

# GLORIOUS DOCTRINE THE WORD OF GOD

EXPLORING THE BIBLE'S  
INSPIRATION, INERRANCY,  
AUTHORITY, SUFFICIENCY,  
NECESSITY, CLARITY  
AND MORE...

## Session 5: Inerrancy & Translation

### 1. THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

The inerrancy of Scripture is a necessary implication of the previous doctrines of inspiration and authority we have covered already in this class. Because Scripture is God's word, and because God cannot lie, then the Scriptures must be inerrant. However, there are some important nuances we must understand when talking about Biblical inerrancy.

#### A. INERRANCY DEFINED

"The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact."

(Wayne A. Grudem, Systematic Theology, 90)

There are a few different things we will unpack today from these statements on inerrancy. Firstly we must understand what the doctrine of inerrancy is and what it is not saying.

**When we talk about the inerrancy of Scripture, we are talking about its *truthfulness*.**

When we talk about the truthfulness of the speech of the Bible, we also understand some other things about how it communicates to us:

#### I. The Bible Speaks in Ordinary Language

As we saw in our session on Clarity - the Bible was meant to be understood by ordinary people. Therefore, it uses ordinary language and common figures of speech to its time and context. Grudem illustrates this helpfully:

"This is especially true in 'scientific' or 'historical' descriptions of facts or events. The Bible can speak of the sun rising and the rain falling because from the perspective of the speaker this is exactly what happens... From the standpoint of the speaker, the sun does rise and the rain does fall, and these are perfectly true descriptions of

the natural phenomena the speaker observes.”  
(Wayne A. Grudem, Systematic Theology, 91)

Even today we use this expression of the sun rising or setting, even though we know that scientifically speaking, it is not the sun that is moving ‘per se’, but rather that the earth rotates around the sun and the rotation of the earth causes our perception of the sun rising and setting.

This similarly happens sometimes when the Bible talks about numbers or measurements. For example, in a battle, the exact number of people who died might be 7,989. However, it would not be untrue for a reporter to say that 8,000 men died in the battle. We understand that rough estimates are not meant to communicate exact numbers.

**The limits of truthfulness are determined by the degree of literal precision or imprecision the speaker or author intends and expects his listeners or readers to understand.**

This applies similarly to measurements of quantity and distance. If I said I live 10 km from the office, I would not be being intentionally misleading you just because I actually live 10.76km. It is perfectly natural in everyday language to speak using round numbers or approximations, and this is how the Bible often speaks to us. In instances where it does mean to communicate a precise measurement or number, the context will make it clear.

**Inerrancy has to do with truthfulness, *not* with the degree of scientific precision with which events are reported.**

## **II. The Bible can contain loose quotations**

In our culture, especially if you come from academia or journalism, you are used to quoting a person’s words exactly with quotation marks as a ‘direct quotation.’ However, even in our culture, we are used to indirect or informal quotations that summarize what was said instead of giving the exact words used. Take for example the statement:

“Bill said that he would come to the class a little early.”

This is not a direct quote, but it is an acceptable and truthful report of what was said, even if Bill’s actual statement was, “I will come to the doctrine class 15 minutes before it is scheduled to start.”

“Written Greek at the time of the New Testament had no quotation marks or equivalent kinds of punctuation, and an accurate citation of another person needed to include only a correct representation of the content of what the person said (rather like our indirect quotations): it was not expected to cite each word exactly.”  
(Wayne A. Grudem, Systematic Theology, 92)

The original writers, especially in that time and culture, did not expect to imply that they were using the exact words of the speaker or even the text they were quoting.

**Inerrancy is consistent with loose or free quotations of the Old Testament or Jesus or someone else as long as the content is not false to what was originally said.**

### **III. The Bible may have unusual grammar**

Today, especially in formal writing such as newspaper articles, or a dissertation paper on a scholarly topic - correct grammar is important. However, in the ancient near east, (and even until fairly recently) this emphasis on correct rules of grammar (or even spelling) was not the same as it is today. At times, in the original languages in which the Bible was written, it seems like the authors did not follow the conventional grammatical rules (such as the use of a plural verb where the rules would expect a singular, or use of a feminine adjective when a masculine or neuter would be expected). Sometimes these uses of irregular grammar by the authors were meant to communicate something else or perhaps cue the reader to an allusion in the text.

“These stylistically or grammatically irregular statements (which are especially found in the book of Revelation) should not trouble us, for they do not affect the truthfulness of the statements under consideration: a statement can be ungrammatical but still be entirely true.”

(Wayne A. Grudem, Systematic Theology, 92)

This is entirely true today. Bob the plumber could have horrible spelling and terrible grammar in the way he speaks, yet also be the most trustworthy and truthful person!

We must recognize that the formalization of grammar and spelling did not become a widespread practice until more recent times. Even in English, spelling wasn't formally regulated until the popular advent of dictionaries around the 18th century. Also, until modern times, even authors didn't necessarily spell their own names the same way all the time - far less specific words!

**Inerrancy has to do with the truthfulness of the speech, not the perfection of the grammar by our modern standards.**

## **B. CHALLENGES TO INERRANCY**

### **I. Trying to limit inerrancy only to faith**

One common challenge to Biblical inerrancy is from those who try to limit the Bible's purpose to only teaching us about “faith and practice.” That is, they limit it to speaking authoritatively only in areas that relate to religious faith and life, or ethical conduct. This position would allow for Scripture to have false statements about other areas - such as

historical details or scientific facts. The advocates of this position tend to prefer to say that the Bible is “infallible” but would hesitate to use the word “inerrant.”

“For many this is an overwhelming argument that leads them to hold on to a form of scriptural authority that is limited to the “spiritual realm.” Supposedly, the Bible may be wrong about miracles or cosmology or creation, but it can safely be trusted in “spiritual matters.” Of course, this results in a complete disassociation of the “spiritual” from “everything else,” leaving these teachings hanging in midair with no foundation but feelings.”

