

THE BATTLE OVER PRESUPPOSITIONS ON THE TEXTUAL ISSUE

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible makes it clear that its every Word is essential. All of our doctrines, standards, convictions, and our practices are derived from the Scriptures. The doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture enables us to confidently appeal to these Words to determine all of our theological and doctrinal boundaries. God's revelation is authoritative, sufficient and clear, and ultimately necessary for our existence (Job 23:12; Prov 29:18; Isa 46:10; Amos 8:11; Matt 5:17–18; 16:1–4; John 10:35; Rom 1; 2 Tim 3:15; Tit 1:2; Heb 6:13).

The whole system of God's truth is set forth in the Holy Bible as God's inerrant, infallible and plenary Word. Christians today have accommodated themselves to rationalistic modernism to the point that they no longer hold absolute positions, save perhaps for religious pluralism and the Golden Rule. However, the advent of relativism especially in the textual issue is an insidious adversary, for it rejects the real possibility of absolute truth, even if it promotes infinite forms of meaning. Since the Word of God is our only effective offensive weapon, it would be wholly inconsistent with the character of God to send us out into battle with a sword that is not dependable and uncertain. All of Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit to set forth God's unique system of truth and thus the system of truth is self-attesting.

PRESUPPOSITIONS

Reformed believers are mandated to presuppose the Scriptures in all of their thinking and practice as the ultimate criterion of truth, whereas unbelievers resist this obligation in every aspect of thought and life. Francis Schaeffer defines a presupposition as "a belief or theory which is assumed before the next step in logic is developed. Such a prior postulate often consciously or unconsciously affects the way a person subsequently reasons."¹

Hence, presuppositions are the central pillars, which support the foundation from which we can begin any independent interpretation of data, determining possibilities. When we examine the textual issue we find two basic positions. One starts with Scripture and finds God's instruction about the preservation of Scripture. The other position concerns itself more with man's opinions, questions, philosophies, and speculations.

However, our presuppositional faith is the evidence and substance (Heb 11) we have in what God has spoken! Everything we need to make us perfect or mature as a believer is found in the Scripture (2 Tim 3:15-16). Such a believer studies to show

¹ Francis A Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1968), 179.

“himself approved unto God” (2 Tim 2:15). We must interpret evidence in light of faith through special and then general revelation, not vice versa. Reason cannot produce truth in and of itself, as reason needs prior knowledge by which to reason. Behind all human reason is God’s reason, and the only place we can objectively encounter God’s reason is in Scripture. Every use of reason therefore presupposes the Infinite, Eternal and Unchangeable as everything in the world is in constant change and needs an unchanging point of reference to validate it. Too many professing believers have adopted the worldview of Platonist English Provost of King’s College, Cambridge, Benjamin Whichcote who boasted that “reason is the Divine Governor of Man’s Life; it is the very voice of God.”²

When clear biblical truth is found, as A W Tozer would say, “never do we dare to stand in judgment of that truth; rather, that truth always stands in judgment of us!”³ The absolute rule for theory selection is that we should prefer those textual or scientific theories that do not conflict with the biblical data. This is why theology was once ubiquitously understood as the “queen of the sciences.” The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6) concurs,

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

Now, either this creedal statement is true or it is not. There simply is no higher authority than the Word of God. Naturally, this confessional position can only work when one can particularise his starting point of where this self-authenticating revelation of God is perfectly found. Richard Muller insightfully observes,

The orthodox definition of the truth of Scripture—like the orthodox definitions of infallibility and authority—treads a very narrow line. Scriptural truth is never allowed to rest upon empirical proof: truth depends upon divine authorship and can be defined as a “truth of promise” or as an intentional fidelity or veracity upon the part of God as author.⁴

We must presuppose the primacy of Scripture alone as providing the foundation for all proof. Scripture itself teaches us the priority of Scripture in theological matters. Although many decry this as circular and unacceptable, it should be noted that one either starts with God or with man. Greg Bahnsen summarises the need to argue biblically and presuppositionally,

The Believer must defend *God’s word* as the ultimate starting point, the unquestionable authority, the self-attesting foundation of all thought and

² Benjamin Whichcote cited in *The Cambridge Modern History: Planned by the Late Lord Acton*, vol. 5, (Cambridge: University Press, 1908), 750.

³ A W Tozer cited in “A Simple, Face Value Understanding of Prophetic Scriptures” chapter from *The Revelation about Jesus Christ: A Dynamic Commentary* online at <http://www.revelationcommentary.org/hermeneutic.html>, accessed January 4, 2009.

⁴ Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 323.

commitment. ... The fact that the apologist presupposes the word of God in order to carry on a discussion or debate about the veracity of that word does not *nullify* his argument, but rather *illustrates* it.⁵

The book of Ecclesiastes is the autobiography of the wisest sinner to have ever lived and his conclusion is given in 12:13-14 is that a proper worldview must always begin with the fear of God. The Apostle warned us, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col 2:8). The etymology of the word “philosophy” (*philosophia*) shows that it means “the love of wisdom” and Paul warns us here that our knowledge or philosophy must always be “after Christ.” Jesus Christ is Wisdom personified and in Him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3; cf. Prov 8:22-36; John 1:1-3, 14; 1 Cor 1:24, 30), so what He says on this subject must be received absolutely. Fallen man does not fear God and so cannot reason with true wisdom and knowledge (Prov 1:7; 9:10) as he has lost the true source (Isa 59:1-2; Col 2:2-3). There can be no compromise between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of this world. The Church Father, Irenaeus, a disciple of the godly Polycarp makes clear, “The Scriptures are perfect. In the scriptures let God always teach and man always learn!”

A Christian epistemology begins with the Bible as the Word of God; this is the indemonstrable axiom, from which all true theories are to be deduced. As a consequence of it being an axiom, it cannot be proved. Although, many ridicule perfect preservationists for believing what the Bible says, the Apostle Paul declared in Acts 24:14,

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets.

