

"The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?"

A Critique of James R. White's book

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Justification by faith was the birth cry of the Protestant Reformation. The essential word for men like Luther was faith, which has its roots and life in the living word of God (Rom. 10:17). Today, however, the essential word seems to be justification. Men seek to justify their actions and systems of belief, often at the cost of truth and consistency.

Those who believe the King James Bible to be the preserved word of God for the English speaking people will find no friend in the writings of James R. White and his recent book, "The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?" (Bethany House Publishers 1995). White seeks to justify the use of modern versions such as the NIV and NASV while attacking those who hold to the Authorized Version as the word of God.

It would take a volume to answer all White's objections to the King James Bible and those who believe it. Those criticisms have all been addressed in the writings of those White opposes. However, some points of justification require further examination. The number of contradictions, straw man arguments, and false information is astounding. So are the number of endorsements his book has received by those who view it as "scholarly and accurate," as quoted by Dr. Bruce Metzger, editor of the United Bible Society's Greek text (the basic text for the NIV and TEV). Such endorsements are understandable considering supporters are themselves translators and editors of modern Greek texts.

The real issue is never fully addressed in White's book. In defending modern versions and attacking the Authorized Version, White gives the same old arguments: better texts, the difficulty in translation from one language to another, textual problems in the Textus Receptus (TR, the basic Greek text which underlined the Authorized Version of 1611), errors of the King James Bible, differing editions of the KJV, and the attitudes of those who support it. For example, he makes light of KJV only groups, stating they believe the KJV was "delivered to us via angelic messenger" (pp. 118-119). He boldly declares in one footnote:

We have heard of small groups that go even further, claiming that the KJV was written in eternity, and that Abraham and Moses and the prophets all read the 1611 KJV, including the New Testament! (p. 6)

White's speculations are not scholarly, but merely ridicule and hearsay.

CONTRADICTIONS

Self contradiction seems to be a theme in his book. White states that time should be spent by pastors helping the sick and not defending text types and translations (introduction, p. IV), but then concludes that the Bible "requires us to study its history and the reasons for our trust in its veracity and accuracy" (introduction, p. VI). Apparently, White feels the KJV issue worthy of attention as he has just published a 286 page book on this issue, written a pamphlet entitled "New Age Bible Versions Refuted" in response to Gail Riplinger's book on the subject, and has debated Riplinger twice and author Dr. D.A. Waite on this issue.

In a series of contradictions, White cites several of Dr. Peter S. Ruckman's books, stating that "charges of blasphemy, heresy and even stupidity, fly thick from some elements of the KJV Only movement" (introduction, p. V). Yet, on the same page he says, "The KJV Only controversy feeds upon the ignorance among Christians regarding the origin, transmission, and translation of the Bible." According to White, this view causes conservative Christians to be viewed as "backwards" (introduction, p. VII). Further, KJV only groups are "an 'opening' through which cultic groups often enter into the thinking of the unsuspecting believer" (p. 27). White sends a mixed message that it is wrong to use words such as "heresy" and "stupidity" by supporters of the KJV, but condones the labels of "ignorance," "backwards," and "cultic" for advocates of the Authorized Version.

Another of White's discrepancies depicts those in the King James only movement opposing the use of Greek and Hebrew. White states (pp. 55-56):

Recently I mentioned to a KJV Only advocate that I was teaching both Greek and Hebrew classes. He asked me what percentage of Christians today know Greek or Hebrew. I answered that it is a very small number, to which he replied 'Good.' No need to waste time with such things anyway, since you have God's words in the AV 1611.

Later he admits the Greek Textus Receptus is "...used today by nearly all KJV Only advocates..." (p. 63). How can KJV only advocates hate NT Greek and use the Greek TR at the same time? Every Bible college that believes the King James Bible to be the preserved word of God teaches New Testament Greek.

White illustrates inconsistency in several other places throughout his book.

Chapter two gives a discourse of "New and Improved," noting this phrase comes from advertisers who are "not the most honest people in the world" (p. 9). While the beginning almost reads like a KJV only book against new versions, the chapter quickly changes to criticism of the KJV only movement as die hard traditionalism.

