

NEW TOOLS FOR TEACHING TEXTUAL CRITICISM TO LAYPEOPLE

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Introduction

It is a delicate matter for industrial-strength inerrantists such as myself to explain to laypeople that there are discrepancies in the biblical manuscript tradition—including not just typos but apparently purposeful alterations.

Indeed, when do you have “the talk” with a growing Christian?

“Pastor, where do Bibles come from?”

“Uh..., ask your mother.”

It is tempting to deflect the question.

But the damage an uncaredful answer could do to a layperson’s faith is real; the briars in that portion of the biblical studies pasture are thick. This is true no matter what text-type one prefers, no matter what methods of textual criticism one would practice if it were up to one. And yet it is not up to one, and this is sometimes forgotten in introductory literature for laypeople. The facts of textual criticism that are most interesting to a textual critic are not necessarily those most relevant to readers of vernacular New Testaments.

The inherent complexity of the topic also makes it difficult to teach to laypeople: it is challenging to find the line between adequate information and information overload. Thankfully, then, there are pedagogical tools which can help. This somewhat informal paper will acquaint readers with three new tools for teaching New Testament textual criticism to Christians who have never studied Greek (along with some honorable mentions):

1. The Exploring Biblical Manuscripts interactive in Logos Bible Software.
2. The Lexham Textual Notes on the New Testament
3. KJVParallelBible.org

The first two of these tools are found in Logos Bible Software, and as a disclosure of material connection, I do have a rather material connection to Logos. But I write on my own as someone extremely interested in the topic and not as a salesman. And most of our time will be spent on the third tool, one I created personally and one that has no relationship to Logos. I will conclude with some observations generated by my experience in developing KJVParallelBible.org and an explanation of its purpose.

First, however, I will discuss what laypeople need to know about textual criticism and will briefly list some of the books that might be useful.

What Do Laypeople Need to Know?

What, exactly, do laypeople need to know about textual criticism? What is the minimum threshold? I suggest that most laypeople need enough knowledge to develop one Bible study skill and one Bible-buying confidence.

First, they need to be aware enough of textual critical issues in Bible study that they are able to understand a footnote such as that used by the KJV translators at Luke 17:36, “This verse is wanting in most of the Greek copies.”¹ (And for this they need the further Bible study “skill” of not expecting to attain absolute and exhaustive certainty on every interpretive question.) If laypeople are disturbed by textual notes in the ESV or NET Bible (or the KJV), they need shepherding. And they need knowledge.

Second, and their greatest need, is to feel comfortable with and confident in the overall textual choice that has already been made for them by their pastoral leadership, those who have chosen the translation(s) recommended for use by a given church or group of churches—*and to feel comfortable with and confident in others’ freedom to choose a different evangelical translation*. They need to be stable enough in this confidence that they are not blown about by Ruckmanite or Ehrmanite winds. They need the kind of information that will lead them to the most significant practical textual-critical decision they face: when they walk into a Christian bookstore, will they purchase a translation based on the Textus Receptus or one based on a critical/eclectic text? *This does not actually mean they need to know anything about textual families*; I would prefer they did not, for reasons I hope to make clear. It simply means they need existential confidence in their purchase—without thumbing their nose at others.

Laypeople must be taught enough truth about how we got our Bibles that they can walk into a Christian bookstore, buy a reliable evangelical Bible translation (of which there are many), and trust what they are getting. Textual critical issues need not be on page one of the discipleship manual; they and other complex matters such as the relationship of law and gospel and how to harmonize the four evangelists can be left for volume two or three, at least. But not volume 100. It is difficult to avoid blaming pastors nervous about “the talk” for some of the widespread confusion and discord presently afflicting the church in the arena of bibliology.

The viewpoints of Ruckman and Ehrman—the Scylla and Charybdis of textual criticism, representing radical fideism and radical skepticism, respectively—give no sign of going away. And textual criticism is one of their richest sources of public

¹ See https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Luke_17_1611/

persuasion: the tall briars create a darkness in which misunderstanding can grow like a mold. It is too easy to believe that back in old monasteries nefarious conspirators tampered with the Bible text to suit their own purposes—and in this viewpoint Ruckman and Ehrman ironically stand united. To stretch my metaphor a little thinner, many of Christ's precious sheep are caught in the dark briars of these two conspiracy theories. Christ's undershepherds must do something to extricate them—and to protect other sheep from getting lost in them in the first place.

Introductory Books

There are a number of excellent introductory books and articles available for shepherds to read for themselves and to hand out to trapped or otherwise needy sheep. Loosely ranked according to their usefulness for handing to laypeople (the more Greek and biblical studies knowledge a book or article requires, the further down the list it goes), I offer the following:

- Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods, and Results* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).
- David Alan Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).
- Wendy Widder, ed. Douglas Mangum, *Textual Criticism of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).
- J.B. Williams, ed., *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man: A Layman's Guide to How We Got Our Bible* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald, 1999).
- J.B. Williams and Randolph Shaylor, eds., *God's Word in Our Hands: The Bible Preserved for Us* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald, 2003).
- Philip W. Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography & Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005).
- Michael W. Holmes, "Textual Criticism," chapter 3 in David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 46–65.
- Daniel B. Wallace, "New Testament Textual Criticism," Chapter 2 in Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning, *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), .
- Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

"Introduction" for several of these books is a technical term for an undergraduate or seminary textbook. The people imagined as being "introduced" to textual criticism are future pastors and professors, not current insurance adjusters, factory workers, elementary school teachers, and homemakers. But several of these books set out for

themselves the optimistic goal of making New Testament textual criticism accessible to laypeople—and yet the inherent complexity of the topic makes this a tall order each time. Not every sheep who needs to know something about textual criticism will be able to get through a *book* on the topic.

