

AND THESE THREE ARE ONE:  
A CASE FOR THE AUTHENTICITY OF I JOHN 5:7-8  
ROOTED IN BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

BY  
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22 APRIL 1999

This exegesis is dedicated first and foremost to my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who revealed Himself to me in the written word--perfectly preserved down through the ages and given to me in a language I can understand. Recognizing that, as Martin Luther once said, "The Bible is like a lion; it does not need to be defended; just let it loose and it will defend itself," I hereby construct this defense out of genuine gratefulness for the infallible Word of God as contained in the Authorized King James Bible. Without a perfectly preserved Written Word, I would know nothing of a personal relationship with the Living Word.

Secondly, it is dedicated to the many men, women, and children who gave their lives that I might have the Bible in English, a privilege which I do not take for granted. Thank-you for your sacrifice and may the Lord reward you richly in His kingdom.

Last, but not least, I dedicate this exegesis to my seminary professor, Dr. David Black, whose books have had a profound effect on my acquisition of a working knowledge of the Greek language. No biblical scholar that I have had contact with has exhibited such humility and self-sacrificing devotion toward his students. The reasons for differing with Dr. Black in opinion with regard to the authenticity of I John 5:7-8 are to be laid out in this paper. Despite disagreement, however, he holds my highest respect as a Man of God. I pray, Dr. Black, that you would consider my presentation, acknowledging that this passage does not deserve the hasty dismissal it so often receives.

*"And after him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, **where was a piece of ground full of lentiles:** and the people fled from the Philistines. **But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the LORD wrought a great victory.**"*

*-II Samuel 23:11-12*

-Jesse M. Boyd

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## AND THESE THREE ARE ONE

I John 5:7-8, commonly referred to as the *Johannine Comma*, has been one of the most hotly debated passages with regard to its authenticity for over a century. Because it is one of those few passages included in the *Textus Receptus* which has a weak attestation from Greek manuscripts, many a student has paced his study for hours struggling with the question as to whether or not the *Comma* is a legitimate part of the Holy Scriptures. The hasty dismissal of this passage in most modern versions of the Bible is largely due to the fact that it is only found in eight of the five hundred Greek manuscripts that witness to the fifth chapter of I John. Consequently, it is almost unanimously regarded among modern textual critics as a later scribal emendation.

The primary English translation that contains the *Johannine Comma* is the Authorized King James Bible which is based upon the Greek *Textus Receptus*. The passage reads:

<sup>7</sup>For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. <sup>8</sup>And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

Most modern translations (NAS, NIV, RSV, NLT, LB et. al.), on the other hand, are based upon the Alexandrian text-type tradition (i.e. Sinaiticus and Vaticanus). These versions commonly read as does the NIV:

<sup>7</sup>For there are three that testify: <sup>8</sup>the spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

As anyone can clearly see, there is a substantial omission and consequent mix-up of the text. The modern versions arrive at such a rendering by completely removing verse 7, as found in the AV; then, the phrase “in the earth” is excised and the first phrase of verse 8 (There are three that bear witness) becomes verse 7. Thus, the entire arrangement and sense of the passage is altered.

Unfortunately, this altering of the text is often accepted without question. In fact, the issue is rarely, if ever, reasoned through in modern times. Accusations against the passage’s authenticity are simply announced as though they were facts. Such conclusions imply that there is no evidence that can be mounted in favor of the *Comma*’s genuineness. This, however, is far from the truth. The purpose of this study is to construct such a case. In doing so, the author will apply ten exegetical tools to the text of I John 5:7-8, gearing them toward the issue of authenticity. The overall purpose of such exegesis is not to prove genuineness although the author would concede to such a conclusion. Rather, the evidence will show that a case for

authenticity deserves a hearing as much, if not more than a case for spuriousness. The issue, in other words, is not settled as most critical commentators would assert; there are no foregone conclusions. After all, the burden of proof lies with the accuser whose responsibility it is to prove that the text is an emendation. The exegesis that follows will at the very least cast a shadow of doubt on the accusation itself therefore precluding its ability to be proven.<sup>1</sup> May God Almighty guide this quest which seeks, above all, to magnify and establish his perfectly preserved Word.

### Historical Analysis

The epistle of I John was probably written late in the first century (ca. 90) from Ephesus by none other than the Apostle John. The intended audience is not exactly clear; however, the lack of personal references suggests that it was written to Christians all across Asia Minor. The same can be said for John's Gospel which was also written from Ephesus in the same general time period (ca. 85-90). It is interesting to note the literary coherence that exists between these two separate New Testament writings. The well-known Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson, once wrote, "in the whole of the First Epistle [I John] there is hardly a single thought that is not found in the Gospel [John]."<sup>2</sup> This coherence has been considered even more evident than that which exists between Luke and Acts. Such a fact has led some to believe that I John served as preface or dedicatory epistle to the Gospel of John, for both Books are characterized by repetition, contrast, parallelism, personal elements, profound spirituality, and doctrine.<sup>3</sup> Historically speaking, it is very possible that the Gospel of John was attached to the epistle as it was sent out to the addressees. I John was to be read as an introduction or commentary on the teachings of the Gospel. John Ebrard writes:

It [I John] bears the stamp of a preface or dedicatory epistle. The Apostle addresses himself to specific readers, and holds communion, person to person, with them, in that we mark the essence of the epistle; but he does this on occasion of another communication, to which this is attached, and to which it refers; and therefore, in its form, it is no epistle, no simple and direct substitute of oral speech, but an address uttered on occasion of the reading of another and different communication.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The author recognizes that much of the evidence presented is based upon internal considerations which are subjective by their very nature. What one may see as support for a given reading, another might view as an indictment against that very same reading. Nevertheless, the fact that support can be gleaned for the *Comma* from internal evidence shows that the issue is not a foregone conclusion. The internal evidence, which greatly supports the passage, serves to supplement what critics term a weak attestation in the realm of external evidence.

<sup>2</sup>A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1933), 6: 199.

<sup>3</sup>Josiah Tidwell, John and His Five Books (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1937), 90-92.

<sup>4</sup>John Ebrard, Biblical Commentary on the Epistles of St. John (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1860), 5.

The exhortations contained in I John were uttered by the Apostle on occasion of the contents contained in the Gospel. Having understood the principles of Christians fellowship promulgated in the Epistle, the reader could proceed to understand the entire basis of his fellowship, the life and work of Jesus Christ as promulgated in the Gospel.

Regarding the issue at hand, such a distinct literary/historical coherence fully supports the inclusion of the *Johannine Comma*. The resounding theme of the Gospel of John is the divinity of Jesus Christ. Such is summed up in John 10:30, when Jesus says, “I and my Father are one.” This same theme is prevalent in the Epistle, being concisely and clearly stated in 5:7-8. The *Comma* truly bears coherence with the message of John’s Gospel in this sense. It serves as an occasion to introduce the doctrine of the Trinity as the original readers prepared to study the attached Gospel. Although Christ’s divinity is inferred throughout the epistle, one is not confronted with such succinct declaration as is conveyed in the *Comma*. If this passage is omitted, it seems that the theme of John’s Gospel would lack a proper introduction.

It is interesting to note that one of the earliest allusions to the *Johannine Comma* in church history is promulgated in connection to the thematic statement made by the Lord in John 10:30.<sup>5</sup> Cyprian writes around A.D. 250, “The Lord says ‘I and the Father are one’ and likewise it is written of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ‘And these three are one.’”<sup>6</sup> The theological teaching of the *Comma* most definitely bears coherence with the overriding theme of John’s Gospel. There is no reason to believe that the verse is not genuine in this sense, for it serves as a proper prelude to the theme of the Gospel which, historically speaking, most likely accompanied the Epistle as it was sent out to its original audience.

The heresy of Gnosticism is also of notable importance with regard to the historical context surrounding the *Johannine Comma*. This “unethical intellectualism” had begun to make inroads among churches in John’s day; its influence would continue to grow up until the second century when it gave pure Christianity a giant struggle.<sup>7</sup> Generally speaking, Gnosticism can be described as a variety of syncretic religious movements in the early period of church history that sought to answer the question, “What must I do to be saved?” The Gnostic answer was that a

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<sup>5</sup>The fact that this allusion was made less than two centuries after the completion of the New Testament serves as convincing external evidence for the authenticity of the *Johannine Comma*.

<sup>6</sup>The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Church Fathers Down to A.D. 325 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1926), 5:423.

<sup>7</sup>Robertson, 6:200.

person must possess a secret knowledge.<sup>8</sup> One of the major tenets of Gnosticism was the essential evil of matter; the physical body, in other words, was viewed as evil. According to this line of thought, Jesus Christ could not have been fully God and fully man, for this would have required him to possess an evil physical body.

The seeds of the Gnostic heresy seem to be before John's mind in his first epistle; nine times he gives tests for knowing truth in conjunction with the verb γινώσκω (to know).<sup>9</sup> This being said, the *Johannine Comma* would have constituted an integral component of the case the Apostle made against the false teachings of the Gnostics, especially with regard to the nature of Christ. Robertson notes that John's Gospel was written to prove the deity of Christ, assuming his humanity, while I John was written to prove the humanity of Christ, assuming his deity.<sup>10</sup> He goes on to say, "Certainly both ideas appear in both books."<sup>11</sup> If these notions are true, then the *Comma* is important to John's polemic. Jesus Christ, the human Son of God, is the eternal, living Word (cf. John 1:1). The Word, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, bears witness to "he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ" (I John 5:6). This assertion would have flown right into the face of Gnosticism.

On the flip side of the coin, the Gnostics would have completely disregarded the truth promulgated in the *Johannine Comma*. In fact, they may have excised it from the text in the same way that Marcion took a butcher knife to the New Testament in the second century. Also, the Arian heresy, which taught that Jesus was not God but a created being, grew out of Gnosticism. In fact, it was widespread in the Church during the third and fourth centuries. Not long after the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), an ecumenical council that denounced Arianism, "the whole world woke from a deep slumber and discovered that it had become Arian."<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the prevalent influences of these heresies were responsible for the text falling out of many manuscripts and versions of the New Testament. This hypothesis is at least as plausible as competing theories which suppose that someone added the verses to combat heretical teaching.

