



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Bible Text Corrupted?

Bible Reading: 1 John 5:7

Bible Reading: 1 John 5:7-8 (CSB & NKJV)

- “For there are 3 that testify: 8 the Spirit, the water, & the blood—and these 3 are in agreement.” (1 Jn 5:7-8 CSB)
- “For there are 3 that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, & the Holy Spirit; & these 3 are one. 8 And there are 3 that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, & the blood; & these 3 agree as one.” (5:7-8 NKJV)

• SUMMARY:

• The Bible text, 1 John 5:7 has sparked controversy for 500 years. The longer reading in the King James Version (KJV) offers the Bible’s clearest proof text for the Trinity, yet its absence from early Greek & Latin manuscripts suggests it was never part of John’s original letter. Known as the ‘Johannine Comma’, this passage first appeared in Latin texts around the 7th century and Greek manuscripts not until the 14th. Erasmus initially excluded it from his Greek New Testament but later, under pressure from religious authorities, included it, which eventually influenced the Authorized KJV (1611) – the dominant English Bible for 400 years. Modern Bible translations omit the Comma, yet it remains a flashpoint for debate. Skeptical scholar Bart Ehrman points to 1 John 5:7 as evidence of scribal alterations that enforced orthodoxy, arguing that such changes and copying errors corrupt the New Testament and frustrate access to the original “God-inspired” Scriptures. Here, we examine Dr. Ehrman’s widely-publicized claims in his best-selling books, alongside respected evangelical scholars’ responses, which will reaffirm our confidence in the reliability of Scripture.

I. The ‘Problem Verse’ – 1 John 5:7

• 1 John 5:7 is “one of the clearest examples of a textual corruption that affected doctrine.” –Bart Ehrman
A.KJV vs. CSB Bible Translations of 1 John 5:7-8

- “7 For there are 3 that testify: 8 the Spirit, the water, & the blood—and these 3 are in agreement.” (1 Jn 5:7-8 CSB)
- “7 For there are 3 that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, & the Holy Spirit; & these 3 are one. 8 And there are 3 that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, & the blood; & these 3 agree as one.” (5:7-8 NKJV)

II. Basis for Evaluation – Believers’ View of the Bible’s Inspiration

- A. The Bible’s original ‘Autographs’ divinely inspired (2 Tim. 3:16)
- B. Bible’s original Authors divinely inspired (2 Peter 1:20-21)

III.How the Trinity got into 1 John 5:7

•The 'Johannine Comma': "...the Father, the Word, & the Holy Spirit; & these 3 are one. 8 and there are 3..."

IV.History of the Johannine Comma — Significant dates

- 1.1455 Printing Press Invented
- 2.1516 Erasmus publishes first Greek NT without the Comma (5:7b)
- 3.1522 Erasmus caves to pressure, Gk. NT includes the Comma (5:7b)
- 4.1611 English KJV derives from Erasmus' Greek Text with the Comma
- 5.1881 Westcott & Hort (Cambridge U.) Greek Text excluded Comma (footnote)
- 6.1946 English Revised Standard Version (RSV), NT excluded the Comma
- 7.1979 Nestle-Aland Greek Text (26th ed.) removed all mention of Comma

V.Does 1 John 5:7b belong in the Bible?

- A.Rejected by Scholars & Textual Critics— We're "certain... John never penned [it]." — Edward Andrews
- B.Defended by "King James Only" (KJO) Advocates

