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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Basic Bible Doctrine

"How We Got the Bible, part II: Text" TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the opportunity that is again ours. We rejoice in the ministry of the word of God and we especially thank Thee Lord for the way that it has been preserved for us. We thank Thee for the providence by which we are now able to open the Scriptures and read them with the assurance that we have a true representation of the word that Thou hadst give through the Spirit to the prophets and to the apostles.

Guide and direct us tonight as we consider some of the things that have to do with the transmission of the text. We pray Thy blessing upon each one present, may it be a fruitful time for each of us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject tonight in Basic Bible Doctrine is How We Got Our Bible, the text. Last week we looked at the canon and tonight we look at the subject of the text, both of which are related to the subject How We Got Our Bible. It is of great interest, no doubt, to study the history of the English translations of the Old Testament and the New Testament and a great deal of very interesting literature has been written concerning the history of the Authorized Version, for example, and some of the other versions of holy Scripture. But of course, the history of translations is not nearly so important as the

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history of the text itself. That is, the text that lies behind the translations. As you know, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic and the New Testament was written in Greek. And it is these autographers, that is these writings themselves, that are the inspired writings. The translations are not inspired even though they may be reliable representations of the inspired text, generally reliable. Still, it is the original texts written by the prophets and the apostles that are inspired.

So it is more important for us to know something about the history of the text than the history of the translations of the text. But all of this is related to the question of the reliability of the Bible, and the reliability of the Bible is related to the reliability of the translation of the Bible that you hold in your hands. So it's important for Christians to understand something of the background of the book that they hold in their hands as the word of God.

The study of the text is necessary because there have been corruptions in the transmission of the text. Now when we talk about inspiration of the original text, the inspiration of the text that the apostles and the prophets wrote does not guarantee that that text as it has been transmitted down through the centuries would itself remain verbally, plenarily, inerrant as the word of God. We know, as a matter of fact, that there are corruptions in the Greek and Hebrew copies of the original writings and we do not have those original writings. Incidentally, there are no copies, no original copies, no autographer, no writings themselves, of any ancient writing. So in the case of the Bible the fact that we don't have the original manuscript should not be a problem to us. Of where they have disappeared to, no one knows.

But at any rate, there are corruptions in the transmission, just as you when you sit down to copy a lengthy piece of literature probably make some mistakes. You write a word twice, or you omit a word, or occasionally you drop a line, you miss a line entirely because one line ends with a certain word and another one ends with the same in your eye. As you copy you look back and instead of catching the line where you had just

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finished copying you catch the next line or the one after that that has the word that is the same or one very similar and you discover you've omitted a line. Anyone who's ever tried to copy anything knows that it's easy to make mistakes.

So there are mistakes that have been made in the transmission of the text. We have many manuscripts of the Old Testament. We have many manuscripts of the New Testament in the original languages, and there are many corruptions in them. It's just like the slips of the tongue that occur when a preacher speaks. He may say, "Now in the New Testament we read about Saul and Pilas," and what he meant to say was Paul and Silas. And then that reminds me of the preacher who stood up and said that he was going to read from the word of God and today his reading would be from the Epistle of Paul the Colossal to the Aposians [laughter]. And that kind of thing you do when you are speaking and also when you are writing. There are some interesting variant readings, that's what you call those things, variant readings that have occurred and may be documented.

There's a little place near Edinburgh, Scotland called Juniper Green, it's just a little village. And in periods, ages, a generation or two back Scotland was a land that laid a great deal of stress upon preaching. They used to have on Monday mornings little accounts of the sermons that had been preached in the leading churches. Now, no preacher likes to be thought to be taking his message from anyone else, he likes for people to think that his message is an original message that the Lord God gave him and so he doesn't like to say, "I got most of my message from Spurgeon's Commentary," or from somebody else. But anyway, in the newspaper reporting on a sermon that was preached at Juniper Green the newspaper said, "The Reverend Mr. so and so preached an appropriated sermon," [laughter] and what they meant to say, of course, was an appropriate sermon. But appropriated was probably nearer to the truth. And there is a new report of a preacher who preached in the morning and in the evening, a.m. and p.m., and it appeared in the newspaper as, "The Reverend Mr. so-and so-preached Bash

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in the morning and in the evening." [Laughter] Both and bash are rather close together and the typographical error led to corruption in the text.