The great Apostle was willing to stake his faith and die for it on what was written. He made the ultimate ground of Christian authority as the Word of God and clear he would be “judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers” (Acts 26:6). Paul refused to preach anything but, “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22; cf. Acts 28:23). The only “evidence” Paul accepted as certain was God’s Revelation. It is true that Paul would cite facts and evidences of the resurrection in his reasoning, but only in accordance with the presuppositions of a biblical epistemology.

No observation or experience can be greater than a promise from God, “because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself.” The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, also makes clear that “The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is Truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God.” In the biblical view, a proposition is true because an omniscient God thinks it to be true. In an interview with *Christianity Today* (December 30, 1977) Cornelius Van Til explained, “There are two ways of defending the

⁵ Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1996), 72.

faith. One of these begins from man as self-sufficient and works up to God, while the other begins from the triune God of the Scriptures and relates all things to Him.”⁶

The Roman Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), sought unsuccessfully to synthesise the rationalist axiom of sense experience of Aristotle, and the Scriptural axiom of revelation by arguing persuasively for human intellectual autonomy. However, true Reformed believers reject Rome’s soteriology and bibliology because they are both predicated on this synthesis which is doomed to failure. This is because objective knowledge of truth cannot be known outside the Revelation of God. As New Testament believers, Christ must be the ultimate authority over our theories of epistemology as we must “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts” (1 Pet 3:15). Paul also warns us that we must be, “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,” and then “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Thus all of our methodologies and conclusions as to the textual questions must be controlled by the explicit revelation of Scripture. The Scriptures make clear that God’s providential actions answers to no one, “He giveth not account of any of his matters” (Job 33:13; cf. Deut 29:29). We need to adopt the same spirit as the Virgin Mary and say “Be it unto me according to thy word” Word” (Luke 1:38). As Thomas Strouse shows, the application of biblical presuppositions will guide us to the true Words of God,

The Lord Jesus Christ started the “received Bible” movement after which its preserved Greek text was named in 1633. God the Father gave words to the Son who “received” them and then gave these words to His disciples who “received” them (Jn. 17:8, 20). His Apostles preached and then inscripturated these words so that Jews (Acts 2:41), Samaritans (Acts 8:14), and Gentiles (Acts 11:1; 17:11) received these words as the “received Bible” movement began in the first century. Paul epitomized the Thessalonians as an example of a NT church with the “received Bible” mentality stating, “*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 also in you that believe*” (I Thess. 2:13). The fruit of this “received Bible” movement is any accurate translation built upon the received Hebrew and Greek texts, including the KJV.⁷

PRESUPPOSITIONS AND TEXTUAL QUESTIONS

A textual position that rejects the *a priori* presupposition that “The Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice” must be rejected. A Biblicist derives his ontology and epistemology from biblical theology rather than his own experience filtered through his own reason. It is an insult to God to argue that the only infallible written revelation of Himself so lacks clarity that man has to step in to

⁶ Eric H Sigward, “Obituary: Dr. Cornelius Van Til,” online at <http://www.vantil.info/articles/obituary.html>, accessed 16 March 2009.

⁷ Thomas Strouse, “Refutation of Dr Daniel Wallace’s Rejection of the KJV as the Best Translation,” online at http://www.emmanuel-newington.org/seminary/resources/Refutation_of_Wallace.pdf, accessed 6 November 2009.

determine the process. This inevitably leads to very different ideas about what is scientifically possible, morally just, or rationally plausible. We still have a rational account for holding a textual presupposition, but not for *arriving* at it, because by definition we must *start* with it. For if we declare the need to *prove* it true before we *believe* it to be true, we have simply admitted beforehand our lack of faith in it.

This is vital in the textual debate as the autographs seemingly do not exist and we have no direct link to them. The oldest extant manuscripts are conflicting, contradictory, and emanating from an era that all accept was a period of intense corrupting of Scripture. Therefore, we have no “neutral scientific” bridge that guarantees we have an entire tradition going back to the originals outside the promises of Scripture. All a Critical Text (CT) advocate can be certain about, at best, is that his reconstruction of a text can replicate the majority opinion of a group of third century manuscript copies. Beyond that he is as uncertain and lost as anyone else, as there is no definite way to determine the antiquity of the text which lies behind the extant manuscripts. Most CT advocates believe that the key doctrines or the original text are preserved somewhere among the variants, but they have no logical or scientific reason to believe so. Their belief is predicated more on sentimentality as they have rejected any biblical exegetical basis for assuming perfect preservation.

Textual critical evidential arguments presuppose that man can approach the knowledge of God’s Words, as if man is morally neutral. It is predicated on the idea that man has an unaided intrinsic ability to reach knowledge of God’s Words in making textual choices and conjectural emendations. However, any attempt to separate faith and reason is doomed to failure, as this construction violates Romans 1:18 and 1 Corinthians 10:31. Hebrews 11:1-3 makes clear that biblical faith must precede historical or rationalistic evidence, whereas modern textual critics demand that faith in the biblical promises of perfect preservation be subordinate to the opinions of apostate scholarship about the historical evidence of the manuscripts. Since no one is viewpoint neutral and everyone has presuppositions, why do the CT advocates want to exclude biblical presuppositions on the issue of the text? Do they really believe in the myth of a “secular, academic, religiously-neutral hermeneutic” in criticism? As one philosopher once observed, “absurdity is always a serious art.”

