

“KEPT PURE IN ALL AGES”: A CRITIQUE OF THE TEXTUAL CRITICAL VIEWS OF CONFESSIOAL BIBLIOLOGY

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I must make apologies to Phil Brown, Jeff Straub, and Brian Collins, all of whom encouraged me to be done writing about KJV-Onlyism. I do have two new things to say in this paper: I need to describe a movement you probably haven't heard of, and I need to work out an argument I haven't seen anyone else make. But I would like to say publicly that I will now do my best to move on to other topics. And if I say it publicly, then hopefully I will do it.

This paper has three movements. 1) In the first I wish to briefly canvas what I take to be the mainstream KJV-Only argument for the perfect preservation of the Textus Receptus. 2) In the second I wish to canvas the similar but significantly different defenses given for the same text by proponents of a smaller group of Presbyterians and Reformed Baptists which tends to call itself "Confessional Bibliology." 3) In the third I wish to argue that neither group can justify its grandstanding rhetoric: their views differ only in degree and not in kind from the mainstream view of textual criticism in evangelical biblical scholarship. Their viewpoints buy them fewer textual critical questions but do not eliminate them altogether as they commonly claim.

Introduction: Which TR?

Whenever a defender of the exclusive use of the King James Version argues that the *Textus Receptus* (TR) is the providentially preserved and (therefore) perfect text of the Greek New Testament¹, a simple question is in order: *Which TR?*

Here is a list of all the printed TR editions, beginning with Erasmus' own *Novum Instrumentum Omne* (1516):

- Erasmus produced five TR editions, in 1516, 1519, 1522, 1527, and 1535.
- Cardinal Ximenes printed the Complutensian Polyglot, which included the first printed Greek New Testament, in 1514. But it was not *published* until 1522; Erasmus beat it to market by six years. (Note: Erasmus reportedly used it to alter a few readings in his 1527 edition.)²

¹ Here is an example from Bible teacher John T. Yates of the Faith Bible Institute, whose program is used in many KJV-Only teachers: "The debate between the *Minority* and *Majority* texts [is] important to the Christian. Every Word of God...is of eternal importance and must be established with all certainty." *Faith Bible Institute Commentary Series*, vol. 1, book 3, *The Doctrine of God the Trinity & The Doctrine of the Bible* (Monroe Louisiana: Faith Bible Institute Press, 2018), 223. More examples follow in this first section of the paper.

² There is no independent arbiter of what counts as a Textus Receptus edition; perhaps a Catholic edition indeed does not count. But it came from well before the critical text era and used Majority mss. It probably ought to count as a TR.

- Robert Stephanus produced four editions of the TR, in 1546, 1549, 1550, and 1551. The 1550 became the accepted edition in the English-speaking world.
- Theodore Beza produced nine editions of the TR between 1565 and 1604.
- The Elzevir brothers produced seven editions of the TR between 1624 and 1678. The 1633 edition gave rise to the name “Textus Receptus,” because it called itself “the text received by all.”³
- John Mill produced a TR in 1700.

This makes twenty-seven TRs. I will confess immediately that I do not know how much each differs from the others—and I wonder who does: it would be rather laborious to collate them all, particularly when relatively few are digitized. In this paper I collate just two of the most important TR editions, the identities of which will be revealed in the third section of the paper.

The KJV translators used two TRs: Stephanus (1550) and Beza (1589). I know that these two differed, because an excessively diligent 19th century scholar with the Dickensian name of Scrivener cataloged about one hundred passages in which the text of the KJV agrees with Beza against Stephanus, about twenty in which it does the opposite, and about thirty in which it differs from both.⁴

Consequently, during Scrivener’s day, there was no single edition of the Greek New Testament that perfectly “matched” the KJV, that reflected the textual-critical decisions of the KJV translators. Scrivener therefore produced yet another version of the TR, one that essentially records all the textual critical choices evident in the KJV. And that means one more TR must be added to the list, making twenty-eight TRs—precisely the number of editions the Nestle–Aland has undergone, as it happens. The 28th is...

- Scrivener (1881/1894)

³ The wording of the famous sentence from which the name “TR” is derived is very interesting: “*Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum: in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus*”—“You have, therefore, the text which is now received by all, in which we give [you] nothing altered or corrupted.” Naturally, it has been of interest to New Testament readers from time immemorial to have “nothing altered or corrupted.” But it was extremely difficult in the days before computerized diff-checkers to establish the truth of this claim. And the Elzevirs’ bold claim assumes a standard that has come under very reasonable question since their time.

⁴ See “APPENDIX E: The Greek Text adopted by the Translators of the Authorized Version of the New Testament,” in *The Cambridge Paragraph Bible Of the Authorized English Version* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1873), c–civ.

This is the TR used by the Trinitarian Bible Society and by the KJV-Only world generally. But it is, naturally, only one among many TRs. Should *Textus Receptus* perhaps be *Texti Recepti*?

1. Mainstream KJV-Onlyism and the Textus Receptus

It is uncommon to find defenders of “the TR” who are aware that it is not one immutable text.⁵

R.B. Ouellette, author of one of the most influential and often-cited KJV-Only tracts, quotes George Eldon Ladd giving the standard evangelical view of NT textual criticism, namely that in the absence of divine revelation we are left to our best scholarly lights in evaluating textual variants.⁶ Ouellette responds:

All answers that come from human scholarship will be imperfect and tentative—this is why we need an Absolute Scripture!⁷

Mainstream KJV/TR advocates insist—especially when they are speaking to laypeople—that the TR is the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise that every jot and tittle of Scripture would be preserved in providential perfection (Matthew 5:18).

Charles Surret of Ambassador Baptist College writes in his *Certainty of the Words* (a title that encapsulates his argument regarding textual criticism),

⁵ This writer looks compulsively at bibliography statements on KJV-Only church websites, and after looking at hundreds of such statements, has discovered not one that acknowledges differences among TRs, or specifies which TR they believe to be perfectly preserved.

⁶ “Although God inspired the authors of the Bible to produce a divinely superintended record, he has committed the reproduction and the preservation of the text to the vagaries of human history; and the establishment of a trustworthy text is the labor of a scientific scholarship.” George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 80.

⁷ *A More Sure Word: Which Bible Can You Trust?* (Lancaster, CA: Striving Together Publications, 2008), 76.

