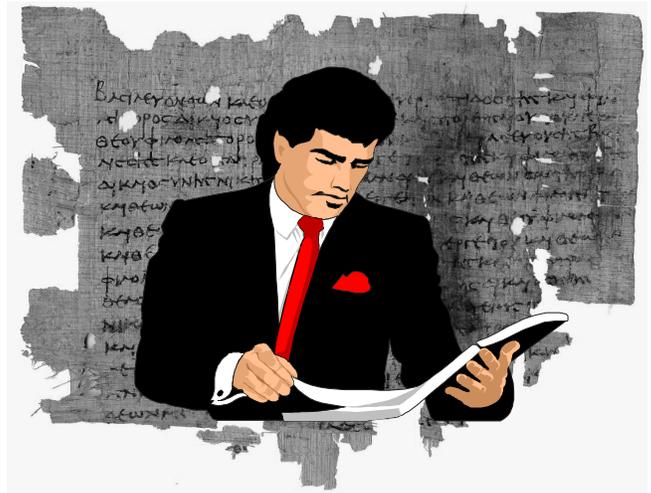

The Bible Versions Debate

Part 3A: MATTERS OF FACT

By Dusty Peterson



We are blessed to be able to present another part in Dusty Peterson's excellent series on bible versions. Because of the length of this part, we are increasing the number of pages in this edition so that we may include other timely articles.

While other commentators sidestep many of the tricky questions associated with this topic (or are perhaps just plain ignorant of them), this is not the case with Dusty. He deals with the tough issues head-on, and through his godly approach and carefully considered style of writing he enables us to deal with them also.

Part 2 in this series dwelt on the characteristics of the different families of documentary evidence behind Bibles in use today. In Part 3, Dusty switches his focus, revealing all sorts of remarkable things in the process. God-fearing readers will find this material a joy.

We hope that all our readers will recognize the great significance of Dusty's articles, and will read them thoroughly. Admittedly it takes time and patience to absorb the wealth of information and biblical truth that he dispenses for our edification. But I can honestly say that I've seen no other discourse on the subject that comes close to the thorough and intelligent manner in which this series does. If it seems too lengthy for some, may I gently suggest that they ask themselves if they share the degree of devotion to Scripture that God expects. It is, after all, His Word to us. — *ajd*

Special Note from Dusty: I must apologize profusely for the terrible delay in publishing this article. It is taking me far longer to tidy and polish my material than I had ever expected. However, I feel it right to make these articles as good as I possibly can rather than short-change readers, even if it means a significantly longer wait than would otherwise be the case. I know you will understand. Many thanks for your patience. *Dusty*

PS: All emphases found in quotations from others are mine unless otherwise noted.

INTRODUCTION

Joan could have wheeled out many excuses for not reading her Bible. She was only a teenager, but that didn't discourage her. She grew up in England in the 1540s, a time when Bibles were expensive, but she didn't let that obstacle get in her way either. She was also born at a point in history when it had been illegal for well over a *century* to own an English Bible. (When Joan was three, William Tyndale was martyred for the "heresy" of translating and publishing the Scriptures in English.) But this likewise failed to destroy Joan's resolve. She was determined to own a copy of Holy Writ in her mother tongue and she worked diligently to save up enough money to do so.

But there is yet another excuse Joan Waste could have used for not studying the Bible. She was born *blind*.

Her young age limited the types of work she could do, but not nearly as much as did the blindness she had suffered since birth. This in turn greatly limited the amount of money she could earn in order to obtain a copy of the Scriptures.

Consider further the obvious fact that, before she even began to save up for her Bible, she knew she would have to find people who were literate enough to be able to read it to her once she *had* obtained it.¹ Additionally, there was every chance these people would also need to be prepared to break the law for her.² (Not long before this time, one risked death just for being caught in *possession* of an English Bible.) All this meant she was probably going to have to *pay* people to read the Scriptures to her.

As it turned out, she was sometimes able to get the Bible read to her for free – provided she braved a stinking gaol. (An old man in prison in Joan's hometown of Derby was prepared to help.) But often she had to pay good money to get the sacred Scriptures read to her, and she was restricted to just knitting and rope-making to earn the money. Nevertheless, through her sheer hard work and her attentiveness to what was read to her, she had memorized large portions of the New Testament by the tender age of 21.³

Ought we not to have the same kind of commitment to God's Word that Joan demonstrated? And is it not a sobering thought that, had English versions based on different Greek texts been available in her day, she would undoubtedly have sought to ensure she obtained a translation based on the most accurate one?

Rejection Of Part 2

In Part 2 of this series we discussed two different “families” of New Testament texts. Both families go by several names, so for convenience I termed them “family A” and “family B.” Part 2 offered numerous reasons to respect family A and *reject* family B. However, some readers are not convinced. Part 3 will deal with their objections, including their argument about “eclecticism.”⁴

There is one especially imposing reason to doubt the conclusions of Part 2: if what I wrote therein about the two families of texts is correct, family A should enjoy huge respect among the great majority of scholars, and family B should long ago have been consigned to the trashcan of history. However, neither situation is the case.

Not only is family B valued by a large number of today’s scholars, it is actually afforded much more weight than family A in many circles. This is a reversal of what we ought to expect if Part 2 in my series is sound, and it is a pivotal reason why people dismiss the conclusions supplied there. I therefore need to explain *why* so many scholars have taken the path they have, and I need to face up to their arguments. I cannot expect readers to happily go against the view of so many scholars if I can’t adequately explain how those scholars reached that view.

In previous articles we touched on numerous understandable (if invalid) reasons why family A came to be disregarded by many scholars at the end of the 19th century,⁵ but why has this attitude survived into the 21st? One of the chief purposes of Part 3 is to describe, and then deal with, the reasons this outlook persists. (In no way is this merely an academic question. Some well-known modern translations in the hands of Christians today have ended up relying heavily on family B manuscripts while virtually ignoring the whole of family A. This has resulted in all the various problems we uncovered in Part 2b. Furthermore, we shall see that the methods used by many modern scholars have even more disturbing ramifications than we discussed there.)

Scholars who esteem family B and neglect family A rely on the principle that, when it comes to determining its original text, the Bible should basically be treated like any other ancient document. In this article we shall identify the reasons offered for doing so, and we shall see if those justifications hold up under examination. I urge readers, as they consider the following material, to have the same type of commitment to Holy Writ that Joan courageously showed.

LIKE ANY OTHER?

In Part 2a we quoted Westcott and Hort saying that, when it came to textual criticism of the New Testament, they refused to introduce any considerations which “could not reasonably be applied to **other** ancient texts.” But they went even further. In another section of their famous *Introduction*, entitled “Application of Principles of Criticism to the Text of the New Testament,”⁶ they wrote:

The principles of criticism explained in the foregoing section hold good for **all** ancient texts preserved in a plurality of documents [whether sacred or secular]. In dealing with the text of the New Testament **no** new principle **whatever** is needed or **legitimate**.

For any readers who imagine that few experts after Westcott and Hort followed their general approach to textual criticism, the famous scholar Bruce Metzger replies, “[T]he general validity of ... [Westcott and Hort’s] critical principles and procedures is widely acknowledged by textual scholars today.”⁷ Likewise, another of Westcott and Hort’s disciples tells us, “[T]he cogency of ... [Hort’s] tightly-reasoned theory shaped – and still shapes – the thinking of those who approach the textual criticism of the NT through the English language.”⁸ We shall witness several more endorsements like these as we progress through Part 3, but the 20th-century scholar Sir Frederic Kenyon was quite unmistakable. When it comes to textual criticism, he said we should treat the books of the Bible “like **any other** books.”⁹

- 1 In Joan’s day the literacy rate in England was “not high by our standards” (although it was “enormous by European ones from the same period”) [Lori Anne Ferrell, Professor of Early Modern History and English at Claremont Graduate University, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/secrets/case_bible/interview.html].
- 2 What Joan was asking people to do had been continuously illegal since 1408. (It’s true that when Joan was 5, in 1538, it was made legal to read the English Bible. However, it was still a seriously dodgy affair – especially in view of the fact that the law had been changed by Henry VIII only out of *spite*! To prove just how shaky things were in this regard, it was made illegal again a mere five years later. But when Joan was 14 it was re-legalized and she was able to purchase a copy of the New Testament.)
- 3 The material here on Joan Waste was obtained from local histories of Derby (e.g., *Triumphs of Grace* by Faith Cook), and from John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*.
- 4 It is claimed that, since many modern scholars describe themselves as “eclectic” (i.e., they select readings from a *variety* of families), this invalidates my arguments. During Part 3 we will disprove this claim and other possible objections to the conclusions of both Parts 1 and 2.
- 5 See especially the section “Where do these steps lead?” in Part 2a, and the section “How did it Happen?” in Part 2b.
- 6 Westcott and Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek* (Macmillan, 1881), p. 73.
- 7 Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (1964), p. 137.

