

# 500WoL Reviews: “Tyndale, The Man Who Gave God An English Voice”

“And the Lyght shyneth in the darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not.” (*John 4:5, William Tyndale New Testament*)

I’m coming up on 40 years of life this Summer and it has me all self-reflective and evaluative. One thing I absolutely need to change is that I need to read more biographies. As someone who has championed fantasy-fiction as reading that captures the imagination, I have woefully underestimated how real flesh and blood human beings with real lives can accomplish the same thing. And in some ways, in a deeper sense, since they are actual history.

Enter this book, written in 2012 by David Teems. It is cleverly written, packed with history down to the small players in Tyndale’s life and absolutely edifies the English-speaking Christian reader with a life worth dissecting.

I confess that Tyndale’s life is fascinating to me on the big story arcs because I am a pastor of a bilingual ministry, an ESL teacher and a subscriber to *Voice of the Martyrs*. Translation is my life’s work, though not nearly to the significance that his was and to the cost that his gave. Persecution and martyrdom are horrific in a human sense, yet biblically we can see how God exalts it. William Tyndale literally gave his life to give people of my native tongue one of the most precious gifts there is, the readable Word of God.

Christian history is indebted to countless people for the Bibles we have today, many of them nameless and faceless, like

the Masoretics of the Old Testament and the often maligned scribes and copyists of the New Testament. Tyndale thankfully is a name we can know and celebrate. He wasn't just a translator. He was a noble man, an educated yet humble man, and a great man. He is a hero. All of us who hold a KJV, or NASB, or NIV in our hands should know his name and his story.

Beyond the major and more well-known plot lines of his life, Teems gives other details that are equally as important. Like how much of the KJV was influenced by Tyndale and how many phrases we find in our Bible, and hence our popular culture, that can be traced back to Tyndale. Like "Am I my brother's keeper?". Tyndale used beautiful, easy-to-memorize, poetic English. And we owe our ability to recall many verses so easily to him.

Teems also speaks over several pages to how much Erasmus and Luther affected Tyndale and how much he affected them. These men were not friends, yet God used them all in their own way to greatly affect how we do church and bible study today. It is a testimony to how no one can do anything on their own. Not just without God's grace, but without Christian community. Even from a distance.

I recommend this book to all Christian teenagers and adults. It's not just an inspiring story, but an illuminating one. In 500 years, this story will still matter. Yet let us read it today.

---

## **A Path of Truth: How the**

# Doctrine of Biblical Authority Has Come Down to the American Church

The authority of Scripture. It is a subject rightly viewed as a fundamental truth by a large percentage of today's Christian world since its origin. The official doctrine might not have been formed until much later in history, but it is very clear in Scripture that God's Word is the final and supreme authority. Among many other things it tells us that God's Word is true (John 17:17), that it is complete and that we are forbidden to add to it (Proverbs 30:5-6), and that it is more than just a good book with good advice; it is God-breathed and sufficient for teaching, correction, rebuke, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). And those are just examples. If I were to list and adequately discuss everything the Bible says on the subject, the end result would be much longer than this article. The ecclesiastical discussion of biblical authority has appeared with several different faces throughout the centuries. It is a discussion that has seen many faces all over the world. There are many. For space reasons, I will just be looking at the line leading up to the American church.

No matter where you go with this the discussion starts in the Mediterranean area. For a long time after the start of Christianity, the exact doctrine wasn't truly set in stone. A more concentrated definition was found to be needed by the third to early fourth centuries to combat the increasing gross misinterpretations and false teachings of God's Word that were infesting the church. In A.D. 325 the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea met and began the practice of condemning heretics who went beyond the accepted teaching of Scripture. In many ways, such meetings were a good thing because they fostered communication among church leaders and the formation of accepted biblical doctrine. However, these councils, while

they met to defend biblical authority, were ironically devaluing it by placing more value on what the human church leadership thought than what the Bible itself thought. The Protestant Reformation would put a stop to the Catholic Church's growing pride and corruption. It put complete authority back in its proper place: The Word of God.

By the 1700s God's written Word was beginning to become subordinate to science and human intelligence. And by the 20th century, fundamental-minded Christians recognized that they desperately needed to band together against the growing modernism to defend the authority of the Scriptures. The battle over biblical authority revealed itself on several important stages inside the fundamentalist movement from 1900 to the present.

### **The Battle of Biblical Authority in America in the Modern Era**

In 1889 Charles Briggs wrote *Whither? A Theological Question* for the Times in which he launched a particularly vicious attack against the doctrine of inerrancy. Briggs' well worded but misled criticisms caught on and would give rise to liberal Christianity. This, in turn, led to the birth of neo-orthodoxy with its emphasis on individual connection and interpretation of Scripture. Neo-orthodoxy was actually a negative reaction against liberal theology. It was formed by the German theologian Karl Barth. Neo-orthodoxy held to traditional orthodoxy but was new (neo) in that it was adapted modern thought to the orthodoxy. It also held that the Bible only became the revealed Word of God to individual readers.

The ever-rising popularity of liberal theology and neo-orthodoxy alarmed traditional, conservative Christians. Some leading scholarly Christians took steps to sound the alarm. The most influential was a book series published between 1910 and 1915 called "The Fundamentals." It was so influential that it played a pivotal role in giving rise to the fundamentalist movement.

## **Fundamentalists and the Specter of Anti-Intellectualism**

There was much genuine sincerity and passion in the fundamentalist camp when it came to defending biblical authority, but unfortunately early on many people in the fundamentalist movement started becoming increasingly anti-intellectual. This de-emphasis on the intellect backfired on them, particularly at a very important time. This was in March 1925 just after the Tennessee legislature had passed the Butler Act, which banned the teaching of evolution in Tennessee schools. Hoping to make their small town more known, the citizens of Dayton asked a volunteer named John Scopes to be willingly arrested and put on trial for supposedly teaching evolution in class.

Although he was not learned in theology or science, a fundamentalist leader named William Jennings Bryan was called to the stand as a defense witness. Clarence Darrow, the lawyer for the evolutionists, succeeded in making a fool of both Bryan and fundamentalists.

But not all early fundamentalists were so anti-intellectual. There were fundamentalist scholars who pushed against this ethic. Probably the leading of these scholars was J. Gresham Machen. Although Machen considered himself a fundamentalist, he harshly disapproved of the fundamentalist movement, mainly because of the anti-intellectualism. His thoughts concerning fundamentalism as a whole as expressed in his famous book, *Christianity & Liberalism*.

Machen also worried that fundamentalists were allowing the liberals to associate with and therefore influence them too much. In this book, Machen gave a logical, biblical defense of fundamentalism and called for a complete separation from liberal theology. At the time, he was teaching at Princeton Theological Seminary. An important turning point in the seminary toward a more liberal theology came in 1914 when they hired the liberal-minded J. Ross Stevenson as president. This

did not sit at all well with Machen. He left and founded Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. At the same time, he started the hyper-fundamentalist mindset.

### **The Birth of New Evangelicalism**

The fundamentalists had a very good founding intention which was to defend the inerrancy and authority of Scripture against encroaching liberalism. Unfortunately, anti-intellectualism wasn't there only big problem. From the 1920s onward there continued to be increasing intolerance coupled with argumentation within denominations and between denominations. Denominations split, and then those groups split, and on and on.

Some fundamentalists got fed up with the fundamentalist movement for what they saw as totally unchristian rigid intolerance. So Harold Ockenga, Carl Henry, and Billy Graham led the charge to begin a complete separation from fundamentalism. In 1942 a number of discontented fundamentalists began the National Association of Evangelicals.

The most influential of these three in instigating this new movement was Graham. Graham said the turning point for him came in 1955 when he came to New York to hold a revival. The fundamentalists there required each Christian in attendance sign a paper saying they agreed with the fundamentals. While Graham certainly agreed with them, he harshly objected to this and refused to sign.

The evangelicals were clear that they were still fundamentalist in belief. In fact, several leading characters in this new movement started Fuller Theological Seminary based on fundamental doctrine. But they were also very clear that they were no longer affiliated with the fundamentalist movement.

During the 70s Fuller began to get lax on biblical authority. In 1976, Harold Lindsell, one of its original founders, verbally criticized Fuller and many other Christian institutions across the country for minimizing biblical inerrancy and authority. During that year he published the very influential book, *The Battle for the Bible*. In its pages, he loudly proclaimed that both of these things were the most important theological subject of all. The book that was so influential in the Christian world that it started a movement that took its name.

From that point until about the mid-1990s there was something of a revival of biblical inerrancy and authority thought among evangelical churches. Throughout much of the 80s, the climate of the American the evangelical world was relatively confused on this issue with many of them not entirely sure where they stood. By the 1990s, most of the evangelical world was kind of lost and unsure of its own beliefs on such matters. Carl Henry, who was still active in the evangelic movement at this time, urged evangelicals to take a stand on the authority of the Bible. Many evangelical churches listened and heeded, taking a firm stand once again on biblical inerrancy and authority.

As for fundamentalists, since the 1960s one biggest debate has been how much they should embrace separatism. Doctrinal debates have continued to rage between various fundamentalist denominations. However, the clear majority of fundamentalist believers still fully embrace the complete authority of Scripture.

### **The Many Paths of the Truth**

*The Bible is abundantly clear that there is only one God and that there is only one way to Him.* But history has seen many paths of the truth throughout the world as Scripture has traveled through history. Each area of the world touched by the biblical message has its own stories concerning the

passage of the doctrine of biblical authority. The story I have summarized here is one of the paths in America. It is not the only one. There have been many paths. And these paths, wherever they may be, continue on. Isaiah 40:6-8 says humans are like grass and our faith like flowers. It says that grass may wither, and its flowers may fall, but it says the Word of God endures forever. The battle over biblical authority continues. People may fail. Human faith may wane. But no matter what the Word of God and its authority will endure forever.

---

## Grace Is

Grace is, according to the Sunday School answer, “unmerited favor.”

The problem with this comes with a misunderstanding of “favor.” We would probably agree that grace is unmerited: undeserved, not earned, etc. But favor causes problems.

Favor would be getting a promotion and salary increase at work. Favor would be avoiding the car accident by inches. Favor would be having a healthy baby.

And, while I think these are blessings that God allows because He is gracious, I believe God does not lay aside His graciousness if I’m overlooked for the promotion, if I am involved in a devastating car wreck, or if my son is born with a disability.