Were homosexuals on the NIV translation committee? White emphatically denies this inquiry (p. 245) but then points out that Virginia Mollenkott was used as a consultant on matters of English style because "she had the reputation of being a committed evangelical Christian with expertise in contemporary English idiom and usage. Nothing was known of her lesbian views." (pp. 245-246)

White claims he is a "biblical conservative" (introduction, p. VII) and believes the Bible is the inerrant word of God. Yet he states, "To err is human" (p. 36). His point that the translators of the KJV were human and subject to error is the same argument the liberal scholar uses about the issue of Biblical inerrancy.

STRAW MAN ARGUMENTS

In the same vein, White builds a series of straw man arguments in order to prove his point. He uses the equation (p. 3), "The King James Bible Alone = the Word of God Alone," to state the view of the KJV only movement. This equation is given without any quotation to support it, and assumes that only the King James Bible is the word of God. The logical implication is that those who hold to this view do not believe any other country has the word of God unless they speak English, or that until 1611 the word of God was lost. Most KJV advocates believe the King James Bible to be God's preserved words for the English speaking people - not the whole world as White suggests (p. 3). King James supporters also recognize the history of the scriptures throughout the church age and

show different times in history where the word of God existed before 1611.

Again, White states of the TR:

Anyone who believes the TR to be infallible must believe that Erasmus, and the other men who later edited the same text in their own editions (Stephanus and Beza), were somehow 'inspired,' or at the very least 'providentially guided' in their work. Yet, none of these men ever claimed such inspiration. (p. 58)

First of all, who believes these men were inspired by God in the same sense the Old and New Testament writers were inspired? White assumes the KJV advocate believes this, and then expresses that men like Erasmus "never claimed to be inspired." Secondly, White quotes Dr. Edwin Palmer of the NIV translation committee as saying, "John 1:18, as inspired by the Holy Spirit...declare(s) that Jesus is God" (p. 103). Because the KJV has a different rendering here, Dr. Palmer calls the KJV and its Greek texts "inferior" and his Greek text "inspired". If a KJV advocate had used such wording concerning the TR, White would have objected.

White points to Dr. Ruckman as evidence that the KJV only movement sees the Authorized Version as a form of advanced revelation superior to the originals.

His arguments represent the extreme of the KJV Only position. We have already noted his statements regarding the perfection of the KJV, even to the point of asserting that the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts should be changed to fit the AV 1611, since even mistakes in the AV 1611 are 'advanced revelation.' (p. 109)

This is another example of Mr. White not doing his homework. It is common to refer to the Greek texts of modern versions as "the original." Since Dr. Ruckman sees these texts as corrupt, he often makes light of them by stating the KJV should be used to correct them. He is not claiming the KJV should be used to correct the authors of the Old and New Testaments, but that the KJV should be used to correct the writings of modern textual critics. As to the superiority of the KJV to the true originals, Ruckman only points out that the originals would serve little purpose to the common English reader since he could not read them but could read his English KJV. Even modern scholars recognize this. Luther A. Weigle quotes Sir Frederic Kenyon, who stated in 1936, "It is the simple truth that, as literature, the English Authorized Version is superior to the original Greek" ["The New Oxford Annotated Bible With the Apocrypha (Revised Standard Version)," Oxford University Press 1977, p. 1553]. Neither Kenyon, Weigle, nor the committee for the Oxford study Bible could be called followers of Dr. Ruckman or part of the KJV only group, although they did recognize how the KJV was superior to the original Greek. Perhaps White will target these men in his next book on the subject.

A curious example is given at the beginning of the introduction about a Christian bookstore sales clerk who is approached by a KJV only advocate asking for a "real Bible." Does this sort of thing happen? Yes it does. But what about the believer who goes into a Christian bookstore and is pressured to get a NIV or NASV? What about the Christian who tries to pick up a book on modern cults or Christian theology and is told how his KJV has errors in it? Or the Christian looking for a Bible who is told the only difference between the KJV and modern versions is that today's translations have removed all the old English of the KJV such as the "Thee's" and "Thou's," only to find whole verses missing and conflicting translation of some verses. While there are militant KJV advocates, there are also militant promoters of modern versions. Most Christians are neither. Contrary to White's implication, the vast majority of those who attend churches where the Authorized Version is used exclusively, and who believe it to be God's word, do not make the issue

of modern textual criticism and Bible translations the central issue in their Christian walk. Most are content to read and believe the Bible they have without altercation and most Christians, both users of modern translations and KJV advocates, are more concerned with living the Bible than defending it.

