

The Lord Jesus Christ and the Received Bible

John 17:8

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Introduction

Around AD 96, Clement of Rome wrote *I Clement*, an epistle to the Corinthians, encouraging them to be united as Paul advised them in I Corinthians. Although some may consider Clement's effort to write extra-biblical writings commendable, this early tendency among the patristics to produce penultimate authorities for Christianity is the quintessence of the extra-biblical authoritarianism of Roman Catholicism. The apostle Paul had already written, under the process of inspiration, the inspired and canonical book of 1 Corinthians.¹ The Corinthian Church, and all churches struggling for unity, needs to heed the *autographa*, and not some non-authoritative, non-canonical epistle of a proto-Roman Catholic bishop. This tendency to look for penultimate authorities to settle matters of truth is prevalent today within Christianity. Theologians want to bolster their arguments with quotes from John Calvin, C. H. Spurgeon, or D. A. Carson, etc. Even in the arena of bibliology, fundamentalists are looking for the ultimate, final quote or statement that will resolve all issues. Some look to B. F. Westcott and F. H. A. Hort, or Bruce Metzger, or to Daniel Wallace for the final, authoritative answer to the supposed complex issue about which text/translation is the best.² Those who look lightly at the great bibliological truths of Scripture concerning inspiration and preservation in theology, look strongly at extra-biblical authorities in practice.

The Bible, however, attests to its own inspiration, preservation, and authority. Furthermore, the author of Scripture, the Lord Jesus Christ, spoke clearly about the doctrines of perfect inspiration, perfect preservation and their resultant text and translations. The bibliologist does not need to listen to secondary authorities since the Ultimate Authority on Scripture has spoken. This essay will demonstrate, by exegeting John 17:8 in the context of Christ's great intercessory prayer for unity, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the author of the received Bible mindset and expects His followers to be united around the received Bible movement throughout history.

Exegesis of John 17:8

¹Paul knew his oral teachings which were inscripturated were inspired, stating "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13). Also, Peter knew Paul's writings were inspired, saying "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16). The fact that John attached a colophon to the Apocalypse (Rev. 22:18-19) indicates that he recognized that any change in the words of the Book of Revelation (whole Bible?) would result in a change of the message of Scripture.

²Some even maintain that a textual "savior" will come along and save the day for text criticism as J. Whitcomb and H. Morris (*The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications*, [Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publ. Co., 1961]) supposedly did for Biblical creationism.

Background

John recorded the Lord's "high-priestly" prayer following His farewell discourse (Jn. 13-16). The prayer naturally divides into three parts; He prayed for Himself (vv. 1-5), for His immediate audience of apostles and disciples (vv. 6-19), and for future generations of believers (vv. 20-26).³ Christ recognized the culmination of His redemptive purpose in the incarnation (cf. Jn. 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 12:23, 27-28, 31-32; 13:1, 31) and prayed. The Lord's prayer for Himself included His desire for mutual glorification of the Son and the Father, His acknowledgment of the scope of the Son's redemptive purpose to give eternal life to those given Him (cf. Jn. 3:15-16; 6:37, 44; 10:28-30), His assertion that He had finished God's redemptive plan (cf. Jn. 19:30), and His request to return to His previous glory shared with the Father (cf. Jn. 10:30).⁴

The Son's prayer for His apostles and disciples is longer than His prayer for Himself.⁵ The Lord interceded for them that they would be kept (vv. 11, 15) and would fulfill their ministry of the Word (vv. 8, 17). Christ was confident that the Father would hear His intercession because the disciples had been given to Him by the Father (vv. 6-7, 9-12), they had been obedient (v. 8), and that the Lord Jesus had kept them. (v. 12). The Son interceded for His apostles because He had given them the Father's Words to minister in the world (vv. 8, 20), which would hate them (vv. 14-19).⁶

The Lord Jesus' prayer extended to future believers as well, who would unite with Christ through the apostles' ministry of the Word (v. 20). He prayed that His disciples would be one in relationship with God (as the Son was in the Father) and that relationship would be manifested with love based the apostles' ministry of the Word (vv. 20, 23, 24, 26). As the Son of God had a spiritual relationship with God the Father (vv. 21-23), so Christ prayed for spiritual unity among His disciples (vv. 11, 21-22) who were in the heritage of the Apostles who received the Lord Jesus Christ's words which He in turn received from the Father (vv. 8, 17, 20).

