



FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE

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Principal: Rev (Dr) Timothy Tow, M.Div., S.T.M., D.D.

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Dear Rev Tan

PERFECT BIBLE NOT PERFECT VERSION

Greetings in the blessed name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I refer to your article in the Grace Weekly of July 3, 2005 entitled "The Perfect Bible or the Perfect Version?: Shifting from the Original B-P Position." I did not know about your article since I am not on your mailing list. I only heard about it from two B-P members who had received your Weekly, and they felt very sad and disappointed over your misrepresentation of FEBC's position on the KJV. I only got to read your article from your church website last Sunday night, August 21, 2005. Since you had written your article against Rev Dr Timothy Tow, and FEBC in your Weekly which is also published in your website, I felt it is necessary to respond to the contents of your article lest you go away thinking that what you have said about us is totally and absolutely true and accurate.

Points of Agreement

First, I must say that I am thankful for your opening paragraph where you declared, (1) "The perfect Bible is acceptable in the Christian Church." (2) "We must have a perfect Bible." (3) "Our Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of God." Indeed, "we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (2 Cor 13:8). The B-P Church and FEBC, for which I have come to love because of the Truth that they teach without compromise, have always held to the three tenets of faith that you have cited above.

It is also true that we have always believed that the Hebrew OT and Greek NT are the verbally and plenary inspired Word of God in the original manuscripts or Autographs.¹ We oppose the neo-evangelical view that the Autographs are not fully or totally inspired, that they are inerrant only in matters pertaining to salvation, but not history, geography or science. This battle for the verbal and plenary inspiration (VPI) of Scripture, the fundamentalists have fought and won in the last century. We all believe and defend this vital doctrine of the VPI of Scripture very well.

¹ Please note that the Autographs are not original "copies" as you wrote, but original "manuscripts." Autographs are not "copies" but the very first handwritten scripts by the author or writer himself. The copies which are the apographs come from the autographs.

Nevertheless, the question remains, “Do we have the inspired Word of God *today*?” This concerns the *preservation* of the Scriptures. I praise the Lord to know that you believe in the preservation of the Scriptures. You wrote, “The preservation of the Bible is an amazing truth. We have the Bible in our hands today.” This is precisely what we want to press home. Indeed as you affirmed, “We have in our hands the perfect Word of God. We believe we have the perfect Bible.”

The above excellent statements concerning the perfect inspiration and perfect preservation of the Scriptures notwithstanding, you have made several contradictory statements, and damaging remarks against those who believe likewise.

Damaging Statements and Allegations

Now, concerning our belief of God’s perfect Word which you say we have today, I am deeply hurt by your statements. I am deeply hurt because you misrepresent our position when you unfairly state that (1) when we speak of the perfect Bible we are speaking of the “Perfect Version” or the “Perfect KJV,” “the perfect Bible has reference to the King James Version (KJV);” that (2) “This version is like the original Autographs;” that (3) This is a “strange and unbiblical teaching;” You also accuse us wrongly with very damaging remarks like, (4) “They think they are the only ones with the truth;” (5) “They can be merciless when it comes to dealing with those who do not take their view;” (6) “they will become a KJV-Only cult.”

Please allow me to respond to your misrepresentations point-by-point.

Not Perfect Version or Perfect KJV but Perfect Hebrew and Greek Scriptures

We do not hold to a “perfect Version” or a “perfect KJV,” and that “this version is like the original Autographs.” We do not believe the KJV is as good, as perfect, or as inspired as the original language or the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures.

It is already explained in my booklet—*KJV: Questions and Answers*—published two years ago (2003) that we hold to no such position. Concerning inspiration and its relation to the KJV, I wrote,

God “inspired” or “breathed out” (*theopneustos*, 2 Tim 3:16) His words in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Strictly speaking, the divinely inspired words were the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words God gave to His writers. The KJV, since it is a faithful and accurate translation of God’s Word, can be regarded as “inspired” or “Scripture,” but only in a derived sense. Dr Timothy Tow says, “The original text may be likened to ginseng, and its translation ginseng tea.

