

Perspective on
The
King James
ONLY
Movement

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I would like to look at an issue, which has cropped up in many churches recently and is proving to be quite a divisive issue among believers and that is the King James ONLY position. This controversy has resulted in many church splits, is responsible for unnecessarily dividing the body of Christ, and has proven to be a headache for many a pastor.

King James ONLY advocates believe that the King James Bible of 1611 is God's perfect, final and preserved word to the English-speaking peoples. According to this belief, any English translation post-dating the King James of 1611 is an attack on God's preserved word, the King James Bible. I suspect one of the chief reasons King James ONLY advocates so strongly adhere to their dogma is to prevent the man in the pew from having to exert any effort beyond the English text to discern the Word of God. There is some validity in that motive. A pastor always discussing what the Greek says can have some chilling effects upon those in his congregation. To begin with, it can cause the person in the pew to lose confidence in his own ability to discern for himself the truth of God's Word and thus shy away from his own personal Bible study. The pastor needs to make sure that the person in the pew, using his English translation of the Word of God, arrives at the same conclusion the pastor arrived at while studying the Greek. The careful pastor will make sure that this happens by comparing Scripture with Scripture in the English Bible, thus building genuine faith in the person in the pew. A pastor flaunting his translational skills from the pulpit may be inflating his own ego, but he is also deflating the confidence of a young Christian's own interpretations in the Word. A pastor's preparations from the original languages should not cause the members of his congregation to lose confidence in their own ability to discern the truth for themselves.

There are those times, however, when the riches in a text can be drawn out only by examining the underlying Greek or Hebrew text. For those instances, the pastor needs to make sure that the person in the pew has access to original language resources for those without formal training in those languages. A good concor-

dance, Vine's Expository Dictionary, or a parallel translation keyed to an English-oriented lexicon can be very helpful for those in the pew desiring greater access to the riches of God's Word in the original languages.

While it is true that we don't want to discourage the English only student of God's Word, neither should we accommodate slothfulness. The truth of the matter is, most Christians today are simply not willing to put forth the effort God expects in discerning His Word. Consider this passage from Proverbs:

Proverbs 2:1-12

"My son, if you receive my words,
and treasure my commands within you,
so that you incline your ear to wisdom,
[and] apply your heart to understanding;
Yes, if you cry out for discernment,
[and] lift up your voice for understanding,
if you seek her as silver,
and search for her as for hidden treasures;
then you will understand the fear of the Lord,
and find the knowledge of God.
For the Lord gives wisdom;
From His mouth [come] knowledge and understanding;
He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
[He is] a shield to those who walk uprightly;
He guards the paths of justice,
and preserves the way of His saints.
then you will understand righteousness and justice,
equity and every good path.
When wisdom enters your heart,
and knowledge is pleasant to your soul,
discretion will preserve you;
Understanding will keep you,
to deliver you from the way of evil,
from the man who speaks perverse things."

Notice again verse 4: "If you seek her as silver, and search for her as [for] hidden treasures." Does that sound like a casual devotional time in the Word or a whole-hearted pursuit for the knowledge of God? Does this sound like we light upon the truth as a result of a half-hearted investigation, or do those who discover the depths of God's wisdom have to do a little digging to uncover those treasures? Don't complain to me that the teaching is over your head, when you spend 30 hours a week in front of the boob tube and one hour a week in the Word! If the teaching is over your head then raise your head!

The chapters ahead contain my objections to the King James ONLY position. First let me say to those of you who are acquainted with the textual arguments, I do not buy into the Wescott and Hort theories. I, for the most part, am persuaded toward the Majority Text tradition - not the Textus Receptus, but the Majority Text - just so you know where I am coming from. But more on that later.

