



Exploring
NEW TESTAMENT
CORRUPTION...
Was it
ACCIDENTAL-
DELIBERATE-
OR BOTH?

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*"Error never shows itself in its naked reality, in order not to be discovered.
On the contrary, it dresses elegantly, so that the unwary may be led to
believe that it is more truthful than truth itself."*

-Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 130-200 AD)



INSIDE SCHOLARLY CIRCLES, it is well known that the Greek New Testament of the Holy Bible has been corrupted to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the person doing the evaluation. Regardless of the argumentation, some amount of biblical corruption is certain. Any person who would argue against this reality is simply uninformed and very badly mistaken. Nevertheless, many theologians and popular religious writers maintain that even if the Bible (or the New Testament) *has been corrupted*, the amount of corruption is so slight and to not disturb any (orthodox) church doctrinal position. Others attest to the inerrancy of the Bible *in its original* languages while others make the same claim for the Bible in its *present* form, generally English. I only wish that the original New Testament writers would have used English!

Still, be aware that I have no intention in this paper to declare that the New Testament is unreliable or that is ought to be set aside. Far from it! I believe considerable accuracy resides in the New Testament (NT). The problem is in removing the wheat from the chaff. What I *am* saying is that the NT needs to be approached with a certain amount of respectful caution in the same way you might approach other dominant historical documents that have passed through the influencing hands of thousands of men—some of them decidedly unscrupulous. Testimony found in any English New Testament text does not automatically make that testimony true. What I *am* saying with absolute certainty is that men are unreliable, and many of these men attend(ed) Christian churches. What I *am* saying is that we cannot just blindly accept what any given New Testament Bible version says, especially in serious areas, without at least doing a little homework and comparing the text to a few other versions. Naturally, that means reading the Bible and it means getting familiar with it, something that the bulk of professing Christians have yet to do. If you plan on living your life according to what the Holy Bible says, do you have a problem with verifying that what it says is accurate? Do you have a problem with verifying that there is only one single God-being, one Yahweh, in heaven or are you content to bump along parroting the Roman church's myth or Herbert Armstrong's fantasy?

TWO COMMENTARY FOOTNOTES BY C.I. SCOFIELD—

The writers of Scripture affirm, where the subject is mentioned by them at all, that the words of their writings are divinely taught. This, of necessity, refers to the original documents, not to translations and versions; but the labors of competent scholars have brought some of our English versions to a remarkable degree of reliability, so that no essential truth of Scripture is ever under any question. And 1Cor.2:9-14 gives the process by which a truth passes from the mind of God to the mind of people. ... This implies neither mechanical dictation nor the effacement of the writer's personality, but only that the Spirit infallibly guides in the choice of words from the writer's own vocabulary. ... Because the Scriptures [OT and NT] are inspired [whatever this word is held to mean], they

*are authoritative and without error in their original words, and constitute the infallible revelation of God to man*¹

Another writer puts it this way: *We believe that the books Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, in their original state, as those men first wrote them were inspired by God. "Holy men of God wrote as they were moved by the breath of God." For that reason, the original documents contain no errors.*² But, there are NO original documents! So, what does it mean to say that the "original documents" contain no error when we have none with which to compare? It means nothing and therefore the statement constitutes simple pious bluster.

David Robert Palmer, the person who penned the above testimony, has, like many others, lifted the target passage in Peter out of context and misapplied it to NT infallibility. How foolish believers can be when blinded by church dogma.

"For when he [Jesus] received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2Pet.1:17-21) {RSV throughout unless otherwise stated.} It should be obvious to anyone that the subject of the passage is Old Testament (OT) prophecy, not New Testament (NT) writings. So this person is basing his conclusion about error-free documents on church dogma, not solid biblical foundations or original documents. He is only parroting what someone else said.

In spite of varying and sometimes silly and self-serving claims of biblical infallibility, it is (or should be) painfully obvious to diligent readers of English Bible versions (and probably others as well) that translated textual interpretations vary widely between versions and that, remarkably, some Bible versions are more infallible, perfect, and flawless than others. Thus, even our English language versions have been degraded (perhaps within a range from very flawless to plain flawless) and flawlessly modified to suit someone's flawless point of view. These flawless modifications came about, in part, because the *underlying* flawless original-language text had changed or because of theologically compulsory interpretive changes representing *overriding* theological pressure for flawless conformity and flawless harmony, and specific flawless church doctrinal requirements.



ILLUSTRATING THE ISSUES

Really, now, how important is it to actually *identify* where (and when) the New Testament has been corrupted, altered, or misrepresented? Don't our preachers tell us that the Bible as

¹ The New Scofield Study Bible, NKJV, 2Cor.2:13 footnote, pp.1392-93; 2Tim.3:16, p.1471

² <http://www.bibletranslation.ws/>

the “Word of God” is flawless? Well, let’s assume for a moment that your preacher, the one you think is awesome, made some especially serious and deliberate misrepresentations about the text of the Bible and you found him out (plus he said the Bible was flawless). The man said “A” was true when “B” was clearly true, and implied that if you did not accept his word, you were as good as an unbeliever. How would you react? I suspect that you would be a bit put out. The next time he speaks, you would not be so quick to accept his word and would be more likely to verify his message. You might remember reading the following verse on your way out the door:

“Woe unto them who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and intelligent in their own esteem!” (Isa.5:20-21, Darby).

Well, I believe the New Testament writings (original autographs) were written by ordinary men living extraordinary circumstances—sincere, God-fearing men who had no earthly (or mystical) idea that they were creating history as they wrote their letters. But neither Yahweh our God nor any ghostly spirit, or supernatural apparition, holy or otherwise, wrote all those words. Evidently, the only words Yahweh wrote were the Ten Commandments upon both sets of stone tablets (**Ex.31:18; 32:16; 34:1**), the first of which, as you probably know, were dashed to pieces by Moses. But the fact that men actually penned the words in the New Testament does not mean that **(1)** it is unreliable or **(2)** the writing was not inspired in some manner. (Technically, the *Bible* was not inspired. Only the writers were inspired. The OT and the NT were put together by men who saw a need to gather together the writings. Later, the NT writings were collected, sorted, and canonized (listed and accepted by the Roman Church) so that other writings could be excluded, like those written by various persons deemed to be heretics.)

I happen to believe that the original biblical writings were inspired by God. Having said that, the question arises: *What do you mean by inspired?* I mean to say that the spirit of God so moved certain people that they were, in a sense, *driven* to write what they knew, heard about, or witnessed, and that they did so from their memory and from their perspective. They did not write what a spirit told them to write. (They were not secretaries or stenographers who were possessed by a supernatural being or spirit that caused them to write mechanically and robotically.)³

Memories are faulty things and perhaps some of these men did not record exactly what transpired but what they thought transpired. Some even made mistakes, I am sure. Does this make their writings of no value? Absolutely not!

³ “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2Tim.3:16-17). The KJV has “given by inspiration.” The Geek word for *given by inspiration* (G2315, *theopneustos* from G2316 & G4154) means “God breathed” or, to breathe upon or blow into; God *expired* or breathed out his words to the people (in some manner) and they *inspired* or “breathed” them in and wrote as they were led, not directed.

What we have today, in the very least, even given the textual alterations or accretions,⁴ is the *gist* of what went on in the first century, however much that term might express; the New Testament is not a history book detailing all the known facts of any given event. The Gospels have differing accounts of similar events because the writers, living, breathing, thinking persons, apparently saw them that way. That they are different from one another lends credence to their stories. If they presented exactly the same story, you would know for a fact that some “wood-shedding” was going on. That is, because they are so alike in virtually every detail, collusion must have occurred—a conspiracy to recount the same story would have happened and they made sure we got the same testimony. But the Gospels are different from one another, so they are believable, at least on that level—but they are not contradictory in the sense that they oppose one another.

Nevertheless, does this mean that we should turn a blind eye to other men later on, some that purposely and some accidentally, altered the writings of the good men who created the original autographs? I think not.

I think that when we see a fine house that has a dirty or a broken window, we do not tell our friends that the window is not dirty or broken. The facts are so obvious that it does not take a structural engineer to see the dirty or broken window. What you do is call in the good folks from Home Depot (or another place) and have the window cleaned or repaired. Then you set about to discover who broke your window. It might have been a monk.

But denying the problem puts you in an unenviable position. You then become, to the ones who have eyes to see, a liar and the truth is not in you. To deny that problems exist is to fear that the authority of the Bible might be undermined if the general population found out about those problems.

The Christian apologist’s knee-jerk reaction to serious biblical textual criticism is to gather his forces and present “proof” that biblical corruption is a myth, mostly, but if there is a bit, *he might concede*, say, a few words here and there perhaps being transposed or a misspelling of a name or two, no problem; scholars have cleared everything up and no church doctrine has been affected one bit. This kind of defense by Christian supporters and champions only goes to show that they are misinformed (assuming they are being honest) and misled into accepting a fairy tale. The faith they have is faith in a book and if that book is challenged, then their faith is challenged. If the book is shown to be in error to any degree, then their faith is in error. If the book cannot be trusted in one small spot, how can it be trusted elsewhere? If the book is in error and their faith is in error, then they have no salvation. As I said in the beginning of this paper, for most Christians, the bottom line is salvation. Whatever happened to “the truth shall set you free”? Nevertheless, where does salvation come from? Does it come from a book—any book? No! A thousand times, no!

⁴ Accretion: the process of growth or enlargement by a gradual buildup as an increase by external addition or accumulation, as by adhesion of external parts or particles. The paperwork both on my desk and in my office are subject to considerable accretion.

But what we fallible humans generally want in Christianity, evidently, is a belief system that is wrapped up in a neat little package. Yet if the core of that package is faith in the writings of men (Bible translations and versions), that belief system is built upon sand; like the house under assault in the NT,⁵ should problems arise, it may suffer greatly.

Sometimes, believers or apologists, and certain cynics will, in their opposition to one another, maintain in spite of any sure evidence to the contrary, that only two views prevail in textual criticism: **(1)** No corruption whatsoever and what little there might be is meaningless or insignificant. **(2)** Most of the New Testament is corrupt and cannot be trusted. These positions are poles apart. But if we can agree that there is some significant corruption of New Testament texts, we can set about determining what they are, how they got that way, what, if anything, we can do about them, and if the corruption threatens any doctrine.

Believers do not want biblical contradictions in their religious lives. Yet when we hear from the pulpit that Mary (supposedly the mother of God, which itself is a Roman church corruption) remained a virgin all her life and then we read in the New Testament that Jesus had brothers and sisters, we instinctively know there is a contradiction there. This contradiction is not a textual one, but a church dogma being inserted into the Bible concerning the brothers and sisters of Christ. New Testament corruption comes in many forms; original language, translated language, and church exposition. The “mother of God” issue is only one example of many. Perhaps one reason why the vast majority of professing Christians are woefully ignorant of the book upon which they have rested their faith is that they have been misled for years by their leadership. Some have faith in a denomination that tells them to have faith in the book. The book is not to be revered. It is not to be an idol. It is an instruction manual or a guide to life. Testimony within this book points to Yahweh God.

Faith in Yahweh is to be stronger than a book of words. Faith in Yahweh is stronger than any given religious movement, even Christianity. Or at least, it is supposed to be. I know that my faith and trust in Yahweh is stronger for having studied this issue. I am told that N.T. Wright once wrote: “the Gospels are more supportive than divisive.” I agree.

Some of you may be familiar with the “Jesus Seminar” people. For your information, I reject them, their methodology, their scholarship, and their conclusions.

As to the Greek texts that underlie the New Testament, there is NO text that can be called *THE* Greek Text. Such an animal does not exist. No single Greek text can be said to represent the original autographs as they came from the pens of the NT authors.

Ronald J. Gordon wrote: *Readers should be intellectually alert when they encounter terms such as original Greek, original Hebrew, “the” Greek, or Autographs because none of these exist and promotional literature frequently boasts how translators referred to the original Greek and Hebrew. It would be permissible for one to refer to original languages of the Bible, however, too many*

⁵ Matthew 7:24-27

translators and marketing representatives utilize this opportunity to allow readers to believe that they have access, not to original language, but to original words! This is simply fallacious, because no one is able to produce any original biblical work. Translators use "a" Greek text and rarely, if ever, look at manuscripts or photocopies. Textual experts have been reviewing thousands of manuscripts over many centuries, especially noting their agreements and differences, categorizing them according to text-type, and compiling their findings into "A" Greek text. Because of this constant process of evaluation, Greek texts, themselves, are in a continuous state of revision.

