**Which Bible 5**

2013

### Eating More Crow

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ. I was wrong. The real question is, what do I intend to do about it? Today I want to examine some historic and modern ideas about text criticism. The reader should be confident that this is not about rewriting the Bible. It’s about what to do with all the thousands of ancient manuscripts we have and the new discoveries of ancient manuscripts that keep cropping up. Still, I did blunder.

### What Exposed the Errors

These errors were first uncovered by the article written by Dr. Daniel Baird Wallace of Dallas Theological Seminary, “The Majority-Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique”, in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (JETS) 37/2 (June 1994) pages 185-215.[[1]](#endnote-1)

### Tischendorf’s Rules of Text Criticism

1849: Tischendorf publishes the Greek New Testament, with Witness of Ancient Recessions, Critical Apparatus, and Rules of Criticism.[[2]](#endnote-2)

“Basic rule: The text is only to be sought from ancient evidence, and especially from Greek manuscripts, but without neglecting the testimonies of versions and fathers.  
1. A reading altogether peculiar to one or another ancient document is suspicious; as also is any, even if supported by a class of documents, which seems to evince that it has originated in the revision of a learned man.  
2. Readings, however well supported by evidence, are to be rejected, when it is manifest (or very probable) that they have proceeded from the errors of copyists.  
3. In parallel passages, whether of the New or Old Testament, especially in the Synoptic Gospels, which ancient copyists continually brought into increased accordance, those testimonies are preferable, in which precise accordance of such parallel passages is not found; unless, indeed, there are important reasons to the contrary.  
4. In discrepant readings, that should be preferred which may have given occasion to the rest, or which appears to comprise the elements of the others.  
5. Those readings must be maintained which accord with New Testament Greek, or with the particular style of each individual writer.”

We must reconstruct Tischendorf’s basic rule, which is essentially sound. “The text is only to be sought from ancient evidence, and [exclusively] from Greek manuscripts.” If there is no Greek manuscript, there is nothing to discuss. Moreover, we are not free to construct a pseudo-Greek manuscript from eclectic reconstruction. The evidence must be left intact, and divergences relegated to marginal notes, footnotes, or endnotes. Every effort must be sustained to preserve a faithful representation of original manuscripts. The testimonies of versions and the Fathers help us decipher, evaluate, and organize the Greek manuscripts. The versions and the Fathers may provide important clues to the structure of families and stemma, and even help us to prefer or select a specific manuscript; but they can never be used as a substitute for actual Greek text.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Rule 1. A “peculiar” reading, a reading which is supported by only one manuscript is suspicious. Nevertheless, no such document is ever to be neglected: it is raw evidence. When a differing reading is “supported by a class of documents” there is all the more reason to consider it as weighty evidence. Only in the case that there is proof of reproduction from a single original can several manuscripts be considered single sourced: for example, 1000 copies from one printing press. However, scribal copying is not bare mechanical reproduction; each individual scribe is endowed with intelligence; consequently, grouping any set of manuscripts as a single witness is based on a risky assumption.

Rule 2. The problem with the obvious “errors of copyists” is that no matter how obvious, it is nearly impossible to detect in which direction the error is made. Almost all copying errors are met with an equally risky exact opposite error.[[4]](#endnote-4) This rule must be set aside; it can only be used if the master exemplar is previously known from other evidence: then and only then, can we be sure of the direction in which the error proceeds.

Rule 3. No a-priory assumptions or conclusions may be drawn from “parallel accounts”: each must be considered as an independent chain of evidence.

Rule 4. No a-priory assumptions or conclusions may be drawn from “discrepant readings”. What appears to be discrepant can either be caused by partitioning a single source, or be caused by the joining of two distinct sources.

Rule 5. No a-priory assumptions or conclusions may be drawn from Greek, or from style. Evidence must be left intact, neither neglected nor destroyed. For example, if a spelling variation was observed, one would need outside information about an era or place where such a spelling variation was in uniform practice before drawing any conclusions about dating, family, or text-type from it. Language is a moving target. Simply observing that language has moved is not productive, until when, where, and how it moved are also known.[[5]](#endnote-5)

We see that we have thrown out all of Tischendorf’s rules. Only one specific interpretation of these rules is left standing.