God does not want His people to look at His Word through eyes of uncertainty, [but] the majority of modern-day textual critics are unsure of the accuracy of their work....⁸

While it is certainly possible that humans could err in making copies (and history has proven this to have been the case), it should also be acknowledged that God is capable of superintending the process in such a way that “all the words” of the originals remain intact for believers to access.⁹

An unpublished white paper written by Bearing Precious Seed Global’s Assistant Director and Translation Director, Steve Combs, acknowledges that “there were textual errors and printing errors in the Received Text when it was first printed.” But Combs insists that “these and other readings were corrected in subsequent editions of the printed text.” He says that

the history of the text from 1516 through 1894 [that is, from Erasmus to Scrivener] is a history of purification and each edition of the Received text brought it closer to perfection. These editions represented steps in the process of God’s preservation of His pure words.¹⁰

Combs knows that this may sound like special pleading, even to his KJV-Only readers (Why would a perfectly preserved text need purification, and where was that perfect text during the process?), but he insists that

this is not the same as the process of textual criticism going on today among doubting and unbelieving scholars. This all took place in a context of faith in God’s preservation of His words.¹¹

Combs knows that the KJV New Testament does not match exactly the 1598 Beza text that the translators primarily relied upon.

⁸ *Certainty of the Words: Biblical Principles of Textual Criticism* (Shelby, NC: Surrentt Family Publications, 2013), 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁰ “Understanding the Development of the Textus Receptus and Its Relationship to the King James Version.” Unpublished white paper, n.d., p. 1.

https://www.bpsglobal.org/uploads/2/9/3/0/29302395/understanding_the_development_of_the_textus_receptus.pdf

¹¹ *Ibid.*

However, the differences between the Beza 1598 text and the KJV represent the pinnacle of the edits made to the TR text and laid the foundation for Scrivener's 1881 Greek TR edition. No Greek text has ever been produced that is better. Nevertheless, their edits to the Received Text were made in English, not Greek. The KJV translation and its changes in Beza's 1598 text was an especially important step toward a completely pure printed Greek text.¹²

This, then, is what we have now in Scrivener's 1881 TR: a "completely pure" Greek New Testament, given to us by the KJV translators.¹³

The Trinitarian Bible Society, which produces the most commonly used printed Textus Receptus (it is Scrivener's text), also acknowledges differences among TR editions. But it insists that they are minor.

¹² Ibid., 4.

¹³ Such a descriptor would have surprised Scrivener, who had a rather different impression of his stated task. Scrivener had no intention of producing the once-for-all, perfectly pure, Greek New Testament. Scrivener was on the committee that produced the Revised Version, which used Westcott-Hort's Greek text. His design in producing his edition of the TR was very practical. "The special design of this volume is to place clearly before the reader the variations from the Greek text represented by the Authorised Version of the New Testament which have been embodied in the Revised Version. One of the Rules laid down for the guidance of the Revisers by a Committee appointed by the Convocation of Canterbury was to the effect 'that, when the Text adopted differs from that from which the Authorised Version was made, the alteration be indicated in the margin.' As it was found that a literal observance of this direction would often crowd and obscure the margin of the Revised Version, the Revisers judged that its purpose might be better carried out in another manner. They therefore communicated to the Oxford and Cambridge University Presses a full and carefully corrected list of the readings adopted which are at variance with the readings 'presumed to underlie the Authorised Version,' in order that they might be published independently in some shape or other. The University Presses have accordingly undertaken to print them in connexion with complete Greek texts of the New Testament." In other words, Scrivener's TR was meant to be a practical tool making it possible to see where the Westcott-Hort text differed from the text underlying the KJV. This was difficult to do before Scrivener, because no GNT existed that perfectly reflected the textual-critical decisions of the KJV translators. F. H. A. Scrivener, *The New Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1881), xxiii.

These variations include spelling, accents and breathing marks, word order and other minor kinds of differences. As it is stated in the preface to the Trinitarian Bible Society edition of the Textus Receptus, “The editions of Stephens, Beza and the Elzevirs all present substantially the same text, and the variations are not of great significance and rarely affect the sense.”¹⁴

The purpose of the above citations is to show that the mainstream KJV-Only movement—the sector of KJV-Onlyism which appears to be numerically the largest¹⁵—regularly argues for the perfect preservation of the TR. And their rhetoric consistently pits the certainty available with the TR against the forever-unsettled-upon-earth critical text. If differences among TR editions are acknowledged at all, they are said to be few and minor—or to be transcended by the final purification of God’s Word, which is found in Scrivener’s 1881/1894 TR.

2. Confessional Bibliology

Proponents of “Confessional Bibliology” take a different path to a similar viewpoint. They follow the more scholarly tradition¹⁶ of Dean Burgon, E.F. Hills, Wilbur Pickering, and Theodore Letis. Currently, the three leading proponents of this viewpoint are probably Jeff Riddle¹⁷, Robert Truelove¹⁸, and Garnet Milne.¹⁹

Confessional Bibliology (CB) reacts to the same concerns addressed by KJV-Onlyism (indeed, the leading CB proponents vigorously defend the King James Version²⁰): the apparent instability of the modern critical text; the loss of the longer ending of Mark and the Pericope Adulterae; the very idea that centuries of God’s people may

¹⁴ G. W. and D. E. Anderson, “The Received Text A Brief Look at the Textus Receptus,” *Quarterly Record* no. 546, January to March 1999.

¹⁵ No statistics exist; this is educated guesswork.

¹⁶ More scholarly than mainstream KJV-Onlyism, though there is noticeable overlap between the two groups: KJV-Onlyism appeals to the same authors, but struggles to produce anything approaching their quality.

¹⁷ Riddle is a Reformed Baptist pastor who holds a PhD from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia.

¹⁸ Truelove is a Reformed Baptist pastor and proprietor of a popular and active Facebook group, “The Received Text.” He was responsible for a new edition of Hills’ *The King James Version Defended* that used Hills’ original title and (rather oddly) interpolates contemporary editorial comments from Hills’ daughter. See *Text and Time: A Reformed Approach to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 6th ed. (Brighton, IA: Christian Research Press, 2018).

¹⁹ Milne is a pastor in New Zealand who has published a monograph on Reformed bibliology with Pater Noster. See *The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Cessation of Special Revelation: The Majority Puritan Viewpoint on Whether Extra-Biblical Prophecy Is Still Possible* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), 2008.