The Nestle Greek Text began in the 1880's by Eberhard Nestle, his son Erwin continued the work of his father beginning with the Thirteenth edition in 1927, and more recently, Kurt and Barbara Aland contributed to its preservation with a Twenty-Sixth and Twenty-Seventh edition; thus, it is presently called, the Nestle-Aland Greek Text. Upon the passing of the late Kurt Aland, it would appear that Barbara is now continuing the work herself. In former centuries, other scholars, such as Erasmus, Griesbach, Beza, Lachmann, Tischendorf, and Tregelles have, likewise, produced more than one edition of "a" Greek text. The King James Version is principally based on Beza's 1589 and Stephanus' 1550, 1551 editions. Modern translators rarely, if ever, look at manuscripts or even photographic copies. They use "A" Greek text which usually contains the scriptural text with notes directing the user to the Manuscript Apparatus at the bottom of the page, such as the very popular 3rd and 4th editions of the Greek New Testament by the United Bible Societies. Nonetheless, all such productions are simply nothing more than "A" continuously evolving Greek text. It is entirely presumptuous for the informed [person] to misdirect the uninformed by suggesting: "Let's check the original Greek" when there exists no such opportunity [and no such text which one might check].⁶

Over time, some 1400 years of hand copying the various writings, it is inescapable and unarguable that the New Testament (NT) writings, the Greek texts, have been modified. No argument. No two manuscripts are the same in every respect. Where have they been modified and why? The answers to these questions are complicated and involved; this may be two big reasons (among several others) why so few practicing Christians have any knowledge or understanding of NT corruption.

I submit to you that the primary or most significant NT modifications have taken place regarding the Nature-of-God issue, and that a great number of these Nature-of-God modifications have been deliberate. Probably most of them have been deliberate. (This does not include thousands of accidental changes throughout the entire corpus of MS evidence.) And these deliberate changes were not only executed within Greek MSS as they were copied, but even English-language translation copies have seen their share of scribal changes. (I suppose other language translation copies have suffered the same fate.) I

⁶ *THE??? Greek Text*, Ronald J. Gordon, Published: April, 1997, <http://www.cob-net.org/compare.htm#greektext>

hasten to add however, that in all likelihood, the majority of deliberate modifications have been made in good faith or with good intentions, that is, not with wicked, sinful, or hateful intentions. Nevertheless, I think there have been a few foxes in the New Testament henhouse.

Certainly, scribes wanted to harmonize the passages, one with another. Some scribes, working out of their personal convictions and under the authority of the church, thought that the writer meant to say something in keeping with church doctrine, which needed to be added, or that he wrote something that was too unorthodox (heterodox). Since the trinity had become foundational to the Roman Church during the copyist years, it would be better and of course, *more orthodox and thus correct*, if the scriptures reflected the notion that Jesus is God. This would be in keeping with the understandings of the church. Thus we find corrupted passages like **Romans 9:5** and **1John 5:7**, for example, residing in translated Bible versions. I am surprised that the other “single-God” monotheistic passages, like **John 17:3**, were not edited out.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS

The New Testament plays a central and important role in Christianity. It is the “book” to which Christians (in theory) refer for moral and ethical understanding as well as church structure and related issues. It is the “book” to which Christians refer for understanding of salvation issues. However, for many Christian believers, the New Testament is the primary authority for more than just salvation; it is the source for learning how to cope with an unfair world. Without the Bible, life for many would be a charming crawl from the cradle, then a boring walk, and finally a dreary stumbling to the grave. Yahweh, in his message to mankind and his working among and through mankind, changed all that. The confidence that many Christians have regarding the Bible and the New Testament in particular is rooted in a belief that the Bible is “divinely inspired”; the words in the “Book” are the words breathed out from God to man, who obediently recorded them for us all. But this belief system also encompasses the idea that the Bible is an accurate historical record, actually an eye-witness account, of the ancient people of God and his dealings with them. To suggest that the Christian NT is less than accurate or that it has serious flaws is to run into a buzz-saw of criticism from any number of apologetic quarters. But two questions loom paramount in the acceptance of the NT as a document that proposes to offer standards of living for proponents. (1) *When was it written* and (2) *How do we know that the NT in our hands today is the same as it was when the original writings were composed?* Scholars attempt to answer these questions within the fields of paleography (the study describing or deciphering ancient writings and manuscripts) and textual criticism.

THE ROLE OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Textual Criticism is not a dirty word or a negative term. *Biblical Textual Criticism* is the method by which scholars weigh the evidence, internal and external, of ancient biblical writings in order to determine or discern which texts conform more closely to the original autographs. The necessity of applying textual criticism to the New Testament manuscripts and thousands of fragments

comes about because of two facts: (1) *No original autographs exist today*, and (2) *What copies of copies we do have all differ from one another*. Had Yahweh decided to miraculously preserve a few pristine copies of the original writings, called autographs, textual criticism would be easy. But evidently, he did not so decide. I wonder why God did not preserve a pristine copy of all the Bible texts?

The importance of scholarly disputes or arguments over this or that fragment as coming from a particular family of MS copies or from any given century would be considerably reduced; we would have the words as they were written and that would be that. No doubt those ideal writings would be dated.

Now, however, since that ideal has not been met, and it is unlikely to be met anytime soon, the textual critic seeks to establish from the multitude of conflicting copies which should be regarded as *most closely conforming to the original*. No one can ever be certain (honestly) that what we have amassed in any NT version truly represents the original autographs. But this may not be as bad as it sounds; much of what we have, I believe, is sufficient for salvation.

The New Testament has been more or less preserved in over 5,000 manuscripts, partial manuscripts, and fragments. Because of the great number of parts and bits, textual critics have generally adopted *eclecticism* after sorting the witnesses into three or more major groupings. They are (1) The Alexandrian text-types, including Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus; (2) The Western text-type, Old Latin and Old Syriac; the (3) the Byzantine text-type; and (4) the Caesarean text-type. The New Testament of the English King James Version was based on the Textus Receptus, an *eclectic*⁷ text prepared by Erasmus based primarily on Byzantine text-type manuscripts. Dr. Hort⁸ suggested another, the *Neutral* text-type.

Tampering with the text clearly occurred in this tunnel period between the time the NT texts were written and the time the writings became treated as Holy Scripture. The differences between the Byzantine, Alexandrian and Caesarean texts show copyists changed the text (e.g. Acts 2:17 in the Western text).

The 3rd century Christian writer Origen condemned those Christians for "their depraved audacity" in changing the text and Jerome told Pope Damascus of the "numerous errors" which had arisen in the texts through attempted harmonizing. In 1707 John Mill of Oxford listed 30,000 variants in the different NT texts, and at the beginning of this century with further discoveries of

⁷ The term *eclectic* means *selecting from various sources, like a cafeteria lunch; to pick and choose from a selection of systems, doctrines, etc.*

⁸ John Anthony Hort (1828-1892), professor at Cambridge, later bishop of Durham; along with Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901), created *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (1881), Codex Vaticanus was their touchstone. They believed they had discovered a representative of the "Neutral Text" which came far closer to the original text than the three forms recognized as Alexandrian, Byzantine, and Western, especially when it stood in agreement with Codex Sinaiticus (ⲁ aleph). Actually, there is no such thing as a "neutral" text of the New Testament. ... Again, the fact that Codex Vaticanus (like Codex Sinaiticus) is from the second half of the fourth century, raises the question how Westcott and Hort could describe their edition as The New Testament "in the original Greek." ... Westcott and Hort had no direct witness to the New Testament text earlier than the fourth century (*Text*; Aland and Aland, p.14).

manuscripts, the scholar Hermann von Soden listed some 45,000 variants in the NT texts illustrating how they were altered. Even in the 4th century Codex Sinaiticus, containing all the New Testament, Professor Tishendorf, the discoverer, noted that it had been altered by at least three different scribes. [Others have suggested some 4-10 different persons altered the text.] This demonstrates that the present-day Bible is not and cannot be an "inerrant copy" of the original writings. (Adapted, website source).

At times, in weighing the evidence, the textual critic's job is not all that difficult, but at other times, the case for or against any one or more readings is extremely complicated and problematical, with the result that no certain answer can be given and someone's professional opinion wins out. Generally, the textual critic will weigh the ancient testimony to see which offers a more or less compelling reason for acceptance. It is into this arena that I have thrown myself, for better or for worse, in this presentation. I must say that I do not consider myself a scholar in the field; I am a researcher and investigator. I research, analyze, and publish some of what I find. Perhaps in the future, say 20-30 years from now, my abilities might approach the scholarship level, but for now, I must muddle along with what I have and be thankful for the works of many true scholars upon whose shoulders I stand. —F. Paul Haney April 27, 2006

THAT ELUSIVE 90 TO 99 PERCENT

Christian apologists and commentators typically suggest (and I have been told) that "90 to 99% of the New Testament is accurate" and that only 1 to 10% has been corrupted to some extent. And they go on to assert that any corruption, real or imagined, has no bearing whatsoever on biblical or church doctrine. This is a common perception and I am hard put to find a legitimate *scholarly* source for these percentages or to verify such an estimate, although I did locate a single source that comes close. There may be others. Unsupported assertions by Christian apologists do not satisfy me. I need verification. One person wrote that **99%** of all the variations in the NT manuscripts are insignificant. That leaves only 1% as significant. Another writes that only 0.5% of the NT words are in question, and further, that these variations are *insignificant*—that they mean nothing. He goes on: *For more than ninety-nine percent of the cases the original text can be reconstructed to a practical certainty.* Notice the *qualification* of the word "certainty"—it is not absolute.

Two relevant and basic arguments—or points of view concerning New Testament corruption revolve around the *degree of corruption* and the *extent of damage* any corruption might have done to our present view of the original manuscripts (reflecting doctrinal positions) as once delivered to the saints.

Despite many searches of old and new reference books and the Internet and elsewhere, I have to date, been totally unable to find any scholarly documentation of any suggested 90%—98% of faultlessness or exactness as asserted by any number of Christian apologists. I would surely welcome and publish such *scholarly* documentation. But please do not give me your opinion about the minute amount of corruption and its low impact—I have opinions of my

own and need no more, thank you very much. *My search is for facts, not opinions.*

All of the suggested low percentages of corruption I have found and analyzed thus far have come from unsupported opinions or assertions of assorted apologists from various Christian camps. My suggestion: Before we assert for whatever reason that some percentage or another of the Bible has been corrupted, we verify our figures, cite the source, and justify the numbers. We simply should not blurt out the traditional percentages and imply that “everybody knows” thus and such to be true because to parrot some unproven percentage would be false testimony and hearsay evidence that is not welcome in any court of law.

One more misleading paragraph: *With all of the massive manuscript evidence you would think there would be massive discrepancies—just the opposite is true. New Testament manuscripts agree in 99.5% of the text. Most of the discrepancies are in spelling and word order. A few words have been changed or added.⁹ There are two passages that are disputed but no discrepancy is of any doctrinal significance (i.e., none would alter basic Christian doctrine).¹⁰ Most Bibles include the options as footnotes when there are discrepancies. How could there be such accuracy over a period of 1,400 years of copying? Two reasons: (1) The scribes that did the copying had meticulous methods for checking their copies for errors. (2) The Holy Spirit made sure we would have an accurate copy of God's word so we would not be deceived. The Mormons, theological liberals as well as other cults and false religions such as Islam that claim the Bible has been tampered with are completely proven false by the extensive, historical manuscript evidence.¹¹ Note: Number (1) is a half-truth. Number (2) is only an opinion.*

Finally, in an email debate with proponents of Islam, Christian missionary and apparent apologist Jochen Katz was reported to say: *I readily admit that there are many different variants of readings in the different manuscripts, 95% of which are copying errors, misspellings, missing a line or doubling a line while copying etc. I am not denying any of this. And I believe that with the basis of many thousands of manuscripts for comparison we can be very confident that the text is today faithfully restored and the researchers in textual criticism assert that the actual literal text is restored to 99.8% leaving only a very few uncertainties.*

But as I said, that isn't even my concern. My concern is that Muslims accuse the Christians of corruption in content which is something completely different. And not in minor things, but in the center of the faith and the Gospel. Did Jesus die on the cross? Is Jesus God? and questions like this. And there is NO evidence that the text has been changed anywhere as to meaning and content. Yes, there have been some well-meaning scribes who wanted to correct some bad Greek grammar in a sentence and things like that, but there is

⁹ In 1John 5:7, a full 22 words have been added, apparently to create a trinitarian proof-text.

¹⁰ These two cited passages were noticeably absent from the website source.