White insists that modern versions are better because they are more understandable. To illustrate he uses two foreign phrases, in reality idioms, to make his case (p. 23). "The French have a saying that goes, 'J'ai le cafard.'" The literal translation would be, "I have a cockroach," but the understood meaning is, "I am depressed," or "I have the blues." He also uses the example of the German phrase "Morgenstund' hat Gold im Mund'," which means, "Morning hours have gold in the mouth," or to fit our English expression, "The early bird catches the worm." These examples allegedly show why dynamic equivalent translations such as the NIV are "better" than a literal translation such as the KJV. The scriptural reference he gives comes from Luke 9:44 which reads, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears" (KJV), as opposed to "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you" (NIV).

The dynamic equivalent translation discards the doctrine of the preservation of God's words and promotes thought-for-thought translation instead. One could argue the accuracy of such a translation and the fear of whose thoughts are being related in the process. The point is two fold. One, there are few idiomatic expressions in scripture to justify the use of thought translations. Two, the very example White uses proves the point. For the English reader, is the phrase, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears" as difficult to comprehend as the connotation of the French idiom, "I have the cockroach"? Surely, White could have provided us with a better example.

A few favorite instances of White's straw man are where he tries to convince the reader that if men like Hills or Erasmus or even the KJV translators themselves were alive today, they would agree with White. This is speaking for the dead.

"I can say with confidence that if Desiderius Erasmus were alive today he would not be an advocate of the AV 1611" (p. 60). How does White know this? Has he been speaking with Erasmus lately?

"Dr. Hills' [sic] honesty is a breath of fresh air. If he had not begun with the assumption of the superiority of the TR, he would undoubtedly have been led to a conclusion in favor, at the very least, of the 'Majority Text' rather than the modern critical texts" (p. 93). Really? Then why did he not do so?

The following is perhaps the best. In reference to 2 Cor. 2:17, the KJV translates the Greek word "kapeleunontes" as "corrupt" instead of "peddle" as the New King James Version does. "Surely if the KJV translators were alive today", states White, "they would gladly admit that 'peddle' is a better translation than 'corrupt,' and would adopt it themselves" (p. 114). This is foolishness. There were peddlers in 1611, but they chose "corrupt" because they felt it was the better translation. No amount of speaking for the dead will change that fact.

White also argues the point of freedom. While stating that "...if people wish to use the KJV, they should feel free to do so" (p. 5), he claims KJV advocates do not grant this same freedom to others using modern versions. Here, White has confused conviction for the Authorized Version with confinement to the Authorized Version. Of course the KJV advocate will sound more dogmatic. He is speaking from the conviction that he has a perfect Bible. However, this conviction does not confine others and people are free to use whatever translation they wish to use. The translators of the NIV wrote in the preface, "Like all translations of the Bible, made as they are by imperfect man, this one undoubtedly falls short of its goals." The KJV advocate agrees that the NIV and all other modern versions are imperfect and fall short. Still, anyone is free to read and believe them.

The translators of the KJV are the focus of White's book in chapter four. "The KJV translators were not infallible human beings," White points out. "Some, in fact, may have harbored less than perfect motivations for their work" (p. 70). No one claims the KJV translators, or even the original writers, were infallible. It is the word of God that is infallible, not men. God can use fallible men to produce an infallible book. Also, White is very vague in his statement. What is meant by "may have"? Where is the proof of such a statement? The only "evidence" White offers is a footnote where William Barlow, the head of the translators at Westminster, is quoted as saying the king of England was "sacred by holy unction" (p.88). This quote is cited from Gustavus S. Paine's book, "The Men Behind the King James Version" (Baker Book House 1959, p. 43). Paine does not suggest on that page that Barlow or any of the other translators had any motives less than pure. Instead he says, "About kings and queens, Barlow was always sound," and that "King James greatly approved of him." Where is the imperfect motivation and who are the "some"?

