

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE KJV?

First, let me concede that indeed, there is *nothing* “wrong” with the King James Version (KJV) of the bible. At least, nothing beyond what any other honest and best effort of true believers striving to honor God produces. And although the KJV is not my primary choice (and I don't use it to evangelize or teach), I do refer to it at times (along with many others) - and it is helpful to me when I do.

So, why all the controversy? What is the true “problem” surrounding the KJV?

Well, it isn't about the KJV at all. It involves those who claim the KJV to be the only *true* translation of the bible, that it *alone* is God's Word, and that it is, itself, God's *inspired* provision. These folks are known as King James Onlyists - and this heresy is labeled King James Onlyism (KJO will be used for both).

In its worst manifestation, the KJO argument attributes all other versions to Satan himself, characterizing them as Arian and other such things, and bringing the most vile accusations against the character of those who had part in their production and those who use them. I have seen and heard many un-Christian-like attitudes and attacks against anything and anyone not of KJV lineage.

If you are a mature believer and unfamiliar with this error, you may be scratching your head, wondering what all the fuss is about. After all, you believe you see the obvious and blatant flaws in such assertions and may be asking yourself, “What am I missing?” Relax - you're not missing anything.

It is not my intent to explore this issue in depth on this page. I have included some links at the end which provide exhaustive, more scholarly treatment which will confirm what you probably already know or suspect. You may find it beneficial to understand the controversy more fully; to gain confidence in your ability to properly represent the truth and refute the errors (Tit 1:9).

What follows are a few random thoughts on the KJO issue. They are not “organized” or complete or the most compelling by any means - just some of my “favorites.” You will find complete and irrefutable evidence that the claims of King James Onlyism are fraudulent at the links provided.

One major tenet of the KJO position is the claim that the KJV is a “literal” (word-for-word) translation, while the modern versions (particularly the NIV) are criticized as “thought” translations (with this strategic characterization tossed around as an epithet). But this argument is merely a specious attempt to justify the KJO heresy. If true, it would render all preaching and teaching of God’s Word (even employing the KJV as a base) as error also, since these efforts are likewise “thought translations.” Also, the significance of the argument is exaggerated and mischaracterized, so that any demonstration that a modern version strays from word-for-word translation is presented, ipso facto, as proof that the modern translation is heretical and the KJV alone is to be trusted.

Yet, an examination of the KJV itself against the original language reveals that it also fails as a word-for-word, “literal” translation - because *no* translation of the original autographs can truly be word-for word. It is impossible to translate from one language to another literally word-for-word because different languages do not always contain equivalent words, idioms, phrases and other literary devices. Those thoughts must then be translated using words which, as closely as possible, render the same meaning and intent. Beyond its now archaic language - and the barrier that presents as a practical matter - the KJV introduces difficulty due to its philosophical approach of attempting to translate word-for-word. Doing so can harm the greater purpose (example to follow).

Likewise, modern definitions and understandings of some words and phrases have changed so drastically that continuing to use the old grammar is a hindrance rather than a help to those seeking spiritual understanding. An example which immediately comes to mind is the word “suffer.” In the KJV, “suffer” means “to allow.” But that meaning is not associated with its common usage today. So when new generations read, “Suffer little children ...,” they are understandably (and unnecessarily) confused. We wouldn’t preach to Germans out of a Chinese bible so why force the KJV upon contemporary English folks?

I have often chuckled and commented to my wife under the leading of one who uses the KJV (not necessarily a KJO) when they read the text from the KJV and then proceed to explain and teach it using the exact language of the NIV! And they probably don’t even realize they just did that! If this argument for the KJV is valid, then all preaching and teaching of God’s Word must be stopped immediately! Each of us must be restricted to reading and speaking the literal KJV - *literally!* No paraphrasing or explaining allowed! That introduces errors!

But let me be clear: I am not at all condoning reliance upon paraphrase versions providing loosely-translated and amplified “thoughts” or “opinions” of the original autographs. Yet, such versions clearly identify themselves as such and serve

purposes other than that of scholastic study and deeper spiritual understanding. For such purposes, we must consult works which render the original thoughts in strict faithfulness to their original intent as best as can be determined - conveying as much of the original depth and insight, and remaining as rich and complete as the author's original, inspired writing as possible.

