

The spiritual aspect of NT textual criticism

Wilbur N. Pickering, ThM PhD

I will discuss the subject under three headings: 1) the source of the problem; 2) the perpetuation of the problem; 3) a solution for the problem.

The source of the problem

There are only two spiritual kingdoms in this world. While the Sovereign Creator was walking this earth in the body of Jesus He declared: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters" (Luke 11:23, Matthew 12:30). Note that the Sovereign does not permit neutrality; either you are with Him or you are against Him (agnosticism is a passive rejection). Even what we do is not neutral; if we are not gathering with Him, we are scattering. There is no third option. Whoever is not with Jesus is with Satan, automatically. This applies to everything in this life; how much more then to something so important as the transmission of the biblical Text. Satan's opposition to God has always included opposition to any word of His directed to the human race. It began in the Garden: "Has God indeed said?" (Genesis 3:1). It follows that to exclude the supernatural from one's model of NT textual criticism is to be fundamentally irresponsible (unless it is wittingly perverse).

Surely, because responsibility begins with presupposition, and you choose your presuppositions. The point is, textual criticism, of anything written, presupposes that the original wording of that writing has been lost, in the sense that no one knows what it might have been. No one does textual criticism on today's newspaper or last week's magazine. No one even does textual criticism on the first edition (1611) of the KJV, since a copy still exists. Most practitioners of NT textual criticism use some form of eclecticism, and they are responsible for having made that choice—they tacitly accepted the presuppositions upon which eclecticism is based.¹ Eclecticism is based on the following presuppositions: 1) the NT writings are not inspired (had they been inspired, they would have been preserved); 2) the early Christians did not recognize them as inspired; 3) therefore they did not concern themselves to protect and preserve those writings; 4) therefore the original wording was lost in the sense that no one knew for sure what it might have been; 5) it was only when the superstition and credulity of the Christians had elevated those writings to the condition of 'Scripture' (around 200 AD) that they began to concern themselves with protection and preservation, only by then it was too late; 6) therefore there was no 'normal transmission' of the NT writings until after the third century.

Such presuppositions reject the available evidence to the contrary. We have historical evidence to support the following statements: 1) the apostles knew they were writing Scripture; 2) the apostles knew that colleagues were writing Scripture; 3) their contemporary Christians immediately recognized that those writings were Scripture; 4) therefore, they were concerned with their protection and preservation (this is demonstrable); 5) the proliferation of well-made copies started right away; 6) there was a normal transmission of those writings from the beginning and down through the centuries; 7) thus, the original wording was never lost.

Why do people reject the evidence, or at least ignore it? Because Satan blinds their minds, as is plainly stated in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. "So where our Gospel has actually been concealed, it has been hidden from those who are being wasted, 4 among whom the god of this age has blinded

¹ They may have been brainwashed, pressured into accepting something without understanding it, but that does not change the nature of the presuppositions. I will discuss this later.

the minds of the unbelieving, so that the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn on them.”

The Text clearly states that Satan, "the god of this age", is in the business of blinding the minds of unbelievers when they hear the Gospel, so they won't understand, so they won't be convicted, so they won't repent and convert. This is a terrible truth, the most terrible truth in the world, at least as I see it. The enemy has access to our minds, access in the sense that he has the power or ability to invade them, whether by introducing thoughts or by jamming our reasoning. The Lord Jesus had already declared this truth previously, when He explained the parable of the sower. "These are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown; but, as soon as they hear it Satan comes and takes away the word that was planted in their hearts" (Mark 4:15). In the parallel passage in Luke 8:12 Jesus adds the following words: "lest they believe and be saved". Note that the Word is already in the mind or heart of the person, but then Satan comes, invades the mind and "takes away" that word. I am not sure just how this intrusion by the enemy works, perhaps he causes a mental block of some sort, but the practical effect is that the Word becomes ineffective, as if the person had not even heard it.¹

Consider also 1 John 5:19 that says that “the whole world lies in the malignant one”. The verb ‘to lie’ here is used of lying on a bed—your entire weight is on the bed. A bed has no will, but Satan certainly does; the picture is one of control. The only way to escape this control is to surrender to Sovereign Jesus. Until you belong to Jesus, you remain in the world controlled by Satan.

Further, in addition to not permitting neutrality, Sovereign Jesus was strict about the requirements for identifying with Him. “Whoever is ashamed of me and **my words** in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of the Man will also be ashamed of Him whenever He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:38 and Luke 9:26). We are not allowed to be ashamed of the words that Jesus spoke; it is mandatory to agree with what He taught. Surely, because we will be judged by those words. “The one who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken, that is what will judge him on the last day;² because I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me, He gave me a command, what I should say and what I should speak” (John 12:48-49). So how can those words judge you? They will judge you based on what you did with them. But how can they

¹ The crucial question then becomes, what can we do about it? We find the answer in Mark 3:27. "No one can plunder the strong man's goods, invading his house, unless he first bind the strong man; then he may plunder his house." I have used the definite article with the first occurrence of 'strong man' because the Greek Text has it, the point being that this particular strong man has already been introduced in the immediate context. "The strong man" here is Satan. (The Jewish leaders tried to explain Jesus' authority over the demons by saying that He expelled them by the power of Beelzebub, prince of the demons. In His retort, Jesus does not waste time with that name but uses the enemy's proper name, Satan.)

So then, the Lord Jesus declares that it is impossible to steal Satan's goods unless we bind him first. (From His use of "no one", it seems clear that the Lord is enunciating a general principle or truth.) And what might the nature of those 'goods' be? In the context (see Matthew 12:22-24) Jesus had delivered someone from a demon that caused blindness and dumbness, and in their comments the scribes and Pharisees include other instances where Jesus had expelled demons—it seems clear that the "goods" are people who are subject to Satan's power, in one way or another. Thus we have the same essential truth as that declared in Acts 26:18—we have to do something about Satan's power over a person so that he or she can be saved! So what can we do? Since the point of handcuffs is to keep someone from acting, I believe that in so many words, aloud or in thought, we must forbid Satan from interfering in the minds of our hearers, before we preach. For more on this subject the reader may consult my site: www.prunch.org, or my book: *Essays, on Discipleship, Missions and Spiritual Warfare*, 2nd edition.

² 'Ignorance of the law is no excuse.' If the Bible exists in your language and you know how to read (or you know someone who can read), then you could have learned Jesus' sayings. Claiming that you didn't know won't hack it.

judge you? They can judge you because they are living (Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 1:23, Acts 7:38). Any word delivered by the Sovereign Creator will be authoritative.

2 John 9 goes in the same direction: "Anyone who turns aside and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God". If you turn aside, you are out. "Does not continue" can only refer to someone who has been 'in'. To continue in His teaching is to agree with Him. How can you have "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16) without thinking like He does?

So what is the point? The point is the following: Sovereign Jesus was adamant about the inspiration and preservation of the OT; and once glorified He was more than emphatic about the NT (Revelation 22:18-19). Although He was presumably referring specifically to the Apocalypse, we may reasonably extend the warning to the whole NT, based on the belief that all of the books of the NT are inspired. Anyone who does not think like Jesus does with regard to the inspiration and preservation of the Holy Scriptures is on the other side. The world in which we live is no longer 'post-modern', it is becoming increasingly anti-Christian. In North America and Europe people have already been put in prison for preaching what the Bible says. To spend eternity in the Lake of Fire is the price you will pay for being 'politically correct' in today's world.

In John 8:44 the Sovereign declared that Satan is "the father of lying", and that "there is no truth in him". According to Hebrew idiomatic usage, the 'son' of something is characterized by that something. It follows that to be the 'father' of something is to be the owner of that something. Several times Jesus called the Holy Spirit "the Spirit of the Truth" (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13). So, all truth belongs to the Holy Spirit, and all falsehood belongs to Satan. It follows that whenever someone lies, he will be serving Satan. And whenever someone embraces a lie (such as evolutionism, Marxism, humanism, relativism, Hortianism, etc.), he will be giving Satan a bridgehead in his mind, which Satan will try to develop into a stronghold. A stronghold of Satan on a given subject does not allow one to think freely about that subject. The person is forced to stay with the lie. (The only way out is for someone with the power of God to come and nullify the stronghold.)

It follows that as long as someone is teaching falsehood, he is serving Satan. Yes, because God "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2), since it is contrary to His essence; He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). Since no lie is of God, and there are only two sides, any lie is of Satan. Attention please: what someone thinks does not change reality. Saul of Tarsus thought he was serving God by persecuting Christians; only in fact he was serving Satan. Since eclectic textual criticism is based on falsehoods, it belongs to Satan. People who think that NT textual criticism is a grey area where anyone can have his 'jumps' are in for a rather nasty surprise. Just by the way, in today's world people are buying the idea that you create your own 'truth'. If something is 'your truth', no one else has the right to challenge it. Since all real truth is God's truth, there is no such thing as 'your truth', there is only 'your falsehood'. The truth is not democratic, it is not determined by human vote or opinion. The truth **is**.