### Burgon’s Rules of Text Criticism

1896: John William Burgon (1813-1888),[[6]](#endnote-6) an English theologian: *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established*[[7]](#endnote-7) is published after Burgon’s death. In the latter, he outlines his “seven Tests of Truth,” which he also calls “Notes of Truth.”

“Notes of Truth.  
1. Antiquity, or Primitiveness;  
2. Consent of Witnesses, or Number;  
3. Variety of Evidence, or Catholicity;  
4. Respectability of Witnesses, or Weight;  
5. Continuity, or Unbroken Tradition;  
6. Evidence of the Entire Passage, or Context;  
7. Internal Considerations, or Reasonableness.”

More than one modern commentator has set aside Burgon’s work as the babbling of an angry fool: this is intellectually dishonest. Burgon wrote several large and weighty documents considering text problems in painful detail: these are worthy of our careful consideration. Westcott refused to consider Burgon, rejecting him with the words of an arrogant fool:[[8]](#endnote-8) who would ever dare to question the papal proclamation of Westcott? Even if Westcott’s conclusions are supported by better, modern evidence, it was rash of him to neglect Burgon’s work. A thorough examination of Burgon is outside of my ability and the scope of this paper. Given opportunity, we may be able to return to Burgon later. Here, we are only concerned with his rules, on which he elaborates at length. Even now we shall unfortunately need to be content with examining a mere summary. Ostensibly, these “Notes of Truth” boil down to an argument of theological presuppositions: namely, verbal, plenary inspiration;[[9]](#endnote-9) and providential preservation. We have previously dismissed the idea that all ancient Byzantine texts wore out, leaving absolutely no trace behind. We will deal with these presuppositions, rather than dealing with the “Notes of Truth” themselves.

Inspiration:[[10]](#endnote-10) There can be no doubt that Scripture is θεόπνευστος; Exhaled might have been a better term for the Holy Ghost’s activity.[[11]](#endnote-11) However, we believe that Exodus 33:11 best describes the normative nature of this inspiration and there is nothing verbal or plenary about it. A better description would be inspired conversation or inspired prophetic utterance. This conversation was a two-way street between the parent and the child, which leaves room for the child’s inability to fully grasp eternal thoughts and for the child to express himself freely in his own words. Nor was it limited to one man, Moses.

“The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. He returned to the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle.”[[12]](#endnote-12)

“The Lord said to Moses, Gather seventy men of the elders of Israel for me, whom you know to be elders of the people, and officers over them. Bring them to the tabernacle of the congregation, so that they may stand there with you. I will come down and talk with you there. I will take the Spirit which is on you, and will put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you bear it not alone.

“Moses went out, and told the people the words of the Lord, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle. The Lord came down in a cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was on him, and gave it to the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, and did not cease. But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. The Spirit rested on them; and they were of those who were registered, but went not out to the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp. There ran a young man, to tell Moses, who said, “Eldad and Medad prophesy in the camp.” Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, “My lord Moses, forbid them.” Moses said to him, “Are you envious for my sake? Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets,[[13]](#endnote-13) and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” [[14]](#endnote-14)

“But in every nation he who fears [God], and works righteousness, is accepted by [God].[[15]](#endnote-15)

Consequently, we are compelled to reject many commonly held views of inspiration on the grounds that they are outside of what Scripture itself says about inspiration. Moreover, some of these views of inspiration are so mechanical that the least flaw brings the whole house to the ground. The Scripture is θεόπνευστος. We should accept that fact at face value without modification. The nature of that θεόπνευστος is evident from the life of Moses. The Decalogue, where God Himself writes, is a rare exception set within the normal case.