But word-for-word translation isn't inherently advisable or virtuous anyhow. Don't think so? Try understanding Job 36:33 from the KJV (context included):

Job 36:27-33 For he maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof: ²⁸Which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly. ²⁹Also can any understand the spreadings of the clouds, or the noise of his tabernacle? ³⁰Behold, he spreadeth his light upon it, and covereth the bottom of the sea. ³¹For by them judgeth he the people; he giveth meat in abundance. ³²With clouds he covereth the light; and commandeth it not to shine by the cloud that cometh betwixt. ³³*The noise thereof sheweth concerning it, the cattle also concerning the vapour.*

Even if you were weaned on the KJV, you may find that a bit challenging!

Which brings us to a final point on this facet of the issue: It is necessary that we understand a key component of the debate. Many reference works which serve as tools for the modern bible student are the same ones assembled, accepted and employed for centuries now. In particular, I refer to the Hebrew and Greek translations of the original autographs which are accepted as the "standard."

If, for example, you consult the Interlinear Bible or Strong's Dictionary or the many other accepted standards of reference which rely on Strong's word numbering, you will find that the original Hebrew word "yagiyd" which is translated as "sheweth" in the KJV does indeed "literally" mean "sheweth." But that's misleading - all that indicates is that at the time the KJ work was done, the best rendering of the original word in the contemporary language conveniently chosen to render it (King James English) was "sheweth."

I point this out because the KJOs use this to conveniently justify their position. They will take you to these tools which show that "yagiyd" literally means "sheweth" and then question your faith and commitment if you dare to substitute "shows" for "sheweth" in open rebellion against what you have just been shown is the true, "literal" translation of the original. But if the timing had been different and the effort undertaken by a different culture with a different language, today's

accepted standard would be entirely different. Yet, as I indicated in my opening, the result of the effort of the KJ translators was, as far as we know, as accurate and worthy at that time as the equivalent modern efforts are now.

However, no one uses the word “sheweth” any more and very few, especially of the newer generations and those to come, will understand what it means. That is simply because we have a modern word which conveys exactly the same concept and meaning. So why not use it? (This is, of course, just 1 example.)

The translation by the KJ scholars was just a snapshot in time undertaken by a mere slice of the world’s culture at that time. There is no way that that rendering can be for all time, for all people, the only translation to ever be accepted as accurate and legitimate (just as the equivalent modern efforts which have been undertaken will find themselves outdated at some point in the future, if the world is still in existence).

But again, to be clear, I am not disparaging the KJV for being inaccurate or illegitimate for those of the KJ culture. What I am asserting is this: While God’s Word does not change, modern culture/language does. Therefore, in order to convey the original unchanging truths accurately and effectively, the words employed to do so cannot be the ones which have since changed.

The only resolution to all this (short of finding a way to prevent language from evolving) would be for everyone to have a complete and accurate knowledge and understanding of the original languages of the bible - and that we should all read and understand copies of the original autographs only. Of course, we must realize that language evolved even over the course of the biblical writings, so that a mastery, say, of the Hebrew of Moses’ writings would not be exactly applicable to the writings of David or the prophets, for example.

Quite simply, the reason that contemporary translations are and will always be necessary is because the language of the older translations will become archaic and out of use, no longer relevant or understood. And these subsequent translations, faithful to the original autographs which do not change, will produce new results based on the most faithful and effective expression of the original thoughts in the contemporary language. The original word “yagiyd” is no longer rendered “sheweth” because the word “sheweth” is simply no longer in usage.

And please note that in all of this we have so far been considering only the English-speaking culture. Where do the non-English-speaking turn for *their* authorized versions? There are thousands of languages in the world - so no single translation into merely one language can be proposed as the only

“authorized” version without putting forth a correlated proposal: that the whole world must master whatever language is chosen for the bible translation.

