

DEFENDING THE BIBLE'S CREDIBILITY
"Part II: Answering Challenges From 'Lower Criticism':
A. Answering The Challenge Of The Bible's Manuscript Variations"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) My **King James Version** Bible reads in Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, *who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*" That verse, reading as stated, creates a big theological problem:

(a) It means that if a believer does not live a spiritual life like the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:3, that he is under condemnation.

(b) Well, elsewhere in Romans where Paul uses that word, "condemnation," he refers to **eternal damnation** (cf. Rom. 5:16, 18 acc. to Moulton & Geden, Conc. to the Grk. Test., p. 534)

(c) Thus, if we go with this KJV rendering of Romans 8:1, we are led to believe that slipping into a carnal life makes one *lose his salvation*, opposing the eternal security of the believer!

(d) However, such an idea counters the teaching of John 5:24 that one who believes in no way shall come under God's eternal condemnation, but is passed from death unto life!

(e) Well, if I check the New International Version, I get a surprise as the NIV leaves off everything after "Jesus" in Rom. 8:1, putting in the footnote that the rest of the verse appearing in the KJV appears in "Some later manuscripts"!

(e) That makes me check my Greek Testament. When I do so, I find that the earliest dated Greek manuscripts behind the New Testament from the Alexandrian and Western text types omit everything following the word "Jesus" in the verse, and only late r dated manuscripts include the other words. (Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary, p. 515; United Bible Societies Greek N.T., p. 548) **Thus, the manuscripts BEHIND the New Testament book of Romans present a theological DIFFERENCE of opinion on the doctrine of eternal SECURITY!**

(2) Well, with these manuscript reading variations, **HOW** can we tell what doctrine is correct so we know what to do when we sin? Do we accept Jesus all over again to avoid hell or just confess our sins and go on in our eternal security, and **HOW do we know?!**

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

Need: *"Though we know the Bible is true, the manuscripts behind our Bible DISAGREE. How then can we know what God SAID?!"*

- I. **Though we know the 66-book Bible is God's Word, challenges face us WITHIN its books that involve "lower" or "textual criticism"!**
- II. **ONE challenge is the VARIATIONS of READINGS that exist between the original language manuscript copies of the Bible:**
 - A. Since the manuscripts (mss) the Bible's authors used wore out, they were copied by men *not* under God's inspiration. Over the centuries of copying, errors crept into the manuscripts as the mss we have **differ** among *themselves*, Rene Pache, The Insp. & Auth. of Scr., p. 186.
 - B. Yet, Jesus said that not one "jot" or "tittle", i.e. small letter or part of a letter would pass from God's Word until all was fulfilled, Mtt. 5:18!
 - C. Well, if we can't *scientifically* prove **which** "jot" or "tittle" should **BE** in a given text due to mss variations, detractors may argue that it is *pointless* to **USE** the Bible as we can't prove *what GOD wrote* for us!
- III. **However, looking at the FACTS reveals that we both HAVE and KNOW God's authoritative Word in SPITE OF this challenge!**
 - A. The textual Criticism of the O.T. reveals we **have** God's accurate text!
 1. Since the Babylonian Captivity, the Jewish Masorete rabbis carefully copied Bible manuscripts to avoid error as follows:
 - a. If they made **1** error in copying, they began anew, Ibid., p. 187.
 - b. If the *original* text seemed to have an error, the Masoretes **left it in the copy (kethib)**, but made a note (*keri*) in the margin, Ibid.
 - c. They invented vowel points in order to preserve the word sounds as only consonants had been written up to that time, Ibid.
 2. Archaeological findings reveal the *quality* of their workmanship:
 - a. Until the 1947 Dead Sea Isaiah scroll discovery, the **earliest** O.T. mss the Church had were dated A.D. 900, Ibid., p. 188.
 - b. When the 150 B.C. Isaiah scroll was found there, predating the known A. D. 900 Masorete scrolls by **1,050 years**, it showed **almost a 100% conformity** between it and these scrolls (Ibid.)
 - c. Most of the variations are interchanges between the *v* & *i*.
 3. Consequently, an O.T. critic, discouraged by his colleagues' failures regardless of their long and massive efforts to discredit the O.T. mss, wrote: "one may say that...time, talent, and learning have all been foolishly thrown away." (Gaussen, Insp. of the Holy Scr., trans. by D. D. Scott, p. 171-172 as quoted in Pache, Ibid., p. 190)