So let us examine some teaching *tools* instead.

1. EXPLORING BIBLICAL MANUSCRIPTS

I recently taught a six-month series on bibliology in my church's adult Sunday School class. The first tool to which I turned in the textual criticism lectures was something that had just been released in Logos 7, "Exploring Biblical Manuscripts." It was put together by the Content Innovation team at Logos, the folks behind the new tools and datasets Logos produces.

If a nerdy wag were to observe that this tool is something of a glorified PowerPoint presentation, I might reply that, yes, this is true—but the level of glorification is pretty high. 10×, I would say. Not only are the layouts and images professionally produced, but the structure of the presentation is truly excellent. And the presentation is admirably lengthy. It took me two Sundays to get through a majority of it; we did not look at every last slide.

All the foundational elements of textual criticism are covered, though the actual practice of textual criticism is not:

- The material science aspect—ostraca, papyrus, scrolls, parchment, ink, different scripts, palimpsests.
- The textual tradition aspect—Sopherim, Tannaim and Amoraim, Masoretes, Dead Sea Scrolls
- Unique textual elements—tetragrammaton, nomina sacra, masorah magna and parva
- Major manuscript finds relevant to the study of both testaments—1QIsa, Aleppo Codex, Sinaiticus, Oxyrhynchus papyri
- Major relevant archaeological finds—Tel Dan stele, Siloam inscription, Cyrus cylinder
- Significant ancient translations—Peshitta, Vulgate

Wherever possible, pictures and graphs and other visuals complement the summary text, which is straightforward and responsible—and accessible to laypeople. In my church, I taught multiple elderly folks who had been in church for decades and yet were fascinated by what was to them a brand new topic. They sat in rapt attention to this recital of ink recipes and obscure scribal details, because the provenance of the Bibles on their laps was for the first time becoming clear to them.

Seeing pictures of ancient manuscripts brings the need for textual criticism out of the darkness and into the light provided by concrete physical objects. When one can see that, for example, the Hebrew Bible has been preserved through the labors of organized and recognizable traditions such as that of the Masoretes—this, too, brings illumination. And a good deal of the alarming mystery of the topic evaporates when one encounters artifacts such as Sinaiticus and the Dead Sea Scrolls—as long as Ruckman or Ehrman has not gotten to one first.

Exploring Biblical Manuscripts adds other values: many of the “slides” contain Factbook links out to more information in one’s Logos library, or links out to the Virtual Manuscript Room at Münster’s Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung. In a pastor or Sunday School teacher’s own study time, these links could be invaluable; and if a class participant raises a question, the answer might be a click away.

Honorable Mentions

A few other Bible software tools deserve honorable mention status here. Each of these is mainly useful for illustrative purposes, as supplements to some other method of teaching the topic to Christians who do not know Greek or Hebrew.

New Testament Manuscript Explorer (Logos Bible Software)

Logos’ New Testament Manuscript Explorer (cf. its Old Testament Manuscript Explorer) provides an accessible, sortable, authoritative list of all the New Testament manuscripts known to biblical scholarship. Especially exciting is that the list includes links to those manuscripts both within Logos (a lock symbol appears if the user does not own a particular manuscript) and out on the web. Students of textual criticism can hereby access not only high-resolution images of specific manuscripts at whatever passage they’d like to study, but they can access high-quality transcriptions of those manuscripts (which is terribly helpful when it comes to minuscules).

For teaching laypeople, it would be worthwhile to show off P52, Sinaiticus and a minuscule both to educate them about the appearance of these manuscripts and to send them an implicit (or perhaps explicit) message: no textual critics are hiding anything; rather, their vocation is to clarify and share all available textual evidence with the entire world. There is no conspiracy to add to or subtract from God’s word. No human being is neutral, but by God’s common grace even unbelieving textual critics feel a compulsion to shed light on their work for anyone curious enough to look. And, as Daniel Wallace has pointed out, at least half of the major textual critics working today are evangelicals.²

² Daniel Wallace

BibleWorks and Accordance

BibleWorks has a similar tool, its “Mss” tab, which permits users to take a look at high-resolution copies of certain major manuscripts within the app (stored on the user’s hard drive). Individual verses are marked off within the images, allowing for easy location of the relevant text. Six major manuscripts can also be searched within BibleWorks as separate Bibles, along with their respective correctors (also listed as separate Bibles). And the Sinaiticus transcriptions are morphologically tagged. These include Boernarianus, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Washingtonianus, Codex Bezae, and M-1141, a representative minuscule. Accordance offers the same texts, both in transcription and as images (except M-1141).

Fragments of Truth

Faithlife, makers of Logos, is also producing a documentary called *Fragments of Truth*, due out in October, 2017, in which Craig Evans takes viewers through the Chester Beatty, John Rylands, and Bodmer libraries among other places—to look at ancient manuscripts of the New Testament.³

2. LEXHAM TEXTUAL NOTES

Now we turn to *The Lexham Textual Notes*, a lay-level textual commentary.

