

YE HOLD THE TRADITION OF MEN: A CRITIQUE OF GOD'S WORD PRESERVED: A DEFENSE OF HISTORIC SEPARATIST DEFINITIONS AND BELIEFS

Dr. Thomas M. Strouse

INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus Christ condemned the religious leaders of His time for "*making the word of God of none effect through your tradition*" (Mk. 7:13). They reinterpreted the Old Testament (OT) Scriptures with "*the tradition of the elders*" (v. 5) and fell under the condemnation of Isaiah's prophecy on those who "*honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me*" (v. 6; cf. Isa. 29:13). The Lord Jesus, always gracious but to the point, repudiated the Pharisees because they rejected "*the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.*" Any individual, church or movement within "Christendom" that promotes the traditions of men, even separatist, fundamentalist men, would be wise to consider the Savior's acute approbation upon such effort.

It is a grievous day for independent Baptist churches when books, such as that authored by Dr. Michael D. Sproul, *God's Word Preserved: A Defense of Historic Separatist Definitions and Beliefs* (Tempe, AZ: Whetstone Precepts Press, 2005), 420 pp., [hereafter *GWP*] espouse the definitions and beliefs of historic separatist men instead of those of Scripture. His title tells the whole story. Employing eight chapters, thirteen photos, six appendices and 852 footnotes, Sproul defends the traditional interpretation for the doctrine of the preservation of God's Word from the quotes of separatist fundamentalists in the last four hundred years.

This book is a colossal illustration of the apologetic fallacy *Petitio Principii* or "begging the question" (*vide GWP*, p. 60). Dr. Sproul assumes what he must prove. Sproul the fundamentalist has trouble "thinking outside the box." Someone told him that historic Separatist Fundamentalism was the citadel of orthodoxy. Now he has assumed that the Separatist Fundamentalist Fathers are the standard for orthodoxy (*GWP*, p. 13). He assumes that the book *The Fundamentals* accurately restates the Scriptural doctrine of Bibliology (*GWP*, p. 13). He assumes that the "giants of Baptist and Separatist interpretation," namely "John Gill, Charles Spurgeon, Thomas Armitage, A. T. Robertson, R. A. Torrey, Noel Smith, Bob Jones, Sr., John R. Rice, Richard Clearwaters, etc.," must have the final word on definitions and beliefs (*GWP*, p. 15). One must ask Dr. Sproul "why separatist fundamentalists?" Who are they, what are they and how do their definitions and beliefs parallel the statements of Scriptures? Why the book *The Fundamentals*? Does this book have some sort of quasi-canonical status? What were the fundamental doctrines, who choose them, and who gave the list-makers the privilege of choosing the fundamentals? Why this list of "giants"? And should not the Apostle Peter be included, even though the Apostle Paul repudiated his cacodoxy with a strong rebuke (Gal. 2:11 ff.)?

Pastor Sproul offers a bizarre perspective with the publication of his book. By his own testimony he has been brought up in a home and trained by schools that used only the *King James Version* (Old Scofield). Furthermore, his present church, Tri-City Baptist Church (Tempe, AZ) uses only the TR (*Textus Receptus*) and KJV in all of its ministries (*GWP*, pp. 13-14). He says the KJV is a "good and faithful" translation and the TR is "amazingly accurate" (*GWP*, p. 14). However, he condemns the exegetical apologetic for the KJVO (King James Version Only) which should be the foundation for his personal and church practice. It seems his problem with the KJVO position is that it is novel and it denigrates the "Fundamental Fathers" who are in the lineage of "historic separatist Fundamentalism" (*GWP*, pp. 14-15). He believes much of the KJVO position is characterized by the works of the flesh, such as sending unsolicited videos and books to churches and thereby undermining their respective autonomy.

His purpose is to write a 400-plus page book based on historical evidentialism, reaching a larger audience than his own assembly it should be noted, to address "an unbiblical assault" coming from the KJVO. He wishes he could spend his time soulwinning, but alas, he is pulled into the bibliology battle (*GWP*, pp. 16-17, cf. p. 312 where he refers to the textual debate as a "quibble" and later as a "needless exercise" [*GWP*, p. 323]). Surely he is not benighted by his contradictory and hypocritical statements, is he? How does and why would a Christian attempt to refute an allegedly unbiblical assault with *history*? Is it not hypocritical to bemoan outsiders who write to influence his church members when his professed goal is to do the same? Then his obligatory cry, apparently to appease his Fundamentalist Fathers, that bibliology is not his "hobby horse" as he writes a book with over 850 footnotes, is disingenuous to say the least. Since when has any discussion concerning the Bible been unimportant to the preacher or teacher of Scripture? Dr. Sproul's self-proclaimed apologetic exhibits a thin veneer of puffed-up scholarship (he and Bob Jones, Sr. seem to be "doctored" more than anyone else [cf. *GWP*, pp. 371-393]) as it keeps the reader informed on the classical Latin expressions of supposed logical flaws in the writings of the defenders of the *KJV* in this work (*GWP*, pp. 60, *et al*). His defense of Fundamentalist interpretation of bibliology has its fair share of contradictory statements (e.g. *GWP*, pp. 384-385), split infinitives (e.g., *GWP*, pp. 55, 285), format gaffes (e.g., *GWP*, pp. 27, 97, 418), misspellings (e.g., *GWP*, pp. 59, 255, 366, 370, 377), non-too-subtle accusations (*GWP*, pp. 313-319), and outright slander. He accuses this reviewer of encouraging Christians to believe there are errors in the *KJV* (*GWP*, p. 63 footnote; cf. also p. 23). This reviewer has made it a point for over 35 years of the ministry of the word not to posit the words "error" or "mistake" upon the texts and translation he embraces.

