

NEW TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITICISM IN THE MINISTRY OF CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

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More than a century after his death, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) continues to influence generations of Christians. Biographies and dissertations are still being written about the Prince of Preachers.¹ However, one aspect of Spurgeon’s thought and ministry has generally been overlooked: Spurgeon’s views on textual criticism. Admittedly, most of Spurgeon’s readers are not reading him for his treatment of textual variants. Nevertheless, one of the most paradigm-shifting events in the discipline of NT textual criticism happened during Spurgeon’s ministry: the publication of Westcott and Hort’s *NT in the Original Greek*.² The Revised NT (RV) was also released that year, bringing Westcott and Hort’s departures from the *textus receptus* (TR) to the men and women in the pews.

Westcott and Hort were not without their critics, but their work had a lasting impact on NT textual scholarship. E. C. Colwell described Hort’s achievement: “He dethroned the Textus Receptus. After Hort, the late medieval Greek Vulgate was not used by serious students, and the text supported by earlier witnesses became the standard text.”³ A similar shift is occurring in contemporary textual scholarship, though certainly the changes are happening on a much smaller scale than that of Westcott and Hort. The United Bible Societies’ 3rd and 4th editions of the *Greek NT* and the 26th and 27th editions of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* have all contained the same Greek text, but the 28th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* has adopted the updated text of the Catholic Epistles in the available volumes of the *Novum Testamentum Graece Editio Critica Maior*, introducing changes to the text.⁴ For the first time in thirty years, the standard text of the Greek New Testament is changing. In light of textual changes happening today, it is appropriate to ask how Spurgeon dealt with the scholarship behind the revisions to the New Testament that happened during his ministry.

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¹ Two recent examples include Tom Nettles, *Living By Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2013); and Christian T. George, “Jesus Christ, The ‘Prince of Pilgrims’: A Critical Analysis of the Ontological, Functional, and Exegetical Christologies in the Sermons, Writings, and Lectures of Charles Haddon Spurgeon” (Ph.D. thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2011).

² Published in May, 1881.

³ E. C. Colwell, “Scribal Habits in Early Papyri: A Study in the Corruption of the Text,” in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship* (ed. J. Philip Hyatt; Nashville: Abingdon, 1965) 370.

⁴ The changes are listed on pp. 50*–51* of the NA²⁸.

In his recent biography, Tom Nettles describes Spurgeon's attitude toward textual criticism as "a robust appreciation."⁵ Citing a college address given by Spurgeon, Nettles captures the reason for Spurgeon's "robust appreciation" of textual criticism: "provided we have the exact text, we regard the words themselves as infallible."⁶ Spurgeon appreciated textual criticism because of his high view of Scripture.⁷

This article seeks to understand better how Spurgeon used NT textual criticism in his ministry and to present Spurgeon as a model for contemporary ministers and scholars through an analysis of his remarks on textual variants and critical editions of the NT. An examination of Spurgeon's works reveals that, although he lived in an age dominated by the King James, or Authorized Version (AV), he was aware of variant readings in the NT manuscripts.⁸ Spurgeon favored a critical text of the NT and discussed textual variants publicly, and his views began to develop much earlier than the 1881 publication of Westcott and Hort's *NT in the Original Greek*. He was an independent thinker who examined the evidence for each variant and came to his own conclusions on the original text.

I. SPURGEON'S DISCUSSIONS OF NT TEXTUAL VARIANTS

In general, Spurgeon's position was that textual variants should be addressed when needed, but should be left alone when not. His advice to his students was thus:

Do not needlessly amend our authorized version. It is faulty in many places, but still it is a grand work taking it for all in all, and it is unwise to be making every old lady distrust the only Bible she can get at, or what is more likely, mistrust you for falling out with her cherished treasure. Correct where correction must be for truth's sake, but never for the vainglorious display of your critical ability.⁹

Spurgeon warned his students against "insinuating doubts concerning the authenticity of texts," recalling a "painful" sermon he once heard, the entirety of which centered on the textual variant of the angel stirring up the waters of the pool in

⁵ Nettles, *Living By Revealed Truth* 181.

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Need of Decision for the Truth," *The Sword and the Trowel* 10 (1874) 103. For the purposes of brevity, references to *The Sword and the Trowel* will be given henceforth as *S&T*.

⁷ For Spurgeon, NT textual criticism was important because it sought the original text of the NT. Since Spurgeon, many textual critics have shifted away from this goal. For a discussion, see Michael W. Holmes, "From 'Original Text' to 'Initial Text': The Traditional Goal of NT Textual Criticism in Contemporary Discussion," in *The Text of the NT in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes; 2d ed.; NT Tools, Studies, and Documents 42; Leiden: Brill, 2012) 637–88.

⁸ "We know that in any one version of [the Bible] there may be minor errors of copyists, which could not have been avoided unless a miracle had been wrought every day for thousands of years" (*S&T* 18 [1882] 162).

⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, "On Commenting," in *Commenting and Commentaries* (Passmore & Alabaster: London, 1893; repr. Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1990) 31, italics his.

Bethesda in John 5:4.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Spurgeon did not avoid textual variants; rather, he discussed them from the pulpit.