¹¹ www.danielpipes.org/comments/42806

*no evidence for intentional corruption of CONTENT and that is what this debate is all about.*¹²

Mr. Katz claims that “the researchers (plural) assert...” but he listed no researchers who made the assertion; not one. Then he asserts that there is “no evidence” for any meaningful changes in the NT text. Again, until he supports these claims, they are merely opinions and hot air. For hours I searched websites and books in vain for some genuine scholarly testimony and support on this 90-99% accuracy rating but all I found were assertions and opinions by Christian apologists who have a need to assert total accuracy. Not one scholar that I could find claims that the Bible (or the NT) is 90-99% accurate and whatever inaccuracies there might be are insignificant. I found one source that comes close, and he quotes yet another source:

*Indeed, in view of the attention that is rightly focused on where the evidence differs, it is worth noting just how much of the New Testament is well established. A survey by the Alands reveals that of the 7,947 verses in the Greek New Testament, seven major editions are in complete agreement regarding 4,999, or 62.9 percent (Aland and Aland, Text, 28-29). If one were to leave aside certain idiosyncracies and minor differences between these editions, it may be estimated that the number of verses about which there is substantial agreement approaches 90 percent of the total. To be sure, the remaining differences can be substantial and important and fully merit the attention given them over the centuries by textual critics. One should not neglect, however, to keep them in perspective, especially as people unacquainted with textual matters are sometimes shocked to encounter statements to the effect that “there are over 30,000 errors in the New Testament.” The intended implication is that the New Testament is unreliable. Such statements are uninformed and inaccurate. If one defines error broadly enough, to include, e.g., spelling mistakes and differences, then it is true that there are tens if not hundreds of thousands of “errors” among the 5,000+ MSS of the New Testament. But this hardly affects the reliability of the New Testament itself, since wherever the MSS are in error others have accurately preserved the text.*¹³

It is crucial to point out that within this citation, Professor Holmes qualifies his remarks with the terms “it may be estimated” and “substantial agreement.” *Anybody can estimate; words are cheap.* And his commentary that “wherever” the MSS are in error, “others” have “accurately” preserved the text, is, I think, misleading, at best, not to mention terribly naïve, if he is not being deliberately deceptive. Here’s why: Such an immature and self-serving remark would lead the casual reader into thinking that any error in any one given MS has been fully and authoritatively corrected in another MS and that what we now have available to the world is a single collection in one place of a totally and completely accurate

¹² <http://groups.google.co.uk/group/soc.religion.islam/msg/8419ce49f4a4792f?output=gplain>

¹³ *Interpreting the New Testament, Essays on Methods and Issues*, Michael W. Holmes, Bethal College, *Textual Criticism*, p.67, n.22. Michael Holmes is professor of Biblical Studies and Early Christianity at Bethal College in St. Paul, Minnesota. He holds several degrees (UOC, Santa Barbara; Trinity Evangelical School; Princeton University) and his resume is impressive (p.531).

edition of the Greek New Testament, albeit from various sources. I do not think we have such an edition anywhere, although we certainly do have “eclectic” Greek texts; i.e., a collection of texts that have been put together from sample writings from any number of sources. Further, Professor Holmes, in these remarks, is referring to only seven “major” editions.

The professor does not catalog or remark on these editions.¹⁴ His statement implies that other editions do exist out there, some of which may be “major” and some of which may be “minor” (according to, as it turns out, his decision). In addition, I suspect that Professor Holmes has never compared *all* the scattered available MSS and MS fragments as to their complementary error-correction he is suggesting, so it is likely that he does not really know whether anyone has “accurately” preserved the NT text or not. If someone has indeed preserved a flawless NT Greek text, why are scholars working so hard to approximate the original autographs? Why are books being written on NT textual criticism? This does not make sense and when things people say do not make sense, I get suspicious. You see, without the original autographs as a reference standard, the original writings cannot be determined to the degree of certainty that Professor Holmes is suggesting. The number of complete or relatively complete NT MSS is about 60 in total and very few are from around the 4th century. Finally, Professor Holmes is quoting a study by others, not a study he personally conducted.

In checking my copy of the cited Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, I see that, unlike Professor Holmes, the authors did not characterize the “seven editions” (pp.28-29) as “major editions.” This characterization came from the Professor. The referenced chart in *Text* (62.9 percent above) does not include orthographical (spelling of names, etc.) differences. Neither are included verses where any one of the seven editions differs by a single word (p.29). So, by dropping citations where a single word is different, along with spelling differences, the authors in *Text* came up with 62.9 percent agreement. But can one word be significant if it is dropped or misspelled? I think so. If a person in serious trouble yelled, “Hop! Hop!! Hop!!!” instead of “Help! Help!! Help!!!,” do you suppose anyone would rush to his rescue? A few missing letters can be a problem, too. If a man asked, “Does your dig bite?” you would be mystified as to what he was asking, until someone edited his words to say, “Does your dog bite?” By that time, however, the man would have been severely bitten by the rabid animal.

In addition to all this, the “modern” versions of the Bible are generally supported by the Alexandrian text-type, which comprises less than 10 percent of all the available manuscript and scraps. The Byzantine text-type, which underlies the KJV line (*Textus Receptus*) comprises, I am told, about 90 percent of the aggregate of the manuscript evidence. But, understand that mere numbers of MSS do not, in themselves, prove a whole lot. It is not the numerical

¹⁴ The seven editions of the Greek NT are: Tischendorf, Westcott-Hort, von Soden, Vogels, Merk, Bover, and the Nestle-Aland; *The Text of the New Testament*, p.29. All seven of these editions lean heavily toward the Alexandrian text—some much more than others.

superiority that matters; it is the accumulation of a number of factors that matters: age, text-type, location, apparent copyist manipulation, etc.

Another point: All of the seven cited NT Greek editions were either heavily or mostly of the Alexandrian type, according to one source. (The edition by von Soden, as I recall, was the least Alexandrian.) That is, the editions were generally based on MSS from a particular locale, in most respects. Thus, you would expect high agreement with MSS from the same general region, in this case, Alexandria. Normally, in the construction of a NT Greek edition, the editors will select the manuscripts to examine. They then set about comparing MSS and fragments and determine, to the best of their ability, which renderings are, in their opinion, the most correct or the most likely to *approximate* the original Greek autographs. And that's what we have today; *approximated Greek editions*. I hasten to add, however, that most of the approximations are very good and for me, acceptable. But not all.

Further, the well-used term *manuscript* can be very misleading. The words "complete" or "partial" should be appended to the word when using it.

Manuscripts dating from 100 to 300 AD are almost entirely papyrus fragments. [Other fragments or manuscripts (MSS) may be on parchment or vellum.] These papyrus fragments are named with a "P" followed by a number. The vast majority of them were found in Egypt in the twentieth century, and are now kept in various museums and libraries throughout the world, including at Dublin, Ann Arbor, Cologne (Switzerland), the Vatican and Vienna.

The earliest manuscript [fragment] of the New Testament was discovered about 50 years ago. P52 is a small papyrus fragment of the Gospel of John (18:31-33 on the front; 18:37-38 on the back), and it has been dated to about 125 AD. This makes it a very important little "manuscript," because John has been almost unanimously held by scholars to be the latest of the four gospels. So if copies of John were in circulation by 125, the others must have been written considerably earlier. Moreover, the Gospel of John's greater theological development when compared with the other three gospels has led some scholars to conclude it was written as late as 120 or even 150 AD. The P52 fragment seems to make such late dates impossible.¹⁵



It is not a "manuscript" in the sense we would think of one. But Christian apologists seldom differentiate in print between full manuscripts and fragmentary partial manuscripts when they suggest that we have "some 5000 ancient New Testament manuscripts." *We do not have that many complete manuscripts; only 50 or 60 or so and many of these are in the process of deterioration.* This citation points to one reason why I suggest that men, even influential Christian leaders, cannot always be trusted to present the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Listen, but verify (**Acts 17:10-12**).

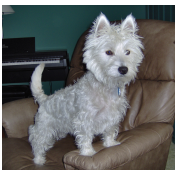
Bart D. Ehrman: *Let me take just one minute and 24 seconds to sum up what we have discovered. Establishing what an author wrote is an indispensable first step to determining what he or she meant. Within the pages of the New Testament there are textual variations that have not yet been satisfactorily*

¹⁵ www.religiousfacts.com/christianity/features/new_testament_manuscripts.htm

*resolved and that have profound effects, not just on a word here or there, but on the entire meaning of entire books and their portrayals of Jesus, e.g., the angry Jesus of Mark, the imperturbable Jesus of Luke, and the forsaken Jesus of Hebrews. These textual problems cannot simply be swept under the table and ignored. Commentators, interpreters, preachers, and general readers of the Bible must recognize their existence and realize the stakes involved in solving them.*¹⁶

WHY SO MANY NEW TRANSLATIONS?

New translations (or versions) seem to be published every day. The Bible book store shelves are loaded with thousands of specialty Bibles; study Bibles, Bibles with commentary and with phony “Jesus” pictures, Bibles for kids, teens, mothers, dads, and just about any group that is a group. I’m waiting for a version suitable for a dog!



Not just any dog, mind you, but my dog, Charlie.

Dr. Dale A. Robbins: *An English version of the Bible did not exist until a little more than 600 years ago. Before then, a version translated into Latin by Jerome in the fourth century, called the Latin Vulgate,¹⁷ was the most widely-used Bible translation in the middle ages (the first major book printed on Gutenberg's press in 1456). Portions of scripture in English began to emerge in the early seventh century, but the first complete English translation was not produced until 1382 by the influence of John Wycliff. Despite fierce opposition of the Roman church, and absence of the printing press, copies of this work were widely circulated. Later in the 16th century, seven more popular English versions were produced, beginning with William Tyndale's work in 1525. This English version of the New Testament was the first to be translated directly from the Greek instead of Latin texts. Before Tyndale's completion of the Old Testament, he was tried as a heretic [murdered by John Calvin's thugs] and executed [burned] in 1536. After Tyndale, several other famous Bibles were produced in the 16th century. The Cloverdale Bible in 1535, Matthew's Bible in 1537, The Great Bible in 1539, The Geneva Bible in 1560 (the first to use chapters, verses, and the italicization of added words), and the Bishops Bible in 1568. [They also used Tyndale's 1525 New Testament, almost verbatim. This includes within the KJV.]*

Finally in 1604, in an effort to resolve severe factions between Englishmen over Bible versions [due to the marginal notes in the 1599-1560 Geneva Bible critical of the divine rights of kings], King James I authorized the translation of another version that came to bear his name. Forty-seven scholars spent six

¹⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Text and Tradition: The Role of New Testament Manuscripts in Early Christian Studies, The Kenneth W. Clark Lectures, Duke Divinity School 1997, Lecture One: Text and Interpretation: The Exegetical Significance of the "Original" Text, *Conclusion*.

¹⁷ See other commentary and footnotes regarding the Vulgate within this paper.

years on the translation, with all work meticulously reviewed and refined by their combined collaboration. The four existing Masoretic texts were used for the Old Testament, and a third edition of the Byzantine Greek text by Stephanus (often referred as the "Textus Receptus"), was used for the New Testament. The King James Version was finally published in 1611, and together with its four revisions (in 1629, 1638, 1762, and 1769), it remains as the most widely circulated Bible in existence. A few other translations were produced over the centuries, but the real revolution of new Bible versions began to erupt in the 20th century, largely due to the widening language barrier. Some of the more influential, recent translations have been: The Revised Standard Version in 1952, The Amplified Bible in 1965, The New English Bible in 1970, The New American Standard Bible in 1971, The Living Bible in 1971, Today's English Version in 1976, The New International Version in 1978, and the New King James Version in 1982.

Apart from these versions, there are numerous study Bible editions, such as the Scofield Reference Bible, the Open Bible, the Thompson Chain Reference Bible, or the Spirit Life Bible, etc., but these are not different translations. These volumes merely feature special study helps, commentaries or references added as a supplement to a particular translation. Besides updating the Bible to contemporary language, another controversy with new translations arises over the issue of the original texts. The KJV New Testament (and all editions since Tyndale) was compiled primarily from the Byzantine family of manuscripts (A.D. 500 - 1000) frequently referred to as the Textus Receptus. But many of the newer translations were produced using a composite of later discoveries¹⁸ of other manuscripts and fragments dating from an earlier period. Among such is The "Alexandrian Family" manuscripts (A.D. 200-400) which include the three oldest: The Codex Alexandrinus (A), the Codex Vaticanus (B) and the Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲁ, aleph), all which were major contributors to most Bible versions after the King James version. Other important codices come from The Western Family, (of the Western Mediterranean areas), and the Caesarean Family of manuscripts (A.D. 200). (A codex is a manuscript bound together like a book instead of rolled into a scroll. The word Codices is plural for codex.)