WARFIELD AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Benjamin B Warfield is a prominent example of those who turn to reason first over the propositional revelation of Scripture. In an introductory note to Francis R Beattie’s *Apologetics*, he writes,

Before we draw it from Scripture, we must assure ourselves that there is a knowledge of God in the Scriptures. And, *before we do that*, we must assure ourselves that there is a knowledge of God in the world, And, *before we do that*, we must assure ourselves that a knowledge of God is possible for man. And, *before we do that*, we must assure ourselves that there is a God to know.⁸

Cornelius Van Til rightly saw this inconsistency in the old Princeton school of Warfield,

⁸ Benjamin B Warfield, “Introductory Note” in *Apologetics* by Francis Beattie (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1903), 24.

Deciding, therefore, to follow the Reformers in theology, it was natural that I attempt also to do so in apologetics. I turned to such Reformed apologists as Warfield, Greene, and others. What did I find? I found the theologians of the ‘self-attesting Christ,’ defending their faith with a method which denied precisely that point.”⁹

Reymond also observes,

Here Warfield calls for a very complete natural theology to be erected by human reason. It would be very interesting to learn from him how he intended to prove, without presupposing the truthfulness of all that the Scriptures affirm about such matters, that the one living and true God exists, that man is natively able to know him, that there is a knowledge of God in the world, and that this God has made himself uniquely known propositionally at the point of the Hebrew/Christian Scriptures, and to prove all of this before he draws any of it from the Scriptures. Frankly, if men could assure themselves of all this on their own, and assure themselves of all this before they draw any of it from Scripture, it may be legitimately asked, would they need Scripture revelation at all? And would not their “religion” be grounded in their labors, a monument to their own intelligence?¹⁰

Ironically, Warfield once warned,

Science, philosophy, scholarship, represent not stable but constantly changing entities. And nothing is more certain than that the theology which is in close harmony with the science, philosophy, and scholarship of today will be much out of harmony with the science, philosophy, and scholarship of tomorrow.¹¹

It is tragic that he never followed his own advice.

Those who adopt this Warfieldian worldview consistently must believe that their faith is built upon nothing but the word of man. This worldview also assumes that man is alone in the universe and is capable of making independent, autonomous judgments about the world around him, with no reference to God. Such a view is to build an epistemological house on sand. It assumes that we cannot be certain as to God’s Words, but we can have faith in our own supposed objectivity in determining those. Hence, someone who believes in perfect preservation by God of His Words and those who reject this look at the same extant textual data and come to radically different conclusions. However, what drives textual critics to their conclusions is not the evidence, but their presuppositions. They are trying to reinterpret the biblical text relating to preservation (or simply ignoring it) in the hope that it can be brought into conformity with present non-biblical, historical models. Essentially, they are attempting to compartmentalise their faith and their scholarship into separate worlds. By carefully questioning the presuppositional framework being used in the background, the spiritually

⁹ Cornelius Van Til, “My Credo,” in *Jerusalem and Athens*, online at <http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/index.html>, accessed 15 April 2009.

¹⁰ Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 144.

¹¹ B B Warfield, “Christianity and Our Times,” an article originally published in *The Church, the People, and the Age*, edited by Robert Scott and George W. Gilmore, 1914, online at <http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/bbwourtimes.htm>, accessed 7 January 2009.

sensitive scholar will avoid being led astray by the numerous details and technical jargon of the CT advocates. Theodore Letis puts it well in a reply to D A Carson,

Both schools interpret the data of NT textual criticism and modern translations differently, and both groups fill in the gaps in the data with assumptions which favor their given position. I hope some are beginning to see that this is not an argument between scholarship (the established school represented by Carson) and non-scholarship (the challenging school which has traditionally been treated as non-scholarly and completely uncritical). To the contrary, the best representatives of both schools display genuine scholarship. Why is it, then, that these two schools co-exist on this all-important issue of the very wording of the NT text? Some will fault me for not answering every objection of Carson's, but it was only our intention to raise the old issue of presuppositions and to underscore the fact that this debate is not one between experts with data and non-experts with dogma, but rather one between experts with the same data, but different dogma—the dogma of neutrality versus the dogma of providence.¹²

In the uncertainty of postmodern textual criticism with its fluid textual tradition, the only genuine alternative is a biblical presuppositional approach. The universe is only correctly viewed through the lens of scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. All we must do is study to find out how God describes His Words and how He will preserve them and then find the texts that match that description. As God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and His Words within it, then it is not a naturalistic purposeless machine and “in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). God executes His sovereign Will through the works of creation (Rev 4:11) and providence (Dan 4:35). As stated in the Confession (5:1): “God, the great Creator of all things, does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will.” David Norris observes,

The Word of God is the meaning of meanings, the fulcrum upon which the whole system of truth moves, it is the Sign around which all others revolve and which they reflect. For this to be so, the Word of God must have pre-existed all other words.¹³

Richard Bacon argues,

When we study the preservation of Scripture — when we study textual criticism — we must do it from a believing mindset. We must begin with the fact that God has spoken in his Word, and that he has preserved his Word for his people by his people. *God has not preserved his Word in a jug in a cave near the Dead Sea.* God did not

¹² Theodore P Letis, ed, *The Majority Text* (Grand Rapids: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987), 201-204.

¹³ David W.Norris, *The Big Picture: The Authority and Integrity of the Authentic Word of God* (Cannock: Authentic Word, 2004), 239.

preserve his Word by setting it on a shelf unattended and forgotten. God preserved his Word by his people *loving it so much that they made copies of it!*¹⁴

Textual critics boast that they have constructed their own worldview autonomously and independent of Scripture. They utilise inductive arguments appealing to any consideration that might be thought relevant to the probability of the truth of the conclusion such as statistical data, generalisations from past experience, appeals to signs, evidence or authority, and causal relationships. We are called to approach Scripture with deductive arguments in which the truth of the conclusion is thought to be completely *guaranteed* and not just *made probable* by the truth of the premises. Believers who adhere to a biblical worldview do not rely upon their own arbitrary assumptions as a tool to judge the truth-claims recorded in the Bible and to construct their own explanations for the extant textual evidence. Our fideistic worldview is not bereft of rationale or logic. There are tremendous and diverse evidences, historical and tangible, for the preservation of Scripture, including thousands of ancient extant manuscripts.

