

28<sup>th</sup> March 2008

**AN OPEN LETTER TO THE BRETHREN OF  
TRUE LIFE BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH <sup>1</sup>**

Dear Brethren,

I received a double-sided, two-page document entitled “Important Missing Facts On Textual Criticism”. The envelope is post-marked 4<sup>th</sup> March 2008, and has my name & address (c/o TLBPC) *printed*, not hand-written.

The missive is anonymous and undated. It is a compilation of selective quotations, with comments (some of these being the writer’s) appended. As it is a photocopy, I am led to believe it has been circulated en masse.

The detailed clarification and rebuttal of the ‘technical’ points raised is perhaps best left to the God-directed faculty of FEBC. I will confine myself, therefore, to certain personal observations, which follow hereunder. With regard to Psalm 12:7 in connection with which the anonymous writer makes much of FEBC’s (and our) “error”, I thought it would be helpful to reproduce, in the Appendix to this open letter, an extract from a conservative assessment of views pertaining to Psalm 12:7 which I obtained from the Internet.

My Observations

The writer’s stance of anonymity vitiates his (or her) entire argument, and surely discredits his motive. It is cleverly crafted, ending with an “honest-to-God” appeal for brotherly unity (at the expense of FEBC), and holding out the ‘carrot’ : acceptance by, and reception into, the company of the ‘majority’. In so doing, I believe the writer has unwittingly revealed his hidden agenda : to discredit FEBC in the eyes of those who support that God-honouring institution, by sowing seeds of doubt as to the scriptural basis for the verbal & plenary preservation of the Scriptures. Indeed, the writer states emphatically, ‘NB. We are concerned with FEBC’s brand of VPP only’.

The latter statement is a contradiction in terms : there is one true and living God, one ‘inspiration’, one ‘preservation’. Be that as it may, if the writer were genuinely concerned with FEBC’s stand on VPP, he really should have set forth his views and concerns in a signed letter *to FEBC* in the first instance! This is, after all, the pattern of honourable and scholarly discourse.

Did the writer have the sanction (explicit or tacit) of the leadership of his church ? If so, they must be held accountable for the writer’s dubious motives and tactics. If, on the other hand, they were kept in the dark, then the writer’s course of action arguably places him under church discipline (which may never be exercised).

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<sup>1</sup> In view of the impact on FEBC, I have circulated a copy of this Open Letter to the Principal, FEBC

Quotations from the Church Fathers and from the many scholarly men who followed thereafter down to our time, whilst often valuable as informed commentary, should never be our primary basis for assessing VPP or any other doctrinal matter. Following Luther, we are to be captive only to the Word of God. That Word is what it is on account of the character of Him who delivered it.

I had to address the issue of preservation of the Scriptures during the years 1996-97, when I taught the Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF] to a young-adults class at Sharon B-P Church. It became crystal clear to me that ‘preservation’ is, in essence, what we now call “VPP”. It perturbed me, therefore, to receive an email dated 9<sup>th</sup> November 2002 from Life Church’s Charles Seet, wherein he attempted at length to justify his rationale for resigning from FEBC. I felt moved to respond on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2003 with a letter (as a fellow elder, albeit in a personal capacity) to the then Board of Elders of Life B-P Church. The following extract bears repeating.

EXTRACT [my letter of 21<sup>st</sup> January 2003]

‘... The Bible is our bedrock. Therefore, views pertaining to the Bible (its nature, composition, content and authority) cannot be matters of personal conviction or preference. They are matters of dogma – by definition.

The confusion in dogma that has erupted involves, inter alia, the inspiration of the canonical bible and preservation of the same .... These twain are complementary, and both together needed to ensure that the true church on earth would always have the very Word of God with them as their only [and error-free] rule of faith and life. Both alike evince the power of God as manifested in His concern that the true church would always have with her the repository of His revealed mind and will.

The actual mechanics of ‘preservation’ may be gleaned here and there from the history of the Church, but ‘preservation’, in the final analysis, is a distinctive work of God’s providence – and therefore inscrutable. As to the object of ‘preservation’ : God has left us in no doubt (in His Word) that it is to give His church a perfect Bible. A lesser view of Scripture would certainly undermine the very Word that it claims to promote, and would, moreover, be dissonant with the revealed character of God.

.... The perfection of the preserved text derives not from its being given by inspiration, for the autographs only were so given, but from the inscrutable working of God’s providential superintendence. Any lesser view of the preserved text is tantamount to undermining the integrity and authority of the Word in the life of the believer and of the church – ‘yea, hath God said?’ ...’

