



## What the Other Side Doesn't Tell You

### The Original Text of the New Testament Has Not Been Lost

Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Part one of a series

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*The vast majority of evangelical college and seminary professors teach that the authentic Word of God probably does not exist today; the original wording has been lost.*

*Can they possibly be right?*

**F**acts are the same for everyone. We cannot simply invent our own. But two people may look at the same facts very differently, or choose to ignore facts. Why? Their presuppositions disagree.

Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in evangelicalism's deep divide on the most crucial of all issues: the authenticity of Scripture.

On one side stand those who believe God's often-repeated promise to preserve His Word forever, not "one jot or one tittle" lost (Matthew 5:18). On the other side stand the majority of evangelical college and seminary professors who deny that the authentic Word of God, as given in the original manuscripts, exists today.

#### The Textual Critics' Presupposition

The "other side" in academia, and those they have influenced who stand in tens of thousands of pulpits around the world, dominate contemporary evangelical thinking. Many (but not all) in evangelical academia seek to reassure the church by stating that they believe in the inerrancy of Scripture "in the original autographs." But they view the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible through the lens of this presupposition: *The original wording has been lost.*

They assert that because we do not have the original manuscripts but only handwritten copies produced over many centuries that contain many textual



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variants, the original wording of Scripture is unrecognizable and therefore irretrievable.

Dr. Daniel Wallace of Dallas Theological Seminary represents this school of thought:

We no longer live in a black-and-white world. We never did really, but those who are embroiled in debates about the Bible have often viewed things in binary hues. These achromatic ideologies can be found on both sides of the theological aisle.

Wallace goes on to say that “absolute certainty”

must be avoided when we examine the New Testament text. We do not have now – in our critical Greek texts or any translations – exactly what the authors of the New Testament wrote. Even if we did, we would not know it. There are many, many places in which the text of the New Testament is uncertain....

The new generation of evangelical scholars is far more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty than previous generations. They know the difference between core beliefs and those that are more peripheral. They recognize that even if we embrace the concept of absolute truth, absolute *certainty* about it is a different matter. [1]

We can't have absolute certainty that what we have in our hands today is in every respect the Word of God. [2]

Evangelical scholars' presupposition that the original wording of Scripture is lost and unrecoverable places them in an uncomfortable position: they must argue that passages such as Matthew 5:18 and 1 Peter 1:24-25, which declare God's promises to preserve His Word fully intact, cannot mean what they plainly say. They recognize that if they took those passages at face value, their presupposition that the original wording is lost could not stand; it would mean that God is a liar.

### The Presupposition of Believers in God's Promise

On the other hand, those who are convinced that Scripture unequivocally states God's promise to preserve every word and every letter of Scripture forever, view the manuscript evidence through a very different presuppositional lens: *The original wording has not been lost.*



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This view rests on the inseparable doctrines of inspiration and preservation:

- God the Holy Spirit acted upon and through the men who wrote the Scriptures in such a way that they wrote the very Word of God (2 Peter 1:19-21, 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- God's Word has been providentially preserved entirely intact, down to the present day, and will be preserved forever as God himself has promised (1 Chronicles 16:14-15, Psalm 12:6-7, Psalm 119:89-96, Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 5:18, Matthew 24:35, Luke 16:17, John 10:35, 1 Peter 1:24-25).

According to this view, the authentic Biblical text is therefore identifiable and absolutely trustworthy. There is not the slightest cause for uncertainty about it.

Linguist and manuscript scholar Dr. Wilbur Pickering, who has worked with the New Testament manuscript evidence more extensively than anyone else in the entire history of the church, represents this school of thought:

[H]ow can we know whether or not the Creator did in fact address a written revelation to us; and if He did, how can we identify it?

Taking the point of view that the Sovereign Creator decided to furnish orientation to our race, He would know that He would have to make it recognizable for what it was, and the evidences would need to remain available to succeeding generations.

But how can we know what means He would use to make His revelation recognizable? We can know by looking at what He has done, and working back, as it were....I here state the presuppositions that I bring to my task: the Sovereign Creator exists, He has addressed a written Revelation to our race, and He has preserved it intact to this day to the extent that we can know what it is, based on objective criteria. [3]

### **Who Is Right?**

Which view is the correct one? Logically, there are three possibilities. The textual critics are wrong; believers in God's promises are wrong; both are wrong. Sound presuppositions bring truth to light. Faulty presuppositions, left unchallenged, will propagate error.

We must examine the evidence to know if a presupposition is true or false. A correct presupposition leads to accurate conclusions.



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This article introduces a series in which we shall focus on the evidence related to the New Testament. That evidence overwhelmingly, irrefutably supports these conclusions:

- The original wording of the Bible has not been lost. God has preserved His Word as He repeatedly promised – every word, every letter, nothing missing, nothing adulterated. We can have absolute confidence in the Authentic Word of God.
- In the case of the New Testament, that authentic text is preserved in the body of Greek manuscripts known as Family 35. It has been empirically proved that these manuscripts communicate the Word of God exactly as originally given by the Holy Spirit. All *inauthentic* New Testament manuscripts – those used for most Bible translations in the 20th and 21st centuries – are deviations from Family 35.
- Honest examination of the evidence makes it clear that textual critics of the Bible – just like evolutionist scholars in the natural sciences – sometimes deal with the evidence dishonestly. They often ignore, suppress, and distort the facts. Sometimes they even invent "facts" to support their case.