Ephesians 2:2 states that Satan is "the spirit who is now at work in the sons of the disobedience". This spirit is presently at work (present tense) in 'the sons of the disobedience'. 'Sons' of something are characterized by that something, and the something in this case is 'the' disobedience (the Text has the definite article)—a continuation of the original rebellion against the Sovereign of the universe. Anyone in rebellion against the Creator is under satanic influence, direct or indirect (in most cases a demon acts as Satan's agent, since he is not omnipresent, when something more than the influence of the surrounding culture is required; that includes the academic culture). Anyone in rebellion against the Creator will also have strongholds of Satan in his mind. Of a certainty. If I am not mistaken, all editions of the Greek NT published by

the United Bible Societies were produced by 'sons of the disobedience', and Satan did not miss the opportunity.

Yes, but how can we know who is a son of the disobedience? Sovereign Jesus explained one way in Matthew 7:15-20:

“Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.¹ 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do people gather grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Just so, every good tree produces good fruits, but the rotten tree produces evil fruits.² 18 A good tree cannot produce evil fruits, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruits. 19 So every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.³ 20 Therefore, you will know them by their fruits.”

Exactly; just pay attention to the results of their work. Since the editors of the UBS editions foisted errors of fact and obvious contradictions on their texts, the result has been a constant weakening of confidence in the NT's integrity and reliability. Equally pernicious are the footnotes in many modern versions whose real purpose is to undermine confidence in the biblical text. Whoever undermines confidence in the biblical text is serving Satan. Just look at the 'fruits'. What a person does reflects what he believes. Also, if you have the Holy Spirit, and know how to listen to Him, you can ask Him about specific cases.

It has always been standard procedure for Satan and his servants to attack strong arguments in favor of the truth as if they were weak and wrong.⁴ To give one example, John William Burgon attacked the W-H theory and text, based on objective evidence, but he also defended the Textus Receptus, that he called the Traditional Text, citing divine providence. The academic world severely ignored the objective evidence and vehemently attacked what they called Burgon’s ‘theological’ argument. They demonized ‘theological’ argument and created a psychosis on that subject. What is the strongest possible argument in support of the biblical Text? Precisely that God inspired it and then preserved it! So Satan energized his servants to do all in their power to exclude the supernatural from the discipline.

Their procedure was totally perverse, satanic, because Burgon’s ‘theological’ argument was in reality a statement of his presuppositions, which he stated openly, as any true scholar should. It is impossible to work without presuppositions, but they attacked Burgon for even having them! They were perverse because they pretended that they did not have presuppositions, and of course they failed to state them. That is dirty.

And then there are the canards, falsehoods that have acquired the status of ‘fact’ within the discipline. It has been standard fare within the discipline to refer to the Byzantine text as being a ‘controlled text’. Whether or not that would be a good thing would depend on who did the controlling. But the idea is clearly presented as being a negative factor because it is used to ‘justify’ neglecting the Byzantine MSS. So far as I know, those who use the idea as a negative factor have never identified who did the controlling. However, if a text is ‘controlled’, someone

¹ Probably demonized; demonic prophecies are always destructive.

² The Lord used 'rotten' and 'evil' (or 'malignant') because He was really talking about people, not trees.

³ The Lord is very clear about the eternal destiny of people who do not produce good fruit. Remember Ephesians 2:8-10—we are not saved by good works, but we are indeed saved for good works; if we do not produce, we are not saved.

⁴ In today’s world, take a hard look at any ‘principle’ or ‘law’ that Satan is using, such as ‘everything is relative’ or ‘hate speech’. It is the opposite that will be true.

has to do the controlling—if there is no controller, there can be no controlling. So who are the possible candidates? I see three possibilities: human beings, Satan, God.

So far as I know, all those who refer to the Byzantine text as ‘controlled’ exclude the supernatural from their model; so for them the controlling is done by human beings, independent of supernatural influence. Since the alleged control had to operate for more than a millennium, it could not be done by a single individual. But who could control the whole Mediterranean world? For over a thousand years the Roman Church used Latin, not Greek. Was there ever a functioning central authority among the Orthodox Churches? Certainly not for a thousand years, and not for the whole Mediterranean world. So who did the controlling?

Not only that, but the supposed controlling was evidently rather lax, since the MSS are full of random mistakes, quite apart from shared dependencies. Consider the conclusion reached by F. Wisse after he collated and analyzed 1,386 Greek MSS containing chapters 1, 10 and 20 of Luke (three complete chapters). He described 37 lines of transmission, plus 89 “mavericks”, MSS so individually disparate that they could not be grouped. Of the 37 groups, 36 fall within the broad Byzantine river, and within them Wisse described 70 subgroups. So what kind of ‘control’ could permit such a situation? I trust that my readers will not think me unreasonable when I say that in the face of such concrete evidence I find the thesis of a ‘controlled’ Byzantine text (excluding the supernatural) to be less than convincing. But then, how shall we account for the comparative uniformity found within it?

My readers should be aware that I personally insist that the supernatural should be included in any model of NT textual criticism. Both God and Satan certainly exist, and both have an ongoing interest in the fortunes of the NT Text. For some time I have been defending the divine preservation of the NT Text in concrete terms. Curiously, those who allege a controlled Byzantine text usually reject any notion of divine preservation. But of course, if they do not believe in divine inspiration, they will not believe in preservation. Someone who denies the existence of a Sovereign Creator will logically insist that a nonexistent being cannot do anything. But how then can such a person explain the Byzantine text? I submit that no naturalistic hypothesis can account for Family 35 (K^r).

Satan would certainly do nothing to help preserve the NT Text; any involvement of his would be with a view to pervert the text, thereby undermining its authority. (I would say that he concentrated his efforts in Egypt, and he uses his servants within the academic community to control the so-called ‘critical’ texts.) I have argued elsewhere that the transmission of the NT Text was predominately ‘normal’, and that normality was defined by the Christian Church. Why were copies made? Because the congregations needed them. Why did the congregations ‘need’ them? Because they understood that the NT writings were divinely inspired, and they were read and discussed in their weekly meetings. To argue that the early Christians were mistaken in that understanding would be beside the point. That understanding (mistaken or not) determined their attitude toward the NT writings, which controlled their production of copies. If the majority of persons producing copies was made up of sincere (more or less) Christians, they would do their work with reasonable care (some more, some less). Those who held a strong view of inspiration would be especially careful.

I submit that the surviving MSS reflect my description above. f³⁵ (K^r), by far the largest and most cohesive group (perhaps the only group that exists in all 27 books), represents the core of the transmission, its representatives having been produced by copyists with a high view of inspiration (as evidenced by the extreme care in their work). Outside that core are a large number of tangents, or rivulets, that diverge from the core in varying degrees, and that began at

different times and places. A monk who was merely carrying out a religious obligation would produce a 'run of the mill' Byzantine copy; good enough for virtually all practical purposes, but not up to the **f³⁵** standard.

So was the Byzantine text 'controlled'? Obviously not in any strict sense. The control was exercised by a common belief (within the Christian community) that the NT was divinely inspired. It was that belief that dictated the proliferation of copies made with reasonable care. That reasonable care is reflected in the basic uniformity within the Byzantine bulk. But to explain the incredibly careful transmission reflected in the **f³⁵** representatives requires something more.

Of **f³⁵** MSS that I myself have collated, I hold perfect copies of the family archetype (empirically determined) as follows: 29 for Philemon, 15 for 2 Thessalonians, 9 for Titus, 6 for Galatians, 4 for Ephesians, 2 for Matthew, and at least one for 22 of the 27 NT books (and many more are off by a single letter!). These are MSS from all over the Mediterranean world, and representing five centuries (XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV). So what kind of control could produce such an incredible level of perfection—a control exercised in isolated monasteries scattered around the Mediterranean world and during five centuries? We know of no human agency that could do it. If the agency was not human, then it had to be divine. Is Family 35 a controlled text? Yes. Controlled by whom? By the Holy Spirit.

Things like 'controlled text' and 'ecclesiastical imposition', also the falsehood that the bulk of the extant Greek MSS have a late text, have been used to discourage people from studying the vast bulk of the MSS. The 'harder' and 'shorter' reading 'canons' are plainly false, as anyone who has studied actual MSS knows. To hide the fact that the oldest MSS are of demonstrably poor quality, eclecticists have stridently insisted that 'oldest equals best', and so on into the night. The discipline of New Testament textual criticism is a veritable stagnant swamp; yes indeed, a veritable stagnant swamp.

