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Steve Gregg Responds to Bart Ehrman



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg responds to the criticisms of Bart Ehrman, a well-known textual critic who has written extensively on the Bible. While Ehrman argues that the Bible cannot be considered divinely preserved or inspired due to the existence of varying manuscripts and textual variants, Gregg believes that the integrity of the Bible is not in question despite these discrepancies. He suggests that textual critics use tools to reliably identify the original readings of the Bible, and that Bible translators often use the results of their work to establish the original reading. Furthermore, Gregg notes that Christian faith is built on the authority of Christ and his teachings, rather than on the belief in inerrancy.

Transcript

The topic I'm going to be speaking about today is a response to Bart Ehrman. And I'm doing this strictly because I was asked if I'd speak about him and his influence and his ideas. Bart Ehrman is a name that's kind of a household word in, well, in the scholarly world and in much popular literature because he's written many best-selling books for not just an academic, but a popular audience.

So his name is very well known. His books have sold over 2 million copies. And he is one who attacks the integrity of the Bible, frankly, and so I have known of some people who've had struggles with their faith ever since being exposed to his influence.

And I've heard him speak a number of times. I've read much of what he's written. He's written lots of books.

And I have a pretty good idea of his main arguments, at least the ones that are seeking to undermine the Bible's integrity directly. And so I'm not a textual critic. I need to make this very clear.

But Bart Ehrman is a scholar of the school, well, of the branch of biblical scholarship called textual criticism. This has to do with evaluating and comparing and assessing the significance of different variations in the different manuscripts of the Bible to see how they impact the decisions we make about what the original text said. And so Bart

Ehrman is in this technical field and he's respected in that field, very respected in that field, though it should not be thought that he's the most respected man in that field.

His own mentor, Bruce Metzger, is no doubt much more highly respected and does not share Bart Ehrman's conclusions. So the reason Bart Ehrman, I think, has become famous, it's not very often that a textual critic of the Bible becomes famous, is largely because of the mood of our age, the desire for people to, in many cases, escape the implications of the Bible being correct and always looking for somebody who seems to have scholarly credentials who can free them from the bondage of belief. And he is one who himself has become, as he would say, freed from that bondage.

Let me tell you a little about him first. I'm gonna tell you about what his claims are, what his implications of those claims are. I also wanna talk about, let me see what's in my notes here.

I've got a lot of notes here. I'm gonna give examples of some of his arguments and we're going to talk about what I believe are his errors. And then I'm going to also talk about the reflections on some of his personal journey and on the personal journeys of those who've come under his influence, okay? So that's a lot to talk about.

I have a lot of quotes and I apologize in advance. I'm very, very poor at reading out loud any quotes, unless it's something I've read so many times I've practically memorized it. And that is not the case with these quotes.

So this will be a little choppy at times as I'm trying to read these quotes from Bart Ehrman himself and from those responding to him. Since I'm not a scholar in a technical sense and certainly not a textual critic, I could not meet him on his own grounds in that field. However, there are plenty of people who do and who are in that field and are in every bit as much respect or more so than he is in it and who've written books and so forth.

And I've read these books since I was very young. The truth is that all the points that Bart Ehrman makes against the Bible are data that has been known to evangelicals for over a hundred years. And I've known them for close to 50 years myself.

I've included some of the data that he uses, in fact, in my own lectures on the authority of scripture. Although I come to different conclusions. He takes the data a certain direction, which by is no means justified by the data itself, as we'll see.

And other people take the data in other directions. It's not that Bart Ehrman knows more about this stuff than evangelicals do. He doesn't.

Everything he presents in his book are well-known things to all in the scholarly community and also to many like myself who are not in the scholarly community, but who read books and study. So he doesn't have anything new. He just has a witty way of

writing and speaking.

He has Harper Collins publishes books, which he also published my books. And they have promoted his books. They have not promoted mine for some reason, but his books have gotten all kinds of attention.

He's been interviewed on all kinds of talk shows and that's why he's such a well-known guy. Just as a brief bio of the man, I'll just take a paragraph out of Wikipedia. If you look him up, you'll find that this is what it says.

Bart Ehrman is an American New Testament scholar focusing on textual criticism of the New Testament, the historical Jesus, the origins and development of early Christianity. He has written and edited 30 books, including three college textbooks. He has also authored six New York Times bestsellers.

He is currently the James A. Gregg Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. So the man's got scholarly credentials to be sure. One of the things that makes him so interesting, in many respects, he's not very different than other attackers of Christianity in the Bible.

And he is a self-professed atheist agnostic, or agnostic atheist, I think is how he puts it. He says he's agnostic in terms of what he knows and atheist in terms of what he believes. He doesn't believe in God, and therefore he's, in his own words, agnostic atheist.

Now, why he stands out from many others who write as atheists against the Bible is that he professes that he was once an evangelical Christian. And I'm sure he was in the movement. He certainly had many things about his early life that would qualify him in the eyes of many as a true evangelical Christian.

When he was a sophomore in high school in Kansas, he had what he calls, quote, a bona fide born again experience. That certainly sounds like an evangelical talking. And he did love to study the Bible.

By the way, he was always a very intelligent, articulate, and witty man. He was, his high school debate team, which he was on, was a state champion debate team. So he knew debate techniques before he was a Christian and in his early Christian life.

So he decided to become an expert on the Bible and probably to defend it. So he got a diploma in biblical studies from Moody Bible Institute. Now, Moody Bible Institute is a very conservative, very fundamentalist Bible school in Chicago.

He got some kind of a diploma of biblical studies there. Then he went on to college, did his undergraduate work at Wheaton College, which is a very evangelical college. And then he went on and did his graduate studies, master's and doctorate studies at

Princeton.

Now, while he was at Princeton, he discovered something that I'm not sure why it took him so long to discover them. He went through the Moody and the Wheaton years, which are education, formal biblical education. And he never learned, apparently, what he learned at Princeton, which surprises me because just from reading Christian books, I learned the things that threw him off.

I learned those things when I was probably in my late teens or early twenties, perhaps, but he learned for the first time that we really don't have the original manuscripts of the New Testament. We only have copies of copies of copies. As a matter of fact, we have thousands of them, about 5,700, almost 6,000 copies of the Greek New Testament in existence that we know of.

Now, the problem with this, so you might think, well, that's a really good thing, but what gave him trouble about that was that in these 5,700 copies of the Greek New Testament, there are a lot of ways in which these manuscripts disagree with each other. And that is to say, reading the same passage in the Bible in different manuscripts of that passage, the wording would sometimes be different. Where that happens, that is referred to as a textual variant.

Where there's textual variants, it means that some manuscripts read it one way and other manuscripts read it maybe a slightly different way. Maybe in some cases, significantly different. Now, this being so, this undermined his view that he had apparently learned as a new Christian or at Moody or somewhere of the inerrancy of scripture.

