

DEAN BURGON AND THE RECEIVED TEXT

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Dean Burgon has all too often been misinterpreted (deliberately?) by both friend and foe. This is still true today a century after his death. For example, “The Dean Burgon Society” consistently denies that Burgon would allow changes to the Textus Receptus until all manuscript, versional and patristic evidence is in hand. Let us allow Burgon to speak for himself.

First of all we must observe that he carefully distinguished between the Traditional Text and the Textus Receptus. He defended the former, not the latter, although he said that they do not greatly differ.

Once for all, we request it may be clearly understood that **we do not, by any means, claim perfection for the Received Text.** We entertain no extravagant notions on this subject. Again and again we shall have occasion to point out (e.g. at page 107) that **the Textus Receptus needs correction.** (*The Revision Revised*, p. 21, note 2. Emphasis added.)

After stating “yielding to no one in **my desire to see the Greek of the New Testament judiciously revised . . .**” (*The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, pp. 10-11, emphasis added) he goes on to say that it would be far better to let the TR stand than to go to the kind of text advocated and published by Westcott and Hort in 1881, although he didn’t name them.

His co-worker and posthumous editor, Edward Miller, reaffirms this:

First, be it understood, that we do not advocate perfection in the Textus Receptus. We allow that **here and there it requires revision.** In **the Text left behind by Dean Burgon**, about 150 corrections have been suggested by him in St. Matthew’s Gospel alone. What we maintain is the TRADITIONAL TEXT. (*The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, p. 5. Emphasis added.)

I have kept before me a copy of Dr. Scrivener’s Cambridge Greek Testament, A.D. 1887, in which the disputed passages are printed in black type, although the Text there presented is the Textus Receptus from which the Traditional Text **as revised by Dean Burgon and hereafter to be published** differs in many passages. (*Traditional Text*, pp. 95-96. Emphasis added). [Only Burgon’s notes for changes recommended for Matthew chapters 1-14 were published--in Edward Miller, *A Textual Commentary upon the Holy Gospels, Part I. St. Matthew; Division I: i.-xiv.* London: George Bell & Sons, 1899.]

“The Traditional Text must be found, not in a mere transcript, but in a **laborious revision of the Received Text . . .** which has been generally received during the last two and a half centuries”

(*Causes*, p. 1, emphasis added). “In not a few particulars, the Textus Receptus does call for Revision certainly . . .” (*Revision*, p. 107). There are many places in these volumes by Burgon which spell out the needed changes in certain passages, as well as further remarks similar to the above.

The question some have asked is whether the materials at hand to Burgon were adequate to make this necessary revision of the Textus Receptus. Burgon answered this in **1864**: “the accumulated evidence of the last two centuries has enabled us to correct it [Textus Receptus] with confidence in hundreds of places . . .” and

It is not to be supposed, (I humbly think,) that we shall ever know much more about the sacred text than we know at present. But it is unquestionably to be believed that as the years roll on, and calm, judicious, conscientious criticism, (represented by such men as Mr. Scrivener,) extends its investigation over the mighty field which lies before it, we shall attain to a greater and yet greater amount of **certainty** as to the true readings of Scripture; approach nearer and yet nearer to the inspired autographs of the Evangelists and Apostles of CHRIST. (“A Treatise on the Pastoral Office,” p. 72, emphasis his.)

From what Burgon said and did it is clear that he intended that corrections to the Textus Receptus should be made in his lifetime, based upon the plenty of solid evidence, and further, that as more and more evidence was gathered and studiously and honestly examined that some further changes should be made. It is apparent that he envisioned a current edition of the Traditional Textform as accurate as the evidence in hand should permit. We envisioned a **progressively improved published text** which conformed to the consensus of the multitude of MSS, and he himself provided the first step in that direction in the notes he had developed and firmly intended should be published at that time (see *Traditional Text*, pp. vi, 95-96). Unfortunately it was never published in its entirety, and the portion which was published (as noted above) seems almost unknown today.

It is hard to understand how those who profess to follow in Burgon’s train can repeatedly and insistently misrepresent his position. We submit that *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* is precisely the sort of thing that Burgon had in mind (though he would probably differ on some of the editorial choices.) We have more MS evidence in hand today than did Burgon, and as more and more of the minuscules are collated, “we shall attain to a greater and yet greater amount of **certainty** as to the true readings of Scripture.”