This is precisely where the argument made by the KJOs falls apart. They want the KJV to be the final and eternal translation of the originals. Somehow, King James English must be the world’s universally accepted language - *and for all time!* But this is only for purposes related to the bible, of course. For even KJOs allow themselves to speak their “normal” language when not in church!

The modern translations faithfully translate the original into the modern language. When the result produces a word which is not what the effort to do so centuries ago produced, KJOs jump up and alert everyone to the “error” of the modern translation! And then, of course, there are the additional differences caused by modern, post-KJV discoveries and, dare we say it, some specific actual errors and ill-advised renderings by the KJV translators to be corrected.

But the KJOs plod on and, springing from the errors above, they offer another quite irritating argument against the modern translations. KJOs enjoy identifying errors in the modern versions by pointing out where they differ *from the KJV*. But, since when has the KJV become God's inspired, pristine standard - replacing the original autographs?! And says who?

Many widely distributed tracts trumpet the KJV's superiority to the modern “translations of Satan” by pointing out these differences without explaining that many (the *majority*) of them *fall in favor of the modern translation!* Because KJOs start from a predisposition that the KJV is God's infallible Word, they expect others to be convinced that the modern translation is always and axiomatically in error whenever some difference is found. Yet, many (not all) of those differences are clearly inconsequential to any unbiased mind anyhow!

Still, the reason that many of these differences are indeed corrections or improvements upon the KJV (not at all the blasphemy the KJOs would infer from that) is because modern translators have the advantage of older and more complete manuscripts than those used in the work of the KJV (discovered since then). Also, they benefit from ongoing study and debate which adds to and hones the existing, ever-growing body of knowledge. As long as this work continues (in true faithfulness to God and His Word), this will always be true.

For example, the KJOs point out all the “omitted” verses of the modern translations (less prevalent are “added” phrases) as proof that some conspiracy is afoot to corrupt the pristine KJV - but the verses omitted in the modern versions have been discovered to be missing in the more reliable originals we

now have. It was the KJV translators who “added” them, not the modern scholars who “omitted” them. Yet, the KJV scholars did not do so with some insidious motivation - they made their best, most honest effort to work with what they had at that time. The modern translators have merely done the same.

Next, the KJO folks claim that the modern translations (again, the attacks focus on the NIV) deprecate the blood of Christ, or the holiness of God, or the seriousness of sin (particularly sexual immorality and especially homosexuality). None of that is true (all that is needed is to truly examine the modern translations). The only way such characterizations can be assigned to the NIV or other faithful modern versions is to read them while wearing KJO glasses.

This is similar to one politician levying the accusation that his opponent “doesn’t care about children.” This stuff *actually happens* and I’m always immediately curious about how the politician is lying and twisting the truth; they are extremely creative at this! For example, it might turn out that he has just introduced legislation calling for 12¼” of reflective safety striping on bicycle helmets for all children, while his opponent’s plan required only 12”. Silliness!

Illustrating this beyond the point above: Politician #1 favors a DWI law which puts violators in jail for 20 years, while politician #2 submits legislation calling for 25 years and then criticizes his opponent for being soft on drunk driving. Then, someone else actually develops and implements a program (faithful to God) which causes folks to stop driving drunk, so that no one goes to jail for DWI anymore - problem solved! Not for those 2 politicians. Having lost sight of the goal, they criticize the man who solved the problem because not enough folks are being tossed in jail. They fail to notice that success has been achieved: no longer is anyone driving drunk! I think that if the modern translations (likewise faithful to God and His original, inspired Word) were employed in mass evangelization and multitudes were won to Christ as a result, KJOs would still condemn them and the folks who used them for God’s glory!

Next, many of the renowned commentators and scholars of old (prior to the modern translations and/or not realizing or concerned that their criticisms would be used “against” the KJV in this future debate) often pointed out errors and poor choices of translation in the KJV. If you delve into their respected works, you will find, again and again, their laments of poor judgment on the part of the KJV translators regarding a particular passage, verse or individual word choice.

Those criticisms then, are available to be appropriately considered and accounted for by subsequent translators (often, but not always, properly

influencing the modern versions). KJOs, of course, bristle at such a thought (that the KJV would require “correction” or “improvement” of any kind)!