His big hangup was that he had learned that the Bible is without any errors, that we have faithfully preserved for us by God's divine intervention, the complete and unspoiled text of the word of God. And that he could just read his English Bible and know that he's reading the exact words that were originally inspired in terms of the New Testament writings. Now, that of course was an idea that had to be abandoned.

Because first of all, if you got almost 6,000 manuscripts of the New Testament and they don't all agree with each other, well, then he says the word of God apparently was not preserved divinely for us. And if it wasn't preserved for us divinely, it probably wasn't divinely inspired either. Now, frankly, I don't know that that's a logical conclusion, but that's how he reasoned with himself.

He tells his own story at the beginning of misquoting Jesus, how he reasoned that, well, if we have all these manuscript copies and all these variants, again, a variant refers to a place where one manuscript in its wording of a passage differs either slightly or more so with another manuscript of the same passage. That's a variant in the manuscripts. And he concluded that if God didn't supernaturally preserve his word, then he didn't

supernaturally inspire it either.

Now, I have to say, I have to disagree with his understanding of the inspiration and inerrancy of scripture. We'll talk about that later on. But even allowing for his view of inspiration that he was taught at Booty, even if it's true that God inspired the scripture, it would not necessarily be true that he supernaturally preserved it.

If he inspired it, it only means that the writers themselves who were prophets and apostles were inspired men and inspired writers. It would not mean that every human being that made a handmade copy of that inspired word would themselves become inspired. In other words, the inspiration of scripture would not simply be in its production, but in its preservation, no matter what kind of careless copyist was making a copy.

I mean, try yourself, just try very hard to make a copy with your own hand, just handwriting of let's say the book of Acts or the book of John. Now you're gonna make some mistakes. And you're no different than the people who copied it through history.

They made mistakes too. The fact that God doesn't preserve you from making a mistake when you copy a passage of scripture does not mean that the passage of scripture's integrity is in doubt. It's your problem, not the Bible's problem.

So in other words, I feel that Bart Ehrman had a logical fallacy from the beginning. But that's another issue we'll talk about later on. What was his view of inspiration and inerrancy of scripture? Well, among the best-selling books that Bart Ehrman wrote, one of the early ones that made a really big splash is called, Misquoting Jesus, subtitled, The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why? And then he goes into giving his reader information about the many manuscripts and the many variants and raising questions then as to whether we can even trust the Bible to be what it originally said.

How do we know what it said if there's all these variants in these manuscripts? Now, notice the subtitle of the book. The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why? Now, why would suggest that whoever changed it had a motive. That is, they did it on purpose, that the mistakes were not accidental mistakes that a copyist would make, but they had an agenda.

That's what why would suggest. Why did these people change the Bible? Why? Who are they? That's the question he says he's answering. But he doesn't really answer that very well because he doesn't know why variants came in.

There are some cases where a theory of a copyist, a scribe having a prejudice could very well be the reason. But I think most scholars believe, and in fact, Bart Ehrman himself says in his book that the scribes who copied the Bible were mostly sincere and desiring to transmit the text as they found it. He says that himself in his book.

And frankly, all textual critics that I've ever encountered say the same thing. Yeah,

people make mistakes when they're trying hard to do it right, but to suggest that they were trying to change the Bible, as he puts it, the story of who changed the Bible and why. And also the very statement, who changed the Bible is a little misleading.

The Bible hasn't been changed. There are simply many manuscripts of the Bible. Some of them are changed from the original and some of them are closer to the original.

But to say who changed the Bible, it's a major New Testament scholar asking this question, raises the suggestion that maybe some conspiracy was there. Maybe some group of sinister people decided they wanted the Bible to say something it didn't say before, and so they changed it. There's no evidence whatsoever that this process ever happened or that there were such people.

What we do have is exactly what we'd expect to have if we had sincere people doing what they can to copy the scriptures and doing so with a very high degree of integrity, but making a few mistakes here and there, quite a few eventually. I mean, when you've got 6,000 manuscripts, then of course having thousands of variants in there is not too surprising. We have to understand, first of all, that every ancient book, anything written before the 16th century, that's when the printing press was invented, anything before that was copied by hand.

If you have copies of Shakespeare, if you have copies of, well, actually, Shakespeare wasn't before that, but still the copies of Shakespeare have been changed by copy. It's not on purpose, usually, I would assume. But any ancient history, the Greek historians, the Roman historians or poets, all those guys, Thucydides, Herodotus, Plutarch, Cicero, Josephus, they were all written back at a time where you couldn't print those up because there were no printing presses, you had to hand write them.

And therefore, any of those ancient books we have, the Bible's not different from them. They all had to be copied. What's interesting is very few people raise serious doubts about the reliability of Josephus or Thucydides or Herodotus, for some reason, even though we have the same kind of manuscript variances.

We just don't have as many manuscripts of those books. But just be aware, it's not a defect in the Bible that a lot of copies were made. That's actually a positive thing.

And we'll see why, even Bart Ehrman says so. I'm gonna quote him, but the things I'm saying that mitigate his case, he says them too. It's just that he then covers them up with a whole bunch of innuendo and, frankly, his own interpretation of how this data should be understood, which is, of course, adversarial toward the Bible.

He's not trying to be fair. He's trying to justify his own agnosticism, frankly. But the best of textual critics don't all go that direction.

And certainly there's no need to from the evidence. Let me give you some of the claims

of Bart Ehrman from his own mouth so you'll know kind of what it is he's saying, besides me telling you what he's saying. Here's what he said.

These quotes come from his book, "'Misquoting Jesus.'" He says, "'What good does it do to say "'that words are inspired by God "'if most people have absolutely no access to these words, "'but more or less clumsy renderings "'of these words into a language? "'How does it help us to say "'that the Bible is the inerrant word of God "'if, in fact, we don't have the words "'that God inerrantly inspired? "'We have only error-ridden copies. "'The vast majority of these "'are centuries removed from the originals.'" In another place in his book, he says, "'The fact that we don't have the words "'surely must show that God did not preserve them for us. "'And if he did not perform that miracle, "'there seemed to be no reason to think "'that he performed the earlier miracle "'of inspiring those words.'" All right, and another part of his argument, he says, "'Not only do we not have the originals, "'we don't have the first copies of the originals.

"'What we have are copies made later, much later. "'These copies differ from one another "'in so many places that we don't even know "'how many differences there are. "'Possibly, it is easiest to put it in comparative terms.

"There are more differences among the manuscripts "than there are words in the New Testament." Now, that is a true statement. But before we take that to the way he wants it to sound, if he said there's more errors and variance in the manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament, many people not understanding what that really means would say, wow, I guess that would call to question every single word in the New Testament. I mean, if there's only so many words, by the way, there's about 139,000 words in the New Testament, and the variance among the manuscripts are estimated variously 200,000 to 400,000.

So it could be as close to half a million of those, between 200,000 and 400,000 errors or variance. In the copies, and only 138,000 words. So he's right in that statistic.

But before you jump to the conclusion that most of the words in the New Testament are open to question, we have to realize that the variance do not affect very many of the verses. There's a lot of these variants, but the reason is because one error in one manuscript in one verse might exist in 600 manuscript copies. And they'll call that 600 variants, even though it's only one word in one verse.