If we understand that faith precedes reason then we must approach the textual debates with consistent faith presuppositions and then use them to reason. Indeed, to approach the textual questions of the extant manuscripts with a supposed neutral scientific approach and affirming the idea that it must be free from theological presuppositions is clearly a contradiction. As one evangelical put it, “For every critic – the liberal just as much as the evangelical – establishing limits is a matter of faith, either in one’s own internal competence, or in another’s (Christ’s) external authority.”¹⁵ Those who hold to non-biblical presuppositions have constructed it upon some set of non-negotiable assumptions and therefore must embrace an authority other than the Bible by faith. These competing worldviews need to be truth-tested and the only objective standard for this is Scripture alone. Ironically, CT advocates cannot show Scripture or evidence to prove their view, yet we are supposed to believe their positions by *faith in their reasoning*.

THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL BATTLE

We are today in a battle over words—it is a battle for the very words of God. The contemporary view amongst even Fundamentalists is the basic premise that the Words of God are *separate* from the meaning. A typical example of this was the translation by J B Phillips’ *The New Testament in Modern English* (1947) who wrote concerning 1 Corinthians 14:22a, “[I] felt bound to conclude, from the sense of the next three verses, that we have here either a slip of the pen on the part of Paul, or, more probably, a copyist’s error.”¹⁶ Phillips had no hesitation in claiming that the words or their consistency did not matter to the Apostle Paul—just the general message,

¹⁴ Richard Bacon, “The Testimony of God through Preservation and Miracles,” online at http://www.fpcr.org/blue_banner_articles/wlc4f.htm, accessed 16 March 2009.

¹⁵ J. Barton Payne, “Higher Criticism And Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed Norman L Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 93.

¹⁶J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (New York: Macmillan, 1960)

Paul, for instance, writing in haste and urgency to some of his wayward and difficult Christians, was not tremendously concerned about dotting the “i’s” and crossing the “t’s” of his message. I doubt very much whether he was even concerned about being completely consistent with what he had already written.¹⁷

Such presuppositional arrogance allowed Phillips to simply amend the words to conform with the message he wants to portray to his unsuspecting reader. Furthermore, it typifies the hubris of the modern textual critic who sets his reason above the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring these very Words in the first instance. Such an unbiblical view is not limited to liberals only. In the Spring/Fall 1996 issue of the *Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary Journal* of the supposedly Fundamentalist Calvary Baptist Seminary in Lansdale, a professor of Old Testament opined, “Is communication achieved by the words that are spoke (or written) or by the meaning that words convey? ... *The message is in the meaning.*” However, 1 Corinthians 2:13 (cf. Ps 12:6-7; Prov 30:5-6; Matt 4:4; John 3:34; Rev 17:17) makes clear the Words matter as Paul said, “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” J D Watson correctly comments,

This sounds very much like the neo-orthodox doctrine of “Concept Inspiration,” which basically teaches that only the concept the author is writing about is inspired, not the actual words he is writing. The obvious fallacy here is how is a concept communicated? Words. Change the words and you’ve change the concept. ... Did you get it? We can’t be sure of the words, but we can be sure of the message. And how pray tell can we do that? How can we be sure of what God means if we don’t know what God said? Or to put it theologically, how can we have an inspired message if we don’t have inspired words?¹⁸

God’s Words were to control, create and define the true Church, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:23). If all the Scriptures were “written,” for the purpose of instructing New Testament saints (2 Tim 3:16), this purpose for the inspired writings must invariably demand their perfect preservation. It does not make any theological or even logical sense to argue that God inspired the Words because He wanted us to have His Words and then for most of the Church Age we have not had them and have no hope of recovering them. Logically, outside the doctrine of special providential preservation, we have no way of being certain which words are inspired if we do not know which words are originally in the Bible. CT advocates have no reasonable or theologically good answers for this. In his recent debate with CT advocate James White, Bart Ehrman cleverly pointed out the fallacy of the CT approach,

Despite the fact that scholars have been working diligently at these tasks for 300 years, there continues to be heated differences of opinion. There are some passages where serious and very smart scholars disagree about what the original text said, and there are some places where we will probably never know. If James wants to insist

¹⁷ J B Phillips, foreword to *The New Testament in Modern English* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958).

¹⁸ J D Watson, “Defending the WORDS of God,” online at www.thescripturealone.com/JDW.html, accessed 20 April 2009.

that we have the original text, then I want to know: How does he know? In any given place, and I can cite dozens of them, he will have differences of opinion not only with me, who is an expert in this field, but with every other expert in the field. If God preserved the original text intact, where is it? Why don't we have it, and doesn't he know where it is? I don't know the answer to that.¹⁹

God also sealed the Canon in history, spiritual gifts ceased, and the apostolic office passed away as man would now live solely by His Words alone. If God promised to preserve all of His Words, He will not alter His course because of mankind, Satan, or anything in all of creation. A Sovereign God controls history precisely just as He has always planned and ordained and nothing can thwart His perfect will (Dan 4:35; Eph 1:11). Douglas Wilson explains why we need to have this authority,

If I believe the Bible in my hands is the absolute and objective Word of God, then when I read it, then obedience, among other things, will tend to be on my mind. But if I do not believe this, then either the Scripture can be set aside as a guide to good works, as it pleases me, or the Bible can become a nose of wax, to be molded into whatever *my* idea of good works might be.²⁰

Dr Ian Paisley comes straight to the point,

There is no middle ground. We either have a reliable Bible in our mother tongue or we have not. What is the use of God verbally inspiring the Bible if He did not preserve it verbally for all generations?²¹