Providential preservation: Neither can there be any doubt that the Scripture is providentially preserved. Having conceded that point, let us further consider exactly what Divine Providence actually guarantees. Divine Providence guarantees that the sun will continue to shine on the just and on the unjust:[[16]](#endnote-16) the whole point being that Common Grace will continue as long as the earth endures, therefore Christians should be about their Father’s business of loving the lost pagan world. Divine Providence guaranteed that when the Israelites and Jews loved God they would prosper, and when they turned away from Him they would fail. It guaranteed that God would abandon the Jewish kingdom, temple, worship, and Autographa in 586. Although God continued to provide for the Israelites and Jews behind the scenes, he never restored the Jewish kingdom, temple, worship, or Autographa. He provided for the return of 516; but the Glory never entered the Second Temple, restored the Autographa, or answered prayer by Urim and Thummim. The return of 516 was almost completely a man centered work, an effort of Common Grace. When the Glory did return between 6 to 4 BC, He entered Herod’s Temple,[[17]](#endnote-17) and was promptly rejected by His people.[[18]](#endnote-18) He never once indicated that the Autographa would be restored: when we next see the Autographa it is the center of heavenly worship.[[19]](#endnote-19) The one thing that providential preservation most certainly does not guarantee is an inerrant Autographa on earth, or even a good archetype. We shall have to look elsewhere to find reasoned support for such an archetype.

Again, we have left none of Burgon’s theological presuppositions standing. The ideas of inspiration and providence are completely redefined, so that they say nothing more or less than what Scripture itself says about them. This new debate about inspiration and providence is open for all to discuss.

### Ehrman’s Rule of Text Criticism

1981: Bart D. Ehrman (b. 1955)[[20]](#endnote-20) authors *New Testament Textual Criticism Quest for Methodology*.[[21]](#endnote-21) Ehrman’s Rule of text criticism states that preservation requires perfection: that is, no textual corruptions may exist in at least one of three cases: either in all manuscripts, a set of manuscripts, or a single manuscript.[[22]](#endnote-22)

Since we have stricken Burgon’s views of providential preservation to the ground, Ehrman no longer has a point. Perfection on earth does not exist. Man is a sinner, and corruption of the Church and of the Bible text is the expected norm. Man corrupts everything he touches. The real question before us is, whatever shall we do about it? More to the point, what has God already done about it? This is cause for more careful and fresh examination of the Scriptures themselves, and not for fraudulent pious handwringing. Our task has not changed: we are to find what heaven has said and get in step with it.

### Parker’s Comments on Text Criticism

David C. Parker[[23]](#endnote-23)

“Commenting on the text of the Greek New Testament, he said:

The text is changing. Every time that I make an edition of the Greek New Testament, or anybody does, we change the wording. We are maybe trying to get back to the oldest possible form but, paradoxically, we are creating a new one. Every translation is different, every reading is different, and although there’s been a tradition in parts of Protestant Christianity to say there is a definitive single form of the text, the fact is you can never find it. There is never ever a final form of the text.

Regarding a textual change in Codex Sinaiticus:

There is also a fascinating place in the codex in the Sermon on the Mount where we can see a change to the text altering the attitude to anger. Jesus says the person who is angry with his brother deserves judgement. But there is a variation on that. If you look at the page in Codex Sinaiticus you will see that somebody’s added a little word in the margin in Greek which changes it to “the person who is angry with his brother without good reason deserves judgement,” and there you’ve got two very different views of Christian life.”

If we take Parker’s comments seriously, and we should; the very least requirement is a new set of rules. We need to rethink the whole field of text criticism, and reexamine all the evidence. Obviously, I do not possess the right skills for reexamination of the evidence: but I am a serious student of Scripture and have some suggestions about where the rules should be headed. A few of the subjects we should explore include:

* What is an accurate definition of Autographa and where are they located?
* How were Autographa historically accessed and how do we access them today?
* Are the Autographa a single collection of unchanging documents, or can they be changed? Are there possibly multiple Autographa?
* What is Inspiration?
* What is Inscripturation and how does it relate to Transcription?
* What is Canonization and who has authority to Canonize? Is Canonization fundamentally: an act of God, an act of the Jews, an act of the Church, or an act of man?
* How shall evidence be handled?
* How do we focus on real translatable differences, and not on meaningless trivia, or on mere document counting?
* What Bible(s) can we recommend to the Church?

