

An Examination of the **NEW KING JAMES VERSION**

PART 2

*by A. Hembd, MACS
Reformation International Theological Seminary
A consultant to the Society*

IN this instalment of our article, we examine the translational problems of the New King James Version of the Bible, following which in an appendix we offer a brief critique of the modern so-called Byzantine Majority Text with its errors.

It should be noted at the outset that editions of the New King James Version differ from year to year and country to country without any indication that they differ. We have used herein primarily the 1982 American edition, referring also to a copy from 1987 and an online edition from 2006, as well as to a 1982 British edition (known as the Revised Authorised Version). All of these editions exhibit essentially the same problems except the British edition, which does not capitalise pronouns referring to Deity. (The Revised Authorised Version is no longer available.) However, the edition which one particular person is using might not contain all of the problems which we will examine herein.

Translational Problems in the New King James Version

Introductory Remarks

In our previous instalment, we discussed the corruption of the Nestle-Aland/UBS Critical Text of the New Testament. In particular, we examined the corruption of the Alexandrian or Egyptian texts upon which it is based. We did so, because the New King James includes readings from the Nestle-Aland/UBS text in its marginal notes. We also alluded to the manifold problems in the modern Byzantine Majority Text and to the errors in the von Soden Critical Greek Text upon which it is based, again because the NKJV includes readings from this text in its marginal notes.

In contrast to these corrupted Greek texts, which the NKJV translators have wrongly, we believe, deemed worthy to use in footnotes in their marginal notes, we

affirmed the purity, authenticity, and faithfulness of the Providentially preserved Textus Receptus family of texts, the Greek text from which our Authorised Version (called in some parts of the world the King James Version) is translated. Moreover, we took the editors of the New King James to task for their denigrating remarks against the Textus Receptus which they make by implication in their preface.

The Textus Receptus is to be commended above all other editions of the Greek New Testament for its **doctrinal fidelity** to the originals, to the autographs. Despite a very few minor blemishes—a spelling error in two or so places,¹ and one verse that some believe to be an interpolation²—the Textus Receptus is nonetheless infallible in every point of fact and doctrine, and that, we believe, in every verse of its text. Not only that, but all the doctrines of the autographs may be found in the Textus Receptus in **their native and original power and strength**. Why is this so? Because the Textus Receptus alone, above all other editions, retains the Apostolic readings in 1 John 5.7, Acts 8.37 and in many other verses. We therefore contend that the Received Text family of the Greek is a faithful, pure, and authentic edition of the originals, preserving them in every meaningful jot and tittle.

Regarding doctrinal fidelity and factual inerrancy, these are all-important in a **translation** of the Bible as well. We would affirm most confidently that our Authorised Version is a reliable and faithful translation of the original language texts. Our Authorised Version is in no wise given to the freewheeling extensive use of dynamic

equivalence in its translation as are some of the modern translations. It gives, to the contrary, as much as is possible, a word-for-word rendering of the originals.

Not only that: the Authorised Version was also translated by men of sound doctrine and orthodoxy. This, too, is all important in a translation. Why? Because the translators must understand the **doctrine** of the Holy Scriptures which they are translating, so that they might faithfully render the **doctrine** that is being communicated by the texts.

But now we must ask ourselves, does the New King James Version also demonstrate this same doctrinal fidelity in translating correctly the original language texts? We submit that it does not; it has to the contrary seriously **diluted** and **obscured** important doctrines of the Scriptures in key verses.

Is the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked in hell an essential doctrine of the Scriptures? And what of the doctrine of experimental religion: does the true Christian experience the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost in the midst of his tribulations?

Moreover, does God save worthy or unworthy sinners? Is Christ's salvation difficult, or is His yoke easy and His burden light? Is man good, or is God alone good? All these are foundational doctrinal matters which are impacted by the translational choices of the New King James Version translators.

We now examine translational errors of the New King James which have a major doctrinal impact. After that, we will look at

errors in the NKJV which do not have such a major doctrinal impact, but which do render the original sense of the passage incorrectly, these being but a few examples of many similar problems which are to be found throughout this translation.

Translational errors of a major doctrinal impact

Eternal punishment or annihilation?

A very grave, but also **intentional**, translational problem in the New King James Version is its rendering of the New Testament Greek words which the Authorised Version correctly renders with the English word ‘hell’. In ten verses of the Scripture the New King James Version has retranslated the passage to use the word *hades* instead of hell. Those verses are Matthew 11.23, Matthew 16.18, Luke 10.15, Luke 16.23, Acts 2.27, Acts 2.31, Revelation 1.18, Revelation 6.8, Revelation 20.13, and Revelation 20.14. The New King James, rather than translating, has instead used a direct transliteration of the Greek word Ἅδης (*hadēs*), which is used in the Textus Receptus. However, the other two Greek words used for hell in the New Testament—γεεννα (*gehenna*) and τάρταρος (*tartarō*)—it continues translating as hell.

One must ask: why have the NKJV translators opted to transliterate **only the Greek word *hades*** and not the other words for hell?

We deem it noteworthy that the Greek word *hades*, as employed in classical mythology, does not at all mean a place of

eternal punishment and estrangement from God. To the contrary, it primarily means ‘the abode of the dead’, and therefore, figuratively, ‘the grave’.³ In this sense, **if one were to fail to take into account the New Testament’s use of the word as a whole**, the word could be mistaken to mean ‘a condition in which a person is taken out of existence’, hence, annihilationism.

Moreover, the word *hades* is frequently employed in the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) when translating the Hebrew word *sheol*; and *sheol* does often mean grave. Thus, the New King James Version’s employment of *hades* in the New Testament could lead English readers to think that perhaps the word grave is the one actually meant. On the other hand, if one were to argue that by capitalising the noun Hades as the NKJV translators have done they are indeed referring to a specific place, what would that place be? The classical abode of the dead, as used by the Greeks? Eternal punishment for the wicked as opposed to everlasting bliss for the righteous? Perhaps a judgment seat at which the wicked are not punished for ever but are rather annihilated? The capitalisation does not help, but only makes the whole matter darker and more ambiguous.

One could be given the impression that the text is **not** speaking of the ‘lake of fire and brimstone’ spoken of in Revelation 20.10 —the everlasting home of the devil, the beast and the false prophet and their worshippers, from which (14.11) ‘the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever’. One could wonder whether the use of the word *hades* were employed so as to give annihilationists—those who deny the

eternal damnation of the wicked in hell for ever—opportunity for foisting their views on unsuspecting readers. Annihilationists say that the wicked will simply be destroyed out of existence at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Of course, this is a serious error.

In four verses in the New Testament, *hades* may possibly mean the grave: Acts 2.27,31, Revelation 20.13,14. In the first two verses, Luke, himself a Greek, directly quotes Psalm 16.10 as it was translated from the Hebrew into Greek, using the word *hades* for *sheol*. These verses speak of Christ's being in *sheol* for three days and three nights. Some affirm this literally to have been hell (as did Martin Luther); others, such as the Westminster divines, believed it refers to the grave (as often the Hebrew word means).⁴ In Revelation 20.13-14 *hades* clearly speaks of the grave, because this *hades* will itself be cast into the lake of fire.

However, outside these four verses, *hades* unquestionably always refers to eternal punishment, as is evidenced by Luke 16.23–24. This passage tells us of the eternal sad fate of the rich man who had no compassion for Lazarus, the poor beggar who had died at his gates. The Authorised Version correctly renders these verses as:

And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

The Greek word for hell in the first sentence

is *hades*; and the NKJV correspondingly translates the first part of verse 23 as:

And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

In this passage *hades* is clearly a place of eternal torment. It is clearly the abode of hellfire, as even the NKJV itself shows us in verse 24, translating that verse as does the Authorised Version: '... send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; **for I am tormented in this flame**' [bold type here and throughout added for emphasis unless noted]. *Hades* here clearly is the place where the wicked suffer in flames for ever. It is the place where 'their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched' as the Saviour Himself tells us in Mark 9.46. If indeed the place referred to in the Greek New Testament as *hades* is identical to hell, **why then change the word?** Why confuse English readers with a **new** term, when the old adequately renders what is meant by the passage?

The translators of the New King James affirmed that it was their intention to provide a mere language update of the Authorised Version, so as supposedly to make the Scriptures easier for the modern English reader to understand. Why then change a word which is already easy for the English speaker to understand? Who does not know what hell is? Why introduce a new term with which many may not be familiar?

Moreover, why does the New King James **not** change the word for hell in Matthew 5.22,29,30; 10.28; 18.9; 23.15 and

23.33, and other places where the Greek word *gehenna*, a place of burning in the valley of the son of Hinnom,⁵ is used? Why does it not transliterate also the word *tartarōō* in 2 Peter 2.4, where the Scripture tells us that ‘God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell? Could it be that this has been done because these instances do not admit of the interpretation ‘the abode of the dead?’

When we consider that the practice of replacing the word hell in English versions with the word *hades* began with the translation of the Revised Version of 1881, we can only be alarmed.

The heterodoxy of several members of that translation committee, notably William Robertson Smith, a Scottish higher critic, and George Vance Smith, a Unitarian, is all too well known.⁶ The Unitarians since Vance Smith’s time have joined with the Universalists, who obviously deny the eternal punishment of the wicked in hell, believing as they do that all men in the end will be saved. Hence, we would not be unwarranted in believing that some of the committee members on the translating committee for the Revised Version in 1881 also leaned toward either universal redemption or annihilationism, and that this influenced their changing the word hell to *hades*.

Although we have no proof that any of the translators of the New King James Version at present lean toward the heterodoxy of the translators of the Revised Version, yet are we not warranted in at least fearing that they have proven too accommodating to those of such views, even if only unconsciously?

The Web site *Religious Tolerance* tells us the following (quite approvingly from their point of view):

Annihilationism is a growing belief among Evangelicals. It is promoted by many Evangelical leaders including F.F. Bruce, Edward W. Fudge, Michael Green, Philip E. Hughes, Dale Moody, Clark H. Pinnock, W. Graham Scroggie, John R.W. Stott and John W. Wenham.⁷

These are some famous names indeed! Given the ‘slippery slope’ that many even famous evangelicals are now following with respect to the Biblical doctrine of eternal punishment, **we cannot stress enough the importance of holding to a Bible version that clearly teaches and holds forth this essential doctrine.** Seeing then that the NKJV has abandoned this standard, we cannot recommend this translation. Indeed, the New King James is foundationally deficient in blurring this essentially important truth.