²⁰ See, for example, Jeff Riddle’s use of Joel Beeke’s “13 Practical Reasons to Retain the KJV.” <http://www.jeffriddle.net/2009/07/joel-beeke-on-practical-reasons-for.html>. See also Truelove’s satirical post, <https://roberttruelove.com/learn-cuneiform-to-read-the-kjv/>.

have gone without some of God's words—all of these lead CB proponents away from the mainstream evangelical viewpoint on textual criticism. A “confessional” approach to bibliology is not a path open to mainstream KJV-Onlyism, which is generally independent Baptist and therefore not confessional. It is Reformed Baptists and conservative Presbyterians who make up most of the adherents of Confessional Bibliology.

The specific statement of the Westminster Confession of Faith (the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 uses precisely the same wording) uses language very congenial to contemporary defenders of the TR:

The Old Testament in Hebrew ... and the New Testament in Greek..., being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; (Matt. 5:18) so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.²¹

CB asks: *What Greek New Testament text were the Westminster divines confessing to be “kept pure in all ages”?* And it answers: the Textus Receptus.²² This was the text actually in use at the time of the confession.²³

Confessional Bibliology is still a tiny minority viewpoint in evangelical circles: whereas Burgon managed to find a publisher for his work, Letis, Riddle, Truelove, and Milne have all had to resort to various kinds of self-publishing and internet advocacy.

This is no insult; a view is not wrong because it is held only by a few. In fact, Confessional Bibliology merits discussion because it appears to be growing, and because it is finding some young adherents. My impression is admittedly unscientific, but I believe Confessional Bibliology holds some attraction for those influenced by the Young, Restless, and Reformed movement. As these younger men (now around age 40) take leadership in churches, a significant number are digging deeper into a Reformed tradition that they first entered through soteriology. Next comes ecclesiology, and then, for some, bibliology. Protestant pluralism and

²¹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

²² Or, often, the “traditional text” or “ecclesiastical text.”

²³ Note also the WCF's use of Matthew 5:18 as a proof-text: “Truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18 ESV).

doctrinal downgrade you will always have with you, and people react differently to them: some resort to assorted confessionalisms.²⁴ A stable tradition is appealing.

But CB has to overcome the natural, obvious reply to their use of WCF 1.8, one my own wife immediately gave: the TR was all they had. CB has to show that the Westminster divines chose the TR self-consciously in contradistinction to variant readings they then knew.

So after citing WCF 1.8, the next major phase in the CB argument is often an appeal to John Owen—particularly his “Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture.”²⁵ Owen’s discomfort with another scholar’s choice to list hundreds of NT textual variants is taken as an indication that other 17th century British Reformed dogmatists meant to defend the TR when they wrote WCF 1.8. Owen spoke of

the purity of the present original copies of the Scripture, or rather copies in the original languages, which the church of God doth now and hath for many ages enjoyed as her chiefest treasure.²⁶

Robert Truelove, for example, builds on this article, arguing that Owen’s statements

demonstrate that those in the era of the great English confessions believed their Received Text was a functionally pure text in spite of any variant issues which they saw as so trifling as to be virtually dismissive of them. It is therefore inconceivable that men like...Owen would accept many of the conclusions found in the modern Critical Text.²⁷

The late Theodore Letis makes a nearly identical appeal in his *The Ecclesiastical Text: Criticism, Biblical Authority & the Popular Mind*.²⁸ Letis is an excellent and vivacious writer, in my mind the most gifted by far of all the KJV/TR defenders I have ever encountered.

²⁴ A recent graduate of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary joins a current student at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary as proprietors of ConfessionalBibliology.com.

²⁵ *The Works of John Owen*, Ed. William H. Goold, Vol. 16 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 345ff.

²⁶ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 16 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 353. Letis cites these very words.

²⁷ “Reformed Confessions of Faith and the Traditional Text,” Feb. 15, 2018, <https://www.roberttruelove.com/reformed-confessions-of-faith-and-the-traditional-text/>.

²⁸ 3rd edition (Brighton, IA: Just and Sinner Publications, 2018), section IIIA in chapter 2.

I do not believe CB proponents such as he and Truelove are interpreting Owen accurately,²⁹ but they insist that orthodox theologians were always united in investing authority in the *apographa* (the copies) and not in the *autographa* (the original written copies of individual Bible books).

This generally leads them next—and Letis is here the best example—to pillory B.B. Warfield. Warfield, Letis says, foolishly adopted the German “lower criticism” of text, not realizing that it was just as unorthodox as the German “higher criticism” he opposed. Warfield, Letis says, tried to save the Bible from higher critics by “relegat[ing] inspiration to the inscrutable autographs of the biblical records.”³⁰

Hills and Letis both build elaborate histories of biblical criticism which seem to exist merely to create a guilt by association—one Letis, especially, makes explicit.

While everyone in confessional ranks attempted to resist to the death the invasion of the nineteenth-century German higher criticism with its quest for the historical Jesus, they nevertheless unwittingly gave way to the process of desacralization by assuming the safe and “scientific” nature of the quest for the historical text. The ... entire history of the influence of Biblical criticism on confessional communities is but a working out of this theme, with adjustment after adjustment taking place, until the original paradigm of verbal inspiration evaporates and no one is so much as aware that a change has taken place.

Textual criticism is itself wicked and insidious, and it must necessarily lead to the death of inspiration.³¹

²⁹ I sympathize with Owen’s concern, but evangelical biblical scholarship has judged Owen to be wrong in one significant respect: far from thinking that listing out variants is a bad thing, textual critics have taken it as their duty to list them all. In my judgment, however, Owen ultimately lands on the view held by the mainstream today: “The whole Scripture, entire as given out from God, without any loss, is preserved in the copies of the originals yet remaining; what varieties there are among the copies themselves shall be afterward declared. In them all, we say, is every letter and tittle of the word.” WJO 16, 357. This cannot mean perfect preservation or no need for textual criticism, because he acknowledges that the Bible has not been perfectly preserved and even offers rudimentary principles for determining which “lections” are to be retained. He certainly knows, two centuries before Westcott and Hort’s text, that variant readings exist in “the TR”: “We grant that there are and have been various lections in the Old Testament and the New” (Ibid., 358–359). He mentions the “Keri and Ketib” readings in the OT, and says of the NT, “That there are in some copies of the New Testament, and those some of them of some good antiquity, diverse readings, in things or words of less importance, is acknowledged” (Ibid., 363).

³⁰ Letis, *Ecclesiastical Text*, Kindle loc. 303.