(James R. White, *Scripture Alone*, 74)

However, this position falls short of the Bible’s own claims for itself as we have seen before.

The Bible affirms that:

- “ALL” of Scripture is inspired (God-breathed) and profitable (2 Tim. 3:16)
- Completely pure (Ps. 12:6), perfect (Ps. 119:96) and true (Prov. 30:5)
- We must believe everything laid down by the law and prophets (Acts 24:14 & Luke 24:25)
- Whatever was written was written for our instruction (Rom. 15:4)

These texts do not imply that there is any part of Scripture that cannot be trusted, nor does it make any restrictions on the kinds of subjects to which it speaks truthfully.

“If we begin to examine the way in which the New Testament authors trust the smallest historical details of the Old Testament narrative, we see no intention to separate out matters of “faith and practice,” or to say that this is somehow a recognizable category of affirmations, or to imply that statements not in that category need not be trusted or thought to be inerrant. Rather, it seems that the New Testament authors are willing to cite and affirm as true every detail of the Old Testament.”

(Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 93)

The Bible repeated gives us accurate and specific historical details in the text which helps us to understand and trust what it is saying. Of course, we must also factor in what we spoke about prior - that the Bible often uses phenomenological language (from the viewpoint of the observer), summaries, approximations and imprecise details to communicate to us - but this does not mean that it is untrue or that it limits itself only to speaking truthfully about religious topics.

To be sure, the Bible is not intended to be primarily a detailed history book or scientific textbook - that is not its major purpose. The Bible’s major focus and purpose are to teach us the way to salvation in Jesus Christ, what we should believe and practice as Christians and how to love and serve God. So, it is correct for us not to try to read it like something it is not (a science textbook or detailed history of everything), but we also cannot dismiss any



parts of its contents as unimportant or unnecessary. Everything in Scripture is there because God intended it to be there.

**If the Bible spoke falsely about historical details or scientific facts, then what confidence could we have that it speaks truthfully about the eternally important details of spiritual truth!**

## II. Errors in the Transmission of Scripture

The Bible we hold today is obviously not the same as the parchment upon which Paul, Peter, or Moses wrote upon. What we have today is the product of thousands upon thousands of copies from the originals which have been passed down through the centuries. Scribes copied the original documents and they were distributed to various other people and locations and copied and copied and copied. This is commonly referred to as the 'Transmission' of the text of Scripture. This raises a few concerns for us.

Before we continue, we must clearly define some words that will be used.

- **Autograph** - this refers to the original document which was written by the hand of the original human author.
- **Manuscripts** - this refers to old copies of the documents of the Old and New Testament.
- **Variants** - this refers to the variations or differences in one copy or manuscript to another.
- **Textual Criticism** - this is the scholarly study of the form of the text of Scripture, based on comparing the available copies to us and the various variants between the manuscripts.

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) expands on what is meant by inerrancy this way:

"We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant." (Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Article 10)

We see in this statement, the affirmation that inerrancy and inspiration refer to the autographs - the documents which were produced directly by the Divinely inspired authors of Scripture. Also, copies of the originals are only considered to be the Word of God as far as they are accurate to the originals.

This sets up a problem that is commonly used to attack the Christian conviction on the inerrancy of the Biblical text.

### **The Problem of Variants**

It is common knowledge in Biblical Studies that the copies which we have access to today of the original documents of the Old and New Testaments contain differences or variants. No two copies before the invention of the printing press are exactly the same because they were hand-copied by various scribes of differing skills and accuracy.

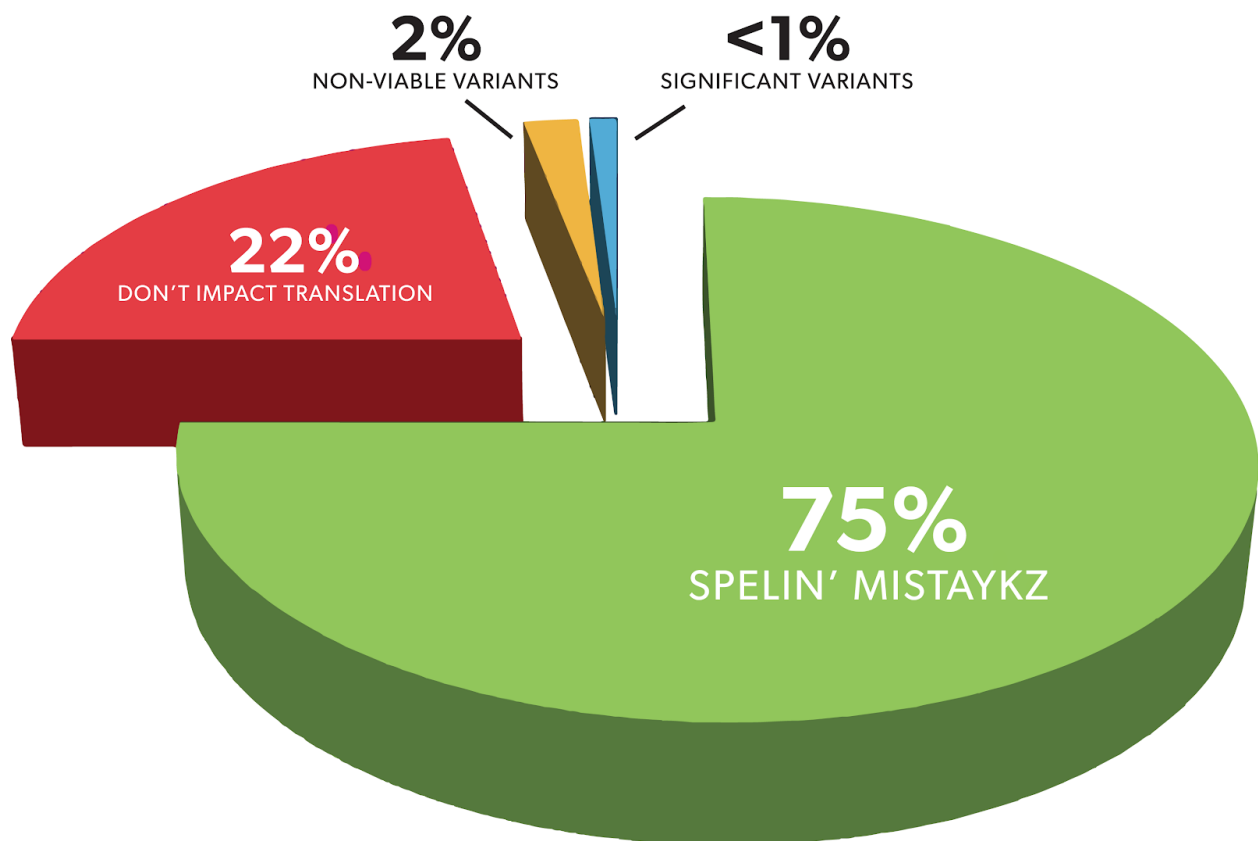
This fact is often pointed to by critics of the Bible to raise serious doubts about the faith. Scholars such as Bart Ehrman - who once considered himself an Evangelical Christian - say things like, "there are more variants than there are words in the New Testament." Indeed there are some 200,000-300,000 textual variants - and the total number of words in the Greek New Testament is 138,162 words.