We must here note that this novel way of translating *hades* agrees with the identical practice of the New American Standard Bible, which also blurs the doctrine of eternal punishment by translating *hades* in the same way in the same verses.⁸

Many poor sinners have been awakened to the reality of their need to fly to Christ through the fear of hell and eternal torment, as is abundantly manifest by the many conversions that were wrought by Jonathan Edwards’s famous sermon ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’.⁹ Although a mere fear of hell with a coerced

confession of Christ is surely not sufficient for eternity—there must be the revealing of Christ to the soul (cf. Galatians 1.16) and the shining of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ into the heart (cf. 2 Corinthians 4.6) transforming the heart and making a man into a willing person in the day of God’s power, a man who cannot but love Christ (cf. Psalm 110.3) if it is to be well with that man for eternity—yet many are first brought seriously to begin **seeking** God through a sense of their very real danger. The minimising of God’s very real wrath against sin and His purpose to punish it most severely for all eternity cannot but work very great mischief and harm to the eternal souls of men. We cannot but condemn the New King James Version for thus diluting the doctrine of eternal punishment with its setting aside the word hell in so many important verses of Holy Writ.

| ***Romans 5.1–5: Experimental religion, or mere orthodoxy in the head?***

A very important doctrine in the Scripture is that of experimental religion. By ‘experimental’, we do not mean the exalting of personal experience over the truth of the Word of God. We rather mean the putting of one’s profession of faith to the touchstone of Scripture, to see whether that profession is confirmed with the marks and evidences of those graces which true believers possess. These would include the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5.22–23, especially as it comes forth in seasons of trials and temptations. But also by the word ‘experimental’ we must refer to the Spirit’s work in **manifesting** such evidences of grace to the faith and consciences of true

believers, to **confirm** to them that they are indeed in covenant with God and that God loves them, and that Christ will indeed be with them in all their manifold temptations and trials.

The Saviour tells His disciples and, in them, all His true church, that ‘He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him’ (John 14.21). Those who through a living faith in Christ endeavour to walk in Him in humble reliance upon Him at every step of the way, ‘leaning upon [their] beloved’ (Song of Solomon 8.5), will experience manifold trials and oppositions in this life. Their own flesh will oppose them. The old man will rise up against them. But also, the world and Satan will oppose them. At times, even the Lord Himself to try them may, as He did with Job, withdraw His sensible presence from them so that they must then live out of bare faith upon His Word (Job 23.8–9).

Such people may be in great straits; indeed, Paul tells us that ‘all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution’ (2 Timothy 3.12). ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation’, the Saviour tells His people in John 16.33. For this reason, the Lord’s people are ‘an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD’ (Zephaniah 3.12). They are a people who **need** the confirming assurances of Christ’s love to their souls, and it is to such that Christ manifests Himself to the strengthening of their souls. By His witnessing to them of the marks of their faith that manifest themselves in the midst of their trials, along with fresh revelations of

the glory of Christ in all His Person and Work, the Holy Ghost often sheds abroad in their hearts the felt sense of the love of God, helping them most wonderfully.

It is this that we believe that the Apostle speaks of in Romans 5.1–5. Accordingly, we will next consider the NKJV's rendering of Romans 5.1–5, which tends to undermine the doctrine of experimental religion shown in those verses. The Authorised Version correctly renders this passage thus:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, **experience**; and **experience**, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

The word placed in bold in these verses, **experience**, speaks of this experimental religion. However, the New King James makes a very major change in this one word and in doing so, the doctrine. It changes **experience** to **character**. Thus, the NKJV in verses 3 and 4 reads, 'knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, **character**; and **character**, hope'. This change is not at all warranted by the Greek word *δοκιμη* (*dokimē*) from which it is translated. (It is interesting to note, however, that the NKJV translators agree here in essence with the New

American Standard of 1995, which translates *dokimē* as 'proven character'.)

Dokimē properly means proof arising from having survived a test or trial. The verb from which it comes properly means to put to the proof or to put to the experiment, as a chemist would submit a rock to a series of tests to determine what its chemical makeup was. The proof spoken of here in the text is **twofold**: it refers both to God's proving the sincerity of the true believer before men and angels, **but it also refers to God's proving His own faithfulness to the hearts and consciences of His children** by His sustaining them with the felt sense of His love shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost freely given them, as verse 5 goes on to say.

Thus, the proper meaning of the text is that the Christian glories in tribulations because he knows from the proof of his own faith demonstrated to his own mind and conscience that his God loves him, and that therefore his God is perfecting him through these tests. His having had his faith put to the proof or put to the experiment is good for his soul. It demonstrates the reality of his faith to God, to the devil, to the world, and to his own conscience and soul. As these trials demonstrate the reality of his own faith to his own soul and the reality of Christ's standing with him in his trials, these experiences in turn show him, in time, the love of God to his soul. They become as an Ebenezer (1 Samuel 7.12), a rock of memorial to God's help and sustenance to him in time of need. They are experiences to which he often looks. Accordingly, the Authorised Version's translation of the

word *dokimē* as ‘**experience**’ is most appropriate. These witnessings of the Holy Ghost as to the reality of his faith are precious experiences that the child of God never forgets. By these experiences, God manifests His faithfulness and help to the poor believer when he cries out to Him, and the poor child of God finds God to be faithful to His Word, a ‘very present help in trouble’ (Psalm 46.1).¹⁰

The New King James Version in translating the passage as ‘and perseverance, **character**; and **character**, hope’, states a truth, but it does not at all adequately nor faithfully set forth the doctrine as espoused in the original language text. This mistranslation also robs the believer of a beautiful text with much comfort. The believer does not find tribulation joyous at first but he finds the peaceable fruits of righteousness issuing therefrom. He finds the very sensible help of God in time, at every step. Daniel finds angels with him in the lions’ den (Daniel 6). Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego find a fourth one ‘like the Son of God’ with them in the furnace (Daniel 3.25). Paul finds the Lord standing by him in the night while his enemies plot his murder with the Sanhedrin (Acts 23.11). Stephen, as he is about to be cruelly stoned, sees the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on God’s right hand (Acts 7.56). Job, after a long season of lacking altogether the sensible presence of his God so that he had to say ‘Behold, I go forward, but he *is not there*; and backward, but I cannot perceive him’ (Job 23.8), yet found after a time the Lord speaking to him out of the whirlwind and that mightily for his deliverance (38.1; 40.6).

Given these things, how can we **not** say that patience worketh **experience**, and that these experiences, by the Holy Ghost, witness God’s incomprehensible love to the soul of the poor child of God, many a time so that he is almost overwhelmed, ‘sick of love’ (Song of Solomon 2.5; 5.8), and yet most marvellously strengthened thereby for time to come?

So then, the Greek word *dokimē* refers to the experiment to which the believer’s faith is put and to the proof that issues therefrom. But it also means ‘**experience**’ as we properly understand it—the proof of God’s faithfulness to the soul and heart of the child of God.

Again we must ask, what is so hard to understand about the word ‘experience?’ Why have the New King James translators, without a real warrant from the word in the original language, decided to change it? We cannot but think that the translators of the NKJV simply did not themselves understand the full significance of the passage.

We cannot but feel that the failure to note the experimental component of this verse by the NKJV translators reflects the general dearth of experimental religion in our day. This is indeed a day in which mere historical, non-saving faith in the head (but not in the heart) is often taken by many to be actual, vital godliness in the soul; and even the godly of our day, we fear, have been lulled by the general lukewarmness of our time to a deadness in spiritual matters. Accordingly, we cannot but regard the New King James Version as a fruit of this spiritually barren age. There is a deficiency, it seems to us, in the NKJV’s

setting forth fundamental experimental truths of the Word of God. Does this deficiency perhaps stem from a relative unfamiliarity of the translators themselves, and indeed with Christians in general, with experimental matters when compared with Christians of the past?

The age in which the Authorised Version was translated was an age that abounded in experimental writings on the life of grace in the soul, an age, we believe, unparalleled in that regard. It was an age that began in the late 1500s with the sifting, searching, and examining preaching of William Perkins at Cambridge University,¹¹ and which shortly brought forth such experimental preachers as Richard Sibbes,¹² William Ames,¹³ Thomas Goodwin,¹⁴ William Guthrie,¹⁵ John Owen¹⁶ and many others.

Thus, we cannot but prefer the Authorised Version, especially with respect to its setting forth the Scripture's teaching concerning the experimental life of grace in the soul. We believe the Authorised Version has done this because of the very experimental and spiritual nature of the age in which that noble translation was produced.

| Matthew 7.14: The way of salvation: narrow or difficult?

The Authorised Version correctly translates this verse as: 'Because strait *is* the gate, and **narrow** *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it'. The New King James Version translates it as: 'Because narrow *is* the gate and **difficult** *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it'.

The Greek word translated as 'narrow' in the Authorised Version and 'difficult' in the New King James is the participial form of the Greek verb *θλιβω* (*thlibō*), which properly means to narrow or constrict. In the Greek it is a perfect participle, literally meaning narrowed. While this can mean narrowed, or difficult in a figurative sense, yet in the Biblical sense here, it can only mean **narrow in that salvation exclusively comes through faith in Christ only and through repentance toward God**. We cannot properly say that salvation is difficult because the Saviour Himself, Who cannot lie, tells us that His 'yoke *is* easy, and [his] burden is light' (Matthew 11.30). Salvation is impossible with man, but not because it is difficult. In Christ the intolerable yoke of the covenant of works¹⁷ which makes absolutely no provision for the forgiveness of sins is taken away, Christ having fulfilled that covenant **for** His people who believe on Him.

They are but called to look to Him and to repent only through faith in Him, He enabling them by justifying them with a righteousness outside themselves and by giving them a new nature and progressive sanctification within their souls through the Holy Ghost indwelling them. The only thing which makes salvation impossible for unregenerate men is their unwillingness to come to Him, and Christ takes away this enmity in the day of His power (Psalm 110.3).

By mistranslating the Greek word as difficult, the New King James would give the reader the impression that the poor sinner must **work** his way to God, that salvation is somehow a work of his own willpower with

a little of God's assistance helping him to overcome the heart of evil within. But no, salvation is all of grace; it is not of works, but of faith, and that faith is all God's work (see Ephesians 2.8). Salvation is **narrow** because it is **alone** by Christ by grace through faith. Man must throw away his own righteousness and his own works to come to Christ; he must renounce confidence in his own abilities. He must forsake **every** other false ground of confidence and come by Christ alone. It is a **narrow** way because it is an **exclusive** way.

Thus, in mistranslating this verse the New King James has cast doubts on the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone! We cannot but chide with the New King James translators on this critical point and point out their serious deficiency in rendering fundamental doctrines of the Gospel.

Accordingly, we would exhort our readers to hold fast to the Authorised Version, which is indeed a faithful **doctrinal rendering** of the original languages.

| Zechariah 9.17:

Man's goodness or God's goodness?