Next, KJO folks love to refer to their coveted KJV as the “Authorized Version,” but it was simply “authorized” by a mere man: James, the presiding king of England (and Scotland) at the time. This is a neat deception for the unwary. Furthermore, the key motivation for commissioning the KJV was to put the Word of God into the people’s hands in a translation they could read and understand - and around which unity could be established. How ironic that the subsequent effort of others with similar righteous concern and motive should be impugned!

Finally, to reiterate a couple of salient points, if the KJV is indeed the only acceptable version, what are the French, German, Spanish or Swahili to use? Are they to be denied the true version of God’s Word simply because they communicate in the “wrong” language? And since language evolves over time (notice the differences since the 1611 issue of the KJV!), which version will we be using 20 millennia from now, if the world should still exist? The KJOs argue that everyone should learn and master King James English! To which, a reasonable response would be: “Why stop there? Shouldn’t we all learn the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek in order to read and understand the only *truly* inspired and inerrant version?”

In essence, the only *true* bible version is a collection of the original autographs, requiring everyone to master the ancient languages. But that introduces another problem: Who will teach us those languages to a level of exactness and completeness which guarantees our understanding will be united in accuracy? Rejecting that for its obvious foolishness, KJOs nonetheless face a different, yet also irresolvable dilemma: How and when was King James English established as the absolute, eternal standard? By whom? To suggest that everyone, forever, must master KJ English is just as inane as the suggestion above!

Anyway, how does universal use of the KJV ensure elimination of, or some degree of safeguard against error? And, if not in error itself, why was the KJV subsequently revised (4 major and numerous minor revisions, incorporating over 75,000 corrections - including the removal of the Apocrypha)? Finally, why do KJOs reject even the New King James Version (NKJV) which simply replaces unnecessary, archaic words with modern counterparts (does/doeth)? This cannot honestly be criticized for altering meanings - and cannot be denied to improve the effectiveness and benefit of conveying God’s Word. (KJOs claim that “ye” and “thou” differentiate “you all” and “you singular” which the modern “you” does not. Now *that* is definitely a compelling argument that the KJV was uniquely and solely divinely inspired among all other bible versions for sure!)

In any case, as one who has ministered to many jail inmates and others with poor education, I have had to learn to skillfully and accurately communicate the Word of God faithfully in the vernacular - subsequently steering folks as they are able to a more formal grasp and articulation of its truths. But the more formal or traditional offers nothing beyond that of a faithful modern rendition.

The bottom line is simply this: Are those in leadership and teaching roles truly interested in seeing folks come to know, understand and apply the truths of God's Word as effectively as possible - or are they more concerned about preserving nostalgia, or impressing the youngsters and newbies, or lording their knowledge and abilities vis-à-vis the KJV over those to whom it is a work in a foreign language? Will it be style - or substance?

In the end, we must remember that the goal is motivation to enthusiastic and proper application of God's Word in the lives of true believers. If the application is honoring of and pleasing to God, then the communicated truth was effective from the view of the only One who matters - notwithstanding that some are miffed when the lost are converted with "says" rather than "sayeth."

Here are just a few of probably hundreds of internet sites where you can find a much deeper, more complete and scholarly treatment of the KJO "controversy."

[Is the King James Version the Only Bible that a Christian Should Read? - Rich Deem](#)

[Which King James Bible? - A Remnant - Defending the faith - Good News Messengers Church](#)

[The Great Inconsistency of King James Onlyism - James May](#)

["Confessions of a King James Only Advocate" - My Journey through King James Onlyism - Fred Butler](#)

[Hip and Thigh - Examining the apologetics of King James Onlyism - Fred Butler](#)

[Field Guide to the Wild World of Religion - The King James Only Movement](#)

[Integrated Publishing - King James only controversy - David M. Williams](#)

[Lion of Judah - Christian Apologetics - KJV Onlyism is a False Teaching](#)

[Lion of Judah - KJVO page](#)

[Alpha and Omega Ministries - Christian Apologetics and Theology - KJVO](#)

[The Interactive Bible - KJVO](#)