³¹ Letis also criticizes Warfield for his complicity in bringing the novel concept of “inerrancy” into evangelicalism. This gave rise to one somewhat humorous circumstance. I recently rewatched Pensacola Christian College’s “Leaven of Fundamentalism” videos from the late 1990s, and there was one distinctly odd moment when Letis, standing on stage with

At this moment, this is how far I can trace the general argument of Confessional Bibliology. But I must give one more quotation and then list other postulates they commonly make.

The key quotation comes from Hills' *Text and Time* (originally *The King James Version Defended*). This is by far the clearest statement I have found from representatives of this camp on differences between TRs.

God's preservation of the New Testament text was not miraculous, but providential. The scribes and printers who produced the copies of the New Testament Scriptures and the true believers who read and cherished them were not inspired, but God-guided. Hence, there are some New Testament passages in which the true reading cannot be determined with absolute certainty. There are some readings, for example, on which the manuscripts are almost equally divided, making it difficult to determine which reading belongs to the Traditional Text. Also, in some of the cases in which the Textus Receptus disagrees with the Traditional Text, it is hard to decide which text to follow. Also, as we have seen, sometimes the several editions of the Textus Receptus differ from each other and from the King James Version. And, as we have just observed, the case is the same with the Old Testament text. Here, it is hard at times to decide between the *kethibh* and the *keri* and between the Hebrew text and the Septuagint and Latin Vulgate versions. Also, there has been a controversy concerning the headings of the Psalms.

In other words, God does not reveal every truth with equal clarity. In biblical textual criticism, as in every other department of knowledge, there are still some details in regard to which we must be content to remain uncertain. But the special providence of God has kept these uncertainties down to a *minimum*. Hence, if we believe in the special providential preservation of the Scriptures and make this the leading principle of our biblical textual criticism, we obtain *maximum certainty*, all the certainty that any mere man can obtain, all the certainty that we need. For we are led by the logic of faith to the Masoretic Hebrew text, to the New Testament Textus Receptus, and to the King James Version. But what if we ignore the providential preservation of the Scriptures and deal with the text of the holy Bible in the same way in which we deal with the texts of other ancient books? If we do this, we are following the logic of unbelief, which leads to maximum uncertainty.³²

Here is what Hills does: he takes the amount of uncertainty provided by his viewpoint, uncertainty which his rhetoric has largely ignored, and proclaims it

Del Johnson of PCC, criticized inerrancy. Johnson was visibly shaken and did not know what to do. PCC did not do its due diligence on Letis.

³² Hills, *Text and Time*, Kindle loc. 5510.

“minimum” and therefore acceptable. He takes the amount of uncertainty in the critical text view and proclaims it “maximum.” We have “all the certainty that we need,” he said.

Here are other beliefs commonly held in CB circles:

- Confessional Bibliology continually argues that the Bible in the hand is superior to the manuscripts in the bush. Either God’s people have always had full access to the pure text, or God is a liar.
- They consistently decry the autographa and praise the apographa.
- They contrast their “supernatural” view of textual transmission with the “naturalistic” view of textual criticism practiced by the mainstream view.
- They argue that the same logic used for canon ought to be used for text: use in the church of self-authenticating readings constitutes validation by the Spirit.³³
- Everywhere they simplify the debate by reifying “the TR” (or “the Ecclesiastical Text” or “the Traditional Text”), as if it is one stable entity rather than an unstable collection of variants.

It is to prove this last postulate of my own that we now turn.

3. Stephanus vs. Scrivener

KJV-Onlyism usually treats the TR as perfect and therefore stable. When it acknowledges differences among TR editions at all, it dismisses them as minor.

Confessional Bibliology usually treats the TR as perfect and therefore stable. When it acknowledges differences among TR editions, which it does regularly do, it dismisses them as “trifling.”

Each group cuts a wide and deep ditch between “the TR” and all present and future critical editions. They provide no consistent principles that I could see for performing textual criticism on TR editions.

Owen himself suggests something like the plan I would like to use for this third portion of the paper:

³³ An upcoming CB conference featuring Robert Truelove and Jeff Riddle is called “The Text and Canon Conference.”

A man might...take all the printed copies he could get of various editions, and gathering out the *errata typographica*, print them for various lections.³⁴

I say “something like,” because we will not be looking at typographical errors, but at “various lections” between two TR editions. I am driving at a point I will later reveal; I think there is a lesson for us in these variants—and a rhetorical opportunity. These, again, I will reveal later.

For now it is enough to question the claim that “the TR” perfectly preserves the every-jot-and-tittle text of the inspired *autographa*. I examined all the differences between two of the twenty-eight editions of the TR, probably the most significant editions in existence—significant because 1) the 1550 TR was the most widely used GNT in England during the time of the KJV translators and 2) Scrivener’s TR is the most widely used TR today. By comparing these two TRs we will see where the KJV translators decided *against* the most significant TR edition of their day. We will see, then, where the KJV translators did the work of textual criticism.

I have categorized the discrepancies between these two TRs—spelling differences, tense differences, word differences, etc. And I have listed these categories in order of significance, starting with the excessively minor and moving all the way up to the one “contradiction” I discovered.

1. Spelling differences.

There are multiple spelling differences between the Stephanus TR and the Scrivener TR. Here are just a few.

- οὐτω (outō) vs. οὐτως (outōs) (Mat 2:5; 5:12, 16, 19, 48; etc., etc. throughout the NT)
- ναζαρετ (nazaret) vs. ναζαρεθ (nazareth) (Mat 2:23; 4:13; etc.)
- ἰνα τι (hina ti) vs. ἰνατι (hinati) (Mat 9:4; etc.)
- δια τι (dia ti) vs. διατι (diati) (Mat 9:11, 14, etc.)
- βεελζεβουλ (beelzeboul) vs. βεελζεβουβ (beelzeboub) (Mat 10:25).

I confess that after the Gospel of Matthew I tired of writing down mere spelling differences; there are many, many more. But they are so insignificant that I found I lacked the will to list them. I tend to think that any TR defenders who chance across this article will dismiss this first category of TR discrepancies as utterly insignificant—as I do. These spelling differences make no difference for meaning

³⁴ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 16 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 364.

and, with the possible exception of the last, no difference in translation. If there is a difference between *Beelzebul* and *Beelzebub* (and translations go both ways), we today do not know what it is.³⁵

2. Differences that do not have to show up in translation, but could.

There is a οτι (*hoti*) at Matt 9:33 that is present in Stephanus but not in Scrivener. This makes no difference in meaning, though an unnecessarily fastidious translator could try to reflect it. It would mean the difference between “They said it was never so seen” (Scrivener) and “They said **that** it was never so seen” (Stephanus).

