“The Bible Has Been Changed and Corrupted Over Time”

You Bible-thumping Christians are so deluded and stupid. The Bible has been so changed and translated and mistranslated over time that it can’t be trusted. Didn’t you play the telephone game when you were a kid? Whatever the first person whispered to the second person, is going to be very different from what the last person hears. Stop acting as if you have all the answers—your Bible is a book of myths.

You’re in good company; a lot of people think that way because they simply don’t know the facts about how trustworthy the Bible really is. When you find out the truth about how the Bible has been handed down from one generation to the next, your charge will have as much significance as proclaiming that courts have no basis for determining the constitutionality of issues since the Constitution was written so long ago we can’t know what it originally said.

But we can go back to the original Constitution and check, right?

We don’t have the original biblical documents, but we have the next best thing: thousands of copies of the original New Testament manuscripts, by which we can determine what *was* originally said. The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (www.csntm.org) tells me that the current number is about 5500 copies of just the Greek New Testament, and when we combine the Greek with all translations in the various languages before the printing press was invented, there are a staggering 15,000 copies of NT manuscripts in existence, with more being found every day!

Greg Koukl of Stand to Reason (www.str.org) helps illustrate how Bible scientists (the discipline of textual criticism) can

assure us of the Bible's accuracy:

RECONSTRUCTING AUNT SALLY'S LETTER

Pretend your Aunt Sally learns in a dream the recipe for an elixir that preserves her youth. When she wakes up, she scribbles the directions on a scrap of paper, then runs to the kitchen to make up her first glass. In a few days Aunt Sally is transformed into a picture of radiant youth because of her daily dose of "Sally's Secret Sauce."

Aunt Sally is so excited she sends detailed, hand-written instructions on how to make the sauce to her three bridge partners (Aunt Sally is still in the technological dark ages—no photocopier or email). They, in turn, make copies for ten of their own friends.

All goes well until one day Aunt Sally's pet schnauzer eats the original copy of the recipe. In a panic she contacts her three friends who have mysteriously suffered similar mishaps, so the alarm goes out to the others in attempt to recover the original wording.

Sally rounds up all the surviving hand-written copies, twenty-six in all. When she spreads them out on the kitchen table, she immediately notices some differences. Twenty-three of the copies are exactly the same. Of the remaining three, however, one has misspelled words, another has two phrases inverted ("mix then chop" instead of "chop then mix") and one includes an ingredient none of the others has on its list.

Do you think Aunt Sally can accurately reconstruct her original recipe from this evidence? Of course she can. The misspellings are obvious errors. The single inverted phrase stands out and can easily be repaired. Sally would then strike the extra ingredient, reasoning it's more plausible one person would add an item in error than 25 people would accidentally omit it.

> Even if the variations were more numerous or more diverse, the original could still be reconstructed with a high level of confidence if Sally had enough copies.
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> This, in simplified form, is how scholars do "textual criticism," an academic method used to test all documents of antiquity, not just religious texts. It's not a haphazard effort based on hopes and guesses; it's a careful linguistic process allowing an alert critic to determine the extent of possible corruption of any work.{1}

When the thousands of copies of manuscripts (far more than for any other document of antiquity) are compared, we can know that the New Testament is 99.5% textually pure. In the entire text of 20,000 lines, only 40 lines are in doubt (about 400 words), and none affects any significant doctrine.{2}

Even if all the manuscripts in the whole world were to disappear, the New Testament is so comprehensively quoted by early church letters, essays and other extra-biblical sources that we could still reconstruct almost the entire testament.

We have a much fuller explanation of this in our article "Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?" at www.probe.org/are-the-biblical-documents-reliable

The historical evidence for the reliability of the biblical documents is so great that we can rest assured that the Bible we read today is the same Bible that God intended for us to have from the very beginning.

Wishing you well,

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

Notes

1. Greg Koukl, *Solid Ground*, Jan/Feb 2005, Stand to Reason.

2. Norman Geisler and William Nix, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 475.