

STAND FIRM AGAINST KJV-ONLYISM

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Stand firm.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 16:13** “Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong.”
 - ii. Over the past several years I have preached a number of messages under the theme of “Stand Firm.” The focus has been on current popular false teachings that are the biggest threats to the church. We’ve looked at annihilationism, atheism, evolution, pluralism, sexual liberation, Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Roman Catholicism, the misuse of glossolalia, critical race theory, oneness Pentecostalism. My goal has been to help you identify these false teachings, and ground you in the truth so that you don’t get pulled in. My goal is for you to be alert, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, and be strong.
 - iii. Today we are going to look at another false teaching that causes a lot of problems for Christians: KJV-Onlyism. The KJV refers to the King James Version of the Bible, originally published in 1611.
2. What is KJV-Onlyism?
 - i. Not the same as someone who simply prefers the KJV.
 - ii. Two basic doctrines ([Dr. Mark Ward](#)):
 1. The KJV is the only trustworthy English Bible translation.
 2. The KJV is the only English Bible based on the pure/preserved/perfect Hebrew and Greek texts.
 - iii. Other ideas in KJV-Onlyism:
 1. Only the KJV is the word of God.
 2. All other versions are so corrupt that they should not be used, nor called the Word of God.
 3. Most KJV-Onlyists argue that the Greek text behind the KJV, is itself inspired and inerrant, and the KJV is the only version that accurately translates it.
 4. A few KJV-Only advocates believe that the KJV itself is the product of inspiration, and is perfect and without error (Peter Ruckman). It is an improvement of the original autographs. A re-inspired Bible. Where the Greek and the KJV disagree, disregard the Greek.

II. PROBLEMS WITH KJV-ONLYISM

1. Not the first English translation.

- i. Many KJV-Onlyists believe that the KJV is superior because it is the first English translation of the Bible, and all others since have been corrupted.

But in truth the KJV was not the first English translation, and it was based on previous English translations.

ii. A Short History of the English Bible

1. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek.
2. The Latin Vulgate by St. Jerome was the official Christian Bible from the late fourth century on.
3. The Wycliffe Bible. John Wycliffe translated the first English Bible 1382. At the time, English Bibles were against the law, so many of his followers were executed – burned at the stake with their Bibles hanging around their necks. All of Wycliffe's copies were handwritten. Even though it could take up to a year to copy a single Bible, thousands were produced. The weakness of this translation was that it was translated from the Latin Vulgate rather than the original languages.
4. The Tyndale NT. William Tyndale translated the first English NT from Greek in 1526. It was also the first English NT in the age of printing (rather than hand-copying).
 - a. Tyndale's work is considered a masterpiece.
 - b. He coined several words that found their way into the common English vocabulary: Passover, peacemaker, scapegoat, beautiful, etc.
 - c. It was still unlawful to translate or read the Bible in anything other than Latin, so Tyndale was arrested and burned at the stake.
5. The Coverdale Bible. In 1535, Tyndale's assistant, Myles Coverdale, printed the first complete English Bible. He used Tyndale's NT, and added the OT.
6. The Matthew Bible. In 1537, John Rogers published a complete English Bible. It was called the Matthew Bible to conceal the translator's identity, since it was still illegal to translate the Bible into English.
 - a. Had 2,000 notes.
 - b. Sometimes called the "Wife-Beater's Bible" because of the marginal note at 1 Peter 3:7: "If [the wife] be not obedient and healfull unto [her husband, he] endeavoureth to beate the feare of God into her..."!
 - c. In 1555 he was the first martyr to be burned at the stake under Mary Tudor (Bloody Mary) – the Catholic Queen.
7. The Great Bible was published in 1539. It was called the Great Bible because of its large size. This was the first English Bible to be printed

with the King's permission (King Henry VIII). The king ordered that a Bible be placed in every church.