We now look at a text which the New King James translators **deliberately** chose to alter, **purposely revising what is said in the original language**. That verse is Zechariah 9.17. We now look at both verses 16 and 17 so as to get the full context of the passage. In the Authorised Version, this correctly reads as follows:

And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his

people: for *they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land. For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.*

Repeatedly in the chapters preceding this verse, the prophet Zechariah chides with the children of Judah, expostulating with them for their sins. Such is the case in chapter 7 verse 12 where he says, 'Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts'.

It was not a worthy people that the Lord would save. It was a desperately wicked people who had oppressed the widow, the fatherless, the stranger and the poor, as Zechariah had witnessed against them in chapter 7.10–12. But the Lord would save them in His free and sovereign grace because He so willed, just as in His free grace He had loved their fathers (Deuteronomy 7.7–8). Accordingly, we can only say 'how great is **his** goodness' (Zechariah 9.17). We have no goodness of our own; 'there is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God... there is none that doeth good, no, not one', Scripture tells us in Romans 3.10–12. This is so with both Jew and Gentile, as Paul tells us: '... we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin' (Romans 3.9). Both the Gentile believers and the Jewish believers sought not God. Instead Christ sought them. 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you', says Christ in John 15.16.

Accordingly, the Lord saved and delivered an **unworthy** people in the verses in Zechariah 9.16–17. They deserved nothing but eternal condemnation in hell, but God in His grace and goodness saved them.

But look now at how the New King James translates Zechariah 9.17!

In its 1987 edition it has rendered this verse: ‘For how great is **their** goodness, and how great **their** beauty’. They translate it thus, even though they **acknowledge in a footnote to the verse** that ‘their’ is ‘Literally *his*’ in the original language text: if translated literally the verse would be ‘For how great is **his** goodness, and how great **his** beauty’. The NKJV translators opted **deliberately** to change the pronoun (used as an adjective in the text) so as to give glory to man instead of to God! Such a rendering of the text is not only wrong, it borders on heresy. It would say that the Lord saves **worthy** sinners, He saves those who are good! (By the way, the 1987 NKJV again agrees with the original NASB in rendering ‘their’ for the Hebrew word for ‘his’; the 1995 edition of the NASB also still translates it in this way.)

In its original 1982 edition, the NKJV read, ‘For how great is **its** goodness, and great **its** beauty’, with a footnote again acknowledging that it could be rendered with ‘his’: ‘and great his beauty’. It appears that, in its 1982 edition, the NKJV translators may have mistakenly interpreted the pronoun/adjective (which they have rendered as ‘its’) to refer to Zion, instead of to the Lord Himself (who, as Christ tells us, is the only One Who is good); and thus, they have revised the verse in 1987 to read as does the

New American Standard. But we cannot but view this mistranslation as an obscuring of the doctrines of free grace and of the doctrine which is itself set forth by the passage. All the deliverances of the Old Testament people of God set forth in types show the way of salvation as it would fully be revealed in the New Testament. God saved an unworthy people in both the Old Dispensation and the New. We cannot but believe that true believers, even under the shadowy dispensation of the Old Covenant, were indeed saved with New Testament grace alone through a saving view of Christ portrayed in their ceremonies and temporal deliverances.

In all, we cannot but feel that the NKJV translators are shaky in their doctrinal moorings in important fundamentals of Law and Gospel. Their obscuring of the doctrine of free grace, that free grace which is clearly set forth in the original language in this passage in Zechariah 9.17, abundantly manifests the weakness of their doctrinal foundations.

| Matthew 20.20:
Is kneeling before Christ the same as worshipping Him?

We now examine in the NKJV the rendering of a passage that tends to weaken the doctrine of Christ’s divinity: Matthew 20.20.

The Authorised Version correctly translates the verse as: ‘Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping *him*, and desiring a certain thing of him’.

‘Worshipping him’: the fact that Christ is worshipped displays His divinity, for only

God may lawfully be worshipped, as the Second Commandment plainly teaches us. The second of the Ten Commandments teaches us that we may not bow down before idols because bowing down is worshipping.

When Cornelius fell down to worship Peter, Peter rebuked him, telling him ‘Stand up; I myself also am a man’ (Acts 10.26). Men may not be worshipped, nor may idols or even angels. So also said the angel to John in Revelation 19.10 and 22.8–9 when John would have fallen down to worship him; the angel tells him to do it not but to ‘Worship God’. Thus, neither men nor angels nor idols are to be worshipped. God alone may be worshipped.

But in Matthew 20.20 we find that both the mother of James and John, and the men themselves, are worshipping Christ and Christ forbids them not. Why? Because He is indeed God.

How does the NKJV translate this verse? ‘Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, **kneeling down** and asking something from Him’. Notice that ‘worship’ has been diluted to ‘kneeling down’.

In the Authorised Version, every occurrence of the Greek word *προσκυβω* (*proskuneō*) is translated the same, namely, as worship. Even in the New King James, most of the time it is translated thus. Indeed, the NKJV renders *proskuneō* as worship in Acts 10.25, where Cornelius falls down to worship Peter. Yet here it has failed to translate the word properly when dealing with a far more important Person than Peter, One Who is indeed worthy of worship.

We cannot say, on the mere ground of this one verse alone, that the editors of the New King James did not believe that Christ, as God, is worthy of worship; but we must say that there is a certain carelessness and indifference toward the **significance and importance** of this doctrine as it is clearly set forth in this verse. We cannot but think the NKJV translators’ failure to render *proskuneō* in its true meaning of worship in this verse reveals a lack of reverence. The all-importance of this doctrine—namely, Christ’s accepting worship, and this as a proof of His Godhead—merits much more reverence and diligence in preserving this doctrine in every text of the Bible where it is manifested, as it should have been in this verse.

| *The marginal notes on 1 John 5.7:
Are the Three Persons of one essence,
equal in power and glory?*

Here we cannot but reiterate our displeasure with the marginal notes in the New King James Version. The strongest witness in the Bible for the unity of the Trinity and the consubstantiality of the Three Persons—that is, their sharing the same divine essence—is clearly found in 1 John 5.7. This text, we are persuaded, was likely excluded first by Origen, and even perhaps by his predecessors, because of their subordinationist views (that Christ and the Holy Spirit are inferior to the Father), and their views concerning the Modalist Monarchist heresy (that the Father is the Son, and the Son is the Father, and so on), which heresy was a major problem in the third century. In addition, Origen’s devotee, Eusebius of Caesarea, was Emperor Constantine’s favourite bishop and held

extreme subordinationist views—indeed he was an Arian for a time, and then a Semi-Arian, even after the Council of Nicaea. Eusebius¹⁸ was very much involved in the textual criticism of the text, as had been his predecessor Origen. Constantine ordered fifty copies of the Scriptures from Eusebius for the churches in Constantinople, which copies certainly would have set the standard for a time for the text. Eusebius had invented a system of cross referencing the four Gospels, a system now called the Eusebian Canons, which were in most of the Greek manuscripts for many centuries, and even found their way into the early copies of the Latin Vulgate. Thus we see the universal sway that Eusebius held for a time over the New Testament text, particularly in the church of the east.

Eusebius was opposed to the doctrine of Christ's being of the same essence as the Father, and therefore would have been opposed to 1 John 5.7. He would have had the ecclesiastical power for a time to have excluded that text from the authorised copies.

However, the *Johannine Comma*, as it is called, persisted in the Old Italic Version of the churches of Africa where Eusebius's influence was the weakest and where the Eusebian Canons were not utilised, at least in their older copies. The verse was likely preserved then in the church of the west, where the influence of Arianism and Semi-Arianism had been the least.

We therefore uphold the authenticity of that passage. It is the strongest witness to the doctrine of the Trinity and to the consubstantiality and equality of the Three

Persons of the Trinity that can be found anywhere in the Bible. If we delete the strongest witness for the Trinity and for the $\delta\mu\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\omicron\varsigma$ (*homoousios*), as the early Greek Fathers called the sharing of the divine essence by the Three Persons, then we necessarily **weaken** those doctrines. Those doctrines no longer appear in the Scriptures with their native and original strength and force.

But what do we find in the New King James Version concerning the *Comma*? We find the following footnote for 1 John 5.7: 'NU-Text and M-Text omit the words from *in heaven* (verse 7) through to *on earth* (verse 8). Only four or five very late *Greek* manuscripts contain these words'. This means that the Nestle-Aland/UBS Critical Greek Text and the so-called Byzantine Majority Text both exclude 1 John 5.7.

With the words 'only four or five manuscripts'—but not taking into account at all the history of the text or the nearly universal attestation to the authenticity of the *Comma* in the Western Church—the NKJV translators make it appear that the text was almost surely not in the original autograph.

Yet, because of overwhelming historical evidence, **the masters of the eastern Byzantine text, namely, the Greek Orthodox Church, not only included the *Comma* in their official version; they included it also as one of their official lectionary readings!** Though we must view the Greek Orthodox Church as being in serious error because of its idolatries, we must also acknowledge that they know the history of their own text better than any

modern text critic, and they know how the Arian controversy ravaged their text for a time. On the grounds of overwhelming historical evidence, likely presented to them at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, they opted to re-include that verse in their copies.¹⁹

Thus we must argue that in its embracing modernist views of text critics like Bruce Metzger and Kurt Aland concerning 1 John 5.7, the New King James Version has also weakened the doctrine of Christ's Godhead with its marginal notes.

Hebrews 2.16:

Did Christ take upon Himself the nature of the seed of Abraham, or did he merely 'help' the seed of Abraham?

We now return to our consideration of the text of the NKJV. The NKJV alters with its translation a very important passage in Hebrews 2.16 concerning Christ's incarnation and His taking our human nature.

The Authorised Version correctly renders this verse as: 'For verily he took not on *him* the nature of angels; but he took on *him* the seed of Abraham'. This means that Christ did not take to Himself an angelic nature; He took to Himself the nature of mankind, specifically, being born of the seed of Abraham.

Note the italics for the words *the nature of* and *him*. The Authorised Version itself gives us the literal reading of the passage in the marginal note it appends to this verse: 'Gr. *taketh not hold of angels, but of the seed of Abraham he taketh hold*'. The Greek word for 'taketh hold' is ἐπιλαμβανομαι (*epilambanomai*), which literally means to

take upon, but which can also mean to lay hold of or to seize. Only in a figurative sense could it mean give aid, but this is how the New King James Version renders it, without there being any clear reason for translating it in a figurative sense here.

The context of this passage shows us clearly that Christ took to Himself flesh and blood, and not the nature of angels. 'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same', verse 14 of this same chapter tells us. Accordingly, the whole context of the passage tells us that He took to Himself our human nature, body and soul. Christ, as God, is superior to all the angels, chapter 1 of this book tells us. But Christ for our sakes was made 'a little lower than the angels' (2.7,9), taking to Himself our human nature, that He might be made conformable to us in all things, sin excepted.