Although White points out the fine work Gustavus Paine did on the translators of the KJV, he overlooked Paine's conclusion:

Though we may challenge the idea of word-by-word inspiration, we surely must conclude that these were men able, in their profound moods, to transcend their human limits. In their own words, they spake as no other men spake because they were filled with the Holy Ghost. Or, in the clumsier language of our time, they so adjusted themselves to each other and to the work as to achieve a unique coordination and balance, functioning thereafter as an organic entity--no mere mechanism equal to the sum of its parts, but a whole greater than all of them. ("The Men Behind the King James Version," p. 173)

White then proclaims that the translators were Anglicans, like Westcott and Hort, and believed in baby sprinkling (p. 71). Actually, the translators were Anglicans and Puritan. As for believing in baby sprinkling, he forgot to mention that the translators were more concerned with producing God's word for the English speaking people than they were in their church's doctrine. In the original preface to the KJV the translators wrote, "If we be the sons of the truth we must consider what it speaketh and trample upon our own credit, yea and upon other men's too."

White also has a series of quotes from the original preface to the KJV written by one of the translators, Dr. Miles Smith. It would be rather tedious to examine all the quotes, most of which prove nothing or are taken out of context. For example, White seems to think the translators of the KJV favored the need for additional translations and therefore would welcome modern versions (p. 76). It is true the translators stated a "variety of translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of the scriptures." But this statement must be placed in its context. In marginal notes, expandatory definitions would be profitable. At the time the average reader owned few books, if any, and did not have access to the great wealth of study Bibles we have today. Marginal notes explaining words would make the use of the text that much more "profitable." The translators would not accept the readings of modern versions. They had English translations based on the same type of textual readings of modern versions in the Catholic (Douay) Bible. The translators wrote "...and all is sound for substance in one or the other of our editions, and the worst of ours (that is before 1611) is better than their authentic vulgar."

The translators plainly state that their work was equal to David bringing the Ark into Jerusalem and Solomon building the temple. Their conclusion was, as even cited by White, that the KJV "containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God" (p. 75). They restated this with, "And this is the word of God, which we translate," noting that it was God who "...removeth the scales from our

eyes, the veil from our hearts, opening our wits that we may understand His word..." (Further, no matter how simple a translator makes a translation, it will not be understood until God opens our eyes. After all, the Bible is a spiritual book). One can say what he wishes about the translators of the KJV but the facts are very clear. The translators believed they translated the very word of God and that their work was beyond themselves.

White also advocates his idea of "expression of piety" (pp. 43, 45, 46). Simply put, the Greek text of the KJV is "fuller" because it uses expanded titles in reference to Jesus Christ. White notes twenty-three examples of where "He" becomes "Jesus", "The Lord" becomes "The Lord Jesus", or where "Jesus Christ" becomes "The Lord Jesus Christ." This "expansion of piety," White concludes, "led people to naturally expand the titles used of the Lord, possibly even without their conscious effort to change the text" (p. 46). What evidence does White offer for this "expansion of piety" theory? He gives an example of a caller who phoned in while he was on the radio and complained that he should use the phrase "The Lord Jesus Christ" instead of "Jesus." Does modern scholarship now consist of proof by radio?

This "expansion of piety" is not limited to 23 cases. The Greek texts of the United Bible Society differs from the TR 212 times on this issue of the names of God. The NIV omits the name 173 times while the ASV does so 210 times. Since the scriptures teach us "that in all things He might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18), it makes sense to use a Bible with the "expansion of piety" than to have one where Christ is not as prevalent.

FALSE INFORMATION

The real issue is not the inspiration of the KJV, but the preservation of the word of God as stated in scripture (Ps. 12:6-7, Matt. 24:33, 1 Pet. 1:23). White seems to overlook the issue, touching on it briefly at the end of chapter three where he discusses the relationship between preservation according to the canonization of scripture and the keeping of the Bible as a whole. Again, is this not the same argument the liberal theologian uses to deny Biblical inerrancy? All liberal scholars believe in Biblical preservation in the same form touched on in the "King James Only Controversy." But where is the scriptural support for such a view? Sadly for White and his cohorts, there is none.

The essential question is asked on page 243, "Doesn't Psalm 12: 6-7 promise that God will preserve his words?" After all, if God did not keep His words, then there is no need to argue about preservation. White asks, "Where does Psalm 12 say that the 'words of the LORD' refer to the King James Version of the Bible?" The response, and his insistence that Bible believers accept the King James Bible as inspired or re-inspired, shows that White has little understanding of the movement he opposes.