Yours in Christ,

Augie-Herb

[[24]](#endnote-24)

1. <http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/37/37-2/JETS_37-2_185-215_Wallace.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *Novum Testamentum Graece. Ad antiquos testes recensuit, Apparatum Criticum multis modis auctum et correctum apposuit, Commentationem Isagogicam praemisit Constantinus Tischendorf* (please forgive my crude attempts at translation). <http://www.bible-researcher.com/bib-t.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. That being said, the Fathers often have exact quotes of the Greek, text which are every bit as valuable as any other manuscript: such quotes are manuscripts in their own right. The Fathers may also discuss detailed reasons of why a particular Greek word must be used in preference to another… such discussion is invaluable. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This author has over ten-years, hands-on experience with scribal work. He has made every one of these mistakes and many more. The claim that such errors can be sorted out is not convincing. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. known, not conjectured [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Burgon> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/38960/38960-h/38960-h.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. “Westcott once commented: ‘I cannot read Mr. Burgon yet. A glance at one or two sentences leads me to think that his violence answers himself.’ ” What a confession, filled with overweening pride. Burgon was Westcott’s ecclesial superior, who deserved better treatment. Even if Westcott was offended at Burgon’s words, Westcott the scholar should have been able to set his feelings aside in the interests of intellectual honesty. Wallace wastes several paragraphs demonstrating Burgon’s bad disposition; his time would have been better spent examining Burgon’s evidence. <http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/37/37-2/JETS_37-2_185-215_Wallace.pdf>: page 189ff [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Literally, every word: but typically every letter and serif on a letter (Matthew 5:17; Luke 16:17). Greek ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία and μίαν κεραίαν do not correspond exactly with Hebrew yod and those marks that distinguish daleth or nun from resh. Indeed, there is no exegetical reason to seek a Hebrew meaning at all. Iota and yod might have a crude correspondence. Keras, on the other hand, means horn, and is far more conspicuous than tittle, usually counting the number of kings in a nation: hence, indicating the individual laws in the Decalogue. Pressing Jesus’ declaration to details of spelling minutia is at best dubious. More likely, His meaning is that each of the ten “words”, which are really ten sentences, in the Decalogue will stand exactly as they are written. There is little disagreement or doubt about what they mean. Even though we will draw a conservative and strict view of inspiration, we doubt that Jesus intended His words about ἰῶτα and κεραία to be pressed to all Scripture, or even beyond the Decalogue at all. The focus of the Gospels and the New Testament is on the defense of the Decalogue, and not on legal minutia such as dietary requirements. Plenary simply refers to all the words, without condition or qualification: we suspect that this is untrue. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Breathed out, not breathed in, we simply avoid the term expiration because of its negative connotation in the English language. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Acts 1:16; 2:4; Ephesians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Exodus 33:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Moses’ words are prophetic, being fulfilled in Acts 2 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Numbers 11:16-17, 24-29 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Exodus 2:18; 3:1; 4:18; 18:1-2, 5-6, 9-10, 12; Acts 10:35 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Matthew 5:43-48 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Malachi 3:1-6, nor should we think that Herod’s temple is indicated by Malachi. Ensuing events reveal clearly that the temple suddenly entered is Jesus’ body, the Incarnation is the only true temple indicated. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. John 1:10-14, please give careful attention to the words “made by Him” (v. 10), “made flesh” (v. 14), and “Glory” (v. 14), which are so carefully placed together in such close association, and tightly woven argument. The same Glory that created the world, now comes, not in a temple made with hands, but in the temple of His own body. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Revelation 5 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bart_D._Ehrman> [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. <http://books.google.com/books/about/New_Testament_Textual_Criticism.html?id=jqXJnQEACAAJ> [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. <http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/37/37-2/JETS_37-2_185-215_Wallace.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_C_Parker> [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
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