8. The Geneva Bible (1557).
 - a. Due to persecution by Bloody Mary, many protestant scholars fled England to Geneva, Switzerland, where the Reformer John Calvin was living.
 - b. There they produced the Geneva Bible.
 - c. First English Bible translated entirely from Greek and Hebrew.
 - d. First translation done by committee.
 - e. First English Bible with verse divisions.
 - f. Had thousands of study notes.
 - g. Pilgrims used this Bible and took it to America when they landed at Plymouth.
 - h. Shakespeare's Bible.
 - i. Enormous influence on the KJV.
 - j. In the original preface to the KJV, the Bible is quoted several times, and every time it is the Geneva version, not the King James.
 - k. Fifty years after the KJV, the Geneva Bible was still the top English Bible.
9. The Bishop's Bible (1568).
 - a. The Bishops in England wanted a Bible that was not so Calvinistic.
 - b. Produced by bishops.
 - c. The translators of the KJV were directed to base their Bible on the Bishop's Bible.
10. Rheims-Douai Bible (1582).
 - a. The Catholics wanted their own English Bible.
 - b. In the preface, the readership was intended to be priests and other dignitaries; the masses were discouraged from reading the Bible. If they were going to read it, it had better be this one.
 - c. Based on the Latin Vulgate rather than the Greek and Hebrew.
 - d. The Council of Trent (1544) decreed that Bibles should be translated from the Latin, not the Greek. This was not changed until the 1960s at Vatican II.
11. King James Bible (1611).
 - a. King James the VI of Scotland became King James the I of England.
 - b. The church leaders wanted to replace the Geneva Bible because of its marginal notes – Calvinistic, anti-Catholic

(stated that the Pope was the antichrist), and anti-monarchy (against the divine right of kings; said that Christians should obey God rather than government when the two collide).

- c. Sources: A revision of the Bishop's Bible; referenced the Hebrew and Greek, the Tyndale NT, the Coverdale Bible, the Mathew's Bible, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, even the Catholic Rheims NT.
- iii. The KJV should not be chosen because it was the first English Bible, because it was not. It came after many previous versions, and it was based on those previous versions.

2. Underwent many revisions.

- i. Published in 1611.
- ii. Underwent four major revisions: 1629, 1638, 1760, and 1769.
- iii. The KJV Bible that people read today is not the 1611, but the 1769 by Dr. Benjamin Blayney.
- iv. Blayney's revisions fall into five categories:
 - 1. Italics to identify words that are inserted into a passage to clarify, but are not found in the original text. This 1611 did not do this consistently.
 - 2. Textual changes. For example:
 - a. Mk 5:6 Read "he ran" instead of "he came."
 - b. Mk 11:8 Read "branches off the trees" instead of "branches of the trees."
 - 3. Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.
 - a. "Sinnes" was changed to "sins."
 - b. "holy Ghost" was changed to "Holy Ghost."
 - 4. Changes to the marginal notes and references.
 - 5. Corrections to printing errors. Examples:
 - a. Matthew 4:25 great great great
- v. In all, from the 1611 edition to the 1769 edition which is used today, over 100,000 revisions have been made.
- vi. If you are KJV only, then why don't you use the original KJV?
- vii. If the KJV is the best translation, then why did it require over 100,000 revisions?

3. Based on inferior manuscripts.

- i. The KJV-Only debate started on May 17, 1881.
- ii. The NT of the KJV is based on the Greek Textus Receptus (TR), by Desiderius Erasmus, a Dutch scholar, published in 1516.
- iii. This was the first printed (not hand-copied) edition of the Greek NT.

