Textual Criticism How do we know that we have the right Bible?

Prolegomena

- God is in charge of how He makes himself known.
- No autograph of any writer from antiquity or the early church still exists.
- 1,500 years of copies of copies of copies with very little control.
- Almost 6,000 Greek manuscripts and about 18,000 manuscripts in other languages.
 - No two of them are exactly alike.

The only path to the original text is to deduce what the original looked like based on the copies. This is, by definition, what textual criticism is about - the science of the recovery of any ancient document's original text. It involves sifting through the textual material, detecting mistakes and changes, and determining which reading at any given point is most likely to be original. [In other words, textual criticism], is the study and history of mistakes.

Colin R. Nicholl, Ph.D.

4 Different Kinds of Errors – Dr. Dan Wallace

- 1) Spelling and nonsense readings
- 2) Changes that can't be translated; synonyms
- 3) Meaningful variants that are not viable
- 4) Meaningful and viable variants

- 4 Different Kinds of Errors Dr. Dan Wallace
- 1) Spelling-
 - 75% of the errors Easily detectable.
- 2) Synonyms, can't be translated
 - 15-20% of the errors Greek is not dependent on word order, and context easily conveys the use of the synonym.

- 4 Different Kinds of Errors Dr. Dan Wallace
- 3) Meaningful but not viable Matthew 24:36
 - Occasional omission of $o\dot{v}\delta\dot{\epsilon}$ \dot{b} $v\dot{\iota}\dot{o}\varsigma$ (nor the son).
 - Not viable the lack of omission is the most desirable, because it has the earliest and best evidence.

4 Different Kinds of Errors – Dr. Dan Wallace

- An example that incorporates 1, 2, and 3 Romans 5:1
 - $\epsilon i \rho \eta \nu \eta \nu \ \epsilon \chi o \mu \epsilon \nu$ we have peace present tense
 - $\epsilon i \rho \eta \nu \eta \nu \ \epsilon \chi \omega \mu \epsilon \nu [that]$ we may have peace subjunctive tense
 - The context fairly demands that the proper understanding is the first, because Paul is making an argument addressing what is going on *right now* for the believers he is addressing based on faith in Christ.

4 Different Kinds of Errors – Dr. Dan Wallace

- 4) Meaningful and Viable
 - Would impact what we know if so much information didn't exist elsewhere.
 - No matter of importance is at risk.
 - Example: Mark 16:9-20 Does not have the earliest and best attestation, most likely not original.
 - However, all of the matters addressed in this epilogue have independent attestation throughout the New Testament.

A lot of different reasons for mistakes

• What follows is taken *very* liberally from the handouts and notes from "New Testament Interpretation" with Colin R. Nicholl, Ph.D. If another source is used, it will be cited, otherwise, presume Dr. Nicholl as the citation.

A lot of different reasons for mistakes or changes

- Unintentional
 - Scriptio continuα predominant scribal style
 - Fallible memory
 - Misreading
 - Tired
 - Eyestrain
 - Carelessness
 - Eye could slip up or down, side to side, especially where there are similar letters or patters.

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Unintentional Errors

- Assimilation In copying the synoptic gospels, one might conflate a more familiar version.
- Parablepsis losing one's place and then omitting or repeating words
 - Dittography repeating a letter/word/passage
 - Romans 7:25 doubling of the definite article "to" would have changed the noun "thanks" to a verb "I thank", which would have lead a later scribe to add "eu", which means "good", and usually is used as a prefix in the word translated "I am thanking" or "I am giving thanks".
 - •χάρις τὸ θεου
 - •εύχαρίστο τὸ θεου

Unintentional Errors

- Haplography a word occurs twice in a passage, and the scribes eye jumps to the second word.
 - Matthew 5:19 and 20 both end with "The kingdom of Heaven", in slightly different grammatical form.
 - Consequently, some manuscripts don't have 5:20 at all.
 - An omission is often the preferred reading (which we will get to), but if the syntactical context shows a more plausible reason for the omission, and the manuscript evidence is good, then the lack of omission is preferred.