

Intro:

This afternoon I want to address a topic that came up in our Duncan Bible Study a week and a half ago.

The topic is the position known as King James Onlyism. In our discussion, one of our ladies asked this question: “What is the real problem with King James Onlyism?”

I thought this was an extremely perceptive question.

I suppose I am known among you as being against the KJO position. Sometimes we get questions from visitors about it, especially when I was exclusively preaching from the KJV. I always was happy to assure them that I did not hold a KJO position, in fact I recommend several modern versions as excellent translations suitable for Christians to use.

Among independent fundamental Baptists a lot of people hold to some kind of preference for the KJV and a lot of these people would describe themselves as King James Only.

One KJO fellow has an extensive on-line writing ministry and used to publish a monthly magazine. Someone subscribed to it for me a few years ago and I used to glance through it from time to time and write letters to the editor. He usually had no time to answer my questions. He also used to have an online directory of churches. I am no longer on his list, but when I was he described me this way: “Very opposed to KJV-onlyism!” Well, I didn’t mind being described that way because it is true.

But back to the question from the Bible study: “What is the real problem with King James Onlyism?”

- If it is more or less just an academic quarrel between preachers, what difference does it make?
- If it is a significant problem that causes spiritual problems for Christians in general, how does it do that?

Quite frankly I think that King James Onlyism is a significant problem that causes spiritual problems for Christians in general.

I want to address what that problem is in this message, to more fully flesh out the answer I gave at the Bible study.

Before we do that, let me make one qualifying comment:

Most of those who hold a KJO position do so from a motivation to protect the Scriptures against corruption. Corruption is a significant problem when it occurs. Sometimes newer translations / paraphrases are very suspect. Most KJO people sincerely wish to defend Scripture.

Although I disagree with the KJO position, I don't question the sincerity of most KJO people.

But I do believe that KJO-ism is a serious error.

The issue is inspiration and it is seen as we answer these questions – What is Scripture? What is inspiration? What is translation? At what point does someone err in respect of inspiration when making claims of a translation? What is the ultimate damage caused by such an error?

I am going to use the classic text on inspiration as our text this afternoon, so please turn to:

2 Tim 3.16

Our title: *What is Scripture?*

I. Defining Scripture and inspiration

A. The word 'scripture'

1. Lit., 'writing' – singular noun
2. In the plural generally refers to the whole Old Testament ('the writings' – see Mt 21.42, 22.29)
3. Can refer to individual passages of Scripture (Mk 12.10)
4. Is used to refer to other parts of the NT (1 Tim 5.18 || Lk 10.7; 2 Pt 3.15-16)

B. The word 'inspiration' or 'inspired'

1. Lit. 'God-breathed'
2. The process described (2 Pt 1.20-21)

This is a description of the 'Jewish view' by a man who would probably be called a liberal – he has some disdain for this view, but it is in fact not just the Jewish view but the New Testament view:

“According to the later Jewish view, Scripture has sacred, authoritative and normative significance. It is of permanent and unassailable validity. As the dictate of God, it is given by His Spirit. This view referred originally to the Pentateuch but was then transferred to the Prophets and Writings. The implication of the doctrine of inspiration is that the revealed truth of God characterises every word. The Alexandrian synagogue devoted particular attention to the question of inspiration and interpreted it along the lines of Greek ecstaticism.”¹

¹ Gottlob Schrenk, “γράφο, γραφή, γράμμα, ἐπι-, προγράφο, ὑπόγραμμα,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 1, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 755.