But how does the New King James Version translate this verse? 'For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham'. In this **figurative** rendering of *epilambanomai*, the New King James follows the New American Standard which reads 'For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham'.

Thus, the New King James here, contrary to its original purpose, does not simply update the language of the Authorised Version; it retranslates this verse, even changing the doctrine of it! The verse in the NKJV merely speaks of Christ's giving help to the seed of Abraham; the doctrine of the incarnation is altogether overlooked.

Moreover, the translators had to employ a **figurative** sense of the Greek verb in order to do so. Once again, the NKJV translators betray their strong sympathies for the methodologies and philosophy behind the NASB translation, over against those of the Authorised Version. However, this is a very important text for showing the incarnation of Christ. It is a very strong verse in proof of it. However, although other verses even in this chapter and context state the incarnation of Christ, yet the NKJV's rendering of this verse in this way weakens its testimony to this all-important, fundamental doctrine, thus weakening Scripture's testimony to the incarnation of the Saviour.

Given that many Reformed confessions rightly cite Hebrews 2.16 in proof of the Incarnation and the Hypostatic Union, we cannot but condemn this rendering.²⁰

| 1 Thessalonians 5.22:
Abstain from even the appearance of evil, or merely from every form of evil?

We now proceed to examine the New King James Version's re-rendering of 1 Thessalonians 5.22. The Authorised Version, we believe correctly, renders this verse as 'Abstain from all appearance of evil'. The New King James retranslates it as: 'Abstain from every **form** of evil'.

This retranslation certainly weakens the verse. As it is understood in the Authorised Version, the saint is not only to abstain from evil; he also is to abstain from all that would even have the **appearance** of evil. The New King James on the other hand would simply have us to abstain from every form of evil, i.e., every 'kind' of evil.

The Greek word for appearance bears out the Authorised Version's rendering of it. It is the Greek word εἶδος (*eidos*) which means, according to Thayer, 'the external appearance, form, figure, shape'.²¹ Yes, the word can be understood as form or shape (e.g., see shape in Luke 3.22, John 5.37; however, most instances of the word 'form' in the AV are from the word μορφή [*morphē*], as in Philippians 2.6–7), but simply rendering the word in this way does not adequately convey its full significance. It means also the external appearance, and so the verse is indeed commanding the saints to abstain even from that which has the mere appearance of evil, even in regards to something which may not actually be evil. Accordingly, we uphold the translation given by our Authorised Version.

| Another look at the margin—Acts 8.37:
Do we baptise infidels?

We would now examine the marginal note which the NKJV appends to Acts 8.37. That verse, which answers the Ethiopian eunuch's request to be baptised, reads properly in the Authorised Version:

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

The New King James also includes this verse in the text, but here our attention is drawn to the marginal note about the verse.

NU-Text and M-Text omit this verse. It is found in Western texts, including the Latin tradition.

The fact that Dr Arthur Farstad, the editor of the New King James Version, was also a principal editor for the Hodges-Farstad Majority Text—the ‘Farstad’ in ‘Hodges-Farstad’ refers to him—would lead one to think that Dr Farstad himself strongly leans toward the omission of this verse. However, we cannot but think it quite bad that modern men lack the discernment to see why this verse must needs be included.

Although we must view the Greek Orthodox Church as in serious error because of its idolatries, **we would nonetheless believe that they are the masters of the eastern Byzantine text, it being their text; and it is most noteworthy that they have opted to re-include this verse in their official version of the Greek text. It is even one of their lectionary readings**, which shows the high degree of confidence they have in this text and how strongly they apparently think that the omission of that verse in their early texts was a deficiency. We strongly believe the omission to be an excision by Origen which was later enforced by Eusebius of Caesarea.

But this text is very important doctrinally. It is the only text which specifically requires a profession of faith from an adult applying for baptism. Were this text not in the Bible, a Muslim still cleaving to Islam could apply for baptism in the church and there would be little Scriptural warrant for refusing him. One could appeal to other texts, but the appeal would be weakened.

This text clearly shows that an orthodox and credible profession of faith is required from any adult who would apply for baptism in the church. Those who believe in baptism

for adults only strongly appeal to this verse. But paedobaptists—those who believe in baptising the children of believers—also appeal to it in requiring a credible profession of faith from the **parents** who would bring their children for baptism. Were this not the case in churches that baptise children, a church could go about baptising the children of infidels. So then, this verse is highly prized both by those who baptise adults only and by paedobaptists.

In all, Acts 8.37 is a very important doctrinal text and its inclusion without question in the Textus Receptus and in the Authorised Version much marks the integrity and purity of both New Testaments. It is therefore regrettable that the NKJV places question marks about this passage in its marginal note.

| **Psalm 45.13:**

Is the bride spiritually glorious, or merely outwardly glorious? Or, is the Psalm only speaking of Solomon, and not of Christ?

A passage in the NKJV which this author finds very problematic, and which has grave doctrinal consequences, is its rendering of Psalm 45.13. The Authorised Version correctly renders this verse as: ‘The king’s daughter *is* all glorious within: her clothing *is* of wrought gold’.

The entire Psalm is obviously Messianic. Its title, part of the original Hebrew, tells us it is ‘A Song of loves’, very much patterned after and speaking of the same subject matter as the Song of Solomon. Both the Psalm and the Song of Songs speak of the mystical union of Christ, the Heavenly Bridegroom, with His bride, the church of

all ages, composed of believers from both the Old and New Testament eras. Verse 6 of the Psalm is clearly applied to Christ in Hebrews 1.8: ‘Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness *is* the sceptre of thy kingdom’. Paul in this verse in Hebrews, under the perfect inspiration and infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit, uses this very verse in Psalm 45 to prove the Godhead and divinity of Christ.

Yet Christ is also called true man in this Psalm, as verse 7 refers to His being anointed with the ‘oil of gladness above thy fellows’, where we must understand His fellows or companions to be of the sons of men. Though it is not explicitly stated that Christ has companions among the sons of men because He Himself became man, yet the doctrine is clearly implied, especially when we take the verse in context with the rest of Scripture.

Verse 13 of the Psalm refers to the king’s daughter, but the term ‘daughter’ is figurative, since this daughter is clearly the king’s spouse who is being given to him in marriage, as verse 14 tells us: ‘She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee’. The image is that of the bride being presented to the bridegroom, with her bridesmaids in attendance.

Verse 13 gives us a spiritual view of the **spiritual** beauty of this bride: she is all glorious **within**. Similarly, her clothing is of the wrought gold of the righteousness of Christ, to Whom she is espoused: she is clothed with His righteousness, having received that righteousness by faith alone.

All who are truly justified are also born again and therefore sanctified, both initially and progressively. They are made holy within; they are new creatures, ‘old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new’ (2 Corinthians 5.17). They are new men within, and hence, all glorious within. They have a beauty that is not of the outer man or of ‘that outward *adorning* of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but [that beauty which is of] the hidden man of the heart’ (1 Peter 3.3–4). They have that which is beautiful in the Saviour’s eyes: the new heart, that heart which is holy, which is the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, and which has holy desires for Him.

Thus, the Authorised Version very faithfully renders Psalm 45.13 directly from the Hebrew as ‘the king’s daughter *is* all glorious within’.

But how does the New King James render this verse? ‘The royal daughter *is* all glorious within *the palace*’. By adding the words ‘the palace’, which are not in the original Hebrew (nor are they even indicated), the New King James destroys the spiritual meaning of the passage.

Translation problems of a lesser doctrinal impact, but which incorrectly render the sense of the passage

We would now examine passages where we judge the NKJV’s errors to be of lesser doctrinal significance, but where it does indeed incorrectly render the sense of the

passage. Surely this is important! The true child of God desires to understand all of Scripture that he can. If like Job he esteems the Word of God more than his necessary food (Job 23.12), how much then should he desire a translation of the Scriptures that is as accurate as possible!

| *Isaiah 11.3*

The Authorised Version well renders this verse as: 'And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears'. Here the New King James has 'His delight *is* in the fear of the LORD, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears'. The chief difference lies in how the Authorised Version and the NKJV render the first phrase of the verse: 'And shall make him of quick understanding' or 'His delight *is* in the fear of the LORD'.

The verb in the Hebrew language which the New King James has instead rendered as the noun 'delight' is from ריח (riyach, from רוח, 'breathe' or 'blow'²²), which here in the hiphil form can mean 'smell'. The Authorised Version notes this in its margin. This verb is indeed the one employed in Genesis 8.21, where it is said that 'the LORD smelled a sweet savour', when He smelled the sacrifice of clean animals which Noah sacrificed to Him after the Flood, when they had come forth from the ark.

The New King James, then, has **figuratively** rendered the word as 'delight',

as though the Saviour smells with delight the fear of the Lord.

However, we defer, with the Authorised Version translators, to the judicious remarks of Calvin on this verse, which, we believe, better suit the entire context of the verse:

3. *And will make him sagacious. The verb ריח (riyach) which is here put in the Hiphil conjugation, signifies literally to smell, but may also be explained in an active sense, as meaning to give a keen smell; which agrees better, I think, with this passage, so that this sagacity may be also included among the gifts of the Spirit. And this effect is peculiarly applicable to the person of Christ, namely, that far beyond what the godly are able to conceive, he is endowed with a shrewd discernment for governing his people. We ought to attend, first of all, to the metaphor in the verb smell, which means that Christ will be so shrewd that he will not need to learn from what he hears, or from what he sees; for by smelling alone he will perceive what would otherwise be unknown.²³*

The famed Bible commentator Matthew Henry interprets the verse in exactly the same way.

That he should be accurate, and critical, and very exact in the administration of his government, and the exercise of the power committed to him (v. 3): The Spirit

wherewith he shall be clothed *shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD*—of an acute smell or scent (so the word is), for the apprehensions of the mind are often expressed by sensations of the body.²⁴

So then, both John Calvin and Matthew Henry interpret the passage as referring to Christ's having an innate sense in the fear of the Lord, a 'sense of smell' for the things of the Lord, that would enable Him in judging His people. We cannot but believe that, given the context of the verse, this rendering is the correct one.

Verse two says 'And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD'. It is clear that verse three then carries on with this thought, that the Spirit of God would enlarge Christ's human mental abilities in the wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and fear of the Lord. Hence, 'make him of quick understanding' is the correct rendering of the phrase.