Spurgeon's attitude toward the RV reveals a general preference for the AV, but it is important to understand why Spurgeon favored the AV over the RV. As demonstrated below, Spurgeon often supported the critical text underlying the RV. However, Spurgeon disliked the RV as an English translation.¹¹ In a review of *The Student's Concordance to the Revised Version of the NT*, he said:

Is the [AV] better? We think it is in many respects; but the Revised Version has its advantages, and it is assuredly a great help to the English reader if he uses it by way of reference. We hope we shall never hear the New Version read from the pulpit in place of the old, for it has a foreign, un-English sound about it. Oh, that there had been on the committee one man of pure Saxon speech!¹²

Considering the immense size of his works, Spurgeon spent comparatively little time addressing textual variants in the NT. Spurgeon was not a text critic, nor did he ever claim to be.¹³ Nevertheless, Spurgeon did address textual variants enough to expose his view of the original text of the NT. A list of forty instances in which Spurgeon dealt with variants in some form or another in his works is attached as an appendix. Many of these are insignificant—nineteen are instances in which Spurgeon treated each variant as if it were a mere difference in translation, often appealing to the Revised Version.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the following instances are significant enough to merit detailed discussions. The format is as follows: the Greek text, according to the *textus receptus* (TR) is given¹⁵ along with the English of the AV, followed by the manuscript support of the TR reading according to the 28th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*. The textual variant is

¹⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, "Sermons—Their Matter," in *Lectures to My Students*, first series (Passmore and Alabaster: London, 1881; repr. Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1990) 79.

¹¹ For a treatment, see Doug Kutilek, "An Answer to David Otis Fuller: Fuller's Deceptive Treatment of Spurgeon Regarding the King James Version," in *The Charles H. Spurgeon Collection* (Version 2.3, AGES Software, Inc., 1998–2004) 1–21. A version of this article can also be found online at http://www.kjvonly.org/doug/kutilek_david_otis_fuller.htm [accessed 14 December 2013]. Kutilek cites Spurgeon on 1 John 3:1 and Luke 4:18 and gives several references of other instances in which Spurgeon rejected the reading of the AV. However, Kutilek's purpose is not to analyze Spurgeon's use of NT textual criticism but to prove that Spurgeon was not AV-only.

¹² *J&T* 18 (1882) 545; see also reviews in *J&T* 17 (1881) 418 and *J&T* 22 (1886) 500.

¹³ Concerning the variant in Luke 4:18, he said, "I began to ask whether the omission was a correct one or not; and, without making pretense to scholarship, I feel convinced that the revisers are acting honestly in leaving it out" ("Heart-Disease Curable," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 27 [1881] 341). Citations from the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* are henceforth abbreviated as MTP and given without reference to the particular sermon from which the citation comes.

¹⁴ Based on Spurgeon's advice to students about needlessly amending the AV, it seems that when Spurgeon presented variants as mere differences in translation, he did so as a pastor, not as a critic. This was to keep from casting needless doubt on the text of the Bible in the minds of his hearers. Nevertheless, he did "correct where correction must be for truth's sake" (see *Commenting and Commentaries* 31, quoted above) and the test passages considered here are examples of his corrections.

¹⁵ Specifically, *H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ: The NT: The Greek Text Underlying the English Authorised Version of 1611* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, n.d.). The text is essentially the same as F. H. A. Scrivener's 1894 edition of the TR.

given below along with an English translation, followed by its manuscript support according to the NA²⁸. The manuscript support is included only for the benefit of the reader, and it should not be assumed that Spurgeon had the same evidence at his disposal.¹⁶

1. *Luke 22:43–44.*

TR: ὤφθη δὲ αὐτῷ ἄγγελος ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ ἐνισχύων αὐτόν. καὶ γενόμενος ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ, ἐκτενέστερον προσήχετο. ἐγένετο δὲ ὁ ἰδρῶς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ θρόμβοι αἵματος καταβαίνοντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν. (And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.)

ⲛ^{s,2b}, D, K, L, Q, Γ, Δ, Θ, Ψ, 0171^{vid}, f, 565, 700, 892, 1241, 1424, 2542, M, lat, sy^{c,p,h**}, bo^{pt}, Ju, Ir, Hipp, Eus, Hier^{mss}

Variant: [omit vv. 43–44]

ⲡ⁷⁵, ⲛ^{2a}, A, B, N, T, W, 579, l 844, (f¹³ *places after* Matt. 26:39), f, sy^s, sa, bo^{pt}, Hier^{mss}

Spurgeon did not always depart from the TR, and the Lukan Gethsemane scene is one instance of this. A quick search of his works for the phrase “bloody sweat” yields ninety-two hits, and that does not account for variation in the way Spurgeon phrased his references to the event. Spurgeon unquestionably believed this passage to be genuine.

Over a century before Bart Ehrman’s monograph on theologically motivated changes to the NT text, Spurgeon suggested that the omission of vv. 43–44 was an “orthodox corruption” of the original text in Luke 22.¹⁷ He told his congregation:

How extraordinary it seems that he, who is “very God of very God,” should . . . become so weak as to need to be sustained by angelic agency! This struck some of the older saints as being derogatory to his divine dignity; so some manuscripts of the New Testament omit the passage; it is supposed that the verse was struck out by some who claimed to be orthodox, lest, perhaps, the Arians should lay hold upon it, and use it to bolster up their heresies.¹⁸

In an exposition of this passage, Spurgeon also said that the verses gave such a picture of Christ’s humanity that many could not believe them to be true. “Hence, I believe,” he said, “this forty-third verse is omitted in some versions of the Scriptures, and there have been several learned men who, while they could not disprove

¹⁶ For example, Spurgeon would only have had access to fewer than four Greek NT papyri, none of which predated the great codices of the fourth and fifth centuries. Of the three papyri published in his lifetime (P¹¹, P¹⁴, and P³) only P¹¹ (sixth century, containing parts of 1 Corinthians) was available in a critical apparatus (Tischendorf designated it Q in his *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 8th ed.). See Eldon Jay Epp, “The Papyrus Manuscripts of the NT,” in *The Text of the NT in Contemporary Research* 2–3.

¹⁷ See Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the NT* (upd. ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). It should be noted that an acknowledgement of theologically motivated textual alterations was not unknown in Spurgeon’s day. For a brief overview of the history of this line of thought, see Peter M. Head, “Christology and Textual Transmission: Reverential Alterations in the Synoptic Gospels,” *NovT* 35 (1993) 106–11.