Context

The Received Bible

For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me: and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me (John 17:8).

³There may be a parallel with the high priest who offered sacrifices for himself, his family, and the nation on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16:1-34).

⁴Certainly the Lord Jesus Christ's request to return to mutual glory with the Father bespeaks of His pre-existence and deity (cf. Phil. 2:5-11).

⁵These disciples, although they had limitations, were obedient to Christ (cf. Jn. 2:22; Mt. 16:22-23).

⁶Apostates manifest the world's hatred for the Words of God through higher and lower criticism. Their efforts to analyze and evaluate the Bible from the anti-supernatural, rationalist approach eviscerate the Words of the Bible and the character of its Author. The liberals and modernists approach is to "minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4). Questions such as who wrote the Pentateuch or what was the ultimate source for Mark's Gospel or does the *pericope de adultera* belong in Scripture ring of "Yea, hath God said" (Gen. 3:1). This man-centered "wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish" (Jam. 3:15).

God the Father gave Words (ῥῶματᾶ remata) to God the Son (cf. also Jn. 12:49; 14:10). Presumably these Words would be the “all Scripture” (πα=σα γραφή_ pasa graphe) of the Bible canon (2 Tim. 3:16). These Words are the ones Christ promised would not pass away (Mt. 24:35). The Lord’s canonical Words would be available for every generation, He declared, because His canonical Words, and not His *agrapha* (not written), will be the judge of every man. The views that not all of the Lord’s spoken words have been written down and consequently His promise in Mt. 24:35 is for prophecy only⁷ or is hyperbole,⁸ are certainly wrongheaded and refuted by Christ’s claim that “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (Jn. 12:48). Mankind will not be judged by all of Christ’s spoken words since many were not canonical. God is just in His judgment (Jn. 5:30; cf. Rom. 2:2) and will judge man on the basis of His ever available, perfectly preserved, inscripturated Words.

The process, to which the Lord alluded (in Jn. 17:8), was the process of inspiration, wherein the Father breathed out His Words⁹ to the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 8:28), who in turn breathed out these inerrant and authoritative Words to His Biblical writers. The Lord’s Biblical writers in His immediate audience, such as Matthew, John, Peter and others, received the Words and ultimately inscripturated them in their canonical writings which were passed on to future generations through those who would believe on the Lord Jesus Christ through Apostles’ respective Scriptures (cf. v. 20).¹⁰

The Lord’s disciples “have received (ἐλάβον elabon)¹¹ them,” unlike the unbelieving Jews who “receive not” (οὐ λαμβάνετε ou lambanete) the Lord’s spoken words (Jn. 3:11).¹² Those that had received (ἐλάβον elabon) the Lord Jesus Christ in salvation (Jn. 1:12) readily

⁷Daniel Wallace argues that Christ must be referring to “His prophecies” because in John 21, “Everything that Jesus did and said, the whole libraries of the world could not contain. Obviously not all the words of Jesus are written down. So what happened to the preservation of those words? It doesn’t mean that. It means...prophecy,” The John Ankerberg Show Transcript. “Which English Translation of the Bible is Best for Christian to Use Today” (Chattanooga, TN: The Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, 1995), pp. 44,46.

⁸“Matthew 24:35 uses the same hyperbolic language as Matthew 5:18.” William Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 5 (2000): 24.

⁹These canonical words were no doubt the archetypal words to which the Psalmist referred when stating “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psm. 119:89). Combs, like many others, rejects “the idea of an archetypal Bible in heaven,” (“The Preservation of Scripture,” p. 17), but is rebutted by Scripture. Daniel was informed of the same heavenly Bible that contained the prophesied history of the nations and leaders relative to Israel’s future. The informing angel stated, “But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth...and now will I shew thee the truth...” (Dan. 10:21-11:45; cf. Isa. 65:6).

¹⁰Doubtless the Holy Spirit has used Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*, for example, as the means to justify multitudes of repentant sinners through the ages for the Lord’s glory.

¹¹This word is a 3rd person, plural, 2nd Aorist, active, indicative verb from *lambano* (lambano) and means “to take” or “to receive.”

