

- **\*READ Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."\*** I am always so appreciative of those brothers who make efforts in their prayers to give thanks for God's willingness to allow us a small glimpse into His mind through the Bible that He has given to us. We are convinced that this book is profitable for teaching, convicting, correcting, and training. **(II Timothy 3:16)** We are convinced that it is able to do such a thing because it is truly living, active, and capable to showing us either the righteousness or wickedness that is found within us.
- We are convinced that it is able to do all of these things because it isn't simply another book like the books that we might have at home on our shelves. We believe that this book has supernatural origins. We believe that it has withstood the tests of time because it is God's will that His mind be made available to all the generations of mankind. Our belief in these statements are not without strong backing. Considering the internal evidence, we find it to be a historically accurate in everything that is stated as factual. We find its story to be precise and logically progressing from front cover to back cover. Specifically in the New Testament, we find great value in the primary sources of the authorships. The authors even saw first hand or spoke with those who saw what they were claiming first hand.
- Externally, we can consider the sheer number of manuscripts that have been discovered as a strong proof for the authenticity of the Scriptures. Again considering the New Testament, over 24,000 manuscript fragments in Greek, Latin, and other languages have been discovered and handed down over the centuries. 5,800 of those manuscripts are complete or nearly complete Greek documents. Then there are a number of manuscripts that even date way far back to 100-300 years after the original autographs have been discovered. These manuscripts all give evidence towards the historical veracity of the New Testament. F. F. Bruce rightly said, *"There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good attestation as the New Testament."* The Dead Sea scrolls have provided overwhelming evidence concerning the validity of the Old Testament writings. These manuscripts date from the 3rd century BC to the 1st century AD. The evidence is simply overwhelming, and we are left with little excuse to not be convinced of the Bible's authenticity.
- This conviction on our part might give us the motivation needed to share this information with a friends who are much more skeptical about the Bible's validity. We would share this evidence in hopes of convincing them of their need to recognize the Bible as God's Word, but they might come back at us with a question that could catch us off guard if we have never heard it nor considered it before, *"What about the disputed Biblical texts?"*
- It was within the past couple of months during a Bible class that someone was reading a text and after concluding someone asked why they skipped a particular verse. They hadn't skipped the verse, but the verse just simply wasn't included in their particular Bible translation. That led to a few quick words about why it was the case, but I thought it would be good for us to take some time considering the fact that there are some verses in the Bible that are disputed as not being real or authentic. We might think this is simply a tactic of our doubting friends to cause our own doubt in the Bible, but there are serious questions from even Bible believers as to whether or not every verse in our Bibles is from the mind of God. With this question in mind, let's consider what this question is asking and how it can affect our faiths in God and the Bible as His Word.

## **I. Disputed Biblical texts?**

### **A. Some verses of the Biblical text are doubted as being authentic God-inspired writings.**

1. It would be very difficult for anyone to argue that the Bible as a whole is not from God. We have already looked at the abundance of evidence to convince us of this being the case. However, if

there are even just a couple of verses that might be in doubt, then the skeptics are willing to dig in their heels and make this their battle ground to show that the Bible isn't what it claims to be.

This leads us to these considerations over verses that are doubted as being genuinely authentic.

2. There are over 31,000 verses contained within the Bible as a whole (31,102 verses to be exact), and a whopping 39 of those 31,000ish verses (.0013%) are seriously considered to not be authentic in regard to the original writings of the sacred texts. Those verses that I have found that fall into these categories would be: Matthew 12:47; Matthew 17:21; Matthew 18:11; Matthew 23:14; Mark 7:16; Mark 9:44 & 46; Mark 11:26; Mark 15:28; Mark 16:9-20; Luke 17:36; Luke 23:17; John 7:53-8:11; Acts 8:37; Acts 15:34; Acts 28:29; & Romans 16:24.
3. The way that these verses are dealt with will vary from Bible translation to translation. While the New American Standard Bible and New King James Versions and others will include all verses with a footnote and sometimes brackets, other Bibles such as the New English Translation, English Standard Version, Christian Standard Bible, and others will often omit the disputed verses all together with a footnote to acknowledge this has having taken place. The way these verses are dealt with is completely up to those committees that in charge of producing these different Bible translations. So what exactly is the issue with these verses that cause them to have to make these decisions? Why are their doubts about the authenticity of these particular verses?

