



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*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.

### •Introduction

•We hear claims challenging the accuracy & reliability of the NT: “The Bible is full of errors;” “It has been so ‘corrupted:’ through many centuries that today’s Bible is drastically different from what the

authors wrote.” Plus, the original manuscripts written by the apostles no longer exist & are unrecoverable (some critics claim).

**•Is what we read today what they wrote back then?**

•“Prior to the invention of printing, the NT was disseminated by...hand-written copies... by trained copyists [scribes] ...We depend on the manuscript copies that...survive[d]. The original documents ... have not survived... The ‘autograph copy’...is not available... The NT has been transmitted by means of hand-written copies for over three-quarters of its life.” [James K. Elliott, NT Textual Criticism, p. 14]

**•Skeptics Allege:**

•The scribes who copied the NT manuscripts make intentional changes reflecting their own theological views, thereby ‘corrupting’ the text. Adding to this copyists’ unintended mistakes, yields an ‘error-ridden’ Bible text.

•How do we evaluate these assertions? Are we shaken, thinking, “maybe they’re correct”? Can we be reassured?

•Its an important issue. Serious Christians believe Scripture is God’s inspired Word (via the original authors). So, its crucial to be confident that the Bible we read today accurately reflects what the original authors wrote.

•We address these issues related to a single verse –1 Jn. 5:7 –that’s been controversial & provoked much debate.

**•An Aspect of Apologetics:**

•Be “ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you...with gentleness & respect.” (1 Pet. 3:15-16)

•‘Defense’: Gk. apologia “an argument for the defense in a law court or informal explanation”-> “apologetics”

•The present message & material is designed to inform & warn you; its to equip you to answer such questions.

**I.The ‘Problem Verse’ – 1 John 5:7**

•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, Forged: Writing in the Name of God, p. 160)

•1 John 5:7: “a theologically-motivated corruption in the NT... is by no means the only [example]” –B. Ehrman

**A.KJV vs. CSB Bible Translations of 1 John 5:7-8**

•“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)

•“7 For there are 3 that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, & the Holy Ghost: & these 3 are one. 8 And there are 3 that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, & the water, & the blood: & these 3 agree in one.” (KJV 1611)

•The (so-called) “Johannine Comma” (Comma Johanneum in Latin) highlighted in red. (‘Comma’: short clause)

**B.The King James Version (KJV): the dominant English Bible for 400 years (1611-2011)**

•“Since...1611 the KJV...has dominated the field. The 1st ‘authorized version’ [was] ...rendered in 17th-century English. A team of [54] scholars compared prior English translations with a [few] dozen

Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and produced a monumental version of the Scriptures ...[that's] still around after 400 years..." [William W. Klein, et. al., Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, p. 192]  
 •"But none of the oldest, 2nd- to 5th-century [Greek] manuscripts, most ...discovered since 1611 [were used in the KJV] ...We now have 5,800 ...hand-copied documents of part or all of the NT ...We cannot endorse the... use of... [KJV, NKJV] versions when more accurate alternatives are available." [WW. Klein, Op. cit., p. 193]

### **C.Modern Bibles exclude 1 John 5:7 – Have they ‘Tampered with the Text’?**

•"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)

•"The most explicit expression of...the... Trinity in the NT is apparently found in a neatly balanced pair of verses in [1 Jn. 5:7-8]: 'For there are 3 that bear witness in Heaven: the Father, the Word, & the Holy Spirit; & these 3 are one. 8 & there are 3 that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, & the water, & the blood; & these 3 agree in one.'" (5:7-8) [~KJV translation of the received Greek text of 1550 ("Comma" in red)] ...These words missing from the [early/older] Greek text are... the 'Johannine Comma (clause)' ... The first extant manuscripts in the Latin Bible to contain the 'Johannine Comma'...date from the 7th-century... [It] is not found frequently in Latin Bibles until the 9th century, & is lacking from many Latin Bibles more recent than that." [Grantley McDonald, Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe, pp. 3-4]

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

### **A.The Bible’s original ‘Autographs’ divinely inspired (2 Tim. 3:16)**

•"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting..." (2 Tim. 3:16)

•"The Bible is verbally & totally inspired & without error in the original writings [the 'autographs']." [Max Anders, What You Need to Know About the Bible, p. 44]

•"The doctrine of inspiration posits that the Bible's original autographs were divinely inspired... 'breathed out' by God & written by human authors under the Holy Spirit's guidance." [ED. Andrews, Original Text of the NT, p. 136]