Hiding an apparent anger at those who will not embrace the imprecise bibliological statements of the Separatist Fundamentalists (*GWP*, p. 17), Sproul lashes out against any Bible believer who will place his faith on his interpretation of biblical passages in spite of "four hundred years of Baptist thought" (*GWP*, p. 316). In some convoluted way, according to Sproul, the current defenders of *KJV*, including Drs. Bates, Brandenburg, Cloud, Khoo, Manley, Moorman, Sorenson, Strouse, and Waite, potentially violate Prov. 30:11-15 by not subscribing to the insufficient and non-biblical statements of earlier Fundamentalists (*GWP*, p. 15). This shallow and contrived exegesis continues as he bewails the ignorance Christians have of "their history," citing only Hosea 4:6a, "*My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge...*" (*GWP*, p. 21). Of course the rest of the verse teaches that Hosea lamented the Jews' lack of knowledge because they had "*forgotten the law of thy God*" (Hosea 4:6c). The good doctor's unscriptural approach sets the stage for the rest of the book. *God's Word Preserved: A Defense of Historic Separatist Definitions and Beliefs* exalts man's words that can never be authoritative and ignores the only source for absolute truth – the Scriptures.

This critique will enumerate the mantras of the Bible critics, respond to Gephart's review of the book by Kent Brandenburg, editor, *Thou Shalt Keep Them* (El Sobrante, CA: Pillar and Ground Publishing, 2003), 315 pp. (hereafter *TSKT*), and present the essential areas of demarcation in the current bibliological imbroglio.

MANTRAS

In the increasing spate of recent works attacking the defenders of the received Bible in English and the received Hebrew and Greek texts, a *catenae* of mantras permeate the bibliological works of the *KJV* critics Beacham, Carson, Combs, Kutilek, McClain, Price, Schnaiter, Sproul, Wallace, White, and Williams. Although the critics and their ilk regularly chant these mantras, the defenders of the *AV* have responded to all of them in various essays and books. Some of the following expressions appear in the literature of liberals and evangelicals and all of them appear in the historical lineage of the Fundamentalist Fathers.

1. The Bible does not tell how or where God preserved His Word (GWP, p. 91).
2. Erasmus and the KJV translators used Textual Criticism (GWP, p. 293).
3. The KJVO defenders are Ruckmanites/cultists (GWP, pp. 57, 313-319).
4. God preserved His word in the majority (totality) of manuscripts (GWP, p. 298)
5. Historic Fundamentalism is the same as NT Christianity (GWP, pp. 13-17).
6. Christ and the apostles quoted the LXX (GWP, p. 111).
7. KJVO defenders use harsh, vitriolic language (GWP, p. 34).
8. It is not the scope of this book to expound the preservation passages (GWP, pp. 21, 91).

Several of these mantras will be refuted in the remainder of this review, and the others have been answered by recent works such as David Cloud's *Faith Vs. the Modern Bible Versions* (Port Huron, MI: Way of Life Literature, 2005), 775 pp.

GEPHART'S REVIEW OF TSKT

Cover and Introduction

Included in Sproul's book is Dr. Keith Gephart's review of *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, a biblical theology of the doctrine of biblical preservation in which this author has contributed six chapters. Gephart is a professor at International Baptist College (Tempe, AZ) as well as a contributor to the 1999 work entitled *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man* (hereafter *MOGMOM*). After commending the editor Dr. Brandenburg and the contributors of *TSKT* for a "carefully reasoned position" emphasizing Biblical exegesis of the preservation of Scripture, Gephart finds it "sad" that the contributors have separated from fundamentalists over the doctrine of preservation (GWP, p. 373). He noticed the title and cover of the book. He assumes his unproved exegesis of Ps. 12 is correct and denounces the title as a problem. He also assumes his unproved view that the Hebrew vowels were not preserved and condemns the artist's rendering of an unpointed Hebrew text on the cover, although the book gives a disclaimer for this voluntary original painting on page five. Perhaps Dr. Gephart is still smarting from the embarrassing and unconscionable photo of the liberal's *RSV* on the cover of *MOGMOM*.

Gephart charges that the definitions set forth in *TSKT* are distorted because they are not in harmony with his (GWP, p. 374). He condemns its definition of "Biblical Criticism" because he has a confused view of the science of Textual Criticism. Textual Criticism is one of the criticisms of the Biblical Criticism movement that flourished in Europe in the 17th to 19th centuries. Certain axioms dominate this science including "the oldest text is the best" and "the more difficult reading is preferred." Bible believers never used these axioms as they recognized, received and preserved the Lord's inscripturated words in their respective local assemblies. His confusion at this point causes him to state other inaccuracies. He challenges the perspective that the Waldenses existed prior to the twelfth century and that they had a received text Bible. Historians such as Samuel Moreland conceded that the Waldenses go back to the "primitive Christian church," and the Apostle Paul stated that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:15) as the Lord Jesus Christ promised to be with these churches as they received and preserved His words (Mt. 28:20; cf. Rev. 3:8, 10).

