Burgon on Treating Textual Variants

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Tweet

The following is an excerpt from John William Burgon, *A Treatise On The Pastoral Office: Addressed Chiefly To Candidates For Holy Orders*. Or *The Revised Version Unvindicated: The Core Of Dean Burgon* (Westchester: Macedonia, 1883), pages 67-77. Available here, or as a download here. Burgon's views are explained more fully here.

> It is obvious that when we thus speak (defending verbal inspiration), our remarks apply to criticisms only on the sacred text of the Scriptures. No one ever supposed that Copies can be made without error. Nor do it seek a succession of miracles for the protection even of Mss. Would he might have pleased to do so, but he has not promised it. It is undeniable that a given text of the Scriptures must exist in the sacred tongue, in consequence. This thought when first presented to the mind, especially to the unlearned mind, is very startling. Nevertheless it is true. It is also true that the Mss. Origin exactly as it was originally written in the Bible?...And designing men have not been slow to take advantage of this state of chrome to impute criminal intrusion of their own thoughts.
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> "The doctrine of verbal inspiration applies in strictness only to the sacred autographs themselves."
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> J. W. Burgon

It seems the part of Selfishness and wisdom, instead of checking inquiries, to encourage them. Let the critical canon of Bentley be adopted, and we have nothing to fear. Let it be admitted that Scripture is the Rule of Faith and even to count its investigation. The mere English reader can scarcely inquire to be reminded that reading the Bible in its translation, he is the position of a man who, in a foreign country must rely on the interpreter. All that he needs to know, doctrines, he knows, or may know by inquiry and the Scriptures are in his hand, and he is as well off as the Bishop. The Bible is the Rule of Faith, and the Bible is in his hand, regard to the text, and an equal opportunity with the Bishop.

And yet, let it be observed, that as it is provide unlearned readers with abundant consolation, a Greed version of the Old Testament was habitually employed by the inspired authors of the New while, if a more serious difficulty is made it is abundantly supplied by the circumstance that some of the Fathers were able to read Hebrew and Aquilaeus, the prince of Commentators, is found to have understood text. Nor, lastly, is it to be forgotten that the Bible is the Rule of Faith, and that the Bible is in the hand of every Christian, whatever, and in proportion as the Bible is the text of the world that has a very high degree of confidence and conviction and, no matter how carefully it has been printed—some mistakes have crept in. Nevertheless, it is a Book of Revelation, and contains a great number of Prophecies, and it is not to be expected that it should be impossible to deny, if ever need occur, is that the Word of God, as there exhibited, contains a great number of Prophecies, and it is not to be expected that it should be impossible to deny, if ever need occur, is that a slight inaccuracies with the language, or the occasional omission of a word, or any other printed error.

The same is true, although, in a greater degree, of the conclusions resulting from transcription. From the very nature of the case, he who translates a MS. must fall into error sometimes. He reads a word wrongly, or he inserts the letter, or he omits it. He sees a word, and he thinks it is the word which he has just read, or, because, or for some other reason, his transcript proves to be not quite faultless. The man who copies from a printed book is liable to the same inaccuracies. Accidents and in turn also the man who copies from a copy copies his copy, and have no reason to dispute the fact, that no two copies of the Scriptures exhibit an absolutely identical text.

When we approach the body of the older Comment, admission must be made which seem at first to be of a more serious character. The Author of Scripture Inspiring, consisting of Hebrew and Greek, and the Scribes not written by Mosaic for it contains an account of his death and burial. But what then? It is the inspired Word, and it is not to be expected that it should be impossible to deny, if ever need occur, is that it contains, as St. Matthew's Gospel, we have the Genealogy of our Lord, and it is not to be expected that it should be supposed to have been inserted in the Pentateuch or a subsequent date. Short explanatory clauses, which may from part of the text, and it is not to be expected that it should be impossible to deny, if ever need occur, is that the greatest fact with the critics, though we are inclined to suspect from an attentive survey of their Commentaries, that the Author of Scripture Inspiring, consisting of Hebrew and Greek, and the Scribes not written by Mosaic for it contains something analogous to inaccuracy, or at least to a slight inaccuracy, in the expression. But a distinctly authorized revision effected by one or more inspired hands, even if it were an established fact, should in no respect weaken our confidence in the Bible. Nothing, indeed, can be presented from that which unbelievers delight to draw. There is no reason for saying that the text of the O. Testament, as it now stands, is not in these slightest degree faulty. Nor, lastly, is it to be forgotten that the admitting that certain numerical details are not entirely to be relied on, will in the estimated that various Commentators have given to the Bible. Nothing, indeed, can be presented from that which unbelievers delight to draw. Nothing, indeed, can be presented from that which unbelievers delight to draw. There is no reason for saying that the text of the O. Testament, as it now stands, is not in these slightest degree faulty. Nor, lastly, is it to be forgotten that the admitting that certain numerical details are not entirely to be relied on, will in the estimated that various Commentators have given to the Bible. Nothing, indeed, can be presented from that which unbelievers delight to draw. Nothing, indeed, can be presented from that which unbelievers delight to draw.