This sounds like a big problem on the surface and has led many a college freshman to abandon the faith in despair.

### **What is a variant?**

However, we need to understand what counts as a 'variant'. Any misspelling, omission of punctuation or accidentally skipping a word or line, etc - these all count as unique variants. The reason we have so many variants is simply because we have so many copies! The majority of the variants in the manuscripts are inconsequential and most of them are so minor they can't even be translated. 75% of variants are in spelling, and another 22% don't impact translation at all. About 2% are what is called "non-viable" variants which mean that the evidence against them being authentic to the original is so overwhelming that they aren't even considered worthy of serious consideration. Then finally, less than 1% of the variants are actually significant and worthy of further investigation. (See graphic below)

However, if we think about it, if you had a text from me that was more than 99% accurate - would you know what I said to you with certainty? Of course! If I wrote an email that was 99% inerrant, you would have no problems reading it and understanding what was said (given that I wrote clearly). This is what we have in our Bibles.



In fact, this is what the skeptical Bart Ehrman himself has to admit:

"To be sure, of all the hundreds of thousands of textual changes found among our manuscripts, most of them are completely insignificant, immaterial, of no real importance for anything other than showing that scribes could not spell or keep focused any better than the rest of us...

...In fact, most of the changes found in our early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology. Far and away the most changes are the result of mistakes, pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another"  
(Bart D. Ehrman, Misquoting Jesus)

Grudem summarizes it this way:

"...for over 99 percent of the words of the Bible, we know what the original manuscript said. Even for many of the verses where there are textual variants (that is, different words in different ancient copies of the same verse), the correct decision is often quite clear, and there are really very few places where the textual variant is both difficult to evaluate and significant in determining the meaning. In the small percentage of cases where there is significant uncertainty about what the original text said, the general sense of the sentence is usually quite clear from the

context.”

(Wayne A. Grudem, Systematic Theology, 96)

No major doctrine of scripture depends on a variant reading. In fact, **the total number of variant readings that actually have any significance amount to less than 0.5%**! All of this to say, the historical record clearly shows us God’s providential hand in preserving His word - truly, His word stands forever and shall not pass away.

### Missing verses

Perhaps if you’ve been a really careful reader of Scripture, you’ve noticed a few missing verse numbers. In fact, there are 16 which are commonly cited that you would not find if you looked them up in a modern English translation:

- |                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Matthew 17:21 | 10. John 5:3–4   |
| 2. Matthew 18:11 | 11. Acts 8:37    |
| 3. Matthew 23:14 | 12. Acts 15:34   |
| 4. Mark 7:16     | 13. Acts 24:6–8  |
| 5. Mark 9:44     | 14. Acts 28:29   |
| 6. Mark 9:46     | 15. Romans 16:24 |
| 7. Mark 11:26    | 16. 1 John 5:7–8 |
| 8. Mark 15:28    |                  |
| 9. Luke 17:36    |                  |

You would, however, find them if you looked for them in a King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. What gives here? Are Bible translators removing Scripture?

No. There is no conspiracy to remove verses from your Bible. This is simply explained by the fact that the KJV Bible was originally published in 1611, and the persons who produced the text of the KJV were using a manuscript collection called the Textus Receptus (received text). At the time, this was the best collection of manuscripts available to the translators. These “missing verses” appear in those manuscripts of the Textus Receptus (abbreviated as TR).

Probably one of the most famous of these “missing verses” is what is called the Comma Johanne which is the text of 1 John 5:7-8. It says:

“For there are three that beare record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that beare witness in earth, the Spirit, and the Water, and the Blood, and these three agree in one.” (KJV 1611)

“For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.” (ESV)

You can see here that the two translations don't agree. Is the ESV and other modern translations trying to remove a verse that teaches about the Trinity? No.

The Comma Johanneum doesn't actually appear in any early Greek manuscripts of the NT. It actually first appears as an annotation in a Latin translation around the end of the 4th century. It was then back-translated into Greek, where it found its place within the Textus Receptus which the KJV was based on. It eventually ended up becoming part of the Latin Vulgate, and hence was kept in the Bible until better manuscript evidence was discovered.

The TR was based on later and less reliable manuscripts than what we have available to us today due to the discovery of many more ancient manuscripts. These earlier and more reliable manuscripts do not contain the "missing verses" (like the Comma Johanneum of 1 John 5:7-8) that the KJV retains. Thus, this is why modern translations omit these verses - because the evidence of the best manuscripts we have shown us that they were not in the originals.