Why do people take this approach? Here are the five justifications I have seen from Hort and/or his successors. I will offer some thoughts on each as we go along.

“IT IS A BOOK”

A number of scholars do not publicly give *any* reasons for treating the text of the Bible like that of other books, even though they demonstrably do so. Assuming they are sincere in their efforts to reconstruct the true text of the Bible, there can surely be only two reasons why they fail to give any justification for approaching the Bible this way. Either they have never thought about the question (which seems unlikely), or else they do not see the Bible as being on a fundamentally different plane to other books.

Scholars rarely cite this low view of Scripture as their justification for their method of textual criticism, presumably because they know how abhorrent it would be to most Christians.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the reason some academics do treat the text of the Bible as they would any other book is because they view the creation of the Bible as being akin to that for other books. What do I mean by this? Certain scholars deny the verbal-plenary inspiration of the Bible (i.e., that the whole of Scripture, right down to the very *words*, is inspired).

Examples

Here are just a handful of the possible examples one could cite:

Johann Semler

An early textual critic, and one who significantly influenced Westcott and Hort, was Johann Semler. He “taught that the formation of the Biblical canon and text was an **entirely human** process, an accident of history **totally** apart from the guiding hand of God.”¹¹ No wonder he treated the text of the Bible like that of any other book.

Westcott and Hort

Westcott and Hort themselves didn’t believe in the verbal-plenary inspiration of Scripture.¹² They wrote, “Little is

gained by speculating as to the precise point at which such **corruptions** came in. They may be due to the **original writer**, or to his amanuensis [i.e., assistant] if he wrote from dictation.”¹³ Indeed, Hort referred to inspiration as “the common orthodox **heresy**.”¹⁴

Kurt Aland

Aland was the very famous textual critic behind the “Nestle-Aland” Greek. He denied the verbal inspiration of the Bible and even wrote a book entitled *The Problem of the New Testament Canon*.¹⁵

Matthew Black

Black is a “modernistic editor of the United Bible Societies’ *Greek New Testament*. Black co-edited an edition of *Peake’s Commentary* in 1982....The editors openly reject the doctrine of the infallible inspiration and preservation of Holy Scripture.”¹⁶

Bruce Metzger

Let us consider Bruce Metzger – Westcott and Hort’s supporter whom we cited earlier. He apparently believed that Moses did not write the Pentateuch; Deuteronomy was not written until 700 years before Christ; the Old Testament is a mixture of “myth, legend, and history”; the record of the worldwide flood of Noah’s day is exaggerated; the book of Job is a folktale; Isaiah was written by Isaiah plus two or three unknown men who wrote centuries later; the record of Jonah is a “legend”; Daniel does not contain supernatural prophecy; Paul did not write the Pastoral Epistles; Peter did not write 2 Peter; etc. All of these views can be found in the notes to the *Reader’s Digest Condensed Bible*, which were written by Metzger, and in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, of which Metzger was a co-editor prior to his death in 2007.¹⁷

8 J.P. Hyatt, Ed., *The Bible in Modern Scholarship* (Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 370.

9 Sir Frederic Kenyon (1903), as quoted in Jack Moorman, *Forever Settled: A Survey of the Documents and History of the Bible* (e-book), pp. 38-39. Kenyon effectively confirmed his stance, albeit with slightly more ambiguity, when he said “the problem [of how to reconstruct the original text] is essentially the **same**, whether we are dealing with sacred **or secular** literature,” *ibid*.

10 Because they know that most ordinary believers would not give them a hearing if they admitted it, some scholars do not *publicly and explicitly* admit that one reason they approach the text of the Bible the way they do is because they see the Bible as essentially being like any other book.

11 Floyd Nolen Jones, *Which Version is the Bible?* (KingsWord Press, 2006), p. 122. Westcott and Hort credited Semler with providing “important help” in the development of the theory they espoused (Westcott and Hort, *op. cit.*, p.13)150.

12 In the theory held by Westcott and Hort, “there is **nothing** of verbal inspiration; indeed there could not be, since Westcott and Hort **disavowed** that doctrine” (Alfred Martin, *A Critical Examination of the Westcott-Hort Textual Theory*, Th.D. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, May 1951, as given in D.O. Fuller, *Which Bible?* [IBTS, 1975], p. 165).

13 Westcott and Hort, *op. cit.*, pp.280-1.

14 Arthur F. Hort, *The Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort, Vol. I* (Macmillan, 1896), p. 181.

15 D. Cloud, “Textual Criticism is Drawn From the Wells of Infidelity,” March 4, 2008.

16 *Ibid*.

17 This section on Metzger is taken, with small changes, from Cloud, *op. cit*.

So one reason for treating the Bible like any other book is simple. It is a book. Given that the Bible is a book, why not treat it like any other when it comes to textual criticism?

The Bible's Uniqueness

The Bible is a book, but it is like no other. There are many things one could say in defense of this statement, but I shall limit myself to a mere fraction of them, partly for the sake of space and time, and partly because most readers will already be familiar with more than enough of the potential evidence.

History Shows The Bible Is Unique

History tells us that the Bible is unique. Even family B's supporters have admitted there are features of the NT witnesses that are not paralleled in any other literature:

(1) For a start, the very *quantity* of surviving MSS is evidence of the uniqueness of the Bible. One famous Hortian has confessed that the number of surviving MSS of the New Testament is, "a number altogether out of proportion to what antiquity has preserved for other ancient books."¹⁸ For example, "There is but a **single** manuscript that preserves ... the Annals of Tacitus. Only **one** manuscript gives the Greek Anthology. The poems of Catullus come to us in [just] three manuscripts."¹⁹ Hort himself says in this regard that the New Testament "stands **absolutely and unapproachably alone** among prose writings."²⁰

(2) Next, the oldest surviving copies we have of the NT are extraordinarily close in *age* to the original autographs, in comparison to other documents of similar antiquity.

(3) Finally, a well-known disciple of Hort has noted another unique feature of the known NT manuscripts, *viz.*, that they exhibit an "unparalleled amount of **mixture**."²¹

Hort summed up these three points when he observed that the NT "has **unique** advantages in the **abundance**, the **antiquity**, and above all in the **variety** of its documentary evidence."²² Admittedly, these three attributes tell us only that the NT is unique in *degree* rather than in *kind*, but they nevertheless confirm that the Bible is unique and that textual critics ought not to be cavalier in their acceptance of an approach that treats the Bible like any other book.

Attacks Show It Is Unique

The manner in which the world has treated the Bible also demonstrates its uniqueness, as the following quote suggests:

"No book has been more intensely scrutinized or hotly debated. The Bible has outlasted many governments that sought to ban or destroy it. Scholars, intellectuals and even theologians have pored over every verse, [vainly] seeking a way to disprove its divine inspiration."²³

The Bible Is Supernatural

The Bible is plainly supernatural, so we cannot assume we can approach it in the same way we can approach secular literature. What's more, the Bible is not *just* supernatural. It is *God-given*. It is divine, which again militates against a normal approach. (Not all supernatural books are necessarily God-given. Satan is also supernatural, and is perfectly capable of inspiring the writing of supernatural books.)

Internal Claims Show It Is Unique

The content of the Bible is unique in terms of the claims it makes for itself:

"**Five hundred** times in the Pentateuch [*Genesis to Deuteronomy*], **three hundred** times in the following books [of the Bible] and **twelve hundred** times in the prophets, the declarations are prefaced or concluded with such expressions as 'Hear the Word of the Lord,' or 'Thus saith the Lord.' **No** other book **dares** thus to address itself to the universal conscience. **No** other speaks with such a binding claim..."²⁴

Many Other Reasons Exist

For many other reasons, the Bible is not like any other book. We will touch on a few of these reasons later. A serious discussion on the wondrous and unrivalled nature of the Bible is beyond the scope of this series. It could take up many volumes. But what I have written above, and in Parts 1 and 2, will hopefully suffice for the time being. If it doesn't, the reader may want to consider the following closing point: We cannot sensibly treat the Bible like any other book, because *Christ Jesus didn't do so*. See chapter 1 of the volume cited in this footnote for numerous passages confirming this point.²⁵

18 B.B. Warfield, as quoted in A.T. Robertson, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1925), pp. 68-69.

19 Robertson, op. cit., pp. 69-70.

20 Westcott and Hort, op. cit., p. 277.

21 Warfield, quoted in Robertson, op. cit., p. 156. (What Warfield meant by "mixture" is that MSS rarely appear to have been copied from a *single* source document. Warfield also claimed that the NT was "unrivalled among ancient writings in the **purity** of its text as actually transmitted and kept in use" [B.B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), p. 12].)