So don't rush to conclusions. I think what he'd like you to do is think, wow, that raises serious questions about even whether we have any of the words correct in the New Testament. And he doesn't clear that up as much as he really should if he had more integrity, I think.

Let me just say that the majority of the variance in the manuscripts, and by the way, Bart Ehrman admits this in his book, are so insignificant that you would not be able to see them in any translation. What I mean by that is in a Greek sentence, the words may be in a certain order in one manuscript, but another manuscript of the same sentence might have the words in a slightly different order, two words mixed up, as we do all the time. There's many ways to put the same words together to mean the same thing in different orders.

And some of the manuscripts would have a different order, and there might be, if there's 800 copies of one word order and it differs from another, thousands of copies of another word order, that would be thousands of variants of just a sentence that's in different word order. And this is what, Bart Ehrman himself, by the way, he says it in his book, and I heard him say it in a lecture, which you can see online, which is called Misquoting Jesus. He gives this statistic as if it's a big thing, but then he downplays it.

He walks it back like this, yeah, but most of these, vast majority of them are so insignificant that they wouldn't even change the way they're translated if you use one manuscript or the other, translate the same in English. And that is true. That is the nature of many of these.

Here's an example. This would show up in a translation, and it does. In some manuscripts, a writer is using the word we to speak of himself and his audience.

And in another manuscript of the same passage, the copyist has written you, speaking to the audience, not necessarily including himself. An example of this would be Galatians 4, verse 28, where Paul says, we are the children of the promise. Well, some manuscripts say you are the children of the promise.

Are you concerned about that difference? It's very clear that if Paul says we are, he means you and I. And if he says you are, he's not denying that he is, he's just telling that they, it's the same information, essentially. If that bothers someone, let it bother them. It doesn't bother me.

Likewise, in Philemon chapter six, Paul says that, I pray that the effectualness of your fellowship will be effectual through the acknowledging of every good thing that is in us. Another manuscript will say that is in you. Well, whether it's in you or us, including you, is that a major problem to you? If it is, then you've got a problem even understanding what the Bible claims to be.

And we're gonna talk about that when we talk about inerrancy further on down here. The point is that you'll find this phenomenon in Revelation 5.10 also where it says, we shall reign on the earth. He says the angels or someone says to Christ, you have redeemed for yourself men out of every nation, people and tongue, and made them be kings and priests, and they shall reign on the earth.

It's they, they, they. Some manuscripts say that it's we shall reign on the earth, which of

course is slightly different, but it says you have redeemed us from every nation, kingdom, tongue. It's still the people who were redeemed from every nation, kingdom, tongue, that are going to reign on the earth, whether you have, you know, we or they.

So this is the kind of thing that occurs in hundreds of cases, if not thousands of cases, in manuscript of these kinds of variations. Sometimes a variant in the Gospels, and by the way, Bart Ehrman is mainly concerned about the Gospels. It's the life of Jesus and the Gospels that he mainly is focusing on in his treatment.

And in the Gospel of Mark, let us say, Mark may leave out something that Matthew includes in the same story or in the same saying of Jesus. Matthew or Luke may include a little more detail than Mark does. And it turns out that in some manuscripts of Mark, some copyist has inserted into Mark that detail that was in Matthew or Luke about the same passage.

In other words, Mark has been changed by somebody but it's been changed by including information, true information that exists in parallel passages. Now that where that exists, there's gonna be a variant. There's hundreds of thousands of variants, but the overwhelming number, most scholars say about 99% are insignificant.

And Bart Ehrman to a certain extent makes that admission as well. So if a single word in a single manuscript is misspelled like 537 times, that counts as 537 errors. That is to say, if there's one mistake in one verse and 537 manuscripts follow that mistake and misspell that word, that's 537 variants.

So when they say, oh, we got more variants than there are words in the Bible. Well, technically the number of variants as they're generally counted is larger than the number of words in the Bible. But a very small number of words in the Bible are impacted by it.

And we'll have more to say about the exact numbers in a moment. David Allen Black, who wrote key issues in New Testament Textual Criticism, made this point. He said, there are some parts of the New Testament where we are just not sure what the original writing said.

About 400 words fall into this category and comprise about 40 verses. The content of these verses contain no basis for any essential doctrine of the Christian faith. As a result, scholars can recover 97 to 99% of the original content of the New Testament with certainty.

Now, by the way, Bart Ehrman does not deny this because he can't, all textual critics know this. All of these huge number of variants still affect a very small percentage of New Testament words. And I should point out that even when you've got all these variants in a passage, in most cases, textual critics, using the tools that they have and

their ability and their intelligence, are reliably able to say, okay, of these different variants of these manuscripts, this one is clearly the original because it's maybe in the oldest manuscript or it has other attestation.

Maybe the church fathers quoted it numerous times or something like that. And so it's not really impossible or even difficult in most cases for scholars to find the original reading, even in a case where there's many variants in manuscripts. And this is of course what they do.

This is their work, their prose, it's a science. And therefore, we shouldn't worry about whether we've lost much of the content of the New Testament this way. We certainly have not.

About 400 words out of the whole New Testament, and there's 138,000 words, about 400 of them. We're not really sure what words they are. But even in those cases, it just means that one variant is in one manuscript, another variant is another, and so they're not sure which was the original.

And usually it's because they both make sense. If they don't both make sense, then they do know which is the original. But if they both make sense, they're not a problem.

In many cases, they give no different meaning, whether you use that word or that one, those sentences are the same. So again, of those 400 words and only about 40 verses in the entire New Testament, those are the ones that we're not sure about still, but that doesn't mean that we've lost the meaning of the verses. It means there's some words in them that we're not sure what they were originally, but it doesn't mean wildly different meanings could possibly be taken from any of the variants.

Bart Ehrman himself made this statement in his book. He said, I continue to think that even if we cannot be 100% certain about what we can attain to, that it is at least possible to get back to the oldest and earliest stage of the manuscript tradition for each of the books of the New Testament. And do you see what he said? He says, we can't be 100% sure, but it is possible with some certainty to get back to the oldest version of each of the books of the New Testament.

Then what's the problem? If textual critics know how to manage these manuscripts and can come up with a certainty about all except for about 400 words in the New Testament that only are found in 40 verses of the New Testament, why does this raise any questions about the meaning of the New Testament? You see, the reason it does for him, and we're gonna see this, he's gonna say so himself in some quotes I'm gonna give you later, is that he formerly thought in fact, I guess he still thinks that the evangelical view of the New Testament is you can't have problems like this with it. No Bible scholar I've ever read thinks you can't, but he thought that. He thought these things go against the Bible's teaching about itself.

Well, no one can actually find anything in the Bible speaking about itself that would preclude these evidences. So in other words, his evidences and his data and his arguments are irrelevant to his conclusions unless we're trying to defend the idea that the Bible has come down to us. It was inspired every single word and God has preserved every single word right to this present day.