•In 2 Tim. 3:16 "Paul does not point to the human authors of Scripture as inspired people, but says that the writings themselves ...are words spoken by God." [Ray Van Neste, ESV Study Bible, p. 2342]

•In 2 Tim. 3:16 "it is the Scriptures that are described as inspired, not the writers... Paul is stating that it is the final product that is God-breathed..." [J. Scott Duvall, J. Daniel Hays, Grasping God's Word, (4th ed.) p. 492]

### **B.Bible’s original Authors divinely inspired (2 Peter 1:20-21)**

•"No prophecy of Scripture... ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Pet. 1:20-21)

•2 Pet. 1:20-21 "also stresses the divine origin of the Scriptures. How were the human authors involved? They were 'carried along' by the Holy Spirit... So human authors are involved, the Holy Spirit is involved, and the final product (the Bible) is inspired by God." [J. Scott Duvall, J. Daniel Hays, Grasping God's Word, (4th ed.) p. 492]

•Some Scriptures emphasize "the inspiration of the authors [e.g. John] more than the inspiration of the words they recorded. This process of inspiration is suggested by 2 Pet. 1:20-21. God inspired... people of faith with a message to communicate ...thought by thought... The biblical authors then wrote down this inspired message in their own language & world view ...This seems to be...the process Luke describes (Lk. 1:1-4)." [Steve W. Lemke, "Inspiration & Authority of Scripture," in B. Corley (ed.) Biblical Hermeneutics, p. 179]

•"The Holy Spirit was the active revelatory agent working within the OT prophets... This is a key verse in the doctrine of Scripture, indicating that Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit, but at the same time, 'men spoke' God's words using their own personalities, knowledge, background, vocabulary &

style. 'They were carried along by the Holy Spirit' implies that the inspiration of Scripture was...by the Holy Spirit, though without over-riding the personalities of the human authors. Thus, Scripture is fully the Word of God, even though recorded in the words of human beings." [Doug Oss, TR. Schreiner, ESV Study Bible, p. 2420]

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

#### A. History of 1 Jn. 5:7's Trinity — the 'Johannine Comma'

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

##### 1. 1455 Printing Press Invented

- The invention of the printing press in 1455... There was a rebirth of interest in the Greek language ...With the fall of Constantinople to the Turks 1453 many Greek scholars & their manuscripts were scattered ...resulting in a revival of Greek in Western [European centers] of learning." [Ed. D. Andrews, *Misrepresenting Jesus*, p. 326]

##### 2. 1516 Erasmus publishes first Greek NT without the Comma 5:7

- "In 1516...Erasmus published the 1st Greek NT. Almost immediately it became embroiled in controversy and Erasmus was accused of heresy because of critical decisions he made about the text. The most controversial was his decision to not include 1 John 5:7, the so-called [Johannine] Comma..., which was used as a defense of the Trinity ...Erasmus attempted to protect himself & his NT from heresy charges as he revised it for its 2nd edition. ...[When] those attempts failed. Erasmus reinserted 1 John 5:7 in his 3rd edition." [David M. Whitfield, "Yielding to the Prejudices of His Times: Erasmus & the Comma Johanneum," *Church History*... (2015) p.]

##### 3. 1522 Erasmus caves to pressure, includes the Comma (5:7b)

- "In 1516 Erasmus... the great... textual scholar... published a new Latin translation & parallel Greek text... Since the Johannine Comma was absent from all the Greek manuscripts...he didn't include it in his [1st & 2nd eds. 1516, 19]. He was immediately censured [& criticized as promoting heresy] ... He was given a [fabricated] Greek manuscript containing the disputed passage... [So Erasmus reluctantly included it in his 1522 3rd edition with notes questioning its authenticity.]" [Grantley McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe*, p. 5]

##### 4. 1611 KJV derives from Erasmus' Greek Text with the Comma

- "The single most famous incident related to...Erasmus' work on the NT revolves around the words of 1 John 5:7 found in the KJV ... Most KJV Only [advocates] make acceptance of this passage the test of orthodoxy. If your Bible does not have it, you are in deep trouble." [James R. White, *King James Only Controversy*, pp. 99-100]

##### 5. Was 1 John 5:7 (the Johannine Comma) a 'Trojan Horse'?

- "After besieging the walls of Troy for 10 years, the Greeks built a huge, hollow wooden horse, secretly filled it with armed warriors, & presented it to the Trojans as a gift... The Trojans took the horse inside the city's walls. That night, the armed Greeks swarmed out...captured & burned the city. A 'Trojan horse' is thus anything that looks innocent but, once accepted, has power to harm or destroy—for e.g., a computer program that seems helpful but ends up corrupting or demolishing the computer's software." Was the Comma a 'Trojan Horse'?

