

THE KJV-ONLY MOVEMENT

A Biblical Examination of an Unbiblical Position

*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching,
for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”*

— 2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

Forged by Grace Ministries

Introduction

If you've spent any time in Christian communities; online or in person, you've likely encountered someone who insists that the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible is the only legitimate English translation. They may claim that all modern translations are corrupted, that the KJV was divinely preserved in a unique way, or even that reading any other version is sinful. Some go so far as to call fellow believers who use other translations tools of Satan.

This document is not an attack on the King James Version. The KJV is a beautiful, historically significant translation that has been used by God to bring millions to faith over more than four centuries. If the KJV is the translation that helps you connect with God's Word, praise the Lord! Keep reading it!

However, the claim that the KJV is the *only* acceptable English Bible; and that all other translations are corrupt or heretical.. is a position that cannot be supported by Scripture, history, or reason. In fact, the position itself ventures into dangerous theological territory by elevating a human work to a status that belongs only to God's original inspired Word.

This document aims to educate. It explains what the KJV-Only movement is, presents the arguments its proponents make, and then examines those arguments through the lens of Scripture, church history, and textual scholarship. The goal is to equip believers to think critically and charitably about Bible translations while standing firm on what the Bible actually teaches about itself.

What Is KJV-Onlyism?

KJV-Onlyism is the belief that the King James Version of 1611 (or more accurately, its 1769 revision) is the sole authoritative English Bible. While the movement exists on a spectrum, its core claims generally include the following positions.

The Spectrum of KJV-Only Beliefs

KJV Preference (Not KJV-Onlyism)

Many believers simply prefer the KJV for its literary beauty, its familiarity, or its long history in the English-speaking church. This is a perfectly legitimate preference and is **not** what this document addresses. Preferring the KJV is not the same as insisting it is the only valid translation.

Textus Receptus Onlyism

Some hold that the Greek Textus Receptus (the manuscript tradition underlying the KJV New Testament) is the superior or only reliable Greek text. They may accept other translations made from the TR, such as the NKJV or the Geneva Bible, but reject translations based on the Critical Text (Nestle-Aland/UBS), which underlies translations like the ESV, NASB, and NIV.

KJV-Only (Moderate)

This position holds that the KJV is the only trustworthy English translation and that modern versions have removed or corrupted key passages. Proponents often claim that modern translations are part of a deliberate effort to undermine essential Christian doctrines.

KJV-Only (Extreme / “Double Inspiration”)

The most extreme form claims that the KJV itself is divinely inspired, equal to or even superior to the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Some proponents argue that if the KJV differs from the Greek, the KJV is correct. This position is sometimes called “Ruckmanism” after Peter Ruckman, one of its most vocal advocates. This view effectively makes a 17th-century English translation the standard by which the original languages are judged.. a position that is, by any honest assessment, theologically indefensible.

Historical Context: Who Authorized the “Authorized Version”?

One of the most important; and often overlooked, facts about the KJV is the meaning of “Authorized Version.” The authorization came from King James I of England. Not from God. Not from the apostles. Not from a church council. A king; a political ruler, commissioned this translation in 1604, and it was completed by a committee of approximately 47 scholars in 1611.

King James had political motivations for commissioning a new Bible. He wanted a translation that would replace the Geneva Bible, which contained marginal notes critical of royal authority. The “authorization” was a stamp of political approval, a declaration that this was the version sanctioned for use in the Church of England. It was not a divine endorsement.

To elevate the word “authorized” to mean “divinely ordained as the only English Bible for all time” is to read into the title something that neither King James, nor the translators, nor Scripture itself ever intended.

The Translators’ Own Words

Perhaps the most devastating argument against KJV-Onlyism comes from the KJV translators themselves. The original 1611 edition included a lengthy preface titled “The Translators to the Reader.” In it, the translators explicitly defended the practice of making new translations and acknowledged that even imperfect translations still convey God’s Word. They wrote in support of the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) and affirmed that translation is a noble and necessary work.

The translators did not believe they were producing the final, perfect English Bible. They saw their work as one contribution in a long line of faithful translation efforts. Modern

KJV-Onlyism would have been foreign and alarming to the very men who produced the KJV.

Which KJV?

The KJV that people read today is not the 1611 original. The text has been revised significantly.. in 1629, 1638, 1762, and most substantially in 1769. The 1769 revision, primarily edited by Benjamin Blayney at Oxford, is the version found in virtually every KJV Bible printed today. Thousands of changes were made across these revisions, including corrections of printing errors, spelling modernizations, and actual textual changes.

This raises a critical question for the KJV-Only position: if God perfectly preserved His Word in the 1611 KJV, why did it require correction? And if the 1769 revision is acceptable, on what basis can one reject all further revisions or new translations?

Common KJV-Only Arguments and Biblical Responses

“Modern translations remove verses from the Bible.”

The Claim: Modern translations like the ESV, NASB, and NIV are accused of “removing” verses such as Mark 16:9–20, John 7:53–8:11, or 1 John 5:7 (the Johannine Comma).