¹²The Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Words are inextricably united so that rejection of one leads to the rejection of the other. Did not Christ warn the Jews, “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” The field of Biblical Criticism, of which Text Criticism is one facet, is a system of unbelief originated and promoted by apostates. Why are professing fundamentalists attracted to and entertained by any facet of this anti-supernatural movement?

received His words for sanctification (Jn. 17:20), John averred. Upon receiving the Lord's Words (Jn. 17:8), these ministers of God's Words acknowledged (εἰγνώσαν *egnosan*; cf. Jn. 16:30) and believed (εἰπίστευσαν *episteusan*) cf. 3:16-17) that the Father sent the Son (cf. Jn. 5:36-37). The Lord Jesus Christ required His original audience to receive His Words and guard them (cf. Mt. 28:20; "to observe" [τηρει=ν *terein*]).¹³ This "received text" or "received Bible" mindset originated with the Lord Jesus Christ, not with Erasmus, Beza, or the KJV translators.¹⁴ Believers of every generation have expected to receive God's preserved Words. The requirement for and the expectation of the Lord's received Bible has had a theological and historical continuity which shall not be broken, according to Scripture (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). The fact that believers in the first century, in the seventeenth century, and in the twenty-first century, have had a "received Bible" mindset is built upon Scriptural teaching, not historical necessity.

That the first century Christians had a "received Bible" mindset is corroborated by the practice of the first century churches. These NT churches and the members thereof received the oral apostolic teaching which ultimately became the inscripturated Words of God. These inscripturated Words in the form of Gospels and Epistles became the NT Canonical Words which the churches were charged to guard (Mt. 28:19-20; 1 Tim. 3:15; Rev. 22:18-19). Several examples of this "received Bible" mindset in the practice of the NT churches follow.

Peter preached his great Pentecost sermon from within the Jerusalem assembly to hostile Jews. When many of these Christ-rejecting Jews heard the preaching of Peter about repentance and remission of sins, they received (ἀποδεξαμένοι *apodexamenoι*)¹⁵ his authoritative words, as Luke recorded; "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). They realized their responsibility before God and received the oral tradition that ultimately became the inscripturated Words of truth.

Not only were Jews saved when they fulfilled their responsibility before God and received His preached revelation, but so were the Samaritans. Luke stated, "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John" (Acts 8:14). The church in Samaria was established because Samaritans, or half-Jews, had received (δέδεκται *dedektai*) the Words of God preached by a Jew named Philip.

Luke recorded that Jews and Samaritans entered into the Christian life with the "received Bible" mindset. Next, he stated concerning the Gentiles, "And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God" (Acts 11:1). These Gentiles received (εἰδέξαντο *edexanto*), along with Jews and Samaritans, the Lord's revealed truth in preached form. Thus mankind has the responsibility to receive God's revelation by faith and some have exercised this "received Bible" mindset.

The Jewish Bereans "received (εἰδέξαντο *edexanto*) the word with all readiness of mind" (Acts 17:11) and compared Paul's apostolic preaching with the OT Scriptures. They had

¹³Christ commended the members of the church of Philadelphia because they had guarded or "kept" (εἰτηρησας *eteresas*) His word for perhaps some forty years (Rev. 3:8, 10).

¹⁴That believers coined the term "received text" (*textus receptus*) in 1633 and have remained comfortable with the term to this very day demonstrate historically this heritage of the "received Bible" mindset which originated with Christ.

¹⁵The root behind this Aorist participle is δεχομαι (*dechomai*) which means "to take" or "to embrace."

already received the OT Scriptures as authoritative revelation, and now practiced this “received Bible” mindset with the oral tradition.

The Apostle Paul identified his preached word and the Words of God in his ministry at Thessalonica. He stated,

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost... For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:13).

The apostle commended the Thessalonians since they received his preached Word as God’s Words and not as man’s words. Eventually Paul’s canonical preached words became inscripturated in Acts and the Pauline Epistles. The Thessalonians are another testimony to the fact that first centuries churches maintained a “received Bible” mindset.¹⁶

In summary, the Lord Jesus Christ gave perfectly in inspiration and preservation the heavenly Words of the Father to His disciples. They in turn received these perfect Words and obediently kept them for future generations. That the early NT churches did this contestable. The Lord prophesied the means of His inspiration and preservation and fulfilled His bibliological work through His NT churches. The NT declares that the movement of the “received Bible” mindset originated with and is perpetuated by the Lord Jesus Christ through the instrumentality of His NT churches.