Still, the issue is not if the KJV is inspired by God. It is whether God did what he said He would do and keep His words for His people? While some redefine the doctrine of inspiration and apply it to the KJV, most KJV advocates revere it as the word of God for the English speaking people without any proven error. Those who dispute this view will eagerly show some verse they perceive as mistranslated or contradictory. The truth is all such verses or places have Biblical and scholarly support to show they have been translated correctly.

To "prove" his case, White singles out three KJV advocates: Dr. Edward F. Hills, Gail Riplinger and Dr. Peter S. Ruckman. Yet no quotations are given to prove his point. Where does Riplinger claim inspiration for the KJV? Dr. Ruckman states he believes the KJV to be God's word for the English speaking people without any proven error. This is preservation, not inspiration. And even Dr. Hills, as quoted by White, states that the New Testament as we have it today was "not inspired but God-guided" (pp. 92, 93).

The doctrine of preservation teaches that God kept and preserved all His words throughout every century so that believers can have the inerrant words of God. The difference between those who hold to the King James Bible as that word of God and those who accept the use of modern versions is this: supporters of the KJV can produce a Bible they believe is inerrant while defenders of modern versions can not.

Another example of false information is White's treatment of the "Johannine comma" (1 John 5:7). "If indeed the Comma was a part of the original writing of the apostle John, we are forced to conclude that entire passages, rich in theological meaning, can disappear from the Greek manuscript tradition without leaving a single trace" (p. 62). Without a trace? White thinks it was added in the fifteenth century. Yet, it was quoted by Cyprian in 250 AD, used by Cassiodorus in the early sixth century, and found in the old Latin manuscript of the fifth century and in the *Speculum*.

White cites several verses where he claims the KJV has mistranslated the Greek. As already stated, it would take a volume to respond to all of White's problems with the KJV. However, two things come to mind immediately. First of all, one must remember the scholarship of the KJV translators. These were not ignorant men. Most could read and speak several languages including Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic by the time they were in their early teens. They did not just read the languages of the Bible; they thought in those languages. They spent time not only teaching these languages, but also were responsible for writing Hebrew and Greek lexicons which are the basis of modern lexicons. It is hard to believe these men mistranslated a word and that all of them in the committee would agree with the mistranslation. It is one thing to say you do not like or agree with their translation; it is another to claim they translated it incorrectly. Secondly, the difference in translation can be seen in the modern versions. The very fact that the NASV, NIV, NRSV, and even the NWT all use basically the same Greek text yet reflect different readings shows that some Greek words can be translated with more than one meaning.

Gustavus Paine, using one of the KJV translators, illustrates this point:

...Dr. Richard Kilby, the translator in the Old Testament group at Oxford, heard a young parson complain in an earnest sermon that a certain passage should read in a way he stated. After the sermon Dr. Kilby took the young man aside and told him that the group had discussed at length not only his proposed reading but thirteen others; only then had they decided on the phrasing as it appeared. ("The Men Behind The King James Version", pp. 137-138)

Even if there were no questions about text types, variance in translation would still be argued. The KJV advocate argues preservation verses corruption, an argument of textual criticism. The issue of translation is secondary. After all, one can not argue proper translation until he has settled the issue of proper text.

CONCLUSION

By in large, these are the same old arguments those who oppose the Authorized King James Bible have always used. You can ask, "Which edition of the KJV do you have, the 1611 or the 1769?" And like White, you can cite what you view as "Problems in the KJV." This is nothing new and the question still remains unanswered, "Where is the inerrant Bible you speak of?"

White argues that those who can answer the above question by producing a Bible which can be

seen, read, and tested have become cultists looking for "absolute certainty." In fact, he compares them to Roman Catholics looking for absolute certainty in the infallibility of the Pope. He compares them to the Mormons who look for absolute certainty in the authority of the Apostles in Salt Lake City and to Jehovah's Witnesses who look for absolute certainty in the Governing Body of the Watchtower (p. 94). Strangely, all these groups would agree with White that the KJV is full of errors and they have something better. They are free to believe as they wish but truth dictates the assurance that God has kept and preserved His words. On this issue we can be absolute and certain.

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe." (1 Thess. 2:13)

"Commendo vos dilectioni Dei, et odio papatus et superstitionis."

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