

VPP(KJV-onlyism) : Rightly dividing the people of God?

Introduction

It is with good intention that the dean of the FEBC introduced to the BP fraternity a doctrine called the verbal plenary preservation. The claims of the VPP on the surface appears to be God-honouring and thoroughly fundamental. However, since its introduction, the consequences are as follows:

- (i) It has split Life BP church which is a “mother” church to many of us.
- (ii) The constitution of the FEBC has been modified. Attempts have been made, and are being made, to modify the constitution of the some BP churches to reflect what is being taught in the VPP.

From (ii) it implies that the FEBC and the BP churches in the pre-Jeffrey Khoo era were neo-evangelical, if not, why is there a need to revise the constitution?

With all the effort put in by the advocates of the VPP in promoting their doctrine, no church in Singapore has changed their modern bible versions to the KJV. The effect seems to be only felt within the BP family. Some feel good because the KJV they use is a “photocopy in the English language” of the original given by God to the inspired authors. Others are not so convinced, pointing to the “difficult” passages in the bible and reformed church history relating to inspiration. The VPPites have, finally to admit, that their doctrine takes more “faith” than reason to accept.

KJVonlyism and Preservation

One of the charges the VPPites (KJV-onlyists) leveled against modern-version-bible users, and even those who love the KJV, is that they do not believe that the KJV is perfect. It is appropriate at this point to state the position of the VPPite. A quotation from one of its advocate, Dr. Tom Strouse is in order:

*“Since the Masoretic and Received Texts are superior, it follows that their resultant translation, the KJV, is superior. ... **THE KJV IS THE WORD OF GOD IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.** It has no errors” (The Lord God Hath Spoken: A Guide to Bibliology, published in 1992).*

The VPP advocates conclude that since non-VPP Christians do not believe that the KJV is 100% perfect, they (VPPites) therefore reason that non-VPP are saying God’s Words contain errors. So the credibility of God is called into question since there may be many more errors in the Bible. **But this is not true. Non-VPP believe the Word of God is perfect but that the KJV is a very good and accurate translation.** Below is an extract from Dr. G I Williamson(G. I. Williamson, *The Confession of Faith for Study Classes*. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed,1964))

At first sight it would appear that with the disappearance of A [autographs] (probably worn out with use) the text would be doomed to progressive corruption thereafter. But such is not the case. The reason is that God has exercised control over all the elements and agencies concerned with the preservation of the sacred text. We see that God determined that early copies of the original would be made. True, each erred in a slight degree, but they did not all err in the same points.

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Being human, the copier of manuscript B would make a mistake here and there. Likewise would the copiers of C and D. But they would each err in a different, individual way. So that where B erred, C and D would not err. In effect, C and D would thus bear witness against the error of B. And so, while the true (or perfect) original text would not be entirely reproduced in any single copy, yet it would not be lost or inaccessible because by the majority testimony of several copies, error would always be witnessed against. The true text would be perfectly preserved within the body of witnesses¹.

Both the VPPite and the non-VPP fundamentalist believe that **God's Word contains no errors**. For the VPP advocate, the text underlying the KJV (hence the KJV) is the Word of God and it contains no errors, and for the non-VPP it is the body of existing manuscripts that contains God's perfect word. So what distinguishes the VPP advocate and the non-VPP is their **understanding of the preservation** of the Word of God.

Preservation of God's word from a VPP perspective.

A clearly written source on the preservation of God's Word from a VPP advocate's perspective is the article by Dr. Jeffrey Khoo "A Plea for a Perfect Bible.(The Burning Bush; January 2003)" In regard to the New Testament, DR. Khoo argues that

- i. The textus receptus (TR) underlying the KJV is the perfect TR.
- ii. This perfect TR is produced from the available TR's which were pure but not as pure as the one produced by the KJV translators.
- iii. The TR produced by the KJV translators is perfect and no improvement is called for.

