

Regarding the Ryrie Study Bible on Psalm 12:7

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That a Bible verse may be engulfed in controversy does not necessitate that the teaching of that passage in question is unclear. It could just as easily mean that there is a satanic attack on the truth that is manifesting itself in disputations and surmisings about that particular scripture.

Psalm 12:7 is one such example. It is clear from the context of the Psalm that the preservation promised in the seventh verse extends to the pure words of the LORD which stand in contrast to the vain and deceitful words of man which are unreliable and untrustworthy. That David believed and taught that God's pure words were the remedy to man's corrupt words is clear from the flow of the Psalm. Yet it may be acknowledged that this viewpoint is disputed by some these days, especially among those whose primary identification is seen without the Lord's NT churches and within the so-called "Academy." Those of this current position take the tack that the preservation promised in verse 7 is referring to the poor and needy of verse 5 but not to the pure words of verse 6. It is a matter of fact that both interpretations have been seen as legitimate throughout the history of Christianity and Bible interpretation.¹

Historically, our church has held the position that Psalm 12:7 is referring to the preservation of God's words. This is simply because the entire Psalm is a contrast between man's words on one hand ("they speak...with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak...flattering lips...the tongue that speaketh proud things...who have said, with our tongue...our lips...") and the words of the LORD on the other hand, which "are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." We believe that the victory of faith for the faithful and the needy over the oppression of the double hearted and the vain is the originally inspired, permanently preserved, and presently available words of the living God as found in the canon of Scripture we call the Holy Bible. These pure words of the LORD are what will deliver the poor and needy.

The Ryrie Study Bible (RSB)² at first glance appears to take a neutral position on this passage. Each of the 8 verses in the Psalm has an accompanying footnote giving explanation or elucidation on the verse, except for verse 7, which is the only verse with no footnote. This is somewhat unusual, since, as mentioned above, there is some dispute regarding the interpretation of the verse, and a footnote especially here would be a welcome help to the reader.

¹ Cf. for example the faithful 17th Century interpreter Matthew Poole, who in his commentary on Psalm 12 notes, "*Thou shalt keep them*; either, 1. The poor and needy, ver. 5, from the crafts and malice of *this* crooked and perverse *generation* of men, and for ever. Or, 2. Thy words or promises last mentioned, ver. 6. These thou wilt *observe* and *keep* (as these two verbs commonly signify) both now, and *from this generation for ever*, ie. Thou wilt not only keep thy promise to me in preserving me, and advancing me to the throne, but also to my posterity from generation to generation."

² Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Th.D., Ph.D., Ryrie Study Bible: Expanded Edition (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986).

If it would be supposed that the RSB is seeking to avoid controversy, a quick survey of other controversial passages would work to refute such a theory. The RSB most typically does give comment in the footnotes on other passages engulfed in debate, which of course is one of the purposes of any Study Bible. In fact, both Psalm 11 and Psalm 13 have footnotes covering each and every verse of those respective psalms, and passages from Genesis to Revelation which are known to have debatable interpretations are, to this reviewer's knowledge, most often given explanations in the footnotes coming down on one side of the debate or the other.³

Some light is shed on the subject when it is noted that the RSB footnote to Psalm 12:6 reads, "God's words are as pure and valuable as fully refined silver." The note uses the present tense verb "are" to express that the purity of God's words is not something that was resigned merely to the autographs or to ancient copies that are no longer in the hands of God's people.⁴ The pristine purity of God's words was and is a present reality for the people of God.

Furthermore, that the note describes God's words as being "as pure and valuable as fully refined silver" reflects the Psalmist's high bibliology, echoing the doctrinal position of God's people as expressed in places such as the London Baptist Confession of Faith,⁵ and serves to bolster a doctrine of preservation over and against a so-called science of textual criticism wherein God's words need man's constant reevaluation, readjustment, and rehabilitation.⁶ The Bible is replete with the doctrine of preservation, while the ever changing tenets of the "art and science of textual criticism" are nowhere to be found in Scripture.

Finally, with the focus of the RSB footnote on Psalm 12:6 being about "God's words," the reader is left to conclude that 12:7 is also speaking of God's words, in this case their being permanently preserved for every generation through the LORD's keeping. There is no reason contextually, grammatically, doctrinally or thematically to exclude the verbal, plenary preservation of God's words as the teaching of this Psalm.

That the Ryrie Study Bible does not take the opportunity merely to follow the current Academy position in a note on Psalm 12:7 is significant and telling. While the silence may not be deafening, it is nonetheless detrimental to the Academy's stubborn rejection of the Bible doctrine of the LORD's preservation of His words, a doctrine which David held.

³ See for a few examples Genesis 1:2, 2:4, 3:16, 6:2, Mark 16:16, John 3:5, Acts 2:38, et. al.

⁴ David would say in Psalm 17:4, "Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer." David claimed to have God's word from His own lips. What could be purer than that? Yet when David referred to God's word (cf. Psalm 1, 19, 119, et.al.), he was no doubt referring to copies of copies of the Torah which Moses had long before penned.

⁵ This confession refers to the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament as "being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages."

⁶ Cf. for example McCarter who claims, "The goal (of textual criticism) is the recovery of an earlier, more authentic - and therefore superior - form of the text." P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 12. One must ask, what could be superior to what the RSB calls "pure and valuable as fully refined silver?"