Ralph Earle writing in "The Rationale for an Eclectic New Testament Text" in *The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation* admits their uncertainty,

... with thousands of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament at our disposal, we can reach a higher degree of certainty with regard to the probability of the best text. It should be added that comparative statistical studies indicate that all Greek manuscripts are in essential agreement on at least 95 percent of the New Testament text. Significant differences exist, then, in less than 5 percent of the total text. And it must be said emphatically that none of these variant readings pose any problem as to basic doctrines of the Bible. They are intact! We should like to add that all the members of the Committee on the Bible translation are devout Evangelicals, believing in the infallibility of the Bible as God's Word. We have all sought earnestly

¹⁹ Rebuttal by Bart Ehrman in debate with James White on "Can the New Testament Be Inspired in Light of Textual Variation?" on January 21, 2009. The debate transcript is online at <http://mp3.aomin.org/805Transcript.pdf>, accessed 20 April 2009.

²⁰ Douglas Wilson, "That Good Old Narrative Trajectory," online at <http://www.dougwils.com/index.asp?Action=Anchor&CategoryID=1&BlogID=1752>, accessed 20 April 2009.

²¹ Ian R.K. Paisley, *My Plea for the Old Sword: The English Authorised Version (KJV)*, (Belfast: Ambassador, 1997), 17.

to represent as accurately as possible what seems to be, as nearly as we can determine, the original text of the New Testament?²²

Such a loaded admission raises a multitude of unanswered questions. For instance, surely the only reliable scholar who asserts that God did not perfectly preserve His Word in one place is the scholar who knows for certain that he is using an errant edition, can objectively prove to what extent it is errant, and knows that there is an edition that corrects the flaw? The range of possible errors is virtually unbounded, for who can say at what point an “errant” Providence stopped permitting corruptions? Also, who could presume to know how to set God’s imperfect providential preservation in order? Textual critics ultimately base their view on subjective criteria in determining whether or not a textual variant is important. Like Lucifer, the Adamic nature cries, “I will be like the most High” and refuses to recognise the authority of God, but is very comfortable with the authority of man. Like the charismatics with their man-centred pseudo-gospel message of self esteem, textual critics have embraced a low view of Scripture and lofty view of man.

Although many conservative CT advocates attempt to create at least a dichotomy between higher and lower criticism, most textual critics alternate between both systems with ease. This is because both are predicated on the same premises and utilise the same rationalistic methodology. They just change the label on the bottle when moving between both systems of application. Believers should also note that those supporting the CT and modern versions do not seem to be concerned about any other text but the *Textus Receptus* (TR). It is surely suggestive that the devil and his kingdom are only concerned to rid the Body of Christ of that text. The character and beliefs of the CT scholars and adherents should be enough to warn even the naïve of its insidious character. As Strouse comments,

why do liberals, apostates, Roman Catholics and cultists prefer the critical text and its translations instead of the TR and the KJV—could the answer be the weak, anemic, and ambiguous theology espoused in the CT and modern versions? Why do neo-evangelicals use the *UBSGNT* that has Carlos Martini as one of the editors. After all, Martini was too liberal for the RCC to place as a candidate for the recently vacated office of Pope.²³

FRUITS OF TEXTUAL CRITICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

When we survey the last 150 years of Church history, it is clear that since the decline of biblical certainty with the 1881 Revision we have seen the rise of the older, more established cults from evangelical roots adding their new interpretation on orthodox doctrine by pointing to textual variants. Heretical theologies are mutating out of the postmodern marketplace of ideas, with repackaging of old heresies. Ironically, although

²² Kenneth L Barker ed, *The NIV: The Making Of A Translation Contemporary* (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1991), 58-59

²³ Thomas Strouse, “Refutation of Dr. Daniel Wallace’s Rejection of the KJV as the Best Translation,” 5.

record numbers embrace scientific rationalism, multitudes embrace the New Age existentialism, read the astrology charts, and watch for UFOs. The Charismatic Movement which revived the Montanist obsession with subjective experiences in contradistinction to biblical absolutism also has some of its roots in a reaction to rationalism, naturalism, and textual criticism.

Like the Athenians, the *zeitgeist* of our contemporary apostate age lives to spend their time telling or hearing something new, especially in religious philosophy. From the modern church's truncated view of morality and rejection of biblical separation has now emerged a generation who are more interested in environmentalism than moral absolutes. A quick survey around the average Christian bookstore reveals something of the contours of spiritual confusion on these issues of absolute authority. Most sermons in evangelical churches are so anaemic and anecdotal they could easily have been preached by 19th century liberal moralists such as Harry Emerson Fosdick. However, we would never have gotten the cotton candy theological preaching of men like Joel Olsteen unless we had first had a cotton candy Bible version! Even the New Atheists recognise that a faith based on revelation is the only faith worth *rejecting*. This is why Reformed writer, R J Rushdoony boldly observed that "the issue of the Received Text is ... no small matter, nor one of academic concern only. The faith is at stake."²⁴ Certainly, "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Ps 11:3). Bishop D A Thompson pointed out,

To them it is significant that loyalty to the Traditional Text and its translation into many other tongues in Europe and further afield has been accompanied by many manifestations of faith, whereas the discarding of this text and the issuing of the modern versions to which reference has been made, has many associations with the rejection of the historic Christian Faith and of positive unbelief.²⁵

The divergence between the CT and the TR are so great that they produce two different Bibles. The implicit argument of the CT proponents is that the Bible did not exist in its pure form until 1881, and most would accept that it is not even pure today. Such a presupposition explicitly contradicts what Christ and His Apostles taught on the matter (Matt 24:35; 2 Pet 1:19). As Paisley rightly observed,

Paul exhorted "the holding fast of sound words," and in the doctrinal realm the Authorized Version is pre-eminent in doing just that. The Holy Word itself poses the question—If the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do?—Psalm 11:33. The blunt answer is they cannot do at all, they are undone. ... Let us get the matter right. The Bible is not the production of man but the product of God. It is the Word of God. It was not delivered unto the scholars—Greek, Hebrew or otherwise, but to the saints. "*The faith which was once delivered to the saint*" Jude 3. God has delivered His Book to the custody, not of the scholars, the universities, colleges or seats of learning, but only to His saints.