No Bible translation is 100% equivalent to the inspired Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek Scriptures. No translated words can be better than the inspired Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek words. When using the KJV, it is necessary to go back to the original language Scriptures for clarity and fulness of meaning. By way of illustration, the original language Scripture underlying the KJV is like the perfect platinum yardstick of the Smithsonian Institute, inerrant, infallible, authoritative. The KJV and other accurate and reliable translations are like the common yardstick, though not 100% are good and safe enough for use.²

I also wrote against Ruckman’s false view of the KJV,

² Jeffrey Khoo, *KJV: Questions and Answers* (Singapore: Bible Witness Literature, 2003), 8.

Peter Ruckman ... holds to the view that the KJV is *separately inspired* of God, contains *advanced revelation*, and thus *superior to the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures*. Ruckman's position is *erroneous, even heretical* because inspiration in the light of 2 Tim 3:16, and 2 Pet 1:21 is applicable only to the original writers (OT Prophets and NT Apostles), original writings (66 books of canonical Scripture), and original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek).³

In the FEBC Statement of Faith, it is made clear, "We uphold the Authorised (King James) Version to be the Word of God—the best, most faithful, most accurate, most beautiful translation of the Bible in the English language."⁴ In all our writings, we spoke in terms of the perfect Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, not the KJV *only or per se*. If the KJV is the "Holy Bible," or the "Word of God, or the "very Word of God," or the "perfect Word of God," it is only in the *derivative* sense in so far as it accurately translates the original Hebrew and Greek words that God has inspired and preserved.

Not only Autographs but also Apographs

Please know that it is a mistake to think that the original language Scriptures refer *only to the Autographs*. The reformers never thought of the Scriptures as referring to autographs only, but also the apographs. The "autograph only" view came from BB Warfield who followed Westcott and Hort. The reformers never thought of the perfection of their Scriptures in terms of the "inerrant autographs" but "*infallible apographs*."⁵

It is *not true* that the B-P Church believes only in the infallibility and inerrancy of the "Autographs" and nowhere else. This may be clearly proved from the Life B-P Church Constitution (and I believe Grace Church as well) 4.2.1 which states, "We believe in the divine, verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures in the original *languages*, their consequent inerrancy and infallibility, and as the Word of God, the Supreme and final authority in faith and life."⁶

Please note that the Constitution does not say that the inspired Scriptures are in the "original *Autographs*" but the "original *languages*." The inspired Scriptures of the past were the Autographs (first scripts), but the inspired *Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words* ("the original languages") have been "kept pure in all ages" (as stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chap I, para VIII). Thus the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words that God had inspired in the Autographs have been preserved for us by God so that today we have the very same inspired Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words in the preserved Apographs (the copied Scriptures).

Surely you agree that we have the original language Scriptures today. We may not have perfect versions or translations, but surely you will not disagree that we have the same perfect, inspired, infallible, inerrant original language Scriptures today. We cannot accept the view that only believers in the days of the prophets and apostles had the perfect, inspired, infallible and inerrant Scriptures, but believers in the 21st century are somehow shortchanged

³ Ibid, 12-13.

⁴ Far Eastern Bible College Prospectus 2005-2009, 11.

⁵ Listen to the lecture of David Allen, deputation speaker of the Trinitarian Bible Society, on "The Special Providential Preservation of the Word of God," delivered to the Scottish Reformation Society on February 2, 2004, www.bible-sermons.org.uk/audio-sermons/767-special-providential-preservation-of-the-word-of-god.

⁶ "50 Years Building His Kingdom," Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, 2000, 51.

or less privileged, that we do not have the same perfect, inspired, infallible and inerrant Scriptures today. We believe we too have the same 100% perfect Bible as the prophets and apostles had because God has promised to preserve all of His inspired words so that believers in every generation would always have all of His words to the last jot and tittle (Ps 12:6-7, Matt 5:18). Our God will always keep His Word. We do not believe God can break His promises. "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

Not a Strange or Unbiblical Doctrine but a Biblical and Christ-Honouring Doctrine

The present perfection of the Scriptures is not a "strange" doctrine as you say for it is taught in the Reformed Confessions of Faith (in the Westminster Confession, the London Baptist Confession, the New Hampshire Confession, and the Second Helvetic Consensus Formula). More importantly, it is *not* an "unbiblical" doctrine for perfect preservation of the Scriptures is taught in Ps 12:6-7, Matt 5:18 (used by the Westminster divines as a proof-text), Matt 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33, 1 Pet 1:24-25 and many other passages (see George Skariah's ThD dissertation on "The Biblical Doctrine of the Perfect Preservation of the Scriptures," enclosed, my love-gift to you).

