issue” or not, a simple search of the Internet or visit to a local Christian bookstore would certainly clear up any misconceptions.

The mass of articles, books, blog, and web sites, is simply overwhelming. It seems that new books and other related material on the issue are being produced weekly if not daily. If you want to see a good example of the magnitude of the issue, simply peruse a bookstore or search the Internet (a simple search on Google revealed over 655,000 web pages) and you will see volumes of new material at each visit. It has gotten to the point that in order to sell the new products, writers and advertisers are promising “new and important information” or “information never before written”.

The allegations made by people on both sides of the issue are simply astounding. One writer states that the King James Version has ALWAYS been the Bible of choice among conservative believers. Another writer states that the issue of translations has never been considered a fundamental doctrine until recent years. To both viewpoints, I would simply like to point out that the King James Version did not exist until 1611. From the mid-1600s until 1881, it was virtually the only English Bible translation in use.³ So on the one hand, it WAS the Bible of choice because there simply was no other Bible to choose. And on the other hand, the purity of the scriptures is the natural outcome of a holy God inspiring and preserving his holy Word. Inspiration and preservation are DEFINITELY fundamental doctrines of our faith!

Many of the books on the issue today are either mean-spirited or blatantly biased. Some books range from the sentimental (That’s the Bible my momma used.) to the ludicrous. Other authors seek to be a bit more balanced and intellectual in their approach. Sadly, very little material is available which addresses the issue from a biblical viewpoint. However, it does not seem to matter

² Interestingly enough, outside of the independent Baptist realm, very few people are concerned about the issue at all. In fact, as one dear brother put it, “I listen to other brothers and that debate to them is [crazy].…” Thus, it may or may not be the biggest controversy in churches today, but it most likely is the biggest in fundamental Baptist churches.

³ Technically, there were other English translations in print before the King James Version. But historically, by the mid-1600s, the only English translation in major use was the KJV.

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which position you hold, you can rest assured that there is plenty of material to shore up your point of view. There is no shortage of friends to help you and certainly you can find a circle of churches which will receive you with open arms. Conversely, there are also a number others who will treat you as if you were the greatest heretic that ever lived. And sometimes, even those whom you thought should at least understand your position will vilify you!

This controversy has even stretched across denominational lines and is causing quite a stir in both fundamental and more moderate Bible colleges. My observation, however, is that the Independent Baptists⁴ seem to be more concerned about this issue than any other group. It has become a point of separation between otherwise like-minded churches and pastors. I personally know men who were in close fellowship with each other years ago but who have now parted fellowship because they cannot agree on the issue. Sometimes, this separation is deliberate. At other times, it is simply a matter of preference. Yet, the fact remains that this issue itself is charged with emotion along with doctrinal positions.

The question remains as to whether a church's position on this issue should be an issue of separation. Some would say, "Yes, there is no greater subject than the Bible itself." Others say, "No, as long as all the major doctrines are held and supported, then it does not matter which version a church or believer chooses to use."

But let us think this through for a moment. No one would deny that there are some very good books written on the subject of Theology. And yet, we would never claim those books as "the Word of God" simply because the doctrine is straight. Biblically, God did not merely inspire the doctrines or thoughts expressed in the scriptures. No, he inspired every word. Note the wording of Proverbs 30:5.

***Psalms 30:5** For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*

Opinions vary. The opinions seemed to be based upon several factors. First, there is the subject of the translations themselves. Is the King James Version the best? Are all other translations corrupted? Are any of the translations good? Does inspiration extend to the translation? Can a translation be "double-

⁴ For the sake of clarity, I do not consider true Baptists as a denomination since one of our Baptist distinctives is "local church autonomy". Denominational churches do not have exclusive local church autonomy. I point this out for those who may misunderstand my statement concerning denominations.

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inspired”? Did God, in some way, guide the translation of any of the current translations? Is God preserving his Word through translations? Are the modern versions some kind of Satanic plot to discredit the gospel?

And then there is the subject of the Greek and Hebrew texts themselves from which the translations are accomplished. And again, questions abound. Which text is the trust worthiest? Which text is preserved? Can we trust copies? Do we know what the original autographs looked like? Do God’s promises of preservation extend to copies or translations? And what about textual revisions? It is common knowledge that the Greek texts have all been revised. Which revision is the best?

Thirdly, there is the issue of the men who prepared, collated, or otherwise “edited” the texts. Should we consider their doctrinal beliefs? Or, should we simply focus on the work they accomplished? Are we to concern ourselves with the men or their manuscripts? Or should we concern ourselves with both?