Psalms 12:6-7

Keith Gephart attempts to refute the exegesis of Ps. 12:6-7 with his pre-conceived interpretation that the passage promises the preservation of the poor and needy (GWP, pp. 375-377). The interpretative issue revolves around the antecedent of the pronominal suffixes "them" and "them"

("him") in verse seven. The psalmist developed a dichotomy between the seemingly ever-present words of his enemies and the eternally preserved words of God. David, his enemies, and his enemies' words would pass off the scene but God's words would remain for every generation. This is the true exegesis because the closest noun antecedent to "them" is "words." Gephart attempts to make the antecedent jump back to the "poor and needy" because of gender agreement. But his alleged example of "grammatical irregularities" is erroneous as the Hebrew grammarian Gesenius (*TSKT*, p. 32) states that in the poetic books this practice occurs "not infrequently" (= "frequently"). Moreover, Gephart, who is certainly capable of Hebrew exegesis, ignores the fact that "gender discordance" is the *only* rule of gender references in the largest psalm (119) of the Psalter (vv. 111, 129, 152, 167), and not once may the exegete jump back beyond the closest noun. Instructive in this Hebrew exegesis is the example of Ps. 119:98: "*Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.*" This verse contributes to the interpretation of Ps. 12 as the psalmist acknowledges that in spite of his enemies the Lord's commandments are ever with him. The pronoun "they" is a feminine singular demonstrative adjective (literally "she" or "it"). What is its antecedent, the word "commandments" (feminine plural) or the word "enemies" (masculine plural)? Obviously the closest noun in the Hebrew text is "commandments" and the "number discordance" (singular versus plural) is ignored. This author has found that the preponderance of examples in the Hebrew Psalter where there is a "grammar irregularity," the exegete does not need to jump back prior to the proximity noun because of gender/number discordance (e.g., Pss. 9:7; 22:18; 23:4; 43:3; 94:11; 119:111; 120:7).

The burden falls upon the non-verbal preservationists to demonstrate explicitly that the antecedent of "them" is not "words" but instead must be the "poor and needy" (Ps. 12). Until the heirs of the four hundred years of Separatist Fundamentalist Fathers can convincingly do this, they should acknowledge that this is one of scores of verses that teach exactly what *TSKT* purports that the Bible teaches. Furthermore, they should recognize that the contributors to *TSKT* are not interested in fellowshipping with those who, because of their weak bibliology, want to promote an "any Bible will do, all the concepts are there" unity.

Matthew 4:4

Gephart offers confusing and contradictory statements in his critique of the exegesis of this verse. One of the greatest bugaboos that the non-verbal preservationists have is in understanding the nature and interpretation of the expression "it is written" (*gregraptai*). Four times this expression occurs in this passage (Mt. 4:1 ff.) with the Lord and Satan citing, but not quoting, OT verses (i.e., Dt. 8:3; Ps. 91:11-12; Dt. 6:16 and 6:13). The Greek perfect verb combines aspects of the aorist and present verbs, denoting a past action with continuing results. Since the Lord was referring to the past action of writing, and since words were written (obviously the words of the *Torah*), then He was stating that these words were intact in His day. This means either Moses' original manuscript was still intact, which is not this author's position, or the original words (the Lord never promised the preservation of manuscripts so historians must stop looking for the "smoking gun" manuscript) were still intact through the divine promise of verbal preservation (cf. Isa. 59:21).

Gephart denies that "it is written" refers specifically to written words, but states that "man must live by what ever God commands--spoken or written" (*GWP*, p. 377). In light of Heb. 1:1-2, his statement is unbiblical and dangerous. Continuing to be confused about the nature of the perfect tense, he asserts that "it is written" is "not a statement of preservation," but "it simply shows that what was written in the past continues to have abiding significance," and then contradicts himself and admits that "we still have the words but that is not what is stressed" (*GWP*, p. 378). Later, in attempting to refute Sutton, Gephart announces that "'it is written' cannot prove that the actual words written

continue to exist; the words only prove that they were written and that the results of such a writing continue" (*GWP*, pp. 384-385). So, Dr. Gephart, does "it is written" mean that the words do exist or don't exist? As much as this author disdains quoting human authorities unnecessarily, it is instructive to hear from Daniel Wallace, no friend to the defenders of the *KJV*. This Greek grammarian states that "the force of the perfect tense is simply that it describes an event that, completed in the past...has results existing in the present time." He cites Rom. 3:10 as an example saying "This common introductory formula to OT quotations [it is written] seems to be used to emphasize that the written word still exists." Daniel Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publ. House, 2000), pp. 246, 248. This leads to another claim of *TSKT* that Gephart attempts to critique but cannot confute, namely that Christ and the Apostles did not use the *LXX* (*GWP*, p. 378).

Gephart accuses this writer of "serious error" for denying that Christ quoted the *LXX*'s rendering of Dt. 8:3 (*GWP*, p. 379). The fact of the matter is that Christ did not quote verbatim the *LXX* as Gephart admits, and contrary to his "necessary" quote from scholar William Hendrickson who gives the "authoritative conclusion" that Christ is quoting the *LXX* (why does Dr. Gephart have to cite some scholar when he has the linguistic ability to check the *MT*, *LXX* and the Greek NT himself?). What the Lord and the Apostles did was that they alluded to the contents of an OT text to which they gave their inspired *targum* (paraphrase). The NT writers' use of the OT varied including direct quoting and paraphrasing. There are places where the Greek NT agrees with the *Masoretic Text* (*MT*) and the *LXX*; where the NT agrees with the *MT* and not the *LXX*; where the NT does not agree with the *MT* or *LXX*; and where the NT agrees with the *LXX* and not the *MT*. This later scenario supposedly proves the NT writers' employment of the *LXX*. However, another solution which accords with the preserved Hebrew words position (Mt. 4:4; 5:18) is that someone after the first century wrote the NT word or words into their post-first century Greek OT.

This writer's interpretation of Mt. 4:4 is that the OT words, written in the past, were still in existence in Christ's day, and therefore the inspired original words of Moses had been preserved perfectly through perfect copying for nearly fifteen hundred years down to the time of the Lord (cf. Pss. 12:6-7; 33:11; 100:5; 105:8; 119:111, 152, 160, Isa. 40:8; *et al*). The Scripture, both the promises and the fulfillment (e.g., Ps. 12:6-7 and Mt. 4:4), requires this interpretation, Wallace corroborates this interpretation, and Gephart obviously cannot refute this interpretation. Since the Lord Jesus Christ did have the preserved words of the inspired original *Torah* (and full *Tanak*), He could and did promise that all of the jots (consonants) and tittles (vowel marks) would be preserved "till heaven and earth pass" (Mt. 5:18; Lk. 16:17).