#### B. Codex Montfortianus – 'A Pious Fraud'

- "Codex Montfortianus (Trinity College Dublin, Ireland). Probably produced early on in the 16th Century [1500s!!] ...[It] rose to fame primarily as the first Greek manuscript known to attest the so-called [Johannine] Comma, a brief trinitarian interpolation at 1 John 5:7-8. It was from this manuscript, in fact, that ...Erasmus introduced the Comma into the 3rd edition of his Greek NT [It's absent from his 1st & 2nd eds.], thus becoming the standard feature of the textus receptus ['received text'] (& so also the Bible translations based on it [KJV]." [Peter Malik, "Myths about Copying," in E. Hixson (ed.) *Myths & Mistakes in NT Textual Criticism*, p. 158]

- "Many physical details of [Codex] Montfortianus— the evidence provided by the paper [etc.] ...

suggest very strongly that it was produced intentionally to refute Erasmus. But the scribes who carried out this pious fraud presumably [believed] they were acting in the service of a greater truth... [Plus,] Erasmus' inclusion of the comma on pragmatic grounds must also be counted as deceptive." [Grantley McDonald, Op. cit., p. 311]

### **C. 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

### **IV. Does 1 John 5:7 belong in the Bible?**

#### **A. Roundly Rejected by Scholars & NT Textual Critics— not original to NT texts**

• "While some... Latin manuscripts contain... the [Johannine] Comma... [It] did not appear in the original Latin Vulgate written by Jerome [383-404 AD] ... While it would be convenient [to have] an explicit statement confirming the Trinity in the Bible, it is highly unlikely that the Comma... was originally a part of 1 John. Some ancient scribe... intentionally or accidentally added it to a Latin manuscript, & then that addition was copied thousands upon thousands of times. This eventually resulted in the ... Comma... appearing in the vast majority of Latin manuscripts. Whatever the scribe's motives, it is absolutely wrong to add to God's Word. While what the Comma... says is true, it is not a God-breathed statement & does not belong in the Bible. The doctrine of the Trinity is taught & implied in many other biblical passages. If God thought an explicit mention of the Trinity was necessary, He Himself would have made sure it was in His Word." ["What is the Comma Johanneum (1 Jn. 5:7-8)?" GotQuestions.org]

• 1 John 5:7 ... in the KJV says 'there are 3 that bear record in Heaven: the Father, the Word, & the Holy Spirit; & these 3 are one.' That is as explicit a definition of the Trinity as one finds in the Bible. Yet no serious textual critic today accepts this reading as authentic, & neither do evangelical theologians, who are still quite able to make a biblical case for the doctrine of the Trinity. In other words, the fundamental doctrine of the Trinity in no way depends on this variant reading..." [Peter J. Gurry, "Myths about Variants," in E. Hixson (ed.) Myths & Mistakes in NT Textual Criticism, p. 207]

#### **B. We are "certain... John never penned [it]." — Edward Andrews. Its not original!**

• Regarding "1 John 5:7 TCGNT & NTTTC say it is certain that John never penned the addition [the Johannine Comma] ... While these are 'significant' to the text, they create no problem, because... we are certain about the original reading. The doctrinal positions that can be established from the NT [e.g. the Trinity] are not affected by these being omitted. No doctrine stands on one verse." [Edward D. Andrews, Misrepresenting Jesus: Debunking Bart Ehrman's "Misquoting Jesus" p. 292 TCGNT: Bruce Metzger, Textual Commentary on the Greek NT; NTTTC: Philip W. Comfort, NT Text & Translation Commentary]

• To date, only a handful of Greek MSS have been discovered which have the Trinitarian formula in 1 Jn. 5:7-8, though none of them is demonstrably earlier than the [14th] 16th century." Daniel Wallace (amended below)

• "The oldest MS to have the [Johannine] Comma in the text is from the 14th century."—Daniel Wallace (2010)

• "Martin Luther did not include the Johannine Comma in the German translations of the NT that were published during his lifetime." [Charles L. Quarles, 40 Questions About the Text & Canon of the NT, p 10 #11]