¹⁸ *MTP* 48.110.

the existence of this verse in the most ancient manuscripts, have yet laboured hard to cut it out, since they thought it too great a stoop for Christ to take.”¹⁹ As will be discussed later, Spurgeon’s assessment of theologically motivated variations is significant.

2. *Romans 8:1*.

TR: Οὐδὲν ἄρα νῦν κατάκριμα τοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, μὴ κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦσιν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ πνεῦμα. (*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*)²⁰

κ², D², K, L, P, 33^{vid}, 104, 630, 1175, 1241, 1505, 2464, πⁱ, ar, sy^h
(includes first half of addition, but does not include ἀλλὰ κατὰ πνεῦμα: A, D¹, Ψ, 81, 365, 629, vg, (sy^p); Spec)

Variant: Omit μὴ ... πνεῦμα (who ... Spirit).

κ*, B, D*, F, G, 6, 1506, 1739, 1881, b, m, co, Ambst

In 1886, Spurgeon addressed this addition to Rom 8:1.²¹ This instance is one of the most extensive discussions Spurgeon gave regarding a textual variant. Spurgeon organized four sermon points from this text, the third of which came from the variant—in spite of the fact that Spurgeon rejected the originality of this phrase and consequently its inclusion in the AV.

Introducing his third point, Spurgeon said, “Now we come to the third point, upon which we shall speak only briefly, because this part of my text is not a true portion of Holy Scripture.” He continued to mention that it was “very rightly” omitted, and that “the most learned men assure us that it is not part of the original text.” Without going into detail, Spurgeon summarized the manuscript evidence for its omission: “The oldest copies are without it, the versions do not sustain it, and the fathers ... do not quote this sentence.”

Again, Spurgeon suggested an “orthodox corruption” as the cause for this addition to the text of Rom 8:1. After reminding his congregation that throughout history, many have been “afraid of the doctrine of free justification” on the grounds that it might lead to antinomianism, Spurgeon said, “Probably the sentence now before us was put in, and allowed to remain, by general consent, in order that the great truth of the non-condemnation of those who are in Christ Jesus might be guarded from that Antinomian tendency which would separate faith from good works.”

Moreover, Spurgeon continued, revealing his ministerial application of this textual discussion: “the more nearly the text of Scripture is restored to its original purity, the more clearly will the doctrines of grace be set forth in it. The more we get back to true Scripture, the more we shall escape all interference with the complete and perfect salvation which comes of our being in Christ.” Spurgeon

¹⁹ *MTP* 42.526.

²⁰ Witnesses that include μὴ κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦσιν (“who walk not after the flesh”) but do not include ἀλλὰ κατὰ πνεῦμα (“but after the Spirit”) are A, D¹, Ψ, 81, 365, 629, *pc*, vg, (sy^p), Spec.

²¹ *MTP* 32.469–80; delivered on August 29, 1886. Quotations from this section come from pp. 475–77.

acknowledged that this phrase was included in the original text of Romans further down in 8:4, but stated that it was out of place in 8:1. Justification must come first, and only after that may good works follow. This order cannot be reversed. The question remains: How did Spurgeon justify preaching part of a sermon on a variant, which he openly rejected as a later addition to the original text? Spurgeon answered, “Still, the interpolated sentence is true: the man who is in Christ Jesus does not walk after the flesh, but after the spirit. Suppose me to be now preaching upon verse four.”

3. *First Corinthians 6:20*.

TR: δοξάσατε δὴ τὸν Θεὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν, καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι ὑμῶν, ἃ τινὰ ἔστι τοῦ Θεοῦ. (therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.)

C³, D², K, L, P, Ψ, 104, 365, 630, 1241, 1505, 1739^{mg}, 1881, 2464, **π**, vg^{ms}, sy

Variant: [omit καὶ ... θεοῦ]

℘⁴⁶, **κ**, A, B, C*, D*, F, G, 33, 81, 1175, 1739^{ext}, lat, co, Ir^{lat}, Meth

Spurgeon’s discussion of the variant in 1 Cor 6:20²² is significant because it is one of the earliest times Spurgeon discussed a textual variant in his public ministry.²³ This is evidenced by his relatively undeveloped thoughts on the matter. Spurgeon admitted that he was “not clear that the last few words are in the original,” citing that “the old manuscripts and versions, and some of the more important of them finish the verse at the word ‘body.’”²⁴ Even more perplexing is the statement that followed: “still, we will not further raise the question, but take them as being the inspired word of God.”²⁵ Spurgeon’s appeal to the manuscript evidence bears witness to his existing knowledge of the discipline of textual criticism as early as 1871. However, it seems that he accepted the reading of the TR as inspired, though he publicly questioned its originality. This is inconsistent with every other instance in which Spurgeon addressed textual variants and discussed them as such, as is demonstrated below. Perhaps this was an early attempt at not “needlessly amending the AV.”

²² *MTP* 17.433–44; delivered August 6, 1871.

²³ In 1865, Spurgeon mentioned a variant in “the Arabic version” and “several copies” in support of his interpretation (but not the text) of 1 John 1:7 (*MTP* 11.675). However, it is unclear what Spurgeon meant by “several copies,” given the particular variant and its sparse attestation. It is possible that he merely meant other English translations such as William Tyndale’s NT. For a discussion of the variant, see Roy E. Ciampa, “A Note on Problems with the Representation of 1 John 1:7 in Codex Alexandrinus,” *NovT* 52 (2010) 267–71.

Additionally, Spurgeon reviewed several works in the 1860s often favorably for their critical treatment of the NT text; see, for example *S&T* 3 (1867) 333; *S&T* 4 (1868) 232, 329, 523; and *S&T* 6 (1870) 572–73. Also noteworthy is Spurgeon’s comment in 1864, “Beloved, we may rest assured that we have not a word in the Book of God which is untrue. There may be an interpolation or two of man’s which ought to be revised and taken away, but the Book as it comes from God is truth, and nothing but truth.” (*MTP* 10.261).