Understanding of textual criticism has suffered among laypeople in part because it is an unavoidably inductive discipline, and much of the material presented to non-specialists is (understandably) given in the language of deductive conclusions. Covering a truly sufficient number examples in an introductory Sunday School lesson or two is nearly impossible; how many examples, and which ones, are required to form an accurate picture with the right right amount of detail? But the idea that the Bible’s textual history contains discrepancies is more alarming when one’s mind is not stocked with examples. Prejudicial selection of examples, too, is a problem: the Ehrmanite viewpoint is happy to talk about the Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7) and Mark 1:41 (was Jesus moved with “pity” or with “anger”?), because they are looking for an alleged conspiracy by the “orthodox” party to make the NT more “orthodox.” The Ruckmanite viewpoint is happy to talk about Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53–8:11, because they are looking to persuade laypeople that modern versions “take whole verses and even whole passages out of the Bible.” Neither side can make rhetorical hay out of thousands of spelling differences, word-order differences, and other minor variations, many of which do not even show up in translation.

³ The director of the documentary is Reuben Evans, a graduate of Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

The best access laypeople have had to lay-level textual-critical notes on passage after passage has probably been the NET Bible notes. The notes reflect the leadership of Daniel B. Wallace, evangelicalism's most public and prolific textual critic.

But permit me the liberty of taking the NET Bible note on Matthew 5:22 (“everyone who is angry with his brother **without cause**”) and highlighting every element which will be bewildering to people unacquainted with academic biblical studies:

tc The majority of **MSS** read the word **εἰ κἄν** (eikē, “without cause”) here after “brother.” This insertion has support from **2κ D L W Θ 0233 f1, 13 33 ℣ it sy co Irlat Ormss Cyp Cyr**. Thus the **Western, Caesarean, and Byzantine texttypes** all include the word, while the best **Alexandrian** and some other **witnesses (Ɑ64 κ* B 1424mg pc aur vg Or Hiermss)** lack it. The **ms** evidence favors its exclusion, though there is a remote possibility that **εἰ κἄν** could have been accidentally omitted from these witnesses by way of **homoioteleuton** (the next word, **ἐνοχος** [enochos, “guilty“], begins with the same letter). An intentional change would likely arise from the desire to qualify “angry,” especially in light of the absolute tone of Jesus’ words. While “without cause” makes good practical sense in this context, and must surely be a true interpretation of Jesus’ meaning (cf. Mark 3:5), it does not commend itself as original.⁴

A college-educated engineer who is faithful in his church and diligent in Bible study may possibly push himself through this text, making recourse to the introductory matter for explanation of abbreviations. But in my judgment most even college-educated individuals will balk by the second or even the first line and will consider the jargon as justification for skipping “tc” notes in the future.⁵

The Lexham Textual Notes is a new resource from Lexham Press that aims to provide textual commentary on individual passages—an inductive view of textual criticism—in a way accessible to people who have not studied Greek or Hebrew.

LTN’s comment at Matthew 5:22 provides the level of detail appropriate to Bible students without Greek and Hebrew knowledge:

⁴ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Mt 5:22.

⁵ I was recently contacted by a reader of the Logos blog who leads Bible women’s Bible studies and seemed very sharp but who was tripped up by and unable to follow the NET Bible “tc” note at a certain passage I cannot now locate.

The earliest manuscripts have “is angry at his brother,” but some early manuscripts and related later witnesses have “is angry at his brother without cause.” When “without cause” is present, the possibility of unjustified anger is removed.⁶

The introduction to this work notes that the other available textual commentaries—Metzger⁷, Comfort⁸, and Omanson⁹—“perpetuat[e] the cryptic symbols and notations of textual criticism.”¹⁰

On the other hand, the introduction says, the notes inside Bible translations, “while useful, are typically too brief and they do not spell out the options in a consistent and informative manner.”¹¹ The authors of *The Lexham Textual Notes* are not criticizing Bible translations, however: “the bottom of a printed page is not the place for extended dissertations on textual issues.” And they do note that Bible translations at least contain textual information on the entire Bible; Metzger, Comfort, and Omanson cover only the NT.

LTN avoids the mention of NT textual families (“Alexandrian,” “Byzantine”) because “use of these labels can indicate bias”; it prefers instead neutral terminology such as “witnesses” (nearly the only piece of textual critical jargon in the work) and “manuscripts.” It also avoids terminology that implies that the work of textual criticism is complete, such as “omission” or “addition”; it favors instead “presence” and “absence.”

In the OT portion of the book, however, the Hebrew text is assumed as the standard to which the LXX, Syriac, and other early translations are compared:

The LXX, Sam., and Syr. have “on the sixth day God finished his work” as opposed to “on the seventh day God finished his work,” probably to form a better sequence with the reference to the seventh day later in the verse.¹²

The observation here assumes an original text (the Hebrew as it stands in our standard scholarly editions) and an intent to amend it (“probably [in order] to form

⁶ Rick Brannan and Israel Loken, *The Lexham Textual Notes on the Bible*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Mt 5:22.

⁷ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).