Many scholars feel that the older manuscripts have been somewhat more accurate and important to the refinement of the newer translations. However, this has been disputed by others, especially since the older copies make up a tiny portion of the large quantity of manuscripts available. At least 90% of the 5,400 existing Greek manuscripts come from the Byzantine family (the basis for the Textus Receptus), and due to the overwhelming numbers of copies with which to compare and verify for accuracy, some scholars feel that the small handful of older texts should not be used to overrule the credibility of the majority. Although textual criticism shows only slight differences between the manuscript families,¹⁹ in those passages where the older text differs with the newer, the

¹⁸ Such a composite is called "eclectic", i.e., being created by sampling various MSS, or by "picking and choosing" among a number of alternate readings.

¹⁹ To suggest that only a "slight" difference exists is to downplay the scope of differences.

modern translators usually deferred to the older, primarily from the Alexandrian Family manuscripts—Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus.

It should be emphasized that none of the revisions in the new era translations, such as the NIV or NASB (compiled with Alexandrian Family Manuscripts), conflict with any rule of faith or doctrinal issue,²⁰ but some conservative church leaders refuse to accept any tampering with the “tried and proven” Textus Receptus translation of the King James Version. In response to such concerns, the theological community came to see the need for another version, one which would satisfy the need for updated language without venturing beyond the traditional text source. Thus, in the late 1970’s, Thomas Nelson Publishers commissioned a company of scholars to produce a revision of the traditional King James Version. Relying on the familiar Textus Receptus, 130 translators made the needed revisions to modern English and corrections to minor translation errors, while making every effort to retain the traditional phraseology of the old version. This New King James Version, as it was called, was completed in 1982.²¹

SOME UNRELIABLE MEN

It is natural for some Bible teachers to think that the Bible should say what they want it to say or what they think it ought to say. And more than a few well-meaning Bible teachers have succumbed to a strong devilish temptation to force the Bible to reflect the teacher’s thoughts. Consequently, even today, interpretive imposition (deliberate or otherwise) takes place from the pulpit by otherwise reliable leaders. Of a truth, strained interpretations have taken (and still take) place by a crafty few who would have their biblically adverse ideas implanted within the Bible. And, it only takes a few persons in the right places to corrupt the New Testament for a much greater number of readers. And how are they supposed to know what has been tampered with, if the vast majority of Christians are biblically ignorant? Preachers can tell their captured congregations just about anything (as I have already shown) and who will tell the wretched congregation anything different? And who will they believe—their trusted preacher or an outsider like me?

In light of all this disorder and uncertainty, the greatest concern for the typical believer would (and should) logically be two-fold: **(1)** whether his Bible version can be totally trusted, and **(2)** how any of this alleged and suspected corruption might affect his salvation. Salvation is the bottom line for most folks. My answer is that the Bible can be trusted but men cannot. For the most part, the Bible can be trusted but salvation is ultimately and particularly between the believer and Yahweh. And the believer’s responsibility is to seek and find the true God—he cannot depend on religious men to deliver God to him, for some of these men are disobedient and rebellious.

²⁰ That is to say, any rule of the “orthodox” faith or “orthodox” doctrinal issue, the faith and doctrines that came via the early Roman church. Once the “heterodox” persons were gotten rid of, then agreement came easy for the hierarchical Roman church.

²¹ *Why So Many Versions?*, a publication of *Victorious Publications*, Grass Valley, California, © 1995 by Dr. Dale A. Robbins, used by permission.

“My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you; understanding will guard you; delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil; men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways” (Prov.2:1-15).

The New Testament echoes these words.

“Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matt.7:7-12).

The believer is to seek wisdom and knowledge from Yahweh in heaven and permit him to be one’s guide.

Yet, if a person is not truly seeking understanding and wisdom, but is content to “go with the flow,” and becomes misled into worshipping a different God (even multiple Gods, in many cases, being assured by the preacher that it is ok), or misled into accepting a different gospel than the one revealed in the Bible, apart from the NT modifications, who is at fault and who will suffer the harm? If a person closes his mind to biblical corruption or ecclesiastical abuse, and places his trust in men, who is to blame when that belief system fails?

If a person holds up the Bible as the inerrant and flawless word of God that cannot be degraded or corrupted (and many evangelicals especially do that today), discovering that it may be less than flawless or that it was really not protected by God from corruption as they have been told, could throw a kink into one’s belief system. In this light, for instance, if a person worships Jesus Christ as a God because of certain biblical passages that may have been mishandled, mistranslated, or misinterpreted by trusted men, discovering that Jesus is not a God-being could be demoralizing and thoroughly upsetting. This typical believer may think that his salvation just flew out the window. *And by testimony of some folks on the fringe, if Jesus is not a divine, supernatural, transcendent God, salvation went out the window along with their opportunity to become transcendent Gods themselves.*

One favorite but unreliable New Testament proof-text that many multiple-Gods believers (Christian polytheistic camp) cling to, for instance, is found in Romans. This one has been used by Trinitarians and polytheistic Armstrong movement followers alike to bolster a preexistent supernatural Jesus view. From reading this passage in various New Testament versions, it is certainly clear on one hand that Jesus is a Divine God while on the other hand, it is just as clear that he is not a Divine God.

King James Version: “**For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: ⁴Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service *of God*, and the promises; ⁵Whose *are* the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ *came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.**” (Rom.9:3-5, KJV). [69 words]

New International Version: “**For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.**” (Rom.9:3-5, NIV). [74 words]

Revised Standard Version: “**For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. ⁴They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; ⁵to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.**” (Rom.9:3-5, RSV) [73 words]

New Century Version: “**I wish I could help my Jewish brothers and sisters, my people. I would even wish that I were cursed and cut off from Christ if that would help them. ⁴They are the people of Israel, God’s chosen children. They have seen the glory of God, and they have the agreements that God made between himself and his people. God gave them the law of Moses and the right way of worship and his promises. ⁵They are the descendants of our great ancestors, and they are the earthly family into which Christ was born, who is God over all. Praise him forever! Amen” (Rom.9:5, NCV). [103 words]**

The Message: “**If there were any way I could be cursed by the Messiah so they could be blessed by him, I’d do it in a minute. They’re my family. ⁴I grew up with them. They had everything going for them—family, glory, covenants, revelation, worship, promises, ⁵to say nothing of being the race that produced the Messiah, the Christ, who is God over everything, always. Oh, yes!” (Rom.9:3-5, TM). [68 words]**

Contemporary English Version: “**They have those famous ancestors, who were also the ancestors of Jesus Christ. I pray that God, who rules over all, will be praised forever! Amen**” (Rom.9:5, CEV).

Good News Bible: “...they are descended from the famous Hebrew ancestors; and Christ, as a human being, belongs to their race. **May God, who rules over all, be praised forever! Amen**” (Rom.9:5, GNB).

The Simple English Bible: “**They have the family roots. Christ, in the human sense, came from them. However, God is over everyone. Praise Him forever. Amen** (Rom.9:5).

The Cotton Patch Version: “**For I would be willing to sacrifice even my own life in Christ for the sake of my native white American Protestant brethren. They are “good white folks”; they are “saved”; they have the Bible; they have a denominational program; they have worship services and Sunday schools; they have theological doctrines and are staunch supporters of Christ himself. And God, who is over them all, is unceasingly magnified. So be it**” (Rom.9:3-5, CPV). [71 words]

Now, even the casual reader of these verses will notice that something is not quite right in a comparative reading of the citations. On the face of it, just considering the differences in the word counts and the vocabulary, a drastic change has taken place, one from another. Could the underlying Greek permit such radical variance? It would be strange indeed, if the Greek would permit it, and still be an inerrant and incorruptible text. Even in the face of the above textual testimony, some Christian teachers and preachers will tell you that the Bible is incorruptible and flawless, period.

THOSE PATRISTIC AND LECTIONARY WRITINGS²²

Here is something that is not from a scholar. Recently, I received a copy of *Tomorrow's World* published by *The Living Church of God* (an hierarchical Armstrong Worldwide Church of God (WCG) splinter organization) issue dated March-April, 2006. On pages 24ff is an article entitled, *Can You Believe the Bible?* This article, written by Douglas S. Winnall, is heavily based upon a reading of the book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell. The writer of the book purports to give solid evidence that the “Scriptures” (meaning both Testaments) are *totally* reliable as they stand. Winnall writes on page 25: *The Bible claims to be the inspired word of God.* For support he cites **2Tim.3:16; Jn.17:17, and Psa.119:160.** Is that a true statement? Does the *Bible* itself claim to be the *inspired word of God*? No, it does not. (*cit. ref.: All scripture [OT] inspired; Thy word is truth; The sum of thy word is truth. Is every word in the*

²² The word “patristic” means “of pater” or, of the early leaders, or fathers, of the Christian (esp. the Roman Catholic) Church. They may be of the “apostolic fathers” or later period writings. *Lectionaries* are lists of scriptures (usually) meant to be read in church services. *These are service books for liturgical use in church services, containing N.T. passages to coincide with the church's year; some 2000 have now been catalogued and there are four times as many with the Gospels as for Acts with the letters combined. They do not contain the whole N.T. They are indicated by an 'l' followed by a number* (website source).

Bible the “word of God”?) “The Jews said to him, ‘Now we know that you have a demon’ ” (Jn.8:52a).

On page 27: *The reliability of the New Testament is just as certain [as the OT]. As scholars know, “There are earlier and more manuscripts of the NT than for any other book from the ancient world” (Geisler, p.93). These manuscripts reveal that the New Testament “has been transmitted to us with no, or next to no, variation” (McDowell, p.44). “No, or next to no variation” is a serious allegation for such a complex, varied, and fragmented group of documents. If only it were true. And those “earlier” manuscripts are mostly fragments while only a few relatively complete manuscripts date from the 4th century, several hundred years after the originals were penned. And further, whether old or not, all the manuscripts differ from one another; none are the same and “old” does not equate with accuracy. The age of a manuscript is only one factor of textual criticism, and it is not necessarily the best factor.*

To my knowledge, Josh McDowell and Norman Geisler are not NT textual scholars. Mr. McDowell is a “defender of the faith” and Mr. Geisler is a Christian apologist. (At this point, let me say that I do not consider myself to be a New Testament, Textual, or Greek scholar. I am a biblical or theological researcher and investigator. I research and investigate scriptural and doctrinal claims of those who would be teachers of the brethren. Presently, I am researching and investigating New Testament corruption and various relevant claims by Christian apologists and others. In turn, the findings of my research and analysis are published via my writings, mostly within our free quarterly newsletter, *The Fellowship Commentator*, and but also within special-subject Mini-Booklet Studies to whoever will listen. After listening or reading, any person is free to accept, reject, ignore, or respond to my findings without experiencing ill will or unkindness on my part. But if you are going to debunk my writings, it would be good to read them first, which I send free of charge to friend or foe alike.)

The article writer goes on to make *another* astounding and unsupported claim: *In addition to the multitude of available manuscripts, early Christian writers [these would mostly be the patristic “church fathers”] quoted the New Testament so extensively that almost the entire text could be reconstructed from other sources* (p.27). This is a common (and ignorant) declaration.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if what Mr. Winnall wrote is accurate? Why, just pick up any Bible you happen to have lying around and you can bet your bottom dollar that it is just as reliable as any other Bible in any other language—*they are the same*, the same, that is, until you begin to study them.

Metzger and Eherman: *Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic has available the numerous scriptural quotations included in the commentaries, sermons, and other treatises [some of these could be lectionaries] written by early Church fathers. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed,*

*they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.*²³

If we were to stop reading here, a case for establishing the NT text from other writings could be made. Nevertheless, all is not as rosy as it seems with those flawless and infallible “fathers.” The authors continue and they offer a qualification: *Before patristic evidence can be used with confidence, however, one must determine whether the true text of the ecclesiastical writer has been transmitted. As in the case of New Testament manuscripts, so also the treatises of the fathers have been modified in the course of copying. The scribe was always tempted to assimilate scriptural quotations in the fathers to the form of text that was current in the later manuscripts of the New Testament, a text that the scribes might well know by heart. When manuscripts of a father differ in a given passage, it is usually safest to adopt the one that diverges from the later ecclesiastical text (the Byzantine text or the Vulgate). After the text of the patristic author has been recovered, the further question must be raised of whether the writer intended to quote the scriptural passage verbatim or merely to paraphrase it. If one is assured that the father makes a bona fide quotation and not a mere allusion, the problem remains of whether he quoted it after consulting the passage in a manuscript or relied on his memory. Furthermore, if the father quotes the same passage more than once, it often happens that he does so in divergent forms.*²⁴

On the *Day of Discovery DVD*²⁵, one of the narrators stated that, *There is compelling evidence within the Bible of a God who, down through the ages, overruled the corrupting influence of human history.* The speaker never said what that “compelling” evidence might be, of course. He just made the claim. But if “God overruled the corrupting influence of human history,” pray tell: *where was that overruling God when these (and other) versions were being created? Can they all be correct?* In an attempt to discredit the idea of significant corruption, the DVD narrators also extolled the virtues of *the Latin Vulgate* and *the wealth of patristic writings* that (according to some writers) could very nearly (or completely) reproduce the entire New Testament text.