### Why Is This Subject Important?

With few and precious exceptions, pastors and missionaries who have graduated from evangelical Bible colleges and seminaries over the past four-plus decades have been trained under the influence of seemingly plausible but pernicious falsehoods about the origin, transmission and preservation of Scripture. They have received those falsehoods from learned, respected instructors who had received them from their own learned, respected instructors, and so on over several generations.

The average evangelical church member of the past several generations has, in turn, received those plausible but pernicious falsehoods from the pulpit as facts. Those falsehoods have, over time, come to be treated as axioms. The propagation of those falsehoods has massively undermined Christians' confidence in the authenticity of the Word of God. Without an authentic Word from God there is no basis for the Christian faith.



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This phenomenon manifests itself throughout the organized church today. *The State of American Theology Study, 2016* revealed the following measurements of unbelief concerning the Bible:

- Only 37% of those surveyed believe that God is the Author of Scripture.
- 55% do not believe the Bible is literally true, or are not sure.
- 60% believe that "modern science discredits the claims of the Bible" or are not sure that the Bible is scientifically accurate.
- Only 33% believe that the Bible alone is the written Word of God.
- Only 29% believe the Bible is "100% accurate in all that it teaches."
- Only 45% believe the Biblical account of Christ's resurrection is accurate and actually occurred.
- Only 23% believe that a church that does not preach from the Bible cannot be considered a Christian church. [4]

However, it is unfair to be harsh on most evangelical pastors, or their forebears, who have sided with the present majority in evangelical academia. Yes, some have aggressively sided with the academic majority in what amounts to a rejection of what Scripture says about itself. But most pastors simply have not been exposed to the facts and evidence that refute the predominant academic position, and do not understand its great dangers. Additionally, the natural human tendency is for a student to stand in awe of the credentialed scholar who presents what appear to be great new insights on a vital subject – and perhaps not to ask probing questions for fear of embarrassment.

We must understand that the intellectual lineage of the falsehoods to which most present-day pastors and missionaries have been exposed goes back to men from Britain and America who, in the 18th and 19th centuries, went to universities in continental Europe (especially Germany) for parts of their training. There they imbibed sophistries about Scripture from unregenerated men who did not believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible, treated the only supernatural Book as though it were any other human book, and stated their falsehoods as facts without presenting credible evidence.

We must also remember the conditions that prevailed in the time when falsehoods about the text of the Bible began to spread. In the 19th century, the mass of New Testament manuscript evidence that later became easily accessible was



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mostly unavailable even to scholars, much less to pastors and other interested students of Scripture. Defense of the providential preservation of Scripture *based on manuscript evidence* – by far the strongest exhibits for such a defense – was therefore difficult even for leading opponents of the textual critics such as John William Burgon and Frederick Scrivener in the 19th century, and Edward Freer Hills in the 20th century.

It was not until the late 19th and early 20th centuries that this picture began to change. Improvements in the means and speed of transportation made it far more feasible to travel to the libraries, museums, monasteries, and other institutions where New Testament manuscripts are housed.

In the 21st century, the advent of the Internet and digital imaging brought about a quantum leap in manuscript accessibility. Massive numbers of Biblical manuscripts in locations all over the world that were previously unknown or little known, and had rarely (if ever) been examined in-depth by scholars, are now readily accessible from any computer with an Internet connection. This has not only made evidence-based proof of the providential preservation of Scripture possible; it has also made the textual critics' refusal to honestly examine the evidence – and their dogged grip on unsupportable presuppositions – untenable and inexcusable.

### About This Series

This article introduces a series examining these issues. This is the first, God willing, of many series to be published on our website in a new department called *What the Other Side Doesn't Tell You*.

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Articles in this series:

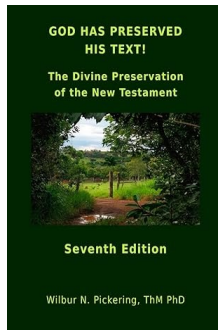
1. The Original Text of the New Testament Has Not Been Lost (this introduction)
2. Identifying the Authentic Text Requires Biblical Presuppositions
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6. Christians Recognized the Autographs as Holy Scripture While the Apostles Were Alive
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8. The Authentic Text Was Transmitted Carefully
9. Who Was Best Qualified to Transmit the Authentic Text, Where, and Why?
10. The Transmission of the Text was Normal
11. The Stream of Transmission Shows Which Manuscripts Are Authentic – And Which Are Not
12. Family 35 Is the Authentic New Testament Text: Seven Proofs



Much of this series will be drawn from part one of *God Has Preserved His Text: The Divine Preservation of the New Testament*, 7th edition (2025), by Dr. Wilbur N. Pickering. You can download a [free PDF](#), or purchase a hard copy on [Amazon](#). All book proceeds go directly to Dr. Pickering.

### References:

1. Daniel B. Wallace, Foreword to *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*, edited by Elijah Hixson and Peter J. Gurry (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019), pages xi and xii. Italics in the original.
2. Daniel B. Wallace, *Is What We Have Now What They Wrote Then?* Dallas Theological Seminary, 2023, accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5AKPiBZcis>
3. Wilbur N. Pickering, *God Has Preserved His Text! The Divine Preservation of the New Testament*, 7th edition (Brasilia: Project Underground Church, 2025), pages 5-6.
4. [The State of American Theology Study 2016, Final Report](#), jointly published by LifeWay Research and Ligonier Ministries, and reproduced by permission.

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