**B. This doubt is caused by the examination of the Bible's manuscripts.**

1. The process by which these ancient manuscripts are examined in order to verify their authenticity and what should be included in what is known as the Bible is called Textual Criticism. The reason this process is needed is because the original documents containing the inspired writings of Scripture simply are not available to us today. They had either been lost, destroyed, or hidden away, and therefore textual criticism was developed for it to be determined what is valid and authentic and what is a fake.
2. The process of textual criticism takes a few different forms with three particular forms being the primary methods that are used. (gotquestions.org)
  - a) The first primary method is known as the Textus Receptus. This method takes the work that was done by a man named Erasmus in the 16th century, and uses his manuscript as the basis for its decisions in translating the Bible. This manuscript was the compilation of all manuscripts that were available during the 1500s. From this manuscript came the King James & New King James Bible translations.
  - b) The next method is call the Majority Text. This method operates much like a democratic process where all of the available manuscripts are compiled together and the textual critics will determine the appropriate translation based upon what is most commonly found. If the majority of manuscripts say "he said" and only a few say "they said" then it is assumed that "he said" is the proper translation. This method is much less popular than the other methods, and no major Bible translations use this means of textual criticism.
  - c) The final method is called the critical or eclectic method. This process takes all evidence both internal and external into consideration when determining how something should be translated and whether or not it is legitimate to the text. The external questions center around how many manuscripts say a particular thing, how old those manuscripts are, and where in the world they have been found? The internal considerations include any differentiations between the manuscript and what could have caused them and which readings seem to fit most logically together. Many of the more modern translations use this type of textual criticism such as the New International version, the New American Standard, and the New Living Translation along with others.

3. For the vast majority of the disputed verses that are listed in the bulletin, the New American standard designates that they are being bracketed because they do not appear in the earliest manuscripts. This means that they are found in manuscripts that date to long after the original writings would have been published and the discovery of older manuscripts points to them having been added much later on down the line of the manuscripts. The eclectic method of textual criticism is the driving force behind this type of approach. It not only looks at the how many manuscripts say a particular thing, but it is also very interested in how the dates of the manuscripts stack up. This means that just because a large number of newer manuscripts contain a verse doesn't mean the verse is authentic, especially if the fewer number of the earliest manuscripts don't contain those particular verse or verses.

**C. Most famous examples: Mark 16:9-20 & John 7:53-8:11.**

1. To see and hear Mark 16:9-20 being included in this discussion of disputed text might catch us a bit off guard since we so often look to this text for evidence concerning the need for baptism for the forgiveness of sins and salvation, but this "longer ending" of Mark is usually noted by either brackets or a footnote as being present only in later manuscripts. The New American Standard also includes what is known as the "shorter ending" of Mark which reads, *"And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And later that, Jesus sHimself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation."* My Bible notes that a few late manuscripts include this verse at the end of verse 8 while a few others have it after verse 20. It is theorized by many textual critics that the proper ending for what we have the most evidence for is **verse 8** which to us might seem like a very strange way to end a Gospel record. It could be that Mark simply leaves the end of his Gospel with a cliffhanger of the Marys being afraid, or it could be that the actual ending of the Gospel has been lost to history. Regardless of the reality, it is widely accepted that what is contained within our Bible is not the legitimate ending of the Gospel of Mark.
2. The disputed section of John's Gospel containing the woman caught in adultery has long considered illegitimate at worst and simply misplaced at best for there have been only a handful minuscule manuscripts that place this story earlier after **John 7:36** and even others after **Luke 21:38**. Many have additionally noted that the context of these verses causes it to look as if it is misplaced. Logically, **John 8:12** would fit on the heels of **John 7:52**, but instead what we have inserted is a break in the narrative where Jesus leaves the temple to go to the Mount of Olives before returning to the temple where he was again teaching the people. This in and of itself might not seem that odd, but the oldest manuscripts have this section as being absent. The first Greek church father to mention this supposed section of John's isn't until the twelfth century. Wescott and Hort publishers of a Greek version of the New Testament in 1881 were so convinced that this section was not legitimate to John's Gospel stated, *"It has no right to a place in the Fourth Gospel, yet it is evidently from an ancient source, and it could not now without serious loss be entirely banished from the New Testament."* They would also say that the earliest Greek manuscript to include this section dates to the fifth century, and yet it is the only manuscript to do so. The section does not being to be found consistently until the 8th century. This story of the woman caught in adultery very well could have happened, but it doesn't seem to have been a part of John's original Gospel account in this location.