And the only people I know who believe that are King James only people. And they think the King James is the original and they know it's translated into English, but they think it was flawlessly translated because of God's supernatural preservation of the text. And they also have a very magical view in my opinion of how the Bible was inspired.

But most of us are not King James only. In fact, a very small cultic, almost like group of Christians are. The rest of us would never have any problem with what Bart Ehrman found so devastating to his faith.

So he obviously didn't have, he didn't have a very informed idea of the biblical view of inspiration scripture, which again, we're going to discuss. So he said, he believed that not quite a hundred percent, but he says we can be at least, it's at least possible to get back to the oldest and earliest stage. That means the original reading of the manuscript tradition for each of the books of the New Testament.

What an admission for him to make. It's like throws the thesis of his whole book out to say that, except he's still assuming that it's not a hundred percent right. So the Bible doctrine of inspiration must not be true because it would be a hundred percent true.

Again, he's apparently very unaware of what modern evangelicals actually believe. And he even says he was, in a later quote I'm going to give you. All right, so here's another, this is a quote from Doug Powell from the Holman Quick Source Guide to Christian Apologetics.

He says, as it turns out, rather than being a disadvantage, or rather than being disadvantaged by not having the original writings, we find ourselves in a position of good fortune. If we had the originals, a critic of the writings would only need to call into question one document. Instead, a critic needs to deal with over 5,300 documents that agree substantially 99.5% of the time.

This ultimately carries as much or more weight as having the originals. So his reasoning is, if we had the originals, the critics could question whether they had changed or not because we wouldn't know. But now we have, frankly, 5,700 copies.

And someone would have to debunk every one of those to say we don't have the text. You see, it's interesting that Bart Ehrman said early on, how could we believe that it's inspired word of God if we don't have the originals? Well, he said, if we don't know what, one of his first quotes I gave you is, if we don't know what those words were, how can we

claim that they were inspired? Or what good does it do for them to be inspired? Well, yet scholars on his level all believe, and he seems to believe too, that to a great extent, we do have those words. We do know what those words are.

That's what textual critics are for. To say God didn't preserve his word ignores the fact that he preserved 5,700 manuscripts of it and gave scholars the intelligence to know how to use those manuscripts to come up with what the original said. So God, in fact, did preserve it more than any other book of ancient times.

There's no other book that has even 1,000 manuscript copies, much less 5,700. Bart Ehrman did make this statement also in his book. He said, the more manuscripts one discovers, the more variant readings, but also the more likelihood that somewhere among those variant readings, one will be able to uncover the original text.

Therefore, the 30,000 variants discovered by the first textual critic, John Mill, back in, I think, the 1700s, he says those 30,000 variants that he discovered do not detract from the integrity of the New Testament. They simply provide the data scholars need to work on to establish the text, a text that is more amply documented than any other in the ancient world, unquote. Sounds like a line out of Josh McDowell.

It sounds like he's being a Christian apologist here. He says, well, you know, the more manuscripts we have, yeah, there's more variants, but there's really a larger opportunity for us to discover what the real text is, what the original was. And then he says, John Mill, who was the first textual critic, he had 33,000 variants.

He only had 100 manuscripts of those. He found 3,300 variants in them. He says, however, those do not detract from the integrity of the New Testament.

Well, if 33,000 don't detract from it, who's to say 200,000 or 500,000 would detract from it? It's obvious that 33,000 variants can be of a certain nature that do not detract from the integrity of the New Testament. That's the words of Bart Ehrman. You'd think you were reading, you know, like I said, Josh McDowell or somebody on that.

He says, these just provide the scholars, the data that the scholars need to work on to establish the text. He says, a text that is more amply documented than any other in the ancient world. These are the points I made about textual criticism 40 years ago in my lectures on the authority of scripture.

So, I mean, where does he think he's getting support for his view? Now, frankly, to the more or less clueless Christian who reads Bart Ehrman, and unfortunately on these kinds of subjects, most Christians are a bit clueless. It sounds like these variants in the manuscripts really are challenges or problems to the Christian Bible believer. They are not.

I'll tell you why. They are challenges and they are problems to be solved by the textual

critics. That's what they do.

That's their job. They're good at it. And therefore, when you have all these variants, the question is, which one was the original reading? Well, that's not my problem, that's theirs.

That's what they do. They solve that problem. And then once they've solved that problem, the Bible translators take the information these guys did and publish it.

So when I'm reading a modern Bible, I'm reading the results of the study of the textual critics who have sorted this out. It was their problem. Fortunately, they know how to solve those problems.

It's not my problem because the problem is solved before it gets to my printed Bible. The printed Bible reflects the things the textual critics discovered about the original reading. And by the way, it's not as if conservative Christians are not supposed to be, we're supposed to hide our eyes from these different differences.

The New King James Version that I use frequently or frankly, any other modern translation is gonna have footnotes. And where it translates a passage that has a variant in some other manuscripts, you're gonna see a footnote. It says, many manuscripts read this way instead.

So it's like Bible publishers have been honest with their readers from essentially the very beginning about the fact that there are variants and they tell you where they are. Which means, of course, you don't have to be too worried about things. So as I said, if you read Bart Ehrman, and for some reason you get the impression, which I think he wants you to get, that all these thousands of variants somehow are a problem to the Christian, they're not.

It's the textual critics' problem. It's his job description. That's what he does.

He has the tools, he has the competence, even Bart Ehrman does. And so do those who don't agree with Bart Ehrman. The data is the same for everybody.

It's the prejudice, I suppose, or the leanings of the critic that will decide whether they go toward skepticism with it. But frankly, most of them don't go. Most scholars do not become skeptics because of these variants.

Because frankly, they know that these variants don't provide any problem. Once you've decided what the original reading was, you've got a problem. If they don't become Christians or if they leave the faith, it'll be for other reasons.

Actually, Ehrman, when he discovered these things, he lost his faith in the Bible, but not in God. For 15 years after that, he still called himself a liberal Christian. And then he

gave up his faith because he was dealing with the issues of the problem of suffering.

God and suffering, one of the biggest things that drives people away from God is their struggling with that issue. And that's what drove him away from God, not these textual variants. So don't think that, well, if you're smart like him, and if you know these facts, you'll just become an atheist.

He didn't. He became an atheist through other issues. And by the way, those can be addressed elsewhere in R. Certainly to suggest that Christianity fails to answer the issue of God and suffering is to ignore the fact that Christianity addresses it very directly, very sanely.

And also, of course, has the only coherent answer available from any philosophy. If you don't believe there's a God, how do you make sense of suffering? It's just a rotten world. But there is meaning in human life and our sufferings.

And so Christianity can answer it. But that's a discussion for another time. But that's what drove Bart Ehrman from faith in God.

That's what made him become an agnostic atheist. These variants, they made him doubt the scripture. But even then, he was overreacting because he's overreacting to his original, rather superstitious idea of the inspiration of scripture, which somehow wouldn't accommodate this kind of data.