⁸ Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary: Commentary on the Variant Readings of the Ancient New Testament Manuscripts and How They Relate to the Major English Translations* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008).

⁹ Roger L. Omanson, *Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

¹⁰ Brannan and Loken, Introduction.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., Gen 2:2.

a better sequence...”). At appropriate points such as Psalm 22:16’s “like a lion my hands and my feet” the Dead Sea Scrolls and “other Hebrew manuscripts” are likewise cited.

Honorable mention: SBLGNT

The SBLGNT¹³ is not a lay-level tool, but it can help pastors stay aware of textual critical issues *at the level most appropriate for pastors*—and can therefore help pastors help their people keep a balanced perspective on the issue. In my judgment, the NA28 and UBS5 both provide too much textual critical information for the average pastor, disinclining him to bother with the minutia. What will most help him is a regular reminder of those few variants that are both meaningful and viable enough to have made it into the specially simplified apparatus of the SBLGNT.¹⁴ The SBLGNT exists at a level of abstraction standing over traditional critical texts; it presents an apparatus not of manuscripts but of printed texts, specifically Tregelles, Westcott-Hort, Robinson-Pierpont, and the NA28/Zondervan Reader’s Greek New Testament (representing the textual critical choices of the NIV translators much as Scrivener’s 1894 text represented the choices of the KJV translators).

3. KJVPARALLELBIBLE.ORG

I have some prefatory comments I wish to make before I explain my third new tool for teaching textual criticism to laypeople, namely KJVParallelBible.org. This site is part of a strategy I have adopted for helping Christ’s sheep—a strategy I would like to urge upon some of the only other people in the world who might care enough to join me, namely you.

I do not presume that all Bible Faculty Summit participants agree with my views on textual criticism, which follow the evangelical mainstream. But I have reason to believe that a solid majority here do agree. And I would like to speak directly to the only gathering of non-KJV-only, historically “fundamentalist” biblical studies professors in existence: when it comes to KJV-Onlyism, we have made a major tactical error and need a major strategic reorientation. (If someone here does prefer the KJV, I welcome your presence and your input but will continue to speak to the majority.) Put metaphorically, we have permitted erroneous and sometimes heretical bibliologies¹⁵ to dictate to us where the debate over the Bible’s text and

¹³ Michael Holmes, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature Greek New Testament* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2010, 2nd ed. 2014).

¹⁴ For an article-length elaboration of this point, see Mark Ward, “Why Pastors Should Use a Different Greek Text” *The Logos Talk Blog*, May 20, 2017, <https://blog.logos.com/2017/05/pastors-use-different-greek-text/>.

¹⁵ It is formally heretical to say that the KJV is “the preserved word of God”; even if KJV-Only leaders who use this now common terminology in their doctrinal statements do not fully understand what they are saying, they are confusing the inspired text of Scripture with a humanly produced translation. The Reformers already fought this battle—over the

translation ought to take place. We have failed to see that textual criticism is KJV-Onlyism's briar patch. By using this Brer Rabbit allusion I do not mean to imply that textual criticism is KJV-Onlyism's proper domain; I mean that leaping into a confusing mass of detail that even professionals find daunting is a classic strategy of all conspiracy theories. *Why did World Trade Center building 7 fall when no plane hit it? Where are the holes in the roof of this supposed crematorium? Why do these alleged moon rocks contain traces of man-made alloys?* Et cetera. Memorization of these talking points puts defenders of mainstream views on the defensive and may even throw them.

Put prosaically, *we must move the KJV-Only debate to English for the sake of Christ's sheep*. I am not trying to make a rule, as if I could do such a thing, but to urge a unified strategy—because I love my brothers and sisters caught in the thicket of KJV-Onlyism and I wish to rescue them with as little damage to them and their churches as possible.

It is my opinion that we must refuse to argue Greek with people who cannot read it. It is a folly and shame to have strong opinions about collations of manuscripts written in languages one has never studied (Prov 18:13); and it is risky for us to let ourselves be dragged into a battleground so full of mud that progress is essentially impossible (Prov 26:4). Engaging them on that ground is also unhealthy for *them*: anyone who cannot read Greek should be able to recognize that every one of his opinions on textual criticism is derivative; by definition, those who cannot read Greek have never directly observed any evidence for any viewpoint on textual-critical issues. Every piece of “evidence” has passed through at least one layer of interpretation, often several. All of their opinions on the issue are derived from authorities they trust (people who may have little to no direct experience with the evidence themselves).

And in order to persuade them that they are wrong about textual criticism you must necessarily diminish or break their trust in those authorities, usually their pastors. To adopt this strategy is therefore spiritually dangerous and rhetorically unwise—and practically unnecessary. Laypeople within KJV-Only churches bear little responsibility for having erroneous opinions about textual criticism as long as they are obeying the Bible translation they have and being gracious about it. Laypeople must be handled gently unless they are actively creating division (Titus 3:10). In my judgment, we should gently but firmly direct all discussions with KJV-Only laypeople to the non-vernacular English of the KJV.

Vulgate—and they won it in favor of vernacular translations, to our eternal profit. See Richard Muller's thorough and excellent discussion of this debate in “The Canon of Scripture and Its Integrity,” chapter 6 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 371–441.