1. The King James ONLY position is logically flawed.

How can a translation be more accurate than that from which it is translated? To ascribe and dogmatically hold that the King James Bible is the perfect Word of God is to give it equal weight with the original manuscripts and thus ascribe apostolic authority to the King James translators. The King James ONLY position, in effect, has God's Word re-inspired for us by the King James translators. If that is the case, are we to now correct our extant Greek manuscripts from the English? Jude taught us in verse three of his epistle to earnestly contend for the faith, which had been in his day once and for all delivered to the saints. But to say that God did not deliver it to the English-speaking people until 1611 is to deny that God once and for all delivered it to the saints in Jude's day.

If the King James translation is perfect, and not one jot or tittle (as they say) can be changed, then what about the English translations before; what about the Geneva Bible of 1560, or the Great Bible of 1539, which all differ from the King James? Are they "straight out of the pit of hell" (an accusation made by the KJV

ONLY proponents against any other translation), because their text is not identical? If the King James Bible is down to the jot and tittle the preserved word of God, then the church for the first 16 centuries did not have the Word of God because the English Bibles they used were not identical to the King James. The truth of the matter is they were all good Bibles. Slight variations in translation do not render the translation useless.

2. The King James ONLY position is contrary to an historical view of Bible translations.

The King James ONLY position is contrary to the historical view of the church concerning preservation. Historically, the church has sought to recover the original writings of the apostles from the extant Greek manuscripts, and then from that, render an accurate translation into the various languages. In fact, most Kings James Bibles have as an introductory footnote a statement which demonstrates this historical and orthodox approach to translating God's Word. I have a facsimile copy of the original 1611 King James. Its introductory footnote states that it is "newly translated out of the original tongues. With the former translations diligently compared and revised." Now did you hear that? "Translated out of the original tongues." In other words, the King James translators considered the underlying Greek text to be the authority behind the translation. But did you hear what else they said: "with former translations diligently compared and revised." In other words, translating the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures into modern languages was to be an ongoing occurrence. Men have always and are always to strive to translate out of the original languages the Word of God. This is a noble process. As human dialects evolve and additional evidence is brought to light concerning the various Greek manuscripts and rules of syntax, the church should continually strive to produce translations which represent, as faithfully as possible, the original intent of those whom God originally inspired to pen His Word.

Ironically, the translators of the King James Bible themselves

did not consider their product the final word to the English-speaking people, in fact, the original King James of 1611 was copiously footnoted with suggested alternate renderings of the text, and the translators even cited passages in which they considered the manuscript evidence for a particular verse to be poor. Certainly, the King James translators, if they were alive today, would not advocate the King James ONLY position. Unlike the apostles, who knew they were writing Scripture, the King James translators did not ascribe finality to their work.

The King James translators were truly godly and humble men. In fact they had to put up with the same nonsense we do today from those who question the necessity for a new translation. Ironically, the original King James Bible of 1611 opens with a treatise entitled "The Translators to the Reader" in which the translators defended themselves against the attacks of those who ridiculed them for producing a new translation of the Scriptures.

Before we go any further, I would like to defend the King James Bible. Now I'm not King James ONLY, I regularly preach from the New King James translation but I would like to offer a rebuke to people who view the King James Bible with contempt. When those who are not King James ONLY discuss the King James Bible, they need to make sure their criticisms are directed toward the King James ONLY position, not the King James Bible. The King James Bible is the product of some very godly men.

The goal of the King James translators was to get the Bible into the language of the common people. They translated despite extreme pressure from the church of Rome; and, by the way, as long as we are paying due respect to those men who translated the King James Bible, we ought also be grateful for the King who commanded it to be translated, King James of England. Now I know what we have all heard about King James, and to be quite honest, I don't know what to think about those reports; but I do know this: in 1611, the church of Rome was more than just a world-wide religious influence, it was a political force to be reckoned with. King James of England was probably one of the only men on earth at that time who could stand up to the military might of the Roman Catholic church and order a translation of the Bible to be

made for the English-speaking people. King James ordered this at the threat of his own peril. He was embattled in a bitter struggle with the church of Rome over whether the Catholic church would regain domination of England and thus regain domination of the world. In fact, in 1605, Guy Fawkes and his gang of operatives for the church of Rome failed in an assassination plot to kill King James, blow up the British Parliament and return England to the Catholic faith. Because of King James' determination, the Bible was, under his orders, translated into the English language. Eternity will only tell how much liberty we in America have enjoyed as a result of England being kept from falling into the hands of the church of Rome.