22 Westcott and Hort, op. cit., p. 73.

23 Todd Strandberg, "The Bible: Can We Trust It?", <http://www.raptureready.com/index.php>.

24 Professor Dyson Hague, *The Wonder of the Book*, quoted in Rev. W. MacLean, *The Providential Preservation of the Greek Text of the New Testament* (Westminster Standard Publication, No. 31, 4th edn., 1983), p. 44.

Summation

Burgon said, "I am asked whether I believe the words of the Bible to be inspired. I answer, 'To be sure I do – every one of them.'"²⁶ He went on to describe the Bible as "the very utterance of the eternal – as much God's Word as if high heaven were open, and we heard God speaking to us with human voice....The Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne!"²⁷ Unlike any other book, the Bible is the "Inspired Scripture – Living Words from a Holy God." Due to its eternal and divine nature it is on a fundamentally different plane from any other book. Thus we simply cannot afford to approach it like any other.

One Danger

What are the risks, in practical terms, of approaching the Bible like any other book? We shall consider several during the course of this article, but there is one that I especially want to bring out at this point.

It is self-evident that neither true Christians nor false brothers through the centuries would have treated the Bible like any other book. Thus, any assumptions which rely on them doing so will inevitably lead to the wrong conclusions. (Incidentally, Hort not only lost sight of the unique manner in which false brothers would have mutilated the text, but he virtually lost sight of false brothers altogether. One of his admirers was forced to admit that, "to Dr. Hort the scribes were all **angels**, as far as theology is concerned."²⁸ Hort was dangerously naïve in this.)

"WE NEED TO BE SCIENTIFIC"

Alexander Souter was a Hortian. He therefore promoted Hort's textual approach that says we should treat the Bible like any other book. He justified his stance by calling it the "strict scientific method."²⁹ Westcott and Hort likewise claimed their approach was "scientific."³⁰ This seems a reasonable position, so what's wrong with it?

Must Start With God

We should certainly be *logical* in our approach to NT textual criticism. But when making decisions about anything, especially decisions relating to spiritual matters, Christians must always start with *God* before anything else. Our consciences tell us God exists. History *shouts* that God exists. And Creation positively screams that God exists. Since God exists, what is truly scientific about ignoring Him, the creator and upholder of the

universe we are studying? As Edward Hills noted, God is more real than anything else, so taking Him out of the equation is hardly a wise move.

Scholars who promote family B often make zero reference to God's hand in the transmission of the Bible text. When reading books by supporters of family B, you'll regularly find them devoid of any mention of God's active involvement in the history of the text.³¹ (Hortians don't deny the *existence* of God. They merely claim He is irrelevant to the issue of NT textual criticism. As such, they ignore Him and effectively *treat* Him as if He didn't exist.) Scholars who promote family B also invariably make zero reference to *Satan's* involvement in the history of the Bible text. Are we really to believe that Satan is not particularly interested in corrupting God's Word?

Definition Of Science

The term "scientific," at least in the context we are using it, properly applies only to those things which can be *observed and tested*.³² Since, in the realm of textual criticism of the NT, we are considering events which took place nearly two millennia ago, we cannot observe them. Nor can we design scientific experiments to test them.

Regardless of the time-gap issue, science is obviously useful for handling *natural* phenomena, but it is, by definition, incapable of dealing with *supernatural* things. Given that the Bible is supernatural, the issue of its text and how it should be reconstructed is chiefly a spiritual one – and therefore one which cannot be handled by normal science. (Hort's method of textual criticism is often called "naturalistic" because it ignores the *supernatural* origins and character of the Bible. For brevity, I too shall sometimes refer to Hort's method as naturalistic.)

An analogy may help here. Let us recall how the Israelites escaped from Egypt. It was hardly "scientific" for them to contemplate crossing the Red Sea on foot, yet that is what God required of them. (Any reader who believes the modernistic idea that the Red Sea was only a couple of inches deep needs to explain how such a small amount of water managed to drown so many of Egypt's army, including their horses [Exodus 14:8-28].)

Nothing is impossible for God. This means that, even when it is just dealing with the *natural* realm, science can never be 100% reliable. For if God is all-powerful He can override experiments and cause miracles.³³ Obviously we see numerous exam-

25 See the "World" volume of a book I have co-authored called *Alpha - the Unofficial Guide*. It is stocked by Sword Publishers.

26 John Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 1905 reprint, p. 86.

27 Ibid.

28 Robertson, op. cit., p. 240; see also p. 159.

29 Alexander Souter, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament*, Revised by C.S.C. Williams, (Duckworth & Co., 1954), p. 16.

30 Westcott and Hort, op. cit., p. 13. So did B.B. Warfield (see Warfield, op. cit., pp. 113 and 117).

31 "[T]here is an entire lack of consideration for the supernatural element in the Scripture in all the writings of Westcott and Hort" [Martin, op. cit., p. 165].

32 For more on this point see Floyd Nolen Jones, op. cit., p. 175.

ples of this in Scripture (e.g., when water was turned into wine, or when the sun stood still for a day, or when an iron axe-head floated). How much less well-placed is science to cope with the supernatural realm!?

Further Remarks

Let me make clear that I firmly believe science has its part to play in this world. We all benefit from scientific innovations. The telephone, the computer, the airplane – all these things and many others can be a blessing. But true science refers to the *observable* universe and deals with physical things and with *natural* phenomena. Thus it cannot sensibly be expected to cope with *supernatural* phenomena. God, His Word, and the Body of Christ, are all spiritual entities and we fool ourselves if we think they are ruled by scientific principles.

One of the ways Hort convinced people to follow him was by arguing that the only alternative to a scientific approach was to be “arbitrary.”³⁴ This reveals a lack of understanding of God’s ways. God is not arbitrary, but neither is He limited by so-called “science.” As we saw in Part 2a, the godly approach to textual criticism is not at all arbitrary.

As an aside, supporters of family B often accuse their opponents of not being sensitive to the historical context of the transmission of the Bible text through the ages. As we shall see in later sections of Part 3, supporters of family B are very selective in terms of the history they are prepared to take into account, and they are even willing to invent history out of thin air. As we shall also see, family A still wins out when the full historical context is viewed from a godly standpoint. But it does seem strange that we are accused of playing down the *historical* context of transmission when it must be evident to all that supporters of family B are roundly ignoring the (rather more important) *spiritual* context of transmission.

DANGER NUMBER 2

A danger with assuming we can approach the text of the Bible in a purely scientific way is that it tempts Christian scholars to allow anyone, whether saved or not, whether walking with God or deep in apostasy, to help in reconstructing the text. For if this discipline is a purely scientific one, then *any* scientist – saved or otherwise – can participate. This is why nonbelievers, heretics and false brothers are being listened to in such numbers. As we shall discover, these people have even been able to take important positions in the world of biblical textual studies.

Think of how critical this is. In view of the divine nature and unimaginable importance of the Bible, this is obviously a nightmare situation.

“WE MUST AVOID CIRCULAR REASONING”

Some scholars understandably feel it is circular reasoning to use “claims” within the text of the Bible to help determine the true text of the Bible itself. (For example, simply because NT manuscripts *say* that there exist “wolves in sheep’s clothing” who would like to undermine God’s Word, this is not considered adequate justification for factoring such people into the equation.) On this basis some scholars argue that we must treat the Bible as if it were like any other book. But there are several problems with such reasoning.

1 - We Are Not *Just* Using Bible Claims

It is important to bear in mind that supporters of family A are not relying solely on evidence found within the *Bible*. We are also using our consciences; we are using historical evidence; and we are using logic. The Bible is plainly unique. The Bible claims to be of God. If we search to see if logic, history and conscience all line up with this claim, we find that they do. (If they didn’t line up, this would become apparent and we could *then* reconsider our approach.) We are simply being consistent about all the evidence available to us.

2 - We Are Not Using *Much* Of The Bible

For readers who fear we are using circular reasoning, it must be stressed that we are not assuming *many* scriptural principles. As Part 2a showed, very little theology is required to determine that family A is where the true text lies. In fact we can encapsulate our “assumptions” into one short sentence, *viz.*, both God and Satan treat Bible manuscripts in a way consistent with their respective agendas, and their respective followers seek to do likewise. This is a principle supported in both the *New and Old Testaments*. Is it genuinely “illegitimate” to work from this footing?

