

**Essential Bible Doctrines**  
*A survey of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible*  
by Nathan Parker

## **Part 1: Bibliology-The Doctrine of the Bible**

### **Introduction**

A discussion of essential Bible doctrines requires a foundation. A good illustration is the construction of a house. A house needs a solid foundation on which the construction is built upon in order for the house to withstand the elements as seasons progress.

In this discussion of essential Bible doctrines, we will be constructing our own “house” of faith and belief in what the Bible says concerning its fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. The foundational doctrine that will begin this study is the doctrine of the Bible, what theologians (individuals who study Bible doctrines) refer to as *Bibliology*.

### **Revelation**

The method by which God makes Himself known to individuals is what theologians refer to as *revelation*.<sup>1</sup> There are two categories of revelation by which God has made Himself known to humanity.

#### *General Revelation*

God has revealed Himself to humanity first of all through *general revelation*. General revelation reaches *all of humanity*.<sup>2</sup> Everyone can come to a general knowledge of God through general revelation, although additional revelation is needed to obtain specific knowledge concerning God and salvation. There are a couple of avenues of general revelation by which God has made Himself known to all of humanity.

*Creation*: God has made Himself known to all of humanity through His creation. The world around us, with its intricate design and order, declares a Supreme Being who created and fashioned the world into existence. Psalm 19:1 states this truth: “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament sheweth his handywork.” Romans 1:20 affirms this truth: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” One need only look around at the created order of the universe to discern the existence of God.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 102.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 31.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 32–33.

*Morality:* God has also made Himself known to all of humanity through an individual's awareness of morality (or conscious). Romans 2:14-15 illustrates this concept by explaining how Gentiles (non Jewish individuals) who have not read the written law of God (God's commandments in the Bible) have obeyed some of the laws of God through their conscious. The passage reads: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)"<sup>4</sup>. There is a general sense of morality and conscious inherent in humanity that discerns between what is morally right and wrong, and such a general sense of morality and conscious affirms the existence of a Supreme Moral Lawgiver, which is God.<sup>4</sup>

### *Special Revelation*

God has also revealed Himself to humanity through *special revelation*. Special revelation builds upon prior knowledge revealed through general revelation. It allows humanity to understand specific knowledge concerning the person and nature of God, as well as understand how God has provided the way of salvation for the sins of humanity.<sup>5</sup> There are two major avenues of special revelation.

*Jesus Christ:* God has made Himself known to humanity specifically through the person of Jesus Christ, the God-Man (which will be discussed more under the doctrine of Jesus Christ). John's Gospel refers to Jesus Christ as the living Word of God in John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." and again in John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." As one looks toward the person of Jesus Christ, one will see God, as Jesus Himself stated in John 14:9: "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father". Jesus is the ultimate special revelation of God.<sup>6</sup>

*The Bible:* God has also made Himself known to humanity specifically through the Bible (also known as *Scripture*). The Bible is the written Word of God and reveals to readers how Jesus Christ is the living Word of God. 2 Timothy 3:15 affirms the Bible as special revelation of God for the purpose of salvation in Jesus Christ: "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." In order for one to come to an understanding of and saving relationship with Jesus Christ,

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<sup>4</sup>Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1020–21.

<sup>5</sup>Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1022.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 73.

one must read the Bible, God's written method of special revelation.<sup>7</sup> The rest of this discussion will center on the Bible.

## Inspiration

The method by which God has revealed Himself in His written Word in the Bible is through *inspiration*. The term *inspiration* means "God-breathed".<sup>8</sup> God spoke (breathed out) His very words, through the Holy Spirit, to a collection of human writers who recorded God's Word in written Scripture (in the Bible).<sup>9</sup> 2 Peter 1:21 affirms this truth: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." There are four terms with form the biblical view concerning inspiration.

*Verbal Inspiration*: Every word in the Bible is inspired by God. Theologians refer to this as *verbal inspiration*. God did not merely inspire the thoughts of the Bible leading men to place God's thoughts into their own words (which would lead to a Bible that could possibly contain errors). God inspired the actual words of Scripture.<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:13 affirms this truth: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." Adrian Rogers summarized verbal inspiration beautifully: "You can't have thoughts without words any more than you could have mathematics without numbers."<sup>11</sup>

*Plenary Inspiration*: Not only is every individual word in the Bible inspired by God, but all of Scripture is also inspired of God. Theologians refer to this as *plenary inspiration*. God inspired the entire Bible.<sup>12</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16 is one the most foundational passages concerning the inspiration of the Bible and the plenary inspiration of the Bible: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:".