The perpetuation of the problem

Those who are in open rebellion against God and His written Revelation will simply continue to do what they can against both. That is a given. But what about those who claim to believe in God and His Word, and may think that they really do, and yet have embraced falsehood with reference to the NT Text? How did they get that way?

The discipline of NT textual criticism, as we know it, is basically a 'child' of Western Europe and its colonies; the Eastern Orthodox Churches have generally not been involved. (They have always known that the true NT Text lies within the Byzantine tradition.) In the year 1500 the Christianity of Western Europe was dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, whose pope claimed the exclusive right to interpret Scripture. That Scripture was the Latin Vulgate, which the laity was not allowed to read. Only priests were allowed to read it, and only the pope could interpret it. Martin Luther's ninety-five theses were posted in 1517. Was it mere chance that the first printed Greek Text of the NT was published the year before?

As the Protestant Reformation advanced, it was declared that the authority of Scripture exceeded that of the pope, and that every believer had the right to read and interpret the Scriptures for himself. The authority of the Latin Vulgate was also challenged, since the NT was written in Greek. Of course the Vatican library held many Greek MSS, no two of which were identical (at least in the Gospels), so the Roman Church challenged the authenticity of the Greek Text.¹ In short, the Roman Church forced the Reformation to come to grips with textual variation

¹ Probably no two MSS of the Latin Vulgate are identical either, but that was not the issue. Indeed, so far as I know, there is no way to establish what may have been the original wording of the Latin Vulgate, in every detail.

among the Greek MSS. But they did not know how to go about it, because this was a new field of study and they simply were not in possession of a sufficient proportion of the relevant evidence. (They probably didn't even know that the Mt. Athos peninsula, with its twenty monasteries, existed.)

Family 35, being by far the largest and most cohesive group of MSS with a demonstrable archetype, was poorly represented in the libraries of Western Europe. For that matter, very few MSS of whatever text-type had been sufficiently collated to allow for any tracing of the transmissional history. Worse, the lack of complete collations made it impossible to refute an erroneous hypothesis within a reasonable time frame. (Lamentably, that lack has not been completely remedied until this day.)

In 1500 the Roman Catholic Establishment was corrupt, morally bankrupt, and discredited among thinking people. The Age of Reason and humanism were coming to the fore. More and more people were deciding that they could do better without the god of the Roman Establishment. The new imagined freedom from supernatural supervision was intoxicating, and many had no interest in accepting the authority of Scripture (*sola Scriptura*). Further, it would be naive in the extreme to exclude the supernatural from consideration, and not allow for satanic activity behind the scenes.

Consider Ephesians 2:2—"in which you once walked, according to the Aeon of this world, the ruler of the domain of the air, the spirit who is now at work in the sons of the disobedience." Strictly speaking, the Text has "according to the Aeon of this world, according to the ruler of the domain of the air"—the phrases are parallel, so 'Aeon' and 'ruler' have the same referent, a specific person or being. This spirit is presently at work (present tense) in 'the sons of the disobedience'. 'Sons' of something are those characterized by that something, and the something in this case is 'the' disobedience (the Text has the definite article)—a continuation of the original rebellion against the Sovereign of the universe. 'Sons of the disobedience' joined the attack against Scripture. The so-called 'higher criticism' denied divine inspiration altogether.¹ Others used the textual variation to argue that in any case the original wording was 'lost', there being no objective way to determine what it may have been (unfortunately, no one was able to perceive such a way at that time).

The uncritical assumption that 'oldest equals best' was an important factor, and became increasingly so as earlier uncials came to light. Appeal was made to the analogy of a stream, where the purest water would presumably be that closest to the source. But with reference to NT manuscripts the analogy is fallacious, and becomes a sophistry. There is general agreement that most of the serious corruption suffered by the NT text happened during the second century, before our earliest MSS. So age is no guarantee.

Both Codex Vaticanus and Codex Bezae were available early on, and they have thousands of disagreements between themselves, just in the Gospels (in Acts, Bezae is wild almost beyond belief). **If** 'oldest equals best', and the oldest MSS are in constant and massive disagreement between/among themselves, then the recovery of a lost text becomes hopeless. Did you get that? **Hopeless, totally hopeless!** However, I have argued (and continue to do so) that 'oldest equals worst', and that changes the picture radically. The benchmark work on this subject is Herman C. Hoskier's *Codex B and its Allies: A Study and an Indictment* (2 vols.; London: Bernard Quaritch, 1914). The first volume (some 500 pages) contains a detailed and careful discussion of

¹ The Darwinian theory appeared to be made to order for those who wished to get rid of a Creator, or any superior Authority, who might require an accounting. The 'higher criticism' served the purpose of getting rid of an authoritative Revelation, that might be used to require an accounting. Rebels don't like to be held accountable.

hundreds of obvious errors in Codex B; the second (some 400 pages) contains the same for Codex Aleph. He affirms that in the Gospels alone these two MSS differ well over 3,000 times, which number does not include minor errors such as spelling (II, 1). [Had he tabulated all differences, the total would doubtless increase by several hundreds.]

Well now, simple logic demands that one or the other has to be wrong those 3,000+ times; they cannot both be right, quite apart from the times when they are both wrong. **No amount of subjective preference can obscure the fact that they are poor copies, objectively so.**¹ They were so bad that no one could stand to use them, and so they survived physically.² But they had no 'children', since no one wanted to copy them. I would say that they were fabricated, not being true copies of any exemplar. In that case, they do not belong to any line of transmission.

Since everyone is influenced (not necessarily controlled) by his milieu, this was also true of the Reformers. In part (at least) the Reformation was a 'child' of the Renaissance, with its emphasis on reason. Recall that on trial Luther said he could only recant if convinced by Scripture and reason. So far so good, but many did not want Scripture, and that left only reason. Further, since reason cannot explain or deal with the supernatural, those who emphasize reason are generally unfriendly toward the supernatural. [To this day the so-called historic or traditional Protestant denominations have trouble dealing with the supernatural.]

Before Adolf Deissmann published his *Light from the Ancient East* (1910), (being a translation of *Licht vom Osten*, 1908), wherein he demonstrated that Koine Greek was the *lingua franca* in Jesus' day, there even being a published grammar explaining its rules, only classical Greek was taught in the universities. But the NT was written in Koine. Before Deissmann's benchmark work, there were two positions on the NT Greek: 1) it was a debased form of classical Greek, or 2) it was a 'Holy Ghost' Greek, invented for the NT. The second option was held mainly by pietists; the academic world preferred the first, which raised the natural question: if God were going to inspire a NT, why would He not do it in 'decent' Greek? The prevailing idea that Koine was bad Greek predisposed many against the NT.

All of this placed the defenders of an inspired Greek Bible on the defensive, with the very real problem of deciding where best to set up a perimeter they could defend. Given the prevailing ignorance concerning the relevant evidence, their best choice appeared to be an appeal to Divine Providence. God providentially chose the TR, so that was the text to be used (the 'traditional' text).³ I would say that Divine Providence was indeed at work, because the TR is a good Text, far better than the eclectic ones currently in vogue.

¹ John William Burgon personally collated what in his day were 'the five old uncials' (Ⲙ,A,B,C,D). Throughout his works he repeatedly calls attention to the *concordia discors*, the prevailing confusion and disagreement, that the early uncials display among themselves. Luke 11:2-4 offers one example.

"The five Old Uncials" (ⲘABCD) falsify the Lord's Prayer as given by St. Luke in no less than forty-five words. But so little do they agree among themselves, that they throw themselves into six different combinations in their departures from the Traditional Text; and yet they are never able to agree among themselves as to one single various reading: while only once are more than two of them observed to stand together, and their grand point of union is no less than an omission of the article. Such is their eccentric tendency, that in respect of thirty-two out of the whole forty-five words they bear in turn solitary evidence. (*The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established*. Arranged, completed, and edited by Edward Miller. London: George Bell and Sons, 1896, p. 84.)

Yes indeed, oldest equals worst. For more on this subject, please see pages 130-36 in *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV*.

² For a detailed discussion of this point, please see pages 130-37 in my *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV*.

³ Please note that I am not criticizing Burgon and others; they did what they could, given the information available to them. They knew that the Hortian theory and resultant Greek text could not be right.