²⁴ *MTP* 17.442.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

4. *First John 3:1.*

- TR: ἴνα τέκνα Θεοῦ κληθῶμεν (that we should be called the sons of God)
642, 1175, 1448, 2492, Byz, vg^{ms}
- Variant: ἴνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν, καὶ ἐσμεν (and we are)
rell.

Spurgeon preached an entire sermon on the short phrase omitted by the majority of manuscripts: “‘And We Are’: A Jewel from the Revised Version.”²⁶ As Spurgeon devoted a whole sermon to these two words in Greek, he gave a comparatively full discussion of the manuscript evidence of their authenticity. He said:

A genuine fragment of inspired Scripture has been dropped by our older translators, and it is far too precious to be lost. Did not our Lord say, “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost”? The half lost portion of our text is restored to us in the Revised Version. . . . That the addition is correct I have not the slightest doubt. Those authorities on which we depend—those manuscripts which are best worthy of notice—have these words; and they are to be found in the Vulgate, the Alexandrian, and several other versions. They ought never to have dropped out. In the judgment of the most learned, and those best to be relied on, these are veritable words of inspiration.²⁷

Not only is it significant that Spurgeon preached an entire sermon on a variant that was absent in the dominant Bible translation in his cultural situation, but the way in which Spurgeon defended his reading is worth note. To his congregation, Spurgeon cited the Vulgate, the Coptic,²⁸ and other ancient versions as evidence of the authenticity of his preferred reading.²⁹ By doing so, Spurgeon revealed that he was confident that his congregation would understand the significance of these terms—or at least that it was profitable to mention them specifically by name. One would not expect Spurgeon to use technical jargon in public ministry, given his copious denouncement of such speech elsewhere.³⁰

5. *Other variants.* Although Spurgeon rarely gave full discussions of textual variants, there are several instances in his works in which he gave partial discussions. Often, these are no more than a sentence or two, but they still contribute to the bigger picture of Spurgeon’s view of the original text of the NT and his use of textual criticism in ministry.

²⁶ *MTP* 32.673–84.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 673–74.

²⁸ Because he referred to manuscripts first, then to the versions, it is improbable that when Spurgeon referred to the “Alexandrian,” he meant either the Alexandrian Text Type or to Codex Alexandrinus. By his wording, “the Vulgate, the Alexandrian, and several other versions,” it is most likely that he was referring to the Coptic versions.

²⁹ Spurgeon referred to a manuscript by name in one instance; he referred to the lack of ἡμῶν “in the Sinaitic manuscript” in *MTP* 27.632.

³⁰ “Tell the people the way to heaven, and point it out to them as plainly as ever you can; and if there are two or three little words of plain Saxon that will do it, use them, and fling the long Latin words on the dunghill where they ought to rot; they are no good whatever in the pulpit, for we want speech that can be easily understood [sic] of the people, the plain speech of the common folk of our day” (*MTP* 40.500).

Concerning the omission of Matt 17:21 (“Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting”), Spurgeon said “There seems to be little doubt that it was inserted in certain copies by persons who thought that it ought to be there because it was in Mark’s narrative [in 9:29].”³¹ This reveals that Spurgeon was aware of textual variants due to harmonization of parallel Gospel pericopes.

Spurgeon regarded the longer ending of Mark (vv. 9–20) to be authentic. His published works contain eight sermons Spurgeon preached from texts in the longer ending,³² and four expositions of Mark 16.³³ However, Spurgeon only addressed the textually suspect nature of this text once, in an exposition. Appealing to internal evidence, Spurgeon merely mentioned that the authenticity of the passage had been questioned, and he assured his congregation that it was, indeed, original to Mark’s Gospel.³⁴

Another variant Spurgeon believed to be the result of an intentional scribal change is the one in Luke 4:18 (the omission of “he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted”). This variant occurs in the passage in which Luke recounts Jesus reading from Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth. “It was not in the original manuscript of Luke,” Spurgeon said, “but probably some pious person added it with the intention of making the quotation more complete.”³⁵ Spurgeon’s solution to this problem was simple: rather than preaching from the text in Luke, he preached from the same text in Isa 61:1.

In 1872, Spurgeon discussed the variant of the *nomen sacrum* Θ̄C and the relative pronoun ὅς in 1 Tim 3:16.³⁶ Significantly, this was nearly as early as his discussion of 1 Cor 6:20. Spurgeon did not depart from the AV in this instance, but said, “I believe that our version [i.e. the AV] is the correct one, but the fiercest battlings have been held over this sentence. It is asserted that the word *Theos* is a corruption for ‘Os.’”³⁷ A few lines down, however, Spurgeon made a significant statement regarding his view (as of 1872) of the original text: “We believe that, if criticism should grind the text in a mill, it would get out of it no more and no less than the sense expressed by our grand old version.”³⁸ This earlier position is quite different

³¹ MTP 42.97. Spurgeon went on to mention that Mark 9:29 also contains a textual problem—the omission of “and fasting”—but admitted that he was unable to know whether the phrase was original or not.

³² They are sermons 625 (on Mark 16:9, MTP 11.217–28), 792 (on Mark 16:9, MTP 14.49–60), 2518 (on Mark 16:10, MTP 43.241–49), 2890 (on Mark 16:14, MTP 50.313–21), 573 (on Mark 16:15–16, MTP 10.313–28), 900 (on Mark 16:15–16, MTP 15.625–36), 2339 (on Mark 16:16, MTP 39.601–09), and 2467 (on Mark 16:20, MTP 42.253–61, with an exposition of Mark 16 on 262–64).

³³ These begin at MTP 42.262, 48.251, 61.155, and 41.149. The first three cover all of Mark 16, and the fourth covers only through v. 14.