So, as you can see, this is not a simple issue. As we discuss this issue, we should seek to keep an appropriate balance. It does not help our position to attack the character of others. This has been done far too often. Nor can we support our views with intellectualism or sentimentalism. Every doctrine, conviction, and standard that a believer takes must be based upon the scriptures themselves. The Bible is the foundation of all that we believe. Thus, whatever position we hold, we must be able to show the truthfulness and the application of that position from the Bible. In fact, according to 2nd Timothy 2:15-26 is a direct challenge to study the scriptures, rightly divide (proper exegesis) and then teach the truth without getting caught up in doctrines which are unbiblical, extra-biblical, and unprofitable. I hope that I will be able to adequately satisfy all the questions we have just asked in a way that is faithful to the Bible itself.

The purpose of this book is not so much to show the superiority of the King James Version. Not that there is anything wrong with the King James Version, but the real crux of the matter is not so much on the level of translation but more on the level of transmission and preservation of the Greek text.

I am well aware that there are words and phrases hard to be understood today. Words such as churl, collops, hoised, wimples, sackbut, habergeon may require the modern reader to consult a dictionary. Phrases such as “pisseth against the wall” may be difficult to preach from. But I am referring to the KJV’s formal equivalent style. Sure, today, we could have used synonyms for those words. But we cannot say that the word choices made by the KJV translators were inaccurate. And obviously, phrases such as the aforementioned one may be hard to read in a public format, but discomfort does not make a phrase inaccurate.

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In other words, before we can evaluate which translation we should be using, we must first be settled on which Greek text we should be using! This leads us to the subject of “textual criticism”.

Textual criticism concerns itself with the study of texts or manuscripts in order to determine the most authoritative form of a text. It is a branch of literary criticism and is not exclusive to the area of biblical manuscripts. A critic seeks to reconstruct the original text as closely as possible. Naturally this presupposes that the existing manuscripts are: 1) not the original manuscripts; and 2) contain differences from the original manuscripts.

As applied to biblical texts, we must keep two facts in mind. First, God promised that we would always have exactly what he gave by the process of inspiration. This is called preservation. Secondly, it is not up to the intellect of modern textual critics to “discover” God’s Word. Because of the history of the manuscripts, the historical evidence concerning the manuscripts, and how we must apply the principles of preservation as expressed in the scriptures, the choice is very clear.

There are basically three approaches made in application of textual criticism, the first of which is eclecticism. This is the practice of considering a wide diversity of manuscripts with the idea that the manuscripts with independent⁵ readings were less likely to have been transmitted. This method allows for the opportunity to draw conclusions based, not on the similarities, but the differences in manuscripts. The resulting text therefore contains readings from a variety of sources. In reality, this has been the dominant approach to textual criticism since the late 1800s and was widely popularized by the theories of Westcott and Hort.

A second approach to textual criticism is called “stemmatology”. This is a three-step process where manuscripts are first grouped according to common errors. The logic behind this is that common errors would point to a common source. Once this grouping has been made, then the manuscripts of that group are examined and decisions are made concerning the variants as to which are preferred. Usually one variant reading will be found more frequently. In this case, the most frequent reading is selected. Sometimes, the variants occur with equal frequency. When this is the case, then the critic chooses based upon his own judgment. Those who employ this method then conclude that there may be

⁵ By independent, it is meant that there are readings which are not in agreement with any other manuscripts.

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passages where no correct reading exists.⁶ At this point a process called “emendation” is applied where choices are made but these choices are usually very “conjectural”. Because of this, some of the choices are even called “conjectural emendations.”⁷

The third approach is called copy-text editing. In this method, a base text is selected and the critic makes changes based upon the witness of other manuscripts. Sometimes, in using this method, choices between variant readings can pose difficulties. In these cases, decisions are usually made in favor of the base-text reading. This is the method that Erasmus used when producing his Greek text. The base text was the readings found in the Byzantine family.

Someone could conceivably claim that the Critical Text was also formed using the copy-text editing method, and in a sense that is true. However, the wrong base text (Codex Vaticanus) was utilized which guaranteed that the outcome would be wrong. But to be totally honest, the method that Westcott and Hort employed was more eclectic than copy-text editing.

Another aspect of textual criticism that we should be familiar with is the difference between “higher criticism” and “lower criticism”. Lower criticism concerns itself more so with the text itself. It focuses on the individual readings and seeks to determine which readings are correct. Thus, it begins with the hypothesis that there IS a correct reading which can be determined. The natural outcome to this approach is belief in the finished product.

Higher criticism seeks to discover the source of a manuscript or reading. It is also called “source criticism” and begins from the hypothesis that the biblical texts already existed in some other form but was brought together at a later date. Since the Bible teaches that all scripture came from God himself, saints through the ages have typically held to certain beliefs concerning the origin of the books of the Bible. But higher criticism often contradicts the traditional views concerning the source of various books in the Bible.

Many proponents of higher criticism treat the scriptures as the work of man in contrast to the biblical principles of inspiration and preservation. The natural outcome to this approach is a lack of faith in the reliability of the

⁶ Obviously, this would completely rule out any faith-based approach with the principles of preservation applied. For if God preserved his word, and He did, then obviously a true reading must exist!