Matthew 5:17-18

The contributors of *TSKT* take the expression "it is written" and the Lord's promise of the preservation of jots and tittles at face value and believe that He was talking about the preservation of the words of the inspired Hebrew original. Since the Lord Jesus Christ had the written Hebrew words of the OT, including all consonants and vowels, He did not need to use the *LXX* even if it did indeed exist. Gephart recognizes that this assertion is basic to the preservation view of *TSTK* (*GWP*, pp. 378-379). He states, "for if Jesus used the Septuagint He used a translation, which often departs significantly from the Hebrew text; yet, He still regarded it as the inspired and authoritative Word of God" (*GWP*, p. 379). Although Dr. Gephart acknowledges the critical nature of the arguments over the *LXX*, his comment suggests that he believes Christ regarded this Greek translation as "inspired"! Is not this a form of Ruckmanism (inspired translation) which he and Sproul so vociferously denounce the *KJV* defenders for supposedly advocating (*GWP*, pp. 56-62)? Elsewhere Sproul describes the *LXX* as "inferior" and "less than absolutely perfect" (*GWP*, p. 112). What these

Bible critics want to say is that since Christ used an inferior translation (*LXX*), Christians may utilize any or all translations, as weak as they may be, and need not expect to have or use a superior translation (i.e., *KJV*).

Gephart rejects Gary Webb's excellent defense of the preserved Hebrew words made up of jots and tittles by stating, "this passage does not discuss the preservation of the physical text of the Scriptures." Contradicting himself, Gephart then states that "even the minutest letters or parts of letters, would have its proper meaning and application and obligation until the end of the ages" (*GWP*, p. 379). Again, Gephart is faced with the conundrum of whether to admit that Hebrew letters were preserved or not. He rejects out of hand Webb's assertion, based in part on John Owen, that the tittle refers to vowel points. His reasoning is that history affords no examples of pointed Hebrew manuscripts (*GWP*, p. 379-380). Of course there is at least one historical book that refers to the existence of inspired vowel points on the Hebrew letters of the OT—the book of Matthew! Furthermore, would Gephart be more inclined to accept Webb's position if he had used John Gill, the premiere vocal proponent for inspired vowel points and one of the Fundamentalist Fathers (cf. *GWP*, p. 15)?

Gephart, to his credit, does not hold that the Masoretes invented the vowel system. Nevertheless, he thinks that they merely passed on the oral tradition of the pronunciation. He says, "The vowels were there and were carried down by the Jewish oral tradition, but they were not represented in written form before the Masorete era" (*GWP*, p. 380). His strongest defense for this unbiblical assertion is the human authority, Dr. F. F. Bruce. On the contrary, the OT teaches that the Lord God spoke words to the biblical writers who were to write down the spoken words. For instance, Jehovah said to Moses, "Write thou these words: for after the tenor (literally "upon the mouth") of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel" (Ex. 34:27). Again the Lord demanded of Jeremiah, "take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel..." (Jer. 36:2). These Scriptures define words as spoken words, and therefore vocalized consonants, and these consonants with vowels were written down at the outset of the inspiration process. There is no biblical argument for the oral tradition of "spoken" consonants! Furthermore, the NT writers recognized vowels in the OT Hebrew text they were using and recorded these vowels. They acknowledged the inspired *daghesh forte* (a small dot to indicate the doubling of a consonant) in words like Immanuel (Mt. 1:23; cf. Isa. 7:14), Anna/Hannah (Lk. 2:36; cf. I Sam. 1:2), Abaddon (Rev. 9:11; cf. Ps. 1:6), Armageddon (Rev. 16:16; cf. Zech. 12:11), and Sabbaton (Mt. 12:5; cf. Ex. 20:11). Paul knew the lengthened vowel pointing of the inspired Hebrew word behind the inspired Greek *arrabon* ("earnest") in Eph. 1:14 because he doubled the "r" (*rho*) in his inspired transliterated spelling of the Hebrew word (*errabon*; cf. Gen. 38:17). The authority of the inspired NT text demands that the vowel pointings were part of the inspired OT text.

Furthermore, Gephart has additional problems. If the Masoretes merely passed on the vowel points affixed to the consonantal text through the process of oral tradition, then did they preserve the proper pronunciation or not? If the words are perfectly preserved through oral tradition (as Gephart seems to suggest: "to pronounce the words correctly" [*GWP*, p. 380]) where are the promises for this? Could not these promises rather be for the preservation of the written vowels that make consonants written words? And if oral tradition is the process by which they were preserved why does Christ condemn this very system of tradition (cf. Mt. 12:1-13; Lk. 10:13-16). If the pointing preserved by oral tradition is not correct, then adding vowels to God's consonants to make non-canonical words is condemned by Christ as well (cf. Dt. 4:2, 12:32; Prov. 30:5-6; Rev. 22:18). Therefore, all of the vowel points in the Masoretic text should be removed, and consequently all of the Hebrew words should be rejected. Gephart's position is beleaguered with enormous problems. For further refutation of Gephart-like arguments concerning the *LXX* and

Hebrew vowel points the reader may visit the EBTS web site (www.emmanuel-newington.org) and download published articles entitled "Scholarly Myths Perpetuated on Rejecting the Masoretic Text of the OT" and "Luke 16:17: One Tittle."