But Bart Ehrman himself says this, that a textual critic can, quote, reconstruct the oldest form of the words of the New Testament with reasonable, though not 100% accuracy. Okay, if you can reconstruct through textual criticism, the original words of the Bible with a reasonable accuracy, not 100%, but reasonable, let's say 97 to 99%, then wouldn't that kind of, and he says that himself, wouldn't that kind of throw out your idea that the gospels are not reliable or that we can't know what they said? You might believe that we know what they said and then think they're not true, but that's a different issue. That has nothing to do with manuscripts.

That has to do with the historical veracity of scripture. We're here talking about whether we actually have the original words of scripture. And he admits it.

For the most part, we do. Although he started out by saying, what good is it to say God inspired the scriptures if we don't have those words? So he kind of talks about it on both sides of his mouth, but his problem, I don't know that he's being dishonest. What he's trying to do is say, you cannot hold an evangelical view of scripture in light of this data.

And what he really is saying, you can't hold the view of inspiration that I held when I was a fundamentalist with this data. But most Christians are not what he was. Most Christians who are evangelical know a great deal more about this data than he knew when he was in Moody Bible College or even Wheaton, apparently.

So he's got a problem in reasoning because he's reasoning against a view that almost nobody holds, which makes his book pretty unnecessary, frankly. Ben Witherington is one of the most respected living Bible scholars. He is currently the professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, but he's recognized widely as one of the best top evangelical scholars in the world.

Now, he talked about Bart Ehrman in one of his books, a book called, What Have They Done With Jesus? And one thing he said was, Bart Ehrman's work deserves more serious attention. Now, he doesn't mean more serious attention than it's getting. He means more serious attention than he's going to give it in this book.

This is in his introduction. He's passing over some things lightly. He's not gonna talk much about Bart Ehrman.

He says, Bart Ehrman's work deserves more serious attention, but in my judgment, he has done what the British call over-egging the pudding. By this, I mean his conclusions far outstrip his evidence for them, which is, of course, what most of his critics have said. He's got evidence.

Everybody has that evidence. His conclusions are a problem. The evidence does not justify his conclusions.

That's why he would be in the minority of honest textual critics. Let me, well, I'll read this quote, too. I don't wanna read everything because I don't wanna run out of time.

But Daniel Wallace wrote in the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. Now, he praises Ehrman in some respects. He has called Ehrman, quote, one of North America's leading textual critics, unquote.

He has also referred to him as, quote, one of the most brilliant and creative textual critics I've ever known, unquote. So he thinks highly of the man's intelligence and competence. But he then says about Ehrman, he says that he overstates his case by assuming that his view is certainly correct.

For example, he says that Ehrman himself acknowledges the vast majority of textual variants are minor, but his popular writing and speaking sometimes make the sheer number of them appear to be a major problem for getting to the original New Testament text, unquote. So, I mean, that's true. He knows all those things are of minor consequence, but he makes it sound like they're more so because of their number.

And none of them are really a problem. Now, there are some major textual issues, and he likes to talk about those, and I don't have any problem talking about them. One of them, let me give you some of his favorites.

We can't take all of them, because he wrote a whole book, and we don't have time to

cover a whole book. But let me give you what I think are some of his favorite. I say this because he wrote of them, and he also speaks about them.

I've heard him interviewed. I've heard him debate. I've heard him lecture.

And he brings some of these up virtually every time he speaks. So I know these are some of his strong ones. Okay, when you give a lecture, by the way, and you're trying to make some points, you give your strongest examples.

When you write a book, you might include weak and strong examples, so you have more time. But if you give him a lecture, you take the very best examples you have. And so these, I take it to be what he considers his strongest examples.

One of them is in Luke 8. I'm sorry, no, this is Luke 2, 48. Luke 2, 48. This is the story when Jesus was 12 years old, and Mary and Joseph looked for him and found him speaking with those Bible scholars in the temple.

And she said, you know, why did you treat us this way? Don't you know that your father and I have been looking all over for you? We're word sick. Now she says, your father and I. Now there are some manuscripts that say Joseph and I, and there are some that say we. And Bart Ehrman says the reason these manuscripts changed your father and I to Joseph and I or we is because the doctrine of the virgin birth was, seemed to be challenged by what it actually said in the text.

Mary actually said, your father and I have been looking everywhere for you. Well, she's referring to Joseph as his father. Bart Ehrman says, well, that makes it sound like Jesus wasn't a virgin born child.

She referred to Joseph as his father and therefore they changed it. Now that might be in fact why they did. And I wouldn't, I have no problem with her saying your father and I. I think that adopted children often refer to their foster parents as mom and dad.

I would assume, I mean, since Mary had to talk to Jesus about Joseph sometime, calling him the father, all the other kids in the family would call him that, was a normal thing. To say that somebody is called father doesn't mean that he's your biological father. It means he plays the role of father in the family you're in.

So I really wouldn't have any issue with that. But Bart Ehrman thought that some Christians did and that they therefore changed the text. Well, I'll go with him on that.

That's okay. But what I want to ask is, what's that got to do with the problems that Bart Ehrman says is in the text? He seems to know for sure what the text said, namely father, not we or not Joseph, that Mary said your father. And I think all scholars believe that was the original text.

So the fact that there are variants has not challenged us in being able to know what the original said. Bart Ehrman is sure he knows what the original said. So what's the problem here? In other words, he's challenging the integrity of the Bible we have by the fact that some copies, some flawed copies were made.

And he talks a lot about why they were and what they look like and so forth and what kinds of mistakes were made. But when all is said and done, he doesn't claim that we have any doubt about the original. And it's only the original that we care about, right? I don't care how many mistaken copies are made, even my own work.

But you can read my own work. And if you know what I said, you'll recognize when a copy of it is badly copied. But how does that make a case for anything that Bart Ehrman wants to make a case for? Another favorite of his and of many is of course, John 8, verses one through 12.

This also includes the last verse of chapter seven. There's a section that's not in the oldest manuscripts. And that's the story of the woman taken in adultery and when Jesus said, I don't condemn you to go and sin no more.

A very moving story, a very important story. But the problem is he says it's not in the Gospel of John. And perhaps it's not because the oldest manuscripts don't have it.

Now I have to say that the story appears in various other places in different manuscripts. It's found in a great number of manuscripts, but not the oldest ones. There's even one manuscript that places it in Luke.

So we could say, well, the story seems to have been recognized as a true story about Jesus by most of the manuscripts perhaps, but it just wasn't part of John originally. Okay, no problem. What I would say is this, if it's not originally a part of John, that's no secret.

I've never seen a Bible yet that didn't acknowledge that. In other words, if you have a New King James, a New American Standard, an NIV, an ESV, see Christian Standard Bible, CSB. If you have any modern translation, when you come to John chapter eight or the last verse of chapter seven, there's gonna be a note there.