So there are corruptions in our text, both over the Old Testament and the New. And because there are corruptions it's necessary to study the history of the text. There are things that occur in the copying of manuscripts that lead to variance because a copyist may think that he understands the text a little bit better than the text that is before him and so he makes changes in it thinking that surely the author did not say that. So exegetically he may make mistakes, and then there are other ways by which mistakes are made.

So it's important for us to know something about that which lies behind that translation that you hold in your hand. Now this is a big subject and it would take us many hours to effectively cover it so what we will do is just give a little survey and if you're interested further in this topic, well there is a great deal that you can read. I would suggest that if you have a Bible dictionary or a Bible Encyclopedia and it's an Encyclopedia of some size that you look up "Bible text", or "the text", and read what those Encyclopedias have to say. Most of them have rather good pointed articles on the text of the Old Testament and the text of the New.

But let's look now at the history of the Old Testament text and we'll first say just a word or two about the time from the Old Testament's completion to 70 A.D. We really do not know very much about the history of the Old Testament text, that is, during this period of time. When the last author completed the writing of the Old Testament, let's just say the author of the Book of Malachi what happened in those hundreds of years between the completion of the Old Testament and the beginning of the writing of the New is veiled in a great deal of mystery. That is, we just don't have any documentation of things that happened.

We know that when the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered about 30 years ago or so that these manuscripts were seen to be or they learned that they were in scriptoriums.

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Now a scriptorium was a place where Scriptures were held. And in scriptoriums of ancient synagogues and also of in ancient sects, scriptoriums or rooms were places where copies were constantly being made. In the case of the Dead Sea scrolls there was a scriptorium and this ascetic colony of people in this scriptorium were constantly making copies of the sacred writings.

It's likely that this practice was something that was a widespread practice in ancient times and so we can probably assume that many copies of passages and books and possibly even sections of the Old Testament were made. We do know that there were some versions of the Old Testament that were commonly read. For example, the Greek translation of the Old Testament was begun around 230 or 240 B.C. and that Greek translation of the Old Testament was known by the writers of the New Testament because they often cite from the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Now as a matter of fact they cite more from it than they do from the Hebrew text of the Old Testament so that was their King James Version or their Authorized Version, or something very similar to it. We know that the Samaritans had a separate translation or a separate version of the Old Testament, Pentateuch. And so, the Samaritan Pentateuch had certain readings that differ from the readings found in our versions. Our version is made from the Masoretic text of the Hebrews and so we know that there were some other versions that were present at this time and that they were unknown to the individuals who have given us the New Testament. That shows us that different forms of the text existed at that period of time.

Now from A.D. 70 to A.D. 900 during this period of time there was a great deal of study by the Rabbis of the word of God. And they were particularly interested in preserving the integrity of the books of the Old Testament. The men who studied them and who did the unusual forms of study that some of them did were called scribes, or Soferim. These scribes were very anxious to preserve the integrity of the Old Testament Scriptures and so they studied very carefully those books and sought to preserve them.

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One of the early Rabbis spoke about putting a fence around the law, and by that he meant to preserve those books. That is, to preserve the integrity of the books and when we say integrity we mean the wholeness of the books so that they would not lose any of what they regarded as the inspired word of God.

Those scribes and the others who studied the word among the Hebrews at this time were particularly interested in counting letters. They counted all of the letters in the Bible, they counted all of the words in the Bible, they counted all of the separate verses in the Bible. They made notations of the word that was the central word in the whole of the Old Testament, the central letter. They also had other ways by which they noted unusual things concerning the Old Testament Scriptures. Then later on these men who became something like masters of tradition and came to be called Masorites because the word *masorah* is a word that means "tradition," there grew up a body of men who had given themselves particularly to the study of the Scriptures with a view to pronunciation of the word of God, with a review to preservation of it, with a view to how the words should be pronounced for chanting and things like that. These men were called Masorites, or masters of tradition. That was the name that was given to them and they were particularly prominent around the 800 A.D. They were concerned with pronunciation of the word of God and the preservation of the word of God.