If they do not bear responsibility for being ignorant of textual criticism in a language God did not call them to study, they nonetheless do bear responsibility to read the Bible in their own language—and to smell what William Tyndale called a “rat” when their leaders insist that the King James Version is written in their own tongue, or that “recent evaluation shows the reading level of the King James Bible to be fifth grade, as a whole—many individual passages would be lower,” or that “the modern versions increase the reading difficulty of the English Bible.”¹⁶ A KJV-Only acquaintance of mine who is a missionary in the lone English-speaking country in South America told me, “I have found that people living in the jungles of Guyana [the lone English-speaking country in South America] are having no problem reading and memorizing passages of the King James Version.”¹⁷ I find this simply incredible. I do not believe he is lying; I do believe he is morally responsible for letting his totem cast a shadow over the obvious.

I have written a book attempting to help laypeople trust their linguistic instincts; they “cannot not” know at some level that Elizabethan English is 1) not the way they speak and 2) regularly confusing and difficult. No matter the good motives mixed into the desire to keep the KJV—conserving a church culture that has brought them spiritual health, resisting the incursion of any number of -isms they have been told are hidden inside modern translations—anyone involved in evangelism, at the very least, is morally responsible to know that KJV English is difficult for *non*-Christians to parse in many, many places. It is no longer a vernacular Bible. It is slowly becoming a new Vulgate.

This is why I have written *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible* (forthcoming, Lexham Press). In the book I avoid discussion of textual criticism almost entirely; I mention it briefly only to dismiss it as a concern: my concern in the book is vernacular translation, no matter which underlying text(s) one prefers. I urge KJV-Only laypeople to ask their pastors for a recommended Bible translation in their own language, and I demonstrate ways in which—through no fault of the KJV translators or of contemporary readers but merely because of the ineluctable process of language change—the KJV is unnecessarily difficult to understand, even in commonly cited passages. “How long **halt** ye between two opinions?”; “God **commendeth** his love toward us;” even the KJV-Only rallying cry, “**Remove** not the ancient landmark”—these well-known sentences do not mean what contemporary speakers assume. Laypeople will not think to look up such common words when their contemporary senses make sufficient sense in context. And laypeople do not commonly have access to the only dictionary that can truly help them, the massive and expensive *Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹⁶ R.B. Ouellette, *A More Sure Word: Which Bible Can You Trust?* (Lancaster, CA: Striving Together Publications, 2008), Kindle loc. 2401.

¹⁷ Private correspondence, January 24, 2015.

I encourage laypeople to ask to have those words in their own language; I thereby reinforce the respect people ought generally to show to their pastors and provoke (I pray) a groundswell of Bereanesque concern for the most important tool in lay Bible study: vernacular Bibles. This is the only healthy way I can see KJV-Onlyism going away without splitting churches and even families. Leaders have painted themselves so far into a corner, have lifted up the KJV totem so high, that they are trapped. They fear they cannot change their minds without destroying their ministries, and some of them are right. I want my book to be a tool in the hands of men who love the truth and their sheep enough to work toward putting vernacular Bibles in their people's hands in the least offensive way possible.

But KJV-Only leadership has a quick answer to any encouragement I give for people to read modern translations: those translations are all based, they say, on corrupt Hebrew and (especially) Greek texts. These leaders insist, as their representatives have repeatedly said to me in phone conversations,¹⁸ that they are not KJV-Only but TR-Only.¹⁹ This is partly good, because they are distancing themselves from a Ruckmanite, double-inspiration view in which the KJV English corrects the Greek New Testament. I appreciate and respect that desire.²⁰

But it has the effect of pulling any discussion about the KJV back into inaccessibly dark briars—and of interposing a trusted authority between “the facts” and a given KJV-Only individual. A layperson (or even a KJV-Only pastor who cannot read Greek) must trust someone else's word regarding the nature, extent, and seriousness of differences between Greek textual traditions. He has little way of checking up on his trusted authority's assertions. He cannot tell whether differences between the NIV and the KJV are due to translation philosophy or to the underlying text. I can cite

¹⁸ I worked in the Fundamentalism File at Bob Jones University for five years and read much KJV-Only literature; I have also spent time on the phone with KJV-Only Bible college professors in recent months while working on *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible*.

¹⁹ This was the first statement made to me by a gracious Bible professor at Fairhaven Baptist College in a recent phone conversation, among many I had with KJV-Only teachers.

²⁰ I acknowledge that TR-Onlyism is better, bibliologically, than KJV-Onlyism. But I self-consciously equate the two—I equate Ruckmanism and TR-Onlyism—because in all of my experience, they come to the same practical end: the text of the KJV is the only acceptable standard for Christian faith and practice, the only trustworthy English translation. One KJV-Only Bible college professor, a young and gifted man, insisted to me in a phone conversation that he was not a Ruckmanite and did not believe in double inspiration—the idea that the KJV translators were themselves inspired and produced a perfect text. But mere minutes later, his objection to updating the KJV for modern readers was, “But you cannot alter the Word of God!” At the key point of distinction between “the Bible” and “the KJV,” the ultimate point, he equated the two. I am aware of not one “TR-Only” Christian who uses the NKJV or any other more contemporary translation of the TR. I do not believe, therefore, that TR-Onlyism truly exists; it collapses into KJV-Onlyism.

only my experience here, but I believe most people influenced by KJV-Onlyism have deeply confused text and translation.