The Westminster theologians themselves did not believe that the Hebrew OT and Greek NT that they had in their hands contained any mistakes. Dr William Orr himself (who incidentally is no fundamentalist) was honest enough to admit, "the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New which was known to the Westminster divines was immediately inspired because it was *identical with the first text* that God had kept pure in all ages. *The idea that there are mistakes in the Hebrew Masoretic texts or in the Textus Receptus of the New Testament was unknown to the authors of the Confession of Faith.*"⁷

GI Williamson in his commentary on the Westminster Confession spoke of God's remarkable and wonderful work of Biblical preservation in "photocopied" terms, rightly understood and not absurdly caricatured,

This brings us to the matter of God's 'singular care and providence' by which He has 'kept pure in all ages' this original text, so that we now actually possess it in 'authentic' form. And let us begin by giving an illustration from modern life to show that an original document may be destroyed, without the text of that document being lost. Suppose you were to write a will. Then suppose you were to have a photographic copy of that will made. If the original were then destroyed, *the photographic copy would still preserve the text of that will exactly the same as the original itself.* The text of the copy would differ in no way whatever from the original, and so it would possess exactly the same 'truth' and meaning as the original. Now of course photography was not invented until long after the original copy ... had been worn out or lost. How then could the original text of the Word of God be preserved? The answer is that God preserved it by His own remarkable care and providence.⁸

Please also note that the Westminster Confession was written in 1648. This was after 1611, the year the KJV was published. Which Hebrew or Greek Bible do you think the English puritans of the Westminster Assembly used? It is probable that they had used the inspired and preserved Hebrew and Greek Bible underlying the KJV and not the corrupt and cut-up

⁷ Cited in Jeffrey Khoo, "A Plea for a Perfect Bible," *The Burning Bush* 9 (2003): 8.

⁸ GI Williamson, *The Westminster of Faith for Study Classes* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 15.

Westcott-Hort Bible underlying the family of modern versions like the NIV, NASB, and ESV with missing words and missing verses. As such, I really cannot understand why any fundamentalist and separatist Bible-Presbyterian pastor would want to side with Anglican liberals—Westcott and Hort—and their corrupt Greek text which is missing 9970 words of God, and has become the source of the modern versions reflecting similar missing words and missing verses.

We are Not the Only Ones with the Truth

Truth does not reside in fallible men, but in the infallible and inerrant Word of God. Truth is for everyone not only Bible-Presbyterians. God's Word is Truth (John 17:17) and God's Word—the Holy Scriptures—is for everyone. True Life B-P Church and FEBC (and for that matter the Bible-Presbyterian denomination) are not the only ones who have the Truth. Everyone who has the perfect, infallible and inerrant Word has the Truth. But in order to have the Truth and the whole Truth (not part truth and part lie), we must have the perfect, infallible and inerrant Word of God which is our sole and supreme authority of faith and practice.

You were unjust to liken us to the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). First, let me point out that what you wrote was historically inaccurate: the RCC did not allow her members to read any Bible, *including the Latin Vulgate!* The people were not even allowed to own or possess a Bible. Only the priests were allowed to read and interpret the Bible. Unlike the RCC, we at FEBC encourage the reading and the studying of the Scriptures not only in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages, and not only in English, but also in other foreign languages. Your elder sister—the College matron—teaches Elementary Greek—and she is an excellent teacher too. At FEBC, we have students from 16 countries, and we do not at all discourage them from reading their Bibles in their own native tongues. We only advise them to use the best, most accurate, most reliable version they have in their native language, and to go back to the inspired and preserved original language Scriptures which we identify to be those behind the faithful KJV and not the corrupt modern versions to check for accuracy and fulness of meaning. As far as English Bibles go, we believe the KJV to be the best English version of the Bible today, and for very good reasons.

Now since you agree that “We have in our hands the perfect Word of God. We believe we have the perfect Bible,” the question remains: Where is this perfect Word of God or perfect Bible that is in our hands today?” Could you please identify your “perfect Bible?” Do you really have it in your hands as you say you do? If so, which? Is it the KJV? If not, then is it the NKJV, NIV, NASB, RSV, TEV, ESV? Which? If it is not in the versions or translations, then is it the Textus Receptus or the Westcott-Hort text?