Again we would point out that the New King James has strayed far here from its stated purpose to be a mere language update of the Authorised Version. (Indeed, the New King James has once again followed the New American Standard!) It has instead retranslated hundreds of passages and, we are persuaded, with less spiritual insight. We must defer to the wisdom of the Authorised Version in better rendering the original meaning of this verse.

| 2 Corinthians 10.5

But we would now examine the New King James Version in 2 Corinthians 10.5. The Authorised Version correctly renders that verse as follows:

Casting down **imaginations**, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

The New King James retranslates this passage thus:

Casting down **arguments** and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Notice that the translators of the NKJV have changed the word **imaginations** into **arguments**. The Greek word λογισμος (*logismos*) properly means reasonings, as indicated in the margin of standard editions of the AV. In a sense, it could mean either imaginings or arguments; thus, the astute translator will need to rely on the context of the passage in order to render the word correctly.

The context of the passage is easily determined by the second branch of the verse: 'bringing into captivity **every thought** to the obedience of Christ'. The passage is speaking about the inner machinations of the carnal mind which oppose Christ and His Word. Given that this is the case, we must understand the word *logismos* here as referring to 'imaginings'

rather than outward spoken arguments. Accordingly, the Authorised Version has better rendered the word.

| Colossians 3.2

We now examine Colossians 3.2. The Authorised Version renders the verse as: ‘Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth’.

The New King James renders this verse as: ‘Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth’. Note that the New King James has retranslated the word ‘affection’ to ‘mind’.

The Greek could literally be ‘mind those things which are above’, but ‘mind’ does not really adequately translate the Greek word φρονεω (*phroneō*) as it is here used. The affections, indeed, the whole bent of the soul and heart, are implied in this word. We now happily defer to the great British Puritan, John Owen, in his explanation of this word, as found in *On the Grace and Duty of being Spiritually Minded*:

φρονησις is the principal power and act of the mind. It is its light, wisdom, prudence, knowledge, understanding, and discretion. It is not so with respect to speculation or ratiocination merely, which is διανοια or συνησις, but this φρονησις is its power as it is practical, **including the habitual frame and inclination of the affections also**. It is its faculty to conceive of things with a delight in them and adherence unto them, from that suitableness which it finds in them unto all its affections. Hence we

translate φρονεω sometimes to ‘think’,—that is, to conceive and judge, Romans xii.3; sometimes to ‘set the affections’, Colossians iii.2—to have such an apprehension of things as to cleave unto them with our affections; sometimes to ‘mind,’ to ‘mind earthly things,’ Phil. iii.19, which includeth that relish and savour which the mind finds in the things it is fixed on. **Nowhere doth it design a notional conception of things only, but principally the engagement of the affections unto the things which the mind apprehends.**²⁵

Thus, we would judge, with John Owen, that the NKJV’s rendering of Colossians 3.2 is not adequate; that to the contrary there is very good reason why the Authorised Version has correctly rendered this passage ‘Set your affection on things above’. The Greek word indeed means a ‘minding’, but it is, as Dr Owen notes, a minding with ‘the habitual frame and inclination of the affections also’.

| ‘Thee’, ‘thou’, ‘ye’, and ‘you’ versus ‘you’ and ‘you’

A major problem comes in the New King James Version where they have indeed modernised the language but to the detriment of clarity. We refer to the NKJV’s modernisation of the words ‘thee’, ‘thou’, and ‘ye’. The New King James simply uses ‘you’ for all three of these words, as well as for ‘you’.

In so doing the clarity of the original Greek and Hebrew is lost because, in fact,

the original languages have distinct forms of the singular and plural pronouns as indicated by the use of ‘thou’, ‘thee’, ‘ye’, and ‘you’ in the English of the Authorised Version. ‘Thou’ is second person **singular** in the nominative case, ‘ye’ is second person **plural** in the nominative case. ‘Thee’ is second person **singular** in the objective case, and ‘you’ is second person **plural** in the objective case.

The differences in these words become crucial in some important passages of Scripture.

| *Isaiah 7.14*

The Authorised Version correctly translates this verse as, ‘Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel’.

The rendering of the New King James Version is almost the same: ‘Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel’.

Initially, it would appear that there is no difference. However, there is an important difference because the New King James Version uses ‘you’ to mean either ‘you (singular)’, or ‘you (plural)’. A person reading the NKJV would not be clear on whether the prophet is speaking to King Ahaz alone or to all Israel (and in the context of this prophecy to us as well).

However, in the Authorised Version, were the prophet translated as speaking to Ahaz alone, the word ‘thee’ would be used,

and not ‘you’. Hence, it is manifestly clear in the AV that the prophet is speaking to all Israel.

The use of ‘thou’ and ‘thee’ and ‘ye’ was already dying out in the days of the Authorised Version translators, as is evident in Shakespeare’s plays. However, the translators of the Authorised Version wisely chose to retain these forms **for greater clarity and closeness to the Greek and Hebrew**. Thus, the reader who exerts but a little effort in learning these words is rewarded with a clearer sense of what the passage is speaking about. We would now consider a verse of greater doctrinal and eternal import.

| *John 3.7*

The Authorised Version says: ‘Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again’. The New King James Version has: ‘Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again”’.

The Authorised Version is abundantly clear in this passage: ‘Nicodemus, I say to you personally and individually that all of you—you and all your brethren, indeed, all of mankind—must be born again’; ‘I said unto **thee, Ye** must born again’. The Saviour here makes it manifestly clear that ‘except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’ (verse 3).

The New King James, on the other hand, using the same pronoun for both you singular and you plural, makes one assume that Christ is only speaking to Nicodemus and that He is telling him that he alone must be born again.

What if a lost sinner were to open his Bible and gaze upon this one verse alone? Could it not be a matter of eternal importance which version of this verse he saw? Would it not be all-important that he know that not only Nicodemus, but also he himself, must be born again?

But we would now look at Luke 22.31–32, and how the translation of ‘thee’ and ‘you’ critically impacts the meaning of that verse.

| Luke 22.31–32

The Authorised Version says: ‘And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren’.

The New King James Version (1982 edition) has: ‘And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren”’.

In the New King James it could appear that the entire passage is speaking to Peter alone. It could appear that Peter alone was going to be sifted as wheat and fall backward for a time. It could appear that, after this time of backsliding, he would then be used to strengthen his brethren.

However, this is **not** what the passage is saying. This is where the Authorised Version is far superior to the NKJV. In its use of the word ‘you’ as a second person plural, in

exact accordance with the original Greek, the Authorised Version makes it clear that **all** the Apostles were going to be sifted as wheat. But then the Lord tells Peter that He is going to convert or turn Peter back, and when Peter is then converted he is to restore and strengthen his brethren.

This passage teaches us the importance of the Gospel ministry: that it pleases the Lord to use broken instruments of the dust, fallen instruments, to restore others. In this day in which often the Gospel ministry is despised, we believe a proper understanding of this verse to be all-important.

But also, it is very important that the English reader of the Scriptures have in his hands a version that differentiates between the singular and plural of the second person pronouns. We have only listed a few of the verses where this is critical; the article *What today’s Christian needs to know about the New King James Version*²⁶ also lists the following verses where such a distinction is important: 1 Kings 9.5–6, Matthew 5.39, 6.4–7, 11.23–24, 18.9–11; Mark 14.37–38, Luke 9.41, 17.21; John 14.9–11; 1 Corinthians 3.16–17, 6.19–20; and Philippians 2.5, with others.

| Problems with capitalisation in the New King James Version

The New King James Version (as seen in the American 1982 edition²⁷) has taken upon itself to capitalise the pronouns which refer to Deity, which initially seems good. However, there is a problem in rendering the

Scriptures in this way because there are verses where it is not always clear whether the pronoun refers to man or to God. Thus, for the translator to take upon himself to capitalise pronouns necessarily entails his **interpreting** the passage. This can also occur if the translator is too quick to capitalise every instance of the word 'spirit'. We now give some examples.

| *Psalm 37.23*

The Authorised Version says: 'The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way'.

The New King James Version has: 'The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way'.

It is obvious here that the New King James Version has **interpreted** this verse to make the Lord delight in the good man. However, it could be that the verse means that it is the good man who delights in the Lord. Indeed, this is what the Psalm tells us in verse 4, where the Psalmist commands his reader to 'delight thyself also in the LORD'.

Additionally, the verse could well mean **both**. It could mean both that the good man delights in the Lord, and that the Lord delights in him.

We submit that, because of cases like this, it is better to follow the practice of not capitalising the pronouns for Deity, so that, in case the pronoun can be taken in two ways, the reader is free under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to make the judgment for himself as to what is intended by considering prayerfully the context.

| *James 4.5*

In the Authorised Version we read: 'Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?'

The New King James has: 'Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?"'

The question here is, does the Greek word for 'spirit' (which is not capitalised in Greek) refer to the Holy Spirit, as the New King James has rendered it? Or could it instead refer to the regenerate nature of the born-again man which also lusts for righteousness, in accordance with John 3.6, which tells us 'that which is born of the Spirit is spirit'? In other words, the new creature, the new man, is spirit, in the image of Christ, Who is a spiritual man (1 Corinthians 15); and that new nature which is spirit is born of the Holy Spirit, who lusts after righteousness. Which of the two does James 4.5 speak of?

Or for that matter, and we think more probably, is the verse perhaps speaking of the sinful machinations of the old man, and his lustings after the things of the flesh?

Again, we think it better to follow the Authorised Version's example in being very judicious about not capitalising the pronouns which refer to Deity and in being cautious about capitalising the word spirit.

| *2 Thessalonians 2.7*

The Authorised Version reads: 'For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way'.

The New King James has: ‘For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way’.

The New King James here has rendered the word for iniquity somewhat more literally, which can be good, having rendered it ‘lawlessness’ which indeed is what the Greek word says. It has also translated the word ‘let’, which formerly meant ‘to hinder’, as ‘restrain’, which is more easily understood by modern readers.

However, the NKJV has capitalised the word for ‘he’. It makes it clear that the translators hold to the view that the ‘he’ spoken of is God. Most of the persons who hold this view believe that this is the Holy Spirit, Who will at some point be taken out of the world with the church in a pre-tribulation rapture.

However, this is not the only understanding of the passage; indeed, prior to the nineteenth century most Protestants viewed the passage in a different way, and there are many Protestants (such as this author) who yet hold to this older view. They apply this verse to the Caesars of Rome, who through the Providence of God held back the revealing of the man of sin, namely, the Pope of Rome. Those who hold to this view believe that it is not one particular man who is the man of sin, but rather that the man of sin is an **office**—the Pontifex Maximus, who has claimed power to change the laws of Scripture with his purgatories, penances, new modes of worship, new feast days, worship of Mary and the saints with all its attendant idolatries, and so on, thus totally

undermining the doctrine of salvation and bringing many into a strong delusion to their eternal ruin and perdition. (I am a former Roman Catholic myself and do not have a particularly favourable opinion of that institution!)

It should also be noted that other views are held regarding the Lord’s Second Coming, many of which arise from an interpretation of this verse.