And this finally ends my prefatory remarks and brings me to the third new tool for teaching textual criticism to laypeople: KJVParallelBible.org. I have not yet publicly released this site, because the NT is only a little more than half done. But in it, I and my team of volunteers are attempting to put a tool in the hands of pastors that will help them teach textual criticism to laypeople, a tool that in particular will put some onus on sheep whose shepherds are misleading them.

If KJV-Onlyism is going to continue to insist that there are massive differences between the textual bases of the KJV and that of (most) contemporary Bible translations, then I must conclude that more light on the topic is healthy and good.

The Structure of the Site

KJVParallelBible.org has a simple structure: each chapter of the New Testament gets one page with two columns. In the column on the left is the KJV as it stands in the 1769 Blayney revision used by the vast majority of KJV readers, based on Scrivener's 1894 Textus Receptus.²¹ In the column on the right is the KJV as it would be if the KJV translators had instead used the modern critical text, a Nestle-Aland 28. In those places where the Greek of the two texts differs, I translate the critical text variants into Elizabethan English and bold the resulting differences between the two English texts. This way, only those differences due to textual variants show up in the English (though not all of them do—because many differences of spelling and word order do not show up in translation).

The site takes a “just-the-facts-ma’am” approach and is officially neutral on questions of textual criticism. Like *The Lexham Textual Notes*, I do not call any variant an “addition” or an “omission”—that would be to imply an accepted standard, and the entire point of the site is to acknowledge that there is no such accepted standard between KJV-Only and non-KJV-Only Christians. Each page presents “the facts” with as little interpretation as possible. And indeed, there is very little interpretation to perform: in approximately 95% of the variants, there is no judgment involved in translating them into KJV diction. Either the word “also” is present or it is not. Either the text says “Christ Jesus” or it says “Jesus Christ.” Very few variants are large or significant enough to require much judgment. This is work that any third-year Greek student should be able to do with very little help.

²¹ Scrivener's text is a record of the textual-critical decisions of the KJV translators. The most powerful argument of Majority Text advocates—that the eclectic text does not exist anywhere in the manuscript tradition—can be leveled at it, though to a lesser degree.

The one significant exception to the overall neutrality of the site comes on the About page, where Charles Surret, a D.Min. graduate of Central Seminary and a long-time teacher at Ambassador Baptist College (and author of two small pro-TR books) briefly offer “counterpoised” advice on how we hope users will interpret the data of the site.

On this About page I am very open about my purposes for creating the site:

I, Mark Ward, am finally responsible for this website. Let me tell you why I made it—and worked with my King James Only brothers to do so. I have no hidden intentions. I’ll tell you exactly what I’d like to accomplish with KJVParallelbible.org:

1. I want to be a peacemaker (Matt. 5:9) between sometimes warring factions of Christianity—the “KJV-Only” and “non-KJV-only” factions—who nonetheless do share important beliefs and a rich heritage.
2. I want to provide a resource for genuine seekers after truth, a resource that has never before existed in the history of the world: an easy-to-use record, in English, of all the differences—and, perhaps more importantly, all the similarities—between the Textus Receptus and the Critical Text.
3. I want you to see for yourself what all responsible defenders of the KJV agree is true: that the vast majority of differences between the KJV and modern translations of the New Testament have nothing to do with the underlying Greek text.

I do also want people to buy my book, and it is not neutral toward the KJV. But on textual criticism it is close to neutral.

Representative Passages

Let us look together at three chapters and examine briefly every variant in them. This site, by being very long on evidence and very short on evaluation, practically demands the formation of an inductive viewpoint.

Matthew 1

Matthew 1, which I have placed on the homepage, contains three variants.

1. In Matthew 1:6, David is called “the king” twice in the TR and once in the CT. So I bold that difference between the two texts. I can discern no difference in meaning between the two verses.
2. In Matthew 1:18, there’s a stray “as” in the middle of the verse; here, too, I can discern no difference in meaning between the TR and CT.
3. In the very last verse of the chapter, there is a significant difference: was Jesus merely “a” son of Mary or was he “her firstborn” son? Here, too, however, this is a distinction without a difference. In this passage, Mary is

called a “virgin,” and she becomes pregnant with this miracle child, this very verse says, *before* she came together with Joseph. Given what else the critical text says, there is no possibility that Mary had other children before Jesus. This is not a legitimate interpretation of “a son” in this text. This is an example of a harmonization from another Gospel, one of the most common reasons for variants within the four Gospels. Presumably, a scribe familiar with Luke 2:7 inserted “her firstborn” because he remembered Jesus being called this and mistakenly thought the phrase belonged in Matthew, too.²²

So far, we have three differences in text that are not differences in meaning. A pastor taking one of his sheep (or a Sunday School class full of them) through this site could talk through these examples as I have just done. He might give special attention to the third variants because it is representative of so many other harmonizations both in the Gospels and in the rest of the NT.

Mark 16

Mark 16:9–20 is one of basically three passages of any significant length that is in doubt within the manuscript tradition. On the Mark 16 page (as on the John 7 page and the 1 John 5 page), I have added a special box offering links to the most responsible sources from each viewpoint that are accessible to laypeople.