[END OF EXTRACT]

Must inspiration-preservation be explicable in terms that the human mind can be comfortable with, before we give our assent thereto ? If so, then we are asserting that God is obliged to appear at the bar of human reason – and *that* would certainly be heresy. A study of the Word does entail a careful analysis of the text, but the danger here is of being sucked into a labyrinth which would eventually leave us at best, confused, and at worst, sitting in judgment upon God and His Word. We need, therefore, to keep ourselves always in check by acknowledging the holiness, perfection, sovereignty and power of the one, true and living God.

The anonymous writer ends with the mantra, ‘For the record : I use only KJV. May God help us to reconcile. A lifer.’

Be not deceived, brethren. Truth – God’s truth – must take precedence over ‘reconciliation’.



J. T. Joseph

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## APPENDIX

<http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/strouse-psalm127.html>

### STROUSE SAYS PSALM 12:7 TEACHES PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

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A recent issue of the *Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary Journal* contained an article on “The Preservation of Scripture” by Academic Dean William Combs. While gently rejecting the view of some fundamental Baptists, such as Edward Glenny (former professor at Central Baptist Seminary), who say the Bible nowhere promises the preservation of Scripture, Combs himself doesn’t go much farther, claiming that the Bible does not tell us in what manner or how purely the Scriptures will be preserved.

**It is apparent that the man [William Combs] has spent far too much time reading the unbelieving works of modern textual critics, such as Bruce Metzger. [*emphasis mine*]**

If a child of God follows Combs' advice about the Bible, he would be forced to master many ancient languages as well as the "science" of textual criticism in order to sift through the entire documentary evidence in an attempt to somehow reconstruct the "original autographs." This is a task that 99.9% of born against [*sic*] Christians are not equipped to do, even assuming that modern textual criticism is a true and exact and believing science (which it is not).

As Combs examines various Bible passages that have traditionally been used to support the doctrine of preservation, he sees only a vague, ill-defined promise that is almost meaningless in practice. When he comes to Psalm 12:6,7, Combs takes the position which has become popular in recent years that this Psalm does not promise pure preservation of God's canonical words.

*Dr. Thomas Stouse, Emmanuel Baptist Theological Seminary (296 New Britain Ave., Newington, CT 06111), has produced an excellent critique of Combs' article. Following is the section of Dr. Stouse's critique that refutes Combs' position on Psalm 12:6,7 [*italics mine*] --*

"Combs assures the reader that the original words are pure and inerrant words, but does not know how purely they are preserved (p. 15). Of course the retort is that if the pure originals are not preserved purely, then how can they be preserved at all. Is one to understand that God has promised to preserve His pure originals impurely? Combs does concede that these verses 'might be a general promise of preservation.'

Next, Combs argues that the grammar of vv. 6-7 is against the word preservation interpretation. Instead, the gender differences between the masculine plural pronominal suffix 'them' and its antecedent feminine plural 'words' forces one to look for another antecedent which is masculine plural (i.e., 'poor' and 'needy' in v. 5).

"However two important grammatical points overturn his argument.

First, the rule of proximity requires 'words' to be the natural, contextual antecedent for 'them.'

Second, it is not uncommon, especially in the Psalter, for feminine plural noun synonyms for the ‘words’ of the Lord to be the antecedent for masculine plural pronouns/pronominal suffixes, which seem to ‘masculinize’ the verbal extension of the patriarchal God of the Old Testament.

Several examples of this supposed gender difficulty occur in Psm. 119. In verse 111, the feminine plural ‘testimonies’ is the antecedent for the masculine plural pronoun ‘they.’ Again, in three passages the feminine plural synonyms for ‘words’ have masculine plural pronominal suffixes (vv. 129, 152, 167).

These examples include Psm. 119:152 (*‘Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou has founded them for ever’*), which Combs affirms to be ‘a fairly direct promise of preservation’ of the written form of the Torah (p. 18). As the KJV/TR bibliologists have argued all along, both the context and the grammar (proximity rule and accepted gender discordance) of Psm. 12:6-7 demand the teaching of the preservation of the Lord’s pure words for every generation.

“Next, Combs quotes the *NIV* rendering ‘you will keep *us* safe and protect *us*...’ to argue for the preservation-of-saints interpretation. However, the *NIV*’s translation of ‘us’ for ‘them’ is based on inferior Hebrew texts influenced by Greek. Furthermore, the context of the whole Psalm argues forcefully for the preservation of the words of God which are the antidote for the words of men in every generation.

“Combs and his ilk do not have a convincing grammatical, biblical or theological argument for the ‘preservation of saints’ interpretation in Psm. 12:6-7. **The proper, contextual exegesis of this passage teaches that the Lord has preserved the pure originals intact for every generation**” [*emphasis mine*]

(Dr. Thomas Strouse, “Article Review,” April 2001).

*END OF EXTRACT*