Not capitalising the personal pronoun leaves the passage open for interpretation. It leaves it open as to whether the restrainer is the Holy Spirit or some other power. To its credit, the New King James (at least in the 1982 edition) appends a footnote in which it acknowledges that the pronoun could be in lower case. But certainly its rendering of the passage sets forth one particular view over all others, and thus is highly interpretative.

We again submit that it is best to refrain from capitalising the pronouns that seem to refer to Deity, lest we foist an interpretation upon the text which perhaps is not the right one.

| *Isaiah 53.9*

The Authorised Version correctly renders this verse as ‘And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth’.

‘And he made his grave with the wicked’: yes, it was **Christ** Who made His own grave. Christ says, ‘Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but

I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father' (John 10.17–18).

Christ laid down His life. No man took it from Him. Indeed, the Greek says no **one** took it from Him. He laid it down and He took it up again. It was He even Who, with the Father from all eternity, determined into which grave His body would be laid and what death He would die. It is He Who upholds all things by the Word of His power (Hebrews 1.3), and it is He Who of His own personal sovereignty agreed with the Father as to all of the details of His death which He would undergo.

Accordingly, we must say indeed that it was **Christ Himself** Who made His grave with the wicked, as part of His own humiliation, that He might pay in full the debt of shame which we owed God for our sins. This is literally what the original language, the Hebrew, says: '**he** made his grave with the wicked'.

But the New King James, actually changing the word in the original language, says instead 'And **they** made His grave with the wicked' (although the 1987 edition does append a marginal note that admits that the original language says 'he' and not 'they'). Once again, the New King James seems to have come somewhat under the nefarious influence of the New American Standard, which incorrectly renders the passage 'His grave **was assigned** with wicked men', even though the Hebrew will not allow of this translation. The Hebrew literally reads 'And he gave (or appointed) with the wicked his grave'. The Hebrew verb נתן (*natan*) in this

passage is in the qal (active), not the niph'al (passive). Thus, 'was given' or 'was assigned' is altogether incorrect; the passage must be literally understood as 'he appointed with the wicked his grave', which is translated more simply as 'he made his grave with the wicked' in the Authorised Version.

We have said that the NKJV appears to have come under the influence again of the NASB because '**they** made His grave with the wicked' corresponds much more closely in meaning with the '**he was assigned** a grave with the wicked' rendering of the NASB, than it does with the actual 'he appointed with the wicked his grave' of the original Hebrew.

Most importantly, the New King James here has altered the wording of the original language, and in doing so has robbed the church of an important truth. The sovereign Christ decreed to lay down His life; no one, not even the Father, could take it away from Him if He were unwilling. This same sovereign Christ ordained with the Father all the details of His own death, including the specifics of how He would be crucified with the wicked. This, by the way, is how we understand the words 'made his grave with the wicked'. We believe that this means that He decreed that He would die the death of the wicked, with wicked persons at His side, He being crucified with two thieves, one on each hand.

| *Titus 3.10*

The Authorised Version correctly reads 'A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject'. The Greek word

for heretic is ἀρετικός (*hairetikos*), which is indeed the very word from which we get heretic. Although in classical Greek ἀρεσις (*hairesis*, heresy) refers to a divisively partisan spirit, yet the overall use of that word in the New Testament indeed refers specifically to one who causes division with false or heretical doctrines.

Yet the New King James translates the verse ‘Reject a **divisive** man after the first and second admonition’. This alteration does indeed change the doctrine of the text. The Authorised Version’s rendering, which is the correct one, limits the power of church courts to disbarring only those who are doctrinally heretical from the Lord’s Table. However, as the New King James renders it, the church could well claim power to excommunicate anyone who was simply hard to get along with.

It is true that most modern lexicons list the word *hairetikos* as meaning factious. However, this certainly was not the case in the past, in better days. We happily defer in this instance to the wise exegesis of this passage that John Calvin gives us:

10. Avoid a **heretical man**. This is properly added; because there will be no end of quarrels and disputes, if we wish to conquer obstinate men by argument; for they will never want words, and they will derive fresh courage from impudence, so that they will never grow weary of fighting. Thus, after having given orders to Titus as to the form of doctrine he should lay down, he now forbids him to waste much time in debating with **heretics**...²⁸

Matthew Henry begins his discussion of Titus 3.10 with exactly the same understanding of the word, prefacing his remarks with these words:

Here is the fifth and last thing in the matter of the epistle: what Titus should avoid in teaching; how he should deal with a heretic; with some other directions.²⁹

Matthew Henry goes on to prove that ‘heretic’ is the only understanding of the term that will fit the context. Paul has just told Timothy in verse 9 to ‘avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain’. In verse 11, Paul says of such a man that he ‘is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself’. Such ominous terms certainly would not be applied to a man who was merely factious or divisive. Paul is here specifically addressing those of the Ebionistic heresy, the Judaizers. He is saying that they are heretical, and that after a mere two admonitions, Titus should have nothing to do with them.

Modern men, with their lexicons, have altogether overlooked the **context** of this passage, and as well have failed to read the sound writers of old like Calvin and Matthew Henry. We cannot regard Calvin and Henry as deficient in their Greek! Again, **in order to understand the New Testament use of a term**, the exegete must himself be one who is soundly grounded in the doctrines of the Scripture, so as to understand how the term is being used in the context of Scripture.

Thus, we must confidently affirm that the modern interpreters are wrong. *Hairetikos* here in Titus 3.10, as seen by the context of the term, plainly refers to a **heretical**, and not a merely divisive, man. Thus, Paul only grants to Titus the church power to exclude heretical persons, not merely divisive people who may be hard to get along with.

Having seen a number of cases of the abuse of power by church courts of some American churches in the United States, I can assure the reader that we certainly do not wish church courts to be granted the kind of unbridled, subjective power indicated by the NKJV. In many situations in church government which I have observed, church members who have caused trouble for the church authorities by simply asking too many questions have been excommunicated for ‘contumacy’ or rebellion. While we grant that fomenting divisions in the church in the fashion that Korah (Numbers 16) did merits church discipline, we do not grant that everyone who simply is hard to get along with or who asks the church elders too many difficult questions deserves to be cast out of church communion. Yet we would judge that this is what possibly could be construed by the translation of the New King James in this passage.

The New King James’s translation is not warranted by the New Testament use of the word *hairetikos*. Indeed, the NKJV itself translates cognate forms of the same word as this one properly, as a form of heretic or heresy, in other passages (as in 2 Peter 2.1).

Before we leave discussion of this verse, however, we must point out that once again

the New King James translators appear to have come under the influence of the New American Standard. The NASB renders the verse ‘Reject a **factionous** man after a first and second warning’. Factionous and divisive are synonymous. They do not mean heretic, as indeed the original word in the Greek in its New Testament context does.

NKJV departures from the Textus Receptus, where it follows the Critical Text instead

As a final note, we must observe the following disturbing characteristic of the New King James, namely that in certain passages it has plainly departed from the Textus Receptus and instead opted to follow the Critical Text, contrary to what it has claimed. We have confirmed the NKJV’s departures from the Textus Receptus in the following passages: 2 Corinthians 3.14, 2 John 7, Acts 19.9, Acts 19.39, Philippians 2.9, and Revelation 6.11. We now give four examples of this departure.

Acts 19.9

AV: disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

NKJV: reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus

The difference here is again in the Greek text followed. Both the Textus Receptus and the Greek Patriarchal Text include the Greek word *τινος* (*tinος*) after the name Tyrannus, meaning literally, ‘a certain Tyrannus’. Even

the Hodges-Farstad Majority Text has this reading. The Nestle-Aland/UBS Critical Text omits *tin*os, and the New King James similarly omits the word ‘one’ or ‘certain’. Again, the New King James has departed from the Textus Receptus, instead following the Critical Text, without a word of explanation anywhere.

| 2 Corinthians 3.14

AV: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; **which** vail is done away in Christ.

NKJV: But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, **because** the *veil* is taken away in Christ.

We have highlighted the word that the New King James has changed from the Textus Receptus, ‘which’ to ‘because’. The difference here is caused by the Greek word, which in some editions of the Greek is ὁ τι (*ho ti*) and others ὅτι (*hoti*). The Textus Receptus in all editions reads the former; the Critical Text and the Greek Patriarchal Text of the Greek Orthodox Church read the latter. (The Patriarchal Text is likely the reading of the majority of extant Greek manuscripts. The Textus Receptus may be following a minority reading of the extant Byzantine manuscripts here.)

Although the difference is a subtle one, we must ask ourselves: why has the New King James here departed from the Textus Receptus without documenting this in the marginal notes? Why indeed has it departed from the Textus Receptus at all, given its

stated purpose was to follow it? According to this purpose, these alternative readings should have been noted in the marginal notes, with the reading of the Textus Receptus in the actual text.

| Philippians 2.9

AV: Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him **a** name which is above every name

NKJV: Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him **the** name which is above every name

Again, we have highlighted the word in question, ‘a’ or ‘the’. The difference is because of the reading of the Greek text employed. Textus Receptus and the Greek Patriarchal Text have ὄνομα (*onoma*), ‘name’, whereas the Nestle-Aland/UBS Critical Text has τὸ ὄνομα (*to onoma*), ‘the name’. Again, the New King James has departed from the Textus Receptus with no notation of the fact whatever.

Given that the Greek Patriarchal Text follows the Textus Receptus here, it is probable that ‘a name’ is, in fact, the majority reading; yet the New King James has here inexplicably opted to follow the Critical Text instead.

| Revelation 6.11

AV: And **white robes** were given unto every one of them

NKJV: Then **a white robe** was given to each of them [1987 edition of the NKJV says ‘And’ instead of ‘Then’].

Again, the difference here is in the Greek text employed. All editions of the Textus Receptus read ‘white robes’, whereas the Greek Patriarchal Text and the Nestle-Aland/UBS Critical Text read ‘a white robe’. It is possible that the Textus Receptus employs a minority Byzantine reading, but again we must ask: why has the New King James departed from the Textus Receptus without a single notation of that fact?

The listing here given of departures from the Textus Receptus underlying the AV by the New King James is by no means comprehensive. There may be many more. Some of the readings may be taken from other editions of the Received Text, but the question arises, why?

In some instances, I found some deviations from the Textus Receptus upon which the Authorised Version is based, where the NKJV followed Stephanus 1550 or the Critical Text instead. None of the deviations mentioned in this article, however, are found in Stephanus. In each of these cases, the New King James deviated from **any** version of the Textus Receptus. However, in the cases where the New King James varied from the Textus Receptus underlying the Authorised Version, perhaps to follow Stephanus, we must ask ourselves: why did they do this, when the NKJV was supposed to be a mere language update of the Authorised Version? Why, then, did the translators not consistently follow the Textus Receptus basis of the Authorised Version?

But, as we have seen above, the New King James not only deviates from the Textus Receptus basis of the Authorised Version: it

deviates outright from **any** edition of the Textus Receptus.