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<sup>8</sup>David Puckett, *Class Notes—General Church History I* (Wake Forest, NC: Southeastern Seminary, 1998), 10. Proponents of Gnosticism claimed to possess a superior knowledge (γνῶσις) and so were called *Gnostics* (Γνωστικῶν).

<sup>9</sup>I John 2:3, 5; 3:16, 19, 24; 4:2, 6, 13; 5:2.

<sup>10</sup>Robertson, 6:201

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1984), 167.

## Literary Analysis

In addition to the matter of historical context, the literary context of I John 5:7-8 demands our attention. All three levels of literary analysis—canonical, remote, and immediate contexts—are important. With regard to the text's place in the New Testament canon, the *Johannine Comma* is the only clear affirmation of the Trinity throughout the entire New Testament. Apart from it, the triune nature of God is only arrived at after having pieced numerous passages together (e.g. Matthew 28:18 + John 10:30 + John 1:1 + Acts 5:3-4). If a later scribe interpolated the passage to make a case for the Trinity, there are many other places that it could have been inserted so as to disguise its spuriousness. For example, the statement “these three are one” would have made a nice addition to the phrase “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” in Matthew 28:19.

The *Johannine Comma* also fits the remote context of the entire epistle of I John. This can be seen by focusing upon the book's genre. I John has long been classified as an epistle proper, a letter written to simply edify other believers in the faith. However, it lacks the external form as is characteristic of other New Testament epistles. I John contains no formal greeting or benediction, and the author and readers are not mentioned or specified. Hayes argues, “There is no suggestion of any particular occasion for the writing of I John. It might have been written at almost any time and in almost any place and under almost any conditions. Its contents are suitable for all times and places and conditions of men.”<sup>13</sup> These facts have caused some to cast aside the notion of “epistolary form” in favor of the theological treatise such as is found in the Book of Hebrews. However, this classification also has its problems because I John is not “a production sent forth in the form of a treatise, but a thoroughly epistolary outpouring of thought and feelings.”<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the best classification of I John can be arrived at by blending epistle and treatise. Vedder argues that the affinities of this book are with the Wisdom literature. He writes, “The lack of continuity of thought, so perplexing to those who persist in regarding this as epistolary in literary form, becomes appropriate and even characteristic in a composition of the Wisdom order.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, one sees a collection on brief essays or thought, more or less connected

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<sup>13</sup>D. A. Hayes, *John and His Writings* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1917), 161.

<sup>14</sup>John Ebrard, *Biblical Commentary on the Epistles of St. John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1860), 3.

<sup>15</sup>Henry Vedder, *The Johannine Writings and the Johannine Problem* (Philadelphia, PA: Griffith and Rowland Press), 99.



to a general theme - the fellowship of the believer. "A brief prologue states this theme, and an equally brief epilogue sums up what the writer regards as the chief things established by what he has written."<sup>16</sup> One, however, cannot completely dismiss the epistolary connotation. I John is a letter in which the author expresses a personal relation to a definite class of readers. "The writer is concerned throughout with a given situation. He takes for granted that his readers are acquainted with the persons and events he has in mind, and makes allusions, in almost every paragraph, to which the clue has now been lost."<sup>17</sup> With all of this in mind, the word "Epistolary Treatise" can be coined to fit I John. The Book contains numerous brief discourses dealing with a wide range of subjects. At the same time, however, while the Apostle chooses not to use the set epistolary forms, he approaches the readers as a community, briefly addressing them in the prologue (1:1-4) as well as the epilogue (5:21). Furthermore, the theological discussions contained therein are laced with personal emotion and feeling which is common in New Testament epistles.

How does the genre of I John relate to the *Comma*? If the book is properly recognized as an "Epistolary Treatise," then the theological teaching contained in 5:7-8 fits the structure of the epistle neatly. Such a statement, in fact, would be expected. The Epistle of I John can be broken down in the following manner:

- I. Prologue (1:1-4)
- II. Our Advocate (1:8-2:2)
- III. Obedience (2:3-6)
- IV. Purpose (2:12-14)
- V. Love of the World (2:15-17)
- VI. Antichrist (2:18-28)
- VII. Character of God's Children (2:29-3:12)
- IX. Love (3:13-24)
- X. Test of the Spirit (3:24-4:6)
- XI. God is Love (4:7-21)
- XII. Victory of Faith (5:1-5)
- XIII. Three Witnesses (5:6-13)
- XIV. Prayer (5:14-17)
- XV. Epilogue<sup>18</sup>

Each aforementioned section, excluding the prologue and epilogue, constitutes a brief discourse on a different theological topic. While no particular order is apparent, each discourse serves to heighten the readers understanding of Christian fellowship, the overriding theme of I John.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>17</sup>Ernest Scott, The Literature of the New Testament (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 260.

<sup>18</sup>Vedder, 103-132

The *Comma* is found in the midst of a brief discourse dealing with three witnesses. This discourse contributes to the overall theme of the Book by promulgating a consequence of Christian fellowship, the verification of Christ's credentials. The *Comma*, nicely aligned with the structure of the entire book, shows plainly that Christ is one with the Father and the Spirit as he bears witness in heaven. At the same time, his baptism, crucifixion, and the earthly ministry of the Holy Spirit bear witness on earth. It is these witnesses that verify Christ's identity as the Son of God. In light of these facts, the believer can have fellowship with God Almighty. If the *Comma* is omitted from the passage, the structure breaks down. The theological argument of 5:6-12 becomes vague and one is left trying to figure out how to apply these verses. They most definitely do not fall in line with the preceding discourse (Victory of Faith) or the one that follows (Prayer).

Finally, I John 5:7-8 fits the immediate context; in fact, it is an indispensable component of the surrounding verses. Metzger, in his Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, argues that "as regards intrinsic probability, the passage [The *Johannine Comma*] makes an awkward break in the sense."<sup>19</sup> Upon close examination of the immediate context, however, one finds that this assertion is far from true. For example, if the *Comma* is omitted, verse 6 and verse 8 are thrown together, "which gives a very bald, awkward, and meaningless repetition of the Spirit's witness twice in immediate succession."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the omission causes the concluding phrase of verse 8 (and these three agree in one) to contain an unintelligible reference.<sup>21</sup> What is "that one" (το εν) to which "these three" are said to agree? In other words, "that one" in verse 8 which designates One to whom the reader has already been introduced does not have antecedent presence in the passage. "Let verse 7 stand, and all is clear, and the three earthly witnesses testify to that aforementioned unity which the Father, Word, and Spirit constitute."<sup>22</sup> The passage makes absolutely no sense if the *Comma* is omitted. The phrase "in earth" in verse 8 as well as the entire ninth verse would also have to be knocked out to regain the sense because both infer that the "witness of God," as promulgated in the *Comma*, has already been introduced.

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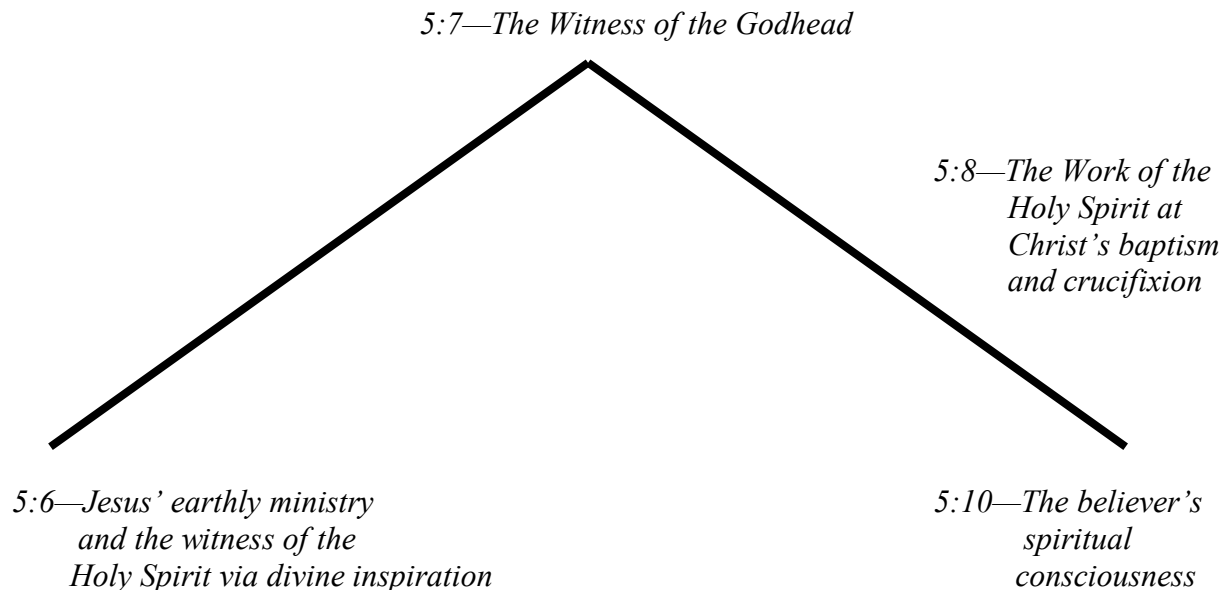
<sup>19</sup>Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (Stuttgart, Germany: United Bible Societies, 1994), 649.

<sup>20</sup>Robert Dabney, The Doctrinal Various Readings of the New Testament Greek (Edinburgh: Banner of Trust, 1967), 306.

<sup>21</sup>In the Greek, the phrase reads, "οι τρεις εις το εν εισιν" which literally translates "and these three agree to that (aforesaid) One."

In a slightly broader immediate context, John has asserted in the previous six verses that faith is the bond of the believer's spiritual life and his consequent victory over the world. Such faith must have a solid warrant, and the truth by which it is to be assured is none other than the Sonship and Deity of Jesus Christ (cf. I John 5:5, 11, 12, 20). This warrant is first presented in 5:6, in Jesus' earthly ministry and the witness of the Holy Ghost speaking by way of inspired men. In 5:7, it comes in the words of the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, asserting and confirming by miracles the unity of Christ with God the Father. Thirdly, the warrant appears in 5:8 through the work of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with Christ's baptism and crucifixion, all of which verify the atoning work of the Saviour.<sup>23</sup> Finally, as promulgated in 5:10, the warrant lies in the spiritual consciousness of the believer himself, certifying to him his divine charge. "How harmonious is all thus if we accept the 7th verse as genuine, but if we omit it, the very keystone of the arch is wanting, and the crowning proof that the warrant of our faith is divine (5:9) is struck out."<sup>24</sup>

FAITH'S SOLID WARRANT



<sup>22</sup>Dabney, 307

<sup>23</sup>The spelling of the word "Saviour" as retained in the Authorized Version is preferred by the author. The modern English translations remove the "u" from this title. As a result, a seven-letter word (7= the number of God) becomes a six-letter word (6=the number of man).