The Reality: Modern translations have not removed anything. These passages were not present in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts available. The question is not whether modern translators removed them, it is whether they were added to later manuscripts. Textual scholarship overwhelmingly indicates the latter. When modern translations bracket these passages or include footnotes, they are being transparent about the manuscript evidence.. a practice the KJV translators themselves would have appreciated, given that they too made textual decisions about which readings to include. Notably, the Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7–8 in the KJV) was not in Erasmus’s first two editions of the Greek New Testament. He only included it after being pressured, and even then under protest, because the passage appeared in almost no Greek manuscripts.

“The Textus Receptus is the preserved Word of God.”

The Claim: God preserved His Word through the majority of Greek manuscripts, represented by the Textus Receptus, and the Critical Text used by modern translations is a corruption.

The Reality: The Textus Receptus was compiled by Desiderius Erasmus in 1516 using a handful of late medieval Greek manuscripts, some dating no earlier than the 12th century. In places where he lacked Greek manuscripts (notably the end of Revelation), he back-translated from the Latin Vulgate into Greek, essentially creating Greek text that had never existed in any manuscript. Since Erasmus’s time, scholars have discovered thousands of earlier manuscripts, including papyri from the 2nd and 3rd

centuries and major codices like Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. The Critical Text is not a corruption, it represents a more complete picture of the manuscript evidence.. drawing us closer to the original autographs. To insist that a 16th-century compilation from a handful of late manuscripts is superior to a text informed by thousands of earlier witnesses is not a position of faith, it is a position of historical ignorance.

“Modern translations attack the deity of Christ.”

The Claim: Modern translations are accused of undermining the divinity of Jesus by altering key verses.

The Reality: This claim collapses under the slightest scrutiny. Every major modern translation (ESV, NASB, NIV, CSB, NLT) unambiguously affirms the full deity of Christ. John 1:1 (“the Word was God”), Titus 2:13 (“our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”), Colossians 2:9 (“in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”) these texts are present and clear in every reputable modern translation. In some cases, modern translations actually make Christ’s deity *more* explicit than the KJV. For example, the ESV and NASB render Titus 2:13 in a way that more clearly identifies Jesus as God, compared to the KJV’s rendering which can be read as distinguishing between God and Jesus.

“Psalm 12:6–7 promises God preserved the KJV.”

The Claim: Psalm 12:6–7 (“The words of the LORD are pure words... Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever”) is used to argue that God promised to preserve His Word perfectly in the KJV.

The Reality: This is a significant misapplication of the text. Read in context, the “them” in verse 7 most naturally refers to the people mentioned in the preceding verses, the poor and needy whom God promises to protect. Even if one applies this passage to the preservation of Scripture, it says nothing about a specific English translation. God’s Word was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. If this verse promises preservation, it promises the preservation of the original-language texts, which are indeed remarkably well-preserved across thousands of manuscripts. Using this verse to defend a 1611 English translation requires reading into the text something that simply is not there.

“Revelation 22:18–19 warns against changing God’s Word.”

The Claim: The warning against adding to or taking away from “the words of the prophecy of this book” is applied to anyone who uses a translation other than the KJV.

The Reality: In context, “this book” refers specifically to the book of Revelation, not to the entire Bible or to any particular translation. This passage warns against altering the prophetic content of Revelation itself. Applying it to Bible translation is a misuse of Scripture. Furthermore, the very act of translating involves choices about wording, the KJV translators themselves “changed” the wording from earlier English translations like the Geneva Bible and the Bishops’ Bible. By the KJV-Only logic, the KJV translators would also stand condemned by this verse.

The Core Scriptural Problem with KJV-Onlyism

As believers, we are called to test everything against Scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:21, Acts 17:11). So here is the foundational question: ***Where in Scripture does it say that the King James Version is the only valid Bible translation?***

The answer is simple: nowhere. Not once. Not in any verse, in any translation.

Scripture teaches that God's Word is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16), living and active (Hebrews 4:12), and will endure forever (Isaiah 40:8, 1 Peter 1:25). But none of these passages specify a language, a translation, or a manuscript family. The doctrine of inspiration applies to the original autographs, the texts as they were written by the biblical authors under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

To insist that the KJV; and only the KJV, is the preserved Word of God is to add a requirement to Scripture that Scripture itself does not make. And adding requirements to God's Word that God Himself did not make is a serious matter. In fact, it borders on the very kind of behavior Jesus rebuked in the Pharisees, who elevated their traditions and interpretations to the level of divine command (Mark 7:6–9).

Consider the implications: if the KJV is the only preserved Word of God, then billions of Christians throughout history who never spoke English; including the early church, the church fathers, the reformers, and the global church today.. have never had access to God's true Word. That is not a position that honors God's sovereignty. It diminishes it.