The Masoretic text arose as a result of the studies and practices of these men, and today when a young theological student opens up the Bible in the Hebrew text he is opening up the Masoretic text of the Old Testament, that's what it's called. We might call it the Hebrew text of the Old Testament but it's the Masoretic text because it's a text traceable to the work of the Masorites. They were interested in the punctuation of the text because in the early days they did not have any vowels. So in the reading of the Old Testament they had only consonants. Therefore it was possible upon occasion to read a text in a different way by putting different vowels with the same consonant.

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For example, just to give you an illustration if I can, we will just put this down here, in English it would be something like this. Now in the context, if you did not have a context you might find this rather difficult to read. But if you knew, for example, if a person was talking about a book or you might read this and you would read it rather easily, "Have you read this book?" The vowels are missing, the consonants only are here. Now if I were to put it this way, then of course you would know this is, "Will you read this book?"

So the Masorites were very interested, since the text did not have vowels, they were interested in preserving the correct pronunciation of the word of God. That meant that they had to devise a system by which they might punctuate the text in such a way that it would be read as tradition said that it should be read. And so there were different systems that were devised for punctuating the text but finally a system that grew up around Tiberius and Palestine became the dominant one and today when you look at a Hebrew text of the Old Testament you will find that underneath the letters there will be things like this. You will find occasionally something like this inserted or you will find this, and so on. These are little marks to note a certain particular vowel that should be read. For example, this is a short A, roughly, this is a long one, this is a long I, this is a very short E, this is just a short E, this is a long E, and so on.

This system has been preserved to this very day and so when theological students read the Old Testament that's what they read. They read the consonants but they read it as it has been pointed, this is called pointing, they read it as it has been pointed by the Masorites. Now capital C, from A.D. 900 to the present, during this period of time there took place a lengthy collection of manuscripts by both universities and libraries. A certain man by the name of Verkovich collected over two thousand manuscripts for the Leningrad library. Furthermore, some of the synagogues had Genizahs, places that where manuscripts were kept. And so this period of time was largely a period of time of collection of the manuscripts that had been preserved down through the centuries.

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There is at the present time no Hebrew manuscript other than the Dead Sea scrolls earlier than about 895 A.D. The reason for this is that the manuscripts among the Hebrews after they had been well worn were usually taken into a place like a Genizahs and there they were kept and they were buried with certain important men, often, who died. If Rabbi so and so died they buried some copies of the Scripture with him or they buried them in sacred grounds. In other words, they did not preserve those particular copies and so the result has been we don't have any ancient Hebrew manuscripts other than those that have been rather recently discovered.

In 1947 the famous discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls took place and a number of ancient manuscripts were discovered in near the Dead Sea apparently preserved by an ascetic colony, sometimes linked with the Essenes who lived and ministered before the time of Christ around that particular area. They discovered some rather interesting thing in these scrolls. There is a fairly well preserved manuscript or two of the Book of Isaiah, one of them particularly profitable for study. And one of the things that they learned from this was that the text that those men studied back just before the time of Christ was very close to the text that is found in the Masoretic text centuries later.

Now in Cairo also in relatively modern times hundreds of manuscripts have been discovered too. These have not been thoroughly studied and so we cannot say too much about the character of those manuscripts. But at least we can conclude this rather brief survey by saying that the material of the text of the Old Testament is greater than for any other ancient document except that of the New Testament. So when we say that we don't have any ancient manuscripts that go back relatively early we're not saying anything other than that which is true of all manuscripts of ancient writings. We have more material for the study of the Old Testament text than we do for any other ancient document except the New Testament. And the thing I think that is particularly important for us is that the consonantal text of the Masoretic text agrees in large measure with that copy of the Book of Isaiah which has been found in Qumran or with the Dead Sea scrolls.

