

# **New Testament Survey Class # 1**

## **C-3 Jan. 8, 2017**

8 Classes

Jan 8

Jan 15

Jan 22

Jan 29

Feb. 5

Feb. 12

Feb. 19 - NO CLASS due to Marriage Retreat

Feb. 26

Feb. 5

Will explore context, culture, purpose, authorship, audience. etc. of each book of bible.

**Question: Why would this information be important?**

**All these things effect how we approach and interpret the NT.**

- One key in understanding the Bible to our fullest potential (especially the New Covenant) is recognize that is intended to be a book of principles for a thinking people of God who know him and his will.
- This is important because it helps us to understand the Bible in the manner in which it was written to us.
  - Whether we realize it or not, every person has a method of they use to interpret and understand the Bible.

- If we understand the Bible to be a book of **authoritative and guiding principles for God's people**, then we will approach it to find those principles; an approach which allows us to find value in every single verse in the Bible, and to remain consistent in how we interpret every passage of Scripture.

From C.O.R.E class = 6 principles to interpret.

#1 Observe

#2 Navigate

#3 Consider Context

#4 Pull out the Principle

#5 Application

#6 Put it into Practice

This class will help especially with steps 1 & 2

## **Step 1 Observe:**

- In crossing the river, it is wide indeed
- 2000 years ago it was written
- Things are different over here
  - dress
  - morals
  - geography
  - politics
  - attitudes about money
  - customs
  - gender roles & attitudes
  - what is important to people i.e. what motivates them.
  - humor is different.

**but to answer those questions ... you have to know about those things.**

- **this class will address cultural, authorship, political etc.**

**Step 2 Navigate:** you are starting to carry the scripture back over the river to your life, but you have to cross the wide river again.

**At the heart of this step is to attempt to understand what was happening in the text that we are reading and how the original audience would have read it.**

**EXAMPLE: John 4 the Woman at the Well:**

- But the original audience would have seen something very different than a Messiah talking to an open woman.
- But the original audience would have seen something very different
- They would have seen cultural expectations being challenged at every turn.
- Jews should have avoided Samaritan territory.
- A Jew shouldn't be talking to a Samaritan. A man shouldn't be talking to a woman publicly like that.
- A woman shouldn't be at the well at that time of day; early in the morning was the time to draw water (a reader's assumption would have been that she must have been avoiding people).
- There was no point for a Jew to talk with a Samaritan about worshiping God.
  - They worshiped at different Temples and
  - the Samaritans only accepted the first five books of the Scriptures.

Makes the "new" teaching of God could be worshiped anywhere as long as it is done in spirit and truth. more meaningful because he was breaking social and religious norms all over the place.

There are many GAPS between our time & the time the NT was written:

**Rocks in the river we must navigate around:**

Will discuss 4, though there are many others.

**1. We will start with the language gap.**

The biblical texts were written in different languages than most of us read them in, so that means we are separated from them right away.

The vast majority of us must read translations of the texts.

That doesn't mean that they are unreliable or we can't really ever know what the Bible says, but we simply have to be aware that translating from one language into another always has difficulties.

For instance look at four English translations of Matthew 11:12:

12[?] From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. NIV '84

12[?] From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ESV

2[?] From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been suffering violence, and the violent have been seizing it by force. HCSB

12[?] From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. NIV 2011

## **2. Culture gap:**

- Already saw from our initial discussion that differences in culture can effect how we feel about issues or assumptions we make about the scriptures
  - birth of Jesus
  - slavery

## **3. History gap:**

## **4. Covenant gap:**

- Jesus was a Jew, bound by Hebrew law
- So was the thief on the cross

## **Trusting the New Testament**

- Without trust, it is just another book
- If I can't trust what it says, why live my life by it?

Fable of how we got the New Testament:

Once upon a time there was a man named Jesus who was a learned, albeit somewhat radical Jewish rabbi or sage who taught many wonderful things about knowing God. After his death, however, his followers splintered quickly into competing factions with each group claiming different things about who Jesus was. Each group had their own beliefs, their own doctrines, their own practices, and even their own set of writings about the life of Jesus and his teachings that would eventually come to be viewed within their own sects as sacred writings. For several centuries these groups competed against one another, with each claiming that they had the market cornered on the truth about Jesus, but it was all very confusing for everyone at that time.

By the time the fourth century rolled around (nearly 300 years after the death of Jesus) one sect finally came to the forefront of power and influence. This group chose the writings that agreed with their beliefs and practices and declared them to be the “canon” or

the “measuring stick” for who Jesus was. Once they had rejected the many other writings about Jesus that were available and decided upon the twenty-seven that they did, they set about putting down and getting rid of the other accounts of Jesus and writings that reflected different beliefs. They then began to demand that everyone who wanted to be considered a Christian must accept only the beliefs espoused by these twenty-seven books, and all other beliefs were labeled “heresies”

The above brief tale of how we got the Bible as we know it today has been popularized by such modern authors as Bart Ehrman, Dan Brown, Elaine Pagels, and Dominic Crossan, and has been accepted as the accurate version of history by today’s popular media and most secular institutions of higher learning. In addition to all of these early church power games, it has become popular to claim that the New Testaments that we have today are so riddled with copying errors and changes that they can’t possibly be trusted. Thus, they are error-riddled products of 4th century power and decidedly not the word of God.

