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Section: Doctrine of the Word of God

**HANDOUT NOTES**

**Q24. Can we trust the Bible?**

Yes. The Bible is completely true and without error in its original manuscripts.

* **Intro**

**Textual Variant:** Any place among the manuscripts in which there is variation in wording. This includes word order, omission or addition of words, spelling, or punctuation differences.

**John 17:14-19** “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

* **Review**

**Q22. What is the Bible?**

The Bible is God’s inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, written word.

**Q23. Who wrote the Bible?**

The Bible was written by chosen men who were taught and carried along by the Holy Spirit.

**Matthew 22:31** “And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God …”

**Jeremiah 17:9-10** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? “I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

* **Textual Variants**

A textual variant is a difference between similar texts from different sources in the manuscript copies that we possess. Over the course of time, since the first century Apostles penned the New Testament, we have recovered manuscripts and fragments of these writings. When we compare these fragments and manuscripts, we will find certain variants (or to say it another way, differences) between the writings.

* **Understanding the Numbers**

We have at, or slightly more than, 400,000 textual variants in the New Testament manuscripts. Considering there are only approximately 138,362 words in the Greek New Testament, this reality can seem a bit alarming.

**Titus 1:9** He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

99% of the variants have to do with nuances in the original Greek language, and they have zero effect on the text or the meaning of the text.

* **Some Reasons for the Variants**
1. Movable Nu - This is a phrase relating to a rule in Greek grammar. It is an awful lot like the English use of the word “a” and “an.”
2. Similar Endings - When copying manuscripts, the writer would look down at the copy they were making and look back to the letter they were copying, picking up at a different location because they recognized the end of the word and thought that’s where they had left off. The end of the word was similar to the end of the word they were copying, and they accidentally skip an entire line of text.

Removing 99% of 400,000 variants leaves 1% or roughly 4,000 variants, which brings our numbers down to 1 variant per three pages of the Greek New Testament text. Considering the 1% (the 4,000 remaining variants): Only half of these variants are viable variants. Not every variant has the equal possibility of containing the original meaning. If one manuscript from the 14th century has a variant that’s not found anywhere else, that variant is not going to be considered viable. What we actually have is approximately 1500 meaningful, viable variants in the handwritten, Greek New Testament texts that we possess.

Of the handwritten, Greek New Testament texts that we possess, we have approximately two million pages of Scripture. Of these two million pages, we have about 1500 viable, meaningful, textual variants.

* **Scripture Compared to the Writings of Antiquity**

The New Testament writings are hands-down the earliest contested writings of antiquity. The New Testament writings are the most accurate writings of antiquity. The New Testament writings are the most represented writings of antiquity. If we cannot trust the New Testament writings, then we cannot trust any other writing of antiquity.

In comparison, the average length of writing between most works contemporaneous with the New Testament--such as the historical works of Pliny, Suetonius, or Tacitus, and their first extant copies—is 500 to 900 years. This means that writings of these historical figures do not have any manuscripts to show what they wrote until 500 to 900 years after they had written them. The New Testament has nearly the entirety of it attested for within 100 years of the original authors.

Church, we have more reason to be confident in the Scripture we hold than any other writing of antiquity. We can say, with much confidence, that the Scriptures have been transcribed accurately. We can confidently hold to the trustworthy word that has clearly, sovereignly been carried down through the ages.

* **The Benefit of a Wide Geographical Collection**

What you actually have is the New Testament being written in multiple places, by multiple authors, to multiple audiences, at multiple times. The manner in which the New Testament was copied and transmitted would make wholesale changes to the text impossible.

Since we have such early copies of the texts, it is very clear that wholesale changes have not happened. If they had, we would have clear evidence that there were wholesale changes made. This is why we want a text that comes from multiple geographical locations and multiple writers.

* **Transmission vs. Translation**

The transmission of the text is the way that the various texts were copied and spread across the world.

The translation of the text is when we take a Greek or Latin text and translate it into a different language.

The textual variant is a difference found in a transmitted copy of Scripture. The difference in translations either come from the original text used or are an error in meaning due to difficulties in differing languages.

* **Brief History of Transmission**

Shortly after Christ, Rome began a truly intense time of persecution for this new sect called “The Way.” This persecution went on for 250 years. Rome tried to destroy the Church’s documents along with the Church itself. During this time, you didn’t want to be caught with a copy of these letters or manuscripts. People had to copy these things in secret. Many times, they had to do it at night by candlelight.

Entire libraries would be burned during the Roman persecution. It’s truly amazing we have all the manuscripts we do have. God clearly preserved His word through time and even persecution.

* **Viable Textual Variants**

The two multiple verse textual variants that we have in our Bible are found in the longer ending of Mark (16:9-20) and the end of John chapter 7 through the beginning of John chapter 8—the story of the woman caught in adultery.

Pastor Joshua teaching about Scripture, Textual Variants, and John 7:53-8:11: <https://discipleschurch.com/audio/ODC-09-11-16-web.mp3>

* **Before the Council of Nicaea**

The earliest manuscripts we have declare sound truth long before this Council ever met.

**John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

In total, we have 12 manuscripts from the second century (within 100 years of the original writings) that contain portions of all four Gospels, nine books of Paul, Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation. This compromises a very large portion of the New Testament that we have today. All in all, we have over 124 Greek manuscripts written within the first 300 years after the writing of the New Testament.

The Bible is internally consistent. God’s word has no falsehood and no contradictions, in and of itself. In all of this discussion of Scripture, the most important concern is a theological concern.

* **Conclusion**

We have about 400,000 variants, 99% or more have zero effect on the text or the meaning of the text. Of the remaining 1%, half are not viable variants. The remaining variants are usually marked in your Bible and typically removed from the text with a footnote or bracketed to show that it is a variant.

There is no other writing of antiquity that even comes close to this. The New Testament writings are hands-down the earliest contested writings of antiquity, they are the most accurate writings of antiquity, and they are the most contested writings of antiquity. If we cannot trust the New Testament writings, then we cannot trust any other writing of antiquity.

* **Sola Scriptura**

Scripture alone is the ultimate authority. This emphasizes that Scripture is the final authority for salvation, doctrine, and sanctification for mankind.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

**Acts 5:29** But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

**Matthew 4:4** But he [Jesus] answered, “It is written, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’’’

Sola Scriptura or Scripture Alone is a phrase that declares the inerrant and infallible Holy Bible is the sole source of written divine revelation. When it comes to life of true Christians, we must see our desperate need to live according to the special revelation of God, given to us in His holy word.

**Romans 2:1-2** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**John 17:14-19** “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

God clearly has a plan and work for His word to complete. He promised us it would not return to Him void but that it would accomplish all that He had sent it out to do. God has graciously revealed Himself to us in and through His holy Bible. We must not be a people who take that for granted. We must continue to submit our feelings and lives to the word of God, which will never fail to be true!