3. The King James ONLY position is contrary to manuscript evidence.

But as grateful as we are to the translators of the King James Bible, I do not believe they produced God's final and preserved word for the English-speaking peoples. No, rather, the historical position of the church has been to view the original languages as the authoritative source of God's revelation. This leads to another source of controversy in the battle for the Bible; that is, which family of manuscripts deserves to be given the greatest weight in determining what was the exact wording of the original documents.

The facts are as follows: the original documents of the New Testament are gone. They probably wore out sometime during the first or early second century from frequent copying and handling. What we have today are over 5000 copies of the original manuscripts, but no two, which are exactly alike. What textual scholars have been able to do, for the most part, is to classify these copies into two major families of manuscripts: the Alexandrian text type and the Byzantine text type.

The Alexandrian text type is named for the place of their discovery: Alexandria, Egypt. The Alexandrian text is the underlying Greek text for modern translations today. The NIV, New American Standard, and Revised Standard Version all have the Alexandrian text type as their underlying text. Those who favor this

text type argue that these manuscripts deserve greater consideration in reconstructing the writings of the apostles because they are the oldest extant manuscripts and therefore are probably closer to the originals. Approximately five percent of extant manuscripts represent this text type. On the average, these manuscripts date back between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD.

The Byzantine text type is named for the ancient empire in which they were widely discovered, the Byzantine Empire, which for the most part approximates the earliest Christian communities during the spread of Christianity. Although the Byzantine family of manuscripts is not as old as the Alexandrian, they exhibit greater uniformity, and demonstrate greater consistency amongst themselves than their Alexandrian counter-parts. The proponents of the Byzantine traditions rightly point out that their textual tradition had wide circulation amongst the early churches probably because of their universal acceptance. Those who favor the Byzantine text type argue that the Alexandrian text type did not have wide circulation and was probably an idiosyncrasy representing a narrow strand of tradition. This is my persuasion concerning the discussion of manuscript evidence.

From the Byzantine, or as it is called today, the Majority Text, sprung another 16th century Greek text, known as the Textus Receptus. The Textus Receptus was based on about a half dozen Byzantine manuscripts, none, which were earlier than the twelfth century AD. This Textus Receptus is the underlying Greek text of our King James Bible. The Textus Receptus, although based for the most part on the Byzantine or Majority Text, is not identical to the Majority Text. In fact, in the Book of Revelation a substantial number of the verses contain minor variants between the Majority, or Byzantine text type, and the Textus Receptus. In fact, Erasmus, who compiled the Textus Receptus in the 16th century, did not have the last few verses of the Book of Revelation in Greek so he translated the Latin Vulgate into Greek and included it at the end of the Textus Receptus.

I now would like to offer just one example of why I believe the Majority Text, (not the Textus Receptus, not the Alexandrian, but the Majority Text) best reflects the original New Testament

documents. By the way, to the best of my knowledge no major publishing house has published a translation based on the Majority Text, this in spite of the fact that 95 percent of the extant manuscripts are Majority text type. The New King James Version in its footnotes does cite the major textual variants, between the Alexandrian, Majority and Textus Receptus, which is one of the main reasons it is the Bible I use. Here is one example in which the internal evidence of the Word of God points to the Majority Text as being the most accurate text. In the book of 2 Thessalonians, Paul ends his letter as follows: "The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you all."

Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit states here that every one of his epistles is going to end with this hand-written salutation of "Grace to you" in one form or another. Look for yourself, at the end of every one of Paul's epistles is this salutation of grace. Go ahead, start with the epistle of Philemon and work your way back through the epistles of Paul and you will find each and every epistle ends with the salutation which Paul made with his own hand, "Grace to you", in one form or another, except the Book of Romans. Now wait a minute. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit said that it would be a sign in every one of his epistles, that each of them would end with the "Grace be with you" salutation. In the Majority Text, verses 25 through 27 of chapter 16 of the book of Romans appear at the end of chapter 14, which, by the way, fits the context. Paul in Romans chapter 14 is offering instruction concerning weak Christians who need to be established in the faith. The last three verses of Romans chapter 16 are an encouragement to Christians who need to be established. So, clearly, the Majority text alone contains the correct ending to the book of Romans.

4. The King James ONLY advocates use divisive tactics.

Some readers may wonder why this is such a big issue with me. I can only respond that this issue is very close to me because it has resulted in driving a wedge between many otherwise friends in

the faith. I personally have been written off as a heretic by many fundamentalists, people who once were my friends, because of my rejection of the King James ONLY position. We also have family members, who now look upon our ministry with disdain because I don't believe the King James Bible is God's preserved Word to the English-speaking peoples. So, if you sense I have strong convictions concerning this issue, know that it has substantially negatively impacted a great many friendships.

Let's now examine some of the tactics of the King James ONLY advocates. A thorough investigation of the King James ONLY position will reveal a string of half-truths, manipulation of historical facts, and character assassination of any who dare view the textual evidence with an open mind.

I have found as a rule that the most militant proponents of the KJV ONLY position themselves have little or no training in the original Greek; which prompts the question, how can a person who can't even read the New Testament in the original language discuss the significance of textual variants in that language? How can he impugn the motives of modern translators when he can't even judge the result of the translator's work? I don't think I have ever met a person who has spent years preparing to study God's Word in the original languages, who did not also possess a deep abiding reverence for God's Word. The truth of the matter is, some men love God's word so much that they want to explore the depths of its riches in the original languages. That, my friend, is a commendable pursuit, not a pursuit upon which to heap contempt.

But rather than enjoying a discussion concerning the Word of God in the language in which God originally inspired it, many KJV ONLY proponents exercise great deception and character assassination against those who desire to investigate the riches of God's Word in the original languages. Half-truths and a re-writing of history is also what I have found when examining the position of those whom ardently hold to the King James ONLY position.

Which really prompts another question: can a person who so heavily relies on half-truths and a re-writing of history to defend his position still possess any ability to objectively examine any evidence? God's truth never flies in the face of evidence. God's

truth will always stand up to an honest objective examination; and, while sometimes men misinterpret evidence, as in the case of evolution, evidence closely examined and properly interpreted will always be in agreement with the Scriptures.

5. The King James ONLY position is anti-evidential.

A believer should never have to ignore or shun empirical evidence in his search for the truth. Since God is the Creator of all and Ordainer of all history, He welcomes serious investigations into historical evidence. Christians should never have to behave like ostriches with their heads in the sand to protect their beliefs, avoiding historical facts, which are well established. Such behavior is repulsive to honest inquirers for the truth and has turned many away from giving Bible Christianity a serious consideration. All truth is God's truth. When we discover information, which is contrary to what we perceive to be truth, we need to conclude that we are not interpreting that truth properly, but we should never hide from it.