Can any ordinary saint who has no knowledge whatever of the original languages know what is a proper version of God's Word or which is absolutely reliable? The

²⁴ Rousas John Rushdoony, "The Problem of the Received Text," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, 12(1989): 9.

²⁵ D A Thompson, "The New Testament Text and Early Church History," *The Bible League Quarterly* (April 1968).

answer is “yes” or else Jude verse 3 is error. Jude verse 3 is not error but divinely revealed truth. The attempt to bamboozle the ordinary saints of God with irrelevant controversy must be demonstrated. The ploy to take from the saints their divinely appointed role of custody of the Book and place it in the hands of scholars must be exposed for what it is, a device of the devil himself. Thank God for the simplicity which is in Christ which devastates the duplicity which is in Satan.²⁶

God places supreme importance upon His written Word and its exaltation is a theme which runs throughout the Bible. The Lord also gave us three grave warnings (Prov 30:5-6; Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18-19) to those who would corrupt the Scriptures and even concluded the final revelation with a fearsome final reminder in the last verses of Revelation. We cannot look to scientific proof to establish the doctrine or preservation any more than we can for inspiration or canonicity. God’s Word says that His revelation to man was preserved for all time, to each and every generation, in every single Word, and through His people. Those biblical presuppositions should be the entire frame of reference within which the facts are to be understood when we come to this issue. The “facts of textual history” cannot be neutrally interpreted autonomously to establish the veracity of the Christian faith but require the starting-point of faith from which to interpret them. This is because all knowledge of the Words of God are rooted in God as, “the fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7). That does not mean that the fear of the Lord can be safely set aside in order to conduct our textual critical investigations.

We are told to, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Prov 3:5) not to denigrate our intellect per se but to make us know that our minds were never meant to be objects in which to put our trust. When something in the Bible does not appear to make sense, the reader should assume that he is failing to understand something. Fundamentalists, such as Paul Downey, foolishly congratulated himself on his rational wisdom to determine revelation by claiming, “The Christian faith has never been a blind fideism, but has always relied on both the revelation of God and empirical evidence.”²⁷ Historically and biblically (as far back as Genesis 3) we should have concluded that we should be sceptical about our unguided natural abilities, but certain about the truth of revelation. However, this has been now exactly reversed. Modern fundamentalism has embraced the triumph of reason over revelation in textual issues and now in other historic doctrines. Stephen M Davis, an adjunct professor at the supposed fundamentalist Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary, writes recently of the six literal twenty-four-hour days of creation,

Raising the question of the “days” in Genesis 1 might seem unthinkable for many believers. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that “the doctrine of creation has proved vulnerable because it works in territory where the rights of Christian theology to operate have been subject to sustained challenge, first by natural philosophy and more

²⁶ Ian R K Paisley, *My Plea for the Old Sword*, 73-75.

²⁷ James B Williams ed, *God’s Word in Our Hands: The Bible Preserved for Us* (Greenville: Ambassador Emerald International, 2003), 393.

recently by natural science (McGrath 1993, 95). Most Fundamentalists appear to hold to the view of six literal twenty-four-hour days of creation. Closely aligned with the literal view is the young earth theory. Divergent views are often associated with either liberal views of Scripture, which deny inerrancy, or with atheistic, Darwinian evolution. ... According to Hebrews 11:3, we affirm that “we understand that the universe was created by the word of God.” There can be no question as to what God did. There may be no resolution among Christians about the “how” and “when.”²⁸

The rejection of biblical fideism has left men like Davis entirely agnostic about how and when God created! We, on the other hand, would assert dogmatically by the authority of Scripture alone that the world was created recently, *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) by divine fiat in six literal twenty-four-hour days.

ARE DOCTRINES AFFECTED?

It is true that it is a logical fallacy to argue that if one point in a book is mistaken, then all points in it are likewise mistaken. The problem is when the authority and reliability of the book in question is self-attesting based on the position that it is completely true. The pernicious argument for the existence of only an imperfect Bible is compounded by the fact that you do not know with any objective certainty what the mistakes are. This was cleverly illustrated by the agnostic Bart Ehrman when he pointed out, in his 2009 debate with James White, that arguing that no doctrine is affected because we have essential purity in percentages of agreement between manuscripts is fallacious as one could have 99 words out of 100 that were the same but this would be irrelevant if the missing word was “not.” In an earlier interview, Ehrman states of the textual differences, “some of the differences are very significant and can change the meaning of a passage or even of an entire book. Is there any textual critic who can say that these are not facts?”²⁹ Textual critic, Daniel Wallace, admits examples of doctrine that he is uncertain over because of variants,

I do think that there are many textual variants that need to be wrestled with so that we can know how to live and how to act. Should we fast as well as pray when performing exorcisms? Should women be silent in the churches or not? Is eternal security something that Christians have or not? Are we still under the OT law? How should church discipline be conducted—viz., should I address someone who has not sinned against me or am I allowed to confront only those who have sinned directly against me? These are issues that are directly affected by the textual variants and they require some serious thinking and wrestling with the data. So, I would say that to the extent

²⁸Stephen M Davis, “Creation “Days” in Genesis: Twenty-Four Hours or Not?,” online at <http://sharperiron.org/2009/03/03/creation-%E2%80%9Cdays%E2%80%9D-in-genesis>, accessed 4 March 2009.