I misunderstand God’s favor as “what I want” rather than what He wants. I would never choose the hard road. Ever. Not even once. God chooses it for me because it’s what is best. And the hard road in His will is also His favor.



Think about it in terms of our heroes in the Bible. Was God NOT gracious when Joseph was sold into slavery? Was He NOT gracious when Joseph was wrongly imprisoned? Knowing what God does through these misfortunes of Joseph, I can clearly see His grace; by allowing Joseph to endure these difficulties, God promotes him and saves the Hebrews.

But it's not as easy for me to proclaim Him as gracious in the midst of one of life's messy chapters when I don't know the whole story.

Another problem with how we discuss and define grace is when we contrast it with judgment. God is a God of both. One is not laid aside while He picks up the other. Jesus demonstrates this for us perfectly.

Was it gracious of Jesus to cleanse the temple and throw out the money changers? Would we call it grace when Jesus called the Pharisees "brood of vipers" or "white-washed tombs" (Matthew 23)? Jesus did not take off His attribute of grace so He could wear His judge's robe. Grace involves truth, or it's not grace. If Jesus would have ignored the religious leaders' Jewish elitism and religious hypocrisy, He would not have shown them grace.

As a parent, this makes sense to me. The Bible tells me that God disciplines those He loves as a father disciplines his child (see Proverbs 3:12 and Hebrews 12:6). Disciplining my child is an act of grace. Further, to NOT discipline my child is to "hate" him (Proverbs 13:24). If I only show what my kids would call "favor" towards them, the results would be disastrous. Kids' ideas of what is favorable are not always what is best. So my "unfavorable" discipline, food choice, rules, conversations, etc. is for their overall good. It's ungracious to make every choice based on what they would consider favorable.

I have seen a trend in statements such as, "If I am wrong

(about this issue), I want to err on the side of grace.” Grace is never on the same side as falsehood. Grace is always connected to truth. If it’s true that child abuse is wrong, then it’s not gracious to ignore it or accept it just in case it’s okay. (Of course it’s not okay.) If it’s true that that having sex with someone who is not my spouse is wrong, then it’s not correct to ignore or accept it in the name of grace. Having laws against child abuse and punishment for abusers are gracious acts in that these are correct. Showing grace to an unfaithful spouse could include civil agreements in the dividing of assets in divorce, custodial arrangements, and forgiveness—but not acceptance and tolerance of the behavior. It would be ungracious to say, “Just sleep with whomever you heart tells you to. Because if I’m wrong about wanting you to be faithful to me, then I would rather err on the side of grace.” Ludicrous!

By His grace I am saved through faith, and not by things I do, or I would certainly boast about how good I am (Ephesians 2:8-9). Grace is about what He has done, what He does, and what He will do. Grace is unmerited favor, as long as I don’t misunderstand or limit what “favor” actually means.

---

## **No, The Greek Doesn’t Reveal Secret Bible Meaning, But It Helps**

**“Well, I Use the Greek”**

One of my favorite things I’ve heard Dr. Robert Picirilli say is that when talking about Bible interpretation in small groups or informal conversation, people always want to know,

“Well, what does the Greek say?” It’s a fair question if you understand how God gave us the Bible, and specifically the New Testament.

I didn’t take Greek as an undergrad at Welch College because I was a youth ministry major and it wasn’t required. And when I started grad school several years ago at Moody Theological Seminary, it still wasn’t required for my degree. Yet being older and wiser, I delayed graduation to take all of the classes they had on the subject.

The first two courses were great, and it was a lot of vocabulary and translation. The third, with perhaps my favorite professor ever, Dr. Julius Wong Loi Sing, was the most beneficial for several reasons.

First, and most importantly, he taught us that if you learn to read the New Testament in Greek and it makes you proud instead of humble, then you are reading but not understanding. Which is utterly useless to the Kingdom of God. I’ll never forget this quote: “You are not supposed to dominate the Bible; it is supposed to dominate you.”

Second, he told us that Greek should be like your underwear; you should use it but people should not be aware of it. In other words, do not constantly and haughtily make everything about, “Well the original Greek says…” and “Now if you understand the Greek syntax Paul uses here…” And lastly, and the point of this article, he taught us that Greek does not contain some kind of hidden, secret meaning to Bible texts. But it does help.

Last year for *Rambling Ever On*, I wrote an article called *#Blessed: The Beatitudes As Modern Day Facebook Statuses*, which if you would like you can read [here](#). In that article I tried to practice Dr. Wong Loi Sing’s advice about the underwear. Yet I think it could be interesting for the readers of REO to see how things go behind the scenes of an article

like that, because it says something about the way God communicated the Bible to us.

First, I want to look at Matthew 5:3-16 in English. You don't have to read this to get what I am wanting you to see. Just survey it quickly:

**3** *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

**4** *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

**5** *"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*

**6** *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

**7** *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

**8** *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

**9** *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

**10** *"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

**11** *"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.*

**12** *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

**13** *"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.*

**14** "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; **15** nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **16** Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

First, note a couple of things. One, the translation I used (the NASB) separates vs. 13-16 from vs. 3-12. Two, there is little about vs. 3-12 that gives any sense of separation within these verses.

Now, I want to show you these verses in Greek. I just want you to look at them. You do not have to understand one iota of Greek to get what I am trying to communicate here. In fact, to save time and space I'm going to go ahead and highlight some things that stand out to me:

**3 Μακάριοι οἱ** πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

**4 μακάριοι οἱ** πενθοῦντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

**5 μακάριοι οἱ** πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσι τὴν γῆν.

**6 μακάριοι οἱ** πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται.

**7 μακάριοι οἱ** ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται.

**8 μακάριοι οἱ** καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται.

**9 μακάριοι οἱ** εἰρηνοποιοί, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται.

**10 μακάριοι οἱ** δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

**11 μακάριοί έστε** όταν όνειδίσωσιν ύμᾶς καὶ διώξωσιν καὶ εἴπωσιν πᾶν πονηρὸν καθ' ύμῶν ψευδόμενοι ἔνεκεν ἐμοῦ. **12** χαίρετε καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, ὅτι ὁ μισθὸς ύμῶν πολὺς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· οὕτως γὰρ ἐδίωξαν τοὺς προφῆτας τοὺς πρὸ ύμῶν.

**13** Ὑμεῖς **έστε** τὸ ἄλας τῆς γῆς· ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἄλας μωρανθῆ, ἐν τίνι ἀλισθήσεται; εἰς οὐδὲν ἰσχύει ἔτι εἰ μὴ βληθὲν ἔξω καταπατεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

**14** Ὑμεῖς **έστε** τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου. οὐ δύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι ἐπάνω ὄρους κειμένη· **15** οὐδὲ καίουσιν λύχνον καὶ τιθέασιν αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τὸν μόδιον ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὴν λυχνίαν, καὶ λάμπει πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ. **16** οὕτως λαμψάτω τὸ φῶς ύμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅπως ἴδωσιν ύμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα καὶ δοξάσωσιν τὸν πατέρα ύμῶν τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

A couple of things to notice, which are made easy by my highlights. First, there is a contrast in verses 10 and 11. You can see it in English as it changes from “Blessed are the/those” to “Blessed are you”. But for some reason I never saw it until the first time I read it in Greek. Perhaps because the English obscures the consistency of verses 3-10 by switching between “the” and “those”. In Greek the form is exactly the same every time.

I think the change from vs. 10 to 11 is significant. If I wear khaki pants and a blue shirt eight days in a row and then on the ninth day I wear blue jeans and a blue shirt you will wonder why I changed. The same is true for understanding biblical authors in how they write.

I personally think the change is there because Jesus gives eight beatitudes (vs. 3-10) and vs. 11 begins a commentary on the last one about being persecuted. This sharp change in the passage can also be seen without any hindrance in English by the use of “for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven” in verses 3 and 10. This creates a bun type affect of the passage.

The commentary on persecution, in my opinion, continues through vs. 16 and this can also be seen in my highlights by use of "You are" and other forms of "you" from vs. 11 to vs. 16. In fact, if I play around with the English a little, you can see it even more clearly in English than Greek:

**3** *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

**4** *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

**5** *"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*

**6** *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

**7** *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

**8** *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

**9** *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

**10** *"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

**11** *"Blessed you are when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.*

**12** *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

**13** *"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.*

**14** *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; **15** nor does anyone light a lamp and put it*

*under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **16** Let **your** light shine before men in such a way that they may see **your** good works, and glorify **your** Father who is in heaven.*

Now you may ask, "What difference does it make?" Well maybe not much. But as a preacher I have to confess, knowing that verses 13-16 should not be separated from vs. 11-12 (or from vs. 1-10 ) then it affects my interpretation of verses 13-16. How often do you see a new subheading in Bibles over vs. 13? What if I told you that shining your light before men, in context, was directly linked to being persecuted? Does it change your understanding of the verse? Or its application?

One more thing I want you see this, this time only in verses 3-6:

**3** Μακάριοι οἱ **πτωχοὶ** τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

**4** μακάριοι οἱ **πενθοῦντες**, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

**5** μακάριοι οἱ **πραεῖς**, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσι τὴν γῆν.

**6** μακάριοι οἱ **πεινῶντες** καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται.

Notice that the four words are alliterated, beginning with the same Greek letter you may recognize from math class as Pi (though I was taught to pronounce it with a long 'e' instead of a long 'i'). I know some people find outline alliteration annoying in modern preaching but it's used here. What does that mean? Perhaps nothing. After all, vs. 7-10 are not alliterated. Yet, I think it probably means that vs. 3-6 are



one subgroup of the Beatitudes and vs. 7-10 are a second group. Even further, I think if you study them you will see that it could be that vs. 3-6 deal with man's relationship to God and vs. 7-10 deal with man's relationship to other men. This follows the pattern of both the Ten Commandments and The Great Commandment given by Jesus.

And this absolutely changes how I interpret the Beatitudes, especially vs. 8 which I interpret differently than you probably have ever heard. If you want to read more about that interpretation you can read the article the I linked at the beginning of this article or you can go [here](#). Note that I don't think that my interpretation is undoubtedly correct or beyond reproach, but that I got there by study and not some crazy, baseless theory.

Again, it has been my aim to be informative without being pedantic and helpful without being condescending. I am no Greek expert and never will be. But I have benefited from it and I hope that I can help others see its benefit. God did, after all, reduce himself to human language to give us the main source of truth we have.

Questions? Comments? Let us know below!