*Inerrancy*: In addition to every word in the Bible being inspired by God and the entire Bible also being inspired of God, the Bible is also completely free from error. Theologians refer to this using the term *inerrancy*. When an individual reads the Bible, he can fully trust the Bible as

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<sup>7</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 73.

<sup>8</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 484.

<sup>9</sup>Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 160.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 80.

<sup>11</sup>Adrian Rogers, *The Adrian Rogers Legacy Collection – Sermons* (North Palm Beach, FL: Adrian Rogers Foundation, 2011), Why I Know the Bible is the Word of God.

<sup>12</sup>Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, ed. Jim Vincent and Allan Sholes, Revised and Expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 169.

being completely free from any errors. John 17:17 affirms this truth: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”<sup>13</sup>

Inerrancy allows the Bible, while remaining completely free from any errors, to include a variety of literary styles, as the Bible includes: poetry, narratives, letters, prophecy, etc. Inerrancy also allows for a variety of details explaining the same historical events while remaining completely free from any errors, as one sees when reading the Gospels. Additionally, inerrancy allows for figures of speech used in the Bible such as the use of “I am the door” to describe Jesus Christ in John 10:9. All of these elements are included in the Bible, yet the Bible is completely free from error, and these elements do not weaken the inerrancy of the Bible at all.<sup>14</sup>

*Infallibility*: Not only is the Bible completely free from any errors, it will not fail to accomplish its purpose as the special revelation of making known the person and nature of God and salvation through Jesus Christ to humanity. Theologians refer to this using the term *infallibility*. For the individual who desires to truly understand the person and nature of God and how one can come to salvation through Jesus Christ, the Bible provides the answers to these questions and will not fail the individual seeking these answers.<sup>15</sup>

After examining the biblical view concerning inspiration, it would be wise to survey a few false, non-biblical views concerning inspiration. *Divine dictation* is the non-biblical view that the men who were involved in the writing of the Bible passively wrote down the words dictated to them by God. They acted as mere secretaries without any personal involvement in the writing of the Bible. This view is clearly false as one examines the variety of literature and styles used throughout the Bible. In the Gospels alone, there is a sharp distinction between the simple writing of John and the more elaborate writing of Luke.<sup>16</sup>

Two other false, non-biblical views concerning inspiration that are at opposite extremes are *natural inspiration* and *mystical inspiration*. *Natural inspiration* views the Bible as being written solely by men without the supernatural guidance of God. 2 Peter 1:21 clearly refute this false view. *Mystical inspiration* views the writers themselves as being inspired by God in anything written by them, which would make their extra-biblical writings equal to the Bible in terms of inspiration and authority. This is certainly a false view concerning inspiration that will be examined in more detail on the subject of canonicity.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 66.

<sup>14</sup>Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, ed. Jim Vincent and Allan Sholes, Revised and Expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 171–72.

<sup>15</sup>Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 66.

<sup>16</sup>Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, ed. Jim Vincent and Allan Sholes, Revised and Expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 165.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 83–84.

Three other non-biblical views concerning inspiration which are similar in views (with a few variants) are: *degree*, *partial*, and *concept inspiration*. *Degree inspiration* views some parts of the Bible as more inspired than other parts of the Bible. 1 Corinthians 2:13 refutes this clearly false view of inspiration. *Partial inspiration* views some parts of the Bible as inspired, while other parts of the Bible are not inspired. This is also clearly a false view concerning inspiration which is refuted in 2 Timothy 3:16. *Concept inspiration* views the concepts (thoughts) of the Bible as inspired, but the words of the Bible are not. This is clearly another false view concerning inspiration which is refuted in 1 Corinthians 2:13, and Adrian Rogers' excellent quote under the discussion of verbal inspiration exposes the fallacy of this false view.<sup>18</sup>