• "Martin Luther would use Erasmus' 1519 [2nd ed. without Johannine Comma], & William Tyndale

would use the 1522 edition [3rd ed. with the Johannine Comma] for his English translation.” [Edward D. Andrews, *Misrepresenting Jesus*, p. 327]

•“The expansion of...[1 Jn. 5:7-8] to specify 3 witnesses in heaven, ‘the Father, the Word, and Holy Spirit’, while identifying spirit, water & blood as the witnesses ‘on earth’ is best explained as one of the many ‘versional glosses’ in the [NT] letters [i.e., where copyists have embedded notes from the margin into the NT text itself ]... It is first attested in Latin tradition in the 4th century, but does not appear in Greek until the 16th century: one of the minuscule manuscripts in which it is found, GA 61, is likely to have been created in response to Erasmus’ omission of these words from his edition, although there is no evidence that he suspected this nor that he had promised to include the text if a Greek witness could be found ... Nevertheless, Erasmus’ subsequent adoption of these words led to their inclusion in the printed edition of the Greek NT ...[& thence into the KJV]; they are rejected by modern editors.” [HAG. Houghton, “Text of the Gospel & Letters of John,” JM. Lieu (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, p. ]

•“Some... [treasured] proof texts [for the Trinity] evaporated because they were, in fact... mirages: 1 John 5:7’s ‘three who bear witness in heaven,’ for example, withered away at the first touch of... textual criticism. By overwhelming consensus, the... Comma is judged not to have been in the original manuscript [of 1 John] & therefore it should not be used as biblical support for Trinitarian theology... The discarding of the Comma is perhaps the clearest example of the helpful & clarifying ...work of biblical criticism

... This text should not be used as biblical support for [the Trinity] ...” [Fred Sanders, *Triune God*, p. 164]

•“Today, the Johannine Comma is widely dismissed by NT scholars as a later interpolation [insertion] in the text of 1 John. This is true of mainstream scholarship across the theological and denominational spectrum, regardless of the approach to Trinitarian theology and despite the question of whether ... the doctrine of the Trinity emerges from the pages of the NT.” [Dorothee A. Lee, “Foreword,” in Grantley McDonald, *Op. cit.*, p. xi]

•Today’s “‘official’ Roman Catholic Bible in Latin, the Nova Vulgate (1979), does not include the Johannine Comma, because it renders the Greek text of the Nestle-Aland edition. After more than four & a half centuries, Erasmus initial judgment on the Johannine Comma had been vindicated.” [Grantley McDonald, *Op. cit.*, p. 295]

### **C. Defended by “King James Only” (KJO) Advocates**

•The Johannine Comma (1 Jn. 5:7-8) has played a significant role in the “King James Only” (KJO) debate.

•KJV advocates argue the omission of the Comma weakens the biblical case for the doctrine of the Trinity.

•David Otis Fuller, a leading KJO advocate, defended the Comma’s authenticity in his book *Which Bible?*:

•“The omission of this vital proof text for the Trinity is part of a larger attack on the deity of Christ & the triune nature of God in modern Bible versions.” [David O. Fuller, *Which Bible?* (1970) p. ]

•“If you remove 1 John 5:7, you are left with a Bible that downplays the Trinity, and that is a satanic move to diminish the deity of Christ & the person of the Holy Spirit.” [Peter Ruckman, *Christian’s Handbook of Manuscript Evidence* (1970) p. ]

### **V.1 John 5:7 Weaponized by Bart Ehrman**

#### **A. Who is Bart Ehrman?**

•Bart D. Ehrman (born Oct. 5, 1955) is an agnostic NT scholar focusing on textual criticism of the NT, the historical Jesus, [etc.]. He has written & edited 30 books, incl. 3 college textbooks. He has also authored 6 NY Times best-sellers. He is Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of N. Carolina, USA.

•Ehrman was raised in the Episcopal Church; as a teenager, he became a ‘born-again’ evangelical...

After studies at Moody Bible Institute & Wheaton College (IL.) he went to Princeton. There he began to doubt & turned into a Liberal Christian, but later became an agnostic-atheist after struggling with the problems of evil & suffering.

### **B. Bart Ehrman's book: Misquoting Jesus: ...Who Changed the Bible & Why**

- Bart Ehrman's book *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible & Why* (2005) has been quite successful... It has sold over 100,000 copies. It reached #27 on the New York Times bestseller list, indicating its wide appeal & strong reception, especially among those interested in biblical scholarship & textual criticism. The book's popularity has been driven by Ehrman's accessible writing & the controversial nature of its subject matter— how the NT has been altered through centuries of copying and translation.