---

# Five Petra Songs That Taught Me the Truth

To be perfectly clear up front – this is not a joke. This is not some sarcastic, ironic, wink-at-the-audience type of article. This is real. I am sure there are many out there that either do not know who *Petra* was or many that do know and wish they did not. For any number of reasons, though *Petra* was one of the most popular and well-loved rock bands in the Christian music scene, there is a level of indifference, or worse, disdain directed towards them and towards that entire era of “Christian rock.” Someday, I hope to further explore the peculiar myopia of the Christian music world. In no other genre of music are the historical roots ignored like Christian music. It is as if any artist, band, or song that did not come out in the past few years does not even exist. However, as I said, that is an article for another day.[1. That day is here! Part One is available [here](#).] Today, I do want to shine a light on a band that paved the way for so many others. A band that sold millions of records, won dozens of Dove and Grammy Awards, and most importantly, gave kids like me some absolutely great music to listen to. Music that was not only cool but that imparted great truth to a young, impressionable mind. So here are five, of the many, truths in *Petra* songs that spoke to me in my youth and helped me see God, the church, and spirituality in a much clearer way. I have included a Spotify playlist with the Five songs at the end of the article.

**Petra taught me to be more outwardly focused.**

Song: Rose Colored Stained Glass Windows

Album: More Power to Ya (1982)

Scriptural Support: Matthew 25:35-48, John 13:34-35, Luke 6:27-36.



Key Lyric:

*Out on the doorstep lay the masses in decay*

*Ignore them long enough, maybe they'll go away*

*When you have so much you think, you have so much to lose*

*You think you have no lack, when you're really destitute*

This album came out when I was four years old, so it took me some time to discover it and truly appreciate what I was hearing. This song in particular worked slowly on me. I responded immediately to the opening of the song – with an organ churning out “Showers of Blessing” and then transitioning to the acoustic guitar melody. When the truth behind the song finally broke through for me, it was a lightning bolt type moment. So many times our churches are insulated things. We build walls in so many ways to keep out the ugliness and messiness of the world. As believers, we are no different. This song challenges me every time I hear it. It pushes and prods me to reach out more, to care more, and to love more.

**Petra taught me that prayer is a vital part of the Christian life.**

Song: Stand In the Gap

Album: On Fire (1988)

Scriptural Support: 1 Chronicles 16:11,  
James 5:16, Ezekiel 22:30, 2 Corinthians  
1:11, 1 Timothy 2:1.



Key lyric:

*Stand in the gap*

*Coming boldly to His throne of grace*

*Stand in the gap*

*He will hear you when you seek His face*

Too often, prayer can feel like a last resort. When someone we love is hurting, we look for any numbers of ways to help. We exhaust ourselves trying to “fix” the problem, usually to poor result. Scripture makes it clear that we should seek the face of God first and often. While this was a truth taught to me at home and in church, this song brought the truth home in a way I had not understood before. Our lives are a battlefield and when one of us is wounded, our job is to stand in the gap, defending and upholding them with our powerful and effective prayers.

**Petra taught me that my eyes are closed to the suffering in the world.**

Song: Hollow Eyes

Album: Beat the System (1984)

Scriptural Support: Matthew 25:35-48,  
Psalm 9:9; 10:14; 12:5, 7; 34:18;  
37:18-19.



Key Lyric:

*The least of these is hungry.*

*The least of these is sick.*

*The least of these needs clothing.*

*The least of these needs drink.*

*The least of these knows sorrow.*

*The least of these knows grief.*

*The least of these has suffered pain, and Jesus is His name.*

I am not sure how old I was when I first heard this song. I do remember being very young. I also remember a long drive from the interior of Panama, back to our home in Panama City, when I listened to this song. This might have been around the same time I first heard it, or it could have been a short time later. I was one of those kids that would latch on to new music like it was essential to my continued existence. I soaked it in completely. I have a distinct memory of hearing this song at night while on the road. I remember hearing the haunting words and melody. I remember being shaken by it, down to my very bones. All at once, this song widened my perspective of the world, showed me the truth of worldwide suffering, and made it perfectly clear that to ignore all of it, was to ignore Jesus Himself.

**Petra taught me that God is my Rock.**

Song: You Are My Rock

Album: This Means War (1987)

Scriptural Support: Psalm 18:1-6, Psalm 31



Key Lyric:

*You are my rock, my fortress, my shield*

*You are my rock, let Your strength be revealed*

*My rock, my comfort, my peace  
My salvation, my refuge, my God  
You are my Rock*

While this album came out when I was 9 or 10 years old, I truly hit my music obsession stride around my early teens. This Means War! was a landmark moment. It hit me at a time when I was struggling with assurance of my faith. With the gentle wisdom and patience of my parents and albums like this, I was able to nail things down in a permanent way. This song in particular was a huge help. There were times, in my head, when things felt out of control. My spirit felt like it was being tossed and turned, this way and that, with fear and doubt. This song became an anchor point, a rallying cry to me. When I felt surrounded by the darkness, God's inescapable light would break through. I was never standing alone.

**Petra taught me that God has conquered death forever.**

Song: Grave Robber

Album: Not of This World (1983)

Scriptural Support: Hebrews 9:27, John 4:14, 1 Peter 1:24, Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 15:26, 51-55, Revelation 7:17



Key Lyric:

*Where is the sting, tell me where is the bite  
When the grave robber comes like a thief in the night  
Where is the victory, where is the prize  
When the grave robber comes  
And death finally dies*

This is a song that has encouraged me for the majority of my life. For one, it is full of Scripture, with verses and

passages woven in and out of the lyrics. It is a bold and full statement of faith that our God is stronger than death. He is the grave robber and the killer of death. Secondly, the song itself is upbeat; building to a powerful bridge and final restatement of the chorus. The band chose to make the song triumphant and victorious, instead of contemplative and reserved. The melody and style do much in imparting the true power behind the lyrics. Our hearts might still ache for those who have gone before, but we are promised a reunion of joy where we will witness death being swallowed by the giver of life.

I could probably write about another dozen songs by *Petra* that spoke to me just as powerfully. I could talk about *Godpleaser* or *Adonai*. I could go on and on about *Creed*, *He Came, He Saw, He Conquered*, or *Hey World*. I could spend hours discussing the songs, the words, and the integral role music has played in my life. I won't. This is enough for now. I am eternally grateful for the way God has used music to teach me, mold me, and help me see Him more clearly. *Petra* was a big part of that.

---

**“Reclaiming the Lost Art of Biblical Meditation”: A**

# Review

*"I wish I could single-handedly revive the art of Scripture memorization in our homes and our churches. There's no greater legacy to bequeath to our children than a storehouse of memory verses to draw upon their whole lives through."* (Robert J. Morgan)

## **The Title Made Me Feel Bad (In a Good Way)**

I can't recall a time in my life when a book title convicted me like this one did. If there is one thing I know I should do but don't do often enough, it's biblical meditation. So I got this book as quickly as I could and read it carefully.

I'll go ahead and abandon any pretense that this "review" will offer any substantial critique of what Dr. Morgan writes here. I think it is dangerous to put people on pedestals where they cannot be critiqued, but my main goal here is to try to influence people to read this book because the content is so important. Any criticisms I have are extremely superficial and will succumb to the weight of the Dr. Morgan's central message.

## **Evangelical Crusades and Hannibal Lector Bring it Home**

The content portion of the book is a tidy 123 pages and I knocked it out in a couple of days in probably less than three hours total. It reads simply enough that I would think an average 9-year old could understand it. But that is not an insult because it's chock full of extremely helpful advice, Scripture references and practical illustrations that I hope not only inspire me but also guide me at 39 years old to make Scripture meditation a bigger part of my life. I've been a



pastor for 15 years. I have attended two exceptional Bible Colleges. I have memorized and meditated on Scripture before. But as I alluded to above, I have never made it a habit and such an integral part of my life as you can tell Dr. Morgan has.

Anyone who knows Dr. Morgan or has sat under his preaching knows that you can count on two things with everything he teaches: First, he will incorporate a ton of Bible. I remember once when I was at a service at Donelson, Dr. Morgan's church in Nashville, his ministry cohort Jeff Nichols joked from the stage that when he takes notes on Rob's sermons he can count on there being like 17 well thought-out Scripture references in support of each point. Secondly, he will show you how diversely read he is by citing an insane amount of biographical information and quotes from people from centuries ago and people from today. Just look at the footnotes in the back of this book and marvel not only of his use of Billy Graham and J.I. Packer, but also Anthony Hopkins and Stephen King. And also his use of people I do not know but that he knows personally and had invaluable wisdom to offer for this book.

And what he does by quoting the sacred and the secular is build a very simple yet very powerful case for how valuable meditation is for learning and behavior. The amount of times the Bible refers to meditation, even if it doesn't use that word, is legion. Old Testament, New Testament, historical books, psalms, prophets, gospels, letters...every section has significant contributions here and that makes this material impossible to ignore.

**We Don't Meditate Because We Are Good; We Meditate **Because We're Not****

I confess I appreciate as well how Dr. Morgan weaves in at

times his own personal weaknesses and struggles that have led him to be a better meditator. It is easy for someone like me to look at his lengthy pastoral and preaching ministry and to idealize it. But he does not allow for that. He no doubt practices biblical meditation as well as anyone I know and has earned the right to write this book, but he allows us to see that meditation exists in large part because we are so flawed and weak. We must meditate because we know God so poorly on our own. Our minds are so bent to evil and darkness, worry and anxiety, that meditation is as much like medicine for the sinful soul as it is exercise for the mind. I daresay that is what separates Christian meditation from things like Zen Buddhism. The book is definitely written humbly and not haughtily and I am positive that when a person meditates constantly on the Bible, teaching others to do well will likely be from a place of humility. That's how the Bible works in teaching us about how we relate to God.

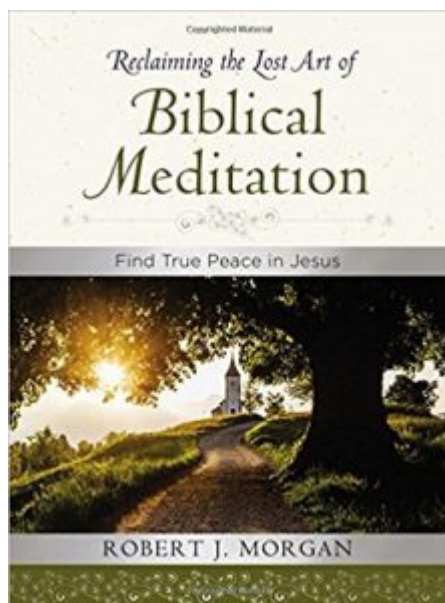
The 'tips' interspersed are so practical, yet not often practiced. At least by me. I am praying that will change. Sticky notes will be easy. Sharing my meditation with people I come across during the day will be hard. But I will try both, and many other things he advises.