John 17:8

Gephart rejects this author's exegesis on Jn. 17:8 ff. as irresponsible, charging him with asserting that "Jesus here refers to some kind of 'Received Text'" (*GWP*, p. 381). This is a misleading and deliberate inaccuracy. What this author did say is that "The Lord Jesus Christ required His original audience to receive His Words and guard them (cf. Mt. 28:20...). This '**received text**' or '**received Bible**' mindset originated with the Lord Jesus Christ, not with Erasmus, Beza, or the KJB translators. Believers of every generation have expected to receive God's preserved Words" (*TSKT*, p. 54). Gephart notes that the Lord's words were not yet inscripturated at the time of His prayer, which teaching this author also acknowledged and incorporated into his overall exegesis. Gephart states that not all of the Lord's words were written down (inferring this from Jn. 21:25), which again this author has dealt with biblically. He then charges this author with making a "huge leap" by referring to Jn. 12:48 and that the Lord will judge mankind by His words. But Gephart does not explain how the just Lord will judge mankind with His canonical words if they are not inscripturated and available to every generation (*GWP*, p. 381).

Finally, Gephart disdains this author's denunciation of Textual Criticism and asks "how did we ever determine which words are the 'received words' of Christ?" This is a fair question (Sproul asks the same question, *GWP*, p. 309 footnote) but of course *TSKT* has already answered it (*TSKT*, pp. 109-116). However, for review one may examine the following biblical truths:

9. The Lord's NT dispensation guardian for Scripture, both OT and NT, is the local immersionist assembly (Mt. 28:19-20; I Tim. 3:15).
10. Church members must recognize the Lord's words.
 - a. They hear the Lord's voice as He impresses upon their heart His canonical words (Jn. 10:27). They do not have to rely on the axioms of Textual Criticism.
 - b. They have the spiritual capacity to discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (I Jn. 4:6). They reject false additions or subtractions of words (Rev. 22:18-19).
 - c. They are to prove all things, including preaching (I Cor. 14:29) and alleged Scripture (II Pet. 3:16) with Scripture (I Thess. 5:21). They reject false systems that produce false readings of words.
 - d. They are to reject false canonical writings (II Thess. 2:2).
 - e. They have the unction from the Holy One Who dwells in them, and therefore these church members may know all things (including all of the Lord's canonical, inscripturated OT and NT words), according to I Jn. 2:20 and 27.
 - f. They have great confidence (Prov. 22:20-21) in the objective word because the subjective work of the Spirit confirms the particular word or verse in their heart (e.g., I Jn. 5:7).
11. Church members must receive by faith (fideism) all of the Lord's written revelation (cf. Jn. 17:8, 20; I Thess. 2:13), just as they received Him (Jn. 1:12).
12. Church members must preserve the Lord's canonical inscripturated words for their generation and future generations (cf. Mt. 28:20 with Rev. 3:8, 10).

Believers who are in the Lord's churches and consequently have the Lord's words along with the Author of Scripture indwelling them have the privilege of knowing all things, including which

written words are the Lord's. The Lord's immersionist assemblies have recognized, received, and preserved His words in the first century and in the twenty-first century. There is no biblical reason to deny that they have done this in the intervening centuries as well. The Lord's churches have been able to recognize His words in the multiplicity of manuscripts, texts, and languages with the help of the indwelling Spirit, and without the help of textual critics. At the present time the Lord's churches recognize, receive and preserve the *KJV* (the 1769 Blayney) as the word of God in the English language and the Hebrew Masoretic and Greek Received (Scrivener's) texts as the preserved words of God in Hebrew and Greek, respectively.

Case Study: Ephesian Church

Since the NT gives believers the written record of approximately seventy years of "inspired history" from the life of Christ (Gospels) through the early years of the Lord's churches (Acts and Epistles) to His last revelation (Book of Revelation), it is instructive to learn what the Lord expects from Christians after this era (i.e., first Christian century). The Ephesian church should be examined as a case study. This assembly received Paul's Epistle to it (Ephesians) and I and II Timothy, and may have received some or all of John's Epistles according to tradition. It was one of seven local churches to which the Book of Revelation was addressed (Rev. 1:4), and obviously was the first church so addressed (Rev. 2:1). Having received the Book of Revelation, the Ephesian church had the responsibility of passing either it or a copy of it on to the church of Smyrna. The Ephesian assembly members were given a beatitude about keeping or preserving (*terein*; cf. Mt. 28:20 with Rev. 3:10) the "sayings of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 22:7-10). They were also given a warning about adding or subtracting words (Rev. 22:18-19). Some church member reproduced a perfect copy of the Book of Revelation (without the aid of a textual critic or the axioms of Textual Criticism) and passed it onto the church of Smyrna, which church did the same thing so that very quickly there would have been one original Book of Revelation and six perfect copies. One may conclude that since the Lord commanded and therefore expected this, that this process of the Lord's assemblies recognizing, receiving and preserving His words in the following generations would be accomplished because of His promised presence with His candlesticks (Rev. 1:13; cf. Mt. 18:20; 28:19-20). This has indeed happened because the Lord's candlesticks still have His words and still recognize His words. History does not and can not give all the facts concerning the Lord's preserved assemblies preserving His preserved words (could He do it through the "secret" line of Alpine peasants? [cf. *GWP*, p. 91]), but this preservation has happened just as He predicted, "*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen*" (Mt. 28:20b).

Case Study: I John 5:7

Another case study concerning the controversial *Comma Johanneum*, I Jn. 5:7 is instructive. In spite of centuries of attacks upon the canonical status of this verse by heretics, scholars and the Fundamentalist Fathers, the Lord's assemblies have and still do recognize, receive and preserve this pro-Trinitarian verse in the texts and translations containing it. Believers in the Lord's immersionist candlesticks have the indwelling Spirit Who witnesses to their heart that these are indeed His canonical, inscripturated words (I Jn. 2:20, 27; cf. also Jn. 10:27). Those who want to expunge this verse from Scripture either do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, or are not in His ordained depository for truth (i.e., the local immersionist assembly; cf. I Tim. 3:15), or are influenced by the "scholarship" of unbelievers or those outside His assemblies. This "scholarship" is not based on the unction of the Holy One Who teaches all truth, but instead is built on the human reasoning that the "oldest is best" and "most difficult is preferred" mentality, which is neither predicted in Scripture as a means of obtaining truth nor blessed of God in history. What the Lord has promised is that He

would preserve His words through His ordained institutions (Israel and the local church), and believers within these institutions would, with spiritual discernment, recognize and receive the true words/canon, and then preserve them for future generations.