<sup>24</sup>Dabney, 307

## Textual Analysis<sup>25</sup>

The brunt of the argument against the authenticity of the *Johannine Comma* lies within the realm of textual criticism. Unfortunately, as mentioned, it is one of the few passages included in the *Textus Receptus* which has a weak attestation from the Greek manuscript tradition. As a result, most modern critics toss it into the wastebasket. An example of such hasty dismissal can be seen in the United Bible Societies' fourth edition of The Greek New Testament.<sup>26</sup> In the critical apparatus, as well as Metzger's accompanying commentary, the evidence presented is misleading and deceptive to the average reader.<sup>27</sup> One is led to believe, as Metzger claims, that the passage is absent from virtually every known Greek manuscript; it is quoted by none of the Greek Fathers; and it is absent from the manuscripts of all ancient versions.<sup>28</sup> Though such assertions may have a ring of truth to them, they are broad generalizations that result from a biased evaluation of all the evidence. Perhaps the best approach to constructing a case for the inclusion of the *Johannine Comma* involves a point by point refutation of Metzger's arguments, for they bespeak the opinions of most critical scholars. As noted, the purpose of this study is not to prove the authenticity of the *Comma*, such a conclusion can only be accepted by faith in the preserved Word of God. Nonetheless, the external evidence in favor of the passage is far greater than modern critics would have us to believe by their tales of the "stupidity of Erasmus."<sup>29</sup>

### Metzger's presentation of the manuscript evidence is misleading.

The first claim that Metzger makes is that the *Comma* "is absent from every known Greek manuscript except eight . . . the eight manuscripts are as follows . . ."<sup>30</sup> Next, he proceeds to list the manuscripts, but only catalogues seven (61, 88, 221, 429, 636, 918, 2318). Where is the eighth manuscript? The critical apparatus of the UBS<sup>4</sup> adds Codex Ottobonianus (629) which dates to the fourteenth century, but Metzger fails to mention it. One is forced to wonder about this initial contradiction. Four of these eight manuscripts contain the *Comma* written in the margin (88, 221, 429, 636), while the other four include it as part of the text.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Because the foundation of all accusations against I John 5:7-8 rests upon textual evidence and the interpretation of that evidence, this analysis will be more lengthy and complex than the others.

<sup>26</sup>Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce Metzger (4th Edition), The Greek New Testament (Germany: United Bible Societies, 1994).

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 819; Metzger, Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 647-648.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Robertson, 6:241.

<sup>30</sup>Metzger, Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 647.

<sup>31</sup>Oftentimes, the marginal readings are hastily dismissed. However, what are they doing in the margins? It makes more sense that someone would put them there because they recognized the passage to be missing.

It is interesting to note that both Metzger and the UBS editors fail to list the Codex Britannicus as evidence for the *Comma*.<sup>32</sup> Their reason for doing this is probably the same reason that all modern textual critics ignore the codex--they equate it with Codex Monfortianus (61). The so-called “evidence” for this miscalculation centers around Erasmus, the man whose *Novum Testamentum Graecum* was utilized by the AV translators. The well-known anecdote says that Erasmus was criticized for omitting the *Comma* from his first and second editions. He argued that no Greek manuscripts contained the reading and supposedly challenged his critic, Edward Lee who charged him with being an Arian for omitting I John 5:7-8, to produce a manuscript with the passage. Only then, would he include it in his edition.<sup>33</sup> Codex Monfort is supposedly the manuscript that was hastily drawn up to meet Erasmus’ demands; the ink was supposedly still wet when Erasmus received it. Nevertheless he is said to have inserted the verse, defending his actions by stating that he had received a transcript of the *Comma* from Codex Britannicus (what is believed to be the Codex Monfort).<sup>34</sup> First of all, the argument that Erasmus challenged Lee is completely unsound. A careful perusal of Erasmus’ words in his *Liber tertius quod respondet . . . Ed. Lei* yields evidence to the contrary:

Is it negligence and impiety, if I did not consult manuscripts which were simply not within my reach? I have at least assembled whatever I could assemble. Let Lee produce a Greek MS. which contains what my edition does not contain and let him show that that manuscript was within my reach. Only then can he reproach me with negligence in sacred matters.<sup>35</sup>

Erasmus does not challenge Lee to produce a manuscript. Rather, he simply argues that Lee can legitimately reproach him with negligence if and only if he can demonstrate that manuscripts could have consulted containing I John 5:7-8. As Henk J. de Jonge states, “Erasmus does not at all ask for a MS containing the Comma johanneum. He denies Lee the right to call him negligent and impious if the latter does not prove that Erasmus neglected a manuscript to which

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<sup>32</sup>The reading of the Comma found in Codex Britannicus is given by Orlando T. Dobbin in *The Codex Monfortianus: A Collation* (London: Bagster, 1854) on page 10. His source is Erasmus’ *Apologia ad Jacobum Sunicam* (1522), reprinted in the Basle edition (1540) of Erasmus’ works, pp. 238-296. Codex Britannicus reads: “<sup>7</sup>οτι τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες εν τω ουρανω ο πατηρ ο λογος και το πνα <sup>8</sup>και ουτοι οι τρεις εν εισι, και τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες εν τη γη το πνα, το υδωρ, και το αιμα και οι τρεις εις το εν εισι ει την μαρτυριαν των ανων λαμβανομεν.” The underlined phrase is not found in Codex Monfortianus, so the two manuscripts cannot be the same. Furthermore, Erasmus could not have gotten the Comma from the Monfort Codex.

<sup>33</sup>William Combs, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” in *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Spring 1996), 49.

<sup>34</sup>Michael Maynard, *A History of the Debate Over 1 John 5:7-8* (Tempe, AZ: Comma Publications, 1995), 76.

<sup>35</sup>Desiderius Erasmus, *Liber tertius quo respondet reliquis annotationibus Ed. Lei* (LB IX 199-284) [May, 1520]. Translated by Henk J. de Jonge in “Erasmus and the *Comma Johanneum*” (*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 56 [1980], 381-389).

he had access.”<sup>36</sup> In light of these facts, there never was a manuscript produced to convince Erasmus. If there had been, Erasmus would have surely been smart enough to detect such a forgery.

Although Codex Monfortianus is dated by modern critics to the sixteenth century (ca. 1520), one must wonder where the reading of I John 5:7-8 came from. It did not come from Ximene’s Polygot, for it was not published until 1522.<sup>37</sup> It did not come from Erasmus because it does not match his Greek in scores of places.<sup>38</sup> Rather, the literal affinities of Monfortianus are with the Syriac Version which was not known in Europe until after 1552.<sup>39</sup> Besides, this codex has been dated by Adam Clarke to the thirteenth century.<sup>40</sup>

As far as Codex Britannicus is concerned, it cannot be equated with the Monfort, because the respective renderings of I John 5:7-8 are quite different. On the one hand, the Monfort omits the articles in verse seven (ο, ο, το) and transposes “αγιον πνευμα.” In verse 8, the articles (το, το, το), a conjunction (και), and the last phrase (και οι τρεις εις το εν εισιν) are missing. Britannicus, on the other hand, includes the articles and the final phrase but omits the adjective “αγιον” in verse 8. Where did Erasmus acquire the last clause for his third edition? He surely did not get it from the Complutensian Polygot or Codex Monfort, but from Britannicus. This is why Monfortianus “cannot possibly be the same with the Codex Britannicus.”<sup>41</sup> At this point, no date as been assigned to this manuscript.

Metzger’s presentation of evidence from the Early Church Fathers is misleading.

After promulgating his faulty catalogue of Greek manuscripts containing the *Comma*, Metzger claims that “the passage is quoted by none of the Greek Fathers.” Such a bold assertion

<sup>36</sup>Henk J. de Jonge, *Personal Letter Addressed to Michael Maynard* (June 13, 1995).

<sup>37</sup>The reading of the *Comma* found in the Monfort Codex could not have come from the Complutensian Polygot. Although this edition was first printed in 1514, Cardinal Ximenes did not get permission from Pope Leo X to publish the work until 1520. It was not until 1522 that this edition actually began to circulate and eventually come into Erasmus’ hands.

<sup>38</sup>Erasmus first included the *Comma* in his third edition which did not appear until 1522. The reading of the *Comma* as found in the Codex Monfort does not match Erasmus’ reading in his third edition in several places. For example, the last clause (and these three agree in one) is not in the Monfort, but included in Erasmus’ third edition. Furthermore, the six articles are omitted and αγιον and πνευμα are transposed. Erasmus included the articles and did not swap αγιον πνευμα.

<sup>39</sup>Peter Ruckman, “James White’s Seven Errors in the King James Bible--Errors 6 & 7,” Bible Believer’s Bulletin (March 1996), 3.

<sup>40</sup>Adam Clarke, The New Testament: A Commentary and Critical Notes (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, n.d.), 6: 928-929.

<sup>41</sup>Charles Forster, A New Plea for the Authenticity of the Text of the Three Heavenly Witnesses, (Cambridge: Deighton Bell and Co., 1867), 126.

is also misleading because Gregory of Nazanzius (a Greek Church Father from the fourth century), although not directly quoting the passage, specifically alludes to the passage and objects to the grammatical structure if the *Comma* is omitted (Metzger, on the other hand, would have one to believe that the Greek Church Fathers knew nothing of the passage). Gregory writes:

What about John then, when in his Catholic Epistle he says that there are Three that bear witness, the Spirit and the Water and the Blood? Do you think he is talking nonsense? First, because he has ventured to reckon under one numeral things which are not consubstantial, though you say this ought to be done only in the case of things which are consubstantial. For who would assert that these are consubstantial? Secondly, because he had not been consistent in the way he has happened upon his terms; for after using Three in the masculine gender he adds three words which are neuter, contrary to the definitions and laws which you and your grammarians have laid down. For what is the difference between putting a masculine Three first, and then adding One and One and One in the neuter, or after a masculine One and One and One to use the Three not in the masculine but in the neuter, which you yourself disclaim in the case of Deity?<sup>42</sup>

In this brief excursus, Gregory objects to the use of a masculine plural participle with three neuter nouns ( [7] m:pl = [8] n+n+n ) which, of course, is the case if the *Comma* is omitted. In other words, “Gregory of Nazianzus objected to the omission of 1 John v.7f.”<sup>43</sup>

Metzger’s presentation of evidence with regard to the Trinitarian Controversies is misleading.