But doesn't this pose a problem? Doesn't this show that people were adding verses to scripture?

No. The presence of these 'extra verses' in the TR and KJV shows us a tendency of the early scribes. If they were ever unsure about a text of Scripture, whether it was original or not, they would rather keep it than throw it away because they did not want to lose anything that was Scripture. So the tendency was for the manuscript tradition to accumulate extra verses rather than lose verses. We see this clearly as we compare the later manuscripts to earlier manuscripts. The fact that we have so many early manuscripts makes it possible now to determine which verses were in the original and which were added later because of this tendency.

### **The up-side of variants**

All this talk of variants can seem a bit pedantic and leave us wondering, why is this even important? Wouldn't it have been better if God had just miraculously caused all the scribes that copied the manuscripts to turn into human Xerox machines and produce no variants at all?

At first glance, that can seem appealing, until you realize what this trail of variants gives us.

Firstly, it shows us that at no time was there some council or powerful religious group that controlled the entirety of the text of the Bible. Thus, no person or group could have ever decisively changed or manipulated the message of Scripture to say something else than what was actually written.

"Never was there a time when any man, group of men, or church "controlled" the scriptural text. Even if a group had decided to alter it, they could never gather up all the copies already in existence; the means of travel would preclude such an attempt even if one was launched, for distribution of the copies would far exceed anyone's

ability to recover them all. So if such a major “editorial effort” were to take place, what would be the result? Let’s say someone, five hundred years after Christ, gathered up a bunch of manuscripts and “erased” all references to a doctrine. When those manuscripts and those copied from them would later be compared to all the manuscripts this group could not revise, the alteration would stand out like a lighthouse in the darkness. Any addition or deletion would be easily detected. This is why the entire manuscript tradition is so important: Any “tampering,” because of tenacity, is immediately apparent.”

(James R. White, Scripture Alone, 144)

Other religions like Islam do not have this, since, in the 7th century, all the manuscripts of the Qu’ran were gathered together by the third caliph - Uthman - and the variants were burned and then an ‘authorized’ version of the Qu’ran was issued. Uthman realized that there were variant readings and recitations of the Qu’ran that differed quite significantly. So, to solve the problem - they simply collected all the copies they could and burned them, then issued an official version. This sort of process never happened with the Bible, and the trail of variants in the manuscripts shows clear evidence of this.

Secondly, because there are variants, we are able to trace the transmission of the texts of Scripture. By following how one variant reading is copied and appears in other manuscripts, you can figure out who copied who and thus figure out when and where the Scriptures travelled. This is very important for studies in the history of transmission and also helps us understand what the state of the church was like in various parts of the world. Perhaps some parts of the world did not have some books of the Bible yet because it had not yet been passed on to them. This would significantly affect how their theology developed in that area.

Thirdly, even though there are variants, it does not mean we do not have what was originally written. Because of the trail of evidence, scholars can follow the clues and figure out what was original and what was not. In fact, we have a level of certainty for the text of the New Testament that no other book of antiquity can boast or rival.

“The original readings are still present, even when there are a number of options for a given word or phrase, but the benefit of knowing that the text has not been edited in wholesale fashion, as some assert, far outweighs the work we must invest in the study of textual variants.”

(James R. White, Scripture Alone, 144–145)

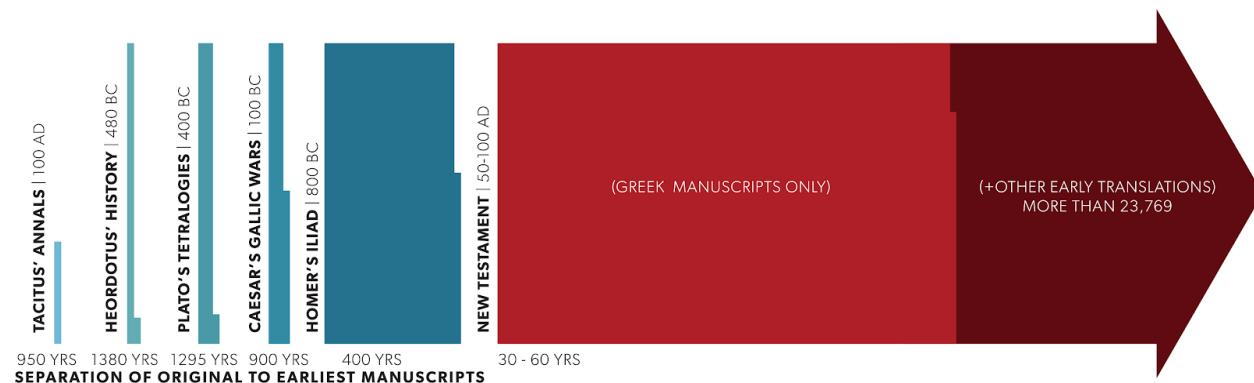
### **An Embarrassment of Wealth of Evidence**

The problem we have with the NT is not actually that we are missing parts of it - but rather that we have too much! Think of it like a puzzle. If you had a 1000 piece puzzle, but you empty the puzzle box to find 1050 pieces - you obviously have 50 pieces too many. This is

