

PRESUPPOSITIONS IN APPROACHING THE TEXTUAL DEBATE

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(1) All of our doctrines must be from the Bible (2 Tim 3:16). The Bible is self-attesting (1 Cor 14:29, 32, 37; Matt 18:19). How we view our world is not how God views it and believers are mandated to think God's thoughts after Him (Isa 55:9), which requires a scriptural presuppositional approach to the textual problems. A believer must study to show "himself approved unto God" (2 Tim 2:15). As Cornelius Van Til puts it, "The Bible is thought of as authoritative on everything of which it speaks. And it speaks of everything." We are to receive these promises by faith (Heb 11:13; Matt 13:22; Rom 1:17).

God revealed the Scriptures so men could know His will both in the Old and New Testaments and in the future (Deut 31:9-13, 24-29; 1 John 1:1-4; 2:1-17; 2 Tim. 3:14-17, 2 Pet 1:12-15). Certainly the Bible makes clear that no Scripture was intended for only the original recipient (Ps 78:5-7; Rom 15:4; Rom 16:25-26; 1 Cor 10:11). God intended for those writings to be recognised and received by the church as a whole (e.g., Col 4:16; Rev 1:4). These Words were to be guarded (1 Tim 6:20-21) as a "pattern of sound words" for the church (2 Tim 1:13-14) and to be used to instruct the future church (2 Tim 2:2).

(2) The Bible promises that God will preserve every one of His Words forever down to the very jot and tittle of the smallest letter (Ps12:6, 7; Ps 33:11; Ps 119:152, 160; Isa 30:8; 40:8; 1 Pet 1:23-25; Matt 5:18; 24:35).

(3) The Bible assures us that God's Words are perfect and pure (Ps12:6-7; Prov 30:5).

(4) The Bible promises that God would make His Words generally available to every generation of believers (Deut 30:11-14; Isa 34:16; Isa 59:21; Matt 4:4; 2 Pet 3:2; Jude 1:17). (This is general availability, not necessarily to every person on the planet.) Certainly, we are told that for around two millennia in history only one small nation had the true and pure words of God, "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD" (Ps 147:19, 20 cf. Rom. 2:14).

(5) The Bible promises there will be certainty as to the Words of God (2 Peter 1:19; Luke 1:4; Prov 1:23; Prov 22:20-1; Dan12:9-10; 1 John 2:20).

(6) The Bible promises that God would lead His saints into all truth, that the Word, all of His Words, are truth (John 16:13; 17:8, 17).

(7) God states that the Bible will be settled to the extent that someone could not add or take away from His Words (Rev 22:18, 19; Deut 12:32). Indeed, the Apostle Peter

in 2 Peter 3:2 warned the saints of his day to be mindful of the “Words” of the Old Testament writings (v2a) and the New Testament writings (v2b), which would be absurd if some of these Words had been corrupted or lost.

(8) The Bible shows that the true Church of Christ would receive these Words (Matt 28:19-20; John 17:8; Acts 8:14, Acts 11:1; Acts 17:11; 1 Thess 2:13; 1 Cor 15:3).

(9) The Bible implies that believers would receive these Words from other believers (Deut 17:18; 1 Kgs 2:3; Prov 25:1; Acts 7:38; Heb 7:11; 1 Thess 1:6; Phil 4:9).

(10) The Bible shows that Bible promises may appear to contradict science and reason. In Genesis 2 we see that a newly created world may look ancient. However, the Scriptures remind us that “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man” (Ps 118:8). The Christian life has to be a walk in faith in God’s promises not in feelings. The devil and the flesh can give you all kinds of feelings. We do not have to answer every question but to believe what God says.

(11) Christ implied the preservation of His very Words as a Standard of future judgment (John 12:48). He also warned of the vanity of ignoring His actual Words (Matt 7:26). Christ emphatically declared, “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). In Matthew 22:29 Jesus rebuked, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures.” If the Scriptures were only accessible in the Originals then why would He chide them for being ignorant of Words that were not available? Believers are commanded to contend for the faith (Jude 3) and this faith is based upon the Words of God (Rom 10:17). Note that concerning the end-times, the Lord Jesus warned, “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8 cf. Amos 8:11; Lam 2:9).