The Practical Problem: Language Changes

The purpose of Scripture is to reveal God's character, His plan of redemption, and His will for our lives. It is meant to be understood. The KJV was written in the English of the early 17th century, a form of the language that modern readers regularly misunderstand.

Consider these examples of words that have changed meaning since 1611:

- **“Let”** in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 meant “hinder” or “restrain” in 1611. Today it means “allow”.. the opposite.
- **“Conversation”** in Philippians 1:27 meant “conduct” or “way of life.” Today it means a verbal exchange.
- **“Charity”** in 1 Corinthians 13 meant “love” in 1611. Today it primarily means giving to the poor.
- **“Suffer”** in Matthew 19:14 (“Suffer the little children”) meant “permit.” Today it means to experience pain.
- **“Prevented”** in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 meant “preceded” or “went before.” Today it means to stop something from happening.

If a reader encounters these words and understands them by their modern definitions, they will misunderstand what God is saying. This is not a minor issue. The entire purpose of translation is to make God's Word accessible. When the translation itself

becomes an obstacle to understanding, a new translation is not a betrayal, it is a faithful continuation of the very work the KJV translators began.

God's Sovereignty Over His Word

The most compelling theological argument against KJV-Onlyism is this: if God is sovereign enough to inspire His Word, He is sovereign enough to preserve its meaning across translations, languages, and centuries.

The KJV-Only position actually *limits* God's sovereignty by suggesting He could only work through one group of English translators in 1611 England. It implies that God's preservation project failed for 1,600 years (before the KJV existed) and continues to fail for the billions of non-English speakers worldwide today.

The gospel has been faithfully preached in hundreds of languages for two thousand years, none of them King James English. Ethiopian believers received the faith through Philip (Acts 8). The early church spread the gospel in Greek, Aramaic, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, and dozens of other languages. God's Word is not limited to one translation in one language. His truth transcends human language, that is precisely what makes it divine.

A Call for Unity: Read the Word and Grow

Here is where this document gets personal. As someone who ministers to believers across dozens of communities, my standpoint on Bible translations is straightforward: **I don't particularly care what translation people read, as long as they are reading one to learn and grow.**

We all have our preferences. I personally favor the ESV for its balance of accuracy and readability. Others prefer the NASB for its precision, the NIV for its accessibility, the CSB for its clarity, the NLT for its approachability, or the KJV for its majesty and tradition. These are all faithful translations produced by teams of dedicated scholars who love God's Word. God can and does use all of them to speak into people's lives.

What is *not* acceptable; what is, in fact, deeply harmful to the body of Christ, is telling fellow believers they are "like Satan" because they read the ESV, or calling someone a heretic because they don't use the KJV. That kind of rhetoric is divisive, unloving, and frankly, ludicrous. It creates an environment where Christians attack other Christians over a man-made tradition, while a lost world watches and sees nothing of the love Jesus said would identify His followers (John 13:35).

The enemy doesn't care which translation you read. He cares whether you read it at all. Every minute spent arguing about KJV superiority is a minute not spent actually studying God's Word, sharing the gospel, or making disciples. We would do well to remember Paul's warning against quarrels about words, "which does no good, but only ruins the hearers" (2 Timothy 2:14).

Conclusion

The KJV-Only position, when examined against Scripture, history, and reason, cannot stand. It is a tradition of men; and like all traditions of men, it must be tested against the Word of God (Mark 7:8). When it is tested, it is found wanting.

The King James Version was authorized by a king.. not by God. Its own translators rejected the idea that theirs was the final word on English Bible translation. The manuscript base it relies on is limited and late compared to what we have available today. And the English language has changed so significantly in four centuries that the KJV can actually obscure the meaning of Scripture for modern readers.

None of this diminishes the KJV's legacy. It is a monumental achievement in the history of the English language and the Christian faith. But it is a translation.. one of many faithful translations, and to elevate it above all others is to make an idol of a book rather than worshiping the God who inspired it.

If someone's position requires them to call brothers and sisters in Christ servants of Satan for reading the ESV; if their view of Scripture drives them to division, hostility, and judgment rather than love, humility, and unity.. then their position has more in common with the Pharisees than with Jesus.

Read God's Word. Study it. Meditate on it. Let it transform you. And extend grace to your brothers and sisters who do the same in a different translation. That is the heart of the gospel.

Key Scripture References

- **2 Timothy 3:16** — All Scripture is God-breathed (inspiration of the original autographs)
- **Hebrews 4:12** — The Word of God is living and active
- **Isaiah 40:8 / 1 Peter 1:25** — God’s Word endures forever
- **1 Thessalonians 5:21** — Test everything; hold fast what is good
- **Acts 17:11** — The Bereans examined the Scriptures daily
- **Mark 7:6–9** — Jesus rebukes elevating human tradition over God’s commands
- **Mark 7:8** — “You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”
- **John 13:35** — The world will know us by our love
- **2 Timothy 2:14** — Avoid quarreling about words, which only ruins the hearers
- **Acts 8:26–40** — Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (the gospel transcending language and culture)