CONTRASTS

<i>Bible Critics</i>	<i>Bible Believers</i>	<i>Scripture</i>
1. Apologetic		
Rationalism & Evidentialism	Fideism	Jn. 20:29; I Pet. 1:8; II Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:3, 6; I Cor. 2:5-13
2. Preservation View		
"Word" Totality of Mss. "All Mss. Good" Text Critics final authority for truth	"Words" Spirit led traditional words Spirit discernment needed Spirit through church members gives all truth	Ps. 12:6-7; Mt. 24:35
3. Means		
RCC-Prot.-Fund. Patristics-UIC Scholars	Local Church Members	Mt. 28:19-20; I Tim. 3:15; I Jn. 2:20, 27

ESSENTIAL AREAS OF DEMARCATION

Certainly the greatest value of Sproul's tome is that it clearly gives the areas of demarcation in the various bibliological views. He has not only marked out the parameters of the Fundamentalist Fathers' preservation view, but he has recognized and delineated the perfect preservationists' view. He understands the basic difference in 11 apologetic approach involves emphasis on historical evidentialism versus emphasis on fideism. This approach then lends itself either to siding with the ecclesiology of the Catholic patristics, Protestant reformers, and Fundamentalists, or identifying with the ecclesiology of the Lord's assemblies including the Waldenses as well as independent Baptist churches. The methodology of knowing truth lines up with one's ecclesiology: the perpetuation of man's wisdom through the tradition of the "fathers" or the instruction of the Spirit through His words in the Lord's churches. This results in either honoring the Fundamentalist Fathers or honoring God the Father. Dr. Michael D. Sproul needs to be thanked for giving these lines of demarcation.

Historical Evidentialism vs. Fideism

Sproul initially debunks fideism in his section on "Inspiration" (*GWP*, pp. 54-56). After quoting Noah Webster's definition for inspiration and proof-texting with five Scripture texts, he gives his definition of inspiration. Surprisingly, Sproul never cites II Tim. 3:16-17 (contrary to the

Fundamentalist Fathers in the FBFI resolution, *GWP*, p. 359) nor reflects in his definition any discussion about *theopneustos*. He makes a distinction between "non-repeatable and non-observable" miracles (such as inspiration and the virgin birth) and preservation, which is "repeatable and observable" (*GWP*, p. 56). He accuses the KJVO advocates of asserting "preservation and inspiration in near identical language and in so doing are willing to lump preservation into a 'faith' issue" (*GWP*, p. 56). Apparently Sproul holds that the Christian may not have faith (or be fideistic) in things that are repeatable. Scripture repudiates this unbiblical and non-traditional perspective (one should notice that he does not cite any Fundamentalist Fathers). Repeatable and observable things such as preaching the Gospel and prayer require faith in the respective repeatable event. For instance, the Lord commanded, "*What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them*" (Mk. 11:24). Prayer is both repeatable and observable. The Lord promises to answer the prayer of the fideistic Christian who has faith in the Lord's promise to answer prayer. Sproul, in contradicting the Lord Jesus Christ, is making assertions that should not be believed.

Further, he states that one must place faith only in a "divine assertion" and "propositional truth," but apparently God has not made assertions about "preservation" nor declared it as propositional truth (*GWP*, p. 56). Sproul demonstrates his "fundamentalism" par excellence with these comments. Historic fundamentalism has always assumed and taken its so-called "privilege" to decide what in the Bible is essential and what is non-essential, what is propositional truth and what is not propositional truth. According to Sproul, the great preservation promises of Scripture such as Ps. 33:11, Isa. 40:8, Mt. 24:35, including Ps. 12:6-7, are not propositional truth and are not divine assertions. Therefore, when the psalmist stated, "*thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever*" (Ps. 119:160), he was not declaring the divine assertion of the eternal preservation of the Lord's word. Does this mean that the expression "*thy word is true*" is not propositional truth or a divine assertion? However, later in his book Sproul states "God has preserved His Word in a striking and beautiful way; not a word is lost" (*GWP*, p. 282). Is he making a propositional statement of truth and an assertion or not? Is this assertion about preservation his or God's? If it is his why is he making an assertion that God supposedly has not made? How does he know that not a word is lost? Can history prove that not a word is lost? If it is God's assertion then it must be biblical for it to have authority, and therefore it may be believed as a propositional truth. But, according to him, historical evidence does not allow preservation to become a "matter of doctrine," and so he warns that to do so would be adding to Scripture, citing Rev. 22:19 (*GWP*, p. 56). Of course his whole system of bibliology makes the prohibition in Rev. 21:18-19 an empty warning, since Satan and his arch-heretics do not fall under this caveat. In fact, as Sproul has employed these verses, it seems that the only ones who are guilty of violating John's colophon are the advocates of the AV.