The Unity of Immersed Believers

The Savior prayed for the unity of those that the Father had given the Son. He stated, “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are” (Jn. 17:11). The foundation of this unity (“one” ε3v hen) is built on the indwelling (ε0v en) relationship of Christ with the believer and is likened to the Father and Son’s indwelling relationship with each other (cf. v. 21).¹⁷ As the believer receives the Lord through His Words (Jn. 1:12) in salvation and receives the Lord’s Words as truth in sanctification (Jn. 17:20), he continues to believe and obey God’s revelation.¹⁸

Those that receive the revelation of truth believe and obey the Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ required early on that those who received Him as Messiah needed to obey Him by publicly identifying with Him through John’s baptism (Mt. 3:6-17; 21:25-27)¹⁹ This baptism

¹⁶All saints enter into salvation in Christ with the “received Bible” mindset. It is only after some believers are indoctrinated contrary to this Biblical mindset and embrace the “restored Bible” mindset do denials of truth unfold.

¹⁷Cf. Jn. 10:30; “I and my father are one.”

¹⁸The Lord Jesus said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words...” (Jn. 14:23; cf. vv. 21 and 24; *vide* 1 Jn. 5:2-3).

¹⁹Almost all Protestant denominations as well as the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church recognize and practice baptism as the entrance requirement for church membership. These groups usually undermine the NT doctrine of believers’ immersion.

pictured the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 6:1-4).²⁰ John's baptism became the baptism of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20)²¹ and was consistently practiced by the NT churches throughout the *Book of Acts* (2:41-47; 8:12; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:33; 18:8 *et al*).

Christ prayed for the unity of those the Father gave Him who in turn received the Lord and His Words, and believed and obeyed Christ by identifying with Him through believers' baptism.²² Paul recognized the answer to the Lord's prayer in part in Galatia. The Apostle addressed the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2) and stated, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27-28). The immersionist churches of Galatia manifested the "received Bible" mindset (Gal. 1:9) and were united in doctrine and practice. Based on contextual exegesis and grammar, the Lord Jesus Christ's prayer for unity was a prayer for those immersionists who have the "received Bible" mindset to be united around the Lord Jesus Christ. For one to reject Biblically this interpretation one would have to prove from Scripture that faithful followers of the Lord do not need to be baptized, that NT baptism is not believers' immersion, that the Lord Jesus would entrust His Words to disobedient believers, that believers' baptism is not the entrance into the local church, that Christ did not give His Great Commission to the local church, that believers did not have the responsibility or mindset to receive Christ's words and that they did not have the responsibility to keep His Words.²³

Conclusion

The Lord prayed for the unity of "the pillar and ground of the truth" movement (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). He gave His inspired and preserved Words to His initial churches of the first century for safekeeping. These apostolic churches had the expectation to receive His preserved Words and keep them for every generation. He wants His immersionist assemblies that have received His Words to be united in truth as is He and His Father. The received Savior with His received Words becomes foundational to the unity He wants for His institution of the immersionist assembly, as this divinely ordained and preserved institution preserves the Scriptures for every generation. The Lord Jesus Christ's preserved churches should be united in Him as they preserve His Words.

²⁰The meaning of βαπτίζω (baptizein) is "to immerse" and the mode is immersion, according to the NT (cf. Mt. 3:16; Acts 8:37-39; Col. 2:12). Nowhere in the NT are the words for "sprinkle" or "pour" ever used for the ordinance of baptism.

²¹Baptized believers must recognize that they have the responsibility to guard the Lord's Words in their respective churches, according to Christ's Great Mandate.

²²This does not mean that immersion is necessary for salvation, because it clearly is not. However, the Lord's whole prayer was concerned with those who receive, believe, and obey. Where do the un-immersed disobedient ones fit in relative to this prayer? Rather, why not ask why don't or won't the disobedient obey? The disobedient, and not theologians, create problems like this.

²³It is apparent as one looks upon the landscape of fundamental Christianity that those on the forefront of the preservation/text/translation issue are the pastors and church members of received text/Bible, Baptist churches who are rightly battling the leaders and scholars of denominations, conventions, fellowships, para-church ministries, Bible colleges, and seminaries.