### **C. 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

- "Bart Ehrman's thesis is that orthodox scribes purposely changed (corrupted) the [NT] text to bring it in line with the beliefs of emerging orthodoxy ... Its raised in his books: *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (1993) & *Misquoting Jesus* (2005)." [Joseph D. Fantin, "Revisiting the Corruption of the NT," *Voice DTS*, 2013]

- "Scribes were not simply machines copying texts word for word. They had their own ideas & their own agendas, and sometimes these affected the way they transcribed their texts." — Bart Ehrman Blog

- "Scribes... inserted [new] material into the NT." — Bart Ehrman

2. "Textual Variants" result from changes & errors made by scribes in the copying process.

- A 'textual variant' is "a variation in wording that occurs when one compares [surviving] copies of a manuscript, representing different readings [versions] of the same passage [NT verse]." (Bruce M. Metzger, *Text of the NT*, p)

- A 'textual variant' is "a difference between manuscripts of the same [NT] text, whether in spelling, phrasing, or content, which has occurred during the transmission [copying] of the document." (Philip W. Comfort, *NT Text & Translation Commentary*).

3. Prof. Ehrman specifically & repeatedly highlights 1 John 5:7 – Exhibit 'A'

- "The verse [1 Jn. 5:7] states, '...3 ...bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, & the Spirit, & these 3 are one,' 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. This shows how scribes sometimes inserted material into the NT that was not originally there." (Bart Ehrman, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God*, p. 160)

4.1 John 5:7 "was added... to support the doctrine of the Trinity" — Bart Ehrman

- "The passage [1 Jn. 5:7] was added to the NT by orthodox scribes who wished to emphasize that the doctrine of the Trinity—... one God in 3 persons: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit— was a teaching of Scripture." (Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p.)

5.1 Jn. 5:7: "clear e.g. of how scribes...change[d] the NT to make it say what they wanted it to say." – B. Ehrman

- "The story of the 'Johannine comma' demonstrates how theological controversies shaped the transmission of the text. Theologically-motivated scribes added this passage [1 Jn. 5:7] to support the doctrine of the Trinity—a clear example of how scribes could and did change the NT to make it say what they wanted it to say." (Bart Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p. 266)

### **D. Ehrman's Popular Books cite 1 Jn. 5:7 is a Key Example**

- "Some of the chief examples... Ehrman discusses are... an explicit statement about the Trinity (1 John 5:7-8)." [Michael J. Kruger, *Reinventing Jesus*, pp. 110-1]

1. In *Misquoting Jesus*, Bart Ehrman writes regarding John 5:7:

- "This longer reading [incl. 5:7b] is not found in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts of 1 John... Its

inclusion was based on a doctrine of the Trinity, not a matter of what the text originally said.”

(Misquoting Jesus, p. 81).

2. In *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Ehrman asserts:

• “1 Jn. 5:7-8, which affirms the Trinity, was added later by scribes seeking to provide clear scriptural support for a doctrine [Trinity] that was already well established in the church.” (*Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p. 229).

3. In *Forgery... : Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics*, he references 1 John 5:7:

• “The insertion of the Johannine Comma [5:7] is one of the clearest instances where scribes altered the text to create theological support for the doctrine of the Trinity. It did not exist in the original writings.” (*Forgery*, p. 328).

### **E. Ehrman alleges 1 Jn. 5:7 is the prime example of a wider pattern of textual corruption**

• 1 John 5:7: “a theologically-motivated corruption in the NT... by no means the only [example]” –Bart Ehrman

• “The passage is the clearest instance of a theologically-motivated corruption in the NT, where scribes inserted wording to bolster the doctrine of the Trinity. But it is by no means the only place where scribes made significant changes.” (Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 81) [Suggests more widespread]

• “1 John 5:7 is part of a larger phenomenon of textual corruption” — Bart Ehrman

• “The insertion of 1 John 5:7 is part of a larger phenomenon of textual corruption, where scribes altered the text in order to promote what they considered to be correct doctrine. This does not mean that the NT is entirely unreliable, but it does suggest that we need to be cautious when claiming that any given passage represents the original words of its author.” (Bart Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p. 266)

### **F. “We cannot be sure of the original words in every passage” – Bart Ehrman**

• “We have so many textual variants... we cannot be sure of the original words in every passage” – B. Ehrman

• “We have so many textual variants in the manuscripts means we cannot be sure of the original words in every passage. However, most... variants do not affect significant theological issues. There are a few, like 1 Jn. 5:7, that do, & these should prompt us to critically evaluate the history of the text.” (B. Ehrman, *Misquoting*, p. 209)

### **G. Ehrman: The original ‘autographs’ are unrecoverable:**

• “We don’t even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals.”

