

Introduction: Canonicity, Textual Criticism, and Hermeneutics

In this lesson we want to document from the Scripture the two doctrines we discussed in the first lesson: (1) Salvation by means of faith alone in Christ alone; and (2) Eternal Security, or the principle that once saved, you can never lose your salvation but will instead retain a relationship with God forever.

When a theological proposition is made it is common for some to pose the question, “How do you know the Bible says that?”

In the course of stating your case, the rejoinders often include the following:

“Well, that's your interpretation.”

Not quite. If everyone is permitted an interpretation then we are all involved in an exercise of futility. There is a *system* of interpretation which, if followed, produces a consistent result. We are about to note some of the characteristics of that system.

“You can make the Bible say whatever you want it to say.”

True! But our intent in these lessons is not to *make* the Bible say anything but rather to systematically determine *what* God says. What we determine will not be human opinion but instead a discovery of God's message to us revealed through an analysis of what He has revealed.

“How do we know that the Bible we have today says the same things it did 2,000 years ago?”

That question can be answered in two ways. We could approach it academically through a discussion of the science of textual criticism, or we could approach it spiritually through the application of faith to the question. We will briefly answer it by means of faith.

QUESTION: Do you believe that in its original form, the Bible is God's inerrant message to man? If you reject that premise then nothing we teach will have any lasting impact on your life and you are wasting your time continuing with this study.

If however, you agree with this premise you are in effect stating that God is powerful enough and smart enough to make His message known to mankind and to secure it in writing.

Therefore we may conclude that if God was faithful enough to *produce* the written Word then He is also faithful to *preserve* the written Word.

Thus we operate under the principle that if God is faithful to compile the Scripture, He is faithful to preserve the integrity of its message

So in order for you to be confident that I am not fostering my opinions regarding salvation and eternal security, we are going to examine *John 3:16* from the standpoint of the language in which the Apostle John wrote it.

On the board you will observe *John 3:16* rendered in two languages, first the English translation as found in the *King James Version* of the year 1611, and secondly the Greek text preserved from the original manuscript of the Apostle John.

John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." KJV

Κατα Ιωαννην 3:16· Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστευὼν εἴη αὐτὸν μὴ ἀποληταὶ ἄλλὰ ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον. Eberhard Nestle's Greek Text

Houtos gar egapesen ho Theos ton kosmon, hoste ton huion ton monogene edoken, hina pas ho pisteuon eis auton me apoletai all' echei zoen aionion.
Transliteration

First of all, the translators of the *King James Version* didn't do a bad job of interpreting this verse. But if we are going to analyze what God the Holy Spirit sought to communicate to us through the writings of the Apostle John, which of the two would be best to receive the focus of our attention?

Obviously, the Greek text. We know it to be the closest to the original autograph written by John as human author. Therefore, in order to determine what the Bible says, we must analyze it in the language in which it was written.

The Old Testament is written in Hebrew with some Aramaic. The New Testament is written in Koine Greek with some Classical Greek.

We will examine the process and procedure which God used to construct the canon of Scripture in a later study. But for the moment we will proceed on the following premise:

God the Holy Spirit so directed the writers of Scripture that without changing their personality, their vocabulary, their frame of reference or their emotional pattern, God's complete and connected thought toward man was recorded in their own language and vernacular, the very words bearing the authority of divine authorship.

The term Textual Criticism needs to be defined to some degree as well:

TEXTUAL CRITICISM :The science of determining the exact text of Scripture as it existed in the original manuscripts, as well as its composition, authorship, and date of writing as judged from internal evidence.

With regard to the development of Textual Criticism, I pass along this quote from:

Thieme, R. B., Jr., *Canonicity*. Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr. Bible Ministries, 1973, pp. 56-57:

The King James Version had been translated very well at the time of its release; but it wasn't long until very definite problems were detected in its text.

About fifteen years had passed when Thomas Roe brought back from Turkey that beautiful manuscript-Codex Alexandrinus.

Since then, and up to the present, over five thousand manuscripts of the Bible have been uncovered, all of them more ancient and more accurate than those that had been used as the basis for the Authorized Version. Upon closer examination and comparison, a great number of discrepancies as well as mistakes showed up in the content. Textus Receptus [the tenth-century manuscript used for the translation of the New Testament of the King James Version] had been in vogue from 1516 to 1750; now it was challenged.

Naturally, the backers of the Textus Receptus strongly opposed those philologists who favored the newly discovered, more ancient manuscripts. Here is the interesting thing: these five thousand manuscripts in question, when compared to the Textus Receptus, had less than one percent difference in text. This is absolutely fantastic!