"If there exists a perfect TR, then which of the many editions of the TR is perfect? It must be affirmed that all the editions of the TR being from the pure stream of God's preserved text are *pure*, no doubt about it. But which is the *purest*? It is the TR underlying the KJV"²

"...Is not the Greek Text underlying the KJV the Textus Receptus? Whose TR? Not completely Erasmus's, Stephen's, or Beza's, it is *a new edition* of the TR which reflects the textual decisions of the KJV translators as they prayerfully studied and compared the preserved manuscripts."²

"I believe God **providentially guided the KJV translators to produce the purest TR¹** of all. The KJV translators had all the various editions of the TR to refer to, and **they made their decisions with the help of the Holy Spirit¹**. I believe the Lord providentially guided the King James translators to make the right textual decisions. As such, **I do not believe we need to improve on the TR underlying the KJV¹**. No one should play textual critic, and be a judge of God's Word today. *God is His own Textual Critic*. I accept God's special providential work in history during the great 16th Century Protestant Reformation."³

¹ bold by the author

² pg5 "A Plea for a Perfect Bible.(The Burning Bush; January 2003)"

³ pg6 "A Plea for a Perfect Bible.(The Burning Bush; January 2003)"

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- iv. The preservation of God's word is similar to the canonization of scripture in that there was a terminus(came to an end.) The preservation of God's word ended when the KJV came into being.

“Is there a historical precedent that tells us that God's providential work can involve a closure, a terminus? The answer is yes. There was a terminus to the canonisation of Scripture at the Council of Carthage in 397. In like manner, the Lord allowed copyist errors and corruptions to enter into the transmission process through the pen of fallible scribes..... I believe that in the fulness of time—in the most opportune time of the Reformation when the true church separated from the false,—God restored from out of a pure stream of preserved Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, the purest Hebrew and Greek Text of all—the Text that underlies our KJV—that accurately reflects the original Scriptures.⁴”

Preservation of God's word from a non-VPP perspective.

The non-VPP view of the preservation of God's Word of the New Testament is that of the historic reformed, protestant and fundamentalist Christian.

- i. God's Word is preserved faithfully, accurately and in a state of essential purity throughout all ages in the family of Byzantine (sometimes called the Traditional, Majority, or Antiochian) text.
- ii. God's Word is preserved forever.

This view is also espoused by the Trinitarian Bible Society founded in 1831 in England.

God has *preserved* His Word. This is not to be understood as meaning that, throughout history, God has performed repeated miracles, nor that He has "inspired" the various rabbis and scribes who worked on the text. We concede that the autographs have long since perished and that some errors have crept into the copies now available to us. Hence there is **need for textual criticism**¹. The doctrine of "**providential preservation**¹" requires careful definition. What exactly do we mean by it? Here, I would quote the words of Professor John H. Skilton: "God who gave the Scriptures, who works all things after the counsel of his will, has exercised a remarkable care over his Word, has preserved it in all ages in a state of essential purity, and has enabled it to accomplish the purpose for which he gave it".

(The Lord Gave the Word: A Study in the History of the Biblical Text by *Malcolm H. Watts* <http://www.trinitarianbiblesociety.org/>)

¹ bold by the author

⁴pg9 "A Plea for a Perfect Bible.(The Burning Bush; January 2003)"

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Providential Preservation Examined

The Westminster Confession of Faith states what is meant by providence.

“Although, in relation to the fore-knowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly : yet, by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out, according to the **nature of second causes**¹, either necessarily, freely, or contingently”.

Summing up VPPite teaching of preservation of God’s Word: The KJV translators came together, and out of a handful of TR produced a **100% error free TR**. This TR is **not to be improved** upon, and to perform any form of **textual criticism** would be God-dishonouring. The TR is **identical** in content with the originals (autographa) except for the paper. (“VPP fundamentalists do not deny that the autographa and apographa⁵ *though distinct are the same*. The *paper* may be different, but the *contents* are the same.”⁶). The preservation of God’s Word **ended** in 1611 when the error-free TR came into being. This is similar to the canonization of the Bible in 397 AD.

There are a few difficulties in the VPP advocate’s doctrine of the preservation of God’s Word.

