



Research: What's Been Done – Part One

Transcript of an interview with Dr. Paul Elliott, president of ASF

Video available on our website

Most of Christian academia – and as a result, the evangelical church – has lost confidence that the authentic Word of God even exists. That is a shocking statement, but we found it is easy to prove.

How did academia and the church get into this mess? That question has been a major focus of our research. This is not a mere technical issue for scholars and pastors. It is a ground-level issue for every Christian.

I think I should begin by reminding everybody that in two other videos I've told the story of my personal journey of discovery that led to the founding of the Authentic Scripture Foundation. And in another part, we gave examples of leading men in Christian academia and the evangelical church whose teachings have undermined confidence in Authentic Scripture.

The fact is, most of Christian academia and the church has lost confidence that the authentic Word of God *even exists*. That's a shocking statement. But it's easy to prove.

A Ground-Level Issue

We must restore confidence in the authentic Word of God. That's why we started the Authentic Scripture Foundation: by God's grace, to help to turn the tide of denial and doubt. Our goal is to declare the evidence of the existence of Authentic Scripture – and all that this means. It's not simply a technical issue for scholars and pastors. It's a basic issue, a ground-level issue, for every Christian.

It's a ground-level issue for the preaching of the Gospel, for the *definition* of the Gospel – saving faith in Christ. It's a ground-level issue for thinking and living in a way that pleases God once you're in Christ. If we don't have confidence that the authentic Word of God has been preserved, and that it exists today and that it will exist forever, then we literally have nothing to stand on, nothing that we can have confidence in, nothing we can rely on, no firm foundation.



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The words of the great hymn – “How a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word” – become pretty meaningless if we don't have that confidence. Without that confidence, we have nothing to offer to a lost and dying world. The church is nothing more than a social club if we don't have absolute truth unmixed with anything false or doubtful.

Jesus in John chapter 12 said this: “He who rejects me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the Word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” This is foundational to the Gospel. Man has sinned, man will be judged. And the basis on which we understand what sin is, the basis on which we understand why and how Christ will judge us on the last day – that basis is the Word of God.

If that's not preserved forever, then what Jesus said about the standard He will employ at Last Judgment is inherently false. That's just pure logic. But Christian academia and the church are today undermining the definition of sin. They're undermining the doctrine of the Last Judgment. They're undermining these indispensable elements of the Gospel.

How are they doing that? By undermining confidence in the existence of Authentic Scripture.

“What Can the Righteous Do?”

When I think about these things, I often think of the opening verses of Psalm 11. David says this: “The wicked bend their bow. They make ready their arrow on the string, that they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart. If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

Indeed – what *can* the righteous do? Produce as many versions of the Bible, as many translations, as you wish. But if Christian academia and the church are continually firing their arrows at the authenticity of the Word of God, and we don't have an answer for those denials of Authentic Scripture, it's all over.

We might as well shut down the church. We might as well stop preaching if all that we have to offer is, “Well, as best we know, we *think* this is what the Bible says. We don't know *exactly* what the original writers actually wrote. God hasn't preserved that.” If that's all we've got, then what we have is nothing better than the pagan philosophers. We don't have anything better to offer than the religious cults. All we have to offer is our opinions on something that we're not sure about – not the authentic Word of God.



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Where to Begin?

And so I, and others who began to be involved with us, started thinking about this. If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? How do we approach this? Where do we begin?

I became convinced that the first thing we needed to understand was this: How did Christian academia, Christian education get into this mess? And how did the evangelical church, as a result, get into this mess? And in that picture, who stood firm? Who compromised? How did the denials come? Where were those seeds of doubt sown? And how long ago did it start? Where did it begin? How did it spread, and who was involved?

As I mentioned in an earlier video segment, I began accumulating books on the subject. I began doing research. I began looking at what people had to say on both sides of the issue, and I soon discovered a problem. The problem was that a significant part of the published information on both sides is unreliable. People had written things, people coming from different points of view, and unfortunately, some of them misrepresented their own side or they misrepresented the other side, sometimes both.

And unfortunately, there's a significant amount of revisionist history on both sides. "Fake news" – as we use the term today. Some of the misrepresentations, I became convinced, were deliberate. That became obvious. They range all the way from what we might call shading the truth – only telling part of the truth in order to support a point of view – all the way to outright, blatant falsehoods.

In other cases, people left out key facts. Sometimes that happened because they didn't know about those facts. Sometimes they decided to leave them out because they were inconvenient. They didn't support the narrative that they wanted to present. But in many cases, I think that people were very well-meaning. Some of them didn't realize they were misrepresenting things. They simply were repeating what somebody else had written in another book or another article, and they were taking that at face value. They were trusting something to be true, when in fact it wasn't true or accurate.

Soon it became clear that we needed to verify literally *everything*. We needed to check the facts as best we could. And so the next question was, how do you do that?

We Must Verify *Everything*

You have to go back to original sources. You have to find out what the men and women and groups involved actually said, what they actually did. Not what other people say



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they said and did, but, what did they actually say and do? So I realized we've got to do a lot of research. In the beginning, I had no idea how much.

One of the things that we needed to do, first of all, was to find out if records still existed. What you're looking for are original letters and documents that these people wrote, that organizations produced, and other kinds of records. They range all over the place. Diagrams, photographs, slides, film strips, moving pictures in later times, sound recordings. Attendance records at meetings can be very revealing. Newspaper and magazine articles, both reporting certain events and information and also commenting on what happened along the way. All sorts of things.

Where Would We Find the Evidence?