• The fact that “We don’t have the originals, that we have only error-ridden copies, & that the vast majority of these copies are centuries removed from the originals & different from them, evidently in thousands of ways, can be distressing to some readers of the Bible, but it is a fact that we must all face.” (*Misquoting Jesus*, p. 7)

• Yet, Ehrman also concedes that, in principle, “we might, through the application of... rigorous methods of analysis, reconstruct what those original words actually were.” (Bert Ehrman, *Misquoting...*, p. 15)

### **H. Ehrman: Textual Corruption undermines Divine Inspiration of Originals**

• “The fact that we do not have the original manuscripts of any of the [NT] books... & that all the copies were altered over time, makes it difficult to believe that the words of these texts are inspired by God. If God wanted us to have his words, why didn’t he ensure that the words were preserved?” (Bart Ehrman, *Forged*, p. 259).

• “If scribes were changing the texts—sometimes unintentionally, sometimes with full theological agenda—then how can we claim to have the original, inspired words? Inspiration implies



preservation, & that preservation did not happen.” (Bart Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p. xi).

•Norm. Geisler replies: “God did not promise to preserve every copy of the Bible free from all errors, but only that the original writings would be inspired & trustworthy.” (Norman L. Geisler, ...*Bible Difficulties*, p. 30).

## VI. Critics Respond to Bart Ehrman

### A.1 John 5:7 (the Johannine Comma) is a unique Case

•“Ehrman’s discussion of...[the] Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7-8) is both lucid & entertaining. But... what is lacking is any acknowledgment that there is no other known example in all of the history of textual criticism of a similar insertion to a critical Greek text being made on the basis of only one, most likely altered, late medieval manuscript. Moreover, Ehrman writes as if the doctrine of the Trinity stands or falls with this spurious addition, which ignores the numerous other Trinitarian references in the NT.” [Ben Witherington, “A review of Bart Ehrman’s, ‘Misquoting Jesus’,” *Denver Journal* (Feb. 2006) p. ]

### B. Ehrman: orthodox theologically-motivated scribes. But other motives are possible

1. Ehrman’s thesis: theologically-motivated scribes made the text more orthodox

•“The Orthodox scribes sometimes changed the texts they were copying in order to make them more orthodox... In the process, they occasionally changed the meaning of the text.” (Ehrman, *Misquoting...*, p. 156).

2. We lack direct evidence of scribes’ motives. Other scribal motives are possible:

•F. F. Bruce suggests “It is likely that the words [of the Johannine Comma] began as an exegetical marginal gloss, [notes in the margin] whose purport [goal] is the interpretation of the 3 witnesses [‘the Spirit, the water, & the blood’ (5:8)] as Father, Word, and Holy Spirit” (F. F. Bruce, *Books & the Parchments*, p. 232).

3. Reflects an Allegorical Interpretation?

•“Some early church fathers, such as Augustine [354-430 AD], interpreted 1 John 5:8 (the Spirit, the water, & the blood) [allegorically] as symbolic of the Trinity. These allegorical readings could have inspired scribes to clarify this symbolism explicitly by inserting 1 John 5:7. Augustine... suggest[ed] that these elements [Spirit, water, & blood] represented the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit in a mystical sense. This interpretation may have led to the [Comma’s]... insertion... into the Latin text to align the scripture with the allegorical theology. Augustine’s interpretation of [1 Jn. 5:8] as a reference to the Trinity likely contributed to...later manuscripts turning an implicit understanding into explicit scriptural doctrine.” (De Trinitate, Book V, Chapter 8).

### C. Critiques of Bart Ehrman

1. “Ehrman is too quick to attribute theological intent.” — Craig Evans

•“While some scribes may have had theological motivations, it is more likely that many variations arose from mundane factors such as inattentiveness or poor copying practices... Ehrman is too quick to attribute theological intent where simpler explanations may suffice.” (Craig Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, p. 119)

2. “Ehrman...read[s] theological motivations into a wide range of textual variants” — Larry Hurtado

•“Ehrman’s tendency to read theological motivations into a wide range of textual variants is methodologically suspect. Not all alterations can be attributed to conscious theological agendas; some are simply due to the normal & expected process of copying texts by hand.” (Larry W. Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, p. 215).