- iv. Erasmus is to be highly regarded for his work. Martin Luther, a priest in Germany, was saved while studying Erasmus' Greek NT, and then inspired to spark the Protestant Reformation in 1517.
- v. However, there were weaknesses in the Textus Receptus because Erasmus based it on six manuscripts, all of them dating from the twelfth century, none of them containing the entire NT.
- vi. From 1611 to the mid-19th century, many more manuscripts of the NT were discovered, and many of them were much, much older than the manuscripts used by Erasmus. Obviously, the older and closer in age that a copy is to the original, the more reliable.
- vii. So, the Church of England decided to make a revision of the KJV, called the Revised Version, that would follow the language and style of the KJV, but it would update some of the archaic words, and it would rely upon the most ancient Greek texts (a Greek text published by B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort).
- viii. The Revised Version differed in hundreds of places based on the more ancient Greek manuscripts. .
- ix. Even though none of the changes resulted in doctrinal differences, the Revised Version was hotly resisted by some. Since then, new English Bible translations have been criticized and rejected by KJV-Onlyists.
- x. One of the main criticisms of the modern translations is that they are different from the KJV. But the KJV is not the standard. The original autographs are the standard. The question is not What does the KJV say? but What did Paul write? What did Luke write? To get that answer, we must use the most ancient, the most reliable manuscripts. This is the advantage of the modern translations over the KJV.
- xi. Most KJV-Onlyists argue that the Greek text behind the KJV is itself inspired and inerrant, and the KJV is the only version that accurately translates it. But an interesting fact to point out is that the KJV is not even based on Erasmus' Textus Receptus. After the TR was published, other scholars revised it. Robert Estienne printed four editions, and then Theodore Beza published four more editions. The KJV is based not on Erasmus' TR, but primarily (not totally) on a combination of Beza's third edition of 1598, and Estienne's 1550 edition, and these two do not fully agree! 111 times the KJV translators went with Beza, 59 times they went with Estienne, and 67 times went with some other text!
- xii. Then, in 1881, a scholar by the name of Scrivener produced another Textus Receptus in an attempt to reconstruct the Greek text underlying the KJV of 1611, since the KJV was not based on only one TR. This TR became known as Scrivener's. Scrivener's Greek text is now used in all KJV-Only Bible colleges and seminaries where they study and teach Greek. The funny

thing is that Scrivener himself was not a KJV-Only advocate. He was one of the translators of the Revised Version of 1881, and he found many faults with Greek behind the KJV. His purpose was not to produce the perfect Greek text, but to produce the Greek behind the KJV so it could be shown where the Revised Version departed from the decisions made by the translators of the KJV!

- xiii. Now, I don't want to alarm you by causing you think that the Bible is unreliable, that we don't really know what the originals say. That is not true. Of the many variants in the manuscripts, the vast majority are insignificant, and none of them affect a Christian doctrine.
- xiv. The central argument in this debate is should Bible translators only use the Textus Receptus, which is based on late manuscripts, or should it rely on all of the existing Greek manuscripts, giving weight to the oldest ones. Whether you are studying the works of Plato, or Aristotle, or the Bible, the vast majority of scholars agree with the latter.
- xv. Again, KJV-Onlyists criticize modern translations because they "cut out" verses. But they don't. There are places where they omit certain verses and words that are found in the KJV, but that's only because they are not found in the earliest, most reliable Greek texts. And in the end, that's what matters.

4. Difficult to read.

- i. **1 Corinthians 14:8-9** "8 In fact, if the bugle makes an unclear sound, who will prepare for battle? 9 In the same way, unless you use your tongue for intelligible speech, how will what is spoken be known? For you will be speaking into the air."
 - 1. Edification requires intelligibility (Dr. Mark Ward).
- ii. But the KJV is not intelligible.
- iii. Written in Elizabethan English, which is no longer fully intelligible.
- iv. The KJV is on a 12th grade reading level, whereas translations like the CSB are on a seventh grade level.
- v. Examples:
 - 1. **Hebrews 12:18 (KJV)** "he is able to succor them that are tempted."
 - a. Succor means "help."
 - 2. **Proverbs 11:15 (KJV)** "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure."
 - a. Proverbs 11:15 (CSB) "If someone puts up security for a stranger, he will suffer for it, but the one who hates such agreements is protected."
 - 3. **John 3:16 (KJV)** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