²⁹Evangelical Textual Criticism, “Interview with Bart Ehrman,” online at <http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2006/09/interview-with-bart-ehrman.html>, accessed 4 February 2009.

that these variants do not represent the original text, to the same extent they are not what God intended.³⁰

However, the more damning indictment of this new textual tradition comes from the very authors. Many argue that theology is not affected in the modern versions, but Revision Committee of 1881 candidly confessed to having a distinct agenda as regards affecting the theology of the text. On the Revision Committee was a Unitarian, G Vance Smith (1816-1902), minister of St Saviour's Gate Unitarian Chapel, York. Smith said this of the Revision Committee, "nor is there anything improbable in the supposition that they may have been influenced by the bias of their own theological opinions. It was at least natural, perhaps it was inevitable, that they should have been so."³¹ Smith boasted of some of these examples with the most devastating admission to those who promote the Westcott and Hort doctrine,

Since the publication of the revised New Testament, it has been frequently said that the changes of translation which the work contains are of little importance from a doctrinal point of view; — in other words, that the great doctrines of popular theology remain unaffected, untouched by the results of the revision. How far this assertion is correct, the careful reader of the foregoing pages will be able to judge for himself. To the writer any such statement appears to be in the most substantial sense contrary to the facts of the case, for the following reasons:

- (1) The only passage in the New Testament which seemed like a statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, has been removed by the revisers as spurious.
- (2) The sole Deity of the Father has been re-affirmed in a remarkable case in which the authorised version had singularly misrepresented the original words. 'The only God' of John v. 44, affords evidence equally strong and clear with that of John xvii. 3, that the writer of this Gospel could not have intended to represent Jesus, the Christ, or Messiah, or even the Logos in him, as God in the same high sense of Infinite and Eternal Being in which He is so.
- (3) The character of the baptismal formula is greatly altered by the simple substitution of the word 'into' for 'in' shewing us that there could never have been, as people have commonly supposed, any ecclesiastical magic in the phrase 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,' seeing that this phrase is not to be found in the New Testament at all, and that the words simply express a change of mind, on the part of the convert, from disbelief or denial to the profession of the allegiance which constituted discipleship.
- (4) One remarkable instance in which the epithet 'God ' was given to Christ (1 Tim. iii. 16) has been excluded from the text, and others of similar kind are admitted by the Revision to be uncertain.

³⁰ Daniel Wallace, "Has God Preserved the Scriptures?," online at <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2007/08/has-god-preserved-the-scriptures-it-depends-part-2/#more-354>, accessed 4 February 2009.

³¹ George Vance Smith, *Texts and Margins of the Revised New Testament Affecting Theological Doctrine Briefly Reviewed* (London: British and Foreign Unitarian Association, 1881), 4.

(5) The only instance in the New Testament in which the religious worship or adoration of Christ was apparently implied, has been altered by the Revision: ‘At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,’ [Philippians 2:10] is now to be read ‘in the name.’ Moreover, no alteration of text or of translation will be found anywhere to make up for this loss; as indeed it is well understood that the New Testament contains neither precept nor example which really sanctions the religious worship of Jesus Christ

(6) The word “Atonement” disappears from the New Testament, and so do the connected phrases, ‘faith in his blood,’ and ‘for Christ’s sake.’ These so commonly used expressions are shewn to be misrepresentations of the force of the original words, such alterations evidently throwing the most serious doubt upon the important popular doctrine of which they have hitherto been a main or indispensable support.³²

Often anti-TR critics argue that we have all the doctrines, but we are just guessing in an “educated way” about what some of the Words are. However, all of the doctrines are based on Words. If every Bible suddenly were missing Mark, Galatians, and 1 Peter, no essential doctrines would be altered it, but it would still be a significant event. Significance does not depend solely on whether or not a fundamental doctrine is affected.

The Bible does not just say that fundamental doctrines are sufficient to live for God but every Word (Matt 4:4; John 12:48). Indeed, if Matthew 4:4 refers to the Scriptures, what God has written and preserved for us, then we can live in a manner pleasing to the Lord. However, if it refers to everything God has ever said (which would be completely absurd cf. John 20.30 and 21.25), then we are all in trouble! All textual beliefs ultimately reason from self-attesting presuppositional systems, which is unavoidable when ultimate truths are being debated. The only major difference is that the perfect preservation approach has theological explanatory power in that it accounts for the fulfillment of man’s purpose on earth, whereas all other beliefs throws the believer into a whirl of inconsistencies and self-contradictions. Just as Immanuel Kant’s epistemology led to the logical nonexistence of his objective *noumenal* world because it is unknowable and therefore cannot be shown to be objective, so do the CT advocate who appeal to the lost originals as their authority.

This circumstance is not unique even to Christianity as every epistemological claim, including that of the textual critic, to know whether something is true or not is tested by some kind of assumed standard within the existing belief system. For instance, rationalists point to human reason tested by logic as the ultimate standard for knowledge, whereas empiricists believe knowledge as derived from the experiences of the physical senses or mind. All approaches to determining the biblical text assumes an ultimate standard in order to prove that self-same standard. Our bibliology must be clear and consistent. God said that He preserved His Word, and that should settle it. God does not promise man a comprehensive answer to every question we have concerning preservation but He does provide a meaningful answer within the context of the scriptural framework for man’s existence and needs. Van Til succinctly points out that the non-Christian’s

³²Ibid, 45-47.

position is also circular: "...all reasoning is, in the nature of the case, *circular reasoning*. The starting-point, the method, and the conclusion are always involved in one another."³³

CONCLUSION

Perfect preservation advocates readily admit that they do not have all the answers as to how God preserved His Words in every generation. By presuppositional faith in the promises of what God said He would do rather than what men speculate might have happened, we can be sure that He has preserved His Word and that is enough. The truth is they do not have the autographs, the first copies of the original manuscripts, and even many of the actual copies from which the KJV translators worked. There were periods in church history, in which Rome destroyed the records and texts of believers, such as the Albigensians and the Waldensians.

