

# **Certainty or Uncertainty: Perfect Preservation or Multiple Versions**

by Kent Brandenburg

God wants us certain. Satan wants us doubting. We put on the “helmet of salvation” against Satan’s fiery darts because God wants confidence (Eph. 6:17). God takes away all excuses; we are “without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). The Bible is full of unquestioning assurance. Faith is the “assurance of things hoped for” (Heb. 11:1). Paul was “confident of this very thing” (Philip. 1:6), “for he was persuaded” (2 Tim. 1:12). These things, God said, were written “that ye may know” (1 John 5:13), because God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). God says, “Thou shalt surely” (Gen. 2:17) and Satan says, “Thou shalt not surely” (Gen. 3:4).

## **The Preservation Issue**

I’ve noticed that people often have their favorite textual position advocate or book. Years ago Central Seminary, in the twin cities area of Minnesota, published a booklet explaining their position on the text of Scripture. It was quite controversial, mainly because it point-blank stated that the Bible did not expound its own preservation. In 2001 it was expanded into a book, *One Bible Only?*, and it became more popular with an added, major contribution from Kevin Bauder, now the Dean at Central. Bauder is more objective and more civil than most MVO (Multiple Version Only) proponents, and he does a good job at putting his finger on the crux of this issue when he writes in the Introduction (p. 26):

Again—this point cannot be overemphasized—perfect preservation demands that all of the words and only the words that were in the originals be present. If the King James-Only controversialists begin to equivocate on this point, they have really given away the debate. If they can admit that a legitimate margin of error exists within their sources, then they do not really believe in perfect preservation at all; they do not really believe that all of the very words of God must be preserved to have the Word of God. If they are willing to recognize two dependable sources that differ on even a single word, then, in principle, they agree with our position. They ought to change the theological, doctrinal judgments that attend their view and admit the whole controversy is simply an academic debate over acceptable percentages. Our discussion should turn from theologizing to the doing of textual criticism.

In a personally refreshing way, Bauder nails the issue. They believe the Bible has errors and we don't. Of course, one omission or deletion and we don't have a perfect Bible any more, and with that one flaw in Scripture, we lose the crystal clear certainty that the Bible and its doctrine of preservation is all about. We suddenly become Central, Detroit, Bob Jones, Maranatha, Pillsbury, Calvary, Faith, Masters, Northland, Clearwater, Desiring God, and others. They don't believe that the Bible they have in their hands is without error. They're not satisfied with just holding that position; they want everyone to become at least as uncertain as they are. They do not so much attempt to make it a Scriptural issue—they generally profess that the Bible does not teach anything specifically about the preservation of itself.

Because this is the issue, it is also the reason why the MVO crusaders push their perfect preservation opponents toward admitting merely one error in the text. That's all they need, as Bauder stated, so with that goal they endeavor through various means to box the one-Bible believers into conceding a single mistake in the text. If they succeed this becomes "an academic debate over acceptable percentages" of uncertainty.

### **Historical Explanation**

To understand how those who profess New Testament Christianity arrived at this position we must go back into history. In the eighteenth century, rationalism came to Europe. During the time of rationalism, which is also known as the enlightenment, coming out of the Dark Ages man believed that he could solve all problems with his own mind. He began to worship his mind. He was in awe of his mind. He felt that he had the mental capacity to understand everything and solve all problems. God, it was believed, didn't interfere in the affairs of men when men were so supremely intelligent they could handle their own affairs. At best, God created the world and just let it go. And now it was up to man. And so they decided that since the mind of man was ultimate, anything that the mind of man could not conceive or understand wasn't true. And so they went to the Bible and anything that didn't seem rational, reasonable, logical, intellectual was eliminated and thus all the miracles in the Bible were denied, this was taught by the likes of Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, and Friedrich Schleiermacher. The central activity of this movement theologically was and is to criticize the Bible. Before, the Bible criticized man, but now the Bible is up for the shellacking. This denial of the supernatural ultimately became modernism.

Today's innovation in theology is called postmodernism which is most recently manifested in the emerging church movement. The emergents take the posture that

the Bible isn't completely clear, that no one can really know what it means. They take that as an academically, theologically, and socially superior position to the certainty crowd. Most of the "conservative" Bible critics don't even like that amount of uncertainty, but where do you think that it all started? It all began when men decided that it was acceptable to believe that one error was found in God's Word, when men stopped trusting what God said and launched into a period of interminable Bible "restoration." When Europe opened the doors and pulled in the Trojan horse of rationalism, intellectualism and the enlightenment, it lost its faith totally and became liberal and dead. That's where we're headed for, if we haven't already arrived, in the U. S.