There are many other translational problems in the New King James

There are many other translational problems in the New King James, but time forbids our going further into them. Suffice to say that we recommend to the reader the excellent work on this matter, *Three Modern Versions* by Alan J. MacGregor.³⁰ Mr MacGregor in thirty pages very carefully scrutinises the many translational problems of the New King James Version.

Conclusion

The New King James Version originally purported to be a modern language update of the Authorised Version. However, in the end it has not proven to be this at all. In Isaiah 11.3, Zechariah 9.17, Luke 22.31–32, Romans 5.1–5, Isaiah 53.9, Psalm 45.13, and many other verses—as also in its transliteration of the word *hades* instead of using the word ‘hell’—the New King James to the contrary demonstrates itself to be a new translation and sadly an inferior one at that. The doctrinal truth and power of the originals, we submit, does not come through this translation.

Not only that, it also, with its marginal notes and critical apparatus, has wrongly condemned the Textus Receptus and held forth the modern versions of the Greek text to be supposedly better, when these texts to

the contrary are greatly flawed. Indeed, in some instances, as we have seen, the NKJV follows the Critical Text instead of the Textus Receptus.

In conclusion, we must say: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN (Daniel 5.25). The New King James is weighed in the balances and found wanting. We must conclude that ‘the old is better’ (Luke 5.39). The Authorised Version has been proven faithful: it faithfully renders the doctrinal teachings of the originals. It is based upon

the Providentially preserved and authentic original language texts.

Jeremiah 6.16 ‘Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls’.

1 Thessalonians 5.21 ‘Prove all things; hold fast that which is good’.

May the Lord bless that which has been written in conformity to His mind and Spirit.

Appendix

A brief critical review of the modern Byzantine Majority Text: why its readings should not be footnoted in an English translation of the Scriptures

As we briefly noted in our last article, the editors of both the Hodges-Farstad and Pierpont-Robinson Majority Texts primarily relied upon the text critical apparatus of von Soden’s Critical Text of 1913.³¹ Herman Hoskier, a famous British textual critic, reviewed von Soden’s Critical Text and published his findings in the *Journal of Theological Studies* in 1914.³² In his article in the *Journal*, Hoskier documented how the von Soden Critical Text was ‘honeycombed with errors’.

Two of the principal errors Hoskier found in the von Soden text were: (1) a failure to account for all the evidence, particularly of important Byzantine manuscripts with which Hoskier was familiar (and which von Soden claimed to have collated), and (2) a failure to take any note at all of the Byzantine lectionaries, that is, the readings of Scripture that were to be read in the church services of the Byzantine or Orthodox Churches. The lectionary readings are important because, in the first place, they are the readings which the church felt were indeed the authentic ones which should be read to their flocks in their worship services. Secondly, the lectionaries comprise fully one-fourth of the manuscript evidence we have today. Thus, a version of the Greek New Testament that ignores the lectionary readings cannot claim to be the reading of the majority.

I myself undertook a brief critical review of some of the variants in the Majority Text Gospels, using the von Soden Critical Text, the Textus Receptus, the Greek Patriarchal Text (the official Byzantine version of the Greek Orthodox Church) and the UBS Critical Text with its textual apparatus. My goal was to find twenty errors in these variants, which I believed would constitute a significantly high number. Starting in Matthew, by the time I reached the tenth chapter of John I had analysed sixty-two variant readings from the Textus Receptus and found twenty-two which proved to be in error. By comparing them with their readings and footnotes, I was able to confirm that these twenty-two variants are actually errors in the von Soden text, which errors have also found their way into both the Hodges-Farstad and Pierpont-Robinson Majority Texts—thus, the Majority Text was wrong in twenty-two of these sixty-two variants, a very high percentage of error indeed! In each error, the Majority Text agreed with the von Soden text.

In all cases, I found that the von Soden text, and the Hodges-Farstad and Pierpont-Robinson Majority Texts with von Soden, had either failed to collate completely the Byzantine evidence extant, or that they had failed to note the lectionary evidence, or both. The following two examples of such neglect should give the reader a good idea overall of the kinds of errors which have now wended their way from the von Soden Critical Text into both the Hodges-Farstad and Pierpont-Robinson Majority Texts.

Before we consider the errors, we would have the reader consider indeed that even the omission of one word in the Word of

God is significant. In both the passages below the words left out by the Majority Text are such as impact the meaning of the verse significantly.

| *Matthew 6.18*

The standard editions of the Authorised Version and the Textus Receptus read ‘and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly’. The Hodges-Farstad and Pierpont-Robinson Majority Texts, with von Soden, omit the word ‘openly’. They thus read the text as ‘and thy Father who sees in secret shall reward thee’. Both the Hodges-Farstad and the von Soden Critical Text indicate that, according to them, the overwhelming majority of Byzantine manuscripts omit ‘openly’. Indeed, they make it appear that the Textus Receptus stands alone in its inclusion of the word against all other Byzantine manuscripts.

However, the UBS Critical Text in its apparatus shows that the Byzantine manuscript evidence is actually divided: part include and part exclude. Moreover, the UBS Critical Text apparatus shows that there is significant Byzantine lectionary support for the inclusion of the word ‘openly’; and indeed, **the official lectionary of the Greek Orthodox Church supports the inclusion of the word**. As would be expected given the official lectionary’s inclusion, the Greek Patriarchal Text, which is the official Greek New Testament of the Orthodox Churches, also includes the word ‘openly’.

Although we by no means commend the Greek Orthodox Church as a church, given its many idolatries and departures in worship from the Apostolic practice (as well

as departures in doctrine), we nonetheless contend that the Greek Orthodox Church are indeed the masters of the eastern Byzantine Greek text of the New Testament and of the Septuagint, these being their texts. The Orthodox have maintained monasteries where manuscript copying was their speciality, going back to the ninth century AD. Particularly this was so in their monasteries on Mount Athos,³³ where thousands of Byzantine manuscripts were copied. We contend that the Greeks themselves, particularly their monks, are peerless in the knowledge of their own text. Moreover, the Orthodox Byzantine text is a static and fairly reliable one, because of the emphasis upon tradition and faithfulness to tradition within that church.

Accordingly, we consider it most significant that the Greeks include ‘openly’ in their official lectionary, which is the version of the Scriptures which is read in their churches. We would deem it strongly supportive of the Textus Receptus’s inclusion of ‘openly’ in Matthew 6.18 that both the Greek Patriarchal Text and the official lectionary of the Greek Orthodox Church have that reading.

Thus, the Hodges-Farstad, the Pierpont-Robinson and von Soden texts are wrong in stating that there is nearly universal support in the Byzantine manuscripts for the exclusion of ‘openly’. They have failed to note all the evidence, particularly the lectionary evidence, and they have failed in particular to note the strength of the witness set forth by the Greek Orthodox Church, its official lectionary, and its official edition of the Byzantine Greek text, the Patriarchal Text.

The exclusion of the word ‘openly’ is indeed significant. The Father does not simply reward His children. He rewards them openly, in the view of the whole world, to the praise of His own glory and cause in the world. By the Lord’s rewarding of His children’s secret prayers openly, even the wicked must confess that there is indeed ‘a God in Israel’, they having seen with their own eyes the fearful answers of the Most High to the humble prayers of His dear children.

| John 10.8

The Authorised Version, with the Textus Receptus, reads ‘All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers’. But the Hodges-Farstad and Pierpont-Robinson Majority Texts omit ‘before me’, making the passage read ‘all that ever came were thieves and robbers’. Von Soden in his text actually includes ‘before me’, but in his critical apparatus he indicates nearly universal Byzantine support for the omission. To its credit, the Hodges-Farstad apparatus indicates minority Byzantine support for the inclusion, though it claims majority support for the exclusion. It then opts to exclude the words, even though the majority of early Church Fathers who quoted this text included ‘before me’, as indicated in the UBS Critical Text apparatus.

But even more importantly, both von Soden and Hodges-Farstad have ignored the lectionary evidence. The UBS Critical Text apparatus indicates significant lectionary support for ‘before me’, **including the official lectionary of the Greek Orthodox Church**. Not surprisingly, the official New Testament of the Greek Orthodox Church,

the Patriarchal Text, includes the phrase. Thus, once again the Majority Texts, with the von Soden text, find themselves at odds with those who are the masters of their own text, the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Again, the omission of the words 'before me' is significant. Not merely all those who had come posing as shepherds were thieves and robbers, but those who had come before Christ were such. That is, those who had come in their own name, not holding forth the Christ promised in the Scriptures—these were such as stole away salvation from the hearts and minds of those who heard them. They were such as held themselves out as deliverers of the church, whereas the true prophets of God had always held Christ before the view of the people. Thus, those who came before Christ but held themselves forth as anointed ones who should be revered of the people were thieves and robbers.

These two errors, of the twenty-two that I found, illustrate the sort of mistakes that have been uncovered in my very cursory comparison of the von Soden text, the Majority Texts, the Textus Receptus, the Greek Patriarchal Text, and the Byzantine evidence as set forth in the 4th edition of the UBS Critical Text apparatus.

In conclusion, the von Soden Critical Text of 1913 was riddled with errors, and many of these errors have found their way into the Hodges-Farstad and Pierpont-Robinson Majority Texts, making both these editions unreliable. Therefore, it was not responsible of the editors of the New King James to include readings from the Hodges-Farstad Majority Text in its marginal notes. We must fault the editors of the New King James for attempting to draw the people of God away from the tried and true, the Textus Receptus, which is indeed the Providentially preserved text of the church.

Endnotes

1. Revelation 17.4 and Revelation 17.8. In Revelation 17.4, following Erasmus's early editions, the Textus Receptus has the word ἀκαθαρτητος (*akathartētos*) for 'uncleanness'. The correct spelling of the word is ἀκαθαρτα (*akatharta*), with the addition of two words, so that the phrase reads τα ἀκαθαρτα της. Robert Stephanus notes this variant in his 1550 critical edition of the Textus Receptus. He notes the correct spelling in the margin as having been found in what he calls manuscript 1 (the Complutensian Polyglot) and manuscript 15. (The spelling *akatharta* is the one followed in all other extant manuscripts of Revelation as well.) This misspelling, noted by the Reformers, has no meaningful impact on the text whatsoever. In

Revelation 17.8, the Textus Receptus, following Erasmus's early editions, has καπερ εστιν (*kaiper estin*)—'and yet is'. Again Stephanus notes this variant in his margin, with the correct spelling as found in his manuscripts 1 and 15 και παρεσται (*kai parestai*), 'and is at hand'. (*Kai parestai* is the spelling of all the other extant Greek manuscripts.) There is a slight impact in meaning here, though not that great when it is considered that the text is speaking of the beast who is the eighth, who had not yet as of John's day come but who nonetheless is of the seven kings and therefore is in a sense already present. The Reformers were not given to changing their text willy-nilly (as do the moderns)! Dr Edward Hills notes the variant found in

Revelation 17.8 on page 202 of his famous work *The King James Version Defended* (Des Moines, IO, USA: Christian Research Press, 2002). One can also get a copy in pdf of Robert Stephanus's famous critical version of the Textus Receptus from Sola Scriptura Publishing at www.solascripturapublishing.com.