To all appearances Satan was winning the day, but he still had a problem: the main Protestant versions (in German, English, Spanish, etc.) were all based on the *Textus Receptus*, as were doctrinal statements and ‘prayer books’. Enter F.J.A. Hort, a quintessential ‘son of the disobedience’. Hort did not believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible, nor in the divinity of Jesus Christ. Since he embraced the Darwinian theory as soon as it appeared, he presumably did not believe in God.¹ His theory of NT textual criticism, published in 1881,² was based squarely on the presuppositions that the NT was not inspired, that no special care was afforded it in the early decades, and that in consequence the original wording was lost—lost beyond recovery, at least by objective means, and that got rid of any objective authority for that text. Of course, because any text defined by subjective criteria will always be inherently subjective. His theory swept the academic world and continues to dominate the discipline to this day.³

But just how was it that the Hortian theory was able to take over the Greek departments of the conservative schools in North America? The answer begins with the onslaught of liberal theology upon the Protestant churches of that continent at the beginning of the twentieth century. The great champion of the divine inspiration of Scripture was Benjamin B. Warfield, a Presbyterian. His defense of inspiration is so good that it is difficult to improve it. Somewhere along the line, however, he decided to go to Germany to study; I believe it was at Tübingen. When he returned, he was thanking God for having raised up Westcott and Hort to restore the text of the New Testament (think about the implication of ‘restore’). One of his students, Archibald T. Robertson, a Baptist, followed Warfield’s lead. The prestige of those two men was so great that their view swept the theological schools of the continent. I solicit the patience of the reader while I try to diagnose what happened to Warfield in Tübingen.

At Tübingen Warfield found himself among enemies of an inspired Bible. Now he was a champion of divine inspiration, but for an inspired text to have objective authority today, it must have been preserved.⁴ Given the prevailing ignorance concerning the relevant evidence at that time, Warfield was simply not able to defend preservation in objective terms (and neither was

¹ For documentation of all this, and a good deal more besides, in Hort’s own words, please see the biography written by his son. A.F. Hort, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort* (2 vols.; London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1896). The son made heavy use of the father’s plentiful correspondence, whom he admired. (In those days a two-volume ‘Life’, as opposed to a one-volume ‘Biography’, was a posthumous status symbol, albeit of little consequence to the departed.) Many of my readers were taught, as was I, that one must not question/judge someone else’s motives. But wait just a minute; where did such an idea come from? It certainly did not come from God, who expects the spiritual person to evaluate everything (1 Corinthians 2:15). Since there are only two spiritual kingdoms in this world (Matthew 6:24, 12:30; Luke 11:23, 16:13), then the idea comes from the other side. By eliminating motive, one also eliminates presupposition, which is something that God would never do, since presupposition governs interpretation (Matthew 22:29, Mark 12:24). Which is why we should always expect a true scholar to state his presuppositions. I have repeatedly stated mine, but here they are again: 1) The Sovereign Creator of the universe exists; 2) He delivered a written revelation to the human race; 3) He has preserved that revelation intact to this day.

² B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (2 Vols.; London: Macmillan and Co., 1881). The second volume explains the theory, and is generally understood to be Hort’s work.

³ For a thorough discussion of that theory, please see chapters 3 and 4 in *Identity IV*. Chapters 3 and 4 in *Identity IV* are little different from what they were in 1977, when I published the first edition. It has been over forty-five years, and so far as I know, no one has refuted my dismantling of Hort’s theory. It has not been for lack of desire. Nowadays one frequently hears the argument that to criticize Hort is to flay a dead horse, since now the ruling paradigm is eclecticism (whether ‘reasoned’ or ‘rigorous’). But eclecticism is based squarely on the same false presuppositions, and is therefore equally wrong.

⁴ This has always been a favorite argument with enemies of inspiration; it goes like this: “If God had inspired a text, He would have preserved it (or else why bother inspiring). He did not preserve the NT; therefore He did not inspire it.” I confess that I am inclined to agree with that logical connection, except that I am prepared to turn the tables. I believe I can demonstrate that God did in fact preserve the NT Text; therefore He must have inspired it!

anyone else—this is crucial to understanding what happened). He was faced with the fact of widespread variation between and among the extant Greek manuscripts. Even worse—far worse—was the presupposition that ‘oldest equals best’, because the oldest manuscripts are hopelessly at odds among themselves. For example: the two great early codices, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, differ between themselves well over 3,000 times just in the four Gospels. Well now, they cannot both be right; one or the other **has** to be wrong, quite apart from the places where they are both wrong. So what was poor Warfield to do? Enter Westcott and Hort. Hort claimed that as a result of their work only a thousandth part of the NT text could be considered to be in doubt, and this was joyfully received by the rank and file, since it seemed to provide assurance about the reliability of that text—however, of course, that claim applied only to the W-H text (probably the worst published NT in existence to this day, so the claim was false).¹ Warfield grasped at this like a drowning man grasps at a straw, thereby doing serious damage to North American Evangelicalism.²

To understand the full impact of the onslaught of liberal theology, one must take account of the milieu. Reason has always been important to the historic or traditional Protestant denominations. In consequence, academic respectability has always been important to their graduate schools of theology. The difficulty resides in the following circumstance: for at least two centuries academia has been dominated by Satan, and so the terms of ‘respectability’ are dictated by him. Those terms include ‘publish or perish’, but of course he controls the technical journals. Since he is the father of lies (John 8:44), anyone who wished to tell the whole truth has always had a hard time getting an article published, no matter how good it was. To get an article published one had to toe the party line. ‘Taking account of the existing literature’ obliges one to waste a great deal of time reading the nonsense (when not deliberate falsehoods) produced by Satan’s servants, all of which was designed to keep the reader away from the truth. One other thing: academic learning feeds pride, not the spirit. No graduate school of theology teaches how to hear the Holy Spirit. At the very beginning Satan placed himself at the ‘tree of knowledge’, and he remained there; he has never left it. And he is the enemy of the truth.

The TRUTH—aye, there’s the rub. Consider 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12: “The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (NKJV). Although verse ten is in the context of the activity of the Antichrist, who will find an easy target in ‘those who are wasting themselves’ (my translation), it does not follow that no one will be wasting himself before that activity. Obviously,

¹ I would say that their text is mistaken with reference to 10% of the words—the Greek NT has roughly 140,000 words, so the W-H text is mistaken with reference to 14,000 of them. I would say that the so-called ‘critical’ (read ‘eclectic’) text currently in vogue is ‘only’ off with reference to some 12,000, an improvement (small though it be). And just by the way, how wise is it to use a NT prepared by a servant (or servants) of Satan? (On the other hand, I claim that God has preserved the original wording to such an extent that we can, and do, know what it is, based on objective evidence.)

² However, I should not be unduly harsh in my criticism of Warfield; no one else knew what to do either. The cruel fact was that the relevant evidence did not exist in usable form at that time. (It follows that any defense of divine preservation at that time had to be based upon faith, faith that God would produce the evidence in His time.) Part of the damage produced by Hort’s theory was its disdain for the vast bulk of later manuscripts—they were not worth the bother to collate and study. Since it is precisely those disdained MSS that furnish the necessary evidence, that soporific effect of Hort’s theory delayed the availability of the relevant evidence for a century. I remember one day in class (in 1957), the professor filled his lungs and proclaimed with gusto: “Gentlemen, where B and Aleph agree, you have the original.” The poor man had obviously never read Herman C. Hoskier’s *Codex B and its Allies: A Study and an Indictment* (published in 1914).

people have been wasting themselves all down through history, and the underlying cause for that ‘wasting’ has never changed: “they did not receive the love of the truth”. (It began in the Garden.)

Please notice carefully what is said here: it is God Himself who sends the strong delusion! And upon whom does He send it? Upon those who do not receive the love of the truth.¹ And what is the purpose of the strong delusion?—the condemnation of those who do not believe the truth. Dear me, this is heavy. Notice that the truth is **central** to anyone’s salvation. This raises the necessary question: just what is meant by ‘the truth’? In John 14:6 Sovereign Jesus declared Himself to be ‘the truth’. Praying to the Father in John 17:17 He said, “Thy Word is truth”. Once each in John chapters 14, 15 and 16 He referred to the third person of the Trinity as “the Spirit of the truth”. Since the Son is back in Heaven at the Father’s right hand, and the Spirit is not very perceptible to most of us, most of the time, and since the Word is the Spirit’s sword (Ephesians 6:17), our main access to ‘the truth’ is through God’s Word, the Bible. The Bible offers propositional truth, but we need the Holy Spirit to illumine that truth, and to have the Holy Spirit we must be adequately related to Sovereign Jesus.