But wait! If we could reconstruct the entire New Testament from the patristic writings, why has it not been done by now? Duh...

Let me try to answer that. It seems to be obvious that the patristic writings are varied as to value. The fact of the business is that the patristic writings—the writings of the Church fathers—just cannot be trusted, especially where biblical citations are concerned, thus, it would be foolish to try to use them to reconstruct anything—even those writings need to be reconstructed.

Some patristic citations of the Bible are in error and incomplete. Some were written from the church father’s memory. How is your memory for verses?

²³ *The Text of the New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration, Fourth Ed., Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, © 2005, p. 126*

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 127-129

²⁵ *The Story of Two Kings; Has the Bible Been Corrupted?*, Day of Discovery DVD, © 2006 RBC Ministries, Mart De Haan and Jimmy DeYoung.

Some came from corrupted manuscripts. And as to the Latin Vulgate, the assumption that Jerome (c.342-420 AD) translated the entire Old Testament is unjustified (while other problems exist with the Vulgate, as well.) The Vulgate is said to be only partially translated by Jerome: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles; possibly also 1 and 2 Chronicles, in addition to only the four New Testament gospels. The Pauline corpus has been regarded as pre-Heironymian (Jerome's full name was Eusebius Hieronymous) even going back to Novatian (d.258), or as a work of a group of 6th century scholars, or as a product of an anonymous reviser from the last years of the 4th century who at least also prepared the Catholic Epistles.²⁶ Obviously, the integrity of the Vulgate is not as good as what some might like us to believe and we cannot reconstruct the entire New Testament from the patristic writings or from the .

And so, if our entire knowledge base of the New Testament were destroyed overnight, how could it be possible to reconstruct the NT from corrupted and erratic patristic writings? How would anyone know what the originals were so as to compare the patristic stuff? No one could know, so the notion of reconstructing the New Testament from patristic writings that themselves have to be reconstructed is just plain silly.

Greek New Testament: Evidence from Ancient Versions: The evidence cited from ancient versions includes the Latin (Itala or Old Latin, and Vulgate), Syriac, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Georgian, and rarely Arabic, Nubian, Old High German, Persian, Provencial and Slavonic. The versional evidence has been derived primarily from printed editions. It must always be employed with caution since the very process of translation frequently obscures its textual basis, and resemblances can be merely accidental, especially is a translation is relatively free.²⁷

Something is amiss when so many versions and so many scholars (and pseudo-scholars) do not agree with one another. How can they all be correct? Answer: *They cannot all be correct.*

We have available today two primary styles of translations. One is the Paraphrase (Dynamic Equivalence), which tries to interpret the *thoughts* of the original manuscript writers and the other is the Literal (Formal Equivalence) or “word-for-word” type. All English Bibles seem to stem from these two forms or are a mixture of them to one degree or another. But, which English version of the thousands now available *correctly* represents the original language autographs? Remember, we have none of the original autographs, just like we have none of the original patristic writings. Just before typing this, I read a paper from a religious website wherein the writer thoughtlessly stated (like Scofield above) that he believes in the inerrancy (perfection) of the “original” New Testament writings. Then he immediately quotes parts of **John 1** in *English* to support a doctrinal position!

What does it mean to say you think the original writings were inerrant, flawless, or without error and infallible when you have none of the inerrant or

²⁶ The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, pp.970-973

²⁷ Greek New Testament, *Introduction* p.xxvi, United Bible Societies, © 1966

flawless or infallible writings on hand? It means nothing; it means you are basing a belief on a unreality, but making the statement may make you feel pious and rather noble. (I was once guilty of this foolishness.) It also gives you an escape hatch in the event you find an error in a current Bible version, which is easy enough to do. Another writer today simply wrote that his group believes that the *Bible* is inerrant. But which Bible and in what language is totally without error? He didn't say.

Darwin Lee fielded this question in one of his newsletters: *Do you feel that the Bible is 100% truth?* Mr. Lee answered: *Yes. Jn. 17:17; "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (KJV).*²⁸ End of discussion, period.

Apparently the referenced Bible is the New Testament and is, in its entirety, said to be the "word of God." Yet, just a few verses earlier making it hard to overlook, within the same cited prayer, Jesus states without qualification that the Father to whom he was speaking was (and therefore is), the "**the only true God**" (Jn.17:3). According to their published writings, both of the Lees apparently believe Jesus was/is a God, so it is puzzling that Jesus' words in **Jn.17:3** are being ignored by them. Mr. Lee, in an article entitled, *Was Jesus God, too?*, published this statement: *Christ was equal with the other God being before the foundation of the world. The God being (Christ) became the son at the time of human conception and the other God being became the Father.*²⁹ The writing by Lee, of course, represents a sharp departure from biblical monotheism into extra-biblical polytheism. But this is nothing new for most of Christendom, certainly not even for fringe groups that, in spite of the facts and reality, defend a claim of monotheism in their belief systems. In a televised sermon on Sunday 4/23/06, fundamentalist Baptist pastor and televangelist Jerry Falwell stated: *"There is ... , only one God and his name is Jesus."* How in the world Mr. Falwell came up with that conclusion from the Bible is beyond me.

I submit that those who would change the text of the New Testament to suit themselves or their church affiliation (whether in the Greek copies or from the pulpit) are in fear of genuine monotheistic biblical authority. Having relatively little more than church mandates to support most of their multi-God doctrines, Bible Modification Practitioners feel a need to "boost" the authority of the NT by outlandish declarations, term redefining, and scripture-juggling, in an attempt to silence others who disagree with them. This tactic has been very successful for many years for the Roman church and her allies, and it is now being employed by others on the fringe. But it is important for Bible readers to be open to the possibility of inconsistency and *apparent* contradiction within the Bible. Most of the time contradictory issues can be worked out relatively satisfactorily. But not always. Yet, it is a poor defense of any biblical authority to maintain (openly or otherwise) that no data, however well established, would ever convince us to abandon or even reevaluate our position. For if we fear being convinced or

²⁸ Newsletter, Jul/Aug 2004—issue No.22, Question No.14, p.8

²⁹ Newsletter, Mar/Apr.2004—issue No.20, p.18. Darwin and Laura Lee were members of the United Church of God (UCG), an offshoot of the now-defunct Herbert Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God (WCG), but were disfellowshipped.

persuaded of another position, what kind of freedom is that? That is enslavement to something other than Yahweh.

New Testament corruption or distortion may ultimately be innocent or deliberate, comes in several forms, and exists at different levels. For example:

(1) The *underlying* Greek may have been reconstructed or distorted, which results in a misrepresentation of the original intent of the author;

(2) The *overlying* English (my language of choice) translation may have been reconstructed or distorted, resulting in a shift from the original intent of the author, a shift that supports a peculiar point of view;

(3) The *overreaching* of biblical presentations by sincere (or otherwise) preachers (they may be orthodox or not) in an attempt to harmonize or justify certain NT passages and not upset the congregation at the same time;

(4) The *overarching* intimidation and pressure exerted against free-thinking members of rigid, hierarchical church and ministry organizations that fear being exposed for what they are. Of course, this historical intimidation by rigid hierarchical church organizations is extant today. Of that I am a firsthand witness. Such hierarchical pressure is sufficient to cause church members to be reluctant to speak out against improper applications of NT passages, resulting in further corruption of the passages in question as well as a fraud being committed upon the congregation.

Points 3 and 4 (intolerant and self-justifying interpretations from the pulpit and church intimidation resulting in congregation abuse) are not often thought of as biblical corruption, but whether the corrupter distorts the text, he distorts the thought behind the text or he just makes an inaccurate oral presentation of the text, the text is equally being corrupted.

Presenting a corrupted text as though it were reliably and accurately employed may rightly be thought of as an abuse of ecclesiastical or religious power. And where a congregation is the recipient of such ungodly distortion, it is being abused and the church (or ministry) presenting the dishonest view may rightly be called an “abusing” church (or ministry).

CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

But some corruption can be avoided simply by remembering to check the greater as well as the immediate context of a passage and this is true whatever language you happen to be using.

An old saying: “A text without a context is a pretext for a proof-text.” Certainly this chestnut has a ring of truth to it.

The first stage in serious Bible study is to consider the larger context within which a passage is found. Unless we can grasp the whole before attempting to dissect the parts, interpretation is doomed from the start. Statements simply have no meaning apart from their context. If I say, “Give it all you’ve got,” you would rightly query, “What do you mean by ‘it’?” and “How do I do so?” Without a situation to give the command content, it becomes meaningless. In Scripture the content provides the situation behind the text.

Two areas must be considered at the beginning of Bible study: the historical context and the logical context. Under the first category we study

introductory material on the biblical book in order to determine the situation to which the book was addressed. Under the second category we use an inductive approach in order to trace the thought development of a book. Both aspects are necessary before we begin a detailed analysis of a particular passage. The historical and logical contexts provide the scaffolding upon which we can build the in-depth meaning of a passage. Without a strong scaffolding, the edifice of interpretation is bound to collapse.³⁰

Frequently, an expositor, wishing to make a point, will lift a passage out of context and all too often, he will base a conclusion upon that passage creating a false doctrine based on the lifted passage (sometimes called a proof text). An excellent example of phony support for a created false doctrine is **Gen.1:26** wherein the multiple-God person desiring to maintain his polytheistic stance (trinitarian or binitarian) cites this passage as a proof-text for the notion that two Gods are talking to one another in a decision to create mankind. Certainly, if you lift it out of its immediate context, the passage becomes a puzzle. But the puzzle disappears if one would but continue reading the very next verse (**v.27**) where it tells us that “he” (God), a singular being, made man in “his” image. He created them. Deliberately ignoring the context, however, the deceitful expositor charges forward with his deception.

Now, the singular God idea of **v.27** is in keeping with the strict monotheistic position asserted by the Old Testament (and New Testament), so the greater context of the single passage is satisfied. But how do we answer the puzzle? Who could God be speaking to? A small amount of research would show the unbiased reader as well as the biased expositor that the audience surrounding God was called the “host of heaven.” And in keeping with a normal dialogue from a king, God said “Let us” do thus and such and create man “in our” image, even though he alone would do the creating.

For a kingly example, in **Ezra** we find that a letter was sent to the king. **“Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king as follows...” (Ezra 4:8)**. Clearly, the letter was directed to the king. Yet, a few verses later, the king makes this statement in his response: **“The king sent an answer: “To Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their associates who live in Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River, greeting. And now the letter which you sent to us has been plainly read before me” (Ezra 4:17-18)**. The letter was sent directly to the king but he said it was “sent to us.” Was the king a liar or was he speaking as the representative of his people? Fifteen seconds of research turned up this passage and gave me the answer:

“And Micaiah said, ‘Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab,

³⁰ The Hermeneutical Spiral by Grant R. Osborne, chap.: *Context*, p.19. (Hermeneutics deals with the principles of exegesis. An *inductive* approach refers to general rules or conclusions drawn from particular facts; reasoning from particular cases to general conclusions. To *deduce* is to reason from a general known principle to a specific, or from a premise to a logical conclusion.)

that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?’ And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, ‘I will entice him’ ” (1Ki.22:19-21; cf. 2Chron.18:18). The host of heaven stood beside God and they conversed with one another. This is the biblical answer to the **Gen.1:26-27** “puzzle.” Elevating Jesus Christ to God-status includes him in with the host of heaven whom a believer is not supposed to worship (**Acts 7:42**). (Sometimes the Bible suggests that the host of heaven includes or is said to be the stars and other heavenly bodies.)

