
***Modern Version Failures.* By Charles Kriessman. Collingswood, NJ: The Bible For Today Press, 2014. 146 pp. Paper, \$14.00.**

This publication by a member of the Dean Burgon Society (DBS) is reviewed because of concern for the doctrine of inerrancy as it relates to the multiplicity of Bible translations. English Bible versions differ not only because of translation methodology but also by the chosen underlying original language texts. Presently, I lean toward the Majority Text following the arguments by Hodges, Pickering, G.H. Clark, and W.G. Crampton while also recognizing that there are many scholarly brothers who advocate the Critical Text. The translations that are surveyed by Kriessman are not ones based on the Majority Text, but it appears that he would find it as deplorable as he finds the Critical Text.

As a layman, I had hoped that this book would provide some concrete examples of deliberate doctrinal perversions occurring in the more popular Bible translations. Unfortunately, this book is itself a failure with regards to honesty and objectivity by alleging that all modern Bible versions inevitably lead to heterodoxy.

For a relatively short book, an inordinate amount of time is spent on “the battle for the mind” and “the whole armor of God.” This seems to be included for the purpose of filler and does not leave much space for the author to accomplish what he claims he will do—that is, analyze and assess major textual and doctrinal errors contained in four modern Bible versions (NIV, NASB, ESV, and CEV). It should be noted also

that there are numerous grammatical errors in the book, some of which are glaringly obvious (pp. 30, 36, 55, 79, 89, 91, and 95). The sentence structure is often cumbersome and weak arguments are overcompensated for by exaggeration and extremism. Also, some historical data and pertinent quotes lack documentation (pp. 91, 94, 105).

Kriessman's contention is basically that "corrupt" Greek manuscripts utilized in modern Bible translations diminish the veracity of some doctrinal proof texts and subsequently open the door to neo-orthodoxy, postmodernism, and heresy. But in his many verse-by-verse comparisons he merely rehashes many of the same arguments and "just-so" statements purported by many other KJV/*Textus Receptus* defenders over the years.

While there are some modern Bible versions that should be rejected for their blatant doctrinal corruptions (*The Message*, for example), the existence of modern translation errors and corruptions does not constitute a positive argument for the KJV, nor does it guarantee that "doctrinal failure" will result when consideration is given to any particular textual variant. Any English translation is still a translation, and even the underlying Greek text of the KJV has its own problems.

Kriessman does not engage the textual issue to a great degree other than to repeatedly insist that the *Textus Receptus* and the King James Bible are "doctrinally second to none" (pp. 80, 107), "unsurpassed" (pp. 81, 97, 106), "unexcelled in doctrine" (p. 81), "the best" (pp. 82, 96, 100), "supreme" (pp. 84, 96), "superior" (pp. 95, 97, 98, 110), and "unequalled" (pp. 99, 101, 109). The fact is, textual criticism and translation methods are subjects far more complex than Kriessman cares to admit, having already made up his mind that any deviation from the King James and the "traditional text" will inevitably result in "doctrinal failure" (p. 3). This is an oft-repeated assertion by the DBS, and Kriessman is perpetuating this charade. He makes many unqualified and extreme statements that should cause any reader to be wary of his position. One example should suffice: "What is being taught in the colleges and seminaries about the textual issues are total lies. The thoughts of the hearts of those teaching are only lies. The thoughts of the hearts of the students coming out are only lies" (p. 10).

Kriessman's sweeping generalization in asserting that all that is being taught in seminaries on textual criticism are "total lies" obviously cannot be sustained unless Kriessman is omnipresent and can see and hear what every professor is teaching at all times in every classroom. He likewise

claims for himself the attribute of omniscience when he informs us that the thoughts of the professors' hearts and those of their students "are only lies." Let us be reminded that only God knows the thoughts of the human heart (Jer 17:9-10). The book's credibility is tainted by such unsubstantiated claims and lack of sufficient documentation.

Many of Kriessman's arguments rest on the assumption that the authentic text is confirmed by its support of a particular doctrine. But this is the reverse of how one must proceed. We do not decide which Greek text is most reliable based on its conformity to orthodoxy. On the contrary, we get our theology from the plain words of Scripture, not Scripture from theological *a priori* arguments. Obviously, we would have no theology at all if God did not first provide us with special revelation from which exegesis can proceed. This is a major flaw in his reasoning.

To his credit, Kriessman rejects the heretical views of Peter Ruckman and Gail Riplinger concerning inspiration. He rightly maintains that only the autographs were divinely inspired (p. 48), and that the doctrine of inspiration does not apply to any translation (p. 49). He devotes almost an entire chapter as well as an appendix to denouncing the Ruckman/Riplinger position on the supposed "inspiration of the KJV." But if Kriessman is dogmatic that only the autographs are inspired then why does he automatically categorize every other English translation as inferior to the KJV simply because it is not identical to the KJV? If it is admitted that inspiration does not apply to the KJV, then it cannot follow that all modern versions are failures merely on account of their deviation from the KJV. Irrationality and circularity undermine Kriessman's thesis, since any modern version is eliminated out of hand even if it constitutes a legitimate translation using Kriessman's preferred texts (i.e., the Masoretic and *Textus Receptus*).

Despite the few legitimate criticisms of some modern Bible translations, there are numerous additional errors in the book which cannot be covered here. I do not recommend this book to anyone looking for help in the Bible version debate.

Nick Sabato