



White, James R.

The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust Modern Translations? 2nd ed.

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Nick Norelli

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Back in early 2002 when I was still an unbeliever a friend of mine gave me and my then fiancée an NIV *Couples Devotional Bible*. A few months later in August of 2002 I confessed Jesus as Lord and began using that as my primary Bible. But there was a problem; everyone in church had KJVs and none of them were as girly looking as the Bible I had. So what was I to do? Keep showing up with this decidedly feminine styled Bible that offered a translation that differed from the one the pastor read, or go out and get a nice looking bonded leather KJV? The choice was simple: conform!

I began to do all of my devotional reading and major studying in the KJV and I soaked it up. The language was so rich, so inviting, so poetic and majestic; in short, the KJV was the Bible for me! I never thought much about it until I had encountered some people in the America Online Christian chat rooms who told me that the NIV and other modern translations were distortions of God's Word. I was alarmed when I heard how these versions added and removed verses at will, all in the name of 'scholarship.' What was I to think about such liberal and harmful translations of the Bible? My initial reaction was to search the matter out for myself, so I turned to the internet. Lo and behold, I came across a number of KJV Only sites which bolstered these claims and showed exactly where the NIV and NASB and other 'perversions' of God's Word had added and removed verses, or seriously altered them. Again, I was alarmed by such a practice. But there was one nagging question that I had: why is the KJV the exemplar? What made the KJV the standard by which all other English translations should be judged? It was this question that

ultimately kept me from KJV Onlyism but I realize that it's not a question that KJV Only advocates generally ask themselves.

Thankfully, James White has written a book (now in its second edition) that addresses this issue. This is not a book describing in detail the history of KJV Onlyism. It is a book defending the Christian's liberty to read from whatever English translation they choose without being accused of being deceived. White's goal is not to dissuade people from using the KJV. Nor is it to say that people can't have strong opinions about the KJV and prefer it as a superior translation. White's goal here is simply to show that the KJV is one of many valid English translations of the original Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek Scriptures. No translation is perfect, and no translation is inspired! He recognizes that this is a subject that most scholars won't touch because of the sheer ridiculousness of it, but for someone like me who struggled with this issue, even if only briefly, a book like this from someone of competence is more than helpful. If I had a copy of this back in 2003 then I could have saved myself a lot of trouble.

White opens the book in chapter 1 by defining various groups that might be thought of in connection to KJV Onlyism (23-8). The first are those who simply prefer the KJV as their English translation. He's not addressing them. The second are those who think that the Majority Text (MT) is to be preferred to modern critical texts and who give good reasons for that belief. He's not addressing them either. The remaining groups are: 3) those who believe that the Textus Receptus (TR) is inspired or has been supernaturally preserved, 4) those who believe that the English of the KJV is inspired and inerrant, and 5) those who view the KJV as new revelation from God that can actually correct the Greek underlying it! It is these three last groups that White is addressing in this volume.

Chapter 2 shows that there really isn't anything new under the sun by pointing out that many of the same types of arguments employed by KJV Only advocates were used centuries ago by those who believed that the Septuagint was the standard and Jerome's Vulgate was problematic because it was unfamiliar. Ironically, Jerome's translation would one day become the standard and when Erasmus came on the scene looking to produce a Greek Bible he was viewed with suspicion. In short, traditionalism is nothing new.

Chapter 3 offers a little primer on textual transmission and criticism. Nothing new or innovative here, just reference to the original languages of the Bible being Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and an introduction to the disputes over translation which White says fall into two categories: 1) textual, i.e., disagreements over what was originally written, and 2) translation, i.e., disagreements over how to translate what was originally written. (44) He then discusses the various methods of translation (formal and dynamic/functional) before moving into manuscripts, textual variants, text types and families, etc. It's also here that he's given his first

opportunity to really take advantage of the second edition by interacting with Bart Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus* as well as tie in some of his current study of Islam and the Qur'an.

Chapter 4 provides a brief history of the production of the KJV, showing that not all KJVs are the same (!) while chapter 5 introduces the reader to some of the main KJV Only advocates and the literature that they put out. Names like Gail Riplinger, D. A. Waite, and Peter Ruckman enjoy the spotlight in this chapter. But in the early parts White is careful to note that legitimate scholars who preceded the KJV Only movement such as Dean Burgeon were *not* KJV Only advocates no matter how their works might be co-opted by people who are! In this chapter Ruckman definitely appears to be the most out of touch with reality but in my estimation Riplinger gets it the worst as White exposes her shoddy scholarship and the deceitfulness with which she uses her sources (see esp. 136-150).

In chapter 6 White shows the circularity of the argument that other versions have been changed while the KJV is the standard by which all others are to be judged. He does this by discussing different translation possibilities as well as the changes in the target languages. Chapter 7 is focused on textual criticism and the differences that exist in manuscripts which affect different translations while various examples are given of how this works out in practice. Chapter 8 (my personal favorite) debunks the ridiculous claim that modern versions of the Bible diminish the deity of Christ and have been doctrinally distorted in other areas. In fact, he shows that if anything, according to the criteria that KJV Only advocates are using, it's the KJV that diminished the deity of Christ as compared to the NIV or NASB!

Chapter 9 addresses various problems in the KJV's translation of the Greek text. White is careful to note that he "do[es] not in any way believe these errors were purposeful on the part of the KJV translators. Unlike many AV Alone defenders, [he] do[es] not believe conspiracies are behind every aspect of the translational issue." (278) Throughout the chapter the KJV is compared mostly to the NASB and sometimes to the NKJV or NIV all with attention given to the Greek or Hebrew underlying the passages. At points White concludes that the KJV obscures the meaning while sometimes it is just plain wrong, e.g., on *Easter* as a translation of *το πάσχα* (290-91). Chapter 10 is one of the best features of the book because it provides concise answers to common questions that will aid the reader in those times when they're discussing KJV Onlyism with KJV Only advocates. Reading the questions and answers was like a flashback to my AOL chat room days, with appeals to Psalm 12:6-7 and charges of "so you're saying I need to know Hebrew and Greek to know God's Word?"

Strangely the chapters stop at 10 before part 2 begins, but part 2 is little more than an extra chapter. This chapter is entitled "Textual Data" and provides a small glossary of terms and specific case studies of textual variants that are relevant to the KJV Only controversy. White says that in this section he's assuming that the reader is familiar with Koine and can follow the

discussion, so I suppose that's why it was relegated to its own 'part' of the book. The KJVO Controversy is rounded out with a fairly substantial bibliography and a number of indices to include an index of Greek terms, a Scripture index, and a subject index. This volume is full of tables, charts, and even some photographs of manuscripts. It's also heavily footnoted which is always appreciated. The bottom line is that there isn't a lot of books on the market addressing this issue in as thorough a manner as White has addressed it. Sure, some authors touch on it, and if I'm not mistaken D. A. Carson wrote a book somewhat similar to this one some years back, but in my opinion this volume will serve anyone well who has to engage with KJV Only advocates. And the fact that it's quite easy to read doesn't hurt matters at all. I was able to complete it in less than 5 days which for me is quite fast!