I think TR-Only brothers will and should dismiss the significance of such differences, much as they will and should with spelling differences. οτι basically functions like a quotation mark and not a word. It is contextually redundant: no one could possibly confuse the meaning of the clause with or without it. This difference is less than minor.

3. Differences in word order that do not affect meaning.

In 1 Timothy 1:2, Stephanus reads “Christ Jesus” (Χριστου Ιησου) where Scrivener reads “Jesus Christ” (Ιησου Χριστου). Once again, there is no difference in meaning that I can discern. But there is a clear difference in translation. And once again, I think TR defenders from KJV-Onlyism and Confessional Bibliology are justified in dismissing this difference as insignificant.

4. Differences that amount to simple redundancies.

Revelation 7:14 is slightly more full in Stephanus than in Scrivener.

Stephanus reads,

These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:14)

The KJV—and therefore Scrivener—reads,

³⁵ Most interpreters think they are alternate spellings of the same name. One dictionary lists the alternate spellings “Beelzebub, Baalzebul, Baalzebub.” See Charles Meeks, “Beelzebul,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:14 KJV)

It is clear what the antecedent of “them” in Revelation 7:14 is. Stephanus makes something that is unmistakable doubly unmistakable. Once again, TR defenders are, I think, justified in seeing this as a distinction without a difference.

5. Differences in number (singular vs. plural).

- There is a singular vs. plural discrepancy at Matthew 10:10; Jesus either tells his disciples not to bring a “staff” (ραβδον, *rabdon*) on their mission (Stephanus) or not to bring “staves” (ραβδους, *rabdous*) on their mission (Stephanus).
- There is another such variant in Matthew 21:7, *επεκαθισεν* (*epekathisen*) vs. *επεκαθισαν* (*epekathisan*)—the difference between one person setting Jesus on the colt for the triumphal entry (Stephanus) and two or more people doing it (Scrivener).
- Similarly, in 2 Pet 2:9 Jesus knows how to rescue the godly from either “temptation” (Stephanus) or “temptations” (Scrivener).

TR defenders might struggle a bit more here than they did with the previous categories of difference; I do not think they will (or should) dismiss this category as insignificant. There are places in the New Testament where the difference between singular and plural matters. Famously, Paul’s interpretation of the Genesis 3:15 seed metaphor in Galatians 3:16 turns precisely on its number—and, indeed, TR defenders of all stripes appeal to precisely this verse as demanding perfect, every-jot-and-tittle preservation.

But quite clearly, no doctrine rides on the above three variants between Stephanus and Scrivener. They are trivial.

6. Differences of person in pronouns

In Mark 9:40, Scrivener reads,

The one who is not against us is for us.

Stephanus reads,

The one who is not against you is for you.

It is quite clear, either way, that Jesus means to include himself among the people to whom this proverbial saying applies. There is a clear difference here in translation, but not in meaning.

7. Tense and/or mood differences in verbs.

- There is a present vs. an aorist participle discrepancy in Matthew 13:24. The difference is between a sower who “is sowing” (σπειροντι, *speironti*) seed (Stephanus) and one who “sowed” (σπειραντι, *speiranti*) seed (Scrivener).
- In Revelation 3:12 there is a tense and mood difference between καταβαινει (*katabainei*, Scrivener) and καταβαινουσα (*katabainousa*, Stephanus). Either the New Jerusalem “comes” out of heaven or it “is coming” out of heaven.

Tense can be very significant for meaning—such as the difference between “You are saved” and “You will be saved.” But it is difficult to see a significant difference in meaning in the above two passages. Whether we envision the sower as now sowing or as having already gone out to sow, the picture is precisely the same.

In Revelation 3:12, too, there is no real difference in meaning between the two TRs. “Time signatures” in apocalyptic literature are often obscure. And whether Jesus is speaking in the prophetic present or the prophetic aorist, clearly the New Jerusalem has not come yet—but will.

Intermission

Before I arrive at points eight through ten, the most significant categories of difference between the two TRs I am examining, I would like to use a brief intermission to hear from the Trinitarian Bible Society, one of the most prominent institutions dedicated to defending the TR—and a group respected by KJV-Onlyism and Confessional Bibliology. TBS is aware of such differences and does indeed dismiss them, as I have recommended they do:

The Greek Received Text is the name given to a group of printed texts, the first of which was published by Desiderius Erasmus in 1516. The Society uses for the purposes of translation the text reconstructed by F.H.A. Scrivener in 1894.

As the scope of the Society's Constitution does not extend to considering the minor variations between the printed editions of the Textus Receptus, this necessarily excludes the Society from engaging in alteration or emendation of the Hebrew Masoretic and Greek Received Text on the basis of other Hebrew or Greek texts. Editorial policy and practice will observe these parameters.³⁶

TBS, the publishing ministry that supplies printed TRs to all wings of the KJV-Only movement, says that all differences between TR editions are “minor.”

And here is the key rhetorical point I have been driving toward, one I commend for use to others: *by dismissing all differences between the TR and the TR as minor, they have implicitly agreed to dismiss a huge portion of the differences between the TR and the critical text.*

1. Spelling differences.

There are many insignificant spelling differences between the TR and the critical text (CT), such as $\Delta\alpha\beta\iota\delta$ (Scrivener) vs. $\Delta\alpha\upsilon\iota\delta$ (NA28).

2. Differences that do not have to show up in translation, but could.

There are many differences between the TR and the CT which a fastidious translator *could* reflect but does not have to. Τοις ουρανοις (Matt 23:9, Scrivener) could be rendered as a plural—“in the heavens,” which would distinguish it from “in heaven” (Matt 23:9, NA28). But the KJV translators themselves opt to render the plural as a singular.

3. Differences in word order that do not affect meaning.

There are many differences in word order between the TR and CT that do not affect meaning. Dozens of times, the very example I adduced above—“Jesus Christ” vs. Christ Jesus”—differs between the two. Consider also “flesh and blood” (Scrivener) vs. “blood and flesh” (NA28) in Hebrews 2:14.