Dr. Morgan lists several times we should meditate—when we wake up in the morning, when we wake up in the middle of the night, when we are lonely, when we are on a plane, when we drive, etc. Basically, we can mediate constantly. At that point the conviction of the book title came and hit me full in the face. I meditate so infrequently. I am too easily distracted. I have little doubt the content of the book, notably the Scriptures within, will change my course on this. I pray that it lasts til I die and is not a short lived emotional response.

**Buy It. Read It. Do It.**

I hope this book helps millions as it has helped my thinking (and, in theory, my behavior). I am challenged to put the phone down more and to focus my thoughts on Scripture and the nature of God more often. I know that Biblical meditation is not a quick fix to all anxiety and depression and crises. But it is a way to know God better and to allow him to change us even if he does not change our circumstances. These things will always be better for us than having everything “fixed”. If we are to know him in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering and if we are to take every thought captive, we must meditate. Dr. Morgan’s book is an extremely beneficial resource to challenge and guide even older Christians in this discipline.

Buy the book by clicking the picture below:



# The Bible: After All the Canon Debating, Copyist Errors, Translation Issues and Subjective Interpreting, Is It Still the Book for Me? (Part 7)

*"The last thing some church goers need is another Bible study. They are already know more than what they are putting into practice."* [Dr. Tony Evans]

Links to the other 6 parts of this series can be found at the bottom of this article.

## PART SEVEN: APPLICATION

**"...[it is] what I do that defines me."** (Batman)

Jesus once said, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

Likewise, Paul the Apostle once said, "It is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of

the Law who will be justified.”

And James has added, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”

**The last step is the foundational step (Christianity: based on paradoxes that make sense)**

Across the New Testament you see this emphasis on doing the Bible instead of just hearing it (or often in our case, *reading* it). And that leads me to the conclusion that we could be absolutely correct in every way in our previous 6 essays on this topic—we could have the right 66 books, the right content in those books, very good translations in English and impeccable interpretation philosophy—and still miss the point of the Bible.

This last essay will deal with the topic of application, or putting the Bible into practice. For those who have been educated similarly to me on this you may note that I am going to try to keep this as simple as I can. I appreciate efforts by my seminary professors and many others to push people into using words like “contextualization” for this area of biblical theology, but I think we often make things like this more nuanced than they should be. And I love nuance. The above quotes from those who wrote the New Testament are not complex or deep and while this subject can be broken down, my aim today is different.

## Maybe Batman doesn't have the best theology

Let me start by giving a definition of "truth" that I think will help crystallize what Jesus, Paul and James said. This definition could be argued or broken down further, but in my opinion it is a sufficient starting point: Truth is the point where our interpretation of a Bible passage intersects with how it should be applied to our lives. To say it another way, the point of each Bible passage is to figure out 1) what it meant to the original audience (our last essay focus) and 2) what it means to us today.

Or to say it even more practically, Truth is **not** "We need to have faith." Neither is it "Noah built the ark because God commanded him to." It's something like "God commanded Noah to build the ark to show faith and so we should have faith to do the difficult and crazy things God leads us to do." Granted, there is more to the Noah story in both interpretation and application, but that is at least part of it. Without interpretation we cannot be sure the message is from God. Without application, we cannot live in obedience to God. Truth is neither merely facts nor merely action (I love the Batman quote above, but within Christianity it has a much different starting point than popular superhero culture). It is both. And both are essential to Christianity.

We know we need to read and learn the Bible. Yet if there is not genuine life change—genuine character transformation by a person in response—then true Christianity is not happening (2 Corinthians 5:17). Often at my church I will pray after a sermon that God will change our thoughts, our actions, our prayers, our reactions, our attitudes, our words or our very being. Application could be one of these things, or several or something different. But there must be some response to the Bible or else we are just like people who look in the mirror and see something on our face and then leave and forget to do anything about it. We are fools with houses on the sand.

## **Make Disciples “As You’re Going” Means You Have to Go**

Since we discussed interpretation in depth back in Part 6, I will only focus on application today.

A extremely significant question in dealing with application of the Bible’s passages is: How can I know what was only for the original audience to practice and what is for me to practice. At the very beginning of the fascinating book *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, William J. Webb gives pages of lists of nothing but commands from the Bible and asks his readers to mark with an X which ones are for us to follow today and which are not. A few examples are:

\_\_\_ “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” (1 Cor. 16:20)

\_\_\_ “You should wash one another’s feet.” (John 13:14)

\_\_\_ “Heal the sick, raise the dead, drive out demons.” (Matthew 10:8)

\_\_\_ “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:5)

\_\_\_ “Do not put tattoo marks on yourself.” (Leviticus 19:28)

And he lists several dozen over a few pages. But you get the point. Sometimes it may seem arbitrary why we put into practice some things literally and for all time such as “Go make disciples of all nations,” but we do not practice commands like “Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife.”

You better believe I looked for a wife! Why do we follow some Bible commands and not others?

**We are still learning beans...**

Well, going back to my last article, context is definitely a key to knowing. We talked about different kinds of context and

several of them not only matter to interpretation, but also application and we touched on that last week. But it bears repeating in clearer terms this week.

Covenant context is crucial to this. Old Covenant (Old Testament) Jews had 613 laws, some moral and some ritualistic, that God had them follow. But the New Covenant of Jesus Christ abolished the Law (John 1:17, Romans 6:14, Galatians 2:21). So I do not believe that getting a tattoo in and of itself is sinful now. Yet some laws, like at least 9 of the 10 commandments, are repeated in the New Covenant and so I do believe that adultery and coveting are still sins before God.

### **Old + New = Timeless (Probably)**

If a command or behavior is found in both testaments it is extremely likely that we need to be practicing it today. Especially if it is repeated over and over. This is one reason I think Christians are justified at times in crying out in disappointment with God. You find this all over the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, but also in Job and the prophets. And you see it in the New Testament with Christ and Paul when they faced death. So I think it is a legitimate biblical application to be raw and honest with God when we are in pain.

Similarly, if you can only find a command in one or two places in the Bible, it makes it more likely that it is not a timeless command. Jesus told his apostles in John 20: "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." This is about the only place you find this command in the Bible yet it used as a basis for getting a priest to forgive your sins in some Christian denominations. Other places in the Bible make it clear we go straight to God through Jesus our priest (Hebrews 4) and that we are all priests (1 Peter 2), so I would argue that this command in John 20 was only for the apostles and fixed for their time.



This, in my opinion, also happens at times in Paul's writings (no matter what you believe about women speaking in church, very few people I know require women to cover their heads) and everything he writes needs to be checked against the general sweep of Scripture.

### **Prayer Is Not A Substitute For Action...**

Immediate context will often help you know how to apply something. Common examples include Jeremiah 29:11 being about a group going into captivity and the passage that says "where two are three are gathered, there I will be" being a reference to church discipline. Common examples like this have been discussed by many so I'll give you a less recognized example. In Exodus 14:13-14, Moses says, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." I cannot tell you how many times I've heard someone read those verses on KLOVE radio or put them on Facebook or Twitter. Yet in the very next verse God says, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on." Surely there are verses that teach us to be still before God (Psalm 46:10), but this is not one of them. Context in this case teaches us that there may be a time to stop praying and start moving.

### **Why Kiss Hello When You Can Just Say "Heeelloooooo...?"**

Something else to consider with biblical application is the idea that some things are timeless commands given as principles wrapped in cultural directives. For example, the command to greet with a holy kiss. I have little doubt based on passages like Ruth 2:4 and Romans 16 and Hebrews 13:24 that greeting people well is a very biblical thing to do. I think it is a timeless command that is very under-preached in the church. Yet, not all cultures do the kiss hello thing (and some people, like Jerry Seinfeld, rebel against it). So we see

a principle—greet each other with joy and blessing—given in cultural terms, kissing. For many of us, a handshake or a smile or just words of greeting will do. It's our culture. But we still apply the principle.

There are many more principles of application we could discuss but as always, I do not write to cover all ground or even most of it; I write to spur you on to more thought and more study from people who can take you further than I can. And I will close with this: I believe any given passage in the Bible must be interpreted within its fixed-for-all-time meaning that cannot change. What those passages meant 2,000 and 3,000 years ago are what they still mean. Yet application is very, very different. It changes constantly. We need to give other Christians room to apply the Bible differently and avoid these culture wars over application. Can Christians commit heresy or just make mistakes with application? Of course, and we need to check all applications against Bible context, good godly wisdom from church people and prayerful consideration. But it is probable that people around you will have different ways of applying things like how to find God's will, what kind of music is good for worship, and a thousand other things.

### **When Said and Done, Let There Be Less Said Than Done**

It was my intention to close with this topic so I could conclude with the thought that we could talk about the Bible all day and how reliable and it is, but if we do not let it change us, it is essentially meaningless. If you have tracked with me, you probably have spent hours reading. I've spent dozens of hours writing and editing. But the time comes, as it did with Moses and Israel in Exodus 14, to get moving.

It is my prayer that this series of articles on the Bible has been helpful to as many people as have needed it. If you have any questions about anything I've written, please feel free to

contact me through the site or otherwise.

To read the Part One Introduction, Go [Here](#).

To read Part Two on the Old Testament Canon, Go [Here](#).

To read Part Three on the New Testament Canon, Go [Here](#).

To read Part Four on the Transmission of the NT, Go [Here](#).

To read Part Five on the Translation of the Bible, Go [Here](#).

To read Part Six on the Interpretation of the Bible, Go [Here](#).

---

# **The Bible: After All the Canon Debating, Copyist Errors, Translation Issues and Subjective Interpreting, Is It Still the Book for Me? (Part 6)**

*"We quote Jeremiah 33:3 as our life verse, but we don't know beans about the context."* [Former Biblical Interpretation Professor at Welch College, Dr. Robert Woodard]

Read Part 1, An Introduction to this series [here](#).

Read Part 2 on the Old Testament Canon [here](#).

Read Part 3 on the New Testament Canon [here](#).