If it is, in your opinion, “the many newer manuscripts [that] have been discovered since the days of Erasmus” which I suppose must mean the minority Alexandrian or Westcott-Hort manuscripts, then how do you explain the additions, subtractions, and changes that are found in these “newer manuscripts” which Dean Burgon judged to be the most “scandalously corrupt copies” in existence?⁹ Unlike Dean Burgon who had a very high view of God's Word, Westcott and Hort had a very low view of it. They distorted the classic proof-text of 2 Tim 3:16 in their Revised Version, which led the great Presbyterian theologian—Robert Dabney—to denounce them as Socinians and Rationalists.

⁹ John William Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (Collingswood: Dean Burgon Society, 2000, 2nd printing), 16.

Why do you side with the enemies and not the friends of God who defend His inspired and preserved words? If you use and recommend the KJV to your church which you rightly said should not be replaced, why do you then seek to attack the very Hebrew and Greek words on which the KJV is translated from? Why do you undermine your own foundation?

Dr Peter Masters of Spurgeon's Tabernacle in a recent letter to me dated August 19, 2005 did not think our position to be in any way Roman Catholic or cultic, but "an honourable one." He also gave his unreserved support and endorsement of FEBC, "May I say that the ministry of FEBC under Dr Timothy Tow and yourself is a remarkable manifestation of the blessing of God in maintaining the inerrancy, fundamentals, evangelism, sound hermeneutics and biblical separation. Your work is magnificent and encouraging in the highest degree."

Rev Tan, you can rightly be proud of your principal, your sister, and your alma mater who continue to remain steadfast and faithful to the Lord without compromise. We pray that all our older B-P pastors will continue help and support their very own school.

On Being Merciless, and Judging Others

You accuse us of being "merciless." How have we been "merciless?" When I write in defence of the KJV, I am writing against those from outside who have written papers and books against our original B-P position. We have been defending, not attacking our own.

We are always patient with fellow believers who may still be ignorant but are sincere in seeking the truth, who may not have the maturity of faith or knowledge yet, who may not be able to see as we see right now because the Lord is still working on them. But Bible professors and teachers who write and publish papers and books to question, cast doubt and attack the inspired and preserved Word of God, who say the Bible is not perfect today, who say the Bible has some mistakes though not serious, who say that some words of the Bible have been lost, we indeed do not spare, for we seek the approval of God, not man. We are not servants of God if we seek the approval of men, and try to be popular with everyone at the expense of truth (Gal 1:10).

The Lord says that teachers will be judged more severely (Jas 3:1). Jesus was "merciless" was He not in denouncing the scribes and the Pharisees calling them "blind guides," "whited sepulchers," "serpents," and "generation of vipers" (Matt 23)? I trust you are not saying that we ought to be nice to enemies who attack the Lord and His Word, who say that God did not or is not powerful enough to preserve all of His words, that we do not have a perfect Bible today because some words have been lost, that there are some mistakes in the Bible. We are often afraid to offend people. But I think we should be more afraid of offending God.

How should we respond to Westcott and Hort and their cohorts who have corrupted the Word of God, and called the Greek Scriptures underlying the KJV "vile and villainous?" We should respond like David, "Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies" (Ps 139:21-22). Our founding pastor—Rev Tow—whom you say you highly respect rightly calls this Davidic virtue, "holy hatred."¹⁰

Dear pastor, we love you in the Lord, and appreciate your ministry amongst us. That is why we invite you to speak at the FEBC chapel. You just spoke to our students a couple of weeks ago, and I greeted you when I saw you that morning. I am of course hoping that you will in time come to agree with our position as you search the Scriptures and think through the issue.

¹⁰ See Timothy Tow, "Holy Hatred," *The Burning Bush* 4 (1998): 106-113.

We Have Not Shifted from the Original B-P Position

The Bible-Presbyterian Church is called BIBLE-Presbyterian precisely because she believes and defends the 100% perfection of the Bible in the original languages without any mistake. Furthermore, the KJV has always been the official English Bible of the Bible-Presbyterian Church from the beginning. There are some churches who have departed from the KJV to use the NIV or the NKJV, and that is unfortunate. These are the churches that have departed from the original B-P position, not us.

