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How do we reconcile these seeming contradictions with our doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration? The fact is, all objections can be reconciled, but the problem is very few know how to reconcile these kinds of things so they reject the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration or they accept the doctrine but live life confused in some form of schizophrenic system of theology.

Although many of these matters are carefully studied under their proper doctrinal categories, the above illustrations are easily understood once one realizes that circumcision was for the physical seed of Abraham, until **the** seed, Jesus Christ, came (John 1:17; Gal.3:19). Eating pork was an O.T. restriction for Israel under O.T. Law. This dietary restriction is **not** for the Church in the age of Grace. The works of Matthew are a matter of true salvation during the Tribulation (Mt.24:29). This has nothing to do with salvation in the Church age of Grace.

Those who do not or cannot "rightly divide" or "accurately handle" sound doctrine and God's word must either reject the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration or live life as a very confused believer. When all is carefully examined, it must be concluded that there are **no** real contradictions whatsoever in the inspired word of God. In fact, these kinds of issues prove that there is an inspired symmetry, which must in fact be the work of a Perfect God.

Objection #3 - Verbal, plenary inspiration is not legitimate because of variations between manuscripts.

It is absolutely true that there are a few textual difficulties in some of the Biblical manuscripts which God has preserved, which we still have available to this day. Dr. Gleason Archer gets to the crux of this matter when he writes: "The real question at issue in regard to scribal error is whether an accumulation of minor slips has resulted in the obscuring or perversion of the message originally intended. ... Is there objective proof from the surviving manuscripts of Scripture that these sixty-six books have been transmitted to us with such a high degree of accuracy as to assure us that the information contained in the originals has been perfectly preserved? The answer is an unqualified yes. ... In fact, it has long been recognized by the foremost specialists in textual criticism that if any decently attested variant were taken up from the apparatus at the bottom of the page and were substituted for the accepted reading of the standard text, there would in no case be a single, significant alteration in doctrine or message." (Gleason Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp.29-30).

Those who were entrusted with the responsibility of hand-copying Biblical manuscripts did make a few scribal and copyist errors. This is long before there was "spell-check." The following are examples of the types of variations which are found between manuscripts.

(Error Type #1) - Haplography.

This is an easy error to make in which a writer writes once what should have been written twice. An English example would be "inerant" (missing one "r"), instead of "inerrant."

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(Error Type #2) - Dittography.

This again is an understandable error in which the writer writes twice what should have been written only once. Using the same English word "innerrancy"(adding an extra "n") instead of "inerrancy."

(Error Type #3) - Metathesis.

This, again, is an easy mistake for a copyist to make in which one inadvertently changes the proper order of letters in a word. Instead of copying "die" one might copy "dei", or instead of copying "soup" one might copy "suop."

(Error Type #4) – Homophony.

This too is an easy mistake to make in which a copyist substitutes a word that sounds identical with a word that actually has a different meaning. A good illustration of this would be someone who inadvertently substitutes the word "meet" for "meat."

These are four kinds of scribal errors, which are logically seen and understood. All in all, there are at least 11 different types of mistakes a copyist could make. (For further discussion read Gleason Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp.32-42). This then becomes the objection ground to verbal, plenary inspiration.

Two of the most respected names in Biblical history for their manuscript study are Brooke Westcott and Fenton Hort, infamously referred to as "Westcott and Hort." In 1870, these two undertook a ten year scholarly project to carefully revise the entire Greek New Testament by traveling to various places and examining all available Greek manuscripts. Their now famous Greek Text was completed in 1881. These two English scholars made a monumental contribution to manuscript copying. Concerning textual variations and difficulties, they write these words: "With regard to the great bulk of the words of the New Testament, as of most other ancient writings, there is no variation or other ground of doubt, and therefore no room for textual criticism; and here therefore an editor is merely a transcriber. The same may be said with substantial truth respecting those various readings which have never been received, and in all probability will never be received, into any printed text. The proportion of words virtually accepted on all hands as raised above doubt is very great, not less, on a rough computation, than seven-eighths of the whole. The remaining eighth, therefore, formed in great part by changes of order and other comparative trivialities, constitutes the whole area of criticism. If the principles followed in the present edition are sound, this area may be very greatly reduced. Recognizing to the full the duty of abstinence from peremptory decision in cases where the evidence leaves the judgment in suspense between two or more readings, we find that, setting aside differences of orthography, the words in our opinion still subject to doubt only make up one-sixtieth of the whole New Testament. In this second estimate the proportion of comparatively trivial variations is beyond measure larger than in the former; so that the amount of what can in any sense be called substantial variation is but a small fraction of the whole residuary variation, and can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text." (Chafer, Vol.1, p.87)

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Since most textual variations can be identified and explained and since no variation changes the meaning of a context, text or doctrine, we may accurately and dogmatically believe in and hold to the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration.