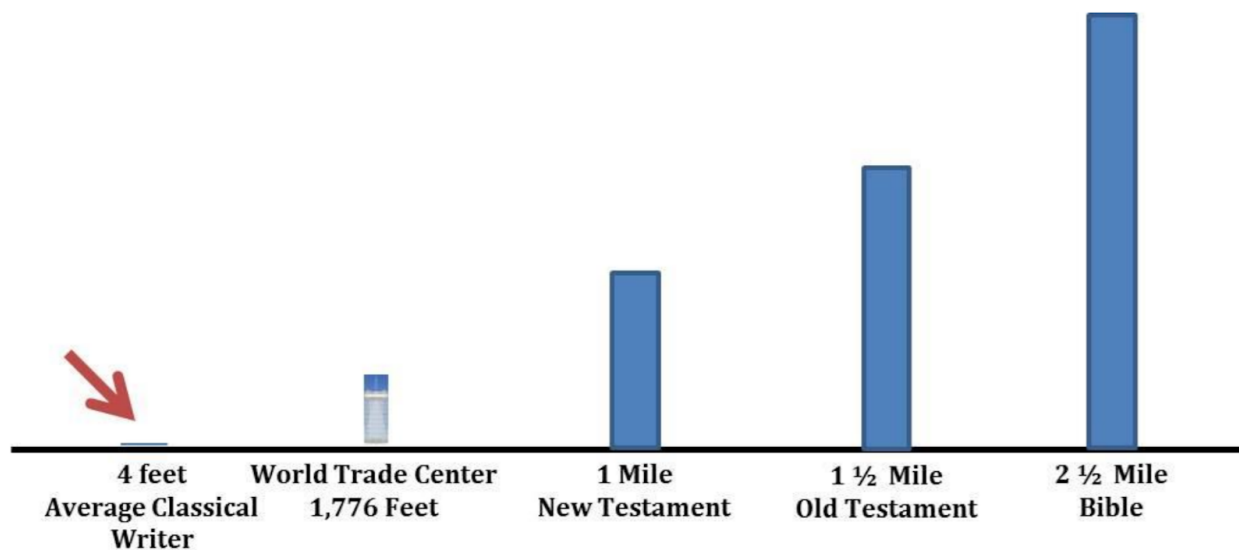
what it is like with the NT, we have more readings or pieces and the job of Biblical scholars of textual criticism is to sort out which pieces are the extras.

**What we have is an embarrassment of wealth of evidence that testifies to the text of the Bible. With that said, there are very few spots where this occurs - in fact, there are 16 places - and none of them are about any important doctrine.**

To illustrate this wealth of evidence, take the graphic below on the manuscripts we have for the New Testament:



There are over 5800 Greek manuscripts of the NT (not counting other translations) which is far more than any other comparable work of antiquity! Not only that, the dating of some of those manuscripts are far closer to when the originals were written than even the best comparable work of antiquity. The closest rival is Homer's Iliad which has about 643 copies, but the earliest copy is about 400 years removed from the original. Compare that with the manuscript evidence for the New Testament, some copies which are dated to within 30 to 60 years of the original, and there is no competition for the preservation of this text!



“Think about this – of just the 5,800+ Greek New Testament manuscripts – there are more than 2.6 million pages. Combining both the Old and New Testament (the

Bible) and there are more than 66,000 manuscripts and scrolls. Do you think it would hit a ten-foot ceiling? A 4-foot stack of manuscripts for the average classical writer compares to over one mile high of New Testament manuscripts and 2½ miles high for the entire Bible.” (Dr. Josh McDowell)

### Nothing to Hide

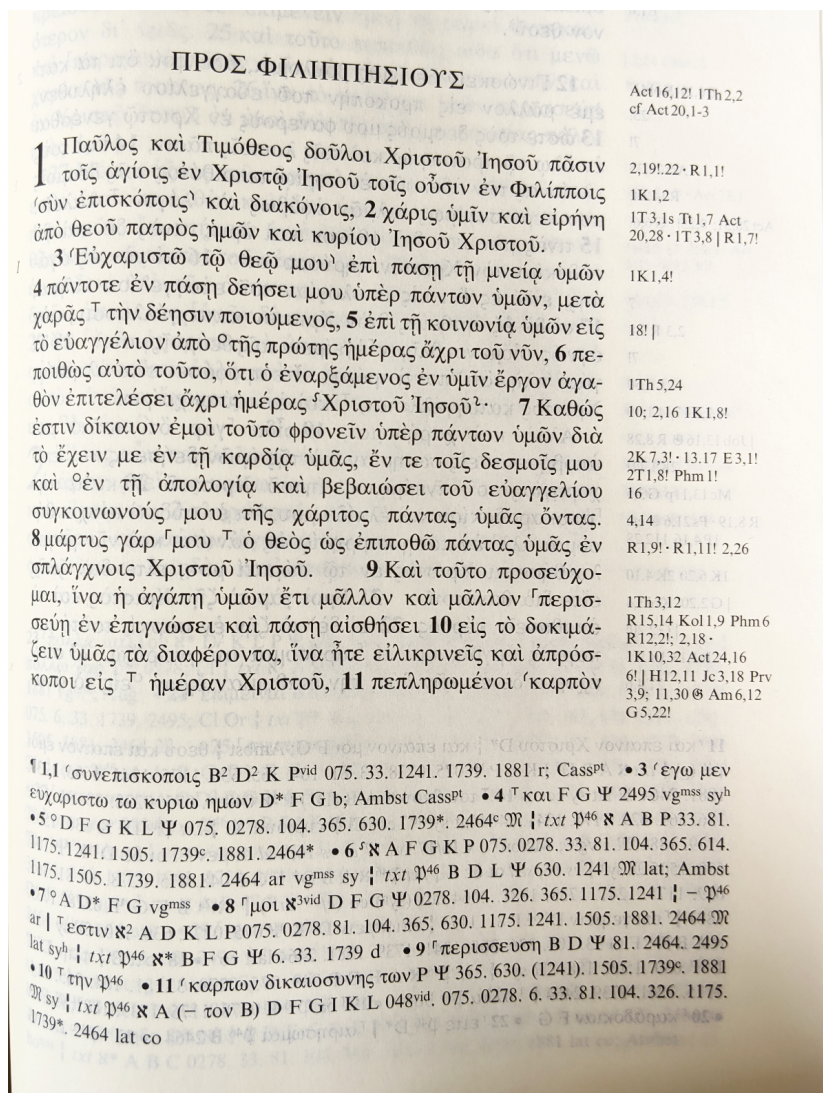
Perhaps you’ve noticed in your Bibles little superscript numbers in the text and footnotes at the bottom of the text that say something like, “other manuscripts read this way...” Now you know why those exist. The fact that our Bibles have these footnotes about various manuscript readings shows us that we have nothing to hide. All the evidence is there for someone to look into every available variant if you wanted to.