And the note's gonna say, the most ancient manuscripts omit these verses. In other words, anyone who pays attention when they read the Bible and reads the footnotes, which are helpful, knows. But that doesn't, what does that do to my faith in scripture? It means that there's a story there, which everybody knows isn't in the oldest versions and might not be a true story.

I think it is a true story. Just because it's not in the oldest versions doesn't argue necessarily it's not a true story, but it tells us something about textual variance. Okay, so let's adjust to that fact.

Okay, we don't know if that story is true. What does that do to the rest of the Bible? Not much. It's a well-known case.

Another well-known case is the final 12 verses of the Gospel of Mark, what they call the long ending of Mark. In the oldest manuscripts, Mark ends at verse eight, but in some measures, many of them, it goes on to verse 20. So that verses nine through 20 are what we have to say a manuscript variant.

And obviously, where we say there's only about 40 verses affected, this would have to be 12 of the verses right here. Now that means that we don't know for sure how much of what's in that section was original. Some people say none of it was.

There's other manuscripts that have somewhat shorter ending of Mark, but not as short as the oldest manuscripts. But again, that's the thing. Everybody knows if they've read the Bible.

Every manuscript, I'm sorry, every translation of the Bible that you can buy has a note that says these verses are not the oldest. So in other words, it's not like there's some kind of deep, dark secret of textual variance that somehow the evangelical church is hiding it from their constituents. It's plainly stated in every Bible I've ever seen.

So why is this brought up as a problem? It means, of course, that if you're a King James Only type or a Bart Ehrman type before he was educated, that your magical view of the Bible and your idea that every single verse in your King James Version was inspired by God, well, it challenges that. I'll admit it. And I would think that that would be a good reason to abandon that view.

But it doesn't give us any reason to abandon faith in Christ or in the stories or the teachings that are confirmed in all the manuscripts or at least can be, through all the manuscripts, proven to be in the original text. So we've got the woman taking adultery. We've got the long Indian mark.

And here's one that I think Bart Ehrman really likes to bring up. I've heard him bring up many different places. And that is about Mark 1, verse 41.

I think I'll actually read that verse, Mark 1, 41, because it's about the leper that came to Jesus in the synagogue and he said, "'If you will, you can make me clean.'" It's the only time in the Bible when a sick person said, "'If you are willing, you can make me clean "'or you can heal me.'" Now, in this passage in particular is a textual variant because most of our manuscripts read Mark 1, verse 41 this way, "'And Jesus moved with compassion, put out his hand "'and touched him and said to him, "'I am willing, be cleansed.'" Now this statement, moved with compassion, which is a term used frequently in the gospels, especially in Matthew. In some manuscripts, it says moved with anger. Now that's interesting, isn't it? It says that Jesus, when this man said, "'If you're willing, you can

make me clean,' it says in some manuscripts, "'Jesus moved with anger, put out his hand "'and touched him and said, I will be cleansed.'" Now, Bart Ehrman finds that to be a problem for the Bible somehow.

Why? Okay, the original either said that Jesus moved with compassion or that he has moved with anger. Now, moved with anger creates maybe issues. With us knowing, you know, Jesus' personality and how short his fuse was or something like that, but it doesn't create any real issues in knowing the story of Jesus to be a true story.

And frankly, a lot of evangelical scholars, and myself included, would be willing to suggest that moved with anger could be the right reading. And let me give you the reason for that. Because one of the textual critics' tools is to recognize that where there's different readings, if one of them is difficult and the other looks like it's smoothed out the difficulty, then the more difficult one is more likely to be original.

It's not likely that a scribe who found a phrase in the original that said moved with compassion decided to change it to moved with anger because that's not really the way you'd expect it to read. Moved with compassion is fairly commonplace. On the other hand, if a scribe found it says moved with anger, that might be something of an embarrassment or something to the scribe.

He might change it to moved with compassion. Now, whichever it is, it doesn't matter because it's not that significant because even if it says moved with anger, it does not say what he was angry about. By the way, Mark two chapters later does speak about Jesus being with anger.

And if you look at it in chapter three in verse four, or not verse four, but what verse is that? That is verse five. It says, so when he had looked around at them, that is the scribes and Pharisees, with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts, he said to the man, stretch out your hand. Now, this is a different case, a different sickness, a different healing, two chapters later than the one that Bart Ehrman's talking about.

But it specifically says that Jesus had anger, not toward the person who was healing. He was angry at the Pharisees. He was angry at the Jews who misrepresented God's love to people.

Now, when Jesus looked at the leper, he would see a man who's been disenfranchised and alienated and treated as scum by the religious establishment. His very pity for the man would make him angry at such a system, just like he was angry at the Pharisees for them not wanting to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus could be angry, we don't know yet what he's angry for, and we may never know.

John Wimber thought he was angry at the devil who caused the leprosy. Other scholars say angry at the Jewish system for treating lepers so badly. Whatever it is, it's not a

problem for the faith, for the Christian faith, and yet it's one of Bart Ehrman's favorite places.

So, see, we don't have the original because these manuscripts say he's moved with compassion, these ones say he's moved with anger. So what? What does that do to my belief in Jesus? And especially if I don't even know what he's angry about, then it doesn't even tell me anything about his character. Maybe he's angry because he's irritated with healing people, but probably not.

Maybe he's angry because he doesn't like injustice. And so these are some of the big problems Bart Ehrman has. As you see, looking at them, they are, in some cases, big passages, or important passages, but the variants aren't really problematic because in almost every case, almost every single case of these big things, everybody knows what the right reading was.

Everyone knows what the original was. We do see interesting changes made by later copies, but so what? That's interesting to a textual critic or someone who wants to compare texts, but it has no bearing on a Christian believer in believing that he has, in the Bible, the original words for the most part, at least 99.5%. Okay, now here's, there are three major errors, I think, that Bart Ehrman makes in his book, in his whole reasoning, really, not just this book, but his speaking and so forth. He's got, his reasoning is flawed on three levels.

One is what I've been talking about already. He overestimates the significance of these variants. He speaks of their high number and makes it sound like that's important to know how many there are, but he does not give the impression that these variants are inconsequential, which is the case in virtually all the cases, the vast majority.

There is a interesting quote from Ben Witherington in his book, What Have They Done With Jesus? I quoted him earlier on another point. He said, quote, "'There is a reason that both Ehrman's mentor "'in text criticism and mine, Bruce Metzger, "'has said that there is nothing in these variants "'that really challenges any essential Christian belief. "'They don't.

"'I would add,' he says, "'that other experts in the text criticism, "'such as Gordon Fee, have been equally emphatic "'about the flawed nature of Ehrman's analysis "'of the significance of such textual variants.'" So these men are not saying that Ehrman has the wrong facts. What he's doing is he's erring in his overestimation of their significance. He said even Ehrman's mentor, he received his doctorate under Bruce Metzger.

And Bruce Metzger is a much more famous textual critic than Ehrman. Well, let's just say much more respected. Metzger doesn't write New York Times bestselling books because, frankly, he's a Christian and people want to buy a lot of books which are against Christianity.