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Now let's turn to the history of the New Testament text. The New Testament text, as you know, was not written in Hebrew but in Greek. And the period of time during which the New Testament was written was the period of time roughly from 50 A.D. to 100 A.D. Now beginning with the Apostles to the time of the received text, that which lies behind our Authorized Version, we have many manuscripts of the New Testament. Just to speak of the Greek manuscripts alone we have five thousand, roughly, Greek manuscripts of the Old Testament. Now these vary, some of them have only a verse or two, some have quite a few chapters, some have books, and there are some that are complete copies of the New Testament, relatively few of those.

We have over eight thousand Latin translations of that Greek text. And then we have many other kinds of, they are called versions, we have many other versions. We have versions in other languages like the Syriac language or like the Coptic language and the Armenian language, and so on. And all of these things are useful to textural critics in determining the correct reading at a particular place where there are variance.

Now in these many manuscripts there are many variants. It has been estimated that among the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament there are two hundred and fifty thousand to three hundred thousand variant readings. This is nothing to be surprised about because scribes were human and they made many mistakes. But the fact that we have many manuscripts enables us through textural criticism to have all the material necessary to do the hard work that must be done in order to arrive at a fairly good understanding of what the original probably was.

There were different kinds of mistakes. Some of these mistakes were unintentional, they were errors of the eye, they were errors of the ear. Occasionally when manuscripts were copied by dictation someone would read a manuscript and someone else would be copying, so it would be an error of the ear. And there were other types of errors. There were some that were intentional errors. A copyist of, for example, the Gospel of Matthew copying the Sermon on the Mount, if he knew the readings of the

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Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Luke and seeing something different in the Gospel of Matthew and having a theory of inspiration which demanded that the text in Matthew be identical with the text in Luke would be naturally - he would naturally tend to want to correct the text that was before him to that text that he knew. So we have harmonizations that occur in parallel passages in the gospels, particularly in the gospels.

There are some scribes who thought that they were great theologians and so what they thought that they could pick out doctrinal errors and they would correct the text if they saw one. Like an Arminian who might be reading the 9th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans and he'd say, "Well surely, surely Paul did not write all of this," and he might want to insert his own particular heretical notions into that chapter, watering down Paul's good Calvinism there in that chapter [Laughter]. Now of course that didn't happen and I'm just using that to be sure you're still awake, but something like this did happen. This is an actual case in the New Testament; it's not an unusual one.

You remember the Lord Jesus speaking about the second coming; he says that the date or the time of the second coming is unknown. He says that no one knows that, "Not even the angels, nor the Son of man, but the Father in heaven." Well now, some scribes who had the idea that the Son of God was God felt that that was something that could not be in the Bible. Surely the Son of God knows the time of the Second Advent. And being sound in the doctrine of the deity of Christ he thought that that was something of a problem. The problem is he was not sound in the true humanity of Christ but he was sound in the deity of Christ and so he just eliminated that "not even the Son", he says, "No man knows the time of the Second Advent, not even the angels." Our Lord said, "Not even the Son," but he just eliminated that. And so it was, "Not even the angels, but the Father." And so the little expression oude o uiov, which means "not even the Son" was just eliminated by the scribe because he thought that was bad theology.

One of the things that makes that rather interesting is to try to answer the question, how can we harmonize the ignorance of Jesus with the omniscience of the

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eternal Son of God? That's one of the problems of theology and of course we harmonize it by realizing that our Lord was possessed of a full and true human nature. And in his human nature it was not a sin not to know something because he learned as you and I learned through the study of the word of God in his human nature. As a divine person he knew the end from the beginning and so he prophesied that he would go to Jerusalem, he would die, he would be buried, he would be raised again on the third day and those things came to pass.

So out of his divine personality he knew, but he was speaking there out of his human nature. And so he, like a true Israelite, a sinless Israelite, learns the truth of the word of God by the divine teaching. Well the scribe didn't understand that, he hadn't had the opportunity of hearing that lecture and so he just eliminated oude o uiov. In this period of time there were others who worked with the text. Origen was a famous critic of the text, one of the first. Erasmus in the 16th Century, a well-known Renaissance scholar that we all study when we study history, was the first to publish a complete Greek New Testament text. He did this in the city of Basel, Switzerland in 1516. He was, as a matter of fact, slower than some others in finishing one but he was faster in printing it and so he had his printed by Froben, the famous printing house in Basel, which incidentally is still there in the city of Basel today. You can walk by the place where the old office of Froben was where the first Greek New Testament was published.