Critical editions of the Greek and Hebrew Testaments are constantly being updated with new data from manuscript finds.

See an example of the Greek New Testament - Nesle-Aland 28th edition (right). It shows the main Greek text on the top, cross-references on the side, and the critical apparatus on the bottom - which lists all the major variants and what manuscripts they are found in. The different symbols and letters represent what type of variation it is, and which manuscripts contain the variant.

All of this information just serves to strengthen our confidence in the biblical text - it is truly a mountain of evidence that testifies to God’s providential preservation of His Word!

This is why Biblical scholarship puts footnotes in our Bibles and publishes openly about the study of variants. There is truly nothing to hide.





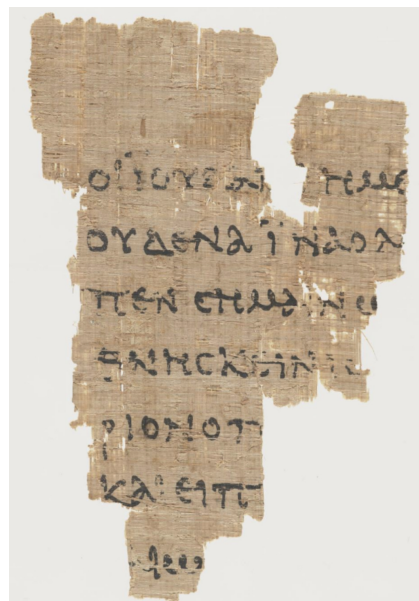
## The Reliability of the Transmission of the text

We see evidence of the reliability of the transmission of the Old Testament text of Scripture in the New Testament itself. Both Jesus and Paul quote the OT as if it can be trusted, although by that point it would have been hundreds of years old.

So confident was the apostle Paul about the inerrancy and preservation of the text of scripture that he could argue his point with the Galatians based on a singular noun! He argues his case that the sole heir of the promises of Abraham is Christ Jesus based on the form of a single word in the OT text of Genesis 12:7 which was written more than 1400 years prior! Paul argues:

“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his *offspring*. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.” (Galatians 3:16)

So we can see that clearly, Paul thinks that the text of Genesis which he had in his day was so faithfully transmitted, that he could make a whole argument on something as small as whether or not a noun used was singular or plural! Wow!



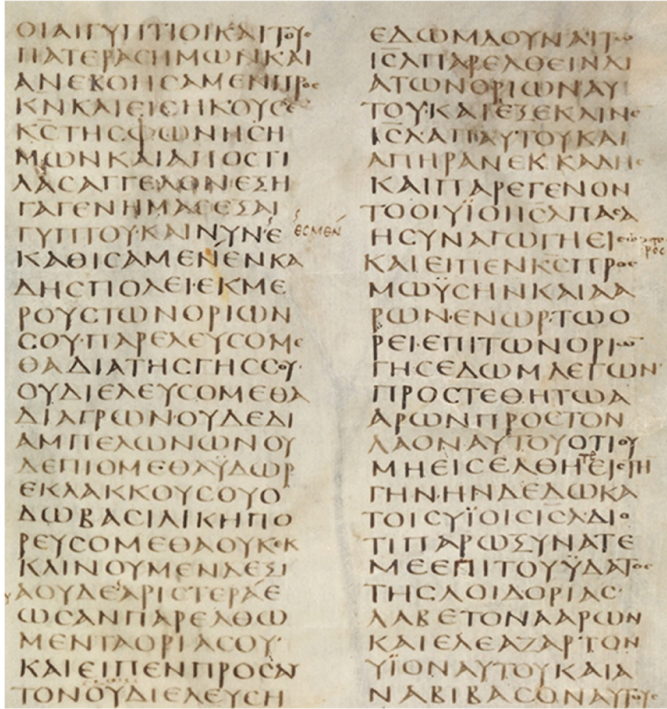
P52 - FRAGMENT OF JOHN 18:31-33

With the New Testament, we have very early copies of the majority of the books. There are over sixty extant manuscripts (in whole or in part) of the New Testament that date between the second and third centuries with Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews and Revelation comprising the most copies from this period. John's Gospel proves to be the most popular in this period with eighteen manuscripts, and Matthew in second with twelve.

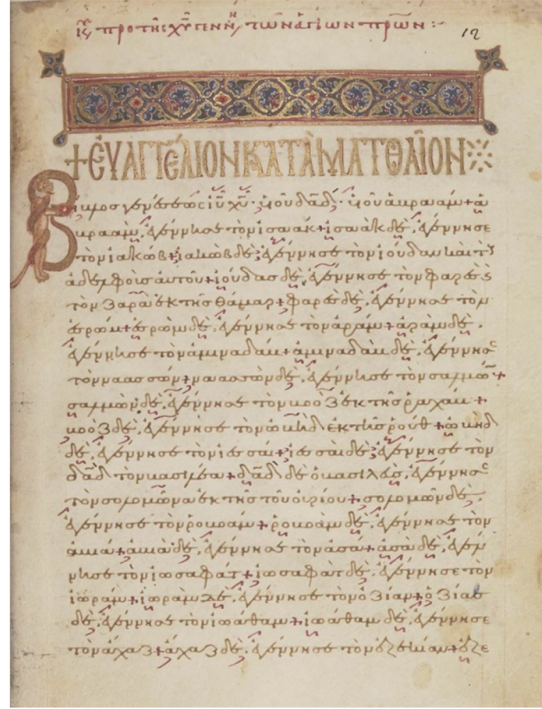
One of the most famous copies currently is P52 which is a copy of John dated to the beginning of the second century around 125 AD. This is only a few years after the original writing of John in the late first century!