- a. **John 3:16 (CSB)** “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”
- vi. Dr. Mark Ward speaks of two different types of words in the KJV that make it difficult to understand:
 1. “Dead words” (archaic; obsolete words no longer present in modern English).
 - a. Mingled people (Jer. 25:20) from the nethermost (1 Kings 6:6) ate snuffdishes (Ex. 25:38) and palmerworm (Joel 1:4) every quarternion (Acts 12:4). Their sheepcote (2 Sam. 7:8) were in shambles (1 Cor. 10:25). Naught (Prov. 20:14) to worry. We outwent (Mk. 6:33) to bewray (Isa. 16:3) the breeches (Ex. 28:42) with putrifying sores (Isa. 1:6) on the sackbut (Dan 3:5). For those who think this is but succothbenoth (2 Kings 17:30), vain janglings (1 Tim. 1:6) and superfluity of naughtiness (James 1:21), winefat (Isa. 63:2) and wist (Joshua 8:14) will unstopped (Isa. 35:5). Trow (Luke 17:9) the wreathen (Ex. 28:14) and gay clothing (James 2:3) over the clift (Ex. 33:32) and churl (Isa. 32:5) the checker work (1 Kings 7:17) down the firepans (2 Kings 25:15) and on hungerbitten (Job 18:12) hoar frost (Ex. 16:14). The latchet (Mark 1:7) to the lowering (Mt. 16:3) has occurrent (1 Kings 5:4) and even munition (Isa. 29:7). The mortar (Num. 11:8) pavement (Esther 1:6) is below the almug (1 Kings 10:12) and pressfat (Hag. 2:16) the sheaf (Gen. 37:7). Understandeth what thou readeth?
<https://www.evangelicaloutreach.org/kjvterms.htm>
 2. “False friends” (words with changed meanings). These are words we don’t know we don’t know.
 - a. Dan Corner “Did you know that in the King James Version of the Bible the word “advertise” means “tell,” “allege” means “prove,” and “conversation” means “behavior”? That “communicate” means “share,” “take through” means “be anxious,” and “prevent” means “precede”? That “meat” is a general term for “food,” and “anon” and “by and by” translate Greek words which mean “immediately”?”
<https://truediscipleship.com/thirteen-facts-about-kjv-onlyism/>
 3. There are at least 827 words and phrases in the KJV that have changed their meaning or are no longer used in our everyday language.
- vii. Because it is difficult to read, this leads to two big problems:
 1. Increases misinterpretation and misapplication.

- a. If we want people to interpret and apply the Bible correctly, then we need to give them a translation they can understand.
- 2. It discourages readership.
 - a. According to a study by the American Bible Society in 2017, people cite two reasons for not reading the Bible: 1) Too busy; 2) They are intimidated because they don't know what the Bible means.
 - b. I have a friend that I used to work with, who was a Christian and regularly went to church. He went to a church where they used the KJV. He told me that he didn't read the Bible because he couldn't understand it. Not surprised!

5. The translators of the KJV would not be KJV-Onlyists.

- i. In the preface to the 1611 KJV ("The Translators to the Reader; eleven pages long), the translators...
 - 1. Admire the work of previous translators of English Bibles. "And to the same effect we say, that we are so far off from condemning any of their labors that travailed before us in this kind,... that we acknowledge them to have been raised up of God for the building and furnishing of his Church, and that they deserve to be had of us and of posterity in everlasting remembrance."
 - 2. Declare that all previous English translations are the Word of God, even if they contain minor errors. They give the example of the word of King James. If King James gives a speech to Parliament, then that is the king's word. If the speech is then translated into French, even with minor errors, it is still the king's word.
 - 3. Acknowledge that a perfect translation is impossible since the translators are not like the apostles, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit.
 - 4. Admitted that the KJV was imperfect with their marginal notes. They carefully examined the original languages, but where they were unsure of how a word or phrase should be translated, which was often, they included a marginal note.
 - 5. Supported the use of multiple translations. "As Saint Augustine saith, that variety of Translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of the Scriptures."

6. Causes division.

- i. One of the main problems with KJV-Onlyism is that it causes division. It destroys Christianity unity.
- ii. Unity was the main thing Christ prayed for in John 17 (v. 20-21).
- iii. We are commanded to pursue unity. Ephesians 4:3 "making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

- iv. But KJV-Onlyists destroy that unity.
- v. It's one thing to say that you prefer the KJV. That's okay. It's okay even if you think the KJV is the most accurate translation. I think the CSB is more accurate than the NLT. But to say that the KJV is the only Bible that is the word of God, and all other translations are corrupt and should be rejected, this is too far. This is majoring on the minors.
- vi. Remember that there are first, second, and third-order doctrines and issues in the church. Bible translation is not a first-order, or a second-order issue.
- vii. At Church Acadiana, we are not going to divide over this issue. If you like the KJV, fine, but don't condemn others for reading modern versions.