But Metzger was the mentor of Bart Ehrman, the one under whom Ehrman received his doctorate. And Metzger says, "'There's no problem here with these. "'This doesn't challenge anything.

"'So why does Bart Ehrman write a book "'pretending that they do?' And it is a pretense because he even in the book admits, "'Ah, we really can get it almost 100%.'" Go back to the original. Timothy Paul Jones actually wrote a book responding to Bart Ehrman or Bart Ehrman called, "'Miscourting Truth.'" And in it, he talks about his own educational journey and having some of the same, being confronted with some of the same problematic things that Ehrman was faced with, but going a different way from it. And Timothy Paul Jones says, "'From the works of Bruce Metzger, "'especially the canon of the New Testament "'and the text of the New Testament.'" These are two works of Metzger's.

"'I learned how despite the hundreds of thousands "'of variants in the Greek New Testament, "'it's almost always possible to determine "'the original reading of the text. "'What's more, I learned that none of these points "'of textual uncertainty undermines any crucial element "'of the Christian faith.'" So if Bart Ehrman said, "'I lost my faith because I found these.'" Well, why? Nothing of the data you found undermines any point of Christian faith. All it undermines is again, is a very superstitious view of the authority of scripture.

A second error he makes, the first was in overestimating the significance of the variants. The second error he makes is that he doesn't seem to indicate that these variants have no impact on the claims of Christ. We have all the same statements of Jesus, all the same stories of Jesus, except for the woman taken in adultery and those few things at the end of Mark.

We have still a consistent picture of what Jesus said, did, what he claimed, and what he insisted upon for men. In other words, we have exactly the same challenge to the reader as if you knew nothing about these variants. There's no challenge there.

And therefore, a person who leaves Christ because of this kind of information is leaving him rather too quickly on no grounds. And one has to wonder, maybe they had other reasons to want to leave Christ and they're using these variants as an excuse because these variants have no bearing on the claims of Christ at all, or on the stories of Christ, except for one or two stories. The third error, and this is what I've been alluding to this all along here, is his view of inerrancy or inspiration of scripture.

Now, like I said, he was taught a fundamentalist, old-fashioned view. And I know those of you who hold it, I mean, oh, old-fashioned. It is old-fashioned.

I mean, if it's true, it's true, but it's old-fashioned because really no evangelical scholars hold to it anymore, frankly, because they've adjusted their thinking to the evidence. But

the old-fashioned view was that the Bible was sort of like a magic book. I mean, they wouldn't literally say this.

It fell down from the sky between leather covers, written essentially by God, or it was written by men, but they kind of went into a trance and did this automatic writing. So every word was God's own word. And therefore, that's the only way they could see it as inerrant.

And inerrant means not having any mistakes in it. Well, the manuscripts certainly have some mistakes in them, but does the original text? Well, that's a subject irrelevant to the question of the variance because the variance had to do not with the inspiration of the scripture, but with the mistakes people made when they're copying it. But almost no evangelical scholars that I know of today believe that the Bible is a magical book where every word was auto-dictated by God and therefore can't have any mistakes.

Paul himself admitted to mistakes. He said, you know, I baptized no one but Crispus and Gaius while I was in Corinth, and he corrects himself two verses later. Oh yeah, I also baptized the House of Stephanus.

I don't remember if there's any others. Now, if he's doing some kind of automatic writing from the Holy Spirit, why would the Holy Spirit make a mistake and then correct himself? We have to realize that none of the writers of the New Testament claimed for themselves what fundamentalists have claimed for them. That is, no New Testament writer said, I am writing under inspiration.

And not one of them said they were inerrant. What they did say is they were telling the truth, and a person can tell the truth whether they're inspired or not. If you want to overlay that with some doctrine of your own making, that they were inerrant and inspired, something they never said about themselves, well, then you can do that.

You're gonna be more vulnerable to kinds of criticisms like Bart Ehrman's, and I don't really prefer to be vulnerable unnecessarily. Why should I take a position the Bible itself does not take about itself, and then have my faith fall apart because it's proven that that mysterious superstition is not true? Let's move along here. Let me read what Bart Ehrman wrote recently after he attended an apologetics conference where three major evangelical scholars were speaking, and I think he was speaking there too.

He wrote a blog about it afterwards, and the evangelical speakers that were there were Rob Bowman, Mike Licona, and Craig Keener. These guys are very, very respected scholars in the New Testament, and they were talking about inerrancy of the Bible, and Bart Ehrman was invited there. I believe he was a speaker there too, though he doesn't make much mention of that, but he's writing a blog about this, and he says, how does one deal with the apparent or real contradictions and still remain committed to an evangelical view of Scripture as inspired by God, and in some sense, inerrant? This is the

words of Ehrman writing his blog.

I stress in some sense inerrant, because as it turns out, it is not at all clear what inerrant means. Our old position, meaning the one he learned at Moody Bible Institute, our old position back then was that any contradiction in the New Testament Gospels, or the Bible for that matter, but yesterday we were talking only about the Gospels, can in fact be reconciled if you look closely and deeply enough at no matter, any contradiction. To be sure, there may be places where you aren't sure how to reconcile them, but in principle, they are all reconcilable one way or another.

He continues, and as a corollary, everything the Bible says is literally true. There are no mistakes of any kind whatsoever in the Bible. Now, he's just told us what view of inerrancy he has, he was raised with.

He says, that was our old view. And that's the view that was dashed by his research, because of course it's not, it's not in agreement with the evidence. And that's why modern evangelicals don't hold that particular mechanical inspiration view.

And most of them will come out and speak against that view, even though they believe the Bible is the word of God. Now, he says, that was our view. And that's what we called inerrancy.

It still strikes me as well, the common sense understanding of what the term means without errors. None of the three speakers yesterday has that view. Their views strike me as odd.

Now this is interesting, because their views are kind of the mainstream views of evangelicalism for the past, I don't know, 50 years or something like that. I mean, it's the view I heard when I was young, and that was 50 years ago. So what he says is their view strikes him as odd.

He was very ignorant of any view other than his own superstitious view. And he didn't even know that the majority of Bible believing people don't hold that view. He says, their view strikes me as odd that they can admit there are technically speaking incorrect statements in the Bible, but that it is still without error.

But they consider my old view, no mistakes of any kind whatsoever, as a dated kind of fundamentalism that is simply not held by thinking Christians anymore. And even more interesting, that my objections to their views are rooted in a fundamentalist views that I myself don't accept, but that I'm assuming in order to attack their alternative views. In other words, they think I'm kicking a dead horse.

Exactly, that's what he's doing. He's attacking a view that nobody really holds anymore. And yet he's making millions of dollars doing so, publishing it.

He said, this is how he closes it. He says, or it doesn't close, but this is another statement in his blog. He says, the current view seems to be much more open to the possibility that there are places that we simply can't figure out.

Places that do appear to be contradictory. And here's the kicker. When they, the evangelicals who take this view, admit there are apparent contradictions, then they say that the details are not important.