The final and most dangerous non-biblical view concerning inspiration is the *Neo-Orthodox* view (proposed by theologian Karl Barth) which states the Bible *becomes* the Word of God as the reader of the Bible experiences the person and revelation of Jesus Christ for himself. This is a dangerous and false view of inspiration as it places one's personal experience above the authority and inerrancy of the Bible. *The Bible does not become the Word of God. The Bible is the Word of God*, which 2 Timothy 3:16 clearly affirms as truth (and refutes the false doctrine of Neo-Orthodox inspiration).<sup>19</sup>

## Canonicity

The method by which the inspired Word of God was preserved in the collection of Scriptures (books) that comprise the Bible is what theologians refer to as *canonicity*. The word *canon* is derived from a Greek word (*kanōn*) which is derived from a Hebrew word (*kaneh*) which means "rule or standard". It is the standard by which the early church affirmed which Scriptures (books) should comprise the Bible.<sup>20</sup> The criteria for canonicity can be summarized into four words:

*Apostolicity*: The first criterion of canonicity is what scholars refer to as *apostolicity*. This means that an apostle (in the New Testament) or a prophet (in the Old Testament) was directly or indirectly associated with the writing of Scripture. In the New Testament, some of the apostles who directly contributed to the writing of the Bible include: Matthew, John, Peter, and Paul. Additionally, Peter and Paul were indirectly involved (providing the eyewitness accounts) in the writing of the New Testament Gospels of Mark and Luke.<sup>21</sup>

*Orthodoxy*: The second criterion of canonicity is what scholars refer to as *orthodoxy*. This means that the in order for the Scripture (book) to comprise the Bible, it was in agreement to the early church's "rule of faith" (for the New Testament) or the religion of Judaism (for the Old

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<sup>18</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 84–85.

<sup>19</sup>Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, ed. Jim Vincent and Allan Sholes, Revised and Expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 165–66.

<sup>20</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), The Nature and Scope of Scripture.

<sup>21</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), The Nature and Scope of Scripture.

Testament). Only Scriptures that were in agreement to the teachings of the apostles (in the New Testament) or the prophets (in the Old Testament) were considered as orthodox by the early church (in the New Testament) or by Jews (in the Old Testament).<sup>22</sup>

*Antiquity*: The third criterion of canonicity is what scholars refer to as *antiquity*. This does not mean whether the Scriptures (books) that would comprise the Bible were merely “old”, but for the New Testament, it would determine whether the Scriptures (books) were written during the time of the apostles. Writings written during the second and third centuries of the early church, as well as other early church literature, while at times were beneficial and edifying to the church, were not included in the Bible because they failed both the criteria of *antiquity* and *apostolicity*.<sup>23</sup>

*Ecclesiastical (church) usage*: The final criterion of canonicity is what scholars refer to as *ecclesiastical usage*. For the New Testament, this term means that the Scriptures (books) that would comprise the Bible were widely used in the early church. This criterion would build upon and be used in conjunction with the other three criteria listed above. Scriptures (books) that fit the criteria of apostolicity, orthodoxy, antiquity, and were used widely in the church (ecclesiastical usage) comprised the New Testament portion of the Bible, in conjunction with the Old Testament already accepted by Jews and the early church.<sup>24</sup>

One final word needs to be made regarding canonicity. Because the Scriptures (books) that comprise the Bible are inspired of God (2 Timothy 3:16), they were already canonical the moment God inspired the Scriptures. The early church leaders did not *ascribe* canonicity to the Scriptures (books) that comprise the Bible. They merely *described* and *affirmed* which books were inspired by God in order for Christians to know which Scriptures (books) comprised the Bible.<sup>25</sup>

## **Transmission**

The method by which the inspired Word of God has been preserved throughout history is what theologians refer to as *transmission*. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew (with portions of Daniel in Aramaic), and the New Testament was originally written in Greek. The original Scriptures containing the hand-written inspired Word of God are what scholars refer to as *autographs*. There are no autographs of Scripture in existence today.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), The Nature and Scope of Scripture.

<sup>23</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), The Nature and Scope of Scripture.

<sup>24</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), The Nature and Scope of Scripture.

<sup>25</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 119.

<sup>26</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), The Nature and Scope of Scripture.