Metzger goes on to claim that if any of the Greek Fathers had known of the *Comma*, they would have “most certainly employed it in the Trinitarian controversies (Sabellian and Arian).”<sup>44</sup> There is some truth to this statement in that Metzger is referring to specific controversies that had taken place by A.D. 323 (e.g. Council of Nicea). There is no extant written evidence that the *Comma* was ever cited in these major Trinitarian controversies, but an argument from silence proves nothing. Nonetheless, Metzger completely ignores the fact that the verse was employed at the Council of Carthage in A.D. 485; by doing so, he would have us to believe that I John 5:7-8 was never used as proof of the Trinity and/or deity of Christ in the numerous debates that arose and plagued the Church concerning these issues. Prior to this council, a conflict had arisen between the Arians (led by King Huneric the Vandal) and a group of bishops from North Africa. An assembly was called at Carthage where I John 5:7-8 was insisted upon by Eugenius, the spokesman for the African bishops, as he confessed his faith and the faith of his brethren:

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<sup>42</sup>The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 7: 323-324.

<sup>43</sup>Maynard, 41. A more thorough discussion of the syntactical problem that arises if the *Comma* is omitted can be found under the Syntactical Analysis.

<sup>44</sup>Metzger, Textual Commentary to the Greek New Testament, 648.

...and in order that we may teach until now, more clearly than light, that the Holy Spirit is now one divinity with the Father and the Son. It is proved by the evangelist John, for he says, 'there are three which bear testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.'<sup>45</sup>

In spite of this example, those that oppose the verse remark that the unanimous testimony of the 400 bishops in no way proves that the *Comma* was in all of their copies. Secondly, they assert that as no dispute took place, but the conference was broken up immediately; therefore, the Arians did not accept the passage. Charles Butler, in *Horae Biblicae*, offered an interesting 12-point rebuttal to the opposers of the *Comma*. Such is a lengthy treatise and will not be employed word for word but adequately summarized.

Charles Butler pointed out that the Catholic Bishops were summoned to a conference where they most certainly expected the tenets of their faith to be attacked by the Arians (the Arians denied the deity of Jesus Christ). Therefore, they would have been very careful about what they included in their proposed confession, seeing as all power was in the hands of their angry Arian adversaries. The bishops included the *Johannine Comma* as a first line of defense for their confession of Christ's deity. If the Arians could have argued what present-day opposers of the verse say (The *Comma* was is no Greek copy and in only a few Latin copies), what would the bishops have replied? If we are to believe that they were unable to hold out one Greek copy, no ancient Latin copy, and no ancient father where the verse could be found, the Arians could have rightly accused them on the spot of following a spurious passage and being guilty of palpable falsehood. It is almost certain that these bishops would not have exposed themselves to such immediate and indelible infamy. They volunteered to include the *Comma* in their confession despite the existence of many long treatises that had been written by the ancient defenders of the Trinity in which the verse had not been mentioned. Such treatises would have served as ample evidence, but the bishops cited I John 5:7-8 instead. Obviously, they had no fear that any claim of spuriousness could be legitimately dashed upon them. If the verse were attacked, the bishops could have produced Greek copies, ancient Latin copies, and ancient fathers in its defense. The *Comma*, however, was not attacked by the Arians and the Catholic bishops (302 of them) were exiled to different parts of Africa, exposed to the insults of their enemies, and carefully deprived of all temporal and spiritual comforts of life. It is ludicrous to think that these men could undergo such persecution and suffering for their belief of the deity of Jesus Christ only to insert a

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<sup>45</sup>Victor of Vitensis, *Historia persecutionis Africanae Prov*, 2.82 [3.11]; CSEL 7, 60. Translated by Michael



spurious verse into God's Word as their first line of defense.<sup>46</sup> The African bishops must have had weighty testimony to the *Comma* in their manuscripts. As a result, they were able to successfully employ the passage as they defended their faith before the Arian accusers.

Metzger's presentation of evidence from ancient versions is misleading.

Metzger follows up with yet another misleading claim in his textual commentary. He claims that "the passage is absent from the manuscripts of all ancient versions (Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Arabic, Slavonic), except the Latin . . ."<sup>47</sup> This allegation is misleading because, as Scrivener asserts, "scarcely any Armenian codex exhibits it, and only a few recent Slavonic copies, the margin of a Moscow edition of 1663 being the first to represent it."<sup>48</sup> F. H. A. Scrivener opposes the inclusion of the verse, and in that aspect, agrees with Metzger. However, he does admit that it appears in a few copies of the Armenian and Slavonic, both being ancient version. Metzger's blanket statement overlooks this fact.

As far as the Old Syriac is concerned, there is good evidence that the *Comma* appeared in its early manuscripts. First of all, it must be noted that when Metzger or the UBS editors refer to the Old Syriac, they are simply alluding to a collation of "five printed editions [sy<sup>s</sup>(1910), sy<sup>c</sup>(1904), sy<sup>p</sup>(1920), sy<sup>h</sup>(1909), sy<sup>r</sup>(1788)(1803)(1889)], each of which is based on one or two MSS, or a slender portion of all extant Syriac MSS."<sup>49</sup> Just because I John 5:7-8 does not appear in any of these five editions does not mean that it was not present in any Syriac copies. In fact, the evidence yields quite the contrary. For example, Jaqub of Edessa, a well-known church writer from the seventh century who wrote in Syriac, inscribed, "The soul and the body and the mind which are sanctified through three holy things; through water and blood and Spirit, and through the Father and the Son and the Spirit."<sup>50</sup> Here, Jaqub is clearly making reference to the three earthly witnesses in conjunction with the three heavenly witnesses as promulgated in I John 5:7-8 with the *Comma* inserted. It must have been in some Syriac copies of his day in order for him to be able to make a legitimate allusion to it.

Maynard in A History of the Debate Over 1 John 5:7-8 (Tempe, AZ: Comma Publications, 1995), 43.

<sup>46</sup>Charles Butler, "To Rev. Herbert Marsh," in Horae Biblicae (London: W. Clarke and Sons, 1817), 403-406.

<sup>47</sup>Metzger, Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament, 648.

<sup>48</sup>F.H.A. Scrivener, A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: G. Bell, 1984 [rep]), 403.

<sup>49</sup>Maynard, 15-16. For a specific identification of these five Syriac editions, one should consult page 51\* of the UBS<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>50</sup>Jaqub of Edessa, On the Holy (Eucharistic) Mysteries, translated by R.E. Brown in The Anchor Bible: Epistles of John (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1982), 778.

Tremellius' *Grammatica Chaldaea Et Syra* (1569) is also of notable importance with regard to Metzger's blanket generalization of the Syriac version. Tremellius translated the *Comma* from Greek into Syriac and placed it in the margin of his codex, as most modern accounts boldly announce, but he left a blank space in the text where the passage should appear.<sup>51</sup> Modern scholars such as Scrivener and Metzger do not mention this. If Tremellius was so sure about the spuriousness of the verse, why did he take the time to translate it? Better yet, why did he place it in the margin, hesitate to disturb the verse numbering, and leave a blank space for it? Tremellius must have been aware of its presence in the Syriac tradition. He himself wrote:

But because it was omitted not only in the printed version, but only in the manuscript Heidelberg codex, nor was read in all the old Greek codices, I did not dare to insert it into the text. So in order that there might not be a disturbance of the verses, and so that their numbers may correspond to the numbers on the verses of the Greek text, I have passed from the sixth to the eighth verse.<sup>52</sup>

As Maynard correctly concludes:

How often is a blank space provided for 1 John v.7f in an English translation today, let alone a Greek edition? The four questions together could indicate that Tremellius must have had doubts. His actions are not in accord with his words. Perhaps, with a blank space, he wanted not only to retain the correspondence with numbers but to ensure that a future Syriac editor would not overlook this spot. (Modern editors do not hesitate over a 'disturbance of the verses.' They merely split verse six in half.)<sup>53</sup>

Another Syriac edition worthy of consideration is Gutbier's *Lexicon Syricum concerdatntiale omnes N.T. Syriaci* which appeared in 1664. This version contains the *Comma* as well as Acts 8:37, another non-majority reading from the *Textus Receptus* that is commonly omitted by modern scholars. Also, of notable importance, is the fact that the Old Syriac has *Textus Receptus* readings for Matthew 6:13; Luke 2:33; 23:42; and John 9:35, against the UBS<sup>4</sup>.<sup>54</sup> It is very possible that the Syriac also agreed with the *Textus Receptus* on its rendering of I John 5:7-8 as well. After all, as Maynard shows, several indexes include numerous Syriac manuscripts as containing the fifth chapter of I John, some even dating back to the sixth century. Unfortunately, these have been neglected, and it remains unknown as to whether or not they contain the *Comma*.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, Metzger cannot legitimately claim that the passage is not found in the Old

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<sup>51</sup>Maynard, 96.

<sup>52</sup>Tremellius' words were provided and translated by Rykle Borger into German in "Das Comma Johanneum in der Peschitta," in *Novum Testamentum* XXXIX, 3 (1987) 280-284. Michael Maynard, in turn, translated Borger's German into English (*A History of the Debate Over 1 John 5:7-8*, 95).

<sup>53</sup>Maynard, 96.

<sup>54</sup>Ruckman, "James White's Seven Errors in the King James Bible--Errors 6 & 7," 3.

<sup>55</sup>Maynard, 334-339

Syriac version, especially since he has obviously not evaluated all the evidence. Jaquob of Edessa, Tremellius, and Gutbier had to get the *Comma* from somewhere.

Metzger's presentation of the evidence from the Old Latin Version is misleading.

