

THAT THOU MIGHTEST BE JUSTIFIED IN THY SAYINGS

* * * THEOLOGICAL RESOLUTION OF TEXTUAL VARIANTS * * *

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Soli Deo Gloria!

"God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged."
(Romans 3:4)

Introduction. God has promised to preserve His words (Ps12:6-7; Isa59:21; Matt24:35). In the N.T., those words have been providentially preserved in the traditional Greek text of the New Testament (i.e., the Textus Receptus). Where textual variants exist in manuscripts, the authentic reading is most often that found in the majority of extant Greek manuscripts. However, a small fraction of those variants that have been accepted into the Textus Receptus are without majority support in extant Greek manuscripts; in such cases the support for these readings usually comes from early versions¹ or citations from early Church writers. However, in the case of some of these variants the authentic reading can be resolved from purely theological considerations, since one of the variants would introduce a factual error or internal inconsistency/contradiction into the Scriptures, whereas the alternative would not. In such cases, it must be true that the reading that would not introduce a factual error or internal inconsistency/contradiction into the Scriptures is the authentic reading (Rom.3:4). Consider some examples of such cases in the sections that follow.

Matthew 1:7-8,10. "... and Abijah begot **Asa**, and **Asa** begot Jehoshaphat ... and Manasseh begot **Amon**, and **Amon** begot Josiah". The names "Asa" and "Amon" found in the Textus Rectus (and the KJV) are minority readings in extant Greek manuscripts; the majority of Greek manuscripts read "Asaph" and "Amos", respectively. However, these names appear in Matthew's genealogy of the kings of Judah descended from King David. Asa and Amon were indeed kings of Judah (cf. 2Chron14:1; 16:11-17:1; 33:20,25), and their appearance in the genealogy of Matthew is perfectly consistent with the genealogy found in 1 Chronicles 3:10-14. The O.T. record does not include an "Asaph" or an "Amos" as kings of Judah. To select "Asaph" and "Amos" as the correct readings, as the critical Greek text and some modern versions do, is to introduce errors into the Bible. Thus, "Asa" and "Amon" can be known to be the authentic readings from theological considerations alone.

Luke 2:22. "And when the days of **her** purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought [Jesus] to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord". The pronoun "her" found in the Textus Receptus (and the KJV) is a minority reading in extant Greek manuscripts; the majority of Greek Manuscripts read "their". However, this verse records the ritual "purification" of Mary "according to the law of Moses". If the reading "her" is correct, it is Mary alone who performed this ritual; if the reading is "their", the implication is that both Mary and the baby Jesus performed this

¹ As an example, the Comma Johanneum (i.e., 1Jn5:7) is found in very few extant Greek manuscripts, and those appear to be late. However, the Comma is found in >90% of all extant Latin manuscripts, which exist in far greater numbers than the Greek, many of which are very early.

ritual. This ritual is commanded in Leviticus 12:1-8. There, it is clear that it is the mother who has given birth to a male child who is unclean for forty days (Lev12:2-4). When the days of her purifying are completed, she must bring both a "burnt offering" and a "sin offering" to the priest in order to be declared ritually "clean" (Lev12:8). There is no mention of any offering required for the male child. The reading of "her", and not "their", is consistent with the requirement of the law of Moses. Furthermore, if "their" were the correct reading, that would mean that a sin offering was made on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ, which cannot be correct since He was "without sin" (Heb4:16). Thus, "her" can be known to be the authentic reading from theological considerations alone.

Revelation 22:19. "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the **book** of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book". The word "book [of life]" found in the Textus Receptus (and the KJV) is a minority reading in extant Greek manuscripts; the majority of Greek Manuscripts read "tree [of life]". However, this verse is the pronouncement of a curse upon those who would take away or "diminish ought from" the words of God (Deut4:2; i.e., modern textual critics?). What would this threat mean for one alive today guilty of this sin?

In the context of the eschatological future, the "tree [of life]" will exist on the "new earth" that will be created by God after the millennial kingdom, where it is said to be "for the healing of the nations" (Rev22:2,14). Consider in turn a believer and an unbeliever who die during the present dispensation. A believer could expect resurrection in order to participate in the millennial kingdom as part of the Bride of Christ, be granted entrance into the new earth, but then be denied access to the tree of life; this means he would die (which is inconsistent with the new earth being a place where there is "no more death"; Rev21:4). An unbeliever could expect resurrection at the Great White Throne Judgment (after the millennial kingdom; Rev20:11-15). Being an unbeliever, his name will not be found in the "book of life", and he will be "cast into the lake of fire" (Rev20:15). Thus, he will not enter into the new earth, so whether or not he is allowed access to the tree of life is a moot point. Both of these outcomes simply make no sense.

However, if the threat is to "take away [a person's] part out of the book of life", the meaning and intention is clear. One guilty of this sin will have his name removed from the book of life, and when he is resurrected to appear at the Great White Throne judgment he will be cast into the lake of fire. Indeed, this threat is consistent with similar ones found throughout Scripture (cf. Exod32:32-33; Deut9:14; 29:20; Ps69:28; 109:13; Rev3:5; 13:8; 21:27). Thus, since "book" is consistent with the whole of Scripture (and "tree" is not), it can be known to be the authentic reading from theological considerations alone.

Conclusion. The so-called science of modern textual criticism has developed a set of arbitrary rules to guide its decision-making process when faced with a textual variant. One of those rules is *proclivi scriptioni praestat ardua*, which means the harder reading is to be preferred. However, application of this rule often results in the critic preferring a reading that is just not sensible, or even introduces a factual error or an internal inconsistency/contradiction into the text of Scripture. For the Bible-believer, this is absurd. A textual variant that would introduce a factual error or an internal inconsistency/contradiction into the text of Scripture cannot be authentic. It must be rejected from theological considerations alone. This is not an arbitrary requirement, but one that honors the

testimony of Scripture that: 1) God "cannot lie" (Tit1:2) and "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas1:17), and 2) God's "word is truth" (Jn17:17) and "true from the beginning" (Ps119:160).