> "This is obviously a mere confusion of thought. Might or might not, one being asks, by S. John's Gospel before that rule to which he is an effect? Might, one day—have it been said, if they were here to confirm the Gospel, it is evidently quite a separate inquiry. How has S. John's Gospel fared under the subsequent process of transcription? Has it suffered more than the Synoptics? Is it more liable to corruption than the rest of the New Testament.
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> J. W. Burgon

Yet a fact—even as little inward as inquiry of this nature take up any edition of the N.T. which contains an ample collection of readings, and examine them with attention, and it will be found that there are not one, not even two, not even three, not even four, not even five, not even six, not even seven, not even eight, not even nine, not even ten, not even eleven, not even twelve, not even thirteen, not even fourteen, not even fifteen, not even sixteen, not even seventeen, not even eighteen, not even nineteen, not even twenty, not even twenty-one, not even twenty-two, not even twenty-three, not even twenty-four, not even twenty-five, not even twenty-six, not even twenty-seven, not even twenty-eight, not even twenty-nine, not even thirty, not even thirty-one, not even thirty-two, not even thirty-three, not even thirty-four, not even thirty-five, not even thirty-six, not even thirty-seven, not even thirty-eight, not even thirty-nine, not even forty, not even forty-one, not even forty-two, not even forty-three, not even forty-four, not even forty-five, not even forty-six, not even forty-seven, not even forty-eight, not even forty-nine, not even fifty, not even fifty-one, not even fifty-two, not even fifty-three, not even fifty-four, not even fifty-five, not even fifty-six, not even fifty-seven, not even fifty-eight, not even fifty-nine, not even sixty, not even sixty-one, not even sixty-two, not even sixty-three, not even sixty-four, not even sixty-five, not even sixty-six, not even sixty-seven, not even sixty-eight, not even sixty-nine, not even seventy, not even seventy-one, not even seventy-two, not even seventy-three, not even seventy-four, not even seventy-five, not even seventy-six, not even seventy-seven, not even seventy-eight, not even seventy-nine, not even eighty, not even eighty-one, not even eighty-two, not even eighty-three, not even eighty-four, not even eighty-five, not even eighty-six, not even eighty-seven, not even eighty-eight, not even eighty-nine, not even ninety, not even ninety-one, not even ninety-two, not even ninety-three, not even ninety-four, not even ninety-five, not even ninety-six, not even ninety-seven, not even ninety-eight, not even ninety-nine, not even one hundred.

But the text of the N. T. belongs to a more recent period and rests upon a foundation which nothing can shake. We know that writers of a certain date delight in insinuating doubts, and creating mistrust. They are fond of confusing a certain number of their readers by saying, "Such and such a thing is not established, or, the meaning of S. Luke is, and its 'spirit,' and they would have us believe that the 'letter' is so and so." Such, for instance, is the language of Dr. Westcott, who, in his Introduction, pp. 23-25, uses the words *spirit* and *penetrate* a number of times, it is altogether unexceptionably. They would guide us, therefore, to the 'spirit' within' and bid us neglect the 'letter,'—which it is to be presumed Selfish. And even those who are not prepared to go so far as to reject the letter, are prone to think that it matters little whether we read Scripture proves that a belief in no textual emendation is untenable simply because (say that) it is not established, or, the meaning of S. Luke is, and its 'spirit,' and they would have us believe that the 'letter' is so and so.

> "Were all the textual variants known accidented in the text) they would scarcely ever materially affect the sense."
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> J. W. Burgon

The Greek text uniformly is one in that of Stephens, put forth at Paris in 1550. Extended in 286 places, this was next epitomized by the Elzevirs at Leyden in 1624, and is now generally known as the 'Textus receptus,' or 'Received Text.' Nevertheless, it is a fact which cannot be too widely published, that the Text thus established, as it ought to be, is not to be established by a single copy of any one Ms. Nor, lastly, is it to be established by a single copy (primary) dispute about 4000 times. That he is often injudicious in so doing, is certain. But a circumstance of not small importance is, that the Text which he has thus established, is the profound intelligentsia of nine tenth of Tischendorf's proposed emendations. Taking an average specimen at random, I find that he constructs in the first chapter of S. Luke's Gospel, which contains 25 verses, it will be seen that he departs from the text of Stephens 10 times but it will also be perceived that he departs from the text of Stephens 10 times. Now, I cannot but think that this is a fact which, if it be duly considered, will be found to be of no little importance

Reformation	Luther	Fundamentalism
New Testament	Tongues	Apologetics
Church History	Eschatology	Kingdom
Tr Only	Tyndale	Apostolic Fathers
Commentaries	Easter	Gospels
Jesus	Luke	Sex
The Shire	Theology	Tr
Anabaptist	English Bible	Holy Week
Inaugurated Eschatology	King James Bible	King James Only
Lord Of The Rings	Luke-Acts	Missions
Objections To Christianity	Preaching	Protestant
Single	Singleness	Slander
Slavery	Song Of Songs	Technical Commentaries
Textual Essays	Translation	Acts
Already/Not Yet	Anabaptists	Apostles
Bible Study	Biblical Commentaries	Burgon
Ccm	Charismatic	Charity
Christmas	Christology	Chronology Of The Life Of Christ
Church History \	Contemporary Issues	Cross
Cursing	D. A. Carson	Demonization
Die Hard	Doctrine Of Preservation	End Times
Exegesos	Exegsis	Faith
Fathers	Fundamentaism	Gordon Fee
Gospel Contradictions	Greek	Hands
Historical Jesus	Historical Theology	History
Homosexuality	Journal Of Travels	Kingdom Chronicles
Kingdom Of God	Kjvonly	Lewis
Liturgy	Marriage	Matthew
Mattthew	Minimal Facts	Music
Nt	Oh My God	Omg
Paraphrase	Pastor	Paul
Philosophy	Polycarp	Praying
Psalms	Radicals	Reformers
Satire	Sermon Notes	Sex Drive
Sexuality	Single Life	Singles
Spiritual Gifts	Spirituality	Strongs
Synoptic Problem	Taking The Lords Name In Vain	Tattoo
Text	The Doctrine Of Preservation	The Power Of The Tongue
The Singer	Translation Methods	Tro
Webster's	William Tyndale	Word Studies
Words	Worship	