Now then, for something to be received, it must be offered; one cannot believe in something he has never heard about (Romans 10:14). The use of the verb ‘receive’ clearly implies an act of volition on the part of those not receiving the truth; that love was offered or made available to them but they did not want it; they wanted to be able to lie and to entertain lies told by others. But the consequences of such a choice are terrible; they turned their back on salvation. I suspect that not many Christians in the so-called ‘first world’ really believe what Sovereign Jesus said in Matthew 7:14: those who find the way of Life are **few!** And do not forget Revelation 22:15; “whoever loves and practices a lie” is excluded from the heavenly City [any lie, including Hort’s].² I will here consider the implications for a student entering a graduate school of theology, because of what happens if he becomes a professor, or NT scholar, in his turn.³

Most such students presumably come from an evangelical environment, and were doubtless taught that the Bible is God’s Word, and therefore inspired. Some may even have been taught verbal, plenary inspiration. However, in most theological schools you cannot get a job as a teacher if you do not agree to use the eclectic Greek text, with all that implies. (Just as you cannot get a teaching job in most universities unless you at least pretend to believe in evolution.) If the school is at least nominally conservative, they will still say that the Bible is inspired. But if a student brings up the question of the preservation of the text in class, there will be an uncomfortable silence. If it was preserved, no one knows what or where it is. The brainwashing has been so complete that many (most?) seminary graduates do not even know that there is any question about what they were taught. They were taught an eclecticism based on Hort’s theory, and for them that is all there is.

But to go back to our student, he finds himself surrounded by professors whose job it is to destroy his faith in an inspired Bible with objective authority. Of course, presumably, very few such professors have ever thought in those terms (so they would object to my statement). They

¹ Please note that it is not enough to merely ‘accept’ the truth; it is required that we love the truth. Satan tantalizes us with fame and fortune (on his terms, of course), so to love the truth requires determination.

² Help! “A lie” is rather general, open-ended. What happens if I accepted a lie without realizing that it was one? But the Text does not say ‘accepts’; it says ‘loves’ and ‘practices’. The implication is that the contrary evidence, to the lie, is available, but has been rejected, or deliberately ignored—the person sold himself to the lie.

³ At the graduate level, a student has the responsibility to evaluate what is being taught—if it goes contrary to the Text, it should not be accepted. I remember one day in chapel, a visiting scholar was expounding Romans 10:9. He stated that the Greek Text plainly means “Jesus as Lord”, but then went on to try to explain why the school didn’t believe that. His effort was rather lame; so much so that I determined to delve into the question for myself.

would say that they are just doing their job, doing what they are paid to do, without troubling themselves with the whys and wherefores.¹ But of course the student is not expecting that; he believes that his professors must be men of God, and so he is predisposed to believe them. Besides that predisposition (and it is powerful), what are the tools at their disposal for doing their job? Well, they have ridicule, sarcasm, brainwashing, peer pressure, the ‘emperor’s new clothes’ gambit, and satanic assistance, for starters. (There may also be threats, failing grades, disciplinary actions, foul play, and so on—I write from experience.) Most of the terms above are self-explanatory, but some readers may not be familiar with the ancient myth about the emperor—it boils down to this: you don’t want to admit that you can’t ‘see’ it, when everyone else claims to be doing so. But by far the most serious is ‘satanic assistance’, and here I must needs go into detail.

Returning to 2 Thessalonians 2:10 and the ‘love of the truth’, as explained above, our main access to ‘the truth’ is through God’s Word, the Bible. Our student may have gone to Sunday school, probably heard sermons with at least some biblical content, and certainly has his own copy of the Bible. In short, he has had, and continues to have, access to ‘the truth’. However, the Holy Spirit does ‘talk’ to us, if we will listen. For example: my father was born in 1906, and in due time went to Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College. In those days the American Standard Version (ASV) was touted as the best thing since the Garden of Eden; it was ‘the rock of biblical integrity’, etc. etc. Now my father had the practice of reading through the entire Bible once a year, a practice that he maintained all his life. Due to the hype surrounding the ASV, he got a copy and began to read it. It was hard going from the start, and he soon had to stop—the Holy Spirit simply would not let him go on. He returned to his trusty AV.

I imagine that at least some of my readers will have a question at this point. Am I implying that anyone who embraced the ASV was not listening to the Holy Spirit when he made that decision? The answer is, “Yes”. Obviously, the same holds for the Hortian theory, etc. Unfortunately, few students of theology are in the habit of consulting the Holy Spirit, and those who do are marked for persecution. No Establishment can tolerate anyone who listens to the Holy Spirit. Surely, or have you forgotten John 3:8? “The wind blows where it wishes, and you (sg) hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who has been begotten by the Spirit.” Notice that the Lord is saying here that it is **we** who are to be unpredictable, like the wind, or the Spirit (“comes” and “goes” are in the present tense). If you are really under the control of the Spirit you will do unexpected things, just like He does.² An Establishment is defined by its ‘straitjacket’, and the Holy Spirit does not like straitjackets, and vice versa.

In John 8:44 Sovereign Jesus declared that “there is no truth” in Satan, and that he is the father of lying. Since God cannot lie, Titus 1:2, it being contrary to His essence, any and all lies come from the enemy. So what happens if you embrace a lie? You invite Satan into your mind. And what does he do there? He sets up a stronghold that locks you into that lie; you become blind to the truth on that subject.³ It is a specific application of the truth expressed in 2 Corinthians 4:4—Satan blinds minds. So what happens to our student? With very few exceptions, he succumbs to

¹ For older, established scholars there is also the matter of pride and vested interest; who wants to admit that he has been wrong all his professional life? Then there is the doctrine of professional ethics, one must respect his colleagues (respect for the colleague trumps respect for the truth). [One must not ask where that doctrine came from.] One other thing: where a school or institution depends on financial help from outside, it will be threatened with the loss of that help, if it does not toe the line, and its very existence may depend on that help, so they cave in.

² Since Satan is forever muddying the water with excesses and abuses, spiritual discernment is needed.

³ On that one subject—you will not necessarily be blinded on other subjects, or at least not at first.

the pressure exerted by the tools already mentioned. In order to get a job, he has to accept the party line, but that is Mammon, and the Sovereign said that you cannot serve God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). So if you are no longer serving God, you are wide open to Satan. The student accepts the party line, and since it is a lie, Satan goes about blinding him to the truth. If he goes on to become an influential scholar, he will almost certainly come under demonic surveillance (since Satan is not omnipresent).

There is a common misapprehension that trips people up at this point. Since any genuinely regenerated person has the indwelling Holy Spirit, how can Satan or a demon be in that person's mind? There is a fundamental difference between presence and control. Very few Christians have consciously turned over every area of their lives to the control of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a gentleman, he will not take over an area against your will (see John 4:23-24). Any areas not under the Spirit's control are open to the enemy's interference, and most especially if you embrace a lie. By embracing a lie you grieve the Holy Spirit; not wise (Ephesians 4:30). You also resist Him; also not wise (Acts 7:51). So why does God not protect you? Because you rejected the love of the truth, and that turned God against you! When God turns against you, what are your chances? Without God's protection, you become Satan's prey (1 Peter 5:8).¹

Anyone in rebellion against the Creator is under satanic influence, direct or indirect (in most cases a demon acts as Satan's agent, when something more than the influence of the surrounding culture is required—almost all human cultures have ingredients of satanic provenance; this includes the academic culture). Anyone in rebellion against the Creator will also have strongholds of Satan in his mind. Since Satan is the 'father' of lying (John 8:44), anytime you embrace a lie you invite him into your mind—this applies to any of his sophistries (2 Corinthians 10:5) currently in vogue, such as materialism, humanism, relativism, Marxism, Freudianism, Hortianism, etc.

The selling of the lie is carried on from generation to generation, resulting in a continuous defection. Most professors are 'parrots', simply repeating what they were taught, without ever going back to check the facts. Some older scholars may have become aware of the facts, but because of vested interest they do not mention them to their students; they maintain the party line. This is all part of what we might call 'generational sin'.

There is generational sin within families, in individual churches, in schools, in denominations and across wider segments of the Church. One very serious generational sin that is endemic across wide areas of the conservative/evangelical community at large is the idolatry that elevates human reason above the revealed Word of God. This idolatry expresses itself on many fronts, but perhaps the foundational one relates to the very Text of Scripture itself—I refer to the mentality that constantly calls into question the very wording of the Text, thereby undermining confidence in its integrity and authority.

The phrase 'generational sin' implies that a whole generation is practicing that sin. It involves a very serious consequence: all subsequent generations receive that sin as part of their 'gene pool'; it is not perceived as 'sin', but as 'truth'. But being in fact a lie, it becomes a stronghold of Satan in their minds and is not questioned. The only deliverance from that sin comes when someone goes back to its beginning and analyzes and exposes the false presuppositions and reasoning that gave rise to the sin. But such a person should not expect to be well received. He

¹ Please keep in mind the sequence of cause and effect—it begins with the rejection of the love of the truth. It is not enough to merely 'accept' the truth, one must love it. For those who have embraced a lie, the only 'medicine' is to return to the love of the truth, rejecting the lie. God may require a public renunciation of the lie.

will certainly be persecuted by the 'Establishment'. However, if he has a means of disseminating his findings, he can influence the future.

