



## Fall 2013 Sermon Series: Bible on Trial

### The Charge:

- A. The Bible is merely a human book, not the message from any God.
- B. The Bible is not true, it contains errors, it is not historically reliable and it is not accurate.
- C. The Bible's teachings are often unscientific, unethical, socially regressive and immoral.

### The Plea: Not Guilty

#### Introduction

We at FTC claim that the Bible is the written word of God. We claim that it is true, without error and that it is authoritative. Everything we teach here has as the Bible as its basis and authority. We claim that it is not merely a truth but that its message is **exclusively the** truth. We claim that the Bible (all 66 books) is not merely a word from God, but that it is **the** word from God. All our theological beliefs are founded on the Bible. Since the Bible is God's word, it is a worthy foundation for our beliefs and practices. If the Bible were not the word of God, it would be instructive, containing much history and wisdom, but it would not be authoritative. If the Bible were not the word of God, it would be like all other books, merely the word of men.

The purpose of this series, Bible on Trial, is to learn why we believe that the Bible is the word of God. Our study will cover eight crucial topics:

**Revelation** addresses the issue of *what God revealed*.

**Inspiration** addresses the issue of *how what God revealed (the Bible) was written and by whom*.

**Canonicity** addresses the issue of *which books are in the Bible*.

**Inerrancy** addresses the issue of the original inspired books *being without error*.

**Reliability** addresses the issue of *how accurate our modern day Bibles are to the original books*.

**Translation** addresses the issue of what it says *in another language*. "What does it say?"

**Interpretation** addresses the issue of meaning, and answers the question, "What does it mean?" "How should we interpret the Bible?" Literal, metaphorical, allegorical, etc? This topic is called **hermeneutics**.

**Application** addresses the issue of life response. "What am I going to do about it?"

*"How can we know that the Bibles we have today accurately reflect originals written 2000 years ago for the New Testament and up to 3400 years ago for the Old Testament? Communication is never perfect; people make mistakes. Copying errors are compounded with each successive generation, just like the message in the telephone game. Over 2000 years have passed; so it's anyone's guess what the original said. Plus, there are so many different translations and interpretations. Who knows what the Bible originally said!?"*

**The Bible makes claims about itself. The Bible requests to take the witness stand. It speaks and wants to be heard, questioned, cross-examined. So let's put the Bible on the trial.**

#### Procedure for This Study

We will appeal to the Bible in our defense of its authority. This may appear to be circular reasoning, but think of this study as a trial. In a trial the accused is permitted to speak in his own defense. The defendant is permitted to testify in his own defense. While the defendant's testimony does not settle the matter, it is admissible as evidence and useful for evaluating the defendant's credibility. It is also fair game for the prosecution to call the defendant back to the stand for cross-examination. In our case, the defendant will not plead the 5<sup>th</sup>.

First, we need to clearly understand the claims. Then we need to weigh the evidence and come to some conclusions. In a court of law, you don't have to prove your point *beyond all shadow of doubt*. You do have to prove your point, or make your case, *beyond reasonable doubt*.

## RELIABILITY – How accurate are our modern day Bibles to the original books?

The argument against the reliability of the New Testament texts can be stated very simply. It goes like this:

*“How can we know that the NT documents we have today accurately reflect originals written 2000 years ago? Communication is never perfect; people make mistakes. Copying errors are compounded with each successive generation, just like the message in the telephone game. 2000 years have passed; so it's anyone's guess what the original said. Plus, there are so many different translations and interpretations. Who knows what the Bible originally said!?”*

### Response:

The above statement confuses the issue of **text variation** with the issues of **translation** and **interpretation**.

**Text variation** addresses the question, “*What is the text?*”

**Translation** addresses the question, “*What does the text say in a different language?*”

**Interpretation** addresses the question, “*What does the text mean?*”

Textual critics are academics who reconstruct a missing original from existing manuscripts that are generations removed from the autograph. New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce explains that the object of the discipline of text criticism is “*to determine as exactly as possible from the available evidence the original words of the documents in question.*” (The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? p.19)

“The science of textual criticism is used to test all documents of antiquity--not just religious texts--including historical and literary writings. It's not a theological enterprise based on haphazard hopes and guesses; it's a linguistic exercise that follows a set of established rules. Textual criticism allows an alert critic to determine the extent of possible corruption of any work.” (Is the New Testament Text Reliable? by Gregory Koukl)

### 1<sup>st</sup>, let's consider the reliability of the NT documents compared to 10 other ancient texts.

Clay Jones, professor at Biola University, has recently (2010) updated the data that compares the Greek NT documents (as a group) to other documents of ancient history in an article published in the *Christian Research Journal*. Below are the results of his research:

Author	Work	Date Written	Earliest MSS copies	Time Gap	Number of MSS copies
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 BC	c. 400 BC	400	1757
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480-425 BC	10th century	1350	109
Sophocles	Plays	496-406 BC	3rd cent BC	100-200	193
Plato	Tetralogies	400 BC	AD 895	1300	210
Caesar	<i>Galic Wars</i>	100-44 BC	9th century	950	251
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 BC-AD 17	Early 5th Cent	400	150
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	AD 100	AD 850	750-950	33
Pliny, the Elder	<i>Natural History</i>	AD 49-79	5th cent fragment 14-15th cent	400	200
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460-400 BC	3rd cent BC	200	96
Demosthenes	Speeches	300 BC	Some fragments from 1 C BC	1100+	340
	<i>Greek New Testament</i>	AD 45-100	Frag. of Gospel of John, AD 115 Some NT books, AD 200 Most of NT, AD 250 Entire NT, AD 325 and later centuries	30+ years  100+ years 170+ years 250+ years	5795 Greek MSS