It is of great benefit and interest for the student of doctrine to have some knowledge as to how scholars go about determining which reading belongs in a particular text or passage. When there is a variation in manuscripts, how do textual critics determine which reading is truly the one God intended? Generally speaking, textual critics use seven basic interpretive rules to determine which reading is probably the one God intended:

(Interpretive Rule #1) - The older reading is to be preferred over a recent reading. The assumption is that the closer one can get to the original, the less likely there is to be a copyist error. This teacher had a friend who wanted to restore an old car and he searched to find the oldest possible specs concerning that car because the older the specs, the nearer to the original.

(Interpretive Rule #2) - The more difficult reading is preferred over the easier reading. The assumption is that most writers tend to simplify the writing into the easiest form for understanding. Therefore if a reading is difficult, it is assumed that it is precisely what God wanted.

(Interpretive Rule #3) - The shorter reading is preferred over the longer reading. If a reading in some manuscript becomes longer, it is assumed that the scribe or scholar added his own comment.

(Interpretive Rule #4) - The reading which best fits the context is to be preferred over one which does not fit the context. If one variant fits the context and another does not, the one that fits is assumed to be correct.

(Interpretive Rule #5) - The reading with the widest geographical support is to be preferred over one that is from a single region or manuscript. The more support and evidence a reading has, the more it is assumed to be the correct reading.

(Interpretive Rule #6) - The reading that closely conforms to the style and diction of the author is to be preferred over a reading which seems remarkably different.

(Interpretive Rule #7) - The reading which reflects doctrinal bias is to be preferred over one that betrays a partisan viewpoint. If anything looks like a theological implant, the other readings will be accepted.

By using these rules, textual scholars are, for the most part, able to accurately determine precisely what God did put in His original word. This is evidence that the Bible is as no other book in the world, for no other writing has governing rules which may be applied to so many manuscripts.

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Objection #4 - Verbal plenary inspiration is not legitimate because no one has actually seen the perfect, original manuscript.

It is true that, to our knowledge, we have not seen the original autograph. However, it is also true that this fact does not eliminate the reality that an original document did exist. There are many proofs that an original perfect manuscript did exist:

(Proof #1) - The character of God demands a perfect written word.

(Proof #2) - The availability of so many copies demands a perfect original.

(Proof #3) - The science of textual criticism demands a perfect original.

(Proof #4) - The logic of observations of life does not negate a perfect original.

(Proof #5) - The ignorance of the original does not negate its perfect existence.

These arguments certainly establish the logic that there is a perfect original manuscript which did and in fact may still exist.

Many have wondered why God did not preserve His original manuscript or at least permit us to know which manuscript was His original. Although the complete answer to this question ultimately exists in the mind of God, there are certain logical reasons why God did not give us knowledge of the original:

(Reason #1) - Because of man's tendency toward idolatry.

Man seems to take a more serious interest in worshipping a relic more than worshipping God. This mentality even existed in Israel's history and may be clearly seen by comparing Numbers 21:8-9 with II Kings 18:4. In the Middle Ages (i.e. A.D. 1300-1400), many icons and religious images were worshipped. Such things as splinters of supposedly the cross, saints teeth and hair and even a spot where supposedly Mary spilt some milk from her breast became things of worship. In our own time, the Shroud of Turin has become, for some, a major issue of faith. Another recent illustration is the possibility of finding remnants of Noah's Ark on top of a mountain. Countries are arguing already who has a right to it. With man's tendency toward idolatry, it is very possible that had God allowed man to know precisely which manuscript was His original, the manuscript would have become the object of worship. It is realistic to assume that countries would have battled for such a document and the document would have commanded the worship due God.

(Reason #2) - Because of God's prerequisite of faith.

It must always be remembered that everything in our relationship to God is based upon faith.