⁷ Conjectural should not be taken to mean “on a whim” or without any rhyme or reason whatsoever. Scholars typically have sound reasons why they prefer one reading or text over another. We may not always agree on their conclusions but their choices are not typically made “on a whim”.

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scriptures. We should also note that there are good men who hold to the Critical Text who would readily reject the methods of higher criticism, though we may differ with them on how to apply the principles of lower criticism. In fact, there is such a strong reaction to the word “criticism” that some are beginning to use the term “textual analysis” to better distinguish between “criticizing the Bible” and analyzing the text.

This book is not so much a rebuttal of higher criticism as it is a discussion of how to apply the principles of lower criticism. It is not a discussion of “if” God inspired the Bible, but, “how” God inspired the Bible. It is a critical analysis of the different viewpoints concerning “lower criticism”. As such, we will seek to be both technically accurate, and yet not so technical that it cannot be clearly understood by both layman and scholar. Thus, we begin with a very simple explanation of the various positions.

A SIMPLE EXPLANATION OF THE VARIOUS POSITIONS

Defining the various positions can be a bit difficult. First of all, if we seek to define them based on the Greek texts, then we will not have a category for those who believe that the scriptures are now preserved in another language other than Greek. If we seek to limit ourselves to the various positions concerning translations, then we will invariably become distracted from the heart of the issue, which is the Greek text itself. Thus, the following positions are an attempt to adequately cover both aspects.

I realize that there are many different positions on the Bible issue. I am also aware that in seeking to explain the basic positions, I will invariably miss something and most likely, there are some who hold positions that may not even fit these categories. But for the sake of clarity, we should attempt to classify the various basic viewpoints on this crucial issue.

In seeking to do research, I have found a variety of explanations ranging from two views (right and wrong) to seven views. Each writer had his own definition for the positions and some of the things that have been said are logical and sound. On the other hand, some writers have approached this with an almost belligerent attitude. I have sought to represent the mainstream positions while at the same time, I tried not to misrepresent anyone’s particular beliefs.

With that being said, here are some very basic positions on this issue. The names of each position are not completely my creations but at the same time, they are not altogether derived from other sources either.

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The Position of Unbelief

This position is held by those who do not believe we have a trustworthy text in ANY form. These people don't believe the promises of preservation, and therefore, nothing we say will ever convince them. They tend to treat the Bible as if it were a secular book, without any respect to the doctrine of inspiration or preservation.

This is a position of doubt. Those who hold this position do not believe we have the exact words of God that were originally penned by the prophets and apostles. And if they are consistent, they must admit that they do not believe that the Bible is given by inspiration at all! This is a thoroughly modernistic approach to textual criticism.

I strongly disagree with this position since I believe that God inspired and preserved His words to every generation. I will explain a lot more about this later in this book on the section dealing with the doctrine of preservation.

It is possible to approach textual criticism from this aspect and still hold to a nominal belief in the doctrine of inspiration and preservation although it tends to lead to disbelief in any supernatural occurrence. Often those who take this position hold any account of miracles, angels, etc. as possibly folklore, legend, or embellishment. Basically, this would be the Sadducee approach – a denial of the supernatural!

All Inclusivism

Simply defined, this position holds that although God promised to preserve His word, He didn't necessarily mean He would do it in any single text or in any particular textual family for that matter. In other words, both the Critical Text and the Textus Receptus can both be received as valid copies of the scriptures. Often, the statement is made that since it is possible to teach every Bible doctrine from either text, then either text can be called "scripture".

This particular view is held by a significant group of believers and is surprisingly popular among many of our fundamentalist churches.⁸ This view

⁸ I am aware that some people don't consider them fundamentalists but at the same time, others do. I am not seeking to pass judgment one way or another. I am simply saying that I have noticed an increasing popularity of this position among a number of those who would consider themselves fundamentalists.

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seems to be more of an academic approach (as versus a faith-based approach) to the text issue.

Those who hold this view do not deny that the Textus Receptus is scripture, but would argue that the Critical Text is just as valid. Often they would make the argument that all of the doctrines of God can be taught from either Greek text. But, while it is true that we can teach any Bible doctrine from either the Textus Receptus or the Critical Text, we need to keep in mind that we could do the same thing with any well-written and thorough book on Bible doctrines, theology, or commentary.

But commentaries are not the Word of God. They may contain good doctrinal teaching but they are not what God gave. There is more to being a Bible than simply containing good teaching. Sound doctrine is obviously important but it is not the only criteria in our obligation to identify the correct text.

In all fairness, those who hold this view are smart enough to know there are contradictory readings between the Greek texts and they would readily admit that both readings cannot be the correct reading. Instead they would say that God did not choose to preserve them all in one place, and that because of the redundant nature of languages, the minor variants are not that big of a deal and certainly not worth fighting over. They are content with the minor amount of uncertainty. Also, I think they would argue that there is a big difference between textual variants and commentaries.