**Canon: Can I trust the Bible? Is it reliable?**

- Television calls it into questions
  - history
  - discovery
  - PBS
- popular magazine
  - Time
  - Newsweek

## 1 Thess 5:19-22

*“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.”*

4 popular objections.

1. The New Testament writers had no intention or idea that their writings would later be given the authority of Scripture (they were only given that authority as a result of later power struggles within Christianity).
2. The New Testament Canon was not established until the 4th century or later
3. There were many written contenders that could have been considered Scripture, but in the 4th century the church chose the writings that agreed with their theology and rejected the other legitimate contenders
4. The New Testament texts have been copied so many times and have so many errors that they are not reliable.

There were 3 standards of Biblical Criticism that help determine which writings were accepted.

The Standard of Canon (which ones are “in”)

1. apostolic - the writings can be traced back to an apostle or one directly approved by an apostle
2. orthodox - it agrees with the teachings of the O.T.
3. Universal - It was widely accepted by all the known churches.

## - Why would the early church have chosen those standards?

### The Reliability of the Text

- Claimed that there are about 400K variations or “mistakes” in the NT.
- Keep in mind the technology of the day = copying (even today, with computers & spell check things get messed up)
- 5800 different manuscripts to consider
- First, it is helpful that we have so many copies because we can detect differences, and by comparing them, experts can piece together what the originals said and when some of those errors crept in.
- We should note that God did give his word through the apostles, but he never promised that the process of copying it and handing it down would be without error.
- Whenever God works with and through humans the process gets a bit messy but it is still very easy to believe that God works through our foibles and mistakes and still is not thwarted in his purposes.

But what about all those copying errors? To hear that there are 400,000 errors in a document that has only 138,000 words is daunting if not faith-damaging.

Even though the claims range from 200,000 to 400,000, we will take the highest number and work from there.

The first thing we need to understand is that any variant in a text is counted as a mistake according to the math of the critics. So if we find the same exact variant in 2,000 of the manuscripts, then it is considered as 2,000 variations rather than one.

That means from the very start, rather than 400,000 separate errors we are talking about an average of about 69 variations per manuscript if we simply

divide the number of variations by the number of 5,800 Greek manuscripts that are available.

That still seems like a significant number but nothing like 400K

The reality is that we have so many variations because we have so many manuscripts.

The average Greek New Testament manuscript is over 450 pages long, meaning there are more than 2.6 million pages of texts. - a lot of opportunity for a slip up.

3 Kinds of “mistakes”

errors;  
non-viable changes; and  
viable changes.

**Errors:** things like minor spelling variations, changes in the word order of a sentence, repeated or omitted words, and repeated or omitted lines

Easily identified, easily explained and easily corrected.

These represent 99% of the “errors” found in the manuscripts.

**non-viable changes;**

These are changes which are more significant than the previous category as far as their impact on the text.

Yet, the differences in this category appear in very few manuscripts, in manuscripts that are known to be less reliable, or only in later manuscripts.

These changes are obvious and easily refuted once we consider the older and more reliable texts.



In other words, these changes are so few or so late that it is obvious that they are changes to the original text and they can be summarily dismissed.

### **viable changes:**

These are changes that do have an impact on the text and there is enough evidence of more than one reading in the various manuscripts that we must weigh the evidence and use textual criticism to determine what the original reading was.

Nearly all of the changes in this category were intentional changes by a scribe at some point which were subsequently copied by other scribes.

Sub categories:

1. **Clarification** - like adding “yours is the kingdom & the power & the glory forever” from 1 Chron 29:11 added to Matt. 6:13 in the Lords prayer. probably by a scribe because it was so popular to add that phrase at the end of a prayer. That copy was then copied and because it was so common, was not even questioned.
  - newest version of NIV does this by translating “brothers” as “brothers and sisters” in places that they interpret the meaning to be for the church at large.

these changes have been easily discovered and none of them change the meaning of any passage, they simply expand or help explain that passage with the use of other Scripture.

2. **Insertions:** Like Mark 16:9-20 or Jn 7:53 - 8:11 - these are listed in our Bibles as questionable passages from older manuscripts and can treat them as such. This is one reason why we don't use them in our Bible Studies with people.

### **3. Changes for Theological reasons:**

**1 John 5:6-8** which says *“This is the one who came by water and blood —Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood.*

*And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.”*

Some later Latin manuscripts read “the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit.” as the 3. A change was made there, but it is a change that doesn’t appear in any Greek manuscripts until the 14 century so we easily recognize the alterations.

When we take away these minor variants, mistakes, insertions, and such we find that we are left with a small handful, at best, of passages in the New Testament that are unclear as to the original wording (***about .002% of the New Testament text***).

These are discrepancies over definitions of greek words that are different, but the words are spelled very similarly.

In none of these types of cases is the ultimate meaning of the passage in doubt, and at no point is any significant doctrine, practice, or belief of the New Testament at stake.

Simply put, the New Testament that we have is reliable and trustworthy.

## **Class Discussion:**

1. Why do you think it is important to understand and be able to explain why we can trust the New Testament that we have as reliable and trustworthy despite the modern attempts at criticism?
2. What are some of the obstacles and/or roadblocks that might keep someone from wrestling through this issues over the reliability of the Bible and being able to defend the word of God?
3. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul distinguishes between approaching the message of the gospel (which we have contained in the Bible) as the word of God or as a human word. What does it mean to approach the Bible as the word of God and not a human word? What does it not mean?