In his section on "God Communicates by Keeping His Word Safe" (*GWP*, p. 277-325), Sproul attempts to parallel advocates of the AV with cultists. His fifth point probably is the most telltale of his catholicity. In condemning Dr. Brandenburg's "fideistic faith," he accuses him of placing "his faith not in the Bible, but rather on his interpretation of several passages that have never been understood this way in four hundred years of Baptist thought...one must be very careful when disagreeing with important interpretations of all other godly men in Baptist history..." (*GWP*, p. 316). This notion not only contradicts historic Baptists' teaching and defense of soul-liberty, but it expresses exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ condemned in Mk. 7:5 ff. Romanists and Protestants, because of their sacral society mentality, have always demanded total allegiance to their respective doctrines, and they persecuted doctrinal dissidents including biblical Baptists. Fundamentalists, including some Baptists, have continued this mindset by identifying non-conforming, independent Baptists as "mean-spirited," "heretics," and those "outside our camp." Historic Fundamentalism

says in effect "this or that is an essential" doctrine in the Bible because the "Fundamentalist Fathers say so," and one may exercise faith (fideism) in it. However, there are some things in the Bible, such as any so-called "assertions" for perfect words preservation, which are "not doctrine," and one may not exercise faith in non-doctrinal statements. It should be obvious, however, that doctrinal and fideistic selectivism in fundamentalism is not biblical and it is not godly. The apostle Paul asserted, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Jude exhorted believers to "contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). All Scripture is profitable and essential for the sanctification of the believer (Jn. 17:17). The Bible asserts unequivocally, "But without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6).

Catholic ecclesiology vs. NT ecclesiology

Since bibliology and ecclesiology are inextricably linked together (I Tim. 3:15), the theologian must be biblically accurate in both doctrines. Whether Sproul realizes it or not, he has marked out another area of difference in the bibliological battle—ecclesiology. Why is it that the scholars of Fundamentalism just cannot seem to convince the church members and pastors of many independent Baptist churches of the supposed superiority of the CT and the need for Textual Criticism? Why do para-church Bible colleges and seminaries struggle in persuading Christians in NT assemblies that they should readily accept the so-called "better" and "more accurate" translations from the CT such as the *NASV*, and now even the remake of the old *RSV*—the *English Standard Version (ESV)* of 2001)?

Historic Fundamentalism has its roots in conservative Protestantism, which movement was an effort to reform the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). All of the major Reformers died as baptized Catholics which indicates they wanted their reformed version of Catholicism in their locale. The ecclesiology of the RCC and of Protestantism was the theory and practice of the sacral society (i.e., state religion); in a word the universal "Christian church" (vide *GWP*, pp. 114-115) or "catholicity." Denominational Fundamentalism continued this catholicity but embraced the notion that it was invisible (i.e., universal invisible church = mystical Body of Christ). The movement of Fundamentalism is really another name for the so-called "greater cause of Christ," the "Invisible Church," the "mystical" Body of Christ. Therefore, any Christian in the universal Body has the "privilege" of practicing the Great Commission (i.e., soul-winning only), and any scholar in the "necessary" para-church movement may pontificate about what is the truth, especially in employing the latest tools of Textual Criticism to restore God's words, since He has not promised to preserve them (except in Heaven), and in fact has not preserved them.

Sproul's ecclesiology lines up with this description. He defends the definitions and beliefs of the early "Church" fathers such as Origen, Jerome, Augustine, etc., of the Reformation fathers, and of the Fundamentalists (*GWP*, pp. 27-34). At the same time, he mocks the position that there were NT assemblies from the first century on which recognized, received and preserved the Lord's words, just as Christ predicted (Mt. 28:19-20; I Tim. 3:15). Independent Baptists do not countenance the position that the RCC was "a good movement gone bad" which needed reform. To the contrary, Bible Christians believe that there have always been NT assemblies, in contradistinction to sacral societies, which have preserved the Lord's words. One such group may have been the Waldenses. Sproul ridicules this biblically predicted position with epithets such as the "secret Alpine trail" (*GWP*, pp. 264-269). Of course, one reason history does not reveal much evidence is that many of these groups of assemblies spent most of their time in hiding from the "Church." Their "Bibles," including the OT for which they had divine responsibility and capability, were hidden or destroyed. The assurance and certainty that the NT believer has in the twenty-first century is that the Lord Jesus Christ promised to be "with" His assemblies until the end of the church age. He was

in fact with His candlesticks in the first century as they began to preserve the canonical text, and He is with His assemblies to this very day as they carry out their responsibility to recognize, receive and preserve His words. The unbroken trail in between, albeit invisible at times, is of great secondary interest, but ultimately it is among "*the secret things [that] belong unto the LORD our God*" (Dt. 29:29).

Those who are impressed with the critical scholarship of catholicity (the universal, invisible, mystical, Body of Christ, para-church movement) have embraced, and will continue to embrace the CT, "totality of manuscripts," "restored through Textual Criticism," type versions such as the *NASV*, *ESV*, *ad infinitum*. The Lord's assemblies, filled with believers indwelt with the Author of Scripture, will continue to have the spiritual wherewithal to recognize, receive, and preserve the Lord's "received Bible."

Tradition vs. Scripture

The proclivity of mankind is to exalt his words and ignore God's. The Lord's spokesman Jeremiah, in some of his last words, prophesied to the rebellious Jews, who desired to return to Egypt, whose words would "stand, mine or theirs" (Jer. 44:28). Unregenerate man and carnal Christians perpetuate man's words as authoritative, and either directly or indirectly hold them at a level equal to the Scriptures. Christ condemned this traditionalism (cf. Mt. 15:1 ff.) and warned Christians to discern both the preaching and the writing of professed Christian ministers (cf. I Cor. 14:29; I Thess. 5:21; II Pet. 3:15-16). Sproul's work is one of the recent spate of books published that defends the historical testimony of professed Christians concerning bibliology (along with *MOGMOM*, and its sequel, J. B. Williams' *God's Word in Our Hands: The Bible Preserved for Us* [GWP, p. 29]). Although these works are interesting and contain some valuable historical data, they show the false assumptions, imprecisions, and lack of spirituality of many of the "Fathers." These books, written by fundamentalists, state that they are not books of the exegesis of pertinent passages, but are indeed the histories of what "godly" Christians have always believed about inspiration and preservation.