You realize of, course, that in the ancient world all copies of the Scriptures had to be made by hand. If you think that is easy, I suggest that you try it for yourself. Write out the Book of Romans. Then check through it and see how accurate you were. Perhaps then you would understand that in writing Hebrew or even Greek for twelve hours every day, the scribes might make a mistake-especially when there were no spaces between phrases, paragraphs or words-all of them in capital letters!

The period of struggle over the correct text of the English Bible lasted from 1750 till 1830, and it gave rise to a new science in philology-Textual Criticism. Finally, in 1830, the Textus Receptus' proponents conceded, and the struggle for the recognition of the older manuscripts was won.

We might call the years following 1830, right up to the present, the period of the improved text. These years produced the unraveling of the true text and its meaning.

In addition to this we must also mention the system we use to translate these manuscripts. It is called the ICE system. ICE is an acrostic taken from three words:

I - is for isagogics: The interpretation of the Bible in its historical setting.

C - is for categories: Classification of Biblical doctrine according to its subject matter.

E - is for exegesis: The grammatical interpretation of Scripture from its original languages.

In John 3:16 we are going to deal with the Koine Greek in our exegesis. The categories we are seeking to examine are Salvation and Eternal Security. The historical setting is the Incarnation of Christ and specifically a discussion He is having with a Jewish professor of theology named Nicodemus.

The verse thus begins with a conjunction which introduces an explanation of what has just been discussed. It looks like this in the Greek:

Γάρ - "For"

In John 3:16 our Lord seeks to explain and amplify the statements He has made in the first 15 verses culminating in the statement found in:

John 3:15 – "Everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life."

The explanatory conjunction *gar* indicates that Jesus is about to discuss in more detail the concept that faith in Him results in eternal life. The subject of the sentence comes next, the masculine proper noun:

Theos - "God"

The subject is accompanied with a verb that is going to reveal that God is the source of the action it describes. The verb is the aorist active indicative of:

agapao - "loved"

What God loved is found in the masculine singular direct object from the noun:

kosmos - "the world"

"For God loved the world."

In order to fully appreciate what a passage is saying to us, we need to examine each word from the standpoint of the Greek grammar; a process we have just identified as "exegesis."

From the grammar so far we have learned that God is presented as a male, the masculine singular of *Theos*.

He is said to love the world-*kosmos*.

Now what does it mean when it says that God loves the world? Is this a statement of His appreciation for His original creation? It is a statement of His preference for the earth over all of His other heavenly creations?

Although *kosmos* is correctly translated “world,” its all-encompassing concept caused it to take on an additional meaning: that which the world includes, namely the human race.

Consequently, we see that God loves the human race. Next comes the question, “What does it mean when it says that God loves us?”

First of all, we need to learn some interesting points from the Greek grammar regarding the verb “to love”: *agapao*:

aorist tense - Culminative; views the love of God for the human race in its entirety but regards it from the standpoint of its existing result.

1. What is the existing result of God loving the world? It is stated in the upcoming result clause.
2. The result clause is going state that God **gave His Son**.
3. And so, the culminative aorist tense views the love of God in its entirety but emphasizes the existing result of that love, namely, the fact that He gave His Son to the world.

active voice - God, as Subject, produces the action of the verb by loving the entire human race.

1. How does God love a species which is demonstrated to be sinful and imperfect? He does so through an unconditional act of grace.
2. Unconditional love means that God's love does not depend upon us, the object, but upon Himself, the subject.
3. In grace, God is free to express His love unconditionally to any object based on His personal integrity.
4. Since mankind is a fallen species because of personal sin, God made the sovereign decision to extend to us a means of reestablishing a relationship with Him.
5. His decision involved a Plan in which deity would take on the form of true humanity and become a substitute for the human race.
6. As substitute, this divine personality would receive the punishment for sins committed by mankind.
7. From this Plan we see emerge the doctrine of the Trinity: God the Father designed the Plan, Jesus Christ volunteered to execute the Plan, and the Holy Spirit agreed to explain the Plan to the human race.
8. The doctrine of the Trinity thus recognizes that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are coequal, coeternal, and coinfinite, being one in essence but three in personality.
9. All three of these divine Personalities agreed to carry out this Plan as a measure of unmerited favor toward the human race.
10. Unmerited favor is also called grace and one of the ways it is expressed is through unconditional love.

Indicative mood: Declarative; indicates that this is a statement of absolute fact; an undeniable principle of Biblical truth; a part of historical reality.

FACT: God unconditionally loved the human race so much that it resulted in Him giving to it His Son.

1. No member of the human race deserves this treatment.
2. At physical birth every individual is physically alive but spiritually dead.