However, there are thousands of hand-written copies of the original autographs of Scripture preserved today in the form of what scholars refer to as *manuscripts*. There are far more manuscripts (and the manuscripts are closer to the date of the original autographs) of Scripture than other comparable ancient literature.<sup>27</sup> The major groupings of manuscripts that have preserved the Old Testament through transmission include the following:

*Masoretic Text*: The majority of the Old Testament manuscripts preserved through transmission come through a grouping of manuscripts called the *Masoretic Text*. These manuscripts were written in Hebrew by a group of Jewish scribes (individuals who hand-copied ancient manuscripts before the invention of the printing press) called the *Masoretes*.<sup>28</sup> The Masoretes were extremely cautious and meticulous in their hand-copying of the Hebrew Old Testament, ensuring its accurate preservation through the centuries.<sup>29</sup> The oldest complete manuscript of the Masoretic Text in current existence is known as the *Leningrad Codex*, which forms the basis for the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) used as the standard Hebrew Old Testament for scholars today.<sup>30</sup> The BHS also forms the basis of the Hebrew Old Testament that the majority of modern English translations of the Bible have been translated from, one major exception being the King James Version which was translated using an edition of the Hebrew Old Testament (also based on the Masoretic Text) known as the *Rabbinic Bible* produced by two scholars known as Bomberg and Ginsburg.<sup>31</sup>

*Septuagint* (typically abbreviated as *LXX* in some scholarly writings): The *Septuagint* is actually a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, but it is discussed in this section instead of the section on translation as it plays an important role in the transmission of the inspired Word of God. The Septuagint is the first complete translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. It was translated by a group of Jewish scholars, and it was used by both first-century Jews during the time of Jesus Christ, as well as by the early church. When the New Testament quotes Old Testament passages, it generally quotes from the Septuagint.<sup>32</sup>

*Dead Sea Scrolls*: The most important discovery of Old Testament manuscripts in modern history is the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* in 1947, which provides Old Testament scholars with a grouping of Hebrew manuscripts which date 1,000 years closer to the original Hebrew autographs than what Old Testament scholars currently had in their possession. These scrolls

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<sup>27</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), The Nature and Scope of Scripture.

<sup>28</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 49–50.

<sup>29</sup>Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods & Results* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 97.

<sup>30</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 54–55.

<sup>31</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 44–45.

<sup>32</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 62–64.

were discovered in caves in the town of Qumran located near the Dead Sea in the Judean Desert. They provide fascinating insights into the preservation and transmission of the Old Testament.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to the Old Testament being preserved through transmission, the New Testament has also been preserved throughout history through transmission. The major grouping of manuscripts that have preserved the New Testament include the following:

*Byzantine Text Family* (Grouping): The majority of Greek New Testament manuscripts originate from a grouping (what scholars refer to as a *text family*) known as the *Byzantine* text family. The Byzantine Text family originated from the Byzantine Empire (which included Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, and the former Yugoslavia). This text family is also known as the *Majority Text* family.<sup>34</sup> The Byzantine Text family forms the basis of the well-known edition of the Greek New Testament produced by the scholar Erasmus referred to as the *Textus Receptus*. The *Textus Receptus* forms the basis of the Greek New Testament upon which the King James Version has been translated.<sup>35</sup>

*Alexandrian Text Family*: The earliest family of Greek New Testament manuscripts was hand-copied and preserved by scribes in Alexandria, Egypt, which is known by scholars as the *Alexandrian* text family.<sup>36</sup> One of the most well-known manuscripts of the Alexandrian text family was discovered by the scholar Tischendorf at St. Catherine's Monastery on the Sinai Peninsula is referred to as *Codex Sinaiticus*. The Alexandrian text family is the primary basis for the modern standard Greek New Testament used by scholars which is referred to as the *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament* (currently in its 28th edition), as well as the modern standard Greek New Testament used in Bible translation known as (and produced by) the *United Bible Societies Greek New Testament* (currently in its fifth edition). The *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament* and *United Bible Societies Greek New Testament* are identical in the Greek New Testament text, with the difference being the *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament* is generally used by scholars whereas the *United Bible Societies Greek New Testament* is used by Bible translators. Most modern English translations of the New Testament are based on the *Nestle-Aland/United Bible Societies* edition of the Greek New Testament.<sup>37</sup>

*Western Text Family*: The text family that includes Greek New Testament manuscripts from the western Mediterranean region (which included Gaul, Italy, and North Africa) is known by scholars as the *Western* text family. This text family influenced Latin translations of the Bible.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 72–74.