If there is any shift in FEBC, it is a shift not in doctrine but in practice. In the past, although we used the KJV in our Bible classes, we studied the Greek language by using the corrupt Westcott-Hort text. It was an inconsistent practice, for the Westcott-Hort text is not the source text of the KJV but of the modern versions. It was an inconsistent practice because the corrupt and critical Westcott-Hort Text undermines the KJV. We have since changed our Greek Bible to use the Textus Receptus which is the Reformation Text, the Text underlying the KJV. We have become consistent in our doctrine and in our practice, which is a shift for the better.

You mentioned in your Weekly that in October 2002, the late Rev Dr Burt Subramaniam, Rev Anthony Tan, Rev Tan Choon Seng, Rev Yap Beng Shin, and yourself met with Rev Dr Timothy Tow concerning FEBC which you all believe to be heading towards an extreme KJV-only view. I believe Rev Tow assured you that FEBC is not heading towards an extreme but faithful KJV-only position. Please be reassured that we are against the extreme Ruckmanite view that the KJV is “advanced revelation,” or “doubly inspired” and better than the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. This we made clear to you and fellow B-P pastors on October 29, 2002, when we—Rev Quek Suan Yew, Rev Das Koshy, and myself—together with Rev Tow met with you, Rev Tan Choon Seng, and Rev Yap Beng Shin over lunch to assure you that we hold to no such extreme views on the “Perfect KJV” or “Inspired KJV.” We clarified that when we talk about the “Perfect Bible” we are talking about the inspired and preserved Hebrew and Greek Scriptures or Hebrew and Greek words on which the KJV is based.

Knowing where we stand, why do you misrepresent us and mislead others by saying that we believe in a “Perfect Version” that “this perfect Bible has reference to the King James Version (KJV),” and that “this version is like the original autographs,” that we “will become a KJV-Only cult?” By so saying, you give the wrong impression to your readers that we hold to Ruckman’s extreme and even heretical position, which we do not. Is this not a violation of the ninth commandment (Exod 20:16)?

You say the “in-fighting” must stop. I agree with you. In fact I yearn for this. We should all stand united in the Truth of the forever infallible and inerrant Word of God in the 100% inspired and 100% preserved Hebrew and Greek Scriptures underlying the KJV our official Bible, and not in the corrupt Westcott-Hort text underlying the modern versions.

If the good old KJV and the modern versions use the same preserved Hebrew and Greek Scriptures of the Reformation and not the corrupt Scriptures of Westcott and Hort, and use the same method of translation which is formal or verbal equivalence and not dynamic equivalence (which you rightly rejected), then there would be no issue at all. But the fact is, not all Bibles today are the same. They are very different when you compare them—words are added, words are subtracted, words are changed. They just do not agree in the words and even the doctrines. So where is the Word of God today which we should trust and use?

Dear pastor, if you read our writings carefully in their proper context, you will see that we are actually defending the B-P position, against those from outside especially from certain fundamental Baptists in the USA who attack our very own Presbyterian and Reformed Faith by faulting the Westminster Confession for introducing a “new doctrine” in 1648, namely, the doctrine of Biblical preservation. They insist that there was no such doctrine before that time, and thus preservation is an unbiblical and false doctrine. They also say that the KJV is inferior, and should be replaced by the modern versions. Why are we undermining our own foundation and shooting our own men? The confusion today is caused by these Westcott-Hort anti-preservationists and by the many modern versions, not by us who cling on to the Reformation Text and the good old KJV which has been time-tested and time-honoured like no other translation, and is still a bestselling Bible, and the official version of the Bible-Presbyterian Church from the beginning till now.

It surprises me that after more than 50 years of history, the Bible-Presbyterian Church renowned for its uncompromising stance on the Bible should fall short and fight shy of believing that the Christian Church *today* possesses a 100% infallible and inerrant Bible without any mistake. It surprises me even more that certain Bible-Presbyterians have no qualms saying the Bible is not perfect and contains some mistakes though not serious. But what surprises me most is that the ones who teach the Bible is perfect without any mistake are written off as divisive and foolish, while the ones who teach otherwise are considered godly and scholarly.

FEBC a Spiritual SAFTI

Our principal and teacher, Rev Tow, has likened FEBC to SAFTI. We are training spiritual soldiers to do battle royal for the Lord, to defend the Most Holy Faith as found in the Perfect Word of God. And we will continue to do so as the Lord grants us the grace. “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (2 Cor 13:8).

Yours faithfully in Christ,

Jeffrey Khoo

Encl