Okay, so let's look at an historical fact, which has recently been altered by those King James ONLY proponents: the dating of the completion of the Septuagint. The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures commissioned by King Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt in 250 BC. The fact that it was completed at that time is attested to by many early historians. Josephus, the first century historian, devotes an entire chapter in his Antiquities of the Jews (Book XII, chapter II) as to how it was finished in 72 days. Irenaeus in his Against Heresies, chapter XXI defends the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus, citing that the Jews themselves in the Septuagint interpreted Isaiah in support of the virgin birth of Christ. Justin Martyr, in his Hortatory Address to the Greeks, chapter XIII, although containing some legend, likewise gives an account of the Septuagint's completion under the orders of King Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt. In fact, the King James translators themselves, in their introductory notes of the original King James Bible attests to the fact that the Septuagint was commissioned and completed during the reign of King Ptolemy

Philadelphus in 250 BC. For years, I have used the existence of the Septuagint before the time of Christ to demonstrate the supernatural nature of Old Testament prophecy. If it is a well-documented fact that the Septuagint existed before the time of Christ, then this fact demonstrates that the prophecies concerning Christ also existed and were indeed fulfilled by Him. This fact serves as a bedrock for the Christian faith.

So, why is the King James ONLY advocate so desperate to put the completion of the Septuagint after the writing of the New Testament Scriptures? It is because the Septuagint is not identical to the Hebrew Scriptures from which the King James was translated; yet Christ and the Apostles often quoted from it. An example of this is found in Luke 4:18:

"The Spirit of the LORD [is] upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to [the] poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to [the] captives
And recovery of sight to [the] blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;"

Christ in this passage is quoting from the Septuagint and not from the Hebrew from which our King James or any other English Bible is translated. This is, by the way, why the Lord's quote here doesn't follow Isaiah 61:1. Go ahead, compare Isaiah 61:1 to the Lord's quotation of it in Luke 4:18. You will see in your Bible recovering the sight of the blind is not mentioned in the Isaiah text.

So what are we to think of this? Whatever conclusion you come to in this passage, it causes problems with the King James ONLY position because the "inspired" translation does not match the Old Testament. Either the people who translated the King James in Isaiah 61:1 got it wrong and the Septuagint got it right, or the Lord is bringing out a fuller understanding of the passage as reflected in the Septuagint. Why doesn't the Lord quote it like it reads in our English Bibles, including the King James? The Lord knew what the Hebrew text said in that passage since He wrote it.

The point is this: variation does not necessarily constitute corruption. Just because my translation of the Bible doesn't exactly line up with your translation doesn't necessarily make my translation "straight out of the pit of hell." The Septuagint, even though not an identical rendering of the Hebrew text, nevertheless contained God's truth and was employed by the Lord and His apostles to advance God's Kingdom.

Here is another example where apparently the New Testament writers quoted the Septuagint and not the underlying Hebrew text of the King James: Romans 9:33, (see also Romans 10:11 and I Peter 2:6), which reads: "As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed".

This quotation can only be from Isaiah 28:16 which reads: "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner [stone], a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste".

Very clearly the apostle Paul is quoting from something other than the underlying text of our English Old Testaments. Once again we see that both Paul and Peter in the quotations cited above are quoting from the Septuagint.

The King James ONLY advocate tries to alter history by saying that the Septuagint was not completed until after the completion of the New Testament Scriptures. This way, Christ is not quoting the Septuagint, rather the Septuagint is quoting Christ. This is a position I had never heard; that is, until recently by the proponents of the King James ONLY movement. Apparently they are willing to alter history to prop up their position.

But, there is another problem. In Romans 9:33, the KJV is at odds with the Textus Receptus. The King James says "whosoever believes will not be ashamed." Actually in the Greek the verb "be ashamed" is a future-passive. In the passive voice the subject receives the action of the verb as contrasted to the active voice, in which the subject of the sentence commits the action of the verb. The King James as it stands today, translates the verb in the active voice, "Whosoever believes shall not be ashamed." The correct translation is "Whosoever believes shall not be put to shame", as

witnessed by the New King James. By the way, the Textus Receptus in this passage agrees with the Majority and the Alexandrian text. In all of the extant manuscripts, the word ashamed is future-passive-indicative. The reason this discrepancy exists in the King James is due to the subtle changes which have occurred in the English over the almost 400 years since the King James Bible was translated. The word ashamed in 1611 carried with it the idea of "being without or left out in a shameful way." Today to "be ashamed" means "embarrassed to be associated with." So we can see, with the evolution of languages comes the need for Bible translations to be updated.