Read Part 4 on The Transmission of the NT [here](#).

Read Part 5 on the Translation of the Bible [here](#).

It is entirely possible to believe that we have the right 66 books, that we have the original wording for every verse of the Bible, and that we have good translations...and still miss the message of the Bible. It's possible to believe everything I've said in the previous articles and still reject the Bible as outdated and irrelevant. Because the next step in getting from "God said" to "I hear and obey" is interpreting it. And that presents a new set of challenges and opportunities to attack the credibility of the Bible.

The Bible has often and for a long time been used to call my God racist, hateful, vindictive, supportive of slavery, a megalomaniac (a big word for 'arrogant jerk'), against women and a whole host of other things which would be true even if the Bible's content is historical and accurate.

### **You can only be arrogant if you are not God**

I am very much convinced that quite often, these accusations against God and the Bible are made by people who do not understand how Biblical interpretation works and filter it through their myopic cultural lens, which is a poor way to attempt to understand anything.

Today I want to talk through reasonable methods for interpreting the Bible. We must remember at every turn that the Bible was written to cultures, languages and time periods vastly different than our own[1. Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis*, 18]. Vastly. It amuses me when people say that parts of the Bible are "weird" to them. I can assure you that a

9th century B.C. Hebrew-speaking Jew would find 2016 America “weird” in many ways. Biblical interpretation—often represented by \$5 words like *hermeneutics* and *exegesis*[2. For a definition, see Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 42-44]—cuts through the weirdness and tries to understand Bible verses and passages the way they were written to be understood: the way their first readers understood them[2. Köstengerger and Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 93]. By teaching this, I think it will help even defenders of the Bible avoid mistakes in trying to understand it, and will certainly help us understand why many attacks on the Bible are leveled out of ignorance.

### **We don't know beans!**

Sound biblical interpretation is all about context. In this essay we will look at several ways context matters. As taught by Dr. Julius Wong Loi Sing, there are three “worlds” of any Bible text:

- The world behind the text (The culture, history, time, etc. of the writings)
- The word inside the text (Immediate context of verses, grammar, word meanings, etc.)
- The world in front of the text (Application)

To give a practical example: Let's say 500 years from now someone uncovers a note written to me by wife that says, “I got a flat on Central. I walked to Armando's and they towed it for free! But I paid \$79 to them for a new one.” The world behind the text looks at Chicago culture in 2016. It asks questions like: Where is Central? Who is Armando? How much money is \$79? How did people transport themselves in that time? Things like that. The world inside the text asks things like: What does ‘I got a flat’ mean? What does ‘free’ mean? What does it mean that they “towed” it? Both of these worlds

have to interact to find out what that note from my wife means. To us, the meaning is simple, just as the the Bible's meaning was to its original audiences.

My professors and pastors have often called this the "historical grammatical method" for interpreting the Bible[2. Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 179-180]: God worked through fixed history and culture and reduced himself to the grammar and syntax of a few now ancient languages.

In the example above with my wife there is no need for application because the message was only for me. But the Bible's message is for everyone so we will deal with application in our next and final essay. For now we deal with the first two:

## **First World Problems**

Let's look at the first world: the world behind the text.

### *Historical and Cultural Context*

People accuse the Bible of being pro slavery. But knowing more about Ancient Near East cultures that surrounded Israel in the centuries before Christ and during his time can help us grasp why that is not the case[7. Paul Copan, *Is God A Moral Monster*, 135].

Even though there are laws governing slavery in the Old Testament and even though no New Testament writer goes out of his way to lambast slavery and evil, we must understand that the Bible 1) does not generally speak to slavery as we think of it from American history in the centuries leading up to our Civil War and 2) does not endorse or promote slavery as good or even ideal.

In comparison to the pagan culture around them, the OT laws on

slavery show mercy and more humanizing behavior towards slaves, and gave rights to slaves that were unheard of for that time[8. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord*, 124] . There were ways to gain freedom, laws against mistreatment and in Deuteronomy 15 we can see God's desire that in an ideal situation there are no poor and no slaves[9. Copan, 127-131] (which I will add, was exactly how the Garden of Eden was and would supposedly have remained without sin). The situation at times was still very rough even for slaves in Israel but we can see God moving his people toward an ideal a little bit at a time, which we will discuss more below.

In the New Testament we can see the the idea of slavery is much less harsh and the New Testament authors move the view of slavery ethic even more towards the ideal of no slaves.

Slavery in the NT cultural context was often not as repugnant as we think of today; History teacher and REO contributor Dave Lytle says historians estimate about 1/3 of people who lived in Rome were slaves and some were highly educated and chose to sell themselves into it to climb the social step ladder.

Beyond this, the NT makes it clear that slaves and free people are equal in the kingdom (Galatians 3:28) and Paul's letter to Philemon is an evidence that the NT was moving toward the ultimate ethic of no indentured servitude[10. Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament metaphor for total devotion to Christ*, 57-61]. He says to not treat Onesimus as a slave but as a brother.

So why didn't God use the Bible to abolish slavery? N.T. Wright compares it to modern cars destroying the ozone—Bible preachers don't preach against that these days because cars are a part of how life functions, even if they do cause great harm[4. Taken from a Q&A found at [www.youtube.com/Does\\_the\\_Bible\\_Support\\_Slavery?](http://www.youtube.com/Does_the_Bible_Support_Slavery?)]. Slavery was similar; it was a part of the fabric of life for those cultures and abolishing it quickly would have been imprudent[5. Murray, 61]. Yet we can

also see from above how God was moving corrupt cultures (including his own people Israel) away from it little by little. When a situation is as awful as you find in cultures of the Bible, you cannot change things overnight. It is similar to trying to go into a war torn, dictator governed country and starting a democratic republic (or whatever you consider to be the ultimate ethic for government). It will not be done very quickly[11. William Webb, *Slaves Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*, 30-66].

Jesus in Matthew 19 speaks to this when he says that God permitted divorce in the OT because people's hearts were hard[13. Ibid, 42-44]. God permits things that he hates at times because people's sin takes them so far from his ideal. (Please know that I believe there are justifiable biblical reasons for divorce that Jesus and Paul taught as well.)

### *Total Bible Context*

Often times the Bible will explain things in other parts that help us understand hard passages better. The killing of the Canaanite people in Joshua is often used to demean the God of the Bible as bloodthirsty and a murderer. But if you read God's words in Genesis and Deuteronomy, you can see that Canaan was a wicked country that engaged in some of the most vile and depraved acts a people group can. And that God waited centuries before finally judging them, showing mercy and patience. When people point out that God commanded that Israel kill the "women and children" it is important to understand that the women may or may not have been as wicked as the men (in Genesis God could not find even 5 total people that were righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah).

And as far as the children go, it is at least possible that God was sparing them from growing up in a circumstance that almost certainly would have led to their lives begin far away from God, as their ancestors were. Yet, no matter what



conjecture we can come up with about why God did or didn't do anything in the Bible, we can always follow up with more questions and more doubt. And at some point we have to ask ourselves, "If God did everything the way I think he should, wouldn't that make me God?" At some point faith that God sees and knows all has to be a part of what we cannot see when interpreting the Bible. We also must acknowledge that if God is the author of life, he has the right to give it and take it. This is why it is not hypocritical for commanding not to murder and yet causing the the death of people.

Total Bible context can be seen as a way to fully understand some passages in the Bible that seem degrading to women.

Without trying to make Paul say things he doesn't say in certain passages about women being silent in church, we should also note that there are other passages in the Bible where women are prophetesses (Exodus 15:20, Luke 2:36), leaders in the church (Acts 18) and leaders in Israel's history (Judges 4, 2 Kings 22). Whatever we believe about Paul's words in his letters, we cannot rip them from the context of the whole Bible.

Another example: if we are to understand Psalms 32 and 51, we must first read 2 Samuel 11-12 because when David wrote those two psalms, the events of 2 Samuel had just happened. The Bible is meant to be read as a whole, not parts here and there removed from their greater context of God's complete story to mankind.

### *Covenant Context*

By this I mean that there are two Covenants (a better word than "Testament" as I explained in Essay #2 in this series) in the Bible and sometimes we must know the difference between the two if we are to understand the Bible's commands on certain topics.

The New Testament church, our present Christian church, is no

longer under the Levitical law as found in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. There are, however, laws that were repeated in the New Testament for believers to continue to follow. So there is no contradiction in a Christian believing that some things in the law are still applicable (like I believe stealing is wrong because Paul says it is in Ephesians 4) and some things that are not applicable to today, like not believing that we must not wear clothes made of two different fabrics. I'd say even the oddest of the Levitical laws had a principle behind them that made sense to the original audience. For example, it may be that God told his people under the old covenant not to wear mixed fabrics as an object lesson for them not to mix with other pagan nations' religions.

Regardless, reading through both testaments will help you know which Laws from Leviticus are for all time and which were temporary until Christ came.

## **Knock the Door Down and Go On In**

The Second World: The Word Inside The Text

Beyond the bigger picture of the world (literally at times) behind the text, we know look at the world inside the text and the more immediate contexts we need to understand when understanding a passage or verse in the Bible.

### *Immediate Verse Context*

Most people who read the Bible carefully can see that when Paul wrote Phillipians 4:13, he didn't mean unilaterally that he could do anything but rather that he could find contentment in all circumstances. At least that is the primary application. You get that from immediate context in Phillipians 4.

Also, if you look at context by disregarding chapter and verse divisions, which were added hundreds of years after the Bible was written and canonized, it helps understand things better.

In 1 Peter 3:1-7, wives are told to submit to their husbands.

Yet if you read 1 Peter 3 right after 1 Peter 2, you can see that Peter is telling wives to do what Jesus did. Jesus was equal to God and yet submitted to him (meaning submission does not have to equal inequality) and endured unfair treatment.

By giving wives the example to follow of Jesus, Peter's Lord and God, he is doing the opposite of demeaning them.

### *Book Context*

1 Corinthians 13 is used in weddings and for very good reason: the biblical definition of love should work in the most intimate of relationships. But it is notable that 1 Corinthians was written to a church and not a marriage so we need to be practicing this kind of love in church as well—especially to those who wrong us and hurt us.

Ecclesiastes is another example, discussed briefly in Part Two of this series. You cannot take everything you read at face value in that book because the author was at the end of his disobedient life and depressed. The book in general is written with a different perspective than most of the Bible.