Despite the CT verbal smokescreens, the best that most textual historians can do today is essentially speculate on what is the history of the transmission of the text throughout this period. The evidence is fragmentary and inconclusive. Since no one can prove what happened in the first two centuries, we must trust in the Scripture as our objective guide to the evidence. TR advocates cannot prove everything that they believe historically happened with tangible evidence, but enough to satisfy someone who is willing to believe Scripture. After all, none of us have seen creation, a worldwide flood or the ark, but we accept the Genesis account of this. The great fundamentalist leader T T Shields makes clear,

The Book is to be our Teacher; the Book is to judge us—we are not to judge the Book. There is a world of difference between these two attitudes of approach. Nowadays it has become common for men to attempt to teach the Book. ... Poor blind souls they are, how little do they know that the Bible was written for our learning! It was intended to be our Teacher, and no man will ever get the wealth of wisdom and of grace here laid up for the believing soul who approaches it in that critical attitude.... It is equally true of the Word of God, that if you would get out of It that which God has put into It for you, you must come to It as to the Word of God: you must surrender your will to It; you must yield your intellect to It; you must let It search your heart; you must sit at Its feet as at the feet of a teacher!³⁴

What we simply cannot do is assert that God has revealed Himself in the pages of a book without at the same time implying that such a revelation is necessary to us. Archbishop Whately once observed that we are not obliged to clear away every difficulty about a doctrine in order to believe it, provided that the biblical presuppositions on which it rests are clear. This is even more so where the rejection of a doctrine involves greater difficulties than its belief, as it does with preservation here. The value of having the scriptural presuppositions is infinitely greater than the subjective opinions of those who fail to distinguish between *difficulties* and *proved errors*.

³³ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 101.

³⁴ T T Shields, "The Comfort of the Scriptures," a sermon delivered on July 10, 1921.

The Bible must never be interpreted simply by the facts of general revelation. If our interpretation of the textual evidence conflicts with what Scripture says, then we simply submit to God's Word and reject our view of evidence and our own reasoning. Any of the standard arguments for scribal errors from a standard textbook for Textual Criticism to explain textual corruptions could be easily applied to the autographs. Did Paul's poor eyesight make him misspell a word? We must believe in God's power to both inspire and preserve His Words. Harriet A Harris in *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* acknowledges the common approach of higher and lower criticism,

Fundamentalism in fact accords with evangelicalism which, according to McGrath, 'accepts the principle of biblical criticism (although insisting that it be applied responsibly).' The difference between the two positions becomes a matter of what sorts of biblical criticism are accepted, and how its responsible application is defined. Here we will discover no hard-and-fast distinctions between fundamentalism and evangelicalism, but varying degrees of acceptance of different forms of criticism.³⁵

Modern textual critics prefer to attribute these to "scribal errors" and correct the Bible according to their subjective interpretations based on diverse and contradictory opinions. They demand that we place our faith in a hypothetical original that does not exist now, and never did exist in a single Book, as well as apostate textual critics to help us iron out some of the "corruptions" in our texts. Naturally, each critic's findings and conclusions differ to the point that we witness the textual Babel of the modern conflicting, multiple-choice versions. Thomas Strouse shows that these critics have other difficulties to surpass,

They must defend the unenviable position that the discipline of textual criticism *in toto* is the one discipline of Biblical Criticism which was unadulterated by anti-supernatural rationalism. And when they do "restore" God's Words, how will anyone know it since this "truth" was determined by extra-biblical means rather than the NT pattern whereby NT church members receive God's preserved Words (Mt. 28:19-20; I Tim. 3:15), which reception is to be confirmed by the same believers hearing His voice (Jn. 10:27)?³⁶

There are indeed difficult passages in the Bible that require us to approach by faith. Doubtless, a Sovereign God has placed these to sift out those who would tamper with His words. No doubt also the lack of 2nd century extant Byzantine manuscripts are a test of the heart to see whether believers will embrace the promises of Scripture over the competing theories of evidential textual critics. We are nowhere instructed in Scripture to restore what God presumably has not perfectly preserved.

It is noteworthy that the Lord never explained the reasons for Job's providential suffering, but simply pointing him to God's Sovereign power in creation by a tour of the universe. Job wisely did not argue with the works of God but simply bowed

³⁵ Harriet A Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8.

³⁶ Thomas Strouse, "Should Fundamentalists Use The NASV?" *Sound Words from New England* Volume 2, Issue 1, June - August 2001, 4, online at <http://www.emmanuel-newington.org/seminary/resources/NASV.pdf>, accessed 7 November 2009.

his head and admitted, “know that thou canst do every *thing*, and *that* no thought can be withholden from thee” (Job 42:2). Through this perspective, Job understood that if God could make all things by Divine Fiat, He could easily govern all things in providence. Unlike Job, many stagger in disbelief at God’s works of providence as they fail to trust His promises. As Thomas Watson noted, “Men murmur at God’s providences, because they distrust His promises.”³⁷

Sadly, many professing believers seem to find difficulty believing in the perfect providential works of God in practical application. When we also understand that God is Sovereign in providential preservation then we will have no difficulty in saying with Moses, “Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect” (Deut 32:3-4).

The facts are that the Reformed churches from the days of the Reformation until the end of the 19th century used no other text for their translations based upon their presuppositions concerning the text. The true Church recognised, received and settled on the Words just as the scriptural model described and as history has corroborated. The *Textus Receptus* and the Masoretic Hebrew Text and the foremost English translation from them – the King James Bible – are the result of God’s special providential preservation of all the words. *C’est un fait accompli*.

³⁷ Thomas Watson, *The Lord’s Prayer*, (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), 167.