Based upon what the Bible says about itself, and we will discuss this more in depth later, we must make a choice. We cannot believe that these two manuscripts are equally valid.

Eclecticism

Just as those who believe that the Textus Receptus is the inspired and preserved text, there are also those who believe that the Critical Text (as constructed by Westcott and Hort) is the superior text. If asked to give an explanation of inspiration and preservation, this group would say basically the same thing as the Textus Receptus Only group. The big difference is that those who hold this position generally believe that the Greek text CAN be improved. In fact, the majority of those who hold to this view would readily agree that the current Critical Text (NA28 or UBS4) is better than the Westcott-Hort text of 1881.

This viewpoint is usually based upon the age of manuscripts. The argument is that since the Critical Text is an eclectic text constructed from the

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“oldest and best” manuscripts, then the Critical Text must be closest to the original autographs. This particular position appears to be most prevalent in New Evangelical and a few Fundamentalist colleges and seminaries.

This was the basic belief of Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. In constructing their eclectic text, which is now known as the Critical Text, they approached the scriptures as if it were just another ancient book. Both men were known for their dislike of the traditional Greek text, which we call the Textus Receptus, even calling it “vile”.

We would strongly disagree with the position of Eclecticism since we believe that God inspired and preserved his words to every generation. I will explain a lot more about this later in the section on inspiration.

But there are other problems with this position. First of all, older is not necessarily better. I have in my office a very old copy of the New World Translation (a corrupted translation done by the Jehovah’s Witnesses - a cult). I have in my hand, a brand new King James Version. I have only been using it for six months. Clearly, older is not necessarily better.

Someone may say that this is a bad illustration because my example deals with printed editions and not hand written manuscripts. Their point is that older manuscripts are nearer the originals because there are fewer generations in which errors could be introduced, unless of course, there is some other overriding consideration.⁹

But that is not the point of the illustration at all. The point is simply to illustrate that the age of the manuscript, though helpful, does not in and of itself determine the purity of the text. It can only prove that the text existed. In the same respect, scientists who find dinosaur bones cannot use the bones to prove evolution. They can only use the bones to prove that a certain kind or species of animal existed during a particular period of time. So the existence of a certain family of texts or certain Greek reading cannot prove the superiority of that reading. It can only show us that the particular family or reading existed.

So I don’t think I am comparing apples to oranges. Copies made by a machine or copies made by hand are both still copies. I understand the argument concerning being closer to the original but that is just the point. If the original is corrupt, then even the best copy would still be corrupt.

Usually, when you read “the older and more reliable manuscripts” in a footnote or commentary, it is usually referring to the Codex Vaticanus or Codex

⁹ And, of course, we would say that the over-riding influence would be the preservation of God.

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Sinaiticus. These two manuscripts date from the 4th century. But we have to remember that we have also found an ancient papyri (P90) which is dated to the 2nd century which is as much in agreement with the Byzantine family as it is with the Alexandrian family.¹⁰

But even if the scholars could show that P90 is Alexandrian and not Byzantine, we can still prove that the Byzantine existed in the 2nd century based upon translations that were done at that time.¹¹ So the “older is better” argument may appear to make sense on the surface, but upon closer examination, it is not as strong as we may initially be led to believe.

The second problem I have with the Eclectic position, the position that believes the Critical Text is God’s inspired word, is that of agreement. The Textus Receptus comes from the Byzantine family. There are 5369 Greek manuscripts in support of the Byzantine family, either in full or in part. The readings of those manuscripts are in nearly perfect agreement (over 98%)¹² with each other. The Critical Text is derived from the Alexandrian family of manuscripts. There are 207 manuscripts in support of the Alexandrian family, either in full or in part. The readings of these manuscripts disagree with each other in literally thousands of places. With this number of disagreement between copies, it is very difficult to understand why anyone could view the Alexandrian family of manuscripts as trust-worthy on any level.

¹⁰ It is not conclusive that P90 is Byzantine. It is also not clear if it is Alexandrian either. The reason for this is because what remains of the manuscript could very well be placed in either family. In all, I could find only 3 independent readings where P90 did not agree with either the Alexandrian or the Byzantine manuscripts. I found only one place where it agreed with the Alexandrian manuscript against the Byzantine manuscripts, and one place where it agreed with Byzantine manuscript against the Alexandrian manuscript. P90 is also the second oldest manuscript to date - some dating it as early as 165 AD. Anyone interested in making their own comparison can go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papyrus_90#Greek_text where the text is laid out very nicely. I strongly recommend comparing it personally rather than take the words of the “scholars”!

¹¹ The Greek Orthodox Bible (2nd century); Old Syriac (150-160 AD); Diatessaron (150-160 AD); Peshitta (150 to 170) - all translations from Byzantine manuscripts, from where we get the Textus Receptus. With that being said, in all honesty, none of these were really great translations anyway. They come with their own set of problems. But they do at least show us that the Byzantine manuscripts existed as far back as 150 AD.