3. Ehrman’s “sweeping conclusion[s] are... based on a handful of examples.” — Craig Blomberg

•“Ehrman repeatedly suggests that scribes were frequently driven by theological motivations, but the evidence doesn’t support such a sweeping conclusion. The bulk of textual variants are neutral, & Ehrman’s conclusions are disproportionately based on a handful of examples.” [Craig Blomberg, *Can*

We Still Believe the Bible? p. 110).

4. “Ehrman... amplif[ies] these [isolated] cases beyond what the textual evidence supports.” –Larry Hurtado

• “There are certainly examples of... ‘theological tampering,’ but the key issue is how widespread & impactful these changes were. Ehrman tends to amplify these cases beyond what the textual evidence supports.” –Larry Hurtado

5. “Ehrman... overstate[s] the importance of theological motivation...” — Daniel Wallace

• “The vast majority of textual variants have nothing to do with theology or intent. They are simply mistakes or insignificant differences in spelling, grammar, or word order. Ehrman tends to overstate the importance of theological motivation in the changes he discusses.” (Daniel Wallace, *Revisiting the Corruption of the NT*, p. 31).

6. “Ehrman focuses on the more sensational... changes.” – Craig Blomberg

• “Ehrman focuses on the more sensational & theologically significant changes, implying that they are far more common than they really are. The majority of textual variants are simple & minor errors, not deliberate attempts to alter doctrine.” (Craig Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* p. 110).

7. Ehrman alleges rampant theological tampering has distorted the NT text

a. Bart Ehrman’s claims

• “Scribes... intent on maintaining [orthodoxy]... often altered the text [so it] ... conformed to their beliefs.” –Ehrman (*Bart Ehrman, Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p. xi).

• “Scribes who were deeply rooted in [orthodoxy]... would alter the texts in ways that supported their views. Over the centuries, the textual tradition has been affected by this tampering.” (Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 180).

b. Critics’ Response

• “Ehrman gives the impression that theological tampering was rampant, but this distorts the textual tradition, which is overwhelmingly reliable & consistent across time. Most changes were not nefarious in nature but arose naturally in the course of transmission.” (Peter J. Williams, “Ehrman’s ‘Misquoting Jesus’: Critique of His View on the Transmission of the NT,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, p. 45).

• “Ehrman paints a picture that theological corruption of the text was rampant. In reality, the vast majority of textual variants are not theological in nature but are rather trivial, such as spelling mistakes or stylistic improvements.” (Daniel Wallace, *Revisiting the Corruption of the NT*, p. 31).

c. Ehrman acknowledges scholars have identified intentional changes

• He writes, “everyone knows that the text has been changed; the only question is which reading... represents the earliest available form of the text... In a remarkable number of instances –most of them actually –scholars by and large agree.” [Bart D. Ehrman, *Whose Word is It?* p. 94]

8. Nothing New Here: The cases “Ehrman highlights have been known & documented... for centuries.” – D. Wallace

• “The textual corruptions Ehrman highlights have been known & documented by textual critics for centuries. They are included in... [the Greek text] scholars have had access to for many years” (D. Wallace, *Themelios*, 2006).

• “Ehrman’s work often rehashes well-known textual variants that have long been recognized by textual critics, although he... emphasizes their potential theological significance.” (Michael Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 2010).

9. “The bulk of... manuscript tradition reflects a faithful & accurate transmission.” – Peter J. Williams,

• “Ehrman gives disproportionate attention to textual variants that appear to have theological motivations, leading to a distorted picture. The bulk of the manuscript tradition reflects a faithful & accurate transmission.” (Peter J. Williams, *Misquoting Jesus: A Review*, *Journal of Theological Studies*, p. 45).

10. “Despite some tampering, the NT text is remarkably consistent & trustworthy.” — Michael Kruger

• Ehrman’s tendency to highlight a few theological alterations leads to an overstated skepticism about the NT text as a whole. The evidence shows that, despite some tampering, the NT text is remarkably consistent and trustworthy.” (Michael Kruger, *Question of Canon*, p. 132).

11. "With more than 5,800 Greek NT manuscripts...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" –B. Metzger, Text of the NT, p. ]

• "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." –D. Wallace, Reliability of NT Manuscripts, p. ]

12. Divine Inspiration does not require Perfect (error-free) Transmission

• "Ehrman assumes that divine inspiration must result in a perfect transmission process. But it's entirely possible that God allowed some human errors in copying while still ensuring that the core message remained intact. None of the essential doctrines...are affected by the variants." (Craig Blomberg, Can We Still Believe the Bible? p. 78).