Metzger also says that the *Comma* does not appear in the Old Latin in its earliest form (Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine). This too, is a deceptive statement, for both Tertullian (ca. 200 A.D) and Cyprian (ca. 250) cite or make an allusion to the passage. If they did not have it in their Latin manuscripts, where did they get it from? Tertullian is not cited as a witness to the *Comma* in the critical apparatus of the UBS<sup>4</sup>. However, less than a century after the death of John the Apostle (possibly as early as A.D. 200), Tertullian wrote:

. . . which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three *Persons*--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: three however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as He is one God, from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned, under the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.<sup>56</sup>

This is a clear reference to the teaching found in the *Comma*. On another occasion, Tertullian, according to John Gill, quotes the passage in question.<sup>57</sup> Athanasius (ca. 350) is likewise not mentioned in the UBS' critical apparatus. However, according to R.E. Brown, Athanasius quotes the passage at least three times in his works.<sup>58</sup> Around A.D. 250, Cyprian, as noted, wrote, "The Lord says, 'I and the Father are one, and again it is written of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, 'And these three are one.'"<sup>59</sup> Cyprian, less than two hundred years after the writing of I John, is expressly quoting the *Johannine Comma*. He must have got it from an early form of the Old Latin in spite of Metzger's claims. It is interesting that even he admits that "Our information concerning the Old Latin translation of the New Testament is very defective . . ."<sup>60</sup>

The Old Latin translations of the New Testament are very important in establishing the authenticity of I John 5:7-8, for Latin was the major language up through the Middle Ages. The Old Latin is not the same as the Latin of Jerome's Vulgate, which by the way, does include the *Comma*. The Old Latin predates the Vulgate text and is found well into the Middle Ages. Did

<sup>56</sup>Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, II-- Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 3: 598.

<sup>57</sup>John Gill, An Exposition on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980 [rep.]), 907-908.

<sup>58</sup>R.E. Brown, The Anchor Bible; Epistles of John (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1982), 782.

<sup>59</sup>Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translation of the Writings of the Church Fathers down to A.D. 325 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 5:423.

the Old Latin consistently contain the *Johannine Comma*? For the answer to this question, one must turn to the Tepl Codex, a fourteenth century manuscript written in Middle High German. This Codex is significant because “the Tepl Codex actually predates a pre-Jerome text from a non-Vulgate MS, w.”<sup>61</sup> Metzger acknowledges that *w* contains “Old Latin readings in Acts and the Catholic Epistles.”<sup>62</sup> It comes as no surprise that the Tepl contains the *Comma* exactly as it is found in the *Textus Receptus*. As Maynard argues, its text “has a remarkable longevity into the 15th century. This indicates that German MSS ought not to be dismissed as mere copies of Latin Vulgate MSS.”<sup>63</sup> According to Elliot, the Tepl comes from the Old Latin and has its affinity with *w* (an Old Latin manuscript from the 15th century).<sup>64</sup> Latin manuscript *w* is dated to the 15th century while the Tepl is dated to the 14th. Had this been reversed, the German Tepl would be regarded with much less value. But, as it is, this Codex actually predates a pre-Jerome Latin text (*w*). The Tepl and the Old Latin manuscripts together “provide pre-Reformation support for non-majority readings of the Authorized Version.”<sup>65</sup> The Tepl not only contains I John 5:7-8 as it is found in the *Textus Receptus*, but Acts 8:37; 9:5-6; and 15:34, all of which are omitted in modern English versions.

The Old Latin from which the Tepl descended is also found in the manuscripts of the Waldensians. History teaches that the Waldensians were those Christians who lived in the Vaudois valley in northern Italy. The Waldensian Church has been dated back to about A.D. 120. Their Old Itala Bible was translated in the early second century. The Waldensians were severely persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church between the fourth and thirteenth centuries. As Jack Moorman argues, “Research into the text and history of the Waldensian Bible has shown that it is a literal descendant of the Old Itala. In other words, the Itala has come down to us in Waldensian form, and firmly supports the Traditional Text.”<sup>66</sup> Gail Riplinger, goes on to promulgate, “It [the Waldensian Bible] was a translation of the true text into the rather rude Low

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<sup>60</sup>Bruce Metzger, The Early Versions of the New Testament Text; Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 285.

<sup>61</sup>Maynard, 62.

<sup>62</sup>Metzger, Early Versions, 304.

<sup>63</sup>Maynard, 62.

<sup>64</sup>J. K. Elliot, “Old Latin MSS in NT Editions,” in A Survey of Manuscripts Used in Editions of the Greek New Testament (New York: E. J. Brill, 1987), 280.

<sup>65</sup>Maynard, 62.

<sup>66</sup>Jack Moorman, Early Manuscripts and the Authorized Version. (Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today, n.d.), 29.

Latin of the second century . . . the Bible of the Waldensians was used to carry the true text throughout Europe.”<sup>67</sup>

The translators of the AV 1611 King James Bible did not simply include the *Comma* because it was in Erasmus’ edition of the Greek New Testament; they had four Bibles on their tables that had come under heavy Waldensian influence.<sup>68</sup> All four contained the *Johannine Comma* as contained in the *Textus Receptus*. The first of these was the Geneva Bible which was translated in 1557 at Geneva, the center of the Swiss Reformation. The basis for the Geneva Bible was the French Olivetan which was translated by Olivetan, a Waldensian pastor and relative of John Calvin. This fact illustrates “how readily the two streams of descent of the Received Text, through the Greek East and the Waldensian West, ran together.”<sup>69</sup> Secondly, the AV translators utilized the Greek text of Theodore Beza, Calvin’s successor at Geneva. With Calvin’s help, Beza brought out a later edition of the *Textus Receptus*. Wilkinson argues:

This later edition of the Received Text is in reality a Greek New Testament brought out under Waldensian influence. Unquestionably, the leaders of the Reformation -- German, French, and English--were convinced that the Received Text was the genuine New Testament, not only by its own irresistible history and internal evidence, but also because it matched with the Received Text which in Waldensian form came down from the days of the apostles [emphasis mine].<sup>70</sup>

The third Bible influenced by the Waldensians and utilized by the AV translators was the Italian Diodati. Diodati, an Italian, succeeded Beza in the chair of Theology at Geneva and translated the received text into Italian. “This version was adopted by the Waldenses, although there was in use at that time a Waldensian Bible in their own peculiar language.”<sup>71</sup> The fourth Bible of interest is the German Tepl which, as previously mentioned, was a translation of a pre-Jerome Latin text into German. “This Tepl manuscript represented a translation of the Waldensian Bible into the German which was spoken *before the days of the Reformation*.”<sup>72</sup> In addition to these four Bibles, there is reason to believe that the King James translators had access to at least six Waldensian Bibles written in the old Waldensian vernacular, all of which contained the disputed passage.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Gail Riplinger, *Which Bible is God’s Word* (Ararat, VA: AV Publications, 1995), 53.

<sup>68</sup>Benjamin Wilkinson, “Our Authorized Bible Vindicated,” in *Which Bible?* Ed. by David Otis Fuller (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975), 212.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.* [emphasis mine].

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

In relation to the Old Latin, Waldensians, and the *Johannine Comma*, it is only appropriate to summarize a rather lengthy discourse by Frederick Nolan. In *Integrity of the Greek Vulgate*, he argues that the Old Latin derived its name from the Italick Church (distinguished from Roman Catholic). The principal copies of this version have been preserved in that diocese, the metropolitan church of which was situated at Milan. Remains of the primitive Old Latin version can be found in the early translations made by the Waldensians, who were the lineal descendants of the Italick church. They asserted their independence against the usurpations of the Church of Rome, and consequently, enjoyed the free use of the Scriptures. All of this provided Nolan “with abundant proof on that point to which his inquiry was chiefly directed; as it has supplied him with the unequivocal testimony of a truly apostolical branch of the primitive church, that the celebrated text of the heavenly witnesses was adopted in the version which prevailed in the Latin Church, previously to the introduction of the modern Vulgate.”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, claims that the *Comma* made its way into the King James Version by way of the Roman Catholic Vulgate are false.

The Old Latin was translated in the second century, but from what? Seeing as the New Testament was originally written in Greek, the translators had to have copies of Greek papyri not too far descended from the original autographs. It is interesting to note every single one of the papyrus manuscripts are silent with regard to I John 5:7-8. The passage has been lost from every one of them. There is no way to know if they contained the *Comma*, but the translators of the Old Latin had to get it from somewhere.<sup>75</sup> Studies show that the principal papyrus manuscripts used by modern textual critics as allies of the minority text of a and B (P<sup>45</sup>, P<sup>66</sup>, and P<sup>75</sup> in particular) agree with the *Textus Receptus* to a greater extent. Together, these three papyri agree with the *Textus Receptus* in 20 places as opposed to 18 places with Vaticanus and 4 places with Sinaiticus.<sup>76</sup> It is conceivable that these manuscripts once contained the *Comma*. Besides, Maynard shows that at least 6000 Old Latin manuscripts have been neglected and consequently remain unexamined. It is very probable that many of these also contain the *Comma*.<sup>77</sup> Dogmatic conclusions, much like Metzger’s, cannot be drawn without evaluating all the evidence.

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<sup>74</sup>Frederick Nolan, *Integrity of the Greek Vulgate* (n.p., 1815), xvii-xviii.

<sup>75</sup>For a complete listing of Old Latin manuscripts which contain the *Comma*, one should consult Michael Maynard’s *A History of the Debate Over 1 John 5:7-8* (332-348).

<sup>76</sup>Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions*, 482.

Metzger's presentation of the evidence from the Latin Vulgate is misleading.