³⁶ Trinitarian Bible Society, “Statement of Doctrine of Holy Scripture,” <https://www.tbsbibles.org/page/DoctrineofScripture>, accessed 10/5/18. Interestingly, the TBS bibliology statement opens with explicit appeal to WCF 1.8.

4. Differences that amount to simple redundancies.

There are many differences between the TR and CT that amount to simple redundancies. The very first textual variant between them, Matthew 1:6, is one example. The TR calls David “the king” twice; the CT calls him “the king” only once. David is not any more or less a king by being named “king” once or twice. One of the most common observable differences between the TR and the critical text is that the TR, as (I think) a later text, tends to fill out and specify what’s already clear in the (as I think) earlier texts that make up the baseline of modern critical editions.

5. Differences in number (singular vs. plural).

There are many number differences between the TR and CT, too, that make no difference at all for the *meanings* of the passages in which they occur. Certainly, no doctrine is affected. My work on KJVParallelBible.org reminded me over and over again that a great deal of the Bible is not directly doctrinal. It is not thereby unimportant, but does it really matter whether Peter makes the tents on the Mount of Transfiguration (ποίησω, NA28) or whether he volunteers James and John to help (ποιησωμεν)?³⁷ If minor differences of number between TRs are acceptable, then they ought in principle to be acceptable between the TR and the CT.

6. Differences of person in pronouns

One of the most frequent differences between the TR and the CT is a switch between first- and second-person in pronouns. The TR says, “We, brethren..., are the children of promise.” The CT says, “You, brethren..., are the children of promise” (Gal 4:28). Differences in pronunciation in various regions and eras of the ancient world may have led to a common confusion between ημων (*hemon*) and υμων (*humon*). The difference between the two is never, to my knowledge, significant for interpretation. Clearly, NT writers such as Paul counted themselves among the saints, and so “you” and “we” often refer to the same set of people.

7. Tense and/or mood differences in verbs.

There are regular tense and/or mood differences between the two texts. One difference that occurs several times is the so-called “historical present.” Matthew

³⁷ Matthew 17:4.

13:28 in the NA28 has a master's servants "say" (λεγουσιν) something to him; Scrivener reads that they "said" (ειπον) something to him.³⁸

Interlude Conclusion

The mainstream evangelical view of textual criticism explains rather well why the kinds of differences that occur between TR editions occur also between the TR and the CT. Here it is: both are the results of textual criticism. Critical texts are simply operating with more data. The various TR editions used an artificially restricted number of (recent) manuscripts, and their standards for evaluation, their rationale, were also less developed. This is not to say that the various TR editors were unintelligent or ignorant; clearly Erasmus was a world-historical thinker. It is only to say that all fields take time to develop, and all scholars build on the work of those who went before. If, as TR defenders commonly argue, the textual critical canons that have guided the formation of modern critical texts are unacceptably subjective,³⁹ one wonders whether the textual critical decisions made by TR editors are any better for having not been worked out explicitly.

8. Differences in Words that Produce Differences in Meaning

Having landed what I pray was an effective rhetorical blow against major TR defenses, I will now proceed to lovingly push my fist a bit further and harder into their flesh.

Most differences between the two TRs in this paper are not significant, but there are a few which are more difficult to label "minor." There are places where the two texts use wholly different words. Some principle of evaluative judgment must be

³⁸ Contemporary English translations generally feel free to turn historical presents into pasts, which sound better in English, so this particular difference is often invisible in English. See Mark Ward, "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>.

³⁹ Garnet Milne writes, "Modern textual criticism is not purely scientific, relying on inviolable and self-evident rules or laws. There is patently a significant subjective component involved, so that Warfield can have certain passages which require conjectural emendation and Westcott and Hort, using the same critical principles, have many other and different passages in need of some guesswork." *Has the Bible Been Kept Pure? The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Providential Preservation of Scripture* (Seattle: Amazon Digital Services, 2017), 36.

brought in for each case to decide which text will be translated and which will go in a textual footnote.

- One example is Matthew 2:11. This is the difference between the wise men coming and “finding” (εὕρον) Jesus with Mary (Stephanus) and coming and “seeing” (εἶδον) Jesus with Mary (Scrivener). The overall sense of the passage is not affected, but quite clearly both readings cannot be perfect preservations of the original.
- 1 Peter 1:8 is similar. Whether Peter’s hearers loved Jesus with “knowing” (εἰδοτες) him (Stephanus) or without “seeing” (ιδοντες) him (Scrivener) makes very little difference: these Christians became Christians without ever meeting the Savior during his earthly ministry. But, again, both cannot be original.
- In 1 Timothy 1:4, Scrivener’s GNT speaks of “the godly **edifying** which is by faith”; Stephanus (in agreement with the NA28) speaks of a “**stewardship** of God which is by faith.” Stephanus’ reading is somewhat awkward; the KJV translators went with the more contextually natural reading, even though it is found in one and only one Greek manuscript (the “Western text,” D).
- In 1 John 1:5, “God is light” is either the “promise” (Stephanus) or the “message” (Scrivener) that John is declaring. The difference is only two letters in Greek (επαγγελια vs. αγγελια), but clearly both cannot be original. In my judgment, the KJV translators chose the more contextually appropriate variant.
- In 2 Corinthians 11:10, Paul’s boasting will either not be “silenced” (φραγησεται, Scrivener) or not be “sealed” (σφραγησεται, Stephanus). The latter makes poor sense; surely the KJV translators made the right textual-critical decision here.
- In 2 Thessalonian 2:4, the man of lawlessness sets himself up against either “all the things that are called God” (παντα, Stephanus) and “all that is called God” (παν το, Scrivener). Meaning does not seem to be affected, but each cannot be original.
- In Philemon 1:7, Paul either felt “gratitude” (χαριν, Stephanus) or “joy” (χαραν, Scrivener)? Surely he felt both, but what did he write? Which TR is correct? Context—internal evidence—is insufficient to determine the answer. Each works. The KJV translators chose “joy.”
- Hebrews 9:1 records a fairly significant difference between our two TRs. A small number of manuscripts beginning in the eleventh century, along with at least one manuscript of the Latin Vulgate, say “The first **tabernacle** (σκηνη) had ordinances of divine service.” Stephanus adopts this reading. Scrivener, reflecting the choice of the KJV translators, has nothing here. The sentence is elliptical, and natural English tends to require translators to insert a word.

