

The Historical Development of Protestant Bibliology

Protestant Bibliology Before 1860

- Inspiration—Divine Dictation accepted descriptor for how inspiration was accomplished; not limited to the original autographs and extended to vernacular languages via translation. Translations = the word of God (*Westminster Confession of Faith*)
- Preservation—believed in the promise of preservation:“. . . being immediately inspired by God, and, **by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages**, are therefore authentical . . .” (*WCF*)
- Inerrancy—no formal doctrine of inerrancy; the scriptures were believed to be inerrant because they are the word of God; the Holy Spirit bears witness with the believer’s spirit that the scriptures are infallible. (*WCF*)
- Textual Criticism—began with the notion the scriptures were the inspired word of God and of Divine origin; what God gave by inspiration was preserved and “kept pure in all ages” and was available to be translated into the vernacular languages of the nations.



Protestant Bibliology is Attacked

Between 1860 and 1900 the Protestant view of the Bible was attacked and rewritten in response to the following forces: 1) Evolution, 2) Liberalism/Modernism, 3) German Higher Criticism, and 4) Rationalism. The attackers point out the existence of *variant readings* in the manuscript copies as part of their attack on Protestant Bibliology. The existence of *variant readings* leads to a confining of inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy to the nonexistent original autographs. It was widely thought by defenders of the Bible at the time that the scriptural standard for preservation required “verbatim identity.” This understanding combined with the undeniable existence of a multitude of *variant readings* in the body of manuscripts became Mt. Impassable for those wishing to hold to historic Protestant Bibliology.



Protestant Bibliology is “Revised” After 1860

Instead of holding the line in the face of attack, Protestant Theologians “revised” Protestant Bibliology according to terms set by their opponents. In an attempt to address the existence of *variant readings* the four doctrines noted above were altered in the following ways:

- Inspiration—was limited to the nonexistent original autographs; Divine Dictation is dropped and ridiculed as a descriptor for how inspiration was accomplished.
- Preservation—the promise of preservation was dropped from doctrinal statements.
- Inerrancy—formal doctrine developed that limited inerrancy to the nonexistent original autographs; took shape in a logical syllogism that meet the German Higher Critics on their own terms.
- Textual Criticism—was completely reworked starting with the rationalistic/naturalistic notion that the Bible is like any other book and should be treated in like manner to any work of antiquity. Replaced the text of the Reformation (*TR*) with a “new and improved” Greek text. Modern Textual Criticism is built on top of the Rationalistic suppositions of Westcott & Hort.

These “revised” points became the new Protestant Orthodoxy on the Bible and were carried forward into the 20th century by Fundamentalists in their doctrinal statements.



Option 1: Originals Only Position

Developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a reaction against the German Higher Critics and Rationalists. During this time doctrinal statements were rewritten to include the language “in the Originals Only” and dropped all references to preservation. This position confines inspiration and inerrancy to the nonexistent original autographs as a means of dealing with the *variant readings*. Has led some to deny that the scriptures promise their own preservation. Advocates argue that it is their job to reconstruct the Biblical text. Position is nonscientific and non-falsifiable, in the absence of the originals how does one know whether they have accurately reconstructed the text. Modern Versions existed since the Revised Version of 1881 but did not succeed in replacing the widespread use of the KJB by American Christians. After WWII the Neo-Evangelical movement grew in popularity and heavily promoted the new Protestant Orthodoxy on the Bible (“Originals Only”) as well as Modern Versions. Position is of no practical consequence and cannot be maintained by faith in God’s word.



Option 2: Faith for Faith’s Sake Position

Formed in the late 1960s and early 70s as a reaction against Option 1 and the sudden popular use of Modern Versions, and their divergent readings from the traditional King James text. Just as Option 1 was forged as a reaction to the attack on Protestant Bibliology in the late 19th century, Option 2 is a reactionary position against Option 1. By the time one gets to Option 2 they are two steps removed from the Protestant Bibliology that existed before 1860 as outlined at the top of the chart. This position pretends like *variant readings* don’t exist and insists upon plenary verbal preservation or the notion the preservation occurred with “verbatim identity” of wording. Some incorrectly insist that God re-inspired His word in English between 1604 and 1611 as a means of providing the “verbatim identity” of wording this view of preservation demands. Has the correct starting point, is consistent with the fideistic (believing) approach to Scripture; but carries the corollary between preservation and Inspiration too far. Refuses to acknowledge the textual/historical facts that no two Greek manuscripts (even Byzantine); editions of the *TR*, or printings of the KJB are exactly the same.



Option 3: Biblically Amended Position on Preservation (The Solution)

In light of the internal and theological problems created by Options 1 & 2 an amended position is necessary. Drops “verbatim identity” as the standard for preservation. If one allows the KJB to teach them about the *nature* of preservation they will conclude that demanding “verbatim identity” as the standard for preservation was overreaching to begin with. There are at least four Scriptural proofs found within the KJB that support this conclusion:

- 1) How the OT quotes OT
- 2) How the NT quotes the OT
- 3) How the NT quotes the NT
- 4) Comparison between II Kings 19 & Isaiah 37 (See notes for Lesson 43)

Observing these realities allows one to maintain their belief in the promise of preservation without overstating the facts. This Biblically revised position can still be maintained by faith in God’s word without abandoning the fideistic (believing) approach to Scripture. Maintaining this position allows one to hit a RESET button so to speak and return to a position on inspiration and preservation that is more in line with the Protestant Bibliology enunciated before 1860. This position is true to the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* and rids the discussion of unscriptural rationalistic presuppositions.