### *Genre Context*

You cannot read a Psalm, which was probably written with a lot of emotion, the same way you read one of Paul's letters. They are different types of writings. Some types of writings, like parables, are figurative. Others are literal. When Jesus said "Preach the gospel to everybody" we do that literally.

When he said to "pluck your eye out," that is not literal.

Those are obvious examples, yet people often treat every book of the Bible as though they were the same genre.

Similarly, when you read narrative, it is important to note that often the Bible is telling us what happened, not what God

wants to happen. It tells us what is, not what ought to be.

No one would use King David's sin with Bathsheba to accuse God of wanting adultery to happen. Yet we often justify actions by saying "So and so in the Bible did it". You need more than human behavior in narrative to prove something is what God wants you to do.

The Gospels are narrative: four accounts of Jesus's life, teachings, death and resurrection. Yet they all differ on details, especially about the resurrection. One Gospel says the tomb was already rolled away, another says it was not.

One says there were two angels, another says there was one.

The reason is that even though they are stories, they are not court documents. The evangelists who wrote the Gospels were not concerned with details and trying to find contradictions in their stories is often a fruitless endeavor. Just because they have different details does not mean any or all of them are lying or that what they said happened didn't happen. When witnesses have the same exact details of events it often means they have colluded to make up a story. Real witnesses of real events will often differ in minor details.

Having said that, we must admit there are, on the surface, contradictions in the Gospels that are harder to explain.

Most notably it seems that John says that The Last Supper happened on Wednesday night while the other Gospels are clear that it was Thursday night. That one is not so easily explained and I recommend I. Howard Marshall's *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* for speculation on why that is and possible reconciling of the passages.

There are several other random things about Biblical interpretation I have been taught over the years. Like, that the Greek words for love "agape" and "philo" are often synonyms and that "agape" isn't always some special kind of special love from God[13]. D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*,

28-32]. Or that when Jesus quotes from Psalm 22:1 on the cross saying, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” it is likely that his hearers would have understood the first part of the psalm being a reference to the whole Psalm and that Christ was also saying he knew God would save him from his suffering, as Psalm 22 teaches.

I say these things to close with the idea that the Bible is deep and not to be studied at a surface level. I do not say this to discourage you. I say to encourage you to get involved in a Bible believing church, read as much of it as you can, get a study Bible, go to Bible studies, check the books I’ve cited throughout this series of essays (found at the bottom of each essay), do whatever you can to learn more. Learn more about context, Bible history, culture and all the rest I’ve written about here.

God not only holds us accountable to what we know but how much we try to know. In the US we have so many resources to learn about the Bible. Utilize them. The more you know God, the more he is glorified. And that should be our end goal.

Read Part Seven [Here](#).

---

# The Bible: After All the Canon Debating, Copyist Errors, Translation Issues and Subjective Interpreting, is it Still the Book for Me? (Part 5)

*The first thing that happened in the history of the church was translation (Acts 2:1-11)...translating the New Testament is, in fact, something each generation ought to be doing.*[1. Taken from the Preface to *A Kingdom New Testament*] [N.T. Wright]

We discussed why this series of essays is important in light of modern scholarly attacks on the Bible [here](#).

We discussed why it is reasonable to conclude the Protestant Old Testament has the right 39 books [here](#).

We discussed why we can be confident our 27 New Testament books are the ones God wants us to have [here](#).

We discussed how we can be confident that the content of our NT books is correct in spite of delays in writing them, gaps in time in manuscripts and mistakes in manuscripts [here](#).

**Christian Unity Lost In Translation**

Since the Bible was not written in English, or any modern language, this step to producing a Bible is extremely important.

This article will be different than the other six in one key way: the other six have issues more commonly attacked by opponents of the Bible while the issue of translation has caused fights and quarrels between Christians themselves. There are enough arguments out there about translation of the Bible to make your head spin and anyone with a Christian background like mine is not unfamiliar with the king of all Christian debates (at least in recent history): the debate over the King James Version of the Bible. I don't aim to make your head spin. I aim more to explain as much as I can with facts, although my opinion on some issues will be impossible to withhold. I really do not mind debating either, but know the point of this series is to defend the Bible, not create conflict within Christianity.

### **Received Text, Critical Text, What's the Difference?**

Since almost all Bibles use the same source (the Masoretic Text)[2. And even then the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls 70 years ago has affected some modern translation, as in Isaiah 53:11 in the NIV] for the Old Testament, I will speak to the differences in modern translations in what manuscripts they use for the New Testament. That is where the bulk of the translation conflicts lie.

As mentioned in our last essay, there are about 5,800 Greek manuscripts we have with which to work. But that does not mean every translation uses the same exact manuscripts as a starting point. Most famously, the KJV uses a handful of manuscripts to translate the New Testament that became known as the Received Text, often referred to by its Latin name, the *Textus Receptus*. [3. Paul D. Wegner, *Journey from Texts to*

*Translation*, 337] This is what my favorite historical Christian, Erasmus (which I will name my first son if I can wear my wife down), had to work with in the early 16th century in compiling a New Testament[4. *Ibid.*].

Taking advantage of more and earlier and (to many scholars) better manuscripts, modern translations use a more eclectic collection from which to translate the Greek of the New Testament into English. Many modern translations work off 27th revision of the Nestle-Aland Greek text. But at least two translations which my wife and I use regularly—the NET Bible and the Holman Christian Standard Bible—use a different yet still eclectic group of manuscripts as a base[5. Stanley Porter, *How We Got the New Testament*, 171].

### **Authorized But Not Eternally So**

I will spare you a lengthy and bloody history (and present) of the debate as to which translation has the best manuscripts from which to work. But since the KJV has been the premiere Bible for Bible translations, I will discuss issues relating to it. Even though the KJV has less manuscripts, the argument for the Textus Receptus (TR) is—to say it simply and in part—that it contains manuscripts of better quality and more orthodox than the ones used by modern translations. The belief is that the TR text family represents the best of the what we have and does not take out words like “Christ” in Romans 16:20 (the accusation being heretics removed it when copying) or the direct mention of the Trinity in 1 John 5:7—essentially the only place where we can find an explicit mention of it in the Bible.[6. Wegner, 338]

Personally, I have no real issue if someone wants to say that the KJV base (the TR) is better than modern eclectic Greek Texts. Nearly everyone who has taught me Greek and Biblical Interpretation disagrees, but I do not care that people



believe such. It is something intelligent believers support and I will not disparage them.

## **You'll Have To Try Harder Than That to Remove The Trinity From My Bible!**

But to take to the level of KJV only-ism is too far. Nearly all genuine scholars from all over the world respect the manuscripts that non-KJV Bibles use. And manuscript issues aside, you get the exact same doctrine from the NIV, or NASB, or ESV, or NLT, as you do from the KJV. Every modern translation that I use teaches that:

- Jesus is God
- The Holy Spirit is God
- There is only one God
- Jesus was sinless
- Jesus died as our substitute for sin
- Jesus rose from the dead to defeat death

...and literally hundreds of other things I believe with all my heart soul, mind and strength. I do not need the KJV's rendering of 1 John 5:7 to believe in the Trinity. I have John 8:58, 2 Corinthians 3:16 and Deuteronomy 6:4 (and dozens of other verses) to teach it to me, in any translation I use.

Before I leave this sub-point, I will add that I strongly encourage you to read more about this since as a blog-type essay it only scratches the surface of the issues. And I do not say this only in the sense that you educate yourself on manuscripts and translations. Read biographical information on William Tyndale. Read about Erasmus. I assure you, my desire to name a child such an odd name is not simply founded in Erasmus' translation of the New Testament (or how weird my name is). Church history matters a great deal. Educate yourself.

## **Translation Theory: You mean we fight about this as well?**

A few years ago, Dr. Matthew McAfee, a professor of Bible and Greek at Welch College (my alma mater) told me and the other pastors of my church that the KJV is often hard to read not simply because it has older English but also because they tried quite hard to translate things as literally and as word for word as possible.

Thanks to Eugene Nida in the middle of the 20th century, some modern translations decided to do more “thought-for-thought” translation[7. Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, 13]. The premise of this is simple: It serves people better to hear or read a translation that sounds more like the language it is written in than the one it is translated from. It is a different approach than “word-for-word” in that it is less literal (and in many cases less “wooden”) and more easily readable.

### **Me, A Name, I Call Myself...**

I’ll give you an example using Spanish. Keep in mind this is very simplistic and much translation is way more complex than this, but my goal to get your appetite for this going and not to parse a bunch of Greek.

Spanish says: “Me llamo Gowdy.”

Now, if you asked me to translate that into English, I’d say without any hesitation, “My name is Gowdy.” But those who know Spanish or are very clever can probably point out that a more literal translation would be “I call myself Gowdy.” Or, at its most literal, “Me I call Gowdy.” In theory, a word for word translation would say “I call myself...” and a thought for thought would say, “My name is...”

Another more complex example: there are times when a Spanish speaker from some countries will ask “Que tienes?” and mean “What’s the matter?” or “What’s wrong with you?” even though

literally that means, "What do you have?" A literal translation would go with the latter in theory while a 'thought-for-thought' may use one of the two prior translations that sound better in English. The problem is that saying "Que tienes?" and translating it "What's the matter?" assumes you know that is what the speaker means when perhaps they actually do mean "What do you have?" There are more risks, to be sure, in thought-for-thought translation. But this philosophy of translation says that the reward of a reader hearing things more naturally in their first language is worth it.

### **Literally The Correct Use of 'Literally'**

You can see from this example the advantages and disadvantages to each take on translation. If you are too literal, things are nonsensical and at times you cannot understand them at all (and there are interlinear Bibles out there that show you how hard the Bible is to read if translated literally— including word order—into English from the original languages). Even if you are reasonably literal it still may hurt the reader's ability to appreciate the message and ideally would require notes of explanation for things like idioms. Yet not literal enough stands more a chance of not accurately representing the first language. This, in essence, is the debate and it has been going on for decades.

I am not a Greek expert by any means, so I shan't pontificate on that. But I do teach English as a second language and have studied Spanish for 10 years, Polish for five and did take Greek in seminary. I say that to say that I have thought about translation a lot and have had to translate many many times in my life. And **my preference** leans towards thought-for-thought. I much prefer a Bible translation that says "a day's wage" instead of "a denarius"[9. Although you will notice that some translations like the NLT will give the modern meaning and then in a note at the bottom also give the literal meaning saying *Greek, denarius*. That is the ideal.]. When I translate

the sermons at my church for Spanish speakers, if the pastor says something is a “piece of cake” for an easy task I will always say that it’s “pan comida” (eaten bread) because that is the equivalent in many Spanish speaking countries.