3 - We Have A Basic Working Text

If (as supporters of family B are so keen to claim) no doctrine is affected between the different Greek texts,³⁵ then surely we can safely approach textual criticism of the Bible with at least a *couple* of these doctrines in mind – e.g., that true Christians would care about the purity of the Bible text and that false brothers exist who would want to subtly undermine it. Such doctrines are plainly taught in Bible manuscripts. If, as supporters of family B often insist, no doctrine is affected between the manuscripts, they must accept these doctrines. They cannot have it both ways.

Even if we ignore all the support that the *Old Testament* gives to the principles espoused by the men who opposed Westcott and Hort, the full spectrum of *New Testament MSS* doesn’t, as far as I am aware, include *any* which oppose a faithful approach to textual criticism.

33 And, thanks to the Heisenberg principle, people today have no justification in placing *total* faith in science - regardless of whether they believe in God or not.

34 Westcott and Hort, op. cit., pp. 12, 13, 65.

35 For instance, D.A. Carson says “No doctrine and no ethical command is affected” (D.A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate* [Baker Book House, 1979], p. 73).

It is also worth noting that, in the first instance, we aren't actually trying to recreate the *text* of the Bible. All we are initially seeking to do is determine which *family* of evidence is the right one. Once we have achieved this, we can refine our text based on the doctrines taught in that family of documents.

4 - We Must Start Somewhere

If we do not start from the basis I outlined in point 2 above, where *do* we start? Certain scholars argue we should begin with no assumptions at all, yet all of these people then proceed to make assumptions of their own. They say they are appealing rigorously to hard "facts," but as Hills pointed out, they are signally unable to provide a definition of what constitutes a "fact" that does not itself *require assumptions*.³⁶

This situation reminds me of the common definition of "truth" as "that which corresponds to reality," a statement which quietly ignores the fact that reality is merely "that which corresponds to truth" – an irrefutably circular argument.³⁷

The reader may say "the definition of 'real' is that which I can touch, or at least see." But there are serious flaws with this! People can easily think they "see" something when it isn't actually there, e.g., through parlor tricks or hallucinations. More crucially, the spiritual world is real and yet cannot normally be seen. (For example, the chariots of fire in 2 Kings 6:17 were real but were invisible to Elisha's servant until God blessed him with a special capacity to see them.)

The scholar D.A. Carson attaches far more weight to family B than to family A. His well-known 1977 book on Bible versions is subtitled "A Plea for **Realism**." Note the way in which his chosen wording here doesn't include a plea for *godliness* or *faith* or *logic*, but only for "realism." In Habakkuk 2:4, did God declare "the just shall live by his **realism**," or "the just shall live by his **faith**"? Does Romans 4:2 say Abraham was blessed by God for his *realism* or for believing the Lord? In Ezekiel 4:14, was not God *angered* by Moses' realism? One could go on and on citing such illustrations. I fear that Carson would have been among the majority in Israel who, when faced with the giants living in the land which God had promised them, effectively said to Joshua and Caleb, "Be **realistic**, the people in the land are far too big and strong for us!" When it comes to textual criticism, are we truly being "real" if we ignore the most real facts about our universe (i.e., the existence of God and Satan)?

The difficulty with assumptions as to what is a "fact" or what is "real" is that God is able both to circumvent our senses and change reality. He is not restricted by the laws of our physical world. He created those laws, and can override them anytime He chooses.

God can keep men totally unharmed even when they are thrown into white hot furnaces; He can turn rivers of water into blood; and He can make five loaves and two fishes feed thousands of people. Is it really sensible to see anything as being more fundamental or more real than the God who created it all in the first place?

The type of textual criticism promoted by supporters of family B is founded on the assumption that God, Satan, true Christians and false ones would all have treated the Bible like they would have treated any other book. In other words, *regardless* of how we approach textual criticism of the Bible, we must inevitably start out with some "assumptions." Surely it is extremely unwise to decide that one of those assumptions is that the Bible can be approached like any other book.

Conclusion

If the Bible isn't special, then it is obviously right to insist on an "objective" approach. But the Bible is special. It is supernatural and unique. The sheer amount of verifiable prophetic fulfillment proves its supernatural nature. Furthermore, God would never put us in a position where we effectively had to deny Him in order to be sure of the text of the Bible. Textual critics cannot realistically deny that both God and Satan have a greater interest in the contents of the Bible than those of any other book. On this basis alone it becomes obvious that the New Testament cannot be approached like any other document.

"WE HAVE TO AVOID THEOLOGICAL BIAS"

Yet another reason offered for approaching the Bible like any other book is that to do otherwise is to open the door to "doctrinal bias." This argument is closely related, although not absolutely identical, to the two arguments we have just seen (i.e., "We need to be scientific," and "We must avoid circular reasoning"). Many of the responses I gave to those arguments apply to this latest one as well.

Hortians claim they are merely being "neutral," but one *cannot* be neutral towards God. You are either for Him or you are against Him (Luke 11:23). It is certainly important to keep doctrinal bias under tight control when performing textual criticism, but Hort's "neutral" method entails *substantial* doctrinal bias. After all, a huge amount of doctrinal bias is required in order to obey Hort's principle that "the harder reading is to be preferred." And how can anyone who possesses true faith in the God of the Bible sensibly claim it is theologically neutral to assume that neither God nor Satan was prepared to act on their respective interests in the transmission of the Bible text?

36 Edward F. Hills, *Believing Bible Study* (Christian Research Press, 1977). This book contains a number of other useful observations regarding the topic of the article you are reading.

37 This, incidentally, is D.A. Carson's definition of truth (Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 55). Admittedly he adds the caveat that the truth is that which is "held to be true by omniscience," but since none of us is omniscient this gets us no further forward. (Of course, Christians know that God is omniscient, but how can we prove this without recourse to the *Bible*?)

As someone once wrote, “If you try to be neutral, if you ignore the divine inspiration...of the Bible and treat it like an ordinary human book, then you are ignoring the **very factors that make the Bible what it is.**”³⁸

“NONBELIEVERS NEED THIS APPROACH”

Some scholars argue that we should approach the Bible like any other book for the sake of *helping the unsaved to accept the Christian worldview*. Sir Frederic Kenyon said, “If we assume from the first the supernatural character of these books [*i.e., the books comprising the New Testament*] and maintain that this affects the **manner in which their text has come down to us**, we will **never** convince those [*unsaved folks*] who start with a denial of that supernatural character.”³⁹

At first glance this looks fair, although it is interesting to observe Kenyon’s unequivocal wording alongside a distinct lack of any *justification* for his claim (a style of argumentation similar to Hort’s). Let us not be cowed by the boldness of this statement but instead approach it calmly. (We Christians should indeed care about the unsaved. But we should also remember that the type of approach Kenyon is demanding points us to a different MS family – and, as we saw in Part 2b, a significantly different Greek text – than had been the traditional text of 1530 years standing. In view of this, it is obvious that we need to check his position.) As it happens, there are a number of *common sense* difficulties with Kenyon’s position, quite apart from the biblical flaws.

Common Sense Problems

Even for folks who do not know their Bible, or who are nervous about a textual approach which relies in any way on the text of the Bible itself, there are big problems with Kenyon’s stance.

How Did the Body of Christ Cope Before This Approach?

Perhaps the most obvious failing in Kenyon’s argument is that evangelists throughout history have been able to convince pagans and other nonbelievers of the supernatural character of the Bible without recourse to a naturalistic approach to its text. Indeed, this approach was largely *unknown* to the Body of Christ until Westcott and Hort came along, yet all sorts of people still managed to be saved during that time. If, as Kenyon says, we will “never” convince people who deny the supernatural character of the Bible unless we use the naturalistic method of textual criticism, how did anyone succeed in convincing others of it before Kenyon and his ilk appeared on the scene?

Nonbelievers Want (and Need) Consistency

People respect consistency. Nonbelievers are impressed by folks who are prepared to *live* by the beliefs they advocate – *i.e.*, who practice what they preach – not by folks who pick and

choose when to observe or apply those beliefs. Nonbelievers are far more interested in listening to those individuals who have the courage of their convictions and who stand by their principles no matter what. If we approach a supernatural entity such as the Bible as if it were *not* supernatural, we are immediately being inconsistent. What nonbeliever will respect such an illogical approach?

Sincere seekers are looking for a worldview which is cohesive rather than confused – a worldview which holds together rather than one with a big loophole in it. How will we impress such people if we claim the Bible to be supernatural and then proceed to ignore this fact? Not only does this approach instantly undermine *our* credibility, it also undermines the credibility of the *Bible* because Scripture’s claims about God and Satan will seem unreliable. In other words, nonbelievers are likely to be even less impressed with the Bible than they were to begin with, for Hort’s approach implies that the Bible contains falsehoods.