³⁴ “These last verses of Mark’s Gospel have, as some of you know, been questioned as to their inspiration and authenticity; but they are so like Mark that you cannot read them without feeling that they are part and parcel of what the Evangelist wrote. Set any critic you please to work; and if he knows the idiom and style of Mark’s writing, he will be bound to say that this is part of the Gospel according to Mark” (MTP 42.264).

³⁵ MTP 27.341.

³⁶ MTP 18.709–720; delivered December 22, 1872.

³⁷ Ibid. 712.

³⁸ Ibid. 712–13.

than Spurgeon's statement fourteen years later that "the more nearly the text of Scripture is restored to its original purity, the more clearly will the doctrines of grace be set forth in it."³⁹

Spurgeon believed an intentional error of scribal clarification was behind the variant in Heb 11:13 ("These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of *them*, and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth"). "You will find that, in the Revised Version, the words 'persuaded of them' are left out, and very properly so, for there is no doubt whatever that they were not in the original, but were added by somebody who wished to explain the meaning to us."⁴⁰

II. COMPARISON TO WORKS RECOMMENDED BY SPURGEON

An exhaustive list of Spurgeon's sources is hardly possible, but Spurgeon did, at times, recommend books that dealt with NT textual criticism. By comparing the textual conclusions of some of these works with Spurgeon's own conclusions, one can evaluate Spurgeon's possible influences in this area. Based on his recommendations in *Commenting & Commentaries* and in *The Sword and the Trowel*, three sources will be considered: Alford's *Greek Testament*, Bloomfield's *Greek Testament* and Bengel's *Gnomon of the NT*.⁴¹ Additionally, Spurgeon frequently recommended the *Critical English Testament*, but since it is a translation and adaptation of Bengel's *Gnomon*, only its differences from Bengel are noted.⁴² The test passages not discussed are included in a table below. In addition, Spurgeon's disagreements and view of Westcott and Hort's text and principles are considered, and the text adopted by Westcott and Hort in their *NT* is included in the table as a "critical control."

1. *Alford's Greek Testament*. In the nine test passages, Spurgeon agreed with Alford five times. Alford included Matt 17:21 and made no mention of a scribal harmony of parallel accounts.⁴³ He cited internal evidence to prove that the longer

³⁹ MTP 32.476.

⁴⁰ MTP 45.365.

⁴¹ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament: With a Critically Revised Text: A Digest of Various Readings: Marginal References to Verbal and Idiomatic Usage: Prolegomena: And a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (2 vols.; 4th ed.; London: Gilbert and Rivington Printers, 1859); S. T. Bloomfield, *Ἡ Καινὴ Διαθήκη: The Greek Testament: With English Notes Critical, Philological, and Exegetical* (2 vols.; 5th American ed. from the 2d London ed.; Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1848); John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the NT* (ed. Andrew R. Fausset; 5 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1860). Additionally, Spurgeon also highly recommended *The Critical English Testament: Being an Adaptation of Bengel's Gnomon* (ed. W. L. Blackley and James Hawes; 3 vols.; London: Daldy, Ibister & Co., 1873–1877). It should be noted that although this work is based on Bengel's *Gnomon*, the *Critical English Testament* departs from some of Bengel's stances on textual issues. Unfortunately, the editors of the *Critical English Testament* cite other critics rather than manuscript evidence for their decisions and rarely discuss the variants as such. Spurgeon recommended these works in *Commenting and Commentaries* 15–18.

⁴² See his recommendation adjacent to that of Bengel in *Commenting and Commentaries* 15–17. He also recommended the *Critical English Testament* in *S&T* 4 (1868) 232, and again, as a better alternative to a competing commentary, in *S&T* 4 (1868) 523.

⁴³ Alford, *Greek Testament* 1.171.

ending of Mark was not authentic,⁴⁴ while Spurgeon cited internal evidence to prove that it was authentic. Alford omitted the phrase in Luke 4:18 from his text, citing the variant in the margin, and like Spurgeon, explained the passage as a summary of what Jesus actually said at the synagogue.⁴⁵ Alford and Spurgeon both agreed on the agony in Gethsemane in Luke 22:43–44—that the verses are original, and the passage was omitted as a theologically motivated variation.⁴⁶ Alford omitted the textually suspect phrase from Rom 8:1. He mentioned its presence in v. 4, and hinted at the doctrinal ramifications of its placement.⁴⁷ Alford also deviated from the TR by omitting the variant in 1 Cor 6:20 from his text. His only comment as to its origin was that it was “inserted apparently with a view to make the exhortation complete.”⁴⁸ Spurgeon, however, took the opposite position based on his exegesis of the passage, saying, “It was the body the apostle was speaking about, and not the spirit, and there is no necessity for the last words [i.e. the variant].”⁴⁹ In 1 Tim 3:16, Alford departed from the TR, but gave a detailed defense of his decision.⁵⁰ Finally, Alford omitted the phrase from Heb 11:13 from his text, but noted it in the margin without giving further comment.

2. *Bloomfield’s* Greek Testament. Spurgeon agreed with Bloomfield’s textual decisions in four of the nine test passages considered. Bloomfield made no mention of a variant in Matt 17:21, but Spurgeon considered it a later addition to Matthew’s Gospel because of scribal harmonization with Mark 9:29. Bloomfield discussed the variant phrase in Luke 4:18 in great detail, arguing that it is original to the text of Luke and was accidentally omitted because of the similarity in the words εὐαγγελίσασθαι and ἰάσασθαι.⁵¹ He included Luke 22:43–44 and considered its originality so certain that he did not list any witnesses for or against its inclusion, offering only two sentences on the variant.⁵² Bloomfield considered only the first half of the variant in Rom 8:1 to be original and considered the second half to be an addition based on v. 4.⁵³ He placed the phrase in 1 Cor 6:20 in brackets, and argued in his notes that the words “*might* have been *added*” to “complete the sense”

⁴⁴ Ibid. 1.407–12.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 1.449–450; see also Spurgeon, *MTP* 27.341–42.