Well, where do you find these things? Ironically, I soon found out that we needed to start not in the churches and schools that had remained true to a belief in preserved Authentic Scripture. We needed to begin our quest by delving into the records of people and schools and churches that had long ago departed from that belief. In other words, we needed to begin in the liberal mainline churches, the liberal mainline colleges, their seminaries. We needed also to go to the evangelical schools, but we needed to go to the other places first. We needed to understand the patterns of unbelief before we could examine the response to that from the other side.

When we began that journey and started answering these questions, by that time I had earned a theological Ph.D. But the kind of research that we now needed to do – I was in many ways a novice at that. I'd done basic research, but not of the kind and the scope that we were going to need to do for this. I had a lot to learn.

The main thing I discovered pretty quickly is that you can find a lot of answers in the mainline college and seminary libraries, but you won't find them on the bookshelves that are open to the public. Every large college and seminary library has an area that they call special collections. Special collections contain the archives of the past, and those special collections aren't stored out in the open in these libraries.

Why is that? It's because of what they contain. Special collections contain the personal papers of men and women, the documents of organizations, all kinds of things. As I've said, all sorts of media. Some of them are quite old. Some of the documents that we've worked with date as far back as 400 years ago. It's fascinating just to hold something like that in your hands and work with it.



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A lot of these things, especially if you're going back before the 20th century or the late 19th century, are handwritten. Most of them are handwritten. A lot of them are fragile. And so these special collections are usually stored in a special climate controlled part of a library part that's off limits to the general public. They range all over the place. Special collections can be very small, just a few pieces of paper pertaining to a particular individual or subject. There are others that are huge. One of the biggest collections that we've worked with is at Princeton Seminary, and that one collection has over 700 large heavy boxes of material. We've only looked at about a half a dozen so far.

Most special collections, as I said, aren't available to the general public. You have to demonstrate to the library curators that you have what they consider to be a legitimate research interest before they'll grant you access. You have to make an appointment to see these things. You have to tell them in advance exactly what you want to see.

And so the day before you arrive, they bring the containers of the things you want to see out of storage. They bring them into a secure room and they let you into that secure room with the documents, the photographs, the films, the old magazines, whatever it is. You have to leave your briefcase and your other personal belongings outside the secure room. No food, no drink comes in with you, not even a bottle of water. You can only bring your computer and any scanner, camera, or recorder that you're going to use, and perhaps paper and pencil to take notes. And it's always pencil, never pen.

You have to provide a valid legal ID. You have to sign a register recording the fact that you're there on a certain date and you're looking at certain containers of documents, so that if there are ever any problems, they can trace back – Who was the last individual who worked with this?

They often require you, especially with older, fragile things, to wear special gloves to handle these things and to use special kinds of handling props to work with them. Usually there's a curator in the room with you all the time, watching the whole time to make sure you're handling everything carefully. To make sure you're not stealing anything. Sometimes they search you before you leave. They're protecting the archives of the past, and that's serious business. And I'm glad that they take it seriously. I didn't object to that kind of treatment.

Some of the special collections are well organized, others aren't. Some of them have what's called a finding aid. As that name indicates, it's an index or a directory that helps you find what you're looking for. Sometimes a special collection has a finding aid that's very detailed. That 700-box archive that I mentioned has an incredibly detailed finding



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aid, down to individual pieces of paper in a lot of cases, which is a tremendous help. I'm always thankful for that kind of thing. It saves so much time.

Other collections don't have any finding aid at all. You're completely on your own. You've got to go through everything one item at a time. And in either case, there's a lot of detective work. Working in these archives has also helped us to identify people still-living people that we need to contact in order to get further details. So we've had opportunities to correspond with, and in some cases, conduct interviews with, people who have been able to tell us more about what happened, why it happened, and when and where, and who was involved. That's always tremendously helpful.

Historical Records Are in Danger

We also discovered that there's something else about these archives that I didn't realize in the beginning: Some of them are in danger, and the very idea of the accumulation of such archives in the future is also in danger. Why is that? Well, there's a movement to promote what's called “diversity” in special collections and other types of historical archives. Liberal theological and secular scholars are saying that the archives that are found in most colleges and seminaries today aren't “inclusive” enough, or not “diverse” enough.

Well, what does this mean in practice? What the term “inclusion” – as these liberal scholars use it – really means is *exclusion*. They're saying, for example, that colleges and seminaries need to remove and even destroy the archives of any theologian, preacher, church, or any other entity that, for example, has the remotest connection to slavery in the 19th century or earlier, whether that's in America or Britain or anywhere else.

And we also, they say, we need to exclude anybody who opposed the feminist movement, or anybody who has opposed the LGBTQ agenda in more recent times. It's the same thinking that's behind the movement to remove and destroy public statues of historical figures of the past. The archivist at one college that had evangelical beginnings told me that the college administration now prohibits their archivists from receiving and cataloging the papers of any preacher, theologian, church leader who is from what the administration considers to be a white European background. We've got to exclude them, they say.

We were told by an archivist at another seminary that there's pressure from the faculty to destroy their archives of theologians who lived in the South during the Civil War. Whether those men advocated slavery or opposed it didn't matter. Faculty members are pressuring the library to destroy the archives, for example, of a leading 19th century



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theologian, simply because his uncle was a general in the Confederate army. They also want to remove or destroy archives of men and organizations who opposed the movement to instill doubts about the existence of Authentic Scripture in the 20th century.

And so our research has become not only an effort to discover what's in these historical archives, it's also turned into an effort to preserve those records digitally. A lot of these things, in fact most of them, have never been digitally recorded or scanned. So the digital records that we're creating would mean that these things would still be available, even if at some point the liberal insanity moves forward and the original documents are destroyed.

This interview continues in Part Two.

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