- B. The textual Criticism of the N.T. reveals we **have** God's accurate text!
1. Though the **Church** copyists were much *less* precise than the Jewish **Masoretes** were, we have numerous N.T. mss written closer to our era so we have better manuscript evidence with which to work to discern the original readings, *Ibid.*, Pache, p. 191:
 - a. Some of the N.T. mss are dated close to their authors, like the Rylands papyrus (A.D. 100-150, see III,B,3, two sermons back)
 - b. Counting the 2,400 cursives, 1,600 lectionaries, 1,000 mss translations of the N.T., 8,000 translations of the Latin vulgate, and quotes from Church fathers (1,819 by Irenaeus, 17,922 from Origen, 7,258 from Tertullian and 5,176 from Eusebius), we have 45,175 existing manuscript portions of the NT! (*Ibid.*)
 2. Comparing this evidence with that of ancient **secular** works, next to the N.T., Homer's Iliad is the closest in greatest mss testimony. Yet, Homer lived in 900 B.C., and the earliest copy of his work we have is **500 years** after his life. We have only **643** mss copies of the Iliad as compared to over 24,000 complete N.T. mss copies, McDowell, A Ready Defense, p. 45. The N.T. wins hands down!
 3. Besides, acc. to world renowned N.T. textual critic, F. J. A. Hort, scarcely more than 1/10th of 1% of the N.T. text can be classified as **substantive** variations, and that out of the mostly repetitive, readily explainable 200,000 mss variations in the N.T.!
- C. From **Scripture's own words** and scholarly findings, we *today* are **assured** of **KNOWING what IS** God's truth from the mss we **HAVE**:
1. **Jesus** prophetically **commended** 20th century believers for *keeping* His Word in Rev. 3:8-10, meaning **WE have and KNOW it today!**
 2. 1 John 2:20, 27 promises us that the indwelling Holy Spirit *clarifies what IS* God's truth so that even **immature** ("little children" = *paidia*, v. 18) Christians are led of the Spirit to **know** what is **true**.
 3. Thus, Pache, (*Ibid.*, p. 193) notes of the mss variations, "not *one* [variant reading] touches on **any** article of faith or **any** moral commandment not *forcibly* supported by other **entirely clear** passages, or by the teaching of the Bible as a whole." In other words, where a truth is disputed by a mss reading, God has seen fit to preserve another **uncontested** reading in Scripture on that truth!

Application: (1) *Not only from (a) the archaeological findings, but from (b) Christ's prophecy in Rev. 2-3 and (c) John's insight in 1 Jn. 2, we know that we STILL have God's accurate Bible, and we can discern its truth by His indwelling Holy Spirit!* (2) *Let us then submit to it and trust it for salvation (Jn. 3:16) and living (Ps. 1)!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

- (1) In our introduction, we discovered a conflict between the KJV reading of Romans 8:1 and the doctrine of eternal security. Well, to handle this problem, we follow the leading of the Spirit and the evidences of the readings as we learned in our sermon (as follows):
- (a) We know from our textual apparatus that John 5:24 is not disputed among the manuscripts. Whether we check the UBS, The Nestle or Kilpatrick Greek N.T. editions, they all testify that of *all* the mss appearances we have of John 5:24 that John 5:24 **indisputably** reads in a way that promotes the eternal security of the believer!
 - (b) We also know from the Spirit's teaching in He. 6:4-6 (which **Greek text** is uncontested in the mss as per the Grk. N.T. editions above [there is a dispute on English translation punctuation, but it doesn't affect the Greek]) that once one is justified, he cannot lose that status; otherwise, to be saved, Jesus would have to die for him again! That would put Jesus to an open shame, and it **cannot** happen again now that He is permanently glorified!
 - (c) We also learned that the **earliest** texts actually **omit** the latter phrases of Romans 8:1 that promote a loss of eternal security!
 - (d) We also know that two distinct early text types from two **different regions** of the Mediterranean -- the Alexandrian in Egypt and the Western in Palestine -- agree that the verse stops with "Jesus." The witnesses of this reading **both** from a **widespread**, let alone **early** evidence give it very reputable credibility.
 - (e) Dr. Marchant King also reports in Bib. Sac. (1973, 130:517, p. 40) that Church Father, Claromontanus (6th cent. A.D.) wrote that the original hand ended Romans 8:1 with "Jesus", and a later "corrector" added in the margin "who walk not after the flesh" while **another, later** copyist added "but after the Spirit."
 - (f) Combing all of this information, we believe that the KJV reflects additions after "Jesus" in Romans 8:1 by copyists at later dates who created an errant statement that one could lose his salvation!

Thus, by the Holy Spirit's leading and use of evidences in the manuscripts via archaeological witnesses, we KNOW that when a believer sins, he does not stand in danger of Hell, but must only confess his sins for cleansing and growth! He can relax and grow in Christ as he can know and keep God's Word NOW!