Supernatural Character Is Obvious

That the Bible is supernatural can readily be discerned from its contents. Even just the multitude of prophecies within it that can each be shown to have been precisely fulfilled are compelling evidence (and there are undoubtedly plenty of these prophecies *regardless of which type of manuscript we use*).

But there are several *other* characteristics of the Bible which oblige mankind to accept it as supernatural. One such is the number of scientific remarks made in it which were only discovered by observation thousands of years after those remarks were first written. (For some details see this footnote.⁴⁰) There are also a variety of alphanumeric patterns in the original text underlying the Bible which cannot possibly be man-made. Furthermore, its historical statements are being proved correct year in and year out and are in a different league to every other known historical record of the period.⁴¹

What this means is that, after even a limited investigation, any sincere person can recognize that the Bible is supernatural – and they therefore wouldn’t be put off by us “assuming” the supernatural character of the Bible when it comes to textual criticism. And if, despite all this powerful evidence, someone still refuses to accept that the Bible is supernatural, they are hardly going to be talked into doing so as a result of us employing a particular type of textual criticism.

Results In Impossibilities

I have never heard anyone explain *why* the unbelieving approach to textual criticism will prompt doubters to accept the Bible as supernatural,⁴² but even if it *did* have this result, so what? A

38 Moorman, op. cit., p. 40.

39 Kenyon (1903) as quoted in Moorman, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

40 See chapter 2 of *Alpha - the Unofficial Guide: World* for more.

41 See for instance MacLean, op. cit., pp. 34-36. Even *Time* magazine has been obliged to admit that the Bible as an historical record has stood up to more than two *centuries* of the “heaviest ... [critical] guns that could be brought to bear” in the area of historical fact (“The Bible: The Believers Gain,” *Time*, Dec. 30, 1974, p. 41).

supernatural book isn't automatically God's *Word*.⁴³ We need to convince people that the Bible is the very *Word* of God. But the Hortian approach will have the opposite effect. As we saw in Part 2b, such an approach leads to all sorts of contradictions in the resulting text, including geographical and chronological impossibilities, doctrinally irreconcilable readings, and logical fallacies. These will do nothing to help people trust in the Bible as God's *Word*, but will actually strengthen their doubts about it.

Not the Purpose of Textual Criticism

The definition of textual criticism is purely and simply the restoration of the most accurate possible representation of the original text. That is the *sole* task of textual criticism, and a textual critic must not allow this activity to be influenced or hijacked by other issues, no matter how laudable they are. The job of convincing people that the Bible is supernatural is a separate discipline.⁴⁴

When acting as a textual critic, a person needs to focus on getting the most *accurate* text – not least so that the Body of Christ can be as healthy as possible. This will help the members of that Body to reflect Christ in their own lives – which will be a major witness to nonbelievers. It will also enable these members to become mature disciples, able to evangelize effectively. (As I noted in a previous article, we are not to produce converts but *disciples*, and family B's text harms that process.)

Not Suitable For Internal Assembly Use

Even if all the arguments I've offered so far in this section were false and it were indeed reasonable to give nonbelievers a copy of the Bible text generated from the unbelieving standpoint, it still wouldn't mean we ought to use the resulting text within the confines of the *Body of Christ*.

As a purely *academic* exercise it may be reasonable to approach textual criticism of the Bible as we would that of any other book. But we must be very careful what we do with the result, especially once we have discovered the (inevitable) truth that this approach produces a different text from the believing approach! The Hortian text is always going to be less accurate than if we attacked the problem from the believing point of view. So even if my arguments above are all wrong and there is good reason to use the former text in evangelistic scenarios, we can't possibly justify giving that text to Christians for any purposes *other* than evangelism.

If they were consistent, scholars who want us to approach the text of the Bible in a *non-spiritual* way for *nonbelievers* should also be happy for us to approach the text of the Bible in a *spiritual* way when we are dealing with *believers*. Kenyon's own argumentation can be turned on its head here. If we *deny* the supernatural character of the Bible, or maintain that its supernatural character *didn't* affect the manner in which its text has come down to us, we will damage the faith of those who start with a belief in that supernatural character.

It is right to want to bless the unsaved, but what about our responsibilities to the *brethren*?

God's Commands About This

Let's now move on from the commonsense problems with Kenyon's argument. What about the *spiritual* problems with it? The Psalmist said that the *Word* of God is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psa. 119:105), so if we want to know the right path to take regarding a given problem, we need to go to the *Word* of God. This principle includes the problem of determining the godly manner in which to perform textual criticism of the Bible. (Readers who see this as circular are directed to the comments I made about "circular reasoning" earlier in this article.)

In view of the fact that we must be guided by Scripture, where is the idea of treating the text of the Bible like that of any other book *allowed*, let alone commanded, in *any* MS in *any* family?

Hortians seem silent on this point. Perhaps that's because Scripture simply does not authorize this course of action and, indeed, explicitly bans it. Below are several of the ways in which it does this.

Not A Faithful Route

Kenyon reckons, "If we assume from the first the supernatural character of [the Bible] ... we will NEVER convince those who start with a denial of that supernatural character."

This shows a distinct lack of faith in God's ability to convict men's hearts and reveal the truth to them. According to the Bible, anything that is not of faith is *sin* (Rom. 14:23). Logically, and as others have pointed out, "If we do not approach the study of how we got our Bible from the standpoint of faith then it is a *sin*."

Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6a), but if we approach God's *Word* in the way unbelievers do then we are "participating in their unbelief" and we therefore cannot be pleasing God.

42 Kenyon said of the NT books, "We treat them at first like any other books, in order to show at last that they are above and beyond all other books" (Moorman, op. cit., p. 39), but he failed to explain *why* this approach would "show at last that they are above and beyond all other books," let alone why it would lead nonbelievers to accept the Bible as *God's Word*.

43 Although the canon is closed, God can still inspire people to write books other than the Bible – which can thus be said to have a supernatural dimension.

44 Some readers may feel it is every Christian's duty at *all* times to tailor *every* activity so as to make it as evangelistically beneficial as possible. But if we are not allowed to assume a few basic, self-evident things when it comes to textual criticism of the Bible, why are we suddenly allowed to assume it is "every Christian's duty at *all* times to tailor *every* activity so as to make it as evangelistically beneficial as possible"? Biblically, our primary task is actually to become ever more Christlike, and effective evangelism will flow naturally from this. Confirmatory passages include Eccl. 1:2-3,14; 12:13; Eph. 4:13,15; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; Psa. 127:1a; John 8:28b; 15:4; Mic. 6:8; Eph. 5:25-27; 1 Thess. 4:3a and Isa. 30:1a.

As a multitude of Bible passages confirm, Christians must walk by faith rather than by sight. What this means is that we must not do things in the Christian life on the basis that they appear reasonable, but instead we must always act *biblically* and we must trust God's manifold promises that He will honor this route. To take the other route is to say to God, "Even though it is abundantly obvious to any genuine believer that both You and Satan have a unique interest in Holy Writ, I am going to ignore that. I am going to approach the Bible as if its contents were lies. I expect You to bless my efforts." Is God likely to be happy with that? Far from it.

We need to realize that God is perfectly capable of making a nonbeliever aware of the truth about a given issue even if that truth has not been proved to the person via *logical propositions*. (Readers should not imagine this to be a radical idea. After all, the Holy Spirit convinced many Bible characters of various truths without providing step-by-step explanations from first principles. And one's conscience can convince one of truths without the need for rational argumentation.)

It is not our central task to pander to obstinate unbelievers. Besides, only the Holy Spirit can truly persuade someone who denies something as plain as the supernatural character of the Bible. Without Him, no amount of reasoning will sway someone who does so. The god of this world has blinded that person (2 Cor. 4:4).

Convert Them First

Did any of God's servants in Scripture ever proselytize in the way Kenyon suggests? No.

Did Jesus Christ ever use this method? No. He always approached the Scriptures as supernatural and trusted the Holy Spirit to confirm this in the hearts of His hearers. (Genuine Christians already know that the Bible is supernatural. The Holy Spirit witnesses this truth to us, as per John 16:13; Psa. 119; 2 Tim. 3:14-16 and so on. Therefore, if we convert people, we don't need to worry about finding ways to convince them.)