⁴⁶ Alford, *Greek Testament* 1.609–10.

⁴⁷ Alford commented that the variant is “probably a gloss introduced from ver. 4, right enough in sense (see there), but out of place here, because the *moral* element of ‘those in Christ’ is *not yet brought in*” (ibid. 2.386).

⁴⁸ Ibid. 2.518.

⁴⁹ “Bought With a Price,” *MTP* 17.442.

⁵⁰ Alford, *Greek Testament* 3.332.

⁵¹ “These words probably formed *one line* of the Archetype; and on that account might be more easily omitted; especially as the line before began with a word of the same ending as that which commenced this; namely, εὐαγγελίσασθαι” (Bloomfield, *Greek Testament* 1.242). While this could explain a hypothetical dittography of the variant phrase, it cannot explain its omission. Nevertheless, Bloomfield did give a discussion on the manuscript evidence of this variant.

⁵² “These verses are rejected by some Critics. But as the external evidence for their omission is next to nothing, and the *internal* very slender and precarious; and as their omission is far easier to account for than their insertion, they may justly be regarded as genuine” (ibid. 1.314).

⁵³ Ibid. 2.46.

of the passage.⁵⁴ Spurgeon argued the opposite of this—that the words are unnecessary—on exegetical grounds. Bloomfield placed the textually dubious quote from Heb 11:13 in brackets and indicated in his notes that it was certainly not original, citing “most of the mss, versions, early editions, and many of the fathers,” as well as “almost all critics.”⁵⁵ He explained that the phrase originated as a gloss,⁵⁶ as did Spurgeon. Finally, Bloomfield retained the shorter reading of the TR in 1 John 3:1 and argued that it was merely an insertion in several manuscripts.⁵⁷

3. *Bengel’s Gnomon*. Less than any other scholar discussed, Spurgeon agreed with Bengel in only three of the nine test passages considered. Bengel did not comment on the originality of Matt 17:21, but included it (and gave exegetical commentary on it) in his *Gnomon*.⁵⁸ Regarding the longer ending of Mark, Bengel only hinted that its genuineness had been questioned. He seemed to give some of the same internal evidence as Spurgeon that the passage was genuine.⁵⁹ While the editors of the *Critical English Testament* retained them, they did not consider vv. 9–20 genuine.⁶⁰ Bengel retained the addition to Luke 4:18, citing the authority of Irenaeus,⁶¹ but Spurgeon considered this addition to be a scribal “completion” of the quote from Isaiah 61. Retaining the Lukan Gethsemane scene, Bengel said, “So utterly incapable is human reason of comprehending the profound depths of His agony in the garden, that some have, in former times omitted this whole paragraph.”⁶² This is remarkably similar to Spurgeon’s comments on the same text, given above. Like Bloomfield, Bengel considered the first half of the variant in Rom 8:1 to be original, but said, “The phrase, *but after the spirit* (ἀλλὰ κατὰ πνεῦμα) is omitted in the first verse on the most respectable testimony.”⁶³ Bengel omitted the variant in 1 Cor. 6:20, citing that it was originally omitted, then later corrected in some witnesses.⁶⁴ While Bengel included θεός in his text at 1 Tim 3:16 (as did Spurgeon) without mentioning its questionable nature, Fausset seemed to “correct” Bengel’s assessment of the text in an extensive footnote, citing much manuscript and patristic evidence as “conclusive against” Bengel’s reading.⁶⁵ In 1 John 3:1, Bengel retained the reading of the TR, omitting the additional phrase. He did not

⁵⁴ Ibid. 2.116–17, emphasis his.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 2.461.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 2.543.

⁵⁸ Bengel, *Gnomon* 1.340.

⁵⁹ “Hence it is that [Mark] so often employs the term, *the Gospel*: hence too it is evident that the last portion of Mark is genuine: ch. xvi. 15, 20” (ibid. 1.497).

⁶⁰ “The best, and now most general view is, that this is an early addition by another hand than Mark’s ... embodying facts known by apostolic tradition” (*Critical English Testament* 1.344).

⁶¹ Bengel, *Gnomon* 2.52.

⁶² Ibid. 2.203.

⁶³ Ibid. 3.97.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 3.243.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 4.263. Since this 1860 edition is the same one Spurgeon recommended in *Commenting and Commentaries*, one may reasonably assume that Spurgeon had access to these arguments when he addressed this variant in 1871.

mention a variant in the verse, though the editors of the *Critical English Testament* did include a list of scholars who commented on it as a variant.⁶⁶

4. *Westcott, Hort, and the Revised NT*. Although Spurgeon never reviewed Hort's *Introduction to the NT in the Original Greek*⁶⁷ in *The Sword and the Trowel*, he did occasionally comment on the accuracy of Westcott and Hort's Greek text. In 1885, Spurgeon reviewed a reproduction of Westcott and Hort's *NT* (apparently, just the Greek text, not the *Introduction*).⁶⁸ While he did not discuss the critical decisions made by Westcott and Hort, he did consider them to be "satisfactory."⁶⁹ In an issue of *The Sword and the Trowel* the following year, Spurgeon responded in a note to the accusation of his rejection of the Revised Version, saying,

A writer states that Mr. Spurgeon does not value the Revised Version of the NT because it takes away many of the texts which were supposed to support Calvinism, and Believers' Baptism. This is news to us. If our friend will keep to subjects which he understands, he will probably approach nearer to the truth when he writes upon them. On the points mentioned, we have never raised a question in reference to the Revision.⁷⁰

While Spurgeon tended to support Hort's critical conclusions, he did not agree with one of his assertions regarding the origin of textual variants. Hort did not believe that any variant *originated* with an "orthodox corruption,"⁷¹ though he did grant that theological motives might have influenced a scribe to choose one way or another among *existing* textual variants.⁷² As previously mentioned, Spurgeon unquestionably attributed the origin of some textual variants to theologically motivated intentional changes to the NT text, specifically with regard to the variants in Rom 8:1 and in Luke 22:43–44. This represents a break in Spurgeon's understanding of textual criticism with that of one of the most influential textual critics of his day.