2. The possible 'interpolation' referred to is found in Acts 9.5–6: 'it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do'. Edward Hills, on page 201 of *The King James Version Defended*, notes that these words are in none of the Greek manuscripts but are present in the Latin, and that Erasmus indicates that he drew them from Acts 26.14 and the Latin. Robert Stephanus notes the omission of the words 'it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks' from his manuscript 11, and all of verse 6 from all his manuscripts. It appears that the Vulgate possibly brought these words over from Acts 26.14. Be that as it may, the words are still true, being as they are universally attested to in all the manuscripts of the Greek in Acts 26.14, although they are possibly not in the original Apostolic text in Acts 9.6.

We are not persuaded that it is beyond doubt that Acts 9.6 is indeed an interpolation. The reading of Acts 9.6 as found in the Textus Receptus does indeed occur in the Latin Vulgate, the Old Italic, the Syriac and the Ethiopic, and is cited thus by several early Fathers. (See Constantin Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum Graece, Editio Septima Critica Minor* [Leipzig, Germany: Adolphus Winter, 1859], under Acts 9.6, page 34 of the book of Acts.) However, if indeed this passage is an interpolation, it is very innocuous, given that it is but the reiteration of what is said in the parallel passage of the same history, by the same inspired author, from the same book of the Bible. Accordingly, we may confidently affirm that, whether this text is an interpolation or not, nonetheless the Textus Receptus is still a faithful reproduction of the divine originals in every **meaningful** jot and tittle.

3. See 'hades', dictionary.com.

4. I agree with the latter interpretation.

5. *Gehenna* was a place of burning next to the brook

Kidron just outside Jerusalem. Sad to say, it was an evil place, in the shade of two mountains; one was the Mount of Olives, said to be a place of darkness where men sacrificed their own children in the fire. The second book of Chronicles 28.3 tells us that Ahaz caused his children to walk through the fire there; 2 Kings 23.10 tells us that Josiah defiled Topheth (as the valley of the son of Hinnom was also known), so that 'no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech'. It is the prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 30.33, who portrays the valley of the son of Hinnom or Gehenna as an image of hell, where God punishes the wicked with everlasting flames for ever.

6. See David Cloud, *The Apostasy of the English Revised Version*, www.wayoflife.org/otimothy/tl09000c.htm. Mr Cloud does an admirable job here of detailing the history of the heretical views of both Robertson Smith and Vance Smith, and how they were both welcome on the Committee for the translation of the Revised Version.

7. 'Is Hell Eternal?', *Religious Tolerance.org*, www.religioustolerance.org/hel_etera.htm. The Web site cites as the source of its proof as to the annihilationist views E.W. Fudge and R.A. Peterson, *Two views of Hell: A biblical and theological dialog* (Downers Grove, IL, USA: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 21.

8. If indeed the New King James translators did not outright consult the translators of the NASB, nor indeed examine their translation, yet nonetheless the high number of times where the NKJV departs from the Authorised Version and adopts the same or very nearly the same reading as the NASB betrays their sympathy for and intellectual alignment with the philosophy and methodologies of the NASB translators. We must also note that, as this article points out, in some instances the NKJV departs from the Textus Receptus to follow the modern critical Greek text.

9. See Jonathan Edwards, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God', *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/sermons.sinners.html.

10. 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble' (Psalm 46.1). Psalm 46.5 (referring to the church), says 'God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early'.

11. For an account of Perkins, his life and work, see *The Works of William Perkins* at www.williamperkinsworks.co.nr.

12. For more on Richard Sibbes, his writings, and especially his work *The Bruised Reed*, a work on the life of the struggling Christian, see www.puritansermons.com/banner/sibbes4.htm.

13. William Ames was a British Puritan who settled in The Netherlands and who became a professor at the University of Franeker in The Netherlands. He was a systematic theologian but, despite the often intellectual nature of his works, was also warmly experimental and deeply searching. For more on Ames, see www.apuritansmind.com/William%20Ames/WilliamAmes.htm.

14. Goodwin was a unique Puritan preacher with a keen philosophical mind but nonetheless very experimental religious fervour, sometimes with a decided Scripturally mystical streak. Goodwin is unparalleled for exposition of the mysteries of Christ in his works like *Christ our Mediator* and *Christ Set Forth*. (These works may be found in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, volume 4, from Sovereign Grace Publishers [Lafayette, IN, USA].) For a fascinating review of Goodwin, his mind, his experimental mindset and his interesting writing style, see the comments of Alexander Whyte, a Scottish minister, at www.puritansermons.com/reformed/whyte01.htm.

15. William Guthrie's *The Christian's Great Interest* (published by the Publication Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1951) is unparalleled for its homely and easy-to-understand, but thorough, description of what true conversion is and what the life of grace is. For more on Guthrie, see Alexander Whyte's comments at www.puritansermons.com/ruth/rwhyte17.htm.

16. John Owen is particularly famous today for his exposition of systematic doctrines of theology, but in my opinion his greatest work is his *Exposition of Psalm 130* (in *Works of John Owen*, volume 6, edited by William Gould [London, England: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966, pp. 323–648], which sets forth the poor, doubting Christian who struggles for the assurance of his own salvation.

17. By covenant of works, we do not refer per se to the covenant made with Moses on Sinai, although that covenant was full of the threatenings of the covenant of works and was very shadowy and dark as to the covenant of grace. Rather, by covenant of works we refer to the covenant made with Adam and in him with us also, he being our Federal Head. Man was commanded in Adam to perpetual, perfect obedience, and the threat was made that, in the day that we should sin, dying we should die. But the Tree of Life held forth an implied promise of eternal life for Adam and for us, had Adam stood fast in that covenant during a time of probation. However, in that Adam sinned and in him all of us also (Romans 5.12—see marginal note), we are all by nature under the curse of eternal death, except we be brought savingly to an interest in Christ. See the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 7, Article 2.

18. For the student who wishes to learn more about Eusebius of Caesarea, his Semi-Arian views, his preeminence with Constantine and his influence over the Greek New Testament text of his time, we would refer you to the following works: Philip Schaff and Reverend Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, volume 7; *Eusebius Pamphilus: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine* by Eusebius Pamphilus (New York, NY, USA: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890), as published by Logos, Inc., on CD. Also see Frederick Nolan, *On the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate or Received Text of the New Testament* (London, England: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1815), pp. 29–38, where Nolan details the influence that Eusebius exercised over the text of his time. Finally, for a detailed glimpse of Eusebius's Semi-Arian views from the words of his own mouth, we would refer you to Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, vol. 1, W. J. Ferrar, trans. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Book House, 1981), sections 147 and 226 especially. Page xxv of the introduction provides a summary by the editor of several cogent passages that fully demonstrate the subordinationism and Semi-Arianism of Eusebius.

19. Henry Martin, *A Critical Dissertation upon the Seventh Verse of the Fifth Chapter of St John's First Epistle* (London, England: William and John Innys, 1719), pp. 74–76. Martin explains how the Greeks were called in to help draft a statement in defence of the

Trinity. The Latins used 1 John 5.7 as a proof text at that Synod, and that Synod's deliberations were also published in Greek. Shortly thereafter, the Greeks began to reincorporate 1 John 5.7 in their official text of the New Testament and in their lectionary readings.

20. As for instance Article XVIII of the Belgic Confession, which says that Christ is 'of the seed of Abraham, since **he took on him the seed of Abraham**', which can only refer to Hebrews 2.16. So also the Westminster Larger Catechism, which directly references Hebrews 2.16 in Scripture footnote *h* to the answer to Question 39. The Westminster Confession of Faith also references Hebrews 2.16 in footnote *l* to Article 2 of Chapter 8, on 'Christ the Mediator'.

21. Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), p. 172.

22. Francis Brown, ed. *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Lafayette, IN, USA: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., 1981), p. 926.

23. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Book House, 1993), 7.376.

24. Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (Old Tappan, NJ, USA: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 4.73.

25. John Owen, *The Grace and Duty of being Spiritually Minded*, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 7 (Carlisle, PA, USA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), p. 269.

26. 'What today's Christian needs to know about the New King James Version' (London, England: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1995).

27. Some British editions of the New King James Version (e.g., the 1982 Revised Authorised Version) do not capitalise pronouns referring to Deity.

28. Calvin, 21.340–341.

29. Henry, 6.875–876.

30. Alan J. MacGregor, *Three Modern Versions*

(Salisbury, England: The Bible League, 2004).

31. Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, eds., 'Introduction', *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), p. xv. 'For the evidence of the Majority Text, the present edition rests heavily upon the information furnished by Hermann von Soden in his *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*'. Robinson and Pierpont also relied on the von Soden text. 'The present Byzantine/Majority Text was jointly edited and refined by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont during the period 1976–1991. The primary textual apparatuses utilized in the preparation of this edition were those of Hermann Freiherr von Soden and Herman C. Hoskier. These same apparatuses were utilized by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad in their "Majority Text" edition of the Greek New Testament'. (William G. Pierpont and Maurice A. Robinson, 'Introduction', *The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Byzantine/Majority Textform*, 1st ed. [Roswell, GA, USA: The Original Word Publishers, 1991], p. xiii.) Although the quote as to its using the von Soden text comes from the 1991 edition, I used the 2005 edition of the Pierpont-Robinson Majority Text in my critical analysis of it in the sixty-two readings spoken of later in this article.

32. Herman C. Hoskier, 'Von Soden's Text of the New Testament', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 15 (April 1914):307-326.

33. From Mount Athos's own Web site on their history: 'In the 5th century AD, the first monks came to Mount Athos, who disappointed from the boredom of everyday communal life, found this beautiful and uninhabited place ideal for worship [sic] their God' ('Athos History', *Mount Athos*, www.inathos.gr/athos/en/AthosHistory.html). R. D. Dedman writes on the Patriarchal Text, referencing the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus's Web site: 'Monks—the scholars of their day—first came to Mount Athos **as early as the fifth century**... The work of copying and transcribing manuscripts has continued unabated at Mount Athos over the centuries. From the mid-ninth century this work included the transcribing of the very oldest manuscripts' (R. D. Dedman, 'Why the "Patriarchal" Text of Greek New Testament', *The Greek New Testament*, kainh.homestead.com/files/noteptxt.pdf).