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In fact, God has specifically stated that without faith it is impossible to please Him (Heb.11:6). We have, in this doctrinal study, clearly demonstrated that our faith is not a blind faith and it is much more logical to assume the Bible is the Word of God than not to assume it. However, what one believes is still a matter of faith. The fact that we cannot point to one particular manuscript and say this is the original one makes this a matter of faith. The fact that we can point to many manuscripts which say the same thing makes this a matter of fact. Therefore, our faith is factual, but it is still faith and that is what pleases God. In this teacher's estimation, manuscript problems actually end up developing our facts and our faith and this is a good thing.

(Reason #3) - Because of God's priority of study.

When God gave man His written word and when God gave gifts to the Church, one of which is Pastor/Teacher, He made an assumption- a human will learn to read and study the Bible and then will go to a church where one who is gifted can carefully expound it. The manuscript problems actually enhance this because it forces one to carefully study what God actually did and did not put into writing. Serious students and teachers of the Word continually search the Scriptures, examining verb tenses, variant readings and clauses in a focused pursuit of truly grasping as accurately and as precisely as possible the Word of the Living God. God wants man to think this carefully about His word. God wants a person to carefully study the Word of God so that it is truly "rightly divided." The fact that we do not have the original autographa available to us forces us to study at an even more dedicated level. The fact that God has not informed us which is the original has forced us to study all the more. The Church should be a major center for training concerning the Word of God. Unfortunately most dodge the manuscript matter or else blindly hold to some position without even carefully studying the actual manuscript evidence. This ends up actually weakening the faith of God's people, not strengthening it.

(Reason #4) - Because of God's purpose of development.

Knowing that there can be textual problems is something that can develop and mature us. It should force us to be careful in our study of the Bible. It should force us to be prayerfully objective in our faith rather than ignorantly subjective. There are doctrines that should be dogmatically defended, yet this prompts us to make certain that our doctrines are based on objective truth, not subjective opinion. Actually, not knowing of or having an original manuscript is something that promotes maturity and development.

There are several types of written documents available today that enable believers to determine the precise reading of a passage and accurately understand the true meaning of a passage:

(Type #1) - Manuscripts

As we have already discussed, there are literally thousands of manuscripts and fragments which have been preserved to this very day. A manuscript is a copy of the original manuscript in the original language.

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(Type #2) - Ancient Versions

These are early translations of manuscripts from the original language into a different language. For example, there is in existence today a copy of the Syrian Bible, known as the "Peshitta", which is a translation into the Aramaic language. This translation contains both the Old Testament and the New Testament and it was completed somewhere near the year A.D. 420. There is also in existence today a copy of the Latin Bible, known as the Vulgate. This was a translation of the Bible into Latin made by Jerome from the years AD 382-405. Another ancient version is a Coptic text, which is an Egyptian translation made in the 4th century. God has preserved every one of these translations and they may be analyzed in connection with manuscript study to determine accuracy.

(Type #3) - Writings

God has preserved many writings of the early church leaders and often these church leaders would quote extensive passages of Scripture in their writings and commentaries. Many of the early church leaders would copy the text and then write their comments on it. For example, in existence today we have available the writings Clement of Rome who lived and wrote around AD 90. We have Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, who lived and wrote around AD 100. We have writings of Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, who lived and wrote around AD 160. As we have already learned, there are in existence today 245 lectionaries in uncial form (early church service worship books written in capital Greek letters) and 1964 lectionaries in minuscule form (early church service worship books written in small Greek letters). These lectionaries contain many passages of Scripture, making it not only possible to determine the reading of the text, but in many instances the meaning of it as well.

(Type #4) - Versions

A version is a translation made of the Bible from its original language into another language. One of the most significant translations done directly from the original language of the Bible was that of William Tyndale (AD 1492-1536). His translation, which was actually completed by Miles Coverdale, is the one called the "Protestant Bible" translation. Tyndale devoted himself to translating the Bible into English and before he finished his work, he got involved in a heated dispute with a man who claimed that English speaking people were better knowing the Pope's word rather than God's word. It was this very dispute that led Tyndale to reply in his now historically famous response - "I defy the Pope and all his laws; if God spares my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost." Before Tyndale could fully complete his translation of both the O.T. and the N.T., he was burned at the stake on October 6, 1536. Tyndale's assistant and proof-reader was Miles Coverdale, who finalized the translation in 1535. It was Coverdale who introduced Chapter summaries and separated the Apocrypha from the other O.T. books of the Bible, a precedent that has been followed in Protestant English Bibles ever since. In fact, "The King James Version is practically a fifth revision of Tyndale's revision..." (Geisler/Nix, p.551).