Of course the Bible is different than a sermon. And that is partly why this is such a big deal. But to me I think the idea of word-for-word being “better” is unfortunate thinking and has infiltrated the American church, with people exalting the ESV and NASB—two very literal translations—as superior to others. But as many people in Christianity have concluded, I think the “best” translation depends on your goal. I do love the NASB if I want to study deeply. But if I want to read a huge chunk of a book of the Bible in one sitting I will get out the NLT, which is far less literal and hence, easier to read. (As evidence, I once read through the NASB in 45 minutes a day in finished in 10.5 months. I did the same with the NLT and it took me four months).

Bible reading is not one-dimensional. There could be any number of goals you have when reading the Bible. That affects which translation is probably more helpful.

### **Some Men (or is it “People”?) Argue Over Gender Neutrality**

Some who are familiar with this theme may note that I have not mentioned up to this point the debate over gender neutral language in the Bible. This covers issues like when the Hebrew or Greek says “the men” when referring to both “men and women.” The question here is whether we translate it as “the men” or as “the people” (or even “the men and women”). This has caused a riff in Christianity, especially with the TNIV earlier this century and, more recently, the 2011 NIV. The heart of the debate is whether we should try to be more friendly in translation to gender issues vs. should we bow to social and cultural pressure and even possibly hurt the translation of some verses. I have had friends and professors on both sides of this.

I will not say much on this except to cite a couple of blogs that deal with it—one on each side—and let you decide for yourself:

[Emasculating Scripture for Political Correctness](#)

[Gender Neutrality and Bible Translation](#)

### **Translation Is Far From Boring!**

Translation can be a fascinating exercise. Watching it happen every week with English and Spanish at my church has been one of the most enthralling events of my life.

So as my last sub-point I want to give an example of how translation can be interesting if you really study it and how I encourage you to learn more if you are able.

Let's look at the wording of Mary and Joseph's relationship in Matthew 1. The commitment level they had when Mary discovered she was pregnant with Jesus is not something that translates into 21st century American English very easily. They were not married, yet our modern American custom of "engaged" is too soft a word to explain it since breaking off their commitment was serious enough for a divorce. Look at a few options provided by major English translations:

*Word for Word Translations:*

KJV: Mary was **espoused** to Joseph...

NASB: Mary had been **betrothed** to Joseph...[adds note explaining "betrothed"]

ESV: Mary had been **betrothed** to Joseph...[adds note explaining "betrothed"]

*Thought-for-Thought Translations:*

NIV: Mary was **pledged to be married** to Joseph...

NLT: Mary was **engaged to be married** to Joseph...

HCSB: Mary had been **engaged** to Joseph...

Here again, we can see the strengths and weaknesses of both strategies, only this time in the Bible instead of from Spanish. Literal gives us more accurate words, yet words like “espoused” and “betrothed” have little to no meaning for most English speaking readers in the US in 2016. Yet the thought-for-thought versions do not capture the meaning of Joseph and Mary’s pre-marriage relationship. Which is best? I’m not sure and in either case you need a note explaining it better than a translation can give you. Of the above, the note in the NASB defining “betrothed” (“The first stage of marriage in Jewish culture, usually lasting for a year before the wedding night, more legal than an engagement”) is the best explanation in my opinion.

## **Final Advice**

In closing, I want to offer some advice on Bible reading in regards to translation. Take them as advice and not as absolute truths:

1. Agreeing with Wright[10. Wright, *KNT*, preface], I say that if possible, get out two English translations at a time when reading. You may have seen those big Bibles with four translations all together. I love mine.
2. If reading two translations at a time bothers you, read through different versions, either by changing regularly or by changing versions after you finish one.
3. If possible, get a study Bible with notes to help explain things like betrothal/engagement.
4. If you know a second language, read your Bible in both.

I say all of these things because no one translation of the Bible can truly capture the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic of the Bible. Multiple translations and languages help bring out fuller meanings. The Bible is not meant to be merely read, but studied.

But more than anything, do something to get the Bible into your daily life. We are so blessed to have so many good translations in English. Much of the world does not have this. Do not take it for granted.

Read Part Six [Here](#).

---

**The Bible: After All the Canon Debating, Copyist Errors, Translation Issues and Subjective Interpreting, Is It Still the Book for Me?**

# (Part 4)

“Sometimes Christian apologists say there are only three options to who Jesus was: a liar, a lunatic or the Lord. But there could be a fourth option—*legend*.” (Bart Ehrman)

To read the Part One Introduction, Go [Here](#).

To read Part Two on the Old Testament Canon, Go [Here](#).

To read Part Three on the New Testament Canon, Go [Here](#).

## **Part Four: The Transmission of the New Testament**

Even if we have the right 66 books of the Bible, as we tried to prove in the last two essays, there remains a significant problem in being sure that we have the right content. Even if Matthew, Mark, 1 John, et. al, are the correct books, New Testament believers face several issues as to how things could have changed in these writings over time: There are decades between the death of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. There are decades between the original writings and the copies we actually have. And there many, many differences in the copies we do have because copyists changed what was written on accident and at times on purpose.

### **They're Gone, Just Like Original Coke...**

So a problem for Bible believers arises when we learn that of all the original copies of the 66 books, we have zero today. None remain. We only have copies, and more specifically, copies of copies of copies at best. And in most cases, copies that are centuries after the original was written. And since copyists made errors, sometimes on purpose, this is cause for concern. At least in theory.



Furthermore, since the Gospels were written decades after the events actually happened, how do we know they got the stories correct? A cursory study of how we got the Bible will dispel the notion that even though God inspired the Bible authors to write what they did, generally speaking it is not as simple as a man sitting down and hearing God (either out loud or in their minds) tell them what to write. Particularly in the New Testament, and most particularly the Gospels, they were inspired to write by experiencing, reading and hearing about Jesus. Their writings mostly came from what they learned, not from direct or even ambiguous dictation from God.

That leads us to the topic of how the New Testament was transmitted. Note that for the sake of space, we will only deal with the New Testament instead of the entire Bible.

### **Witnesses Not To What They Believed, But What They Saw**

So, Jesus died either in A.D. 30 or A.D. 33[1. N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus*, 7]. Even by the earliest date offered, Mark was written in A.D. 60. And the other Gospels are after this date, all written between A.D. 70 and 95, most likely. So that leaves any where from 30 to 60+ years between the events and the record of the events. The problem with this is at least twofold: did they really accurately remember what happened after such a long time had passed and did they change the content of Jesus's life to make him something he wasn't, i.e., "God"? Given time, stories can change into legends. And make no mistake, modern scholarship is accusing the New Testament of this.

Let's start with this: The Gospels were written by eyewitnesses[1. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 5-7]. John and Mathew were apostles, Mark wrote through Peter and Luke did scientist-like research through the apostles and eyewitnesses. The word "witness" and "eyewitness" is a

dominant theme in the New Testament as proof that what the apostles were saying is true—I strongly encourage you to read Luke 1:1-2, 24:36-49; Acts 2:32, 3:15, 5:31-33, 10:39-41, 13:29-31, 26:16; 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 and 2 Peter 1:16 for evidence. Note especially that Jesus appeared to 500 people according to 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. Christianity began with empirical evidence, events that could be experienced with the five senses and shared from that starting point.

In the NT, the word “eyewitness” was not merely a courtroom type description as we think of it today[2. Ibid. 117]. The apostles were not just saying they saw something and could testify to it. They were saying something deeper—that they had first hand experience with Jesus and what he did[3. Ibid.]. They were more than observers talking to the police; they were students telling stories and passing on the teachings of the greatest Man who ever lived.

With that as a background, it is helpful to know how memorization worked in the 1st century church. A few things are notable.

### **I Bet You Never Thought Will Smith Could Help You With This Topic**

First, we should note that Jesus’ sayings were by intention easy to memorize. They were rhythmic and his followers used mnemonic devices and put his teachings into poetic form to help remember them[4. Komoszewski, Sawyer and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, 37-38].

I have often compared this to how easily we remember musical lyrics, especially when put to an incredible beat. The theme song from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* is the example I always sing when teaching this in sermon or lecture form. I have not seen an episode of this show in 10 years or more, yet I can without hesitation start into, “Now this is a story all about how my life got flipped turned upside down...” and sing it all

the way through. I guarantee I will still know the lyrics 20 years from now. There are more words in The Fresh Prince theme than in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, which is the basis of the Christian faith as found in the Apostle's Creed. I am confident I that I know as many song lyrics as there are words found in any of the Gospels. Keep in mind, no matter how much the lyrics to any song matter to me, the teachings of Jesus mattered to the early church far more. That memorization mattered more than anything else in history.

The stories of Jesus were told and shared by the early church in the decades leading up to the writing of the Gospels. As a result, the content was memorized (to varying levels of specificity) by a large group of people and not by a select few[5. Ibid, 33-34]. Group memorization helps with accountability. If I sang the Fresh Prince song around people who knew it and said, "In East Los Angeles, born and raised..." people would correct me.

Please understand that when I say memorize I do not mean that they memorized every single word that Jesus said in the same way we "memorize" the pledge of allegiance. Some teachings were memorized quite well, as Paul did in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, accurately quoting the words of Christ from the Last Supper in Luke 22:19-20[5. Bauckham, 281-82]. Yet other times the way the Gospels recount the teachings of Jesus have differences such as Luke 6:27-36 reading differently than its parallel account in Matthew 5. Also of note is that when the Gospel writers relate stories, they often differ in details, most notably how different the four accounts of the resurrection are in specifics about what happened that morning. That issue will be dealt with in Part 6 of this series, but for now it suffices to say that a Christian should not measure the memorization of the early church against modern expectations of memory as we often see in the academic world. The early church was concerned more with the big picture and less with details.

## **I'm Not Afraid of Q, Or Any of the Alphabet**

It is also obvious from reading the Gospels that we cannot say that all four writers sat down and wrote what they remembered just from their own memories. The first three especially share so much information in common that it is certain that they used each other and other sources to get their information. Which is not a problem at all since there were more than four men who knew the stories.