How do we convert people to Christ if they reject the supernatural character of the Bible? The same way we convert *anyone*: Spirit-led proclaiming of the Gospel. The apostle Paul said, "For the **preaching of the cross** ... is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). In the same passage he also declared, "it pleased God by the foolishness of **preaching** to save ..." (v21). To any reader who imagines that sound evangelism might sometimes legitimately include preaching on the subject of *textual criticism*, Paul appears to have roundly rejected such a notion (e.g., in 1 Cor. 2:4-6) and instead made clear we are to "preach **Christ crucified**" (v23), and that we are to leave the rest to God.

Certain readers may question how this process works – i.e., they may wonder how we convince an unsaved person about the truth of what we are saying if that person doesn't respect the Bible. We don't convince of anything. It is the Holy Spirit who convinces, and He doesn't need to supply a person with formal proof of a statement in order for that person to know the statement to be true. In Romans 1:16, Paul made plain that "the **Gospel of Christ**," rather than mental assent to the supernatural nature of the Bible, "is the power of God" when it comes to saving people. God's Word is made manifest through Spirit-led "preaching" (Titus 1:3).

Pride often gets in the way of accepting the truth. Our job is to proclaim the Gospel such that the consciences of nonbelievers are pricked. This will humble them and thus open a way for them to accept God's Word for what it truly is.

Spiritual With Spiritual

As we have already observed, the Bible just doesn't authorize the type of textual criticism we are querying in this article. Indeed, it specifically prohibits it. The Bible is sacred, but Hortians are treating it as if it were *not* sacred (i.e., as if it were profane). There is a fundamental difference between sacred and profane, and the Bible says we must not treat them alike (Ezek. 22:26; 44:23).

The Bible is a *spiritual* entity, and God's Word tells us we are to "compare spiritual things with **spiritual**" (1 Cor. 2:13). When men approach the words of Holy Writ in a naturalistic manner, they are comparing spiritual with *unspiritual* and are directly contravening this commandment.

The Holy Spirit would never lead us to treat the Scriptures – that He himself inspired – like any other book. Approaching the Bible in such a way requires us to be dishonest, and God will never grace that approach with His Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is not with us, we are going to have a very hard time convincing unregenerate minds of the truth about the Bible (Zech. 4:6).

Ends Do Not Justify Means

The argument that we should approach the Bible like any other book for the sake of nonbelievers is to make the ends justify the means. In the opening sections of Part 2b we saw that this is an unbiblical doctrine. We are *not* allowed to do evil on the basis that good may result (Rom. 3:8). God never puts us in a place where we are forced to be unbiblical. There is always an escape route (1 Cor. 10:13).⁴⁵ We are meant to be holy rather than conformed to this evil world (Rom. 12:1-2). We are to overcome evil with *good* (Rom. 12:21b) rather than with more evil.

Pragmatism is the world's way, not God's way, and this fact leads us neatly into my final problem with Kenyon's argument.

45 To the argument that "the ends do not justify the means," there is, as usual, an exception which proves the rule. Here is an illustration. If the problem you face is a *temporal* one (e.g., physical hunger), and if you cannot see any other option, and provided the commandment you break is only *symbolic*, God does allow you to 'make the ends justify the means.' Hence our Lord's comments about David and the shewbread in Matthew 12:2-5. But this principle never extends to *spiritual* activities (e.g., textual criticism; evangelism).

World's Way

The naturalistic method of textual criticism means we are using *man's* ways rather than God's. As noted in previous articles in this series, we must accept that God's ways are not our ways. This is true in evangelism as in every other spiritual area. We are not to do that which is right in our own eyes, but "that which is right in the eyes of the LORD" (Deu. 13:18; 2 Chron. 14:2).

When even the prophet Samuel, a hero of the faith, was trying to identify the man with whom the Lord was going to replace Saul as King of Israel, he had to be admonished that the Lord does *not* see as man sees (Sam. 16:7). The Bible says man's thoughts are "vanity" (Psa. 94:11). They are useless. For instance, David would never have been allowed to go into battle alone against Goliath – and certainly not without armor – if man's ways had been followed. Nor would Gideon have relied upon only 300 fellow warriors to confront a Midianite army vastly superior in numbers.

We need, like Caleb, to *wholly* follow the Lord. We need to do things God's way even if it seems bizarre by the world's standards. We must trust God and not imagine we know better than He. Peter made this very mistake when he began to rebuke Christ Jesus for prophesying His own death (Matt. 16:22). And this is a particularly apt example in the context of our discussion, for both Kenyon and Peter apparently believed it would be better for the world if their own ideas were followed rather than God's ways. Both of their ideas make sense when viewed from a human perspective, but as the Lord replied to Peter, we must savor the things that are of God rather than the things that are of men. For yet another example of this principle in action, see Luke 22:24-27.

We Christians are to be holy. The word "holy" essentially means "separate." We are to separate ourselves from the world's ways. The Hortian approach to textual criticism is to *follow* the world's ways. But God's Word says, "the wisdom of this world is **foolishness** with God" (1 Cor. 3:19). For more proof regarding the foolishness of using the world's methods to assist our evangelism, I strongly recommend readers to consider 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5.

Finally

The Bible calls us again and again to be devoted to the *truth* (see Jer. 9:3; 3 John 1:3-4; Zech. 8:19; Deu. 32:4, etc.). Therefore we must seek the *true* text of the Bible, not merely the text which purports to be the more convenient for evangelism. (Unsurprisingly, the text which purports to be the more convenient for evangelism has proved to be nothing of the sort. Christ's dis-

ciples over the centuries did far better evangelistically *before* this "neutral" approach to textual criticism came in than has subsequently been the case.)

DANGERS OF NATURALISM

Paul tells us, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16a). It is obvious that the Bible's contents are not like any other book and so we must never treat them as if they are.

There are very real dangers to the naturalistic approach. I mentioned one of them at the end of the section entitled "It is a book" – i.e., this approach is guaranteed to produce a corrupt text, because it ignores the Bible's true nature and denies the unique factors in operation during its history. Another problem caused by this "scientific" approach is, as I noted earlier, that it allows anyone – even outright false brothers – to participate in reconstructing the text. But there are other serious dangers – so many, in fact, that I've had to group them into two categories.

(1) Knock-Ons

When taken to its logical conclusion, the naturalistic approach damages faith both in the canon of Scripture and in the teachings found therein.

Text

The naturalistic method has a definite "tendency to breed skepticism concerning the text of the Bible."⁴⁶ One could quote many Hortian scholars expressing serious doubts about the purity of the text they have generated, and even about the very *recoverability* of the Bible text. See this footnote for more.⁴⁷

Among those that have followed Westcott and Hort pessimism has prevailed. [More than a quarter of a century after W&H's Greek was made available to the general public] Rendel Harris declared that the New Testament text had not at all been settled but was "more than ever, and perhaps finally, **unsettled**."⁴⁸

Canon

The naturalistic approach prompts even more perilous doubts about the Bible. After all, if we are not allowed to assume the *supernatural character* of the Bible, why is it okay to assume *anything* about the Bible? Why should we assume the NT canon we have today is correct? Why not question the reliability of the *Old Testament* text as well? And why not then question the canon of the OT? Why assume God wrote a book at all? (Or, if we are permitted to assume He did, why assume the Bible is the only such book?)

46 Moorman, *op. cit.*, p.40.

47 For numerous examples, readers are directed to the section entitled "The Neutral Method Leads To Skepticism Concerning The New Testament Text" in Moorman, *op. cit.* For even more examples see chapter 3, section : "The Skeptical Tendency Of Naturalistic New Testament Textual Criticism," Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (Christian Research Press, 1984), an electronic copy of which is freely available at www.biblebelievers.com/Hills_KJVD_Chapter3.htm.

48 Moorman, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

Naturalistic textual criticism takes us onto a very slippery slope, and those individuals who claim that it is not related to the extremely dangerous “higher” criticism are, at best, being horribly naïve.

Inspiration

If we doubt the reconstructability of the text, and/or if we doubt the canon, this will unavoidably lead to questions about the degree of *inspiration* of the Bible.

As others have asked, “If it is right to discuss the text of the Bible without ‘introducing considerations which could not reasonably be applied to other ancient texts,’ why isn’t it right to follow the same policy in our discussions of the **authorship** and **inspiration** of the Bible?”