It is unfortunate that Spurgeon had so little to say directly about Westcott and Hort's textual decisions. It is fair to say that Spurgeon was familiar with their work, but because he never recommended Hort's *Introduction* and only recommended the *NT* four years after its initial release, it cannot be assumed that Spurgeon found Westcott and Hort's work to be as helpful in settling matters of textual criticism as he found the sources discussed thus far, nor can it be assumed that Spurgeon found it to be unhelpful. Spurgeon simply did not say enough specifically about

⁶⁶ *Critical English Testament* 3.314.

⁶⁷ F. J. A. Hort, *Introduction to the NT in the Original Greek, with Notes on Select Readings* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882).

⁶⁸ The review said: "This edition of the Greek text of the New Testament is reproduced from a larger edition, published in 1881, with an accompanying volume, containing an Introduction, and an Appendix of Notes on Select Readings, and on Orthography ... we see the great advantage of having a cheap edition for students and other readers of the Greek text" (*J&T* 21 [1885] 431).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *J&T* 22 (1886) 91.

⁷¹ "Even among the numerous unquestionably spurious readings of the New Testament there are no signs of deliberate falsification of the text for dogmatic purposes" (Hort, *Introduction* 282).

⁷² *Ibid.* 283.

their work for his estimation of it to be discerned. Nevertheless, while considering Spurgeon’s textual decisions, Westcott and Hort’s *NT* is included in the table below as a “control” text, opposite the TR.

Table 1: Comparison of Critical Decisions

Variant	Spurgeon	Alford	Bloomfield	Bengel	WHNT
Matt 17:21	Omit v. 21 ^B	Retain TR	Retain TR ^F	Retain TR ^F	Omit v. 21 ^B
Mark 16:9–20	Retain TR ^D	Omit vv. 9–20 ^D	Retain TR ^E	Retain TR ^D	Retain vv. 9–20, but reject their genuineness ^D
Luke 4:18	Omit ιάσασθαι ... καρδίας ^B	Omit ιάσασθαι ... καρδίας ^B	Retain TR	Retain TR	Omit ιάσασθαι ... καρδίας
Luke 22:43–44	Retain TR ^A	Retain TR ^A	Retain TR ^E	Retain TR ^A	Retain TR
Rom 8:1	Omit μή ... πνεύμα ^{A,B}	Omit μή ... πνεύμα ^{A,B}	Omit only ἀλλά ... πνεύμα ^B	Omit only ἀλλά ... πνεύμα	Omit μή ... πνεύμα ^{B,E}
1 Cor 6:20	Retain TR	Omit καί ... θεοῦ ^C	Bracket καί ... θεοῦ ^C	Omit καί ...θεοῦ	Omit καί ...θεοῦ ^G
1 Tim 3:16	θεός ^G	ὅς	θεός	θεός, but ὅς acc. to editor in footnote.	ὅς ^G
Heb 11:13	Omit καὶ πεισθέντες ^C	Omit καὶ πεισθέντες ^E	Bracket καὶ πεισθέντες ^C	Omit καὶ πεισθέντες ^F	Omit καὶ πεισθέντες
1 John 3:1	Add καὶ ἔσμέν	Add καὶ ἔσμέν ^E	Retain TR ^E	Retain TR ^F	Add καὶ ἔσμέν ^E

^A Citing a theologically motivated variation

^B Citing scribal harmonization from parallel accounts

^C As a gloss

^D Citing internal evidence

^E Did not give as much evidence for decision as Spurgeon

^F Did not mention or acknowledge a variant

^G Spurgeon discussed the variant years before Westcott and Hort’s work was available.

III. CONCLUSION

Although time and brevity do not permit a more extensive treatment of Spurgeon's use of NT textual criticism, one is able to make some observations of his thought and practice. First, Spurgeon was an independent, critical thinker, knowledgeable in the discipline of NT textual criticism, and he weighed the evidence and made his own judgments, rather than taking the word of any one individual. He referred to manuscripts by name, appealed to the practice of weighing rather than counting manuscripts, cited the ancient versions and demonstrated an understanding of the value of patristic citations. Furthermore, Spurgeon offered explanations of the origins of textual variants, especially theologically motivated changes, revealing a working knowledge of scribal habits.

Second, Spurgeon only discussed variants when necessary and frequently treated them as if they were mere differences of translation between the AV and the RV. A comparison of his discussions of textual variants before and after the release of the RV reveals that these discussions dramatically increased in frequency once the RV was released, and his understanding of the discipline increased. However, it must be noted that Spurgeon did not hesitate to discuss textual issues from the pulpit before the release of the RV.

Finally, to Spurgeon, evangelistic preaching of the gospel of Christ was preeminent. NT textual criticism was merely a servant to this goal. Since God gave the original text and the gospel is set forth most clearly in the pure original,⁷³ the recovery of the original text is necessary for the sake of the gospel. Moreover, Spurgeon often presented the variant as if it were merely a difference in translation, rather than call attention to the fact that the very text of the NT was in question.