A solution for the problem

It remains to comment again on 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, using my translation:

That one's coming is according to the working of Satan with all power¹ and signs and lying wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception among those who are wasting themselves, because they did not receive the love of the truth² so that they might be saved.³ 11 Yes, because of this God will send them an active delusion so that they will believe the lie⁴ 12 and so that all may be condemned who have not believed the truth but have taken pleasure in wickedness.⁵

Notice the sequence: first they reject the love of the truth; it is as a consequence of that choice that God sends the delusion. The implication is that there is a point of no return; God sends the delusion so that they may be condemned. The only intelligent choice is to embrace the truth!

Consider with me the consequences of the facts enunciated in verses 10-12 for a whole nation, like Brazil, where I now live. We have many thousands of local churches that call themselves Christian. But I know of almost none that could be characterized as 'loving the truth'. No one wants a Bible with objective authority. Humanistic, relativistic, materialistic values have taken over the churches. Biblical values are no longer acceptable. In consequence, Satan has control of the government, of education, of health services, of commerce, of the entertainment industry, in short, of the whole culture. The churches that have rejected biblical values are part of the problem—since they have rejected "the love of the truth", they have been taken over by "active delusion".

Note that God Himself sends that delusion with the declared objective of condemning all those who believed the lie. If God Himself visits "active delusion" upon a whole country, what possible escape is there? The only possible 'medicine' is "the love of the truth". Those of us who consider ourselves to be true subjects of Sovereign Jesus need to appeal to Him to show us how to promote the love of the truth to the churches and to the society at large. Here in Brazil it may be too late, but if God's grace still offers us a window of opportunity, we must devote ourselves to promoting the love of the truth by all possible means.

But to return to the stated subject of this article: what I have said about Brazil applies to textual critics as well. Since eclectic textual criticism is based on falsehoods, it belongs to Satan. Since most theological seminaries and Bible schools teach eclectic textual criticism, even the most conservative ones, and since that is the only option that they teach, most students graduate

¹ When Satan fell, he did not lose his power.

² The use of the verb 'receive' clearly implies an act of volition on their part; that love was offered or made available to them but they did not want it; they wanted to be able to lie and to entertain lies told by others. But the consequences of such a choice are terrible; they turned their back on salvation.

³ Since there are only two spiritual kingdoms in this world, that of Sovereign Jesus and that of Satan, "those who are wasting themselves", in this text, are still in Satan's kingdom and therefore wide open to his "wicked deception". The Text states plainly that they are wasting themselves "because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved". They are not saved.

⁴ Perhaps "the lie" is best illustrated in our day by the theory of evolution: 'There is no Creator'—so there will not be any accounting; so you can do what you feel like. How terrible will be the awakening!

⁵ "Taking pleasure in wickedness" involves rejecting the Truth of a moral Creator who will demand an accounting, or even overt rebellion against that Creator (like Lucifer/Satan).

thinking that is all there is. The graduate may believe the NT to be inspired and inerrant in the autographs, but he uses, and teaches from, an eclectic Greek text and modern versions based on an eclectic text. He embraced a lie because he trusted the teachers who assured him that it was the truth. But that lie has become a stronghold of Satan in his mind, which is why so many evangelicals seem to be unable to reconsider what they were taught. Far worse, if God Himself sends active delusion into their minds, because they embraced a lie, how can they escape? However, God is just, and will take all relevant factors into account. Someone who is determined to teach and defend the lie is probably in a bad way.

Now then, any solution for the problem must be pursued in the spiritual realm. People will not change unless the malignant interference in their minds is cancelled. So then, on what basis might we neutralize interference? The most fundamental question for human life on this planet is that of authority: who has it, to what degree, and on what terms? As the chief priests said to Jesus, “By what authority are you doing this?” (Luke 20:2). After His death and resurrection Sovereign Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). So He is perfectly within His rights, clearly competent, to delegate a piece of that authority to us. Consider Luke 10:19: “Take note, I am giving you the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions,¹ and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing at all may harm you.” Instead of ‘am giving’, perhaps 2.5% of the Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality, have ‘have given’ (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.)—a serious error. Jesus said this perhaps five months before His death and resurrection, addressing the seventy (not just the twelve). The Lord was talking about the future, not the past, a future that includes us!

Consider further John 20:21: Jesus said to them again: “Peace to you! Just as the Father sent me, I also send you.” “Just as... so also”—Jesus is sending us just like the Father sent Him. So how did They do it? The Father determined and the Son obeyed: “Behold, I have come to do your will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7). And what was that will? To destroy Satan (Hebrews 2:14) and undo his works (1 John 3:8). Since Jesus did indeed defeat Satan (Colossians 2:15, Ephesians 1:20-21, etc.), but then went back to Heaven, what is left for us is the undoing of his works.² It seems clear to me that to undo any work we must also undo its consequences (to the extent that that may be possible).

¹ The Lord gives us the authority to “trample snakes and scorpions”. Well now, to smash the literal insect, a scorpion, you don’t need power from on High, just a slipper (if you are fast, you can do it barefoot). To trample a snake I prefer a boot, but we can kill literal snakes without supernatural help. It becomes obvious that Jesus was referring to something other than reptiles and insects. I understand Mark 16:18 to be referring to the same reality—Jesus declares that certain signs will accompany the believers (the turn of phrase virtually has the effect of commands): they will expel demons, they will speak strange languages, they will remove ‘snakes’, they will place hands on the sick. (“If they drink...” is not a command; it refers to an eventuality.) But what did the Lord Jesus mean by ‘snakes’?

In a list of distinct activities Jesus has already referred to demons, so the ‘snakes’ must be something else. In Matthew 12:34 Jesus called the Pharisees a ‘brood of vipers’, and in 23:33, ‘snakes, brood of vipers’. In John 8:44, after they claimed God as their father, Jesus said, “You are of your father the devil”. And 1 John 3:10 makes clear that Satan has many other ‘sons’ (so also Matthew 13:38-39). In Revelation 20:2 we read: “He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is a slanderer, even Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited earth, and bound him for a thousand years.” If Satan is a snake, then his children are also snakes. So then, I take it that our ‘snakes’ are human beings who have chosen to serve Satan, who have sold themselves to evil. I conclude that the ‘snakes’ in Luke 10:19 are the same as those in Mark 16:18, but what of the ‘scorpions’? Since they also are of the enemy, they may be demons, in which case the term may well include their offspring, the humanoids (for more on this see my article, “As were the Days of Noah”, available from www.prunch.org). I am still working on the question of just how the removal is done.

² For more on this subject see my article, “Biblical Spiritual Warfare”, available from www.prunch.org, or in my book, *Essays on Discipleship, Missions and Spiritual Warfare*, 2nd edition (it also contains ‘Days of Noah’).

Consider also Ephesians 2:4-6: “But God—being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions—made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up together and seated us together in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” This is tremendous! Here we have our authority. Christ is now seated at the Father’s right, ‘far above’ the enemy and his hosts. This verse affirms that we who are in Christ are there too! So in Christ we also are far above the enemy and his hosts.¹ Surely, or is that not what is stated in Ephesians 1:16-21?

I really do not stop giving thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the real knowledge² of Himself, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His^[F] calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power into³ us who are believing, according to the demonstration of the extent of His might which He exercised in the Christ when He raised Him^[S] from among the dead and seated Him at His^[F] right, in the heavenly realms, far above every ruler and authority and power and dominion—even every name that can be named, not only in this age but also in the next.

Now then, “far above every ruler and authority and power and dominion—even every name that can be named, not only in this age but also in the next” must include Satan and his angels. If Christ, seated at the Father’s right, is “**far** above” them, and we are in Him, seated at the Father’s right, then we too are above all the hosts of the enemy. That is our position and authority for neutralizing interference.

Well and good, but just how are we to go about doing it? The religious professionals (church leaders, seminary professors, etc.) are part of the problem, so we may not look to them to do anything. The few who are not bound by Satan do not know what to do, or are afraid to act. It follows that any solution for the problem must be pursued by sincere followers of Sovereign Jesus with other and different occupations. What follows is written for such followers. If you are one of them, you should ask the Holy Spirit what He wants you to do in your specific situation.