2 Timothy 3

Now, 2 Timothy 3. I found it interesting and, somehow, poignant, that the NT chapter containing the most important statement on inspiration is one of the relatively few NT chapters in which not a single textual variation between the TR and CT shows up in English translation. Ironically, there is one difference that would show up in numbers of other Indo-European languages. It is in 2 Tim 3:14, in the phrase “knowing from **whom** thou hast learned them.” In Spanish, this relative pronoun would be rendered *de quiénes* in the plural and *de quién* in the singular. But English does not distinguish relative pronouns by number.²³

This is ironic, because one of the major talking points of the most reasonable KJV defenders²⁴ is that continued use of *thee* (singular) and *ye* (plural) is exegetically helpful. This is a valid point. But this level of specificity is simply not available in

²² “The Textus Receptus, following C D* K W Δ Π most minuscules al, inserts τ ό υ before υ ί ό υ and adds α ύ τ ή ς τ ό υ π ρ ω τ ό τ ο κ ο υ (“her firstborn son”) from Lk 2:7.” Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd. Ed., (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 8.

²³ The nominative (“who”) and objective case (“whom”) distinction is also leaching out of the language; the latter remains only in more formal contexts. When used in others it sounds either hoity or toity, perhaps both. See the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. *who*.

²⁴ Such as Joel Beeke and Mike Barrett, both of whom make this point in essays in their *Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible*

Elizabethan or contemporary English for other pronouns, such as *whom*. I have never heard KJV defenders complain about this supposed lack of precision in the KJV. Language cannot be exhaustively precise. Some nuances will always be lost in translation.

As I say on the About page, I am praying that KJV-Only individuals will look over this site, maybe check three or four pages like the ones we have just examined (hopefully more), and conclude, “This is what we’re fighting over? Where are all the ‘massive, doctrinally significant differences’?”²⁵

Observations

As I and my team have worked on KJVParallelBible.org, as I have answered their questions about a few tricky passages, and as I have checked every bit of others’ work, I have deepened and, I hope, corrected my own inductive picture of the differences between the two major textual traditions. I conclude my paper with a few other observations I have made that I would suggest users of the site help laypeople to see as well.²⁶

1. In searching for an accessible way to explain textual criticism to laypeople, I initially described many textual variants as “typos.” And I do believe that there are the equivalent of “typos” in the manuscript tradition. But after looking at thousands of units of variation (on my way to looking at every single difference between the two textual traditions), I have come to conclude that I was wrong: my current hypothesis is that most variants serve a smoothing function not unlike contemporary functionally equivalent translations.
2. As textual critics have long pointed out, the TR is longer. It has more bolded phrases. I find this to be a profound support for the critical text viewpoint, especially given that so many variants are harmonizations and smoothings. What scribes would purposefully remove such smoothings, given how little difference they make?
3. There are some odd characteristic differences that are too regular to be the result of the work of random scribes. Some kind of recension would seem to be the best explanation for the frequent transposition of “Jesus Christ” in the two texts. Whichever text one prefers, it appears that someone, or a group of someones, decided on a standard and brought the manuscripts into line.
4. Similarly, there is a very frequent confusion of ἡμῶν (our) and ὑμῶν (your). Rather than a purposeful recension, however, this would seem (again, no matter what text one prefers) to be the result of pronunciation changes. The

²⁵ R.B. Ouellette says, “The new Critical Text leaves out many words that are essential to the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith.” *A More Sure Word*, Kindle loc. 1019.

²⁶ I offer some of these as hypothetical;

change in meaning in passage after passage (*your* is indeed different from *our*) does not seem to me to favor any party or sect I can conceive of in any period of the Christian church. Given that all the writers of the New Testament were themselves Christians, the difference in overall meaning between *your* and *our* is frequently minimal.

5. After looking at page after page of the NT in my own mother tongue, I have gained an intuitive appreciation for the importance of displaying not just differences between these two textual traditions but similarities. I have been using textual-critical resources for coming up on twenty years, I took a doctoral level course on the topic, and I have never run across a resource which made the *similarities* between Greek MSS as accessible as the differences. A mere list of either does not give a full picture; neither does a critical GNT—because it is not in the heart language of readers, and because it faithfully reports differences (such as word order) that are so minor as to be not worth the time of anyone but a professional textual critic. KJVParallelBible.org is the best way to form up a truly inductive picture of the *significant* (meaningful, viable) differences between translations. I want not merely the meaninglessness of so many differences but the massive number of identical words and verses to get across to readers. I marvel at the providential hand of God in preserving this text, even if I am unwilling to anoint one particular manuscript as the exhaustively perfect one.
6. In working on this project—and I am looking at every last difference between Scrivener's TR and the NA28—I was continually forced to ask a healthy question that can get lost amidst the minutia that is textual criticism: does this textual difference create a difference in *meaning*? Many of the textual variants that force a difference in translation do not create a discernible difference in meaning. If there is a difference between “the star came to rest over the place where the child lay” and “the star came and stood over the place where the child lay,” I cannot discern it. Maybe one does indeed pick up on some kind of theme in the story or some kind of wordplay, and to make it possible for me to find that connection I do want to establish which choice was “original”—but so far I am not seeing it in this passage.
7. There are minor discrepancies between the edition of the KJV I used and Scrivener's GNT. In Mark 2:28, for example, the KJV has “and,” the CT has $\kappa \alpha \iota$, and the TR has nothing.
8. Occasionally the KJV supplies in italics a word that is not (obviously) in the TR but is present in the CT, causing one to wonder whether they had manuscripts we know not of. In Mark 16:2 the KJV supplies the word “day” and in John 7:34 the word “me.”
9. One fun and interesting challenge, among the few not-perfectly-straight-forward questions my team had to answer, was how to translate $\lambda \epsilon \gamma \epsilon \iota$ inside historical narrative in the way the KJV translators would have done it. Mark 6:31, for example, reads “And he **said** ($\epsilon \tilde{\iota} \pi \epsilon \nu$) unto them, Come ye