Ignoring the context is the basic error that encompasses other errors and makes them possible. *Failure to note context may be the most frequently occurring error, since the majority of commentaries are organized around a word-by-word approach that usually isolates each word from the other terms surrounding it and as a result fails to put the message of the text together as a coherent whole.*

For instance, in Philippians 2:7 heauton ekenosen ([cf. Gr. 1438/2758] “emptied himself”)³¹ has become the focus of widespread debate centering upon the kenotic theory, [Gr. kenosis] namely whether Jesus Christ “emptied himself” of his deity [see Darby, NASB]. The traditional evangelical approach has been to respond that Christ emptied himself of the prerogatives of and glory of deity but not of his divine nature (cf. v.6; see Lightfoot)³². However, as Hawthorne has noted, this ignores the context (1983:25-86). There is no (genitive [relational] of) context given for the “emptying,” and it is better in this light to recognize the intransitive nature of the verb. In the semantic range another use fits the context better, to “pour out” or “make himself nothing.” This fits the transition from “did not consider equality a thing to be grasped” to “took on the form of a servant” as well as the parallelism with “humbled” in verse 8. A proper regard for context removes the necessity of debating the kenotic³³ school on their own grounds.³⁴

Besides context, the **Gen.1:26** passage (or, *In the beginning, God, Gen.1:1*) is also an example of word isolation and misapplication of definitions. A number of persons from various church organizations and ministries argue simplistically that *because* the Hebrew word underlying “God” is *elohim* (H430), and the word is plural in form, *this* means (aside from *all* contextual considerations where the word is clearly singular in usage) that God is plural in form. This self-imposed ignorance and naiveté stems from an overwhelming desire to support a church doctrine that demands multiple God-beings (in various forms) rather than a desire to search for and accept the reality of a passage.

³¹ See the Darby Bible, NASB, YLT, HCSB. The Message has: *Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!*

³² New International Version Study Bible commentary: *Lit: “emptied himself.” He did this, not by giving up deity, but by laying aside his glory (see Jn. 17:5). Another view is that he emptied himself, not of deity itself, but of its prerogatives—the high position and glory of deity.*

³³ The *kenotic school* refers to the camp that accepts *emptied*(himself) as the proper definition of Greek *kenosis* in Phil.2:7: “...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant...”

³⁴ The Hermeneutical Spiral, p.75.

Word isolation and misapplication of definitions are frequently found residing in the tainted writings of certain professing Christian churches, sects, and ministries.

MANY BIBLE VERSIONS

The world today has many versions of Bibles. Some are supposed to be word-for-word translations (literal) while others are said to represent the thoughts behind the text (dynamic equivalence). But who best determines that the interpreted *thoughts* behind the words in paraphrase and dynamic equivalence Bibles are correct and who determines that the word translations in the literal versions are correct? And how do we know that the underlying Greek is correct for any given translation, seeing that some 1400 years of hand copying (by rank amateurs and professional alike) went by from the autographs to the printing press? Can it be possible that all during those years that no significant biblical corruption took place? Hardly.

Are we to believe that Yahweh (or as has been said, the holy spirit), made sure all the words of the Bible were perfectly preserved and that no unscrupulous or deceitful person got his nasty hands on legitimate copies of the autographs in order to corrupt them? Some folks would answer in the affirmative. If so, when and how did Yahweh certify that the original autographs and multiple thousands of copies were exactly what he meant the authors to write and the scribes to copy?

The apostle Paul seems to have dictated some writings attributed to him. How do we know that his “secretary” or “stenographer” got all his words correct? Could he have written another word that sounded like the one spoken?

In spite of our great distance from the originals, biblical scholarship has shown that biblical corruption, alterations, accretion, and distortion did in fact take place. No one living in the real world denies this fact. We also know that most of the corruption was accidental and that a good portion was *not* accidental, but deliberate. We cannot always know the motives behind deliberate corruption and text manipulation. Often they are implied, if not stated outright.

And accordingly, after reviewing and analyzing the results of such manipulation, accidental or deliberate, scholars have found that many New Testament biblical texts in the Greek were changed to suit the theology of the copyist (a lesser amount) while many more were changed by an assortment of errors in judgment or simply by pure accident. In fact, of all the 5,000 or more NT manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts, no two of them agree in all particulars—they all differ in one way or another. This fact is seldom reported by the popular preacher who would write on the issue. The question of whether these differences are *substantial* or *insignificant* falls within the realm of scholarly textual criticism. Generally, orthodox Christians who write about the issue suggest that any differences are all insignificant. This is a bit hard to believe. Others suggest otherwise. Admittedly, textual criticism is a complex issue.

To further complicate the matter, scholars tell us that we have only about 50 to 61 complete manuscripts. Some of these are deteriorating beyond possible rescue. The rest are delicate fragments. Some fragments and manuscripts are

turning to dust and being lost forever. We simply do not have thousands of complete, pristine manuscripts to compare to one another.

Bruce Metzger: *Lest, however, the wrong impression be conveyed from the statistics given above regarding the total number of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, it should be pointed out that most of the papyri are relatively fragmentary and that only about fifty manuscripts (of which the Codex Sinaiticus is the only Uncial³⁵ manuscript) contain the entire New Testament.*³⁶

M.W. Holmes: *In all, something over five thousand witnesses to the Greek New Testament are extant today. Many (if not most) of these, it should be noted, are fragmentary or incomplete. Only 3 majuscules³⁷ and fifty-six minuscules³⁸ contain the entire New Testament; another 2 majuscules and 147 minuscules lack only Revelation. As for content, the Gospels are found in just over 2,300 MSS, the Acts and Catholic letters in about 655, and the Pauline letters in about 780, and Revelation in about 290. With regard to date, over 65 percent are from the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries, while less than 2.5 percent are from the first five centuries.*³⁹

EVERY BELIEVER SHOULD BE A TEXTUAL CRITIC

Textual criticism is a compelling and intriguing field of study that should be of great importance to every believer, bar none. Indeed, the believer is admonished to be a textual critic himself, rather than continuing in ignorance.

“There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2Pet.3:16b-18a; cf. Rom.12:2; Phil.1:10; 1Jn.4:1)). To protect against being carried away by the flow of error, one must be knowledgeable. There is power in knowledge—power over error and power over denominational and cultic church intimidation.

We are to test everything: **“Test everything; hold fast to what is good” (1Thess.5:21).** The Greek word *dokimazo* (G1381) corresponds to *test, prove, discern, examine, approve, and try. Examine and try everything!*

³⁵ *Uncial* (*L. an inch*) designates a kind of large rounded letters used in ancient Latin and Greek manuscripts. Uncial writing was used in Latin manuscripts as early as the third or fourth century, but was seldom used after the tenth (Webster's New Universal Dictionary).

³⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text Of The New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption & Restoration*, Third Enlarged Edition, *op. cit.*, p.34, note 3; A similar statement can be found in D. Stone, *Teach Yourself Books: The New Testament*, 1996, Hodder Headline Plc: London (UK)p. 96. (Codex Sinaiticus is deteriorating also.)

³⁷ *Majuscules*: Somewhat larger; a large letter, capital or uncial.

³⁸ *Minuscule*: A small cursive script developed from the uncial and used in medieval manuscripts.

³⁹ M. W. Holmes, "Textual Criticism", in D. A. Black & D. S. Dockery (Eds.), *Interpreting The New Testament: Essays On Methods and Issues*, 2001, Broadman & Holman Publishers: Nashville, p.49.

I have often emphasized the “Berean Method” of Acts from the pulpit and in writing:

“The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men” (Acts 17:10-12). The “noble” Jews were not simply “high-standing” persons, but were individuals who “received the word with all eagerness,” yet, they took time to *examine* and *analyze* the scriptures (OT writings) every day to verify what was being said by Paul and Silas. Textual criticism is not a recent phenomenon. But, ignorance of the topic is astounding.

Bart Ehrman: *What is striking, however, is that most readers—even those interested in Christianity, in the Bible, in biblical studies, both those who believe the Bible is inerrant and those who do not—know almost nothing about textual criticism. ... who do not realize there is even a “problem” with the text...*⁴⁰

The goal of the textual critic is not to tear down or destroy a text. Nor should it be to establish a preexisting ideal. One goal of the professional and objective textual critic is to determine as best he can, the most reasonable variation of a text that most is sensible within the context. The greater task of the textual critic is to study and compare the available manuscripts in order to discern which of the variations most closely conforms to the original.

F.F. Bruce: *The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which none dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.*⁴¹

THINGS WRITTEN BY SCHOLARS AND OTHERS

Bruce Metzger: *In the preceding section the reader will have seen how, during about fourteen centuries when the New Testament was transmitted in handwritten copies, numerous changes and accretions came into the text. Of the approximately 5,000 Greek manuscripts of all or part of the New Testament that are known today, no two agree exactly in all particulars. Confronted by a mass of conflicting readings, editors must decide which variants deserve to be included in the text and which should be relegated to the apparatus. Although it may seem to be a hopeless task amid so many thousands of variant readings to sort out those that should be regarded as original, textual scholars have developed certain generally acknowledged criteria of evaluation. These considerations depend, it will be seen, upon probabilities, and sometimes the textual critic must*

⁴⁰ *Misquoting Jesus* by Bart D. Ehrman (world-class scholar), *The story Behind who Changed the Bible and Why*, © 2005, pp.14-15

⁴¹ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, 1984, Fifth Revised Edition, InterVarsity Press (Leicester, England) and William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (Grand Rapids, Michigan), p.15.

*weigh one set of probabilities against another. Furthermore, the reader should be advised at the outset that, although the following criteria have been drawn up in a more or less tidy outline form, their application can never be undertaken in a merely mechanical or stereotyped manner. The range and complexity of textual data are so great that no neatly arranged or mechanically contrived set of rules can be applied with mathematical precision. Each and every variant reading needs to be considered in itself, and not judged merely according to a rule of thumb.*⁴²

Bart D. Ehrman: *I kept reverting back to my basic question: how does it help to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we don't have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by the scribes—sometimes correctly but sometimes (many times!) incorrectly? What good is it to say that the autographs (i.e., the originals) were inspired? We don't have the originals! We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently, in thousands of ways.*⁴³

Establishing the texts of the original New Testament manuscripts via textual criticism is no simple matter—we are dealing with an extremely complex issue. What the experienced textual critic attempts to determine is *the most likely case for the original writings*. In this search for the most reasonable text, that is, the one that best approximates the original autograph, many additions or changes to the New Testament wind up based upon a majority vote of the textual committee and others are relegated to footnotes or margin references. So, the fallback position even of highly trained and experienced textual critics is the majority opinion from colleagues.

It has also been said that because we have a great number of NT manuscripts and scraps, that fact says something about the accuracy of those MSS and scraps. But simple age or quantity do not establish accuracy. One inaccurate 4th century MS may have ten altered copies of it while one more accurate 5th century MS may only have one copy. Which is to be preferred?

B.D. Ehrman: *Of course, we would expect the New Testament to be copied in the Middle Ages more frequently than Homer or Euripides or Tacitus; the trained copyists throughout the Western world at the time were Christian scribes, frequently monks, who for the most part were preparing copies of texts for religious purposes. Still, the fact that we have thousands of New Testament manuscripts that were made during the Middle Ages, many of them nearly a thousand years after Paul and his companions had passed off the face of the earth, does not mean that we can rest assured that we know what the original text said. For if we have very few early copies, in fact, scarcely any, how can we*

⁴² Bruce Metzger, scholar from Princeton University; *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, pp.10-11

⁴³ *Misquoting Jesus*, p.7

know that the text was not changed significantly before it began to be reproduced in such large quantities?⁴⁴

G. A. Wells: *I have noted elsewhere that, if there had been a Tacitus club in every European town for 1,000 or more years with as much influence as the local Christian clergy, sections of the Annals would not have been lost. And if, instead of copying orthodox literature repeatedly, Christian scribes had copied works regarded as heretical or even downright hostile to Christianity, we should have a much clearer picture of what underlay the church's struggle against opposing forces.⁴⁵*

This is an interesting thought. Had the church and others diligently preserved the writing of the antagonists of the new Roman church system, we would indeed have a better grasp of the events surrounding the emerging Christian faith. As it is, most of what we know about all those “heretics” is gleaned from orthodox writers who criticized them.