To continue, at what level should we ‘neutralize’? The candidates that suggest themselves are: institutions, teachers, students, church leaders, and lay people. How about working at all levels? Next, what procedures are at our disposal to do the neutralizing? I offer the following: a) forbid any further use of Satan’s power, in a specific case; b) claim the undoing of the consequences of the use of that power that there has been (to the extent it may be possible); c) destroy any

¹ We should be consciously operating on that basis, but since few churches teach this, most Christians live in spiritual defeat.

² I finally settled on ‘real knowledge’ as the best way to render επιγνωσις, the heightened form of γνωσις, ‘knowledge’. Real knowledge is more than mere intellectual knowledge, or even true theoretical knowledge—it involves experience. The Text goes on to say, “the eyes of your heart having been enlightened”. Real knowledge changes your ‘heart’, who you are.

³ “Into us”—that is what the Text says. Note that ‘believing’ is in the present tense. Consider Ephesians 3:20. “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to the power that is working in us.” Note that “is working” is also in the present tense; having believed yesterday won’t hack it, we must believe today. This tremendous power that God pours into us, as we believe, exceeds our powers of imagination. Well now, my personal horizon is limited and defined by my ability to imagine. Anything that I cannot imagine lies outside my horizon, and so obviously I won’t ask for it. I sadly confess that I have not yet arrived at a spiritual level where I can unleash this power—I have yet to make the truth in this verse work for me. But I understand that the truth affirmed here is literal, and I only hope that others will get there before I do (so I can learn from them), if I keep on delaying. The whole point of the exercise (verse 21) is for God to get glory, and to the extent that we do not put His power in us to work we are depriving Him of glory that He could and should have.

strongholds of Satan in their minds (including blind spots); d) bind any demons involved and send them to the Abyss, forbidding any further demonic activity; e) take their thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. In my experience, to be efficient we need to be specific: name the institution; name the person.

But just a minute, I submit for consideration that faith is a basic prerequisite for making use of our position and authority. The theological training that I myself received programmed me not to expect supernatural manifestations of power in and through my life and ministry. As a result, I personally find it to be difficult to exercise the kind of faith that the Lord Jesus demands. Consider:

In Matthew 8:5-13 the centurion understood about authority—he gave orders and they were obeyed, promptly and without question.¹ But the Lord Jesus said he had unusually great faith—faith in what? Faith in the Lord’s spiritual authority; He could simply give an order and it would happen. Perhaps we should understand this sort of faith as an absolute confidence, without a taint of doubt or fear. In Matthew 21:21 the Lord said, “Assuredly... if you have faith and do not doubt” (see Mark 11:23, “does not doubt in his heart”) you can (actually “will”) shrivel a tree or send a mountain into the sea. See also Hebrews 10:22, “full assurance of faith”, 1 Timothy 2:8, “pray... without doubting”, James 1:6, “ask in faith with no doubting”. Mark 5:34 and Matthew 15:28 offer positive examples.

If someone gives a commission, they will presumably back it up to the limit of their ability. Since Christ’s ability has no limit, His backing has no limit (on His end). In Matthew 28:18 He said, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” Then comes the commission: “As you go, make disciples... teaching them to obey all things that I have commanded you”—the pronoun refers back to the eleven apostles (verse 16). So what commands had Jesus given the Eleven? Among other things, “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons” (in Matthew 10:8 perhaps 94% of the Greek manuscripts do not have “raise the dead”). The Eleven also heard John 20:21. Knowing that we are being backed by the Sovereign of the universe, who has all authority and power, we can and should act with complete confidence.

A word of caution is necessary at this point. Consider James 4:7—“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Note the sequence: we need to verify that we are in submission to God before taking on the devil. Then we should claim our position in Christ at the Father’s right hand. Since few Christians have received any remotely adequate level of instruction in the area of biblical spiritual warfare (most have received none), I need to explain the procedures.

Forbid any further use of Satan’s power:

This procedure is based on Luke 10:19. Sovereign Jesus gives us ‘the’ authority over all the power of the enemy. Authority controls power, but since we have access to God’s limitless power (Ephesians 3:20), we should not give Satan the satisfaction of our using his (and he could easily deceive us into doing things we shouldn’t). We should use our authority to forbid the use of Satan’s power, with reference to specific situations—in my experience, we must be specific. (I have tried binding Satan once for all until the end of the world, but it doesn’t work; presumably because God’s plan calls for the enemy’s continued activity in this world. We can limit what the enemy does, but not put him completely out of business, or so I deem.) But just how should we go about it?

¹ The centurion did not say, “In the authority of Rome...”, he just said, “Do this; do that.” The Lord Jesus did not say, “In the authority of the Father...”, He just said, “Be clean! Go!” In Luke 10:19 He said, “I give you the authority over all the power of the enemy”—so we have the authority, so it is up to us to speak! Just like Jesus did.

In the armor described in Ephesians 6 we find “the sword of the Spirit” (verse 17). A sword is a weapon for offense, although it is also used for defense. The Text tells us that this sword is “the ρημα of God”—ρημα, not λογος. It is God’s Word spoken, or applied. Really, what good is a sword left in its sheath? However marvelous our Sword may be (Hebrews 4:12), to produce effect it must come out of the scabbard. The Word needs to be spoken, or written—applied in a specific way.

In the Bible we have many examples where people brought the power of God into action by speaking. Our world began with a creative word from God—spoken (Genesis, 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26; and see Hebrews 11:3). Moses did a lot of speaking. Elijah spoke (1 Kings 17:1, 18:36-38, 2 Kings 1:10, 12). Elisha spoke (2 Kings 2:14, 21-22, 24; 4:16, 43; 6:18). Jesus did a great deal of speaking. Ananias spoke (Acts 9:17-18). Peter spoke (Acts 9:34, 40). Paul spoke (Acts 13:11; 14:3, 10; 16:18; 20:10; 28:8). In short, we need to speak!

Claim the undoing of the consequences of the use of that power that there has been:

This procedure is based on 1 John 3:8, allied to Luke 10:19. It should be possible for us to command Satan to use his own power to undo messes he has made, thereby obliging him to acknowledge his defeat (which will not sit well with his pride). The Son of God was manifested for the purpose of “undoing the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8), and it is incumbent upon us to continue His work here in this world (John 20:21). How can you undo a work without undoing its consequences as well? The Father sent the Son to undo Satan’s works, and the Lord Jesus Christ is sending us to undo Satan’s works. Again, I understand that we must be specific.

Destroy any strongholds of Satan in the person’s mind:

This procedure is based on 2 Corinthians 10:4 and 1 John 3:8. Since strongholds, and blind spots, in the mind are a work of Satan, and we are here to undo such works, this falls within the area of our competence. It is done by claiming such destruction in so many words, being specific.

Bind any demons involved and send them to the Abyss:

This procedure is based on Mark 3:27 and Luke 8:31. “No one can plunder the strong man’s goods, invading his house, unless he first binds the strong man—then he may plunder the house” (Mark 3:27). Since the definite article occurs with ‘strong man’ the first time the phrase occurs, the entity has already been introduced, so the reference is to Satan. Here is a biblical basis for binding Satan, which is now possible because of Christ’s victory. If we can bind Satan, evidently we can also bind any of his subordinates. “And he¹ kept imploring Him that He would not order them to go away into the Abyss” (Luke 8:31).² I take it that Jesus did not send them to the Abyss at that time because He had not yet won the victory, and the demons were ‘within their rights’, under Satan, who was still the god of this world. But the demons were obviously worried! (They knew very well who Jesus was, and what He could do.) I would say that this is one of the ‘greater things’ (John 14:12) that we may now do—rather, that we should do. As for forbidding any further demonic activity, we have the Lord’s example (Mark 9:25), and we are to do what He did (John 14:12).

Take their thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ:

This procedure is based on 2 Corinthians 10:5. In the context, the thoughts are of people who are serving Satan (even if unwittingly). (Of course we should always be checking to be sure that

¹ The boss demon does most of the talking, representing his cohort.

² The Text has ‘the Abyss’, presumably the same one mentioned in Revelation 20:3. The demons knew something that most of us do not.

we ourselves are operating within ‘the mind of Christ’, 1 Corinthians 2:15-16.) Now this procedure moves away from simply neutralizing the enemy’s interference, since it introduces a positive ‘interference’, but it is relevant to the issue being discussed here, since it is protection against falling back into the former error. Again, we must be specific.

Some further texts that may apply: Luke 4:18-21, Psalm 149:5-9, John 14:12.