We also have codices like the “Chester Beatty codex P45, dated c. 250, which contains all four canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), which are followed by the book of Acts.” (Michael J. Kruger, Canon Revisited)

The oldest NT manuscripts exist in the form of what is called “Majuscule” text - which means it was written in all caps, without any spaces, and no accents. This was to save on space since parchment and papyri were expensive and precious commodities. The “Miniscule” text - which is a text that is written with common letters, sometimes cursive, and has accenting - became popular later around the 12th century. (see below)



**CODEX SINAITICUS - MAJUSCULE**  
(4TH CENTURY)



**GA 15 - MINUSCULE**  
(12TH CENTURY)

### III. Alleged Errors in the Bible

“It is commonly argued that the Scriptures cannot be inerrant because the instruments used to record them (sinful men lacking omniscience) would by necessity twist and distort the message. But this is little more than a claim that the omniscient and omnipotent God is incapable of using even the fallen creation to accomplish the ends of His divine decree. Was God truly dependent upon the omniscience of the authors in giving His Word? Remember: Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21). Does it not follow that the Spirit would never carry these men into error? Would not the need for omniscience be only on the part of the Spirit? The belief that imperfect humans necessarily preclude an inerrant revelation is based primarily upon a rejection of God’s sovereignty in human affairs.”

(James R. White, Scripture Alone, 72–73)

Many of the alleged errors and contradictions in the Bible are not actually errors or contradictions of the text itself, but rather errors in understanding and interpretation by the reader. We must not confuse our ignorance of the correct meaning of a text with a legitimate error of the text. There is not space here to go into detail on every alleged contradiction and error, but there are many good apologetic books and Bible commentaries available that answer all the major challenges in this area.

Two books you can check out are:

- [Keeping Faith in an Age of Reason: Refuting Alleged Bible Contradictions](#) by Dr Jason Lisle
- [Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties](#) by Gleason L. Archer

“There have been many past instances where people thought for certain they had convicted God’s Word of error based upon the current state of knowledge in their day, only to be proven wrong in succeeding generations. Growth in knowledge of the historical context, cultures, events, and languages brought vindication of the text. Was the text wrong when believers lacked the background information by which to fully clarify a text? Not at all—the error lay in the ignorance of the critic.” (James R. White, *Scripture Alone*, 76)

Dr. John Frame says it well for us:

“When we deal with Bible problems, then, it is important for us to be aware of these limitations, that is, to read humbly. When we are faced with a problem, it is no dishonour to say, “I don’t know how this can be resolved.” Scientists do that all the time, when they encounter a phenomenon that seems to run contrary to a theory they believe. When the evidence for the theory is otherwise substantial, the scientist rightly assumes that the phenomenon can somehow be reconciled to the theory, even if he doesn’t know how that will happen.” (John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 181)

## **C. PROBLEMS WITH DENYING INERRANCY**

### **I. The Moral Problem: Does God lie?**

If we deny that the Bible is inerrant in the original autographs, then we imply that God inspired the authors to lie, and thus God lied. If this is true, and we are to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), then that would pose the moral dilemma of us following God’s lead in lying. However, if the Bible lies, then how could we even trust what Ephesians 5:1 says? Should we not be imitators of God then? You can see how things fall apart very quickly.

### **II. The Trust Problem: Can we trust God?**

Once you start loosening the grip on inerrancy and start to allow that Scripture can speak falsely about minor matters and details, then that opens up the possibility that Scripture *CAN* speak falsely to us! So then, what basis do we have to trust that anything in Scripture is true? What about what the Bible tells us about the way to salvation and eternal life?

At first, disregarding minor issues by stating that Scripture can err on them may seem like an easy way to dismiss or disobey sections of the Bible that we don’t like and aren’t inclined to trust. However, such a stance will eventually increase to the great demise of any

meaningful faith in what God has said in His Word. If we can't trust God's Word in the small things, why would we trust it in the big eternal things?

### **III. The Pride Problem: We put ourselves above God's Word**

For us to say that God's Word is wrong on a particular subject means that we pronounce it in error on our own authority. Essentially we would be saying that we know truth more certainly and accurately than God does! We would become a higher standard for truth than God Himself, and so we would self-idolatrize ourselves.

So, in light of all the evidence for the inerrancy of Scripture, why do people still doubt?

"The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one ever dreams of questioning ...if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt."

(F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, pg 10)

NT scholar F.F. Bruce puts his finger on the real problem - the same one we have been pointing to in this workshop series - the internal presuppositions and biases of people. Jesus made a similar verdict: "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." (John 3:19)

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## **2. TRANSLATIONS**

We will look briefly at the topic of the translation of the Bible. The Bible exists in many different languages today. It has been translated from its original languages of Hebrew and Aramaic in the Old Testament, and Greek in the New Testament so that people all over the world can read it in their own language.

### **A. How is the Bible Translated?**

#### **I. The Supposed Problem of Translation**

There is a common myth about Bible translation that is often propagated by skeptics and critics from other religions. It goes something like this, "What you have is not what was originally written, but rather copies of copies of translations of translations. And just like you lose the original meaning of a message when it is translated from one language to another to another, etc - you also don't have any confidence that your modern translations are accurate."

At face value, this can seem to be a big problem. However, it is based on a misunderstanding of how Bible translation actually works.

## **II. The Truth About Bible Translation**

Bible translations today are not based on other translations in different languages, but rather are based on the best information we have about the originals. Every modern translation is produced by going back to the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. Therefore, the argument falls through since it is not a perpetual game of translations telephone, but rather, scholars constantly go back to the original languages.

## **B. What are the differences in translations?**

There are different approaches to Bible translations which are important to understand when we are looking to choose a Bible to read or study.

### **I. Formal Equivalent**

Formal Equivalent translations aim to be as rigidly equal to the original text, even sometimes keeping the word order of the original languages. They are sometimes called “Word-for-Word” or “literal” translations. An example of a Formal Equivalent is the NASB, KJV and ESV.