One such interpretation germane to the biblical doctrine of preservation is that the Lord and His apostles quoted from the errant and inferior Greek translation of the OT, the *LXX*. This interpretation goes back to at least Augustine, through the Reformers, and culminating in the *KJV* translators (GWP, pp. 95-119). Certainly the impressive trail of Christian scholars holding this position requires that it has the stamp of "orthodoxy." And yet the Bible believer must ask "is this 'orthodoxy' biblical?" After all, Origen, Jerome and Augustine were complicit in the errors and condemnation of the "accursed gospel church movement" (Gal. 1:8-9) known as the RCC. The Protestants attempted to reform this accursed movement, perpetuating its faulty ecclesiology and imprecise bibliology, and the "Fundamentalist Fathers," having little ecclesiological discernment, propagated the ancient errors of the "Church." What is the final authority for truth—two thousand years of Christian scholarship or Scripture?

There are at least four lines of biblical argumentation affirming that Christ and his apostles never used the *LXX*, but instead employed the Hebrew text as their OT Scriptures. The historical evidentialists normally ignore these arguments, and when they attempt exegesis it is *ad hoc*.

First, the Lord Jesus Christ affirmed that the words of the Hebrew original (of Moses) were still intact in His day (cf. Mt. 4:4; Lk. 4:4). He affirmed that the jots and tittles of the Hebrew words of the original (Greek does not have jots and tittles) would be preserved until the great dissolution of the heavens and earth (cf. Mt. 5:18; II Pet. 3:10-11).

Second, the Lord alluded to the three-fold division of the *Tanak* on several occasions. The *Tanak*, an acronym for the *Torah* (Law), the *Nabi'im* (Prophets) and the *Kethubim* (Writings), started with Genesis and ended with II Chronicles. In contradistinction, the *LXX* was divided similar to the OT canonical divisions of most English Bibles today, starting with Genesis and ending with Malachi. Christ alluded to the Law and the Prophets (Lk. 24:27), to the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms, the first book of the Writings (Lk. 24:44), and to the whole spectrum of the OT recording the persecuted prophets ranging from Abel (Gen. 4:2 ff.) to Zacharias (II Chron. 24:20-22) in Lk. 10:50-51.

Third, He and His apostles had no necessity to employ the *LXX* as they evangelized the Gentiles. When they evangelized the Jews they used the Hebrew Scriptures and when they evangelized the Gentiles the Lord spoke His inspired Greek words (cf. Mt. 15:22-28) and the bilingual apostles taught the authoritative "apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42) in Greek.

Fourth, when the Lord and the apostles did cite the OT, they gave their inspired *targums* (paraphrases) of the passage to which they alluded. For instance, on one occasion when the Lord Jesus Christ taught in the synagogue, He was handed a scroll and He found the passage of Isa. 61 (Lk. 4:15-20). The Hebrew text was in His hand intact ("it was written"), and Luke recorded the Lord's *targum* with its application. His inspired paraphrase expanded the truth of Isaiah's text (the Greek behind "to set at liberty them that are bruised" is not coming from either the Hebrew or *LXX* of Isa. 61:1, so Luke is not giving a quote but a paraphrase), and where the *LXX* agrees with the NT Greek text rather than the OT Hebrew, it may be the result of someone inserting the NT Greek into the *LXX*. The issue is not whether there was a Greek OT before the first century, since there may have been early portions of the OT translated into Greek, but did the Lord and His apostles ever biblically hint at using it or ever have the theological and practical necessity to employ it? Since there is absolutely no biblical proof that Christ "quoted" the inferior *LXX* as His "Bible," there is no biblical precedent for Christians to expect or be satisfied with an inferior, "totality of manuscripts," "restored to the 4th century by textual criticism," "apostate edited," "all the doctrines are there," text and translation.

Sproul has successfully delineated the two mutually exclusive arenas concerning bibliology: the Bible critic's "arena of Tradition" emphasizing Historical Evidentialism and the Bible believer's "arena of Scripture" emphasizing Fideism. The Lord's churches have made their choice and continually refute, repudiate and reject the scholarship of the "Church." Scripture has predicted this assessment and history confirms it. To be sure, a certain degree of "agnosticism" exists in both arenas, but the Lord requires believers to say, "I believe the Biblical promises and 'evidence' (whether it be history, reason, science, etc.) must conform to these biblical assertions."

CONCLUSION

The vast size and enormous historical documentation of Dr. Sproul's tome looks intimidating (cf. I Sam. 16:7). However, the Lord Jesus Christ condemns any attempt to posit the history of man's traditional interpretation of bibliology, as impressive as it might seem, as the final authority for believers. Christians must reject all penultimate authorities and undauntedly trust exclusively in the Lord's assertions of propositional truth. His preserved canonical words will be the basis for man's judgment, as the righteous God holds man accountable for every word which proceeds from His mouth. His institutions have recognized, received and preserved these words for their respective generations. Sproul has done a commendable service in delineating the arenas of battle, namely Evidentialism versus Fideism, Catholic ecclesiology versus NT ecclesiology, and Traditionalism versus Scripture. With which position will the Spirit-led believer align himself?

Solomon said it all when he asserted, "*Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge*" (Prov. 14:7). The Lord requires separation, by those who have the spiritual capability to perceive, from those who do not have the knowledge of biblical truth. The Lord's assemblies have constantly done this and no mountain of 852 footnotes will deter them from recognizing, receiving and preserving the Lord's words. Books authored by Bible critics that engage in logomachy with the Author of Scripture, Who indwells and teaches NT church members bibliological truth, are feckless and will have minimal impact on "*the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*" (I Tim. 3:15).