<sup>34</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 110.

<sup>35</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 110; Widder, 112.

<sup>36</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 110.

<sup>37</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 113–14.

With the Word of God being preserved through transmission into thousands of hand-written manuscripts, when scholars have examined various manuscripts throughout history, they have noticed slight differences between manuscripts. These differences are what scholars refer to as *textual variants*. The method by which scholars compare the textual variants of various manuscripts of the Word of God in order to discern which manuscripts are closest to the original autographs is known as *textual criticism*. When one hears the word “criticism”, what generally comes to mind is the negative, destructive form of criticism of the Bible which attempts to undermine the inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God (this is known as *higher criticism*). Textual criticism, on the other hand, is the method by which scholars determine which manuscripts are closest to the original autographs. As long as the scholar who is involved in textual criticism believes in the biblical doctrine of inspiration of the Word of God as outlined above (and the majority of modern scholars involved in textual criticism do), then healthy textual criticism is not only permissible when studying the Bible, it is also necessary and beneficial to determining which manuscripts scholars have access to today are closest to the original autographs.<sup>39</sup>

Some of the principles scholars use when involved in the method of textual criticism include the following: some scholars prefer the textual variants found in the oldest manuscripts, whereas some scholars prefer the textual variants found in the majority of manuscripts, while other scholars prefer the textual variants found in the largest variety of manuscripts. Additionally, many scholars involved in textual criticism generally use the following three principles when examining textual variants: scholars prefer the shorter textual variants as closer to the original autographs, scholars prefer the more difficult textual variants (textual variants that were less likely to be “smoothed out” by a scribe during the hand copying process) as closer to the original autographs, and scholars prefer the textual variants that best fit the style the original author of the autograph would most likely use.<sup>40</sup>

In terms of the families of manuscripts, for the Old Testament, scholars generally prefer the Hebrew Masoretic Text as being closest to the original autographs. For the New Testament, scholars generally prefer the Alexandrian (older) text family of manuscripts, although some scholars prefer the Byzantine (majority) text family. With that said, scholars involved in textual criticism examine all the major families of manuscripts to determine which manuscripts are closest to the original autographs.

In terms of the New Testament, I personally tend to lean more toward preferring the Byzantine (majority) text family the majority (no pun intended) of the time I am involved in textual criticism (my view of New Testament textual criticism is similar to that of J.B. Hixson and is different from the view of many scholars who lean more toward the Alexandrian/older text

<sup>38</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 110.

<sup>39</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 6–7.

<sup>40</sup>Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 35–38.

family). With that said, when involved in textual criticism, I heavily examine the various text families to determine which textual variant is likely closer to the original autographs. One instance where it is clear the Alexandrian (older) text family is closer to the original autographs versus the Byzantine (majority) text family is the use of the Greek word for *whom* in 2 Timothy 3:14. The *Textus Receptus* (based on the Byzantine text family) uses the singular word for *whom* (*tinōs*), whereas the *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament* (based on the Alexandrian text family) uses the plural word for *whom* (*tinōn*). The plural is clearly the most likely textual variant closest to the original. Paul was not the only person who instructed Timothy in the Scriptures. Others, such as Lois and Eunice, instructed Timothy in the Scriptures when he was at a young age in addition to Paul's instructing of Timothy in the Scriptures. The plural textual variant reflects everyone who was involved in instructing Timothy in the Scriptures, whereas the singular only reflects Paul as the sole instructor to Timothy in the Scriptures.<sup>41</sup>

One bottom line to remember when thinking through the discussion concerning textual criticism is that no variant reading across any manuscript affects the central message and theology of the Bible. One can be confident that the Bible one holds in one's hands is the inspired, preserved Word of God.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary: Commentary on the Variant Readings of the Ancient New Testament Manuscripts and How They Relate to the Major English Translations* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2008), 675.

<sup>42</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), The Nature and Scope of Scripture.