¹² I have not personally compared every Byzantine manuscript with every other Byzantine manuscript but this figure seems to be the basic consensus among the textual scholars no matter what their position on the textual issue is.

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Selectivism (Sentimentalism)

This position is really not a position of the Greek and Hebrew texts but more of a sentimental viewpoint. It may be true that there are those who hold to one of the above positions because, “That is what I was taught” or, “That is what my parents believed”. But usually, this position is more focused on the translation rather than the text from which it is taken.

Since this is not really a position on the text at all, I will not really be dealing with this at length. I believe if we are truly aware of what the scriptures say, and truly aware of the problems with the Critical Text, we will not choose a translation based upon sentimental feelings.

It is interesting that this view doesn't really have anything to do with the text or even the accuracy of the translation. It is more about the sentimental attachment that someone has to their particular translation. Typically, this is the position that we hear from those who use the King James Version. (Well, this is the Bible that I have always used. . .) But as a missionary, I have met others who were raised on a translation that is not only from the wrong Greek text, but also inferior in translation. Yet they said the same things that some of our sentimentalist King James supporters do!

On the other hand, I have met men who defended their favorite translation with the statement, “This translation is good enough to build a church on, to grow as a believer with, and to evangelize the lost with.” And that is true. As a missionary, I have seen men do that very thing! And in many cases, missionaries are not left with any other option. Often, mission work has to be performed with tools that are sometimes less than optimal and missionaries do a great job with what they have to work with. In some languages, there may not even be a completed New Testament translation, and yet the missionary wins souls and starts a church. But “good enough” is not good enough.

Years ago, there did not exist a good translation in our field of labor. And I can assure you that, though we missionaries used what we had, many of us greatly desired something more trustworthy. It is difficult to instill a level of confidence in the scriptures in young believers when we are constantly having to “correct” a bad word choice in an inferior translation. The fact that God can use something inferior (and He often does. He uses man!) does not signify that we should not try to use the best available.

Inspired Translation Position

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This position is usually held concerning the King James Version. The idea is that God somehow supernaturally inspired the translators as they did their work. Those who are purists in this position believe that if there were any differences between the King James Version and the Textus Receptus, then the King James Version takes precedence since it is an “advanced revelation”. This is often called “double-inspiration” because according to this teaching, the King James Version translators were “double-inspired” as they translated from Greek and Hebrew to English.

But there are several problems with this view. First, the translators took 3 years to complete the work. If it were inspired, then it should have only taken a few days since there were at least 43 (and probably more) working on it simultaneously. Second, why did they need to proofread the King James Version to ensure accuracy? If it were inspired, there would have been no need for proofreading because it would have been perfectly translated the first time! Thirdly, why did the translators place alternate possible translations in their notes?¹³ Shouldn't they have known with certainty which word God wanted? Fourthly, why are there differences between the King James Version and the Textus Receptus?

And, yes, there are differences between the King James Version and the Textus Receptus. Nothing of any real doctrinal consequence, but nonetheless, things that are different are not the same. For example, in Acts 19:20 the King James Version says, “God” but the Textus Receptus has “Kurios” or “Lord”. “Kurios” is translated “Lord” 761 times in the King James Version but only one time as “God”. There is no denial. They are different. We may not be comfortable with that fact but facts are very unmovable things, aren't they?

One “Critical Text” supporter, after having read some of my articles on the Textus Receptus made this charge:

“TR advocates, frankly, do not practice textual criticism. Rather, to be a TR advocate, you have to take the work of two or three dead textual critics (Erasmus, Stephanus, and Beza), and insist that they were right in all of their decisions, or at least all of the decisions that were finally put into Scrivener's

¹³ Some of their column notes are really quite contradictory to what was put in the main text. For example, in Judges 19:2, the translators put “four months” in the main text but in the column notes they put “a year and four months”. In Hebrews 11:35, the translators cross-referenced to a book that is not even a part of the canon – 2 Macc. 7:7!

Actually, the very fact that they USED column notes shows that the translators knew they were not inspired.

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edition. Rather than working from evidence to edition, a TR advocate works from the edition that they've already decided is true and then backtracks to the evidence and selectively chooses those evidences that confirm their premade conclusions. I don't mean to sound overly critical, but this is just what I see in your book and Edward F. Hills' book, and other TR advocates. Any evidence is sufficient as long as it supports the desired conclusion."

And that is true to a point. But facts are very obstinate things."Any evidence" that is true is still evidence. If it can be used to support both texts, it should be disregarded. But if not, it must be properly explained, but CANNOT be disregarded simply because it disagrees with one's position. That's why some of my KJV friends take just about as many shots at me as my Critical Text friends. I am not afraid to discuss differences between the Textus Receptus and the King James Version and they don't like those facts. But no matter. They are still facts.