The KJV translators obliged, putting “covenant” in roman type (the equivalent of italics in some modern-day Bible translations). In my judgment, “tabernacle” is a metonymy for the Mosaic covenant. So the two verses mean the same thing—but the KJV translators elected to insert italics when they could have used Stephanus’ reading.

- James 5:12 is very interesting. It provides a perfect example of the kind of difference that regularly occurs between the TRs and the critical texts. Stephanus’ TR warns readers not to swear, “lest you fall into **hypocrisy**” (ὡς μή εἰς ὑποκρισὶν πεισῆτε). Scrivener’s TR warns them not to swear “lest you fall **under condemnation**” (ὡς μὴ ὑποκρισὶν πεισῆτε). Only one of these texts could generate the other, and I think the KJV translators saw just what I see and made just the right choice. Clearly, someone along the line read the text without spaces—INAMHYPOKRISINPESEHTE—and misjudged one of the word boundaries, failing to divide ΥΠΟΚΡΙΣΙΝ into ὑποκρισὶν and winding up with “hypocrisy” rather than “under condemnation.” This word division left some scribe(s) with a difficulty: the sentence is clearly missing a word (“in order that they might not fall hypocrisy”). And the only viable candidate is εἰς (“in order that they might not fall into hypocrisy”). So εἰς was dutifully added in. The scribe who did this surely thought he was correcting someone else’s mistake; he did not realize he was adding his own. It is hard to imagine the change happening the other direction. Anyone who sees INAMHEIΣYPOKRISINPESEHTE will know immediately that the key word is *hypocrisy*; otherwise there would be a meaningless doubling up of prepositions (ΕΙΣΥΠΟ).
- In Revelation 7:10, the redeemed cry out “Salvation!” either “to our God who sits on the throne” (Scrivener) or “to the one who sits on the throne of our God” (Stephanus). It is possible there is a difference in meaning here: perhaps Stephanus’ reading could be saying that the Son sits on God’s throne, but that would seem odd given that the redeemed add additional praise to “the lamb.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Two more matters of interest to modern-day scribes: 1) in Galatians 3:8, there is a clear but minor difference between This variant is significant, however, because the modern critical text goes with Stephanus against Scrivener. Indeed, in many places where Stephanus and Scrivener disagree, the critical text has the same reading as Stephanus. 2) In Hebrews 11:14, Abel “still speaks” either in the middle voice (λαλεῖται, Stephanus) or the active (λαλεῖ, Scrivener). There is no difference in meaning here, nor in translation. But there is still something interesting to note: the KJV translators go against the majority of manuscripts to select λαλεῖ. In fact, they agree with the modern critical text here against that majority.

I do not relish as an inerrantist telling laypeople that the biblical manuscript tradition contains variants. So I am eager to point out that the two TRs I compared are almost as similar as it is possible for two books printed without the aid of a computer to be. The overall sense of most passages that contain discrepancies is very similar, no matter which reading you choose.

But the differences are not random, not the equivalent of typos. They do yield different translations—*and someone must choose which to translate*. The KJV translators had to. Erasmus had to. Everyone who prints a Greek New Testament or a Bible translation has to. The problem of textual criticism will not go away. Being “TR-Only” doesn’t solve that problem when the question is, *Which TR?*

The TR-Only position is typically used to remove uncertainty, to obviate all need for humans to “sit in judgment” over the text of Scripture. But clearly this will not work when “the” TR is not itself absolute. And if wholly different words are “trifling differences” when they occur between TRs but “corruptions” when they occur between the TR and CT, one wonders where the line is between trivial and corrupt.

9. Contradictions

Most seriously, there are two places I found in the New Testament in which our two TRs actually contradict one another. This does not mean that one teaches a false doctrine and another the true, only that clearly both cannot preserve the correct reading.

- James 2:18 is the first. Here are the two texts in parallel:

Stephanus	Scrivener
αλλ ερει τις συ πιστιν εχεις καγω εργα εχω δειξον μοι την πιστιν σου εκ των εργαων σου καγω δειξω σοι εκ των εργαων μου την πιστιν μου.	αλλ ερει τις συ πιστιν εχεις καγω εργα εχω δειξον μοι την πιστιν σου χωρις των εργαων σου καγω δειξω σοι εκ των εργαων μου την πιστιν μου.
But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith by your works, and I will shew you my faith by my works.	But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will shew you my faith by my works.

In one clause within this verse, Stephanus has James saying the opposite of what Scrivener (along with the critical text) has him saying. The overall point is the same: works must accompany faith, or it is no true faith. But the rhetorical strategy is markedly different. James is either directly contradicting his imagined interlocutor (as in Stephanus) or subtly, perhaps even sarcastically, challenging his non sequitur (as in Scrivener). As with the examples in the previous category, a choice must be made.

- Revelation 11:2 provides the second of two very simple contradictions between the two TRs. Is John told not to measure the court “**inside** the temple” (εσωθεν, Stephanus) or “**outside** the temple” (εξωθεν, Scrivener and NA28)? Textual critics and translators must choose.

This second-to-last category of difference occurs between the TR and CT, too—and in precisely the same way. That is, the two contradict one another but still teach the same doctrine.

10. Missing “verses”

The final category of difference is the most serious, because it is the largest. But in order to populate it, I will need to do some of my own special pleading. There are no whole verses that differ between Stephanus and Scrivener. But, famously, 1 John 5:7 is wholly lacking in early editions of Erasmus’ TR. And, just as famously, the Johannine Comma is missing from modern critical texts.

Again the same kind of difference found between TR editions is found between “the TR” and the CT.

The one category of difference which is not found between TRs but is between the TR and CT traditions consists, basically, of two passages: Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53–8:11. Consequently, Confessional Bibliology always moves discussion back toward these two texts.

Conclusion

Many KJV-Only Bible college professors have personally told me that they are not, in fact, KJV-Only but Textus Receptus Only. I suspect that knowledgeable TR-Only brothers, when pressed by a very simple argument like mine, will be willing to clarify in good faith. They will say, “It is Scrivener’s TR that is the perfectly preserved Word of God, not Stephanus’ TR.” I suspect they will appeal to the

providential use of Scrivener's TR, especially in the King James Version.⁴¹ If they are inclined toward overmuch honesty, they will start changing their doctrinal statements; instead of saying (as countless churches and schools now do) that they believe in "the Textus Receptus," they will clarify that they believe in "F.H.A. Scrivener's 1881/1894 edition of the Textus Receptus."