### **The Biblical Position: The Position of Certainty**

Scripture claims perfection for itself (Psalm 19:7; 119:140). The Bible teaches perfect preservation in the languages in which it was written (Matthew 5:18—"jot", "tittle"). The *graphie* (Scripture) was the actual markings on the page, the letters and words (2 Timothy 3:16), and those are what God promised to preserve. The Bible teaches general accessibility (Matthew 4:4; Isaiah 59:21) of those Words to every generation of believers. The Holy Spirit, Who inspired every Word, continues to know every Word, and it is He, the Spirit of Truth, Who indwells true churches (1 Corinthians 3:16), Who guides them "into all truth" (John 16:13). Churches agreed upon the Words of the *Ben Chayyim* Hebrew Masoretic Text and the several editions of the *Textus Receptus* (essentially 1598 Beza), settling on the Words of the text behind the King James Version of the Bible (found today in Scrivener's 1894 Greek text). This stated position is also the historical position of the Lord's churches, despite the creation of a new but fraudulent history made-up by the proponents of uncertainty.

We have grounds for translations of the original languages in that the Greek New Testament quotes (in Greek) parts of the Hebrew Old Testament. We can say that an accurate translation of God's Word is God's preserved Word. We believe we have this in the King James Version of the Bible.

### **The Naturalistic Position: The Position of Uncertainty**

On the uncertainty side of New Testament preservation of Scripture, three major positions exist. None of them believes that Christians possess a perfect copy of the Bible. The *Critical Text* is the Greek text of the New Testament that is the product of late 19 century textual criticism (a general description for everything from Westcott and Hort-1881 to the United Bible Society Fourth Edition); the New Testament text

behind almost every modern Bible version. Textual Criticism is a division of Biblical criticism in which men judge extant copies of the text of Scripture and attempt to reconstruct the presumably lost readings of the original manuscripts. As it relates to textual criticism, Biblical criticism is an ongoing means of determining which words are closest to those of the original manuscripts. The criteria for weighing the manuscripts are the same as those used in the criticism of ancient secular literature. According to someone who has actually counted the words, the Critical Text differs than the Received Text of the New Testament by 7%. Of course, we're only talking about degree of certainty.

*Majority Text* is the terminology that for a long time was generally synonymous with the Received Text in that a vast majority of extant manuscripts support the Received Text. Two modern published texts are also called *The Majority Text*, one edited by Arthur Farstad and Zane Hodges (1985) and the other by Maurice Robinson and William Pierpont (1991). These two published editions of the Greek New Testament result from the same rationalistic philosophy as the Critical Text, the premise that the Word of God has been lost, and, therefore, must be restored, in this case, by means of counting manuscripts. Some like the Farstad and Hodges text because its only 2% different than the *Textus Receptus*.

*Eclectic Text* is a description of a text formed from varied manuscripts of potentially different text types that is based upon the choosing of a person or group in accordance with his or its subjective criteria. The English word "eclectic" comes from a Greek word which means "to choose." Eclecticism says that almost any Christian in any era can choose what the Words of Scripture are. Recently a website that is a proponent of this position defined their "balanced eclectic position" as: "Each text type is to be evaluated independently without premeditated bias as to which manuscript family is most authoritative. It also posits that internal and external evidences are to be considered equally. This school basically suggests that each textual variant be investigated thoroughly and considered on its own merits." With eclecticism a pastor or teacher can decide the very week he makes his presentation what he thinks God's Words may be.

### ***What's Wrong?***

What's wrong with uncertainty? Uncertainty starts with man's reasoning, his interpretation of history, or what he thinks is evidence and conforms the text of Scripture to his thinking. If that sounds like rationalism; well, it is. New versions are regularly published, determining based on updated research what presently has the

best chance of being the Word of God. The criteria is primarily a long-standing group of principles that are very similar to those used as a basis for analyzing secular literature. There is no guarantee that the text actually is the majority text. Not all of the manuscripts have even been collated and counted by which this decision could even be made. This let's you choose what God's Words are based on your own unique textual criteria, where you can get personally involved in restoring the text of the Bible. None of these reflect a Biblical position on the preservation of Scripture.

The Bible is replete with guarantees and assurances. In Matthew 4:4 the Lord says, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Man shall live by every word that proceeds out of His mouth. He shall. That promises every Word and the accessibility of those Words. I don't have to prove it from history. I just accept it by faith. God said it and that settles it. I'm certain.