- C. These concepts apply only to certain writings
1. They cannot apply to every religious writing
 2. They cannot apply to every writing of every apostle or prophet (some we know of were not preserved)
 3. They can only apply to the original writings
 4. They can apply to copies only insofar as the copies are faithful to the original writings

II. Understanding the difference between inspiration, transmission and translation

- A. Inspiration: original writings given by apostles and prophets and included in the canon
- B. Transmission: the process by which hand-written originals were copied by hand until the dawn of the printing press
1. This process appears to have enjoyed the **providence** of God in preserving enough data for later generations to be **confident** that we know what **the original** said with **hardly any exceptions**
 2. This process did not involve any miraculous enabling of the copyists to perfectly preserve a pure copy in any one manuscript or set of manuscripts

Example of a copying error:

^{KJV} **John 1.18** No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.

^{NAU} **John 1.18** No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

The difference between the two readings is a matter of three Greek letters – the essential meaning is not different, but the older manuscripts give us the NAU reading.

- C. Translation: the process by which the original words in the original language are put into a receptor language

Powerpoint slide containing the following translations of 2 Tim 3.16

^{KJV} **2 Timothy 3:16** All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

^{NAU} **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

^{NKJ} **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

^{NIV} **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

These versions have slightly different wording, but they all say the same thing

^{ERV} **2 Timothy 3:16** Every scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness:

Can we say that the ERV (English Revised Version) says the same as the others?

- “Some have connected this adjective in a different way and translated it as ‘every inspired scripture is also useful.’ But this violates the parallelism of the two adjectives in the sentence, and the arrangement of words makes clear that both should be taken as predicate adjectives: ‘*every scripture is inspired...and useful.*’”²

Translation: the process by which the original words in the original language are put into a receptor language

1. Translation can faithfully reflect the original
2. Translation can err in reflecting the original

² *The NET Bible, New English Translation Bible (NET)* (n.p.: Biblical Studies Press, LLC, 1996), 2 Ti 3.16, BibleWorks, v.8.

3. Every translation suffers from two kinds of ‘errors’
 - a. Mistranslations either accidental or deliberate
 - b. Language drift where an originally correct translation turns into an error as language changes (‘let’ KJV = ‘hinder’)

When it comes to translations, we describe them as ‘faithful’ or ‘unfaithful’ or sometimes ‘corrupt’ – the Jehovah Witnesses translation is corrupt, deliberately mistranslated.

III. The critical error with respect to elevating a single translation over all others

- A. When you elevate one translation over all the others, you give it the status of ‘Holy Scripture’ as opposed to the others
 1. No others can meet its standard
 2. All others must be considered corrupt
 3. No such thing as ‘faithful translations’, all except the One True Translation are corrupt, even though they say essentially the same thing
 4. You elevate the Translators to the level of the Apostles and consider their work to be ‘God-breathed’

Many KJO people will say that they don’t consider the King James Version to be inspired the way the originals were. But then when you ask this question, their real belief is exposed:

- Would you consider it wrong or unspiritual for a Christian to use another version of the Bible?

- B. The ultimate damage caused by One Holy Translation
 1. Pride
 - a. Pride that they have the spiritual insight to discern the One Holy Translation
 - b. Pride that they are the True Defenders of The Faith
 2. Schism
 - a. Consider those who use other translations to be in sin, not pleasing God

- b. Must divide from other Christians who are aiding and abetting the corruption of the One Holy Translation

Conclusion:

The turmoil that exists in the church at large, especially within the independent fundamental Baptist churches, is schismatic – divisive.

Divisiveness is the root meaning of the word ‘heresy’ – when you divide over something the Scriptures do not address you are guilty of heretical behaviour (though you may not consider yourself heretical – you may sincerely want to please God).

There are good reasons to divide ourselves from many professing Christians:

- Some deny the Lord that bought them (teach false things concerning Christ and the gospel)
- Some behave in morally unacceptable ways
- Some will coddle and comfort those who make either of these first two errors

All of these causes may result in legitimate divisions between Christians. There are precious few churches that really preach the pure gospel and try to lead their people to live holy lives.

Unfortunately, however, some churches, while maintaining otherwise good doctrine and lifestyle, become divisive over an overzealous though well-intentioned doctrinal error.

We really can’t walk very well with folks in this camp either.