Here are other Bible evidences that guide us:

(1) God also has established Biblical precedents which show that He keeps and protects His Words. For instance, when Moses broke the original copy of the tables of God, they were replaced very soon afterwards and not hundreds of years later and Scripture makes the point that these second tablets were written “the words that were in the first tables” (Deut 10:2). In the book of Jeremiah, God responded to the burning of His inspired Words by preparing Baruch to record in it “all the former words that were in the first roll” (Jer 36:28).

(2) Jesus preached from the existing scrolls and we are explicitly told they were “Scripture” (Luke 4:21). Jesus also explicitly said the “Scripture” that they were reading was “spoken unto you by God” (Matt 22:31 cf. Mark 12:24-26). Indeed, Christ said to His audience that when they read the Scripture they would see that which was written by Daniel the prophet himself (Matt 24:15; Mark 13:14). Other New Testament passages argue from the Old Testament text based on a phrase (as in Acts 15:13-17), a word (Matt 22:32), or even the difference between the singular and plural form of a word (as in Gal. 3:16).

(3) The Bible warns that there would be those who would “corrupt the word of God” (2 Cor 2:17; Jer 23:29) and handle it “deceitfully” (2 Cor 4:2). The Apostle Paul warns of those who “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” as heading towards apostasy (Rom 1:25). There would arise false gospels with false epistles (2 Thess 2:2). Jesus taught us that if a tree is corrupt, the fruit will be corrupt. Likewise, if a tree is good, the fruit will be good (Matt 7:17). He was speaking of false prophets. False prophets and false teachers corrupt the Scriptures (2 Pet 2:1-3). We must understand that there will always be a line of perversion as there will be of preservation. We are commanded to be *fruit inspectors* based upon the premise that if a man’s doctrinal belief is in error we can conclude that he will do the same to the Scriptures (2 Cor 2:17). “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7); so all knowledge of the Words of God is rooted in God.

(4) God utilised fallible but Spirit-filled human writers to pen His divinely inspired Words of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16, 1 Pet 1:21). A fallible but Spirit-filled John the Baptist could point infallibly to Christ. As much as a fallible but Spirit-filled Church can recognise and receive the infallible Canon, so can she also recognise and receive the infallible Words of this Canon (John 10:27). Canonicity was recognised by the true Church (not Rome) and the corollary of this must be that the Canonised Words must be recognised by the true and faithful Church and not Rome’s texts or apostate textual critics such as Westcott, Hort, Aland, Metzger etc.

(5) The Church at Antioch has a noteworthy position in Scriptures in contrast to Alexandria. Antioch is the first place where the born-again believer is called a Christian (Acts 11:26). It is also interesting to see that where both Antioch and Alexandria are mentioned in the same passage, Antioch is listed as a place of service, while Alexandria is listed as a place of disruption (Acts 6:5-10). Egypt is for the most part associated with ungodliness in the Bible (Isa 19:14; 30:1-3; Act 7:39; Rev 11:8). Most of the New Testament books were written originally to cities in the Byzantine Text area and none written to Alexandria. However, it was precisely in Alexandria that corrupters of the true text dominated.

Dr Kent Brandenburg summarises from these presuppositions,

When we see what God has taught about His Words and the preservation of them, we choose to believe what He said, despite tangible evidence. Individual hand-copies had errors. God said that men would change the Words of Scripture. He warned of it. We see that this is the strategy of Satan, to amend the Words of God. However, God promised and so we believe that He overcame the work of Satan and preserved His Words so that we would have a settled text that is perfect in fulfillment of His promises. The *textus receptus* of the NT and the Hebrew Masoretic of the OT are the only texts that could have been preserved and available. They are the only texts that believers will claim perfection.

I wasn't there when God created the world. I believe it anyway. I wasn't there when God inspired His Word. I believe it anyway. I wasn't there when Jesus died on the cross. I believe it anyway. I wasn't there when God preserved His Words. I believe it anyway. God will be pleased with your reception of the Words He preserved.