But what we "TR advocates" don't appreciate is when someone says there is no reason for reading "x" to be in the Bible and then they try to discredit any reason given. For the record, I don't like some of the approaches taken by some TR defenders myself. But if a point of evidence is valid, it has to be dealt with. It cannot be ignored or explained away.

There is a little Greek conjunction "kai" that is often used in the Bible. Sometimes, it is left totally untranslated in the King James Version simply for readability sake. Examples would include John 17:25 where it says, "O righteous Father the world hath not known me." If the translators had translated "kai", it should say, "O righteous Father (also/moreover/indeed) the world hath not known me." Rev 8:7 begins with "kai" but it is left completely untranslated.

Sometimes verb tenses are different. Matt 21:13 has "And said unto them" when in the Greek the verb "said" is in present tense. So, the phrase should read "and saith unto them". Does it matter? Not so much, really. I mean, when you think about it, the whole story is in past tense from our perspective anyway.

Now, before anyone gets too upset, and begins to accuse me of being a Bible hater, let me clarify. Every preacher I have set under has said, "The Bible is inspired." and I totally agree. I have said the same thing many times myself! But the King James is not "double inspired".¹⁴ The King James Version is a trustworthy, faithful and accurate translation of what God gave us in the original languages of Greek and Hebrew. It is the Word of God. It is completely trustworthy. Yet every language has its own specific nuances and limitations so

¹⁴ Some people prefer the phrase "advanced revelation" over "double inspiration" but they both mean basically the same thing.

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we should not expect a perfect match. On the other hand, we should not think that differences between the two texts totally invalidate the King James Version. But we cannot have our cake and eat it too. Whatever allowances that we make for ourselves concerning the King James Version must also be afforded to other translations.

One writer blatantly stated that if a person is not “King James Only” then he must be “Critical Text” only. But in reality, this issue is not that simple. In fact, I know quite a number of people who are not “King James Only” and yet they do not agree with the eclectic position or the inclusive position as I mentioned earlier. Let’s consider two other positions which are also very popular, and which are not necessarily “KJV Only”.

The Preserved Translation Position

There is a rather sizable group which believes that a translation can be called “God’s preserved Word for the English speaking people”. You may have read that same statement in a church constitution or on a website somewhere. And it is quite possible it is even in the doctrinal statement of your church.

But this position misses the point, theologically speaking. In fact, this position not only misses the point, but actually clouds the issue. And again, I don’t mean to cause unnecessary controversy over terms, but I don’t think we fundamentalists have given enough thought to what we are saying when we make this statement. According to God’s Word, the LORD preserves several things – His people, his church, and His Word. But when we say He preserves His Word, what is it exactly that He preserves? Again, God preserves what He inspired. So if we say that God did not inspire a translation, then we cannot say that God preserved a translation.

For the most part, those who make the statement are seeking to defend the King James Version from the onslaught of modern criticism. Because there is a sizable group of “scholars” who attack the King James Version, or at least attempt to cast doubt upon its accuracy, quite a number of conservative Bible believers have taken to defending the King James by referring to it as a “preserved” translation. I understand the desire to defend it. But I still think we would be better off if we thought through our defense, and then presented a defense that was more theologically accurate. Statements like “God’s preserved word for the English speaking people” may have little to no impact to the effectiveness of ministry in the church pew. But it can have much a more serious impact on the mission field.

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This belief that a translation can be preserved is quite binding when we move into the area of translation. One man said to me, “Why even look at the Greek and Hebrew when the King James is perfect?” I answered, “I am sure that God would rather we translated from what was given by inspiration than from what was given by translation.” And please understand, I am not seeking to cast doubt upon any translation. I just believe we need to be more careful with how we use biblical or theological terms. Their misuse can cause more problems than what is immediately apparent.

Another man said, “We cannot know the Greek and Hebrew because it is a dead language. Let’s just translate from the King James Version.” I answered, “Well, then, let’s save a lot of time and just teach people English! It sure is easier than translation work!” Yes, biblical Greek and Hebrew are dead languages in the extent that we do not use them in their biblical forms today. But that very fact actually helps us tremendously because that very fact also means the definitions of the words and grammar usage are set and will not change.¹⁵

A third man said to me, “What if you find a difference between the King James Version and the Greek? You are still going to use the King James Version for translation, right?” I replied, “If the Textus Receptus is God’s preserved word and the King James Version is a perfect translation, then what differences do you suppose we will find?” This man was the most disturbing to me because first of all, he thought it was a bad idea to look at the Greek in any case. He felt that if we found a significant difference between the Greek (that which was given by inspiration) and the King James Version (that which was given by translation), we must use what was given by translation. He would not even entertain the thought of looking into the Greek because he did not want to face the possibility of finding out he was wrong in his beliefs. How could he believe that the Greek was inspired and the English was perfect if he found a difference? So to ensure that he never found a difference, he would not even consider looking at the Greek! I call this willful academic dishonesty! If the King James Version is as good as we claim it to be, then it can stand on its own merits. Any examination would only further vindicate its accuracy and instill greater confidence.