Now Erasmus only had a few copies of the manuscripts of the Bible from which to make his text. He was anxious to finish it and get it on the market first and so he did. But he used only, as I remember, about ten, maybe eight, manuscripts and he didn't have anything for Revelation chapter 22, verse 16 through 21. He didn't have any Greek manuscript for that and so when he came to that all he did was just to look at his Latin translation and translate the Latin back into Greek. And so in his version he has a section for which there is no documentary evidence at all.

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Now it wasn't long after that that a man by the name of Stephanos published some editions of the Greek New Testament and one of them in 1550 A.D. came to be what we call the Textus Receptus, or the Received Text. Now that Received Text is the background of the King James Version. The kind of text that the King James Version renders, or is a translation of, is the Textus Receptus type of text. Now it too, since it was based largely, Stephanos's version was based largely on Erasmus, Erasmus's text and just a few other, as I remember, it too is a version the Textus Receptus that is based on very few manuscripts and all of them are of relatively late date.

Now we have, as you know, going on in Evangelical circles today quite an argument over the relative value of the text lying behind the, say, the New American Standard Bible and the text that lies behind the Authorized Version. And some even regard it as a question of orthodoxy, now that is if you do not accept the general inspiration of the Authorized Version you are heretical, if you are one who read one of the more modern versions like the New American Standard Bible or the American Standard Bible or the New International Version then you're liberal. All of that is really nonsense, it's an interesting academic question, of course, but it actually has nothing whatsoever to do with a man's orthodoxy in the faith.

It is sometimes said that the Authorized Version's text, that is the text that lies back of it, is much more orthodox doctrinally than the text that lies behind the New American Standard Bible or the New International Version. That is just nonsense theologically because both of the text, all of those texts, that lie behind those translations teach the same theology. There is no theological point at issue. That interpretation of some particular verses may be at issue, but not the theological position.

Now from the time of the Received Text to the present or to, yes from the Received Text to I didn't say to Wescott and Hort. There are some interesting men who have been textural critics following the time of the issue of the Textus Receptus. We don't have time to talk about men like Robert Bentley, Bengel, Wettstein, also a man from

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Basel, J. J. Greisbach who was one of the greatest of the critics, modern criticism really begins with Greisbach, or Karl Lachman. Karl Lachman is an interesting man because he is the one who launched the first real attach against the Textus Receptus, the text that lies back of the King James Version. Lachman researches and his professorship date from about 1831 to 1850. And he is perhaps best known for the fact that it was he who acted as a rebel and began to promulgate the idea that the text lying back of the King James Version was not the best text of the New Testament.

Now finally in 1883, this is capital C in the outline from Wescott and Hort to the present. In 1883 two Englishmen, Brooke Foss Wescott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, these were two very well-known Church of England scholars. They were men who were genuine believers, they were orthodox men. Their ideas of the doctrine of inspiration were a little looser than the ideas of Evangelical, most Evangelicals, today but they were very sound Christian men. Their commentaries are well worth reading, in fact I think I've read most of, I believe I've read all, of their commentaries that they have written and they are very, very helpful.

They issued a text of the New Testament, it was somewhat of an epoch in New Testament textural criticism because they not only gave a text of the New Testament which based, they felt, on older manuscripts and better manuscripts, but they also set forth the methodology by which they arrived at their particular text. Now that text has become the basis of the English Revised Version, the American Standard Version of 1901, the New American Standard Bible which many of you hold, that text, the Greek text, lying back of that is essentially the text of Wescott and Hort, not exactly but essentially the kind of text that Wescott and Hort set forth. And so it's fair to say, and probably accurate to say, that the text of the New American Standard Bible is essentially the kind of text that Wescott and Hort edited and published as a more accurate text of the New Testament. Whenever you read in modern versions about we now have access to older manuscripts and therefore we have a better manuscripts and a better New Testament text usually is

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traceable to the researches of these two Englishmen, Hort and Wescott, and principally Hort who did most of the study of methodology.