The next statement that Metzger makes is that the *Johannine Comma* is not found in the earliest form of the Vulgate as issued by Jerome.<sup>78</sup> True, it does not appear in Codex Fuldensis (A.D. 546), one of the oldest extant Vulgate manuscripts, but Jerome, the author of the Vulgate, died a little over a century before this codex was copied. How can Metzger legitimately argue that this codex is the exact text that came from Jerome? In fact, Jerome himself, in the fourth century, claimed that irresponsible transcribers left out I John 5:7-8 in the Greek codices.<sup>79</sup> If they were cutting it out in the Greek manuscripts, what would stop them from doing it in the Latin Vulgate manuscripts? Seeing as Jerome views such an omission as irresponsible, it is only logical to believe that he included it in his translation. Later, it was cut out as is evidenced by Codex Fuldensis, but reappears again in well-known Vulgate manuscripts such as Ulmensis (ca. 850) and Toletanus (988). Scrivener said that the passage “is found in the printed Latin Vulgate, and in perhaps 49 out of every 50 of its manuscripts.”<sup>80</sup> Moreover, against Metzger's claim of lateness, the *Comma* is claimed by others to be found in twenty-nine of the fairest, oldest, and most correct of extant Vulgate manuscripts.<sup>81</sup>

As has been adduced, Bruce Metzger's external evidence for the omission of I John 5:7-8 in the UBS<sup>4</sup> is extremely misleading and deceptive at almost every point. Thus, he fails to prove that the passage is an interpolation. The textual evidence supporting the *Comma* is much greater than most critics would have us to believe; an honest evaluation of the evidence yields a case for inclusion that is at least as plausible as one for exclusion.<sup>82</sup> Once again, the burden of proof lies with the accuser. Metzger falls short.

If I John 5:7-8 is genuine, why is it missing from so many Greek manuscripts? Better yet, does its absence constitute disproof? No, it does not, for no modern textual critic argues that a majority of manuscripts is the sole sufficient proof. In fact, there are readings accepted in the UBS<sup>4</sup> that are accepted on far less evidence than that of I John 5:7-8 (cf. Matthew 11:19; II Corinthians 5:3; James 4:14). Even Aland, the UBS' own, admits that the true text can

<sup>77</sup>Maynard, 343-348.

<sup>78</sup>Metzger, Textual Commentary of the New Testament, 648.

<sup>79</sup>Jerome, The Canonical Epistles. Translated by Michael Maynard in A History of the Debate Over 1 John 5:7-8 (Tempe, AZ: Comma Publications, 1995), 41.

<sup>80</sup>Scrivener, 650.

<sup>81</sup>Maynard, 343.

hypothetically exist in one manuscript.<sup>83</sup> The majority, however, is not as extensive as most people think. Oftentimes, the statement is made to the effect that there are only four Greek manuscripts out of 5000 that contain the text of the *Comma*.<sup>84</sup> Such a statement implies that 5000 manuscripts contain I John 5. This is hardly the case, for less than 525 even contain this chapter. Of these, only 498 are hostile to the *Comma*. This is substantially less than 5000. Of those 498 manuscripts, only 14 of them predate the ninth century.<sup>85</sup> The same scholars that reject the *Comma* criticize the *Textus Receptus* for following so-called “late manuscripts” when they use the same manuscripts as the bulk of their evidence against I John 5:7-8. In other words, 97 per cent of their evidence is late. Maynard asserts:

Opposers of 1 John v. 7f are not admitting, that after four centuries (the 17th to 20th) of scholars searching for MSS they could not even muster 3% of all their evidence against 1 John v. 7f as being significant, *by their standards*. Only 14 Greek MSS (2.8%) of the 482 hostile MSS [Maynard arrives at this number from the fact that Metzger considers 16 of the 498 manuscripts to be worthless and irrelevant] they would consider boasting about, were dated from the ninth century or earlier.<sup>86</sup>

Another “reason that the absence of 1 John 5:7-8 in Greek MSS before the sixteenth century does not constitute disproof is that God is not obligated to have a regular transmission through Greek MSS for every authentic verse.”<sup>87</sup> God may have allowed I John 5:7-8 to fall out of 14 Greek manuscripts prior to the ninth century and many thereafter for the purpose of drawing our attention to the doctrine of the Trinity, for after all, the *Comma* is the most concise and clear statement regarding this subject throughout all of Scripture. Such a scenario is at least plausible and worthy of consideration.

### Lexical Analysis

The *Johannine Comma* contains one word that is worthy of lexical analysis with regard to the issue at hand—*λογος*. This is a well-known term employed with respect to Jesus Christ in Johannine Christology. The second person of the Trinity is referred to as the “Word.” Such a

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<sup>82</sup>Besides what has been mentioned in this brief textual analysis, there is a lot more evidence for the authenticity of I John 5:7-8 as retained in the *Textus Receptus* of the AV 1611 King James Bible. For more information, one should consult Michael Maynard’s astounding work, [A History of the Debate Over 1 John 5:7-8](#).

<sup>83</sup>Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 281.

<sup>84</sup>Stewart Custer made such claim in *The Truth About the King James Version Controversy*. (Greenville, SC: BJU University Press, 1981). He, however, argued that only 2 manuscripts contained the *Comma* out of 5000. Similar claims have been made in the classrooms of many colleges and universities across the country.

<sup>85</sup>There are only 14 Greek manuscripts hostile to the *Johannine Comma* that predate the ninth century. They are as follows: a, A, B, Ψ, K, L, P, 048, 049, 0296, 1424, 1841, 1862, 1895. Maynard lists these in [A History of the Debate Over 1 John 5:7-8](#) (pp. 333-335).

<sup>86</sup>Maynard, 286 [emphasis mine].

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*



metaphor is unique to the Apostle John and can also be found in John 1:1, 14; I John 1:1; and Revelation 19:13. This fact, in and of itself, argues heavily for the authenticity of the verse, for as Robertson admits, the occurrence of the metaphor in the three aforementioned books is “an incidental argument for identity of authorship.”<sup>88</sup> Λογος, being a favorite of John’s with reference to Christ, was appropriate to use when referring to Christ’s divine eternity with God the Father and the Holy Spirit as is the case in the *Comma*. On the other hand, if the passage is an interpolation that was added to prove the trinity, the forger almost certainly would not have employed λογος over υιος as found in the common Trinitarian triage of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (cf. Matthew 28:19). This issue of tradition, however, will be discussed more in depth under the traditional analysis.

### Syntactical Analysis

Of significant interest with regard to the *Johannine Comma* is the issue of syntax. Plainly speaking, if the *Comma* is omitted, John’s word choice seems extremely awkward and unusual with respect to the general rules of the Greek language. The masculine article, numeral, and participle (There are three that bear witness<sup>89</sup>) are made to agree with three neuter nouns (Spirit, water, and blood<sup>90</sup>). As Robert Dabney argues, “This is an insuperable and very bald grammatical difficulty.”<sup>91</sup> John most definitely would not have made such a connection, for his structure and syntax are altogether simple and understandable. In attempting to excuse this awkward choice of words, Daniel Wallace states “the fact that the author has personified water and blood, turning them into witnesses along with the Spirit, may be enough to account for the masculine gender.”<sup>92</sup> However, the personification of the water and blood does not become evident unless the *Comma* is present. It is true that the Spirit (πνευμα), a neuter word, is sometimes used in connection with masculinity because the author is referring to the Holy Spirit as a person, a member of the Godhead; but inanimate objects are rarely, if at all, “masculinized” for the purpose of personification. Besides, Wallace’s answer does not explain verse 6. There, Πνευμα, as the third person of the Trinity, is not provided as a masculine to personalize the Spirit’s witness; it remain neuter.

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<sup>88</sup>Robertson, 5:4.

<sup>89</sup>οι τρεις μαρτυρουντες

<sup>90</sup>πνευμα, υδωρ, αιμα

<sup>91</sup>Dabney, 306.

<sup>92</sup>Daniel Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 332.

If the disputed verse is allowed to remain, the three neuter nouns agree with the two masculines (Father & Word<sup>93</sup>) and one neuter of verse 7 (Holy Spirit<sup>94</sup>), and, according to the rules of Greek syntax, the masculines among the group control the gender over a neuter connected to them. Such is termed the “power of attraction” and is common throughout the New Testament and John’s writings in particular. As previously noted, Gregory of Nazanzius, an early Greek Church Father, objected to the omission of the *Comma* for similar syntactical reasons (ca. 385).<sup>95</sup>

### Structural Analysis

By applying a little elementary sentence diagramming to this passage, a contrast of two groups of three becomes apparent. It is common scriptural usage to present solemn truths or warnings in groups of two, three, or four. Examples of this include Proverbs 30; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 13 etc.; the visions of the butler and baker in Genesis 40; and the combination of Christ’s words in Matthew 12:14. It is in accord with Biblical usage, therefore, to expect that in I John 5, “there are three that bear witness” will be repeated at least twice.

The *Comma* is also structurally important with reference to verse 9. I John 5:7 describes the witness of God; I John 5:8 describes the witness of men. “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater” (5:9). Without the *Comma*, 5:9 has no antecedent and consequently, makes no sense.

### Rhetorical Analysis

In the realm of rhetorical criticism, the *Johannine Comma* seems to conform to the Apostle John’s literary style. As far as tone is concerned, “there reigns throughout the Epistle a firm and manly tone, the perfect opposite of all effeminate and sentimental enthusiasm” (e.g. 1:6-10; 2:19; 3:6-10; 4:1-2; etc.).<sup>96</sup> This tone is likewise prevalent in the *Comma* which tersely presents the truth of an important doctrine, leaving the reader with no room to question.

John’s writings are also characterized by contrasts. According to Tidwell, “the ordinary contrasts cover almost the same words and ideas of the Gospel such as life and death, light and darkness, righteousness and unrighteousness with several others and with the addition of Christ and anti-Christ.” The *Comma*, in particular, feeds the contrast which John creates between Jesus

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<sup>93</sup>Πατερ, Λογος

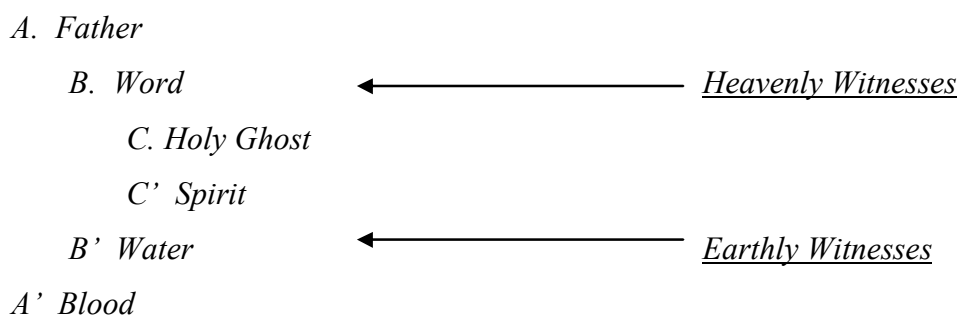
<sup>92</sup>Αγιον Πνευμα

<sup>95</sup>The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, 7: 233-234.