Mark is generally considered the first to be written for several reasons. Mark omits a lot of material from Luke and Matthew (the thought being he would have included things like Jesus's birth narrative had he written after the other two), his "grammar" is worse (his writing is more redundant and clunky than the other two) and his Gospel contains things that are hard to read for us: things like the failings of the apostles and limitations of the power of Jesus and, even in one case (Mark 2:26), an apparent mention of the wrong king by Jesus in giving an OT story[6. Robert Stein, *The Synoptic Problem*, 48-65]. Matthew and Luke iron many of these things out: they add more to the story, they tell the same stories with less redundancy and better wording (even though they are longer by word count, Luke and Matthew generally tell the same stories as Mark with less words—in other words, they edit him, if it is true they wrote after him) and they avoid things like the mention of the king in Mark 2:26[7. *Ibid.*]. Taken together, all of this leads many—but not nearly all—scholars to put Mark first and claim that Luke and Matthew used his material.

Another issue related to this arises when we see that Luke and Matthew have a lot of similar material that is not found in Mark at all. This leads us to believe they shared a common source for their writings other than Mark[8. James G. D. Dunn, *The Oral Gospel Tradition*, 61-62]. Many in the academic world have deemed this source as "Q" because we have no idea what the source is[9. *Ibid.*]. I suppose it is the unknown that

scares people because this is often cited as a reason the Gospels are unreliable. Yet, Christians need not fear this "Q" source. All it means likely is that Matthew and Luke both used the same eyewitness, certainly an apostle, who had written things down, as a reference for their writing on Jesus that would become their version of the Gospel. Some scholars believe that apostles wrote things about Jesus down in notebooks in the era before the Gospels, even if we do not have those records either[10. Bauckham, 287-88]. But If your faith is ruined by the fact we don't know what source Luke and Matthew shared in writing their Gospels, your faith is in the wrong thing.

So that takes us to the first writing of each Gospel. The next enormous problem arises in the missing original writings, as previously mentioned. We have no original of any of the 27 books. What do we have?

### **Tens of Thousands, That's a Lot**

We have 5,800+ manuscripts in Greek of the New Testament[10. Daniel B. Wallace, *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament*, 27]. But let us qualify that number. While it is an astronomically large number compared to other works in antiquity, it does not mean we have 5,800 copies of the complete New Testament. Most of them are partial manuscripts, containing a few verses or a book or a set of the Gospels, etc[11. Ibid, 28].

Even still, we have a lot to work with as far as manuscripts and the entire NT is found several times over in those nearly 6,000 manuscripts. In addition, there are also tens of thousand of other manuscripts in Latin from very early in Christian history and from other languages like Syrian and Coptic[12. Ibid, 29]. Including NT quotes from early church fathers, we have a sea of information in which to figure out

what the original wording was for all passages in the NT[13. Ibid, 30]. Ultimately, we find new manuscripts every year and the more we add, the higher degree of certainty we have about the wording of every verse in the New Testament[14. Stanley Porter, *How We Got the New Testament*, 66]

### **The Ink Was Barely Dry**

How early are these manuscripts? This matters because, generally speaking, you want manuscripts that are closer to the time of the original. Date is not the only thing that determines the quality of a manuscript, but it is important.

We have manuscripts as early as 125 A.D., just a few decades after the NT books were written (between 50 A.D. and 100 A.D.)[15. Craig Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 26]. But please know that we have very few that early. The vast majority of our manuscripts are hundreds of years old. Only about a dozen are from the 2nd century[16. Wallace, 27-28]. I say to be as honest as I can with you about the data. I do not think it serves Christian apologists well to mislead people, even if not intentionally, with this information.

### **A Story Like That's Gotta Be True!**

The question then may arise about the time lapse (several decades) from the first writing to the copies we have. Fifty years is a long time for copyists to change things and make Jesus into a legend. There are several reasons why I do not believe it's reasonable to think that the Gospels became legends between the first writing and the first copies we have. One is there wasn't enough time—it was and is very hard to create a legend in just a few decades. Secondly, the content of the Gospels doesn't lend itself to legend. A lot of what you find in the Gospels is embarrassing historically: women are prime witnesses, the apostles are ignorant and humiliated at times, and Jesus comes across weak and powerless, among other things[17. Tim Keller, *A Reason For God*, 106-108]. Also the Gospels are very specific in details,

which opposes legendary writing[18. Ibid, 109-110].

Back to the manuscripts themselves, a Christian can very satisfied with what we have. It gives us a reliable base with which to work.

### **And They Would've Gotten Away With It, If It Weren't For Those Pesky Text Critics**

The problem is having this many manuscripts gives us an outrageous amount of differences in the manuscripts. By accident (because of poor eyesight, fatigue and slips of the pen) and on purpose (because they felt they could improve the writing), copyists changed things while copying[19. Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, 250-271]. Estimates are that there are several hundred thousand differences in the manuscripts we have, making the task of trying to figure out what the original words were very arduous and time consuming[20. Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 88-90].

Fortunately, the process of what is called *textual criticism*, which is both an art and a science, does this work for us. To be totally upfront, the vast, vast majority of differences in NT manuscripts are not meaningful to any level. A substantial percentage of changes by copyists are things like spelling, word order and changing pronouns to nouns for clarity in long passages[21. Wallace, 40-42]. According to Wallace, 99% of textual variants (the differences in the manuscripts) are not "meaningful and viable," meaning they do not change the meaning of a verse or text to any real level or cannot be attested in a significant amount of manuscripts[22. Ibid, 42].

### **How Do They Do It?**

There are several "rules" that text critics use to govern how to go about determining which wording is correct when there

are differences. Aland and Aland give 12, which include:

- Only one reading can be original (“correct”)
- Greek manuscripts are given higher authority than other languages
- the type of manuscript takes precedence over internal evidence (i.e., it matters more how early and reliable the manuscript is than what we think the reading should be based on its context in the Bible, etc.)
- the quality of the manuscripts with a given reading is more important than the quantity of manuscripts with a given reading
- and several others[23. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 280-82].

These rules sometimes go head to head against each other and there is no rule that automatically trumps other rules. This is an art at times and common sense must be applied to when deciding on a reading where the criteria make the decision more confusing[24. Ibid.].

Different text critics may have differing criteria but at the end of the day, what they are deliberating matters because we want the original wording of every verse in the Bible. But to be completely straightforward, they could be wrong on all the significant textual variants—those that affect the meaning of verses and can be attested in a fair amount of manuscripts—and the Bible barely changes and definitely does not change in its main point, purpose and the vast majority of its teachings. I think it will help to see some practical examples.

### **Who Took These Verses Out of My Bible?!? (Non-KJV Users Only)**

#### *Missing Verses*

Unless you are using the KJV Bible, your Bible will not have verses like Acts 8:37 and John 5:4. Why? Because when the KJV was written 400 years ago we did not have as many manuscripts or as early manuscripts as we do now. So with



earlier and better manuscripts available to us, many text critics have decided that these verses are not original and were added on purpose by eager copyists who wanted to add explanatory notes.

*John 7:53-8:11 and Mark 16:9-20*

Unlike the previous verses, these passages have not been taken out of modern versions of the Bible, but many text critics believe based on the best manuscripts that these passages were not original[25. D. C. Parker, *The New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts*, 341-343]. Many Bibles put a note with these stories that say as much. It is my opinion that Bibles will not take these stories out because they fear they will not be able to sell copies when people think they have “subtracted from God’s word”. In reality, it is believed copyists added to it by putting in passages like these. In the John passage, it is likely the story is true but that John didn’t include it in his Gospel and that a copyist felt that he should have.

*Mark 1:41*

Based on contradicting textual variants, this verse either says Christ was moved with “compassion” or was moved with “anger”[25. Wallace, 21.]. Text critics differ on which is correct, with most Bibles choosing “compassion” but with some prominent critics, including Ehrman and Wallace, arguing for “anger”. In addition to manuscript type evidence, it is argued that a copyist would be much more likely to change “anger” to “compassion” (to make Jesus seem less harsh) than the other way around[26. Ibid.]. The truth is that it does not matter to any meaningful level what the word should be because in Mark you find Jesus both angry and compassionate and even two verses later in Mark 1:43, Jesus seems angry. It matters to the meaning of the verse, but does not matter to the image Mark gives of Jesus in his Gospel. Nothing substantial is changed.

## *Matthew 24:36*

There is a textual variant here in that some manuscripts leave out “nor the Son” in Jesus’s words when talking about how no one knows the day or the hour of His return[25. Ibid, 45-48].

You can see the issue theologically if you think about it: without the words “nor the Son” it eliminates Jesus as someone who doesn’t know the hour of his return. With the words, it makes Jesus look ignorant and less than omniscient, which would hurt the image of Christ in the Gospels as God in the flesh. So apart from manuscript quality, it could be argued that a copyist eliminated the words “nor the Son” to ‘protect’ Jesus’s divinity. The truth is that there is good manuscript evidence to keep keep the words out of Matthew 24:36 and even if that were not true, in the parallel passage in Mark 13:32 we find the verse with the phrase “nor the Son” and no textual variation there[26. Ibid.]. In other words, if this copyist intentional change is to try to be used to cast aspersions on the quality of our manuscripts and therefore, to cast doubt on the New Testament, then the copyists surely messed up in Mark 13:32 by not eliminating the three disputed words[27. Ibid.].

For me personally, it does not affect my view of the deity of Christ no matter what Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 say because Phillipians 2 says that Christ gave up some rights as God to come to earth and be human. This surely could include some bits of knowledge only God has.

I could go on and on and give many more examples, but I hope that you can see from these few that even the textual variants that change the meaning of passages or add and subtract words and passages do not affect the message of the NT in the slightest. Every core doctrine and essentially every thing I have ever taught from the Bible in the last 20 years as a pastor is wholly unaffected by whether Jesus was mad or compassionate in Mark 1:41. You can leave John 7:53-8:11 in the Bible or take it out and nothing of substance changes.

The work of text critics is crucial to having a good Bible.

But the variants they deal with do not hold major Truth meaning in the balance.

### **VERY WELL PLACED**

Bruce Metzger, who until his death earlier this century was one of the premier text critics in the whole world, once told Lee Strobel that after all of his years of studying the NT canon and the manuscripts of the NT, that his Christian faith in the Bible was “very well placed”[27. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 93]. That is how I feel after staying this topic, both from sides. There are a lot of issues surrounding the transmission of the NT, but legions of men and women have given their lives’ work to proving that what we have is reliable. That we have the words God wants us to, at least in 99.9% of the NT. I am confident that what I believe from the NT and whole Bible is the truth about the One God of the universe.

Read Part Five [Here](#).