Since that time, after that time, there was some debate over the relative merits of the Textus Receptus by a man named Dean Burgon who fought very strongly against the Wescott and Hort text. Dean Burgon was a man who was noted for taking contrary views, in fact he was called the champion of lost causes, and one of the lost causes that he championed, so many feel, was the text lying back of the Authorized Version, the Textus Receptus. Now that's a big subject, we don't have time to go into it, but just to show you that it's still somewhat relevant we have a few faculty members, not all, at Dallas Theological Seminary who are fighting very strongly against the text that lies back of the New American Standard Bible. The vast majority of the members of the faculty would stand on the side of Wescott and Hort but there are a number down there who do not. They are all sound in the faith, that's not that serious a problem, but they are waging quite a battle and not long ago they issued a new New Testament which was based on the Textus Receptus, or that particular kind of text.

Modern manuscript discoveries have been rather unusual. We have had unusual discoveries of papyrus manuscripts in the 20th Century. In the 19th Century the discovery of one of the leading manuscripts of both the Old and New Testament made by a German by the name of Constantine Tischendorf with a very interesting discovery and played a large part in the development of textural criticism. Tischendorf made several trips to Mount Sinai and St. Catherine's monastery there and by some very interesting experiences managed to lay his hands upon one of the oldest of the manuscripts both of the Old Testament in Greek and of the New Testament in Greek. The story is one that we don't have time to speak about, sometime I would like to tell the story of it because it's an interesting story and it illustrates, too, the interesting experiences that a textural critic might have. Tischendorf was a very unusual scholar, devoted his whole life to matters concerning the text of the New Testament.

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Then in the earlier part of the 20th Century there were a number of papyrus discoveries made and these were issued under a man's name, Chester Beatty. In these particular papyrus manuscripts of the New Testament we have a text that goes back to the 3rd Century and so consequently they are of great interest in the study of the text of the New Testament. Then also, just not too long ago, a number of other papyrus manuscripts were discovered which are called the Bodmer Papyri. And in some of them we have manuscripts that go back into the 2nd Century after the time of Christ. These have created a great deal of interest in the study of the text.

One manuscript of interest is a manuscript of the 18th chapter of the Gospel of John, it's a little manuscript that is just about this in size, just a few inches across, and a few inches vertical, about two by three or maybe three by four, I've seen it in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England. And it has five verses of the 18th chapter of the Gospel of John and these verses in this particular manuscript, this little fragment, is thought by many textural critics to go back, possibly, as early as 125 A.D. or many critics date it around 140 A.D. Now that's rather interesting because the Gospel of John was not written until probably the latter part of the 1st Century and so we do have a copy of part of the New Testament within approximately 50 years of the writing of the Gospel of John, if John was written around 95 A.D. as has been believed by orthodox scholars for some time.

Now to sum up this with reference to the New Testament we can say the same thing that we said concerning the Old Testament, except that there is no better substantiated ancient writing than the New Testament. It is the best authenticated and substantiated writing of ancient times. We have more manuscripts, and not only more manuscripts, but we also have manuscripts that are earlier of that ancient writing. Now let me say a few final words about reliability and then I want to read a couple of quotations if we have time.

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The reliability of the biblical text is the thing that we are interested in and capital A, texturally. The textural critic, of course, is interested in producing a text as close as possible to the original text. He wants to know the ipsissima verba, that is the very words themselves that the apostles wrote. The problem with the New Testament and Old Testament textural criticism is not as it is with most ancient writings, we don't have enough manuscripts to be sure of the text. In the case of the biblical writings we have so many texts, so many manuscripts, that it's difficult to study them all and consequently arrive at a reliable text.

Let me read you just a quote or two with reference to this particular item. One of the French textural critics has said, "Between the originals and the extent manuscripts of Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Thucydides, Plato, and Demosthenes," many of these I read when I was studying classical Greek. We never had a professor, incidentally, in any of my own classical studies and I majored in the classics, I never heard a single professor say to me either when we were studying Latin manuscripts or Latin writings or Greek writings, he would never say, "Now the text is very uncertain." But they assumed that what they had was a very good representation of the original. Now he says, "Between the originals of these," that is the writings themselves and the copies, "There is a gap of over a thousand years." The Latin authors are in a somewhat better situation than this, though even in the case of Virgil who is better off than the others the gap extends well over three centuries. That is between the writing by Virgil and the first copy that we have over three centuries.