In Luke 4:18-21 Jesus includes “to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Isaiah 58:6) as one of the things He was sent to do. Turning to Isaiah 58:6, we find Jehovah stating what kind of ‘fast’ He would like to see: “To loose the fetters of wickedness [a], to undo the yoke-ropes [b]; to let oppressed ones go free [a], and that you (pl.) break every yoke [b].” As is typical of Hebrew grammar, the two halves are parallel. “To loose the fetters of wickedness” and “to let oppressed ones go free” are parallel. Who placed the “fetters” and who is doing the oppressing? Well, although people can certainly forge their own bonds through their own wicked lifestyle, I take it that the point here is that wicked beings have placed the fetters on others. “To undo yoke-ropes” and “that ye break every yoke” go together. First we should untie the ropes that bind the yoke to the neck, then we should break the yokes themselves. I gain the clear impression that this text is talking about the activity of Satan’s servants, men and angels. Using culture, worldview, legal devices, threats, blackmail, lies, deception and just plain demonizing and witchcraft, they bind individuals, families, ethnic groups, etc., with a variety of fetters and instruments of oppression.

So what does this have to do with our subject? Well, fasting was an important and required component in their worship of God. So this kind of ‘fasting’ is something that Jehovah overtly wants to see; it is specifically His will. So when we see any work of Satan in someone’s life, it is God’s will that we undo it. If we know it is God’s will, we can proceed with complete confidence. And it is part of our commission (John 20:21).

Notice also Psalms 149:5-9. “Let the saints exult in glory; let them sing for joy in their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand—to execute vengeance upon the nations and punishments upon the peoples; to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the written judgment. This honor is for all His saints.” Note that the saints are in their beds, so the activity described in the subsequent verses must take place in the spiritual realm. I assume that the ‘kings’ and ‘nobles’ include both men and fallen angels. The activity described is the prerogative of “all His saints”—if you are one of those saints, it is up to you. There are a number of ‘written judgments’ in the Text: Zechariah 5:2-4, Proverbs 20:10, Isaiah 10:1-2, Romans 1:26-36 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, at least.

In John 14:12 the Lord Jesus said: “Most assuredly I say to you, the one believing into me, he too will do the works that I do; in fact he will do greater works than these, because I am going to my Father.” “Most assuredly” is actually “amen, amen”—rendered “verily, verily” in the AV. Only John registers the word as repeated, in the other Gospels it is just “amen”. In the contemporary literature we have no example of anyone else using the word in this way. It seems that Jesus coined His own use, and the point seems to be to call attention to an important pronouncement: “Stop and listen!” Often it precedes a formal statement of doctrine or policy, as here.

“The one believing into me, he too will do the works that I do.” This is a tremendous statement, and not a little disconcerting. Notice that the Lord said, “will do”; not ‘maybe’, ‘perhaps’, ‘if you feel like it’; and certainly not ‘if the doctrine of your church permits it’! If you believe, you **will do!** The verb ‘believe’ is in the present tense; if you are believing you will do; it follows that if you are not doing, it is because you are not believing. 2 + 2 = 4. Doing what? “The works that I

do.” Well, Jesus preached the Gospel, He taught, He cast out demons, He healed all sorts and sizes of sickness and disease, He raised an occasional dead person, and He performed a variety of miracles (water to wine, walk on water, stop a storm instantaneously, transport a boat several miles instantaneously, multiply food, shrivel a tree—and He implied that the disciples should have stopped the storm and multiplied the food, and He stated that they could shrivel a tree [Peter actually took a few steps on water]). So how about us? The preaching and teaching we can handle, but what about the rest? I once heard the president of a certain Christian college affirm that this verse obviously could not mean what it says because it is not happening! Well, in his own experience and in that of his associates I guess it isn’t. But many people today cast out demons and heal. Miracles are also happening. So how about me? And you?

“In fact he will do greater works than these.” Well now, if we cast out demons, heal and perform miracles, is that not enough? Jesus wants more, He wants “greater things” than those just mentioned [do not forget what He said in Matthew 7:22-23]. Notice again that He said “will do”, not maybe, perhaps, or if your church permits. But what could be ‘greater’ than miracles? This cannot refer to modern technology because in that event such ‘greater things’ would not have been available to the believers during the first 1900 years. Note that the key is in the Lord’s final statement (in verse 12), “because I am going to my Father”. Only if He won could He return to the Father, so He is here declaring His victory before the fact. It is on the basis of that victory that the ‘greater things’ can be performed. Just what are those ‘greater’ things? For my answer, see my outline, “Biblical Spiritual Warfare”.

In verse 12 the verb ‘will do’ is singular, both times, so it has to do with the individual. Observe that the Lord did **not** say, “you apostles”, “only during the apostolic age”, “only until the canon is complete”, or whatever. He said, “the one believing”, present tense, so this applies to any and all subsequent moments up to our time.¹

Conclusion

People who deny the existence of the Creator, and therefore of an inspired text, have no reason to participate in the debate (except in an attempt to defend their own disbelief, or if they are knowingly serving Satan). The NT gains its importance by being divinely inspired; if it is not inspired, there is no point in wasting time criticizing its text (it would be irrelevant for today). Even so, most textual critics of the NT do not believe in its divine inspiration. So what motivates them? They remind me of the Sovereign’s words in Matthew 23:14 (or 13 in AV). “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you bar *the entrance* to the kingdom of the heavens in the face of the people; for you neither go in *yourselves* nor do you allow those who are trying to enter to go in”. Also in Luke 11:52. “Woe to you lawyers! You have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering!” They were really perverse. If they did not want to go in themselves, that was their choice; but to try to stop others was really perverse! Those guys were really dirty.

I am well aware that I have been blunt, that I have used strong language, but I am in good company. Read again Matthew 23:13-33, where Jesus excoriates the scribes and Pharisees. Here

¹ Also, to affirm that the miraculous gifts ceased when the last shovelful of dirt fell on the Apostle John’s grave is an historical falsehood. Christians who lived during the second, third and fourth centuries, whose writings have come down to us, affirm that the gifts were still in use in their day. No 20th or 21st century Christian, who was not there, is competent to contradict them. And please see the footnote at 1 Corinthians 13:12 in my translation, *The Sovereign Creator Has Spoken*. Any ‘cessationist’ will have a stronghold of Satan in his mind on that subject, because he has embraced a lie. Any doctrine that derives from reaction against excesses and abuses gives victory to Satan. Any argument designed to justify lack of spiritual power cannot be right.

is verse 33: “Snakes! Brood of vipers! How can you escape from the condemnation of Hell?” The Lord was more concerned about their eternal destiny (see John 5:34 and 40) than about their sensibilities, their poor feelings, but He was also reacting to the damage that they had inflicted on others. One gains the impression that people simply do not want to take seriously all that the Bible says about God’s nature. His love necessarily includes a hatred of evil, because of the damage that evil does to the objects of His love. God is love, but He is also justice and wrath. We have no way of really understanding how terrible was the price that Jehovah the Son paid for our redemption. The Son will not take kindly the despising of His sacrifice. Revelation 19:15 declares that the Son will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of the Almighty God all by Himself! It is the Son who will be seated on the Great White Throne,¹ and the wrath on His face will be so terrible that even the heaven will run away (Revelation 20:11)!

People, it is time to stop and think! If God Himself sends active delusion into your mind, you are dead! You are condemned! You absolutely do not want to do anything that could lead God to do that! You absolutely do not want to reject the love of the truth. If you already did, you should fall on your face before God and beg His forgiveness. That is what David did in Psalm 51; he threw himself on God’s mercy. He knew perfectly well that there was no sacrifice for what he had done. (The sacrifices prescribed by the Law were only for ‘sins of ignorance’.) If you were brainwashed and did not understand what had happened to you, the Just Judge will consider all relevant factors. But you had better have a heart-to-heart talk with Him, and ask Him what you can do toward undoing, or alleviating, the damage that you have inflicted on others.

Conclusion: Since textual criticism exists only for a text considered to be lost, the mere idea of criticizing the NT text is already against Jesus. A critic is above the text he is criticizing. I am a NT scholar, not critic; the Text is above me. I have a theory of the preservation of the Text, because the text has never been lost. That said, the fact remains that the extant MSS present us with different readings. We need to collate and study the MSS, but we need a new name for that: I suggest ‘Manuscriptology’.

We have historical evidence to support the following statements: 1) the apostles knew they were writing Scripture; 2) the apostles knew that colleagues were writing Scripture; 3) their contemporary Christians immediately recognized that those writings were Scripture; 4) therefore, they were concerned with their protection and preservation; 5) the proliferation of well-made copies started right away; 6) there was a normal transmission of those writings from the beginning and down through the centuries; 7) thus, the original wording was never lost. Further, I believe that I have demonstrated that we can, and do know what that wording is, based on an objective, empirical procedure.

All glory to God; He has preserved His Text!

¹ In John 5:22 Jesus declared that the Father has committed all judging to Him.