VI.1 John 5:7 Weaponized by Bart Ehrman

- A.Bart Ehrman's Thesis— the Scribes purposely corrupted the NT Text
 - 1."Ehrman's thesis is that... Orthodox scribes corrupted the text of the NT." — Joseph Fantin
 - 2."Textual Variants" result from changes & errors made by scribes in the copying process.
 - 3.Prof. Ehrman specifically & repeatedly highlights 1 John 5:7 – Exhibit 'A'
- "The verse [1 Jn. 5:7] ... is one of the clearest examples of a textual corruption that affected doctrine. It was added to solidify support for the doctrine of the Trinity." –Bart Ehrman
- 1 Jn. 5:7: "clear e.g. of how scribes...change[d] the NT to make it say what they wanted it to say." –Ehrman
- B.Ehrman alleges 1 Jn. 5:7 is the prime example of a wider pattern of textual corruption
 - 1 Jn. 5:7: "a theologically-motivated corruption in the NT... by no means the only [example]" –Bart Ehrman
 - "1 Jn. 5:7 is part of a larger phenomenon of textual corruption" — Bart Ehrman
- C.Ehrman alleges rampant theological tampering has distorted the NT text
 - "Scribes...often altered the text [so it] ... conformed to their beliefs."–Bart Ehrman
- D."We cannot be sure of the original words in every passage" – Bart Ehrman
- E.Ehrman: The original 'autographs' are unrecoverable:
- F.Ehrman: Textual Corruption undermines the Divine Inspiration of Originals

VII.Critics Respond to Bart Ehrman

- A.1 Jn. 5:7 (the Johannine Comma) is a unique Case
 - o"There's no other...e.g. in all of the history of textual criticism of a similar insertion" — Ben Witherington
- "Ehrman is too quick to attribute theological intent." — Craig Evans
- "Ehrman...read[s] theological motivations into a wide range of textual variants" — Larry Hurtado
- Ehrman's "sweeping conclusion[s] are... based on a handful of examples." — Craig Blomberg
- "Ehrman...amplif[ies] these [isolated] cases beyond what the textual evidence supports." –Larry Hurtado
- "Ehrman... overstate[s] the importance of theological motivation..." — Daniel Wallace
- "Ehrman focuses on the more sensational... changes." – Craig Blomberg
- "Ehrman [alleges] ... theological corruption of the text was rampant. In reality, the vast majority of textual variants are not theological in nature, but are rather trivial ...spelling mistakes [etc.]." –Daniel Wallace
- Nothing New Here: Ehrman "rehashes well-known textual variants that've long been recognized" –M. Kruger
- "The bulk of... manuscript tradition reflects a faithful & accurate transmission." – Peter J. Williams,
- "Despite some tampering, the NT text is remarkably consistent & trustworthy." — Michael Kruger
- Divine Inspiration does not require Perfect (error-free) Transmission
 - o"Ehrman... presumes that if God inspired the Bible, He would ensure perfect copies in perpetuity. But God often works through imperfect human processes to accomplish His will. The core message of the NT remains trustworthy despite the...variants." –Ben Witherington

VIII.The Doctrine of the Trinity does not depend on 1 John 5:7

- A.1 Jn. 5:7 is not the foundation of Trinity teaching (Mt. 28:19; Jn. 1:1; 2 Cor. 13:14, etc.)
 - "The doctrine of the Trinity does not rest on 1 John 5:7. This is a spurious text."– Daniel Wallace
- B.Modern Bible Translations exclude 1 Jn. 5:7 (e.g. NIV, ESV, RSV, etc.)
- C.Ehrman acknowledges the Trinity does not rely on 1 John 5:7

•“How does [1 Jn. 5:7] affect the doctrine of the Trinity? In no significant way, since the doctrine does not depend on this one verse. The doctrine of the Trinity...is based on the entire teaching of the NT, not on a single passage.” – Bart Ehrman

D.Ehrman concedes No Essential Christian Doctrine is dependent on Textual Variants

•“Essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the [NT] manuscript[s].” — Bart Ehrman

•“Ehrman admits in more technical works that no essential Christian belief is compromised by textual variants. His more popular works, however, obscure this fact.” –Michael Kruger

E.NT Textual scholars are confident: “We can...determine what the original text said.” –Daniel Wallace

•“The sheer abundance of material is one...reason for the relative certainty in establishing the original text...We have a vast amount of data...which generally points us to the original readings” –Bruce Metzger

•“With... 5,800+ Greek NT manuscripts ... we can... in the vast majority of cases, determine what the original text said... Textual variants... do not obscure the message of the NT.” –Daniel Wallace