But if they do so, they will prove a bigger point that I have been making throughout all my work on King James Onlyism: mainstream KJV-Onlyism, despite its professed allegiance to "the" Textus Receptus, is actually dedicated to the KJV and not to the TR.⁴² *Because what is Scrivener's TR except a record of the textual critical decisions of the KJV translators?*⁴³ As an arcane scholarly tool, Scrivener's text is very useful. But professing faith in its perfect preservation still makes the KJV, and not the apostles and prophets, the ultimate standard—now not just for English renderings but for textual critical decisions also.

And until they do this—until they stop professing allegiance to "the TR"—they are in principle accepting precisely the same kinds of textual variation that occur between the TR and the CT, with the exception of the two big chunks: John 7:53–8:11 and Mark 16:9–20.

Would the KJV translators be happy with this situation? Did they intend for their work to be the One Ring to Rule not just all translations but all editions of the Greek New Testament? Clearly not. What they said about translation in their preface surely they would say, too, about their textual-critical judgments (which does not even merit mention in their preface):

⁴¹ I have often wondered what they would say about alternate GNT readings that have become established in other cultures through equally influential translations such as the Reina-Valera.

⁴² Robert Truelove told me in a private conversation in 2018 (this is a direct quote) that mainstream KJV-Only Christians "doen't care one whit about the TR."

⁴³ Harvard-educated E.F. Hills says this very openly: "How do we know that the King James Version is a faithful translation of the true New Testament text? We know this...through the logic of faith. Since the formation of the Textus Receptus was God-guided, the translation of it was God-guided also. For as the Textus Receptus was being formed, it was also being translated. The two processes were simultaneous. Hence, the early Protestant versions, such as Luther's, Tyndale's, the Geneva, and the King James, were actually varieties of the Textus Receptus. And this was necessarily so according to the principles of God's preserving providence. For the Textus Receptus had to be translated in order that the universal priesthood of believers, the rank and file, might give it their God-guided approval." *Text and Time*, Kindle loc. 3008.

Whatever was perfect under the sun, where Apostles or apostolick men, that is, men endued with an extraordinary measure of God's Spirit, and privileged with the privilege of infallibility, had not their hand?⁴⁴

The KJV translators did not claim perfection for their work. They made excellent judgments, but they were *human* judgments. They did not claim the mantel of Bezalel and Oholiab. The Bible does not promise perfect Bible translations—or perfect textual criticism.

The wealth of widely available information about textual criticism of the Greek New Testament—from the NTVMR to (now) multiple textual commentaries and different textual apparatuses—has had a paradoxical effect among some students of the discipline. It has actually decreased their trust in the reliability of the critical text tradition.⁴⁵ Many have sought the apparently greater stability, simplicity, and objectivity of a Majority Text view—or the apparently full certainty of a Textus-Receptus-Only view. And now that certain embarrassing failures and rhetorical excesses of the KJV-Only movement have discredited TR-Onlyism in the last half century, contemporary disciples of Burgon and Hills have arisen to defend the TR and claim a “confessional” bibliology. But the certainty each group seeks is simply not be had without some kind of special pleading.

After years of attention given to KJV-Onlyism, it is my opinion that its more thoughtful proponents, in all of its camps,⁴⁶ are accepting one presupposition that is driving all of their work: *inspiration demands perfect preservation*.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ David Norton, ed., *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible with the Apocrypha: King James Version*, Revised edition., vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), xxviii.

⁴⁵ In my experience, younger men who have expressed interest in Confessional Bibliology have nearly all come from mainstream evangelical views of textual criticism.

⁴⁶ Proponents of Confessional Bibliology rigorously and regularly deny that they are KJV-Only. But I am compelled to make the same judgment of them that Peter Head (?) made of Theodore Letis: theirs is merely an “upmarket King James Onlyism.” I am unable to locate the citation for this comment, which I am certain I read.

⁴⁷ James Orr said this very thing, in a passage cited by Letis: “If a revelation has been given by God, it is reasonable to expect that provision will be made for the Preservation of the knowledge of the revelation in some permanent and authoritative form.” [Citation] Hills says it, too: “If the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the New Testament is a true doctrine, then New Testament textual criticism is different from the textual criticism of ordinary books. If the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Old and New Testament Scriptures is a true doctrine, the doctrine of the providential preservation of the Scriptures must also be a true doctrine.” *Text and Time*, Kindle loc. 270. This is the very presupposition that drove Bart Ehrman out of evangelicalism: once he saw that the Bible was not perfectly preserved, he reasoned that it must not be inspired. [Citation]

In my opinion, this presupposition is not illogical. It is a plausible read of Matthew 5:18, in particular. But when one looks into the jots and tittles, perfect preservation is simply, clearly, not what God has given us. So he must not have meant to promise it. Matthew 5:18 must be about the efficacy of God's words instead. But every KJV/TR defender (the two defenses almost invariably go together) who cites the promise of every-jot-and-tittle preservation is setting up an absolute standard: if one jot or tittle is either not preserved *or not identifiable with certainty*, the position falls. It is no good for a KJV/TR defender to say, "All the jots and tittles *are* preserved—in the totality of the good manuscripts"; that is precisely the position of the mainstream. In order for TR-Onlyism to work (and for its key rhetoric to be true rather than false), we have to not only have all the jots and tittles, but we have to know precisely and with certainty what each one of them is, and precisely and with certainty which ones do not count among the 144,000. An appeal to perfect preservation of "the TR" fails by this standard. Which TR is perfect, and how do we know?

There is no doubt that TR defenses occasion some frustration in this humble redheaded writer, but the basic argument of this paper is (I pray) irenic and bridge-building. I do not mind if someone uses a New Testament based on any printed edition of the Greek New Testament now available, as long as the translation is made into vernacular English. The actual textual differences between these texts are too minor to cause division among believers. What I wish to see is an end to bibliological sectarianism. And if I can successfully show a TR/KJV defender that TR editions feature exactly the same kinds of variants as those that occur between the CT and TR—if I can show that *our views differ only in degree and not in kind*—I can perhaps make a small dent in the amount of divisive internet grandstanding, and save a layperson the difficulty of being told by well-meaning pastoral leadership that they must call their brother-in-law's Bible "corrupt." What could be more divisive than telling people who cannot read Greek or Hebrew—and therefore lack most of the capacity necessary to check out the issue for themselves—to disdain each other's Bibles?