Johannes Weis: *We have now drawn the Gospel of John within the scope of our study. ... In our view the work is not in its original form, but has reached us after having been worked over. His follows obviously from Chapter 21, especially from the conclusion of the chapter. The man who wrote the appendix [of the chapter] edited the whole work, and this occurred in fact only after the death of the author. He writes 21:24 in the name of a wider circle which still had know the “disciple.” From the redactor comes 13:23, in which the disciple is more exactly designated as the one whom Jesus had loved; furthermore, the passage 19:26f, 35; 20:2-10 derive from him; and 1:40ff and 20:24-29 may come from his hand as well.*

*By means of these passages the legend of the Beloved Disciple, which was thus deepened psychologically, gained admission into the gospel itself. The hand of the redactor is to be traced in a long series of passages in the text itself, in sundry comments, developments of the Lord's sayings, and explanations of them; the reworking is especially to be noticed in the farewell speech of Jesus to his disciples, * yet in the opening chapters it palpably comes to light: 1:24; 4:2,9b,46,54; 1:6-9,14; 1:20,21a,25; 3:28; 7:41a; 8:24b; 5:34; 3:5f,8c,11c,13c; 6:36-40,44-48; 10:6f,9f,16,18,26-29; 12:39f; 4:20-26;37f; 6:51b-58. It is quite possible, nay probable, that the redactor inserted whole passages, such as perhaps the marriage at Cana, the cripple at the pool of Bethesda, the man born blind, or the raisingb of Lazarus and the anointing of Jesus. From all this it follows that the basic gospel narrative was much briefer than the book which lies before us. Yet, on the other hand, the original writer and the redactor stand close to each other; both have forms of piety, religious experience, and religious style which are closely related.*

The foundation document, fully complete in itself, which ends at 20:30f, tells its story from a Jerusalemite standpoint. ... If the author was a disciple, he was not one of Galileans who had journeyed with Jesus, but a Jerusalemite, who

⁴⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction To The Early Christian Writings*, p.449.

⁴⁵ G.A. Wells, *The Jesus Myth*, 1999, Open Court Publishing Co., p.3

*had seen Jesus only when he came to Jerusalem for the feasts. It is possible that he was John Mark, the man to whom the people have been wont to attribute the second gospel. The redaction of the work certainly took place in Asia, where the original writing also probably had its origin.*⁴⁶

THE WHY AND HOW OF NEW TESTAMENT CORRUPTION

No single reason can be set out as the root cause of New Testament corruption and alteration. None, that is, unless one is willing to accept the mode of transmission as the cause: hand copying. OK, a document that is copied by hand is subject to any number of forces that work against a true copy. Some of those forces have already been (or will be) mentioned or alluded to in this paper so there might be a bit of repetition here.

Errors found in manuscripts can be classified into certain categories. These categories come under the umbrella of Accidental and Deliberate. By far, most errors are accidental; minor slips of the pen and so on. But deliberate alterations, changes, or corruption can be done with or without the best of intentions. A monk, intending to harmonize a passage that, to him, is out of place or out of character, might change it for the sake of unity or doctrinal clarity.

All copying of NT manuscripts for about 1400 years was done by hand. Think about that: 1,400 years. That's why they were called "*manu scriptus*." Creating a manuscript was a slow, laborious and often expensive process. It took time to copy a letter by hand. Can you imagine how long it would take to hand-copy the New Testament today—long dreary hours on end, parked under candlelight or an oil lamp, in a cave or a cold room with a flickering fire, sitting on the floor or at a crude table, on a bench made of stone, with a feather quill pen, using ink that froze up on you at times, trying to write on a wide piece of papyrus or a floppy piece of leather? Bad lighting and poor conditions taxed the mind and body and inevitably led to scribal errors. Is there any wonder that no two copies of manuscripts are the same? The conditions inside "professional scriptoriums" (as relatively rare as they were) that some apologists refer to were not a whole lot better. One person would read the text aloud, and others would write down what they heard—or thought they heard. Someone coughing or sneezing or other disruptions would cause the copyist to miss a word or a phrase, and the person would be playing catch-up from then on, adding in what he thought the reader said. Think about it. Even in these wonderful conditions here in a comfortable air-conditioned room, good lighting, good acoustics, and with plenty of ink-pens and paper, should you be trusted to precisely transcribe every word I just said in the last half hour? Of course not. Only a trained person writing shorthand could do it. And not every scribe was trained—most were amateurs.

A professional scriptorium, or copy center, employed people to correct the work of the scribes and was capable of turning out very high quality work. But

⁴⁶ *Earliest Christianity, a History of the period AD 30-150; Vol.2, © 1937, by Johannes Weiss, pp.786-788*

*with regard to New Testament manuscripts, production under such careful control appears to have been the exception rather than the rule.*⁴⁷

*The use of dictation, common in scriptoria, added another step and opportunity for error, particularly in the case of homonyms. The well-known variation in Romans 5:1 “let us have peace” (echōmen) and “we have peace” (echomen; both words were pronounced alike) exemplifies this problem.*⁴⁸

*A scribe’s note in an Armenian MS (cited by B.M. Metzger, *The text of the New Testament; Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd Enlarged Edition, 1992, mentions that it is snowing heavily outside, the ink is frozen, and his hand is numb. Others complain of the physical discomfort involved in copying for six or more hours a day. Little wonder that copies were less than perfect!*⁴⁹

*An ancient historian records an incident around AD 350 in which a man was publicly rebuked for substituting the more refined Attic word *skimpous* for the colloquial Koine *krabbatos* (“pallet”) in John 5:8 (cited by Metzger, *Text*, 196)⁵⁰*

Of course, New Testament corruption would be of no significance if we had the originals, but no ancient autographs exist of any classical, biblical, or patristic writer today. Therefore, it is necessary to try to reconstruct, as best we can, the autographs.

SLOPPY THEOLOGY, SUBSTANCE, SAMPLES & EXAMPLES

But before we blindly accept what **this writer** and others claim is true, why not check it out? Are we not told by the apostle Paul to “test all things” spiritual (**1Thess.5:19-22**)? Yes, we are.

Many of these examples can be found in the KJV but will have been corrected in other versions, such as the RSV. You may be familiar with some of the entries.

As I was about to write this section, yet another newsletter (*Media Spotlight*) arrived in the mail. On page 1 the writer cited **1Thess.5:21** and emphatically wrote: *After all, God commands us to test all things.*

Oops. Where did God make such a command in the Bible? God never commanded us to “test all things.” This is a small *one word* mistake, writing “God” instead of “Paul.” But it is a *significant* error. If we were to accept what this writer said, it would perpetuate the error and we would attribute something to God that we should not. Both the writer and the editor missed the sloppy theology. That the writer no doubt *sincerely believes* that God gave us such a command does not excuse his error. So, here, we can see how errors even in biblical apologetics or commentary can be generated and perhaps perpetuated, should someone else pick this up and pass it along. In this case, the very proclamation to “test all things” is being ignored by the writer.

⁴⁷ *Interpreting the New Testament, Essays on Methods and Issues*, David Alan Black & David S. Dockery, editors, p.65, n.2.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.66, n.6

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.66, n.8

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.66. n.9

Should we not be a bit more careful in our assertions regarding the English language New Testament? If men cannot rely on their memories to correctly quote such a popular NT citation, how in the world can men be relied upon to correctly translate and interpret the original NT writings? Could the New Testament be as reliable as Mr. Winnall (above) and a number of others declare? —That the NT has been transmitted to us with no variation at all? And does the New Testament in reality represent the “Scriptures” as Winnall apparently claims by citing “**All scripture is inspired by God**” (2Tim.3:16)?

It is a common mistake by theologians and others alike, in stating that the Holy Bible IS “Scripture,” meaning that it is the inerrant and uncorrupted “Word of God.” Traditionally, the word “scripture” (when capitalized) refers to the Holy Bible, both Testaments, the sacred (revered, blessed) text of the Christian church. (The NKJV capitalizes scripture but the KJV does not.) The NT Greek word underlying the English word “scripture” is *graphe*, G1124; *writing*. Traditionally, however, the whole Bible is referred to as the “Holy Scriptures” (*hagios graphe*, G40, G1124 (cf. Rom.1:2; 2Tim.3:15) also *hieros* G2413; *gramma* G1121.)

In the first place, “scripture,” as mentioned in the NT, does not include any New Testament writings whatsoever. This is “Basic New Testament Theology 101.” The references to “scripture” point to the *Old Testament*, *Old Covenant*, or the *Torah*, which were often in scrolls in the first century AD and not bound up in a nice KJV Study Bible format. Adam Clarke in his Commentary writes: *The apostle is here, beyond all controversy, speaking of the writings of the Old Testament, which, because they came by Divine inspiration, he terms the Holy Scriptures; and it is of them alone that this passage is to be understood. ... as it [NT] was not collected at that time, not indeed complete, the apostle could have no reference to it.* So since the NT was not collected together at that time, Paul in writing to Timothy could not be referring to the NT at all.

The article writer states that *in the last 200 years, the rise of biblical criticism led many scholars to doubt the inspiration of the Scriptures.* Indeed! This may well be true, since delving into the history and origins of the transmissions of NT texts (and not simply surviving on Roman Catholic and Protestant tradition) will awaken a soul as to the behind the scenes mischief that has been going on for this many years.

On page 27 he writes of “another prominent scholar” who states: *It cannot be too strongly asserted that the substance of the text of the Bible is certain: Especially is this true with the New Testament.* But what does he mean by “substance”? When writing about such issues, we need to be more specific and define our terms. My Webster’s tells me that substance refers to *the real content of a statement or speech.*

Let’s see if the “substance” of the following passage has been retained.

KJV: “**This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.**”

⁸And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one” (1Jn.5:6-8).

RSV: **This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. ⁷ And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁸ There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree” (1Jn.5:6-8).**

The “substance” of the adulterated KJV passage is clearly supportive of the Trinity. But parts of the KJV section were added, as I have been told, by a monk in the 13th century. However, an NIV Study Bible Footnote states: *The addition is not found in any manuscript prior to the 16th century.* Regardless of the confusion in dates, the KJV substance is false. The obvious conclusion has to be that the “substance has not been retained” in the corrupted KJV text of **1Jn.5:7**. And so far, we’re only looking at an English interpretation of the Greek text.

NOTE: *The only Greek manuscripts in any form which support the words, “in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one; and there are three that bear witness in earth,” are the Montfortianus of Dublin, copied evidently from the modern Latin Vulgate; the Ravianus, copied from the Complutensian Polyglot; a manuscript at Naples, with the words added in the Margin by a recent hand; Ottobonianus, 298, of the fifteenth century, the Greek of which is a mere translation of the accompanying Latin. All the old versions omit the words. The oldest manuscripts of the Vulgate omit them: the earliest Vulgate manuscript which has them being Wizanburgensis, 99, of the eighth century.* —Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary.

I have a book in my library entitled, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* by John W. Haley, 473 pages. Strangely enough, he never mentions **1Jn.5:7** in his volume, nor does he examine **Rom.9:5**.

RSV: **“...to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom.9:5).**

You will readily notice that in the RSV, Christ is *not* called God. God is a separate being than the Messiah. But somebody tinkered with the English translation.



Holman Christian Standard Bible: **“The forefathers are theirs, and from them, by physical descent, came the Messiah, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen” (Rom.9:5).**

The HCSB version tells us that the Messiah is “God over all.” If Jesus is “God over all,” where does the Father fit in?

Obviously, both versions cannot be right. So which one is wrong?

NIV: **“Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised. Amen!” (Rom.9:5).**

Interestingly, the NIV Study Bible states in their footnote: *One of the clearest statements of the deity of Jesus Christ found in the entire New Testament, assuming the accuracy of the translation.* ASSUMING THE ACCURACY OF THE TRANSLATION, the statement is true. The some 100 persons on the NIV

translating team back in 1965 declined to simply declare that this is an accurate translation—they left the door open for a quick escape. Why? They wrote the footnote obviously because at least a fair number of them believed it is not an accurate translation. The footnote is a tacit admission that the translation is just not accurate.

What is the “substance” of the Romans passage? For trinitarians, it is a claim for the deity of the Messiah. In truth, it is something else.

RSV: “**And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent**” (Jn.17:3). The clear testimony (substance) of the Messiah himself is that only the Father is “true God” and no one else. But on this passage, Haley in his book quotes Barnes stating that Jesus is testifying only to God “in opposition to false gods.” *What is said here is in opposition to idols, not to Jesus himself, who in 1John 5:20 is called “the true God and eternal life” (p.107).* Is Jesus called “true God” in the 1John passage?

RSV: “**And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life**” (1Jn.5:20). Although it might at first glance appear otherwise, the passage does not define the true God as Jesus. Notice the context: “**We know that any one born of God does not sin, but he who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one**” (1Jn. 5:18-19). So Jesus is born of God as the Son, and the people being spoken to were not born, but just *of* God. If Christ was to be called “true God” it should have come in on the line: “in his Son Jesus Christ who is the true God” rather than as another line.

Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament: *This is the true God.* There has been much difference of opinion in regard to this important passage; whether it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, the immediate antecedent, or to a more remote antecedent-referring to God, as such. The question is of importance in its bearing on the doctrine of the divinity of the Savior; for if it refers to him, it furnishes an unequivocal declaration that he is Divine. The question is, whether John meant that it should be referred to him?*

** Many MSS here insert the word God—“the true God,” this is also found in the Vulgate, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions, and in the Complutensian⁵¹ edition of the New Testament. The reading, however, is not so well sustained as to be adopted by Griesbach, Tittman, or Hahn. That it may be a genuine reading is indeed possible, but the evidence is against it. Lucke supposes that it is genuine, and endeavors to account for the manner in which it was omitted in the MSS.—Commentary, p. 349.*

The woman caught in adultery: Jn.7:53-8:11—

Overwhelming and conclusive evidence exists that the text of the woman caught in adultery was not part of the original text of John, but was added later.

⁵¹ Designating the copy of the Bible first published in 1522 by Cardinal Ximenes, and printed at Complutum, or Alcala de Henares, a city near Madrid.

The evidence for the non-Johannine origin of the pericope⁵² of the adulteress is overwhelming. It is absent from ... early and diverse manuscripts... When one adds to this impressive and diversified list of external evidence the consideration that the style and vocabulary of the pericope [a passage to be used in a formal service] differ noticeably from the rest of the fourth gospel, and that it interrupts the sequence of 7:52 and 8:12ff, the case against its being of Johannine authorship appears to be conclusive. At the same time the account has all the earmarks of historical veracity. It is obviously a piece of oral tradition which circulated in parts of the Western church and which was subsequently incorporated into various manuscripts at various places.⁵³

Omit an entire verse: Acts 8:37—

Verse 37 is a Western addition. ... The formula ... was doubtless used by the early church in baptismal ceremonies, and may have been written in the margin of a copy of Acts. Its insertion into the text seems to be due to the feeling that Philip would not have baptized the Ethiopian without securing a confession of faith, which needed to be expressed in the narrative.⁵⁴

Two words added to a passage: 1Cor.7:5—

The Textus Receptus, following (listed citations and two prefixes) add "fasting and." Both are interpolations, introduced in the interest of asceticism. The shorter text is decisively supported by all the early and the best witnesses.⁵⁵

A trinitarian passage added to an epistle: 1Jn.5:7—

...And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. ⁷ For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. ⁸ And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, ... (KJV)

The passage is absent from every known Greek manuscript except eight, and these contain the passage in what appears to be a translation from a late recension of the Latin Vulgate. Four of the eight MSS contain the passage as a variant reading written in the margin as a later addition to the manuscript. The passage is quoted by none of the Greek fathers, who, had they known it, would most certainly have employed it in the Trinitarian controversies (Sabellian and Arian). Its first appearance in Greek is in a Greek version of the (Latin) Acts of the Latern Council in 1215.⁵⁶

An entire chapter was added to a Gospel: John 21:1-25—

John 21 has been called an *epilogue*, a closing section added to a novel, play, etc. It was added later, but the only real questions are: Who added it and when? Naturally, Christian apologists will say John did it. But was he the author of the book that bears his name? Some think not.

⁵² A selected abstract from a book, esp. a passage from the Bible to be used in a formal service.

⁵³ *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd Ed., pp.187-189

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.315

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.488

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.647-648

Epilogue—Glorification; the resurrected Jesus is still God; Lord of our wills -- Directs our service; Lord of our hearts -- Motive for service; Lord of our minds - - Lack of knowledge no excuse from service. ... The entire chapter reveals to us that the resurrected Jesus is still God. Chapter 21 is an epilogue. I believe that after John had written his Gospel, he added the prologue [John 1:1-14] and the epilogue.⁵⁷

Chapter 21. The evangelist seemed to have concluded his history with the foregoing chapter; but (as St. Paul sometimes in his epistles), new matter occurring, he begins again.⁵⁸

Chapter 21 is an epilogue to John's narrative. Very likely, John decided to add this chapter some time after he completed his Gospel in order to clarify the misconception about the relationship between his (John's) death and the Lord's return. The rumor that John would not die before the Lord's return (21:23) had to be corrected; otherwise, the church might experience great trouble at his death before the Lord's return. John, therefore, decided to add a chapter that would make it clear that Jesus did not say that he would return before John died.⁵⁹

The conclusion is that Chapter 21 was added later.

Liturgical Instructions appear to have been added: Acts 8:37—

³⁶ **And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?'**

³⁸ **And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him" Acts 8:36-38).**

RSV Footnote: *Other ancient authorities add all or most of verse 37: "And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he replied, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' "*

Adam Clarke: *This whole verse is omitted by ABCG, several others of the first authority, Erpen's edit. of the Arabic, the Syriac, the Coptic, Sahidic, Ethiopic, and some of the Slavonic: almost all the critics declare against it as spurious. Griesbach has left it out of the text; and Professor White in his Criseus says, "Hic versus certissime delendus," this verse, most assuredly, should be blotted out. It is found in E, several others of minor importance, and in the Vulgate and Arabic. In those MSS. where it is extant it exists in a variety of forms, though the sense is the same.⁶⁰*

Vincent's Word Studies: *The best texts omit this verse.*

Barnes Notes: **Acts 8:37 - And Philip said ... - This was stated by Philip as the proper qualification for making a profession of religion. ... This verse is missing in a very large number of manuscripts (Mill), and has been rejected by many of the ablest critics. It is also omitted in the Syriac and Ethiopic versions. It is not easy to conceive why it has been omitted in almost all the Greek mss. unless it is spurious. If it was not in the original copy of the Acts, it was probably inserted by some early transcriber, and was deemed so important to the**

⁵⁷ J. Vernon McGee's *Through the Bible*

⁵⁸ Matthew Henry Unabridged Commentary

⁵⁹ Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary

⁶⁰ Adam Clarke's Commentary

connection, to show that the eunuch was not admitted hastily to baptism, that it was afterward retained. It contains, however, an important truth, elsewhere abundantly taught in the Scriptures, that "faith" is necessary to a proper profession of religion.

Passages Added: Mark 16:9-20—

Four endings of the Gospel according to Mark are current in the manuscripts. (1) The last twelve verses of the commonly received text of Mark are absent from the two oldest Greek MSS (aleph) and B), (two other Greek MSS, both of the twelfth century, also lack verses 9-20, namely 304 and 2386), from the Old Latin Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae, the Sinaitic Syriac MS, about 100 Armenian MSS (written AD 897 and AD 913). Clement of Alexandria and Origen show no knowledge of the existence of these verses; furthermore, Eusebius [c.260-c.340] and Jerome [c.342-420] attest that the passages are absent from almost all Greek copies of Mark known to them.⁶¹

Passage Changed: Hebrews 1:8—

Heb.1:8 has two different renderings and one of these has the Son being addressed as "God." **Thy throne O God is forever:** RSV footnote: or *God is thy throne.* *The need to differentiate Christ from God is also evident in the interesting variant in Heb. 1:8, one of the few NT passages that appear to designate Christ as "God." The author quotes Psa.44:7 as a declaration of God to (pros) Christ. ... Interpretive problems abound in this passage, in part because the nominative⁶² "ho Theos," normally construed as a vocative⁶³ ("O God"), could also be taken as a predicate.⁶⁴ In that case, the introductory clause would be rendered, "Your throne is God forever and ever,..." Understood this way, the text no longer calls Christ "God." ... It is interesting to observe that the same manuscripts that that evidence corruption in Heb. 1:8 do so in John 1:18 as well. ... Moreover, ... we are now dealing not with a corruption of the original text but with a corruption of a corruption.⁶⁵*

Passage Changed, Christ Designated as God: John 1:18—

The view of the copyist towards Jesus' status is reflected in the MSS; in Jn.1:18 'the only Son' becomes 'the only God' in some MSS; therefore the Christology of the copyist sometimes led to changes being made on occasion.

A comparable corruption appears in the prologue of the fourth Gospel... I will ... develop my reasons for thinking that the majority of manuscripts are right in ending the prologue with the words: "No one has seen God at any time, but the unique Son who is in the bosom of the Father, that one has made him known." The variant reading of the Alexandrian tradition, which substitutes "God" for "Son," represents an orthodox corruption of the text in which the complete deity

⁶¹ A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament, Bruce M. Metzger, p.102-103

⁶² The doer of an action, the subject of the verb that indicates the action: The *man* believes.

⁶³ Used in a direct address to indicate the person or thing addressed.

⁶⁴ The word or words that make a statement about the subject of a clause or sentence; The wind *blows from the east.* The grass *is green, grass is a plant.*

⁶⁵ *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Bart D. Ehrman, © 1993, p.265

*of Christ is affirmed: "the unique God (ho monogenes Theos) who is in the bosom of the Father, that one has made him known."*⁶⁶

A Misplaced Comma: Luke 23—

An example of a misplaced comma (which would be a tiny amount of corruption), that certainly could change one's perception of a doctrine in question or even the genuineness of the Messiah, should suffice. Consider Luke 23:

Luke 23:43—“And he said to him, Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” When would the thief be in Paradise? He would arrive (on the promise of Jesus Christ) that very day *with* Jesus. Did Jesus Christ go to Paradise that very day? If Paradise is the grave, he did. If Paradise is anywhere else, he did not. Paradise (a word borrowed from the Persians) was thought of in Old Testament times as “the garden of God.” Presumably, God would be found in his garden from time to time. As far as we know, the thief went to his grave, if they took him off of the stake and buried him. He did *not* go anywhere *with* Jesus. Obviously, Jesus broke a promise and did not take the man to Paradise (the garden of God), sometimes considered heaven. Going to heaven at one's death is one very important orthodox doctrine. Many Christians are looking forward to going to heaven when they die. Hymns have been written that reflect the wishes of the believer going to heaven. In one of his typical fiery sermons, John Hagee (an orthodox preacher) said, “*My last breath over here is my first breath over there!!!*” If that statement is untrue, if the related doctrine is untrue, if believers do not go to heaven when they die, a significant portion of orthodox Christendom will be upset and shaken. In any case, the Messiah's reputation is at stake—his honesty is being called into question.

Luke 23:43—“And he said to him, Truly, I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise.” When would the thief be in Paradise? He would arrive at some future time not specified. Jesus makes no promise in this passage therefore, Jesus broke no promise. A broken promise by the Messiah is a significant doctrinal point; how can you trust somebody who breaks promises?

So those persons (usually amateur theologians) who suggest that no significant doctrines are affected by any biblical corruption are wrong.

Outside of scholarly circles, the reality and the extent of New Testament corruption are virtually unknown (this includes the amateur theologians). Not many theologians have investigated the issue and some of these simply parrot what some other person has said about the “infallibility” of the Bible as we know it. In fact, many lay-persons who attend Christian denominational churches accept the Bible as though God hand-delivered it to Moses himself in the King James Version.

Equating Christ with God: Acts 16:31-34—

A similar concern may explain the change of Acts 16:34 in some manuscripts. In this passage the Philippian jailer is urged to believe in “the Lord Jesus (v.31); he complies by “believing in God” (pepisteukos to Theo). Greek, Latin, and Coptic witnesses have changed the final statement so as to eliminate

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.78

the identification of Jesus as ho Theos himself; [believing in God] now the jailer comes to believe "in the Lord."⁶⁷

IN CONCLUSION

This paper does not represent an exhaustive study of New Testament corruption. That ought to be obvious. For the person who wishes to pursue the subject of NT corruption, much evidence is available for particular passages that have changed, whether by accident or design, and much evidence is on hand that points out substantial changes in copies (or exemplars) of the original autographs. Yet, the seeker of truth will soon discover that many Christian apologists still corrupt the minds of their followers by covering up corruption. Don't believe them. No one knows exactly what the original authors of the NT texts wrote. But the tracks of corrupting orthodoxy are everywhere within the copies. The leaders of orthodoxy turned Jesus into a God and the early Christian church, in understandable ignorance, accepted that premise. And the beat goes on.

Still, regardless of corrupting influences ("palimpsest" MSS erased and reused; other fading and worn MSS retraced and who knows what is under the tracings; copyist sleep deprivation, boredom, inattention, slips, repeating lines and words, lack of any real comfort, and zealous sectarian views), I think that we have a reasonably good concept as to what was written and what the authors meant to say. Nevertheless, our worship should be toward *Holy Yahweh*, not the Bible. Praise Yahweh for his blessings. -F. Paul Haney, May 08, 2006



⁶⁷ The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture, p.267