Formal equivalents can be useful as a study Bible since their main focus is upon keeping the text as close to the original. So, they may choose to keep the same number of words in a sentence or even keeping the original word order. However, they can sometimes read awkwardly because of odd grammatical constructions since Hebrew and Greek don't follow the same grammar rules as English. So, they are sometimes harder to read. Also, because of the differences between the languages, no translation can truly be called “literal” - as many bilingual people know, some things just cannot be translated easily (e.g. idioms and expressions unique to a language).

One example of this is from 1 Peter 1:13, where the Greek text literally says, “Gird up the loins of your mind.” I don't know anyone who speaks this way in English - so it would be meaningless to translate it this way. Instead, most translations render it something like “prepare your minds” or “pay careful attention” because it conveys the meaning of the idiom.

### **II. Functional Equivalent**

A functional equivalent attempts to convey the thought expressed in the source text using equivalent expressions from a contemporary language like English. They are sometimes also called “Dynamic Equivalents” or “thought-for-thought” translations. They focus on capturing what was the intended meaning a text was supposed to convey to its readers and then expressing that meaning appropriately in the receptor language it is being translated to. Examples of functional equivalents are the CSB and NIV.

The advantage of functional/dynamic translations is that they tend to smooth out the text and make it easier to read. It rewords the expressions and customs of the ancient text so that modern readers can understand it.

For example, the text of Psalm 23:5 literally reads, “you anointed my head with oil.” However, many modern readers would not understand the significance of this custom. So, the Good News Bible renders it as “you welcomed me as an honoured guest” because that’s what that custom meant.

Some dangers of functional equivalents are that the translators could misunderstand the meaning of a text and cause the reader to understand something the original text was not saying. Furthermore, if the translator has a theological presupposition that disagrees with what the text clearly says, they may render the translation in a way that distorts or hides the meaning of the text. However, for the majority of popular and scholarly translations, these risks are mitigated by the fact that usually, a team of scholars from varying backgrounds and theological persuasions work on a translation. This helps to reduce the factor of individual bias. This is why translations produced by a single person are usually less preferred than translations produced by a team of scholars.

For most people, a functional equivalent is an excellent translation for everyday reading.

### **III. Paraphrases**

Paraphrases are really not to be considered translations at all. They are a summary of what the author/publisher thinks is the main gist or message the Biblical passage is communicating. As a result - there is quite a bit of interpretation that happens and there may be some bias introduced to the text. Examples of paraphrases are the NLT and The Message.

However, paraphrases are not totally useless. Sometimes they can be a good way to get a summary of the big picture of a section of Scripture. But the reader should know that what they are reading is not actually the text of the Bible, but rather someone else’s summary or paraphrase of what they think it says. Sometimes this is helpful for beginners to read a paraphrase to get the big idea, and then read a formal or functional equivalent for further study.

Some paraphrases should be avoided altogether - like the Passion Translation which is promoted by Hillsong and Bethel church - which is misnamed because it is most certainly not a translation. In a scholarly journal, Dr. Andrew Sheard describes the Passion Translation as:

“...abandoning all interest in textual accuracy, playing fast and loose with the original languages, and inserting so much new material into the text that it is at least 50% longer than the original. The result is a strongly sectarian translation that no longer

counts as Scripture; by masquerading as a Bible it threatens to bind entire churches in thrall to a false god.”<sup>1</sup>

The Passion Translation was translated by one person without a credible command of the Biblical languages - Brian Simmons. He adds a lot of his own ideas and words to the text which changes the meaning. Furthermore, the manuscripts which Simmons uses to translate from seem to be 'sketchy' at best.

## C. Which translation should I choose?

The answer to that question depends on what your goal is and how experienced of a Bible reader you are.

If you are just starting out reading the Bible, functional/dynamic translations will be the best for you to understand what Scripture is clearly saying. These are also great for if you want to read big sections of narrative or are doing a Bible-in-a-year reading plan where you're not focused on straining at the minute details, but rather looking at the big picture. A great dynamic translation that we recommend is the Christian Standard Bible (CSB). It is readable yet also very faithful to the original text.

If you are a more seasoned Bible reader, then a formal equivalent may be better suited to you. It is great for deeper study of Biblical texts and helps you to slow down and consider what the Bible is saying or might give you some insights into the original text since it may retain idioms and expressions. We like the English Standard Version because it aims to stay close to the original text in translating word-for-word where appropriate but smooths out the translation in parts where the grammar would be awkward to read in English. This is why it is our main preaching translation.

In practice, it is totally fine to have one translation for daily use and another more 'literal' one for personal study.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think the debate about inerrancy has become such a large issue in this century? Why do people on both sides of the question think it to be important?
- If you thought there were some small errors affirmed by Scripture, how do you think that would affect the way you read Scripture?
- Do you know of any Scripture texts that seem to contain errors? What are they? Have you tried to resolve the difficulties in those texts?

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<sup>1</sup><http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/burning-scripture-with-passion-a-review-of-the-psalms-passion-translation>



- As Christians go through life learning to know their Bibles better and growing in Christian maturity, do they tend to trust the Bible more or less?
- Does belief in inerrancy guarantee sound doctrine and a sound Christian life? How can Jehovah's Witnesses say that the Bible is inerrant while they themselves have so many false teachings?

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- [Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books](#) - Exploring the history of the New Testament text from a theological perspective, Michael Kruger helps Christians understand the facts behind their faith and the legitimacy of the New Testament Scriptures.
- [Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible](#) - Groundbreaking, worldview-based defense of scriptural inerrancy offers a positive case for the Bible's trustworthiness while implicitly critiquing modern materialist worldviews.
- [The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy](#) - R.C. Sproul's handy little booklet *Can I Trust the Bible?* is a short exposition of the Chicago Statement and an excellent brief explanation. You can get it for FREE on [Kindle/eBook](#) or you can buy it as a paperback.