<i>New Testament translations into other languages</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup>	Coptic 3 <sup>rd</sup> -4 <sup>th</sup> century Latin 4 <sup>th</sup> century Syriac 5 <sup>th</sup> century	100+ yrs 100+ yrs 300+ yrs	1,000 MSS 10,000 MSS 350 MSS
	4 <sup>th</sup> cent	Georgian 8 <sup>th</sup> century Armenian 9 <sup>th</sup> century, Gothic 9 <sup>th</sup> century Slavic 10 <sup>th</sup> century Ethiopic 11 century	400+ yrs 500+ yrs 500+ yrs 600+ yrs 700+ yrs	These languages have about 8,300 MSS <i>About 20,000 total !</i>

FF Bruce comments, "No classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus... is in doubt because the earliest manuscripts of his works which are of any use to us are over 1300 years later than the originals."

(The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? p.16-17)

"For most documents of antiquity only a handful of manuscripts exist, some facing a time gap of 800... years or more. Yet scholars are confident of reconstructing the originals with some significant degree of accuracy. In fact, virtually all of our knowledge of ancient history depends on documents like these.... The manuscript textual evidence (for the NT) is exceedingly rich, especially when compared to other works of antiquity." (Koukl)

## 2<sup>nd</sup> let's consider the reliability of the NT documents compared to other ancient translations (versions).

The following is an excerpt from Gregory Koukl's internet article [Is the New Testament Text Reliable?](#)

### **Ancient Versions and Patristic Quotations**

Two other cross checks on the accuracy of the manuscripts remain: ancient versions and citations by the early church Fathers known as "patristic quotations."

Early in the history of the Church Greek documents, including the Scriptures, were translated into Latin. By the 3rd and 4th Centuries the New Testament was translated into Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, etc. These texts helped missionaries reach new cultures in their own language as the Gospel spread and the Church grew. Translations of the Greek manuscripts (called "versions") help modern-day textual critics answer questions about the underlying Greek manuscripts.

In addition, there are ancient extra-biblical sources--characteristically catechisms, lectionaries, and quotes from the church fathers--that record the Scriptures. Paul Barnett says that the "Scriptures...gave rise to an immense output of early Christian literature which quoted them at length and, in effect, preserved them." [Metzger, Bruce M., *The Text of the New Testament*, pages 46-47] Metzger notes the amazing fact that "if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, [the patristic quotations] would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament." [p.86]

### 3<sup>rd</sup>, let's consider the reliability of the NT documents compared to patristic quotations.

#### Early Church Father's Quotations of the New Testament

Writer	Gospels	Acts	Pauline Epistles	General Epistles	Revelation	Total
Justin Martyr (AD 100-165)	268	10	43	6	3	330
Irenaeus (ca. AD 155-200)	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Clement of Alexandria (ca. 160-230)	1,017	44	1,127	207	11	2,406
Origen (ca. AD 185-255)	9,231	349	7,778	399	165	17,922
Tertullian (ca. AD 150-220)	3,822	502	2,609	120	205	7,258
Hippolytus (died AD 250)	734	42	387	27	188	1,378
Eusebius (born AD 263)	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>19,368</b>	<b>1,352</b>	<b>14,035</b>	<b>870</b>	<b>664</b>	<b>36,289</b>

The following is another excerpt from Gregory Koukl's internet article [Is the New Testament Text Reliable?](#)

In the entire text of 20,000 lines, only 40 lines are in doubt (about 400 words out of 807,361 words in NASB), and none affects any significant doctrine.

[Geisler, Norman L., Nix, William E., A General Introduction to the Bible, page 475]

Greek scholar D.A. Carson sums up this way: "The purity of text is of such a substantial nature that nothing we believe to be true, and nothing we are commanded to do, is in any way jeopardized by the variants."

[Carson, D.A., The King James Version Debate, p. 56]

This issue is no longer contested by non-Christian scholars, and for good reason. Simply put, if we reject the authenticity of the New Testament on textual grounds we'd have to reject every ancient work of antiquity and declare null and void every piece of historical information from written sources prior to the beginning of the second millennium A.D.

Has the New Testament been altered? Critical, academic analysis says it has not.

Do the math: What percent of 800,000 words is 400 words?

$$?% \times 800,000 = 40 \quad \text{ANSWER: } .05\%$$

So only about one twentieth of 1% of the lines are in doubt. 99.95% of the words are certain. .05% of the words are not certain. *and none of these variants affects any significant doctrine.*

With so many early citations of Scripture, and to so many existing manuscripts, scholars estimate that the Bible we have today is about 99.95% accurate to the original books written.

The Bible mentions numerous historical persons, places and events, many of which were unknown to history and therefore denied by critics. But the science of archeology in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has proved the Bible to be the most historically accurate work in all of antiquity.

*Message*

*The Bible we have today is 99.95% accurate to the original.*

#### Action Points:

- If you'd like to talk about this topic, I would love to discuss it with you. [jtalone@fardaletrinitychurch.org](mailto:jtalone@fardaletrinitychurch.org) or 201-825-1823
- Sunday School is a great idea for everyone!
- Folds are a great way to get to know the Bible too!
- Read a book of the Bible this week. Pick a book, any book!
- **Interpretation** addresses the issue of meaning, and answers the question, "What does it mean?" "How should we interpret the Bible?" Literal, metaphorical, allegorical, etc? This topic is called **hermeneutics**.
- And **Application** addresses the issue of life response. "What am I going to do about it?"  
*Interpretation and Application will be our focus for the rest of this series.*