¹⁵ For the record, I am not against translating from the King James Version. There have been plenty of missionaries who did fine translations from the King James Version. But it is still my contention that it is safer to use what God gave by inspiration rather than use what has been translated. I do not think it is the only way to do a translation but I firmly believe it is the best way. It is a fact that any person who has ever taken a class in biblical Greek or Hebrew – the more you learn about the original languages, the better you understand the English!

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The Textus Receptus Position

This is the correct position and the one which aligns with the doctrines of the scriptures. Those who hold this position believe that God inspired and preserves his words in the Textus Receptus. Although the Textus Receptus is not a “family” per se, yet it is constructed solely from manuscripts in the Byzantine family.

The first “Textus Receptus” was put together by Erasmus in the early 1500’s (first edition was printed in 1516) with the last revision done by Scrivener in the 1890’s. During that time there were scores of editions which are sometimes referred to as the “Textus Receptus” family.

There are several variations of the Textus Receptus position. Some believe it is superior based upon historical evidence and logical deduction. This group typically takes a look at the types of manuscripts that have been in use throughout history and based upon this, have come to the conclusion that the Byzantine manuscripts were considered superior by the majority of believers throughout history.

Others have come to a “Textus Receptus” position based upon theological teachings. By looking at the biblical doctrines of inspiration and preservation, coupled with the knowledge of which manuscripts have been available and in use throughout history, this group believes the Textus Receptus to be the manuscript that God preserved.

The interesting thing about all of this is that both groups have come to the same position from two different approaches. One approach is more of a faith-based approach while the other approach is more of an academic approach. Yet both witnesses agree to the same conclusion.

Among those who hold to a Textus Receptus position there are those who feel that the other families of manuscripts are simply inferior while some people believe that the other manuscripts are heretical or even Satanic deceptions. We may debate the accuracy of their individual opinions but one point should not be missed - whether a person believes the other Greek manuscripts or inferior, or whether he believes they are a Satanic attempt at sabotage, both would agree that it is best to use the Textus Receptus.

Normally, this group (at least those who use an English Bible) use the King James Version because it is an accurate and faithful translation of the Textus Receptus. Some would state that the King James Version is absolutely perfect while others simply believe it to be exemplary but not necessarily perfect.

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My position is that that the King James Version is a faithful, accurate, and trustworthy translation of the inspired and preserved Textus Receptus. When I set out to write this book, “In Defense of the Textus Receptus”, I believed that the Textus Receptus was God’s inspired word and that the King James Version is a faithful and accurate translation. I now have a deeper conviction based upon a greater understanding which has only strengthened my belief in the Word of God.

DOES IT MATTER?

One could obviously ask the question as to whether it matters which position a person holds concerning the controversy. The answer is “yes” for the following reasons.

It strikes at the core of our belief concerning the doctrine of inspiration.

When talking about the variations between manuscripts, some people say, “the differences are minor”, “the differences are, for the most part, not even translatable.”, or “it doesn’t affect any major doctrine”. While many of these people are genuine brothers who love God and His word, we are driven back to the point of considering how literally we should take the doctrines of verbal/plenary inspiration and the extent of preservation.

Keep in mind that the purpose of this book is not to show which translation is the best. Although we will invariably discuss the accuracy of numerous translations, that is the secondary consideration. Our primary consideration is to discuss the superiority of one Greek text over the other. Thus, the issue is not really the translation so much as it is the text from which the translation is taken.

If we believe that God has given every word, and if we believe that God has preserved every word, then we are left with no option but to admit that no matter how minor the difference, no matter how “untranslatable” the change, no matter how much we can teach from one manuscript as versus the other – it certainly does matter!

It gives us a framework for evaluating new translations.

Aside from the new translations that are obvious corruptions designed to support heretical doctrines, there are also a number of other translations that are not motivated by heresy at all. Some people would argue that whether it is motivated by heresy or not, they contain heresy. Although nothing comes to mind, I know it is quite possible.

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Others would argue that any doctrine of the scriptures can be taught from any of the Greek manuscript families. And therefore, it is not worth fighting over. The first part of this statement may or may not be true. I have never personally tried to exhaustively validate the argument. I have, however, been able to support the major doctrines of the Bible from either manuscript (Textus Receptus, Critical Text) but I am well aware that there are literally thousands of other teachings – some very minor – and I certainly have not been able to validate them all! I do disagree, however, with the conclusion that it is not worth fighting over.

Some claim that not only doctrine, but even the very order of the words are important. For example, if a passage says “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace”, it should not be changed to read, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, peace, joy”. Logically, the change of order does not have an impact of the truth set forth in the context, but some would argue that the very order itself is set to teach some truth that we do not, at this point in our understanding, comprehend. Add to this the fact that God gave the word order and we do not have the right to change it, whether it matters or not!