- Firstly, it is stretching the concept of “**nature of second causes**” too far to be classified as providential preservation. It should be termed **miraculous preservation**. That in about 1611 the KJV translators produced a TR which matches the autographa word for word⁷ is beyond any logic of faith. There is no biblical basis for such an assertion short of God performing a miracle. VPPites have frequently claimed that the KJV translators did not know they were inspired!⁸
- Secondly, Rev. Quek SY of the FEBC has ably argued in Psalm 12:6-7 that God’s Word is preserved **forever** (“*The teaching from these two verses appears quite clear that God would preserve His Holy Word forever.*”)⁹ yet Dr. Jeffrey Khoo claimed that preservation ended in 1611¹⁰. This, and other contradictions, shows the amount of confusion that characterizes the VPP(KJVonlyism) camp.

¹ bold by the author

⁵ ‘apographa’ means copies

⁶ pg 4 “A Plea for a Perfect Bible.(The Burning Bush; January 2003)” Jeffery Khoo

⁷ “...that the *words* of the Received *Greek* and Masoretic *Hebrew* texts that underlie the *King James Bible* are the very *words* which God has *preserved* down through the centuries, being the exact *words* of the *originals* themselves.” Quoting DA Waite pg 4 “A Plea for a Perfect Bible.(The Burning Bush; January 2003)” Jeffery Khoo

⁸ (Question #14 Did the translators of the Authorized Version claim to be inspired by God?) The Answer Book . Samuel C. Gipp (http://www.chick.com/reading/books/158/158_14.asp)

⁹ pg 96 “Did God Promise To Preserve His Words?:Interpreting Psalm 12:6-7”.(The Burning Bush; July 2004)” Quek Suan Yew

¹⁰ pg 9 “A Plea for a Perfect Bible.(The Burning Bush; January 2003)” Jeffery Khoo

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Preservation as taught in the Bible.

The VPP advocates draw a parallel between the translation of the KJV and the canonization of the Bible in that similar to the canon closure (397 AD), preservation of the Word of God ended with the publication of the KJV(1611). Where there are disagreements among the variants of TR, the KJV would be used to correct them. To draw such a conclusion **goes against** the plain teaching in the Bible because preservation (of God's Word) is **forever** - it is an **on-going process** and **does not** end.

The teaching of the Bible is clear. God's Word endures forever (Matt5:18, Luke16:17, Ish59:21, Ish 40:8) and is kept pure(Psalm 12:6, Psalm 119:89). It accomplishes that which God has purposed and will certainly fulfill that which God has planned (Isaiah 55:11). Therefore the **preservation** of the Word of God can be thought of to consist of the following three events.

- Transmission:
Carefully copying the Word of God in the original languages. (John14:26, John16:12-15).
- Canonisation:
Deciding which of the books were immediately inspired by God¹¹. (Rev.22:18, Rev.22:19). This is a non-repeatable event.
- Translation:
Translating the Word of God into the worlds' languages so that the gospel will be preached far and wide to accomplish God's intended purpose.(1Cor.14:27, 1Cor14:28, Neh 8:8, Isaiah 55:11,Acts17:30,Rev10:11)

Whilst canonization of God's holy scriptures has ceased, the translation of the Word of God is an on-going process, and will be carried on so that there will be a bible for every language of the world. God's providential preservation takes place when His Word are being translated in the vernacular language of the people.

The doctrine of the preservation of God's Word is succinctly stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 1 "Of The Holy Scripture"

"The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic ; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them . But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and

¹¹ The Church does not cause a book to be inspired. It exercises its infallible judgment to certify that a particular book was inspired when it was written. The fact that God is its Author makes a book to be inspired. The Holy Spirit prevents the Church from erring in judging which books are inspired and included in the Bible.

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interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come , that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner ; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.”

VPPites often quote the above up to the part “...are therefore authentic” and leave it at that. But to be fair to the Westminster divines we have to quote the whole paragraph if speaking of preservation.

Although most of the modern-day bibles are based on inferior critical texts, God has used them to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Providentially however, there is a realization nowadays, within the evangelical community of the importance of God’s preserved Masoretic and Byzantine text.¹²

Conclusion.