This care for the original words of Scripture, *because they are God's words*, is strikingly similar to Bengel's approach, though Spurgeon often came to a different conclusion than Bengel on the original text. Bengel began not as a textual critic, but as an exegete, and, as he said in the preface to his *Gnomon*, "exegesis was accompanied by a revision of the text."⁷⁴ Bengel continued,

In order to accomplish [teaching others], we ought to distinguish the clearly genuine words of the Sacred Text, from those which are open to doubt or question, from the existence and authority of various readings, lest we should either pass by, and thus fail to profit by the words of the apostles, or treat the words of copyists as if they were those of the apostles.⁷⁵

This view of the importance of establishing the original text of the NT parallels Spurgeon's view of the same.⁷⁶ In order to teach God's word, one must establish what *is* God's word. Thus, the importance of textual criticism, both to Bengel and

⁷³ See Spurgeon's remarks on the variant in Rom 8:1, above and in *MTP* 32.476.

⁷⁴ Bengel, *Gnomon* 1.8.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 1.9–10.

⁷⁶ "To our mind every word of Holy Scripture is precious," after a brief discussion on the variant in John 10:14 (*MTP* 32.2). See especially Spurgeon's comments on the variant in Rom 8:1 above.

to Spurgeon, is that it brings the exegete closer to the exact, original words of Scripture, so that he may proclaim those exact, original words.

Perhaps the best summary of Spurgeon's position on textual criticism came from the Prince of Preachers himself. Though he comments as a Baptist, his position is relevant for a wider circle of Christians. In a sermon delivered on June 19th, 1881—just one month after the release of the Revised Version—Spurgeon said the following in his discussion of the textual variant in Luke 4:18:

Concerning the fact of difference between the Revised and the Authorized Versions, I would say that no Baptist should ever fear any honest attempt to produce the correct text, and an accurate interpretation of the Old and New Testaments. For many years Baptists have insisted upon it that we ought to have the Word of God translated in the best possible manner, whether it would confirm certain religious opinions and practices, or work against them. All we want is the exact mind of the Spirit, as far as we can get it. Beyond all other Christians we are concerned in this, seeing we have no other sacred book; we have no prayer book or binding creed, or authoritative minutes of conference; we have nothing but the Bible; and we would have that as pure as ever we can get it. By the best and most honest scholarship that can be found we desire that the common version may be purged of every blunder of transcribers, or addition of human ignorance, or human knowledge, that so the word of God may come to us as it came from his own hand. I confess that it looks a grievous thing to part with words which we thought were part and parcel of [the New Testament]; but as they are not in the oldest copies, [they] must be given up.⁷⁷

APPENDIX: LIST OF SPURGEON'S DISCUSSIONS OF TEXTUAL VARIANTS

Text	Date	Source	Reject TR?	Comments
Matt 17:21	1886	<i>MTP</i> 42.97	Yes	
Mark 2:17	1891	<i>S&T</i> 28.51	Yes	
Mark 6:20	(1880)*	<i>MTP</i> 26.403–4	Yes	
Mark 9:23	1883	<i>MTP</i> 29.553	Yes	T*
Mark 9:29	1886	<i>MTP</i> 42.97	“We are unable to tell”	
Mark 16:9–20	(1886)	<i>MTP</i> 42.264	No	
Luke 1:78	1886	<i>MTP</i> 32.353	Yes	T
Luke 4:18	1881	<i>MTP</i> 27.341–3	Yes	
Luke 4:34	1884	<i>MTP</i> 30.91	No	T
Luke 6:48	1883	<i>MTP</i> 29.58	Yes	T
Luke 9:11	1881	<i>MTP</i> 27.581	Yes	T
Luke 22:43–44	1881	<i>MTP</i> 48.110	No	
Luke 22:43–44	(1886)	<i>MTP</i> 42.526	No	
John 6:11	(1891)	<i>MTP</i> 37.414	Yes, it seems	T
John 10:14	1885	<i>MTP</i> 32.1–2	Yes	T
John 18:24	1877	<i>MTP</i> 49.121	Yes	T

⁷⁷ *MTP* 27.342–343.

John 21:16	1882	<i>MTP</i> 28.566	Yes, it seems	
Rom 4:19	1890	<i>MTP</i> 36.455	“almost equal”	
Rom 8:1	1886	<i>MTP</i> 32.475–7	Yes	
Rom 14:10	1881	<i>MTP</i> 27.305	Yes	
1 Cor 6:20	1871	<i>MTP</i> 17.442	Unclear	
1 Cor 11:24	1882	<i>MTP</i> 45.428	Yes	
Col 2:13	1889	<i>MTP</i> 35.457	Yes, it seems	T
Col 3:13	1885	<i>MTP</i> 31.277	No, it seems	
2 Thess 2:17	1880	<i>MTP</i> 26.346	Yes	
1 Tim 3:16	1872	<i>MTP</i> 18.712–3	No	
Heb 1:3	1882	<i>MTP</i> 45.391	No	T
Heb 11:13	1882	<i>MTP</i> 45.365	Yes	
1 Peter 1:16	(1882)	<i>MTP</i> 45.564	No difference	T
1 Peter 3:15	(1891)	<i>MTP</i> 37.608	No comment	T
1 John 1:7	1865	<i>MTP</i> 11.675	No	
1 John 2:14	1883	<i>MTP</i> 29.157	Yes	T
1 John 3:1	1885	<i>MTP</i> 32.673–4	Yes	
1 John 5:13	1888	<i>MTP</i> 34.271	No	T
2 John 9	1887	<i>MTP</i> 33.579	Yes	T
Rev 1:5a	1891	<i>MTP</i> 37.583	Yes	T
Rev 1:5b	1891	<i>MTP</i> 37.578–9	No	T
Rev 1:5b	(1887)	<i>MTP</i> 33.589	Yes, but not in meaning	T
Rev 2:5	1886	<i>MTP</i> 32.585	Yes	
Rev 14:1	1889	<i>MTP</i> 39.429	No comment	T
Rev 22:14	1886	<i>MTP</i> 32.476	Yes	
Rev 22:21	(1881)	<i>MTP</i> 27.632	Yes, it seems	

*(Date) The source does not give an exact date. The date in parentheses is an estimation.

*T Spurgeon presented the variant as if it were a mere difference in translation.