William Sanday was an “outstanding English scholar of the generation immediately following that of Westcott and Hort ... [and] an ardent disciple of Westcott and Hort.”⁴⁹ His lack of faith in the inspiration of the Bible comes across loud and clear in the following statement by him:

When we think of the immense part which **myth**, legend and **vague approximations** at truth have borne in the thought and literatures of early peoples, and how very **partial** and **imperfect** history of all kinds has been, and in **many** departments still is, there can be **nothing** abnormal if similar elements enter to some extent into the **Bible**.⁵⁰

I can say without fear of contradiction that belief in the verbal-plenary inspiration of Scripture within the Church of England has been absolutely *decimated* since Hort’s approach to textual criticism became the norm there.⁵¹ Even back in the 1970s, a mind-bending 89% of American clergymen in the Church of England did not believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God at all, let alone believe in the *verbal-plenary* inspiration of the Bible.⁵² By the 1930s those denying the verbal inspiration of the Bible included Church of England **Deans** – the very people who are tasked in the CofE with *defending* the truth.

Teachings

Again, if we are going to start down the road of not assuming anything about the nature of the Bible upfront, where do we stop? Why don’t we also question the truthfulness of the *teachings* given in the Bible? As Hills put it, “[I]f it is not important that the Scriptures be regarded as infallibly inspired, why is it important to insist that the Gospel is completely true?”

By the same token, if we are allowed to approach the *text* of the Bible using rationalism, why is it wrong to approach the *miracles* in the Bible using rationalism? If science, rather than God, comes first, then many of the miracles described in Scripture (e.g., the Lord Jesus walking on water or bringing Lazarus back from the dead) must be assumed to have been lies or at least gross exaggerations, since they are not testable or scientifically observable today. Is this what led Westcott to write, “I **never** read an account of a miracle but I seem to feel its improbability”?⁵³ (Westcott believed the canon of Scripture still to be open, and wrote, “I reject the word infallibility of Holy Scriptures **overwhelmingly**.”⁵⁴)

Knowledge

If one’s faith in the text, or canon, or inspiration, or teachings of the Bible are damaged, then so will be one’s desire to *read* the Bible. Sure enough, the average Christian has become unimaginably more ignorant of Scripture than was the case before Westcott and Hort came along.⁵⁵

Do we regularly see anything *like* the type of commitment to learning and memorizing of God’s Word today that Joan and many others like her displayed in previous centuries? I suggest not, and I suggest further that the work of Westcott and Hort is a central reason for this.

(2) Curses

Even if the reader still believes in the naturalistic approach and is convinced that he has avoided all the above risks, he should ask himself whether his stance could cause his *brethren* to stumble. (He should also bear in mind that the naturalistic

49 Ibid, p. 41.

50 Quoted in Moorman, op. cit., p. 41.

51 I accept that multiple factors have been at work here, but the part played by Hortian criticism has clearly been considerable.

52 “Recently, Western Reserve University mailed a questionnaire to 10,000 clergymen in five major U.S. denominations. It received a reply from 7,442 of them. On it was this question: Do you believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God? This was weaker than asking: Do you believe in an inerrant Bible? Or Do you believe in **verbal** inspiration? There are all kinds of views on inspiration, not all of which concern the actual **words** of Scripture....Yet in spite of the level at which the question was asked, 82% of the Methodists, **89% of the Episcopalians**, 81% of the United Presbyterians, 57% of the Baptists and 57% of the Lutherans answered, ‘NO!’” (James M. Boice, *Does Inerrancy Matter?*, [ICBI, 1979], p. 9).

53 Quoted in Arthur Westcott, *The Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott, Vol. I* (Macmillan and Co., 1903), p. 52.

54 Ibid., p. 207.

55 About forty years after Westcott and Hort’s Greek was made public, T.H. Darlow became so troubled by the way he was “continually” encountering ignorance of Scripture that he started publishing a Bible quiz in the London *Daily Express*. I am confident that today’s average believer would be stumped by even some of the *simplest* questions published therein [T.H. Darlow, *1001 Bible Problems* (Morgan and Scott, 1925)]. Thanks to this ignorance, and the loss of faith in the Scriptures among the general public since Hort’s arrival, no Bible quiz would ever even *get* a weekly slot in a national newspaper in the UK these days.

approach has infected many scholars, and hence Bible colleges, with the obvious implications this fact carries with it for one's own local fellowship.) Readers also need to consider that the Hortian approach brings an entire additional category of dangers which *no-one* can escape. I describe these below.

When used on the Bible, the "neutral" method of textual criticism is unfaithful. Unfaithfulness, as we have already noted, is a sin. Indeed, the naturalistic approach is flagrantly unbiblical in a whole range of ways. Apart from anything else, it treats God as if He were a liar. All of this means we are rebelling against God when we support this method. This will bring a curse rather than a blessing. Following are some further details on this point.

Confusion

Men think they are being clever and wise when they go against the Bible and use the Hortian style of textual criticism. But God has "chosen the foolish things of the world to **confound** the wise" (1 Cor. 1:27a). When we take the Hortian approach, we are taking our own way, and God says, "be ashamed and **confounded** for your own ways" (Ezek. 36:32).

To "confound" usually means to weaken and shame. Could this be why Westcott lost the ability to speak?⁵⁶ Losing the ability to speak certainly lessens a person's power and brings a degree of embarrassment and hence shame. I probably wouldn't have mentioned Westcott's problem if serious loss of speech hadn't also afflicted two of his contemporaries (Philip Schaff and Samuel Tregelles) after their respective major roles in taking the English Bible away from family A and over to the unfaithful Greek resulting from the Hortian approach.⁵⁷

To "confound" can also mean "confuse." If we persist in being unbiblical we can become confused and even blind to the truth. This is a desperately dangerous place to be. If any reader still thinks it wise to follow Hort's unbiblical approach to textual criticism, know for sure that God promises to take "the wise **in their own craftiness**" (1 Cor. 3:19; Job 5:13).

Woe

It is straightforward to trace the source of Hortism to unsaved German rationalists and higher critics. Many, if not most, of the scholars who were pivotal in bringing Hortism to the Body of Christ were unsaved German higher critics (or, like B.B. Warfield, went to Germany to study under such unbelievers). Put another way, people like Hort were turning to the world for help. In the Bible, turning to the world for help is called "going down to Egypt," and God pronounces a curse on

people who do this. Indeed, He says "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help" (Isa. 31:1a). And when God says "woe," we can be certain that the situation is truly grave.

Approaching God's Word in the way He has ordained leads to godly wisdom (Psa. 119:97-100). But approaching it in our *own* way implies we know better than God. Again, He pronounces a curse on people who think like this. He declares, "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" (Isa. 5:21; see also Prov. 26:12).

Death

As we observed at the start of Part 2a, when it comes to the Bible, we are on holy ground. If, during a stroll in the country, we came across a field, and if we had credible evidence that the field was mined, it would be profoundly unwise to approach it like any other field. It is even less wise to walk on holy ground as if it were like any other ground.

God is Almighty and utterly holy. No one in their right mind approaches Him as if He isn't holy, yet they think they can approach His Word as if it isn't His Word. This is self-evidently foolish.

Beyond this, if we believe (as did Hort) that it is illegitimate to approach textual criticism from a spiritual standpoint, we are effectively *denying the faith*. We are basically saying, "My whole Christian life has been a sham and a lie, for I cannot be sure of **any** part of God's Word, else I would bring it to bear on this matter." This, in turn, means we are essentially denying Christ. Surely there is nothing more dangerous than this.

I am not disputing that many people follow the Hortian approach with good motives. Nor am I disputing that, when viewed superficially, the naturalistic way of approaching the Bible text *seems* right. However, God has told us that there is a way that seems right to a man but that "the end thereof are the ways of **death**" (Prov. 14:12; 16:25).

Closing Note

I implore readers to bear these dangers in mind *whenever* they are tempted to approach the text of the Bible like that of other books (including those occasions when readers are considering what method of *translation* they should support). As we progress through the remainder of the articles in this series, it will continue to be vital to avoid viewing the Bible as being like any other book.

Please also be warned that scholars have "wised-up" to just how repugnant it is for thinking Christians to be told that the text of the Bible can be treated like that of any other book. It is therefore rare for scholars to explicitly *admit* they are doing so,

56 Arthur Westcott, op. cit., p. 272.

57 The loss of speech of both Schaff and Tregelles is documented in the same book, i.e., David S. Schaff, *The Life of Philip Schaff* (Charles Scribner's Sons', 1897), pp. 171, 246, 446 and 492. Philip Schaff was the person in charge of creating the American equivalent of the RV. When selecting men for his translation committees, he rejected anyone who accepted what he termed "the **moonshine** theory of the inerrant apostolic autographs" (*Ibid.*, pp. 351 & 439). As for Samuel Tregelles, Westcott and Hort repeatedly praised his work and gave him a special acknowledgement for the "generous encouragement always received from him" (Westcott and Hort, op. cit., p. 322).

even though this is exactly what they are doing. To hide their tracks further, they may very occasionally insert a comment about God in order to make it seem as if they are not treating the Bible like any other. Do not be fooled. They are molding God to fit in with their theory rather than molding their theory to fit in with God. My advice is this: *Whenever* we come across an argument regarding the content of Bible versions, ask yourself if the argument treats the Bible as unique, or instead treats it like any other book. The Bible is both divine and alive, and we must consistently approach its contents from this perspective.