• "Ehrman's argument that the loss of the original manuscripts invalidates divine inspiration... [does not follow]. Christians have always believed that inspiration applied to the original texts, not to every single copy made over the centuries... Textual variants do not negate the inspired nature of the original message." –Michael Kruger

• "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 trust-worthy despite the...variants." (Ben Witherington, Problem with...Ehrman's Misquoting..., blog post, May 2006).

## **VII. 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.)**

• Many critics emphasize that 1 John 5:7 is not the foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity, which is supported by other passages (e.g., Matt. 28:19, John 1:1, 2 Cor. 13:14). They argue that the doctrine would still stand even without this verse. For example, James White, has said:

• "Ehrman tends to inflate the significance of variants like 1 Jn. 5:7, even though this verse [1 Jn. 5:7] has never been central to the doctrine of the Trinity. The church's understanding of the Trinity is derived from the whole of Scripture, not isolated verses...disputed for centuries." (James White, King James Only Controversy, 2009)

• "The doctrine of the Trinity does not rest on 1 John 5:7. This is a spurious text and should not be used to support the doctrine. However, the doctrine is not imperiled by the absence of this verse because it is found in other places in Scripture." – Daniel B. Wallace

• "Ehrman overplays his hand by suggesting that the inclusion or exclusion of 1 John 5:7 has significant theological ramifications. The doctrine of the Trinity does not rest on this single verse, & Ehrman's argument creates a straw man by implying that it does." (Daniel B. Wallace, Review of Misquoting Jesus, Bible.org, 2006)

• "1 John 5:7 [is] well-known & easily recognized by scholars. The Church has not based key doctrines, such as the Trinity, on these disputed verses. Ehrman's emphasis on such passages can mislead readers about the strength of the NT text." (Michael Kruger, The Heresy of Orthodoxy Review, 2011)

### **B. Modern Bible Translations exclude 1 Jn. 5:7**

• Critics note modern Bible translations (NIV, ESV, RSV, etc.) have long excluded 1 Jn. 5:7 or relegated it to footnotes. Most Christians are aware of this issue, & its significance is overstated. It's been recognized as inauthentic for centuries. Ehrman's misrepresents 1 Jn. 5:7's importance. It's a 'storm in a teacup'.

### **C. Ehrman acknowledges the Trinity does not rely on 1 John 5:7**

• "The Trinity...does not rest on an explicitly stated passage of Scripture." – Bart Ehrman

- “The key theological affirmation of the Trinity—Father, Son, & Holy Spirit being one— was not originally found [explicitly] in any of the Greek manuscripts of the NT. Christians may continue to believe in the Trinity, but they should realize that this doctrine does not rest on an explicitly stated passage of Scripture.” (Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 81)
- “This verse [1 Jn. 5:7] is not found in the Greek manuscripts of 1 John until the late Middle Ages. How does it 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, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 81)
- “The doctrine of the Trinity does not rest on a single biblical passage, but on... a range of texts that suggest the divinity of the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. Even without 1 Jn. 5:7, which is a late addition, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is supported by a broader theological interpretation of Scripture.” – Bart Ehrman

#### **D.No Essential Christian Doctrine is dependent on Textual Variants**

- “Essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the [NT] manuscript tradition.” B. Ehrman
- “It would be wrong...to say... changes in the text have no real bearing on what the texts mean or on the theological conclusions that one draws from them... The opposite is the case.” (Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 208)
- “Bart Ehrman’s claim that the variations in our NT manuscripts create doubt about core Christian doctrines is simply not supported by the evidence. No cardinal Christian doctrine is affected by any viable textual variant.” (Michael J. Kruger, *Question of Canon*, p. 110)
- “Significant textual variants that alter core doctrines of the NT have not yet been produced.” –Dan. Wallace
- “Even Ehrman admits in more technical works that no essential Christian belief is compromised by textual variants. His more popular works, however, obscure this fact.” (M. J. Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, p. 43)
- “The position I argue for in *Misquoting Jesus* does not actually stand at odds with fundamental tenets of Christian orthodoxy. Essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the NT.” (Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 252).
- “I don’t want people to get the wrong idea...I’m not saying that we can’t trust the text of the NT altogether. I’m saying that there are places where we’re not sure what the original text said. But, for the most part, we are relatively certain, & the textual variants that exist do not affect