The logical question to ask when considering a discussion such as this is, "If the determinations of the work of textual criticism are true and these verses are more than likely not a part of the original inspired writings of the New Testament, then what type of impact will that have on our faiths? Does this make the entirety of the New Testament unreliable? If not then what about these specific verses that are considered as disputed verses? What type of impact will they have on us as Christians?

## II. What affect should this have on our faith in the reliability of the Bible as God's inspired work?

### A. Most of the verses are non-consequential.

1. The vast majority of the information that is given to us in these disputed verses are extremely non-consequential. Much of the information found in these verses are simply details of the different narratives of things that happened or things that people said.
  - a) Matthew 12:47, *"Someone said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.'"*
  - b) Mark 7:16, *"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."*
  - c) Luke 23:17, *"Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner."*
  - d) Acts 15:34, *"But it seemed good to Silas to remain there."*
  - e) Romans 16:24, *"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."*
2. While these verses and others might be interesting and provide a little more insight into what is taking place, the reality is that we would be impacted none whatsoever if these verses were not ever recorded as having been in these particular texts. However, there are other verses in which some significant teachings are recorded. What do we do when this is the case?

### B. Any significant teachings in these verses can be supported elsewhere.

1. For example, **Matthew 18:11** tells us, *"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost."* This seems like something that is pretty important for us to know, and thankfully this is also stated by Luke in **Luke 19:10**. Additionally, what is found in **Mark 11:26** concerning the need to forgive others so our Father will forgive us is found in Matthew's Gospel account. The fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning Jesus being numbered with the transgressors in **Mark 15:28** is also found in Luke's account.
2. The big example of **Mark 16:9-20** being included in this discussion surely causes us some angst since we often use this specific text to show the need for being baptized for the sake of salvation. Does this mean that we can no longer show this as being according to God's will? Of course not! There are so many verses that are not disputed that we can look to for evidence of God's true purpose and meaning for baptism. Any other number of Scriptures such as **Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, Romans 6, 1 Peter 3:21**, and others will do the job just fine.
3. Additionally, the principles of mercy and patience with others that are found in **John 7:53-8:11** can be found in **Matthew 7:1-5, Luke 6:36, Galatians 6:1, James 5:19,20**, and others. We don't have to have **John 8** to prove that God wants us to be merciful. But then there is also what is found in **Acts 8:37** that we haven't mentioned up to this point. Since this text might not be authentic, does that mean that we shouldn't confess Jesus as the Son of God upon our decision to be baptized? Of course it doesn't mean that! A willingness to confess Jesus as the Lord of our life is always something to be willing to do, especially at the time when we decide to put him on in faithful baptism. We don't have to have an example to show us this is appropriate since we have other texts such as **Matthew 10:32 & Romans 10:9** that show us the need and benefit of doing so. The Scriptures that have been attested as authentic through serious inspection and criticism have given us all things that we need in order to know and do the will of God.

Therefore, the next time your are speaking with someone about spiritual things and they challenge your faith in God and the Bible based upon its authenticity, I hope that you are more confident and ready to explain to them why you believe in the validity of God's Word. Further, I hope that you are even prepared to explain why some verses are in some Bibles and not in others. This isn't anything that should shake our faith, but we ought to actually be thankful that so many people care about God's Word to the degree that they want to be positive that everything found within it is supposed to be there. With this confidence in God's Word firmly rooted within our hearts, may we go throughout this week daily giving strong attention and consideration to it as we strive to even more fully know who He is and what His will is for us in this life.