FINAL SECTION

Joan, our blind girl from the 1500s, patently didn't treat the Bible like any other book, and neither should we. So how did the majority of modern scholars come to be duped into doing so?

How it First Happened

To start with, how was Hort deceived into approaching the Bible like any other book? One problem was that he "took little account of the views of those who opposed [him]."58 This unfortunate path meant that Hort, as he himself admitted, had "no security against some of the wandering lights that are apt to beguile a critic."59 A key error that beguiled him can be traced back to the late 17th century:

At that time the deists and other unbelievers came up with a novel suggestion. "Let us not," they proposed, "begin our thinking by assuming the truth of Christianity. Let us rather take as our starting point only those truths on which Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Mohammedans, and all good men of every religion and creed agree. Then, standing on this neutral platform of common agreement, let us test all religions and creeds by the light of reason."

Instead of rejecting this proposal as fundamentally unchristian, orthodox ... scholars accepted the challenge and during the 18th century developed various apologetic arguments, armed with which they endeavored to meet the unbelievers on their own chosen ground and, fighting in this neutral arena, to demonstrate the truth of historic Christianity and the error of infidelity. Unhappily, however, these orthodox champions did not realize that they had been out-manuevered and that by the

very act of adopting a neutral starting point they had already denied the faith that they intended to defend and had ensured that any argument that they might thereafter advance would be inconsistent.⁶⁰

In subsequent articles we shall see further reasons why Hort took this wrong path.

How it Took Off

Hort's theory "attained almost immediately a tremendous popularity, being accepted everywhere both by liberals and conservatives."⁶¹ Why? One reason is that "Liberals liked it because it represented the latest thing in the science of New Testament textual criticism. Conservatives liked it because it seemed to grant them that security for which they were seeking [*We saw earlier that their supposed security later proved to be an illusion and that their security should have been in Christ.*]."⁶² One such man in the conservative category was the highly influential B.B. Warfield.⁶³ His patronage of Hort and the principles Hort espoused were central to the widespread acceptance of those principles.⁶⁴

As we recorded in Part 2a, another reason for the acceptance of Hort's theory was that a majority of the 1871/1881 Revision Committee yielded to it. This was not due to the cogency of Hort's arguments though. Most of the Committee's members were far too ignorant about textual criticism to withstand Hort. (This is illustrated by the fact that, for many months after publication of the Revised Version, they stayed silent in the face of extensive criticism of its underlying text.⁶⁵ Even when this silence began to threaten acceptance of their work, they still hid behind just two of their fellow Hortians.) Committee members followed Hort for *unhealthy* reasons, e.g., Hort's "dogmatic [style of] presentation,"⁶⁶ and his dominance over the proceedings. (It is estimated that Hort spoke for the equivalent of three full years out of the ten years the committee sat.)

Burton's arguments were powerful, so why did he not carry the day? Previous articles have proffered numerous reasons, but a key difficulty was that Burton's views were effectively hidden from the man in the street. The general populace was told by Hortians that it was not qualified to decide between the two positions.⁶⁷ This immediately discouraged the public from acquainting themselves with Burton's objections. Hortians were also careful to make Burton look as bad as possible. They achieved

58 Martin, op. cit., p. 155.

59 Westcott and Hort, op. cit., p. 323.

60 Hills, *King James*, op. cit., chapter 3.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 For proof see B.B. Warfield, op. cit., pp. 110, 113, 132, 144-5 & 156-7.

64 Predictably, Warfield's acceptance of naturalistic textual criticism also seems to have damaged his faith in the verbal-plenary inspiration of the Bible (Warfield, op. cit., pp. 85-86).

65 *The Times* (London), May 4th, 1882, p. 4. (Elsewhere, Alfred Martin confirmed that "Most of the members of the committee were not textual critics, and were not at home in this area of discussion" [Martin, op. cit., p. 154].)

66 Martin, op. cit., p. 170.

this by character assassination rather than facing up to what he actually wrote. And even on the rare occasions when they *did* mention his writings, they often spent more time focusing on the *tone* of his prose than its *content*.⁶⁸ (Burgon's writing style naturally reflected the anger he felt at the corruption of God's pure Word. Hopefully, readers can see that Burgon was justified in this, and that it was less than godly of his opponents to make such a fuss about the tone he used when exposing that corruption.) But for the most part, Hort and his followers simply ignored Burgon so as to give the impression that his views were not even worthy of *consideration*.⁶⁹

How it Continues

When we think about the question for long enough, it becomes clear that it is ungodly to approach the Bible like any other book. But hopefully I have also shown that a youngster at a Bible college could be fooled into doing so by a clever group of tutors:

While taking care to divulge as few details as possible about the "old," "bigoted," Burgon-style method of textual criticism (so as to avoid its wisdom being revealed), scholars will claim it was haphazard and even arbitrary. They will then argue that the modern method is far more evolved than its primitive and now-outdated predecessor; they will say that the new method is objective and scientific; they will claim their method is neutral and theologically unbiased rather than dependent on circular reasoning and doctrinal presuppositions. Then, playing on every Christian's yearning to see souls saved, they will go for the sucker-punch and claim that naturalistic textual criticism is necessary for the sake of those lost souls who deny the supernatural character of the Bible.

Scholars take care not to explicitly *admit* that the Hortian method treats the text of the Bible like that of any other book. They know they cannot afford to present things in such a stark way if they are to avoid repelling their students. This truth is left unsaid so as to keep anyone from getting upset. But that is happening nonetheless.

The scholars have even more tricks up their sleeves. For instance, they will try to appeal to any pride a student may have in his mental ability by asserting that the naturalistic route is the *intelligent, sophisticated* route. They will also drop big hints that the student will enjoy the admiration of the faculty, not to mention receive much better grades, if they submit to this "progressive" and "informed" stance towards the Bible text.

Of course, as soon as Hort's view became popular enough, scholars were also able to sell the naturalistic method as being the one supported by the "majority," and they could mock anyone who was not prepared to submit to the majority view. (In previous articles we began to see how Hortians gained this position of numerical superiority, and in Part 3 we will uncover more of the methods they used to achieve this. But achieve it they did – as Kenyon made clear in 1901 when he said, "Westcott and Hort's theory ... **holds the field** among scholars today."⁷⁰)

A trusting, uninformed, impressionable young student at a Bible college where the tutors and lecturers employ these arguments, could easily be led down the naturalistic road – and thus it is not stunningly surprising if many of *today's* scholars have been so duped.⁷¹ In view of this, I entreat readers not to allow the fact that most scholars disagree with my conclusions to put them off accepting those conclusions.

Dozens of men have shared their testimony with me that they were not exposed to **both** sides of the issue of Bible texts and versions during their Bible training. Only later did they come into appreciation of [the method espoused by Nolan, Burgon, Miller, Cook, Hoskier *et al*] ... when they studied the aforementioned men (and many others) for themselves instead of depending upon the caricatures of them provided by their Bible college or seminary teachers.⁷²

The Bottom Line

"If Hort was wrong in his basic approach or perspective, then the whole fabric of his theory should be reevaluated."⁷³ I hope this article has succeeded in demonstrating that Hort was indeed wrong in his basic approach. I therefore hope, also, that readers who supported Hort at the beginning of this article will be prepared to reevaluate his theory. If they aren't, I fear that, on the last day, God will say of them that they have "violated My law, and have profaned Mine holy things; they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean" (Ezek. 22:26). Let's ensure God never has cause to say this of us. ❖

Dusty welcomes your comments on his work. However, the address given at the end of previous articles is now obsolete. The best way to reach Dusty is via his Web site (www.bayith.org).

- 67 *The Times* (London), May 4th, 1882, p. 4. This highly misleading newspaper article patronizes its readership by saying "Between the contending parties it is hardly for unlearned readers to decide."
- 68 For an example, see *ibid*.
- 69 Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 152.
- 70 F.G. Kenyon, *Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, (Macmillan, 1901), p. 308.
- 71 Any readers who suppose that Christians cannot be deceived are urged to read the "Church" volume of *Alpha - the Unofficial Guide*.
- 72 Cloud, *op. cit.*
- 73 Wilbur Norman Pickering, *Contribution of John William Burgon to New Testament Textual Criticism* (A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Department of New Testament Literature and Exegesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, May 1968), p. 12.