What matters is the majority message or the major message. The ultimate point, the big picture, the gist. The gist of what the passage is trying to teach is what is inspired and inerrant, not the picayune details.

Now he's representing what he understood Craig Keener and Lacona and these others to say. And maybe they did say that. That's, there are a lot of evangelicals who say that.

You know, it's the thought that's inspired or it's the major ideas that are inspired, not necessarily the words. Well, I mean, that would be agreeable with what the New Testament says about itself. Paul said that he got his insights from revelation from the Holy Spirit.

He said that many times. The gospel writers record the words of Jesus, which were said to have come from the Father. And Jesus told them, the Holy Spirit will come and remind you of what I said.

So we have, in a sense, the authors saying, you know, where I got this from was from God. This information has its roots in God, but they don't claim that as they are setting the pen to the parchment or to the papyrus, that they are at that moment experiencing a phenomenon of inspiration. None of them quote, none of them say that.

So why should we say that? In other words, if I were there to hear Jesus speak and I was a good listener and I remembered pretty well what he said and I wrote it down, the information I'm giving you is inspired by God because Jesus said it, but I'm not inspired by God. It's the information that comes from God. My writing it can be flawed.

I can forget something. Like Paul said, I don't know if I baptized any more than those. You see, the New Testament writers don't claim that when they wrote some kind of magical, supernatural force came over them that made them impossible of misspelling a word or impossible of having a run-on sentence instead of a more literarily clean sentence.

I mean, to say those things about the Bible, to say that it was inerrant in the old fashioned sense, I believe that's an evangelical tradition that arose for the very same reason and on the very same basis as the Catholic tradition, for example, about Mary being sinless. Why do Catholics say that? It's not taught in the Bible, but they really respect Mary. They think she's very sacred.

They want to embellish the degree which they think she's sacred. And therefore they say what they say, she's sinless. Well, that's a human doctrine, it's a human tradition and the Catholics hold it.

But to say things about the Bible that are similar because we respect the Bible. Say, well, therefore it's got every word inspired by God. Well, it doesn't say that.

Why should we say something like that? Which is so vulnerable to being proven wrong because it isn't true. I mean, it isn't. The evidence is there.

There have been some bad copies made and also some mistakes, but you see the mistakes that are made are not consequential. I don't care whether Paul baptized more than Crispus Gaius in the household of Stephanus in Corinth. He couldn't even remember and it's not important for him to know.

The point he's making is he didn't baptize very many people, that's his point. In other words, the words themselves don't have to be inspired if you're getting the truth in general. Now, some people may say, oh, that's kind of a slippery slope down to liberalism.

No, it's simply the straightest path to letting the Bible speak for itself rather than letting traditional fundamentalists speak for it. And God bless the fundamentalists, but they can be cantankerous sometimes, especially those King James zombies. So frankly, what Bart Ehrman rejected was a superstitious view, which was indeed demolished by the evidence he learned about the texts when he went to Princeton.

But the evidence he found out isn't problematic to an evangelical view at all. And therefore, he is in fact kicking a dead horse, unless he's writing a book to the King James only people. Now, let me reflect a little bit on his departure from the faith.

Jesus said that if you build your house on sand, it's gonna collapse when the storms come. You talk about your Christian life, your Christian faith. He said stone, what you build on the rock, he said that is, the rock is Jesus' teachings, Jesus' authority, hearing what he said and doing it, obeying him.

In other words, recognizing the authority of Christ and taking his words as authoritative and doing them. He said, that's building your house on the rock. Now, Bart Ehrman's early faith, whatever it was, was not built on that.

It was built on a superstitious idea about the Bible. And when he found out that the evidence disproved that idea, he had nowhere to go. He didn't know what to do.

His faith was not built on Christ, because if it was, these errors in these manuscripts, they don't have any impact on Christ. And therefore, rejection of Christ has got to be on a different basis than that. And we know that his rejection of Christ and of God was from

his wrestling with the problem of God and evil.

Anybody who says that the arguments that are given about the text of the New Testament in Bart Ehrman's books, that those somehow undermine Christianity, these are people who don't think very straight. In fact, I have to think that those who do argue that way are people who have actually been looking for an excuse to leave Christ for other reasons. And Bart Ehrman has given them something.

It's sort of like what Richard Dawkins said in his book, The Blind Watchmaker. He said, evolution gave the atheist an intellectually respectable justification for his atheism. In other words, he was an atheist already, but he didn't have any justification until evolution came along.

Then, oh good, now I can be an honest atheist now. And I think that there are people who want to be non-Christians for whatever reasons they want to. And they read a book like Bart Ehrman's, which has no bearing on the legitimacy of Christianity even a little bit.

And they say, oh good, now I can go back and have my sinful life or my skeptical life or whatever. And whatever reason people leave Christ, it's not a good reason. And if you do it on very little evidence, and evidence doesn't help the case, then you're really unfaithful.

You know, it's like a husband and wife, an analogy I use a lot of times when I'm talking about Christianity. If a husband is faithful and his wife is faithful, but someone's trying to seduce the wife away from her husband and says, you know, you notice your husband's worked late, extra late, about three times this past week. You know, he says he's working late, but he's really having an affair.

He's really not committed to you. You really can't trust him. If that wife, on such flimsy arguments as that, abandons her faith in her husband, she wasn't very committed to him in the first place.

Because obviously any number of reasons might be given for him working late. He might even really be working late, just like he said. But when somebody takes something like that and says, well, I kind of wanted to get away from that guy anyway.

And so they leave on the basis of, well, he can't be trusted. Well, there's nothing in the report you heard that would suggest he can't be trusted. It's an accusation.

And frankly, books like Bart Ehrman's are making an implicit accusation against the trustworthiness of the Bible. And then extrapolating from that to the untrustworthiness of Christ. And I'd repeat to you, being a Christian isn't about your theory of inerrancy.

I was talking to an atheist friend of mine many years ago, and he said, well, if I became a

Christian, would I have to believe every word in the Bible is inspired? Well, I said, well, I believe the Bible is inspired, but no, you don't have to believe that in order to be a Christian, because the Bible doesn't claim that. Being a Christian isn't about what you think about the inspiration of the Bible. Being a Christian is about what you think about Jesus and what you do about it.

If you rebel against the kingship of Jesus, you're lost. If you embrace the kingship of Jesus, you're saved. And the inspiration of scripture is a non-issue, because even if not one word of the New Testament was really inspired by God, that doesn't mean that the historians who wrote the life of Jesus, who actually saw him and heard him, are giving an inaccurate account.

I don't need necessarily an inspired account of the life of Jesus, I just need a true one. And the evidence is very strong from almost every discipline that looks into it, that the gospels give a true account of Jesus. And from that information alone, I can make a wise decision to be a follower of Jesus.

So I'm not gonna be distracted by irrelevancies, especially when they're false. Even if our own is true in his main point, that, oh, we can't trust that we know the original words of all the Bible. Well, okay, maybe we can't, but I can still trust the parts about Jesus, there's no question about that in the manuscripts.