Carried to its logical conclusion, VPP leads to absurdity i.e. heresy¹³.

(i) VPP fundamentalist Dr. Tom Strouse concluded that non TR-based bible users hear the voice strangers. If that were true, are Indonesian, Chinese, etc Christians who used non-TR based bible saved?

¹² “The currently renewed respect among Old Testament scholars for the Masoretic text is reflected in the ESV’s attempt, wherever possible, to translate difficult Hebrew passages as they stand in the Masoretic text rather than resorting to emendations or to finding an alternative reading in the ancient versions.” Preface to the English Standard Version.

¹³ ‘Christ not only teaches that He will preserve the words of the Father, but also that believers will hear His voice (Jn. 10:26). Where is the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ? HIS VOICE IS HIS WORDS. The Lord has given believers the means by which to verify the "received words." Believers, indwelt with the Holy Spirit, "hear" and know which words are Christ's "received words." Furthermore, according to Jn. 10:5, believers "know not the voice of strangers." Consequently, believers not only recognize a "received text," but believers also reject the voice of strangers ("rejected text"). Applying the teaching of these verses to the version debate, one must conclude that the Lord has preserved His words in a "received text" and that believers will hear the voice of the Lord in this text. This is why Christians have maintained that the textus receptus is the voice of the Lord and that the variants in the modern versions are the voice of strangers.’ The Biblical Defense For The Verbal, Plenary Preservation Of God's Word by Tom Strouse

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(ii) “If God is incapable of giving us a perfect Bible, what makes us so sure that He is capable of preserving our salvation to the very end?” argues Khoo. He went on, “....we might as well doubt our salvation.¹⁴”. By Khoo’s reckoning bible commentators such as Henry, Gill, Barnes, Kiel & Delizsch and Francis Turretin¹⁵ salvation were called into question because they allowed room for scribal errors. Dr. Khoo believes Christians’ salvation is more secure if they believe in a perfect TR.

The claim by the VPP advocates that the TR¹⁶ underlying the KJV is identical to the autographa (original inspired scriptures) is equivalent to a belief in **progressive revelation** and **post-canonical inspiration**. This post-canonical inspiration climaxed and ended with the publication of the KJV in 1611. Sadly, this belief is not far removed from the claims of extra-biblical revelations of the Charismatics.

At best VPP is an opinion and should not be treated as a dogma. To make it a hallmark of orthodoxy and separate from other Christians who do not share the same opinion would set back the cause of fundamentalism.

¹⁴ pg 13 “A Plea for a Perfect Bible.(The Burning Bush; January 2003)” Jeffery Khoo.

The WCF(“Of the Perseverance of Saints”) which accurately reflects what the Bible teaches states “They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally, nor finally, fall away from the state of grace: but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God.....” .

¹⁵ “ The variant readings that occur in Scripture do not detract from its authenticity, because they are easily recognized and understood, partly by the context (*cohaerentia textus*), and partly by collation of the better manuscripts; many are of such nature that, although they differ, yet they agree in meaning (*licet diversae non male tamen eidem textui convenient*)” (Francis Turretin, “Institutes of Elenctic Theology”, Vol I, The Holy Scripture, Q11 Part VIII)

¹⁶ It was **impossible** that the TR were the ‘*exact* words of the *originals*’ because the KJV translators **never** produced any Greek TR. They were busy translating (‘we never thought from the beginning, that we should need to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one,.... but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one...’ “*The Translators To The Reader*” KJV 1611).

Interestingly, **it was not until about the early 1880’s that the TR underlying the KJV came into being.** “F. H. A. Scrivener (1813-1891) attempted to reproduce as exactly as possible the Greek text which underlies the Authorised Version of 1611. However, the AV was not translated from any one printed edition of the Greek text. The AV translators relied heavily upon the work of William Tyndale and other editions of the English Bible. Thus there were places in which it is unclear what the Greek basis of the New Testament was. When he finished he had produced an edition of the Greek New Testament which more closely underlies the text of the AV than any one edition of the *Textus Receptus*.”(‘The Received Text by GW &DE Anderson, Trinitarian Bible Society’)