<sup>96</sup>Ebrard, 41.

Christ and Antichrist (cf. 2:18-23). Jesus Christ is God (cf. 5:7-8). Antichrist, on the other hand, is the one who denies this fact (cf. 2:22).

One final aspect of John's style that is worthy of consideration with respect to the *Comma*, is parallelism. I John is filled with both positive and negative parallelism. For example, the Apostle writes in 1:5, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all," and in 1:9, "Forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I John 5:7-8, the *Comma* included, also contains parallelism, a synthetic type to be exact. The three heavenly witnesses (Father, Word, and Holy Ghost) and the three earthly witnesses (Spirit, water, and blood) are actually the same three witnesses. As Oliver Greene argues, "Therefore, since the Trinity - the Father, Word, and the Holy Ghost - bear record in heaven, it is these three who also bear record in earth."<sup>97</sup> In other words, the promulgation of the three earthly witnesses serves to expand or elaborate on the role of the three heavenly witnesses. The earthly witnesses are sourced in the heavenly witnesses. The "blood" refers to the blood of God (cf. Acts 20:28) while the "water" is a reference to Jesus Christ at his baptism. The "Spirit," of course, is the third member of the Godhead. This particular type of parallelism is very common with John and could conceivably be called a *chiasmus* in this particular instance.



If the *Comma* is omitted, the chiasmic structure falls apart.

Altogether, the *Johannine Comma* reflects John's rhetorical style. Fuller points out, "The connexion of the passage is altogether in its favor. The phraseology is that of the Apostle John; so that if the words are not his, it must have been the most successful imitation of him that can be imagined."<sup>98</sup>

<sup>97</sup>Oliver Greene, *The Epistles of John* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1966), 191.

<sup>98</sup>"Letter IX" in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 1: 708-709.

### Tradition Analysis

With regard to tradition criticism, it is the tradition that the *Comma* does reflect that is significant. Had a redactor added the passage to argue for the Trinity, he would have almost certainly utilized the common Trinitarian formula as found in Matthew 28:19, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” This formula “became part of a very early tradition in the church.”<sup>99</sup> It was employed in the *Didache* (7.1-4) as well as Justin’s *Apology* (1.61). The strength of forgery is similarity not uniqueness. Ruckman argues, “What would have possibly been gained by inventing a different formula than the one given in Matthew 28, which every Christian knew by heart?”<sup>100</sup> Also, Christ is referred to as the “Son of God” numerous times in I John. A true forger would have no doubt utilized “Son” instead of “Word” so as to further disguise his redactional efforts.

### Theological Analysis

The theological significance of the *Johannine Comma* goes without saying. As noted, it is the only clear affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity in all of Scripture. Thus, when James White argues that “the reality is that the amount of variation between the two most extremely different manuscripts of the New Testament would not fundamentally alter the message of the Scriptures,” he is wrong.<sup>101</sup> When John Ankerberg concludes that textual differences only apply to 1% of the text, and none of them are doctrinally important, he is incorrect.<sup>102</sup> The Trinity is a doctrine that sets Christianity apart from all other religions—one God in three persons. It is interesting to note Erickson’s argument for the Trinity in his Christian Theology. He begins by stating, “One text which has traditionally been appealed to as documenting the Trinity is I John 5:7 . . . unfortunately, the textual basis is so weak . . . If there is a biblical basis for the Trinity, it must be sought elsewhere.”<sup>103</sup> He then proceeds over the next five pages to exegete and systematize numerous passages that imply this doctrine. He concludes, “Although the doctrine of the Trinity *is not expressly stated*, the Scripture, particularly the New Testament, contains so many *suggestions* of the deity and unity of the three persons that we can understand why the

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<sup>99</sup>Millard Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 329.

<sup>100</sup>Peter Ruckman, I John 5:7, Why We Retain It In The Authorized Version (Pensacola, FL: Bible Baptist Bookstore, n.d.), 4.

<sup>101</sup>James White, The King James Only Controversy (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1995), 40.

<sup>102</sup>John Ankerberg and John Weldon, The Facts on the King James Only Debate (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 8.

<sup>103</sup>Erickson, 327.

church formulated the doctrine, and conclude that they were right in so doing.”<sup>104</sup> It seems rather strange to base a fundamental Christian doctrine upon suggestion. Perhaps this is why so many cults (Jehovah’s Witnesses) are able to manipulate the Bible so as to assert that Jesus was not God. After all, the Watchtower Bible of the Jehovah’s Witnesses rejects the *Comma*.

A matter of theological significance that transcends the text of I John 5:7-8 concerns the issue of final authority. Is the Bible we hold in our hands the Word of God or not? If it contains errors, it can only be said that the Scriptures contain the Word of God. This is Neo-orthodoxy. When critical scholars boastfully claim that the *Comma* is not a legitimate part of Scripture, they are questioning the authority of the Book and disregarding the traditional text that brought about the Reformation. Questioning, when it comes to the text of Scripture, is the starting point of all kinds of apostasy. Is the final authority in the Book, or is it in what man says about the Book? In other words, should one reject the *Comma* because man says it doesn’t belong, or should it be accepted by faith because it has been preserved in a Bible that God has blessed for 450 years. “*It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man*” (Psalm 118:8). The King James Bible has unquestionably produced more spiritual fruit than all of modern English versions put together. “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). Whatever may have been wrong with modern English versions, “There is one thing that is certain, they produced an ignorance of the CONTENTS OF THE BIBLE THAT IS ABSOLUTELY APPALLING.”<sup>105</sup>

The accusations against I John 5:7-8 that are hurled by modern scholars are typical of attacks that rain down on numerous other places in the text of the Bible (“I know your King James Bible says this, but it really should say this . . .”). Such assaults sound too strikingly familiar to Satan’s discourse in the Garden of Eden. The “Father of Lies” did not argue with Eve about whether or not there was a God, or whether the doctrine of the Trinity was true, or even whether God’s Word was inspired. No, apostasy began when Satan questioned God’s words and placed doubt in Eve’s heart. “Eve, I know that God said you would die if you eat the fruit, but he really meant that you would be just like him, a god” (author’s paraphrase). Jesus warns in Mark 4:15, “Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.” When doubt is given a beachhead, all other defenses soon fall. Hasty dismissals of I John 5:7-8 have served to do nothing but cast doubt upon the sovereignly preserved Word of God.

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid. [emphasis mine].

<sup>105</sup>Peter Ruckman, Biblical Scholarship (Pensacola, FL: Bible Baptist Bookstore, 1988), 105.

According to Moorman, the entire matter boils down to one question: “Has God preserved His word and kept intact His original work of inspiration or has He not? It is a fact that the one common denominator in all the varied errors, deviations, and heresies is that their advocates will first criticize the standard received edition or translation of Scripture.”<sup>106</sup> A heretic has never been able to construct an argument without altering the words of the King James Bible.

Interesting?

Any proper approach to the text of Scripture, including I John 5:7-8, must take into account the doctrine of preservation. In Psalm 12:6-7, God promised to preserve His words for every generation. The same God who inspired the original Greek autographs is most certainly powerful enough to preserve them in the copying process as Greek manuscripts multiplied. If this is not true, what would have been the purpose in inspiring the Scriptures if men were just going to mutilate and corrupt them? Preservation does not just extend to the general message of the Bible, but to the very words themselves (cf. Matthew 4:4; 5:18; 24:35). This being true, the perfectly preserved Word of God existed down through the ages and will be in existence until Christ returns. It is true that not even two out of the five thousand extant Greek manuscripts agree with each other 100% of the time. However, this body of manuscripts most definitely does not represent all of the manuscripts that ever existed. Many have since rotted away. Therefore, in light of God’s promise of preservation, it is not illogical to think that manuscripts once existed that completely agreed with the traditional text of the *Textus Receptus* and consequently, contained the *Johannine Comma*. Maybe Erasmus, Luther, Stephanus, Beza, the Elzivir Brothers, and the King James translators did not have such manuscripts, but why couldn’t Almighty God have guided them into selecting the right words from the body of manuscripts they did possess? After, all God is in control of His words. Towns writes, “If an all-powerful God cannot control the vehicle of His self-revelation, then His power and nature can be questioned.”<sup>107</sup>

A common assertion among conservative evangelicals is that the inspiration of Scripture only applies to the original autographs. This, however, cannot be true in light of God’s promise

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<sup>106</sup>Jack Moorman, “Principles of Bible Preservation,” *O Timothy Magazine* (Vol. 9, Issue 8, 1992), 2.

<sup>107</sup>Elmer Towns, *Theology for Today*, 2nd Edition (Lynchburg, VA: University Press, 1994), 49.

of preservation.<sup>108</sup> The word “Scripture” is never used in the Bible to refer to the originals (cf. Acts 8:32; 17:11). Besides, in II Timothy 3:16, when Paul discusses the inspiration of Scripture, he does so in a context in which he says that Timothy had known the Holy Scriptures as a child (cf. 3:15). Paul is not referring to the original autographs of the Old Testament, for they had passed out of existence long before the Apostle was even born. Paul was saying that the Scripture Timothy had read as a child were inspired. They were not the original autographs, but they were inspired in the sense that they had been perfectly preserved by God Almighty. Some might argue that this interpretation is faulty because it calls for the fusing together of two verses. The “scholar” may see it that way, but the Bible was written for the common man (cf. Psalm 119:99-100). A simple reading (minus grammatical analysis, verb parsings, theological presuppositions, etc.) of this passage clearly shows that Paul is not limiting inspiration to the originals. Such a faulty interpretation is based on theological presupposition.<sup>109</sup> Towns writes, “The Bible . . . is as perfect as God, and its perfection extends to every word.”<sup>110</sup> Most evangelicals will accept this statement as truth, but such a statement is meaningless if there is not immediate access to these perfect words. Immediate access is available by way of divine preservation. Not only is God’s Word perfectly preserved after the Original Autographs, but according to Psalm 119:89; John 12:49-50; 17:8, it precedes them.