In a nutshell, the question is this: should the Church be busy producing new translations of the Scriptures out of the Greek texts based upon the best information we have about those texts, or are we to believe that the King James Bible is an exact equivalence to the Greek text and God's final and perfect and preserved Word to the English-speaking people? Who wouldn't want to believe that we have an exact equivalence in an English translation of that which God inspired at the hands of His apostles and prophets? The fact remains, however, that because of changes in the English language since 1611, the discovery of additional rules of Greek syntax and the discovery of thousands of more extant manuscripts demonstrate the process of translating God's Word is to always be a work in progress. That has been the historical position of the church and continues to be a healthy endeavor today.

6. The King James ONLY position uses an inferior model of preservation of Scripture.

Another question a King James ONLY advocate will ask you is, "do the English-speaking people have the Word of God today" or "do we have the Word of God today?" If you answer "yes", then the next question is "where is it?" If you answer "no", when they say that God lied when He promised to preserve His Word. They will then turn to Psalm 12:6 and 7 and from that text prove that God has preserved His Word. Well, even though Psalm 12 is more likely a promise of God to forever guard the peace of the godly remnant

during the millennium and beyond, it is a safe assumption to believe that God has preserved His Word; after all, it would indeed be unjust for God to hold us accountable to His Word if indeed we did not have it. It is, however, a reach against evidence to dogmatically say that the King James, and it alone, is that Word.

So how did God preserve His Word? I believe the apostle Paul makes mention of the process in Colossians 4:16 in which he instructs the church of Colosse to exchange their epistle with the epistle that the Laodiceans currently had in their possession from another church. Now we all know that there is no genuine Scripture entitled The Epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans. No, rather Paul makes mention of a process which was already set in motion, that is, the churches throughout that region were exchanging Paul's epistles; thus each church compiling a collection of the New Testament books. As the letters were distributed and copied, minor scribal errors were introduced and original documents wore out. But what has descended to us from every corner of the Byzantine Empire as a result of this copying process is a large family of manuscripts known as the Majority text type which just slightly differs from one another but collectively bear faithful witness to the text of the original autographs.

Slight variations in Greek readings do not necessarily constitute corruption, rather slight variations demonstrate that a story has not been fabricated. When a witness is cross-examined in a court of law, slight variation in a testimony demonstrates to a judge that the defendants in a case have not rehearsed their testimony. Thus also the variations in the testimony of the thousands of extant manuscripts demonstrate the preservation of the original account even though these accounts come from various corners of the Byzantine Empire. So, contrary to popular opinion, variations in the extant manuscripts do not demonstrate corruption; rather, they demonstrate a verifiable process through which God has preserved His Word.

By the way, what is a more evidentially persuasive model of preservation: re-gathering manuscript evidence from every corner of the Christian world and discovering their remarkable uniformity or shutting our eyes and believing that God re-inspired His Word in

1611, even though the translators of that Bible did not believe that to be the case? Truly, if God protected His Word down through the ages, He did it in such a way that is verifiable and evidential to all. Extant evidence is never contrary to the knowledge of God. If your model of preservation flies in the face of manuscript evidence and common sense, then your model of preservation is wrong.

So what is the average person in the pew to think about all of this? You know, I have heard the argument that those who often make mention of the Greek are causing the person in the pew to doubt the Bible and in part I can sympathize with that approach. But, on the other hand, there are volumes of resources available today to the non-Greek student of the Word to help them, with certainty, glean additional insight into the depths of God's Word. Today, no English-reading believer should be afraid when he hears a Bible teacher bring forth additional light from examining the Greek. No; rather, such a believer should be grateful he has access to such a teacher.