Others state that the existence of each word, no matter how insignificant, is important. To give another example, “The Lord Jesus Christ” should never be changed to “the Lord Christ”, “Jesus Christ”, or any other variation of this holy title for the Savior.¹⁶

We agree that the content is obviously a key issue in this discussion. But we must also acknowledge that other issues such as authorship, degree of purity, correct understanding of verbal-plenary inspiration, and accurate application of the doctrine of preservation are also of equal vital importance in determining the correct text family.

It gives us a framework for evaluating our relationships to fellow believers with different beliefs.

Aside from the obvious doctrinal implications, we can also ask ourselves whether or not the issue should be a basis for separation. And if it is a basis for separation, to what extent should separate? Should we exercise separation in the same sense that we would toward Jehovah’s Witnesses? Can we associate with,

¹⁶ Interestingly enough, upon this point, there is a difference between the Textus Receptus and the King James Version. In Galatians 5:6 the Textus Receptus says Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (Christ Jesus) while the King James Version says “Jesus Christ”. Understand that this is in no way an attack upon the King James Version. One would have to establish that there is some valid reason to say “Christ Jesus” versus saying “Jesus Christ” and I don’t think that this can dogmatically be done! Call it minor, call it insignificant, but we cannot call it anything other than different!

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yet not yoke up with, those who hold a different position than ourselves? Or should we take the position that it is a personal matter and not a point for division?

The truth is, the issue has ALREADY caused division. What we must ascertain is whether this division is right, or even necessary. Then, we must ascertain, to what extent the division should be made, and in what context we ought to view those we have separated from!

Also, we must remember that people hold to their various positions from varying motives or beliefs. Some take a more lenient approach while others are very dogmatic. For example, some believe that the King James Version is the best translation while others believe it bears the mark of “double-inspiration”. The point is, although two people may come to the same conclusion, they may not agree on how to get there. Some hold to the King James Version from an unbiblical position.¹⁷ Do we really want to consider them our allies when their doctrine is severely flawed? Once again, we are driven back to evaluate, not only the conclusion, but why we have reached it, and whether it is a basis for separation.

ANSWER BASED UPON BELIEF IN INSPIRATION AND PRESERVATION

Ultimately, your answer to the question, “Does it matter?” will stem from your personal beliefs concerning inspiration and preservation. At this point, it will be important to examine both doctrines in order to set the foundation for our discussion.

Unless we have a proper understanding of what the Bible teaches concerning itself, we do not possess the theological tools to draw the proper conclusions concerning the issue. Without a sound biblical foundation, our choices must ultimately rest on one or several faulty bases.

We may base our decision upon intellect. However, this is not only unwise but actually quite dangerous for several reasons. First, the intellect of man is finite, corrupted by sin, and often downright prideful. Since the Bible clearly illustrates the inclination of man to deceive his own self through pride, he can't even see that he is wrong! Note the following verses on self-deception:

¹⁷ Peter Ruckman believed that the English of the King James Version 1611 is superior to the Greek manuscripts. If this were true, we would have to believe that we did not have the perfect Word of God until the 1600s. He arrived at his conclusions from an unbiblical and unbalanced perspective.

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Isaiah 40:20 He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved.

Obadiah 1:3 The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?

Galatians 6:3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

Obviously, if it is possible for a man to deceive himself, he must ensure that his choices are made upon a foundation surer than his own intellect. This does not mean that the world of academia should be avoided but a true biblical perspective requires that we first place our faith in the word of God by which we may judge all secular knowledge, including the world of academia!

Another faulty foundation that is often used in choosing a position is one that I like to call, “the parrot position”. This is where a person is simply repeating what he has been taught by his pastor, seminary professor, mamma, etc. but has never really sought to validate the beliefs for himself.

Although we should be able to trust our leaders, the Bible does not mandate a blind faith in their teachings. Rather, it encourages each believer to seek the truth of a doctrine from the scriptures for himself. The “parrot position” is especially dangerous because it shows a tendency to trust in the wisdom of man without ensuring that it aligns with the Word of God. And by the way, there are plenty of people in every camp who are guilty of this!

A third faulty foundation often used in coming to a position is simply choosing a position to identify with a particular person, group, or organization. Let’s face reality, a lot of people simply hold to a particular position for the reason of acceptance. Since they want to “fit in” with a particular group of preachers, they will espouse a position that is held in common by the group. The cause of this may be an idolization or a favorite preacher, a desire to be “promoted up the ranks” of a particular group, or a need for support from some organization. One dangerous aspect of this mentality is that if a person should decide that his position is wrong – the reason for his decision doesn’t matter at this point – he will feel the pressure to say nothing, continue as he has always done, in order not to be ostracized by his peers.

So to answer the question, “Does it matter?” is not a simple “yes” or “no”. The short answer is, “Yes, it matters.” But we must also take the time to explain why it matters, and how we should apply this understanding. As stated earlier, the