Now in the New Testament we are in much better situation. Now another quote by Fredrick Kenyon goes into much more detail. Mr. Kenyon says, "The contrast in this respect between the New Testament and classical authors may be regarded from two points of view. On the one hand this enormous mass of witnesses gives good ground for supposing that the true text cannot be wholly lost. On the other hand the task of selecting the true text out of all these many and multifarious authorities is one of extreme

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difficulty merely to examine and record the available evidence is an enormous labor to estimate its value, to distinguish between manuscript and manuscript, and between version and version, is the hardest problem that has ever been set to textural criticism. In another respect, however, besides number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors and this time the difference is clear gain. In no case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extent manuscripts so short as in the New Testament." In other words, we have better copies of the New Testament than of any other ancient writing.

The books of the New Testament were written in the latter part of the first century. The earliest extent manuscripts, trifling scraps accepted, are of the 4th Century, say from two hundred and fifty to three hundred years later. This may sound a considerable interval but it's nothing to that which parts most of the great classical authors from their earliest manuscripts. We believe that we have all essentials, an accurate text, of the seven extent plays of Sophocles yet their earliest substantial manuscript upon which it is based was written more than fourteen hundred years after the poet's death. Aeschylus, Aristophanes, and Thucydides are in the same state. While with Euripides the interval is increased to sixteen hundred years. I read Euripides, I never heard my professor say a thing about the reliability of the text, he assumed it was reliable. For Plato, I read Plato, it may be put at thirteen hundred years. For Demosthenes as low as twelve hundred. The great Latin authors are somewhat better off. Horace is represented by several manuscripts written within nine hundred years of his death. There's an excellent copy of Terence after an interval of about seven hundred years. And portions of Livy, I read all of these in Latin, only about five hundred years after his date. And so on.

Only Virgil approaches the New Testament in earliness of attestation, he died eight years before the Christian era and there is at least one nearly complete manuscript which is attributed to the 4th Century besides several fragments and two more of the 5th Century. Yet even so his text is not in so favorable a position as that of the New

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Testament by nearly one hundred years, not to mention the vast numbers of New Testament manuscripts that exceed the numbers of the Virgil manuscripts.

Now theologically what we should remember about all of this is no doctrine of the New Testament is affected by the problems of textural criticism. We have so many manuscripts of the New Testament that go back so early that the question of the arriving at the precise text is interesting and important for Bible exposition but for theology no doctrine of the word of God is at issue. The only thing that textural criticism really helps us to do is to expound a particular text.

For example, in expounding Romans chapter 5, verse 1 which reads in the English Version, "Therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God." The Authorized Version renders the Greek, takes the Greek word *echamen* as genuine at that point. Many of the more recent translations prefer the other reading which is *echomen*. The difference is the difference between a little, between a short O and a long O, *echomen*. And that should be rendered something like this, "Therefore being justified by faith let us have peace with God," or, "Let us go on having peace with God."

Well really it doesn't make a bit of difference whether we read "we have peace with God" or "let us go on having peace with God", both express theological truth. It will make a difference in how we expound that particular text but it doesn't have anything to do with the truth or falsity of the doctrine of justification by faith or of the necessity of going on having peace with God. Or whether we haven't or whether we go on having it.

So textural criticism then does not affect any doctrine of the word of God, it only affects the way that we expound particular passages. Now, when you hear a Bible expositor then say, "I think that the text here is so and so," don't get upset. You've learned a little bit to know that there is a question about text at many points. We can be sure that the Greek text that we hold in our hand as edited text is practically exactly what the apostles wrote. And no doctrine is affected by those many variants that scribes had

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made in copying the many manuscripts that we have of the Bible down through the years. Our time was up about four minutes ago. Let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the assurance that we have when we think of the plethora of the manuscripts of the Bible. Thou hast truly preserved the word of God for us in a remarkable way. We know that inspiration extends to the original writings but in…

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]