yourselves apart into a desert place.” But the CT has $\lambda \epsilon \gamma \epsilon \iota$. Would the KJV translators render this as a historical present (“So she says to me...”) or would they render it as a past, as most modern translations tend to do because of English conventions?²⁷ I was able to use Logos, which tags historical presents, to determine that in the great majority of cases the KJV translators did prefer to translate historical presents as presents.²⁸ So I translated $\lambda \epsilon \gamma \epsilon \iota$ at Mark 6:31 as a historical present. Not so incidentally, if a significant portion of good exegesis, the kind it is worth buying a commentary to get, is finding illuminating parallel biblical examples to whatever passage one is studying, then tagging that goes beyond morphology and into meaning (such as figurative speech, speech acts) is very valuable. Only Logos Bible Software has such tagging in the Bible text.

Conclusion

Heave an egg out of a browser window and you are likely to hit someone who cannot read Greek who is being less than humble and charitable regarding his opinions on textual criticism. I write theology and exegesis on the Internet for a living. I approve and answer comments nearly every day. I know what the democratization of public discourse has done. It has leveled the playing field, perhaps, but it has also expanded it to an impossible size and sunk it about a hundred feet below sea level. Voices have always been diffuse, but some practical limits once kept trolls under bridges where they belong. The money required to reach a large audience was one of those practical limits. It empowered gatekeepers. It was not a golden age; sinful people will always attempt to twist their circumstances in their favor. And the leading counterargument I have heard to the value of KJVParallelBible.org is that the KJV-Only movement as a whole is beyond rational appeal when it comes to bibliology. I agree that the King James Version has become a sociological boundary marker, a totem, and in some extreme cases a rabbit’s foot. It has also become a tradition making void certain words of God here and there all across the Bible—by locking those words in a language only specialists can be expected to decode.²⁹

What, practically, can be done by Christians who love their KJV-Only and TR-Only brothers and wish to rescue them from the Ruckmanite weeds? My feeling is that evangelicalism and non-KJV-Only fundamentalism have simply given up. Every

²⁷ In English, the historical present (“So she says to me...”) sounds like breathless excitement.

²⁸ For an explanation of how to do this in Logos Bible Software, see “How to Search Connections between Greek and English Bibles,” Logos Talk Blog, June 15, 2017. <https://blog.logos.com/2017/06/search-connections-greek-english-bibles/>

²⁹ Old Testament scholar David J. A. Clines gives this advice for scholars studying the KJV: “As with Shakespeare, a commentator should look up the *OED* for every word.” “The KJV Translation of the Old Testament,” in David G. Burke, John F. Kutsko, and Philip H. Towner, *The King James Version at 400: Assessing Its Genius as a Bible Translation and Its Literary Influence* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 248.

family has that one uncle who believes in conspiracy theories—and if you try to appeal to him, your very appeal will be folded into the theory and will establish you as one of the conspirators. His epistemology, as G.K. Chesterton pointed out, is flawless:

His mind moves in a perfect but narrow circle. A small circle is quite as infinite as a large circle; but, though it is quite as infinite, it is not so large.³⁰

The conspiracy theorist's

theory explains a large number of things, but it does not explain them in a large way.... We should be chiefly concerned not so much to give it arguments as to give it air, to convince it that there was something cleaner and cooler outside the suffocation of a single argument.³¹

There is no more air in the Ruckmanite thicket. The single argument that a massive conspiracy exists to attack and corrupt English Bibles has so bound them that their bibliological circle has contracted to a suffocatingly small size.

But it is the province of the young, I suppose, to tilt at windmills their elders have long realized are impossible to topple. I simply love Christ's sheep too much, and I believe too much in the power of the Spirit's illumination, to give up on my KJV-Only brothers and sisters. I want my arms to remain open wide to them; I want to be ready for them to repent from a self-harming bibliology; I want to provide easy avenues of escape for them. I want to provide them air to expand their tight conspiratorial circles. I am pulling NT Greek textual variants out of the darkness of the briar patch and into the light of English vernacular because I believe in God's power to unbend fallen reason. I sincerely pray others will do the same for me if I am overtaken in a doctrinal fault. Reformation Protestantism has always felt that making biblical studies accessible to laypeople is essential for a religion that sees every believer as a priest.

So for this site, and for all teaching of textual criticism to laypeople, I have the paradoxical goal of provoking this reaction: "What a colossal waste of time! These differences are so minor!" If this is what I hear, my time will not have been wasted.

³⁰ Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*. (New York: John Lane Company, 1909), 33.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 33–34.