The doctrine of inspiration does not only apply to the original autographs nor does it apply exclusively to the original languages of the autographs. If God preserved his Word as He promised, then inspiration can apply to translations.<sup>111</sup> When is the last time that Greek and Hebrew was used by God to reach someone with the Gospel? If the original languages were the only source of inspired Scripture, then the ancient Hebrews must have been an extremely ignorant,

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<sup>108</sup>Some might criticize this perspective, claiming that inspiration cannot be equated with preservation. However, the two are inseparable. Preservation reflects inspiration. In other words, the words contained in the Received Text are inspired in the sense that they are preserved.

<sup>109</sup> The “scholar” might go on to argue that no copies are perfect, so they cannot be inspired. Therefore, it is concluded that God’s words are preserved in manuscript copies only as far as these copies agree with the original manuscripts. Such an argument is nonsense. When is the last time that anyone saw the original manuscripts? They passed out of existence almost 1900 years ago. Such a viewpoint essentially says that we cannot know God’s very words because we do not have the inspired originals with which to compare manuscript copies to. This clearly goes against God’s promise in Psalm 12:6-7 and downplays the absolute authority of Scripture.

<sup>110</sup>Towns, 49.

<sup>111</sup>Of course, inspiration can only apply to translations that represent the pure line of Scripture. Modern versions represent a corrupt line of Scripture that was born in Egypt (a), moved to Rome (B), and eventually came to England (RSV) and America (ASV, NASV, NIV, NEB, LB, etc.). The pure line of text, on the other hand, originated in Antioch, is represented by the Old Latin, Old Syriac, German Bibles, the *Textus Receptus*, and the AV 1611 King James Bible.

for the Pentateuch could not have originally been written in Hebrew. After all, “Moses was learned in all the ways of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22), and someone had to translate what Moses said in Egyptian to Pharaoh back into Hebrew. Yet, the Jews believed their Hebrew Scriptures were inspired and still do today. Moorman makes a point worthy of consideration: “as so few can read the original languages, God’s promise to preserve His Word has no practical relevance if it does not extend to translations. . . . If a translation cannot be equated with the actual Word of God, then ultimately this leads to the situation that one must know Hebrew and Greek before they can be saved, or built up in the faith.”<sup>112</sup>

Another principle to keep in mind with reference to “questionable passages” (e.g. I John 5:7-8) is that they must be approached with an attitude of faith. As Hebrews 11:6 asserts, “Without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Dean Burgon once wrote, “There exists no reason for supposing that the Divine Agent, who in the first instance thus gave to mankind the Scriptures of Truth, immediately abdicated His office and took no further care of His work; that He abandoned those precious writings.”<sup>113</sup> The whole crux of the matter boils down to faith, plain and simple. Unfortunately, most modern critics (Westcott, Hort, Nestle, Aland, Metzger, the UBS, et. al.) approach the sacred science of textual criticism with presuppositions against inerrancy. They treat the Bible as if it were just another book. Such an attitude cannot be founded upon faith, and consequently, is not pleasing to God.

Much more could be said about the relationship between inspiration and preservation, but the question must come back to the *Johannine Comma*. In this excursus, the author has shown that a case can be constructed for the genuineness of the text of the three heavenly witnesses. As to how strong a case, the author will leave it up to the reader’s individual judgment. The author does not say that his case is all conclusive, but on the other hand, by no means can it be said to be conclusive that the text should not be included. In the case of the accusation against the King James Bible, the burden of proof, as has been noted several times, LIES WITH THE ACCUSER. The accuser cannot prove his case; therefore, the author accepts the *Comma*’s authenticity by faith., a faith that is backed up with plenty of evidence. God, in His sovereignty, saw to it that

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<sup>112</sup>Moorman, *Principles of Biblical Preservation*, 4.

<sup>113</sup>John Burgon, “The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels” in *Unholy Hands On The Bible*, Vol. 1, Including the Complete Works of John W. Burgon, Dean of Chichester, Ed. by Jay P. Green (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Trust Fund, 1990), A-7.



the text was preserved in the Bible's of the Reformation and the best-selling book of all time—The Authorized King James Version. As to why the passage fell out of so many Greek mss, only the Almighty knows. It is at least possible that the text was excised from the Greek tradition by heretics who didn't want to believe that Jesus was God. Nonetheless, it was preserved in the Latin text through the use of the Latin speaking church.

The whole matter can be concluded with a question? Who would be honored more by the presence of the *Comma* in Holy Scripture—Jesus Christ or the Devil? The answer goes without saying. In the words of Gail Riplinger, “Guesses or God, fear or faith, haughty or humble. These are the perpetual options for the Christian.”<sup>114</sup>

### Homiletic Analysis

It is the author's opinion that the *Johannine Comma* is authentic Holy Scripture. Therefore, it can and should be preached from. Two approaches can be taken—an exegetical and a topical. An exegetical approach might utilize the surrounding context. A possible outline might look something like this:

#### **Proposition: In I John 5:4-10, John promulgates two facts about biblical faith.**

##### *I. THE FIRST FACT: Biblical faith overcomes the world - 5:4-5*

###### *A. The inevitability of overcoming – 5:4*

*1. Stated – “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.”*

*2. Elaborated – “and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”*

###### *B. The identity of the overcomer – 5:5*

*1. What he does – “Who is he that overcometh the world”*

*2. What he believes – “but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.”*

##### *II. THE SECOND FACT: Biblical faith is sanctioned.*

###### *A. Sanctioned by truth – 5:6*

###### *B. Sanctioned by three heavenly witnesses (Father, Word, Holy Ghost) – 5:7*

###### *C. Sanctioned by three earthly witnesses (Spirit, water, blood) – 5:8*

###### *D. A Parenthetical Explanation – 5:9*

*1. The supremacy of the witness of God – “If we receive the witness of men, witness of God is greater.”*

*2. The clarification of the witness of God – “for this is the witness of God which he*

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<sup>114</sup>Riplinger, New Age Bible Versions, 511.

*hath testified of his Son.”*

*E. Sanctioned by the believer’s spiritual consciousness – 5:10*

- 1. Stated positively – “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself”*
- 2. Stated negatively – “he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.”*

A topical approach to I John 5:7-8 might focus upon the nature of the Trinity. A possible outline could resemble the following.

**Proposition: *In I John 5:7-8, the Apostle explicates the triune nature of God from two perspectives.***

*I. THE FIRST PERSPECTIVE: A Heavenly Perspective – 5:7*

*A. Delineated – “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost.”*

- 1. The first person of the Trinity – “Father”*
- 2. The second person of the Trinity – “Word”*
- 3. The third person of the Trinity – “Holy Ghost”*

*B. Described – “and these three are one”*

*II. THE SECOND PERSPECTIVE: An Earthly Perspective – 5:8*

*A. Delineated – “And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood.”*

- 1. The third person of the Trinity – “Spirit”*
- 2. The second person of the Trinity—Jesus at his baptism—“water”*
- 3. The first person of the Trinity—the blood of God shed on the cross—“blood”*

*B. Described – “and these three agree in one”*

## APPENDIX A

THE JOHANNINE COMMA—EARLY EVIDENCE FOR AND AGAINST<sup>115</sup>

**Total examined extant Greek manuscripts = 5,000 +**

**Total examined extant Greek manuscripts that contain I John 5 = 498**

**Total examined extant Greek manuscripts hostile to I John 5:7-8 = 492**

**Historical Breakdown of Hostile Evidence**

2/498 – 4<sup>th</sup> century (a, B) = 0.4% of hostile evidence

2/498 – 5<sup>th</sup> century (A, 048) = 0.4% of hostile evidence

1/498 – 6<sup>th</sup> century (0296) = 0.2% of hostile evidence

0/498 – 7<sup>th</sup> century = 0.0% of hostile evidence

1/498 – 8<sup>th</sup> century (Ψ+) = 0.2% of hostile evidence

8/498 – 9<sup>th</sup> century (K, L, P, 049, 1424+, 1841+, 1862, 1895) = 1.6% of hostile evidence

484/498 – post 9<sup>th</sup> century = 97.2% of hostile evidence

30 mss. – 10<sup>th</sup> century

80 mss. – 11<sup>th</sup> century

79 mss. – 12<sup>th</sup> century

98 mss. – 13<sup>th</sup> century

119 mss. – 14<sup>th</sup> century

55 mss. – 15<sup>th</sup> century

15 mss. – 16<sup>th</sup> century

6 mss. – 17<sup>th</sup> century

1 mss. – 18<sup>th</sup> century

**Historical Breakdown of Favorable Evidence**

A.D. (ca.) 200 – Tertullian

250 – Cyprian

318 – Athanasius

350 – Idacius Clarus

380 – *Priscillian*  
 385 – *Gregory of Nazanzius*  
 390 – *Jerome*  
 450 – *Contra Varimadum*  
 450 – *Latin mss. m*  
 485 – *Council of Carthage*  
 485 – *Victor of Vitensis*  
 500 – *Latin mss. r*  
 527 – *Fulgentius*  
 570 – *Cassiodorus*  
 636 – *Isidore of Seville*  
 650 – *Codex Pal Legionensus*  
 700 – *Jaquab of Edessa*  
 735 – *mss. used by Venerable Bede*  
 850 – *Codex Ulmensis*

*\*In addition to the aforementioned favorable evidence, the Comma can be traced back through the Waldensian Church to the translation of the Old Italic in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Moreover, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, at least 12 Old Latin mss contain the passage; at least 21 in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and at least 189 in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Over 6,000 Old Latin manuscripts remained unexamined to this day. It is also probable that the Comma was found in the Old Syriac tradition as far back as its translation. The Armenian and Slavonic versions bear witness to the Comma in several copies, and the German versions prior to Luther bear consistent testimony to it.*

**RESULT:** *The Johannine Comma enjoys at least 19 pieces of concrete favorable evidence predating the ninth century; hostile witnesses, on the other hand, can only claim 14 Greek manuscripts and an argument from silence with regard to the patristic evidence. The external evidence is not as one-sided as critical scholars would have us to believe. In fact, critical scholars accept other readings on far less evidence (e.g. Matthew 11:19; II Corinthians 5:3; James 4:14). Or, consider Mark 16:9-20. Scholars rejects this passage as an emendation based upon 3 Greek mss. One of those witnesses, Vaticanus, is actually favorable to the reading because it exhibits a vacant space where the eleven verses should be.<sup>116</sup>*

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<sup>115</sup>The information in this appendix is taken primarily from the anthology laid out by Michael Maynard in The History of the Debate Over 1 John 5:7-8 (