III. HOW TO CHOOSE A GOOD TRANSLATION

1. Based on the best manuscripts.
 - i. The KJV is based on the Textus Receptus, which is based on manuscripts that were produced in the 12th century or later.
 - ii. Most modern translations are based on the Nestle-Aland Greek text, and the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament. These are based on all available Greek manuscripts, many as early as the fourth or fifth century.
 - iii. The NIV was made by over a hundred scholars from five English speaking countries, from many different denominations. It is the number-one selling Bible in the world, surpassing even the KJV.
 - iv. The CSB was made by one hundred scholars from multiple countries and denominations who are committed to Biblical inerrancy. It is ranked six on the best-selling translations list.
2. Easy to read.
 - i. Again, with all of the "dead words" and "false friends" in the KJV, it is very difficult to read.
 - ii. I prefer the CSB, NIV, or NLT.
 - iii. There are other good English translations, such as the NASB and the ESV, but they are much harder to read.
3. Not a paraphrase.
 - i. A translation attempts to tell the reader what the original text says, a paraphrase attempts to tell the reader what the passage means. A translation attempts to translate the original text in understandable English. A paraphrase is an author rewriting a verse in his own words. They don't reflect the actual text, but rather the author's interpretation of what the text means. They can be good resources, but not good for daily Bible reading or preaching. Examples of popular paraphrases include the following: J. B. Phillips; Wuest; The Living Bible; and the Message.
 - ii. Instead, it is best to use an actual Bible translation.
 - iii. Two types of Bible translation:

1. Formal equivalence, or word-for-word.
 - a. Stresses being highly literal to the text.
 - b. For every Greek word, the translators used an equivalent English word.
 - c. Examples: NASB, ESV, KJV.
 - d. Problems: Not easy to read.
 - i. KJV: 12th grade reading level
 - ii. NASB: 11th grade
 - iii. ESV: 10th grade
2. Dynamic equivalence, or thought-for-thought.
 - a. The translators stress readability and comprehension.
 - b. They strive to match literal meaning of the text, while using language that is meaningful to a modern audience. Instead of using a single English word to match a Greek word, they might use two or three English words where no single English sufficiently captures the meaning.
 - c. For example:
 - i. A few places in Scripture the OT Hebrew literally reads, "God's nostrils became enlarged." We don't really have a good word-for-word translation for that in English. What it means is "God became angry."
 - ii. In Matthew 1:18, the Greek text literally reads "Mary was having it in the belly!" Meaning: "Mary was found to be with child."
 - d. Examples: NIV, NLT.
 - e. Much easier to read:
 - i. NIV: 7th grade
 - ii. NLT: 6th grade
 - f. Problems: The translators employed more interpretation. If the translator's interpretation is wrong, then it can lead one astray.
3. Optimal Equivalence: A combination of formal and dynamic equivalence.
 - a. Stresses both being highly literal, and highly readable.
 - b. Where a word-for-word translation is clearly understandable, a word-for-word translation is used. When a word-for-word translation might obscure the meaning for a modern audience, a thought-for-thought rendering is used.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that the Bible is inspired. What is meant by “the Bible”? Not a particular copy or translation, but the original autographs. All copies and translations will be imperfect.
2. The KJV was a great translation that God used in a great way. But since its printing over four hundred years ago, the English language has drastically changed, thousands of more ancient manuscripts have been discovered, and our knowledge of the language and culture of the Bible has greatly increased. For these reasons, the KJV is no longer the best or, in my opinion, even a good translation to use. It is better to use a modern translation like the CSB that you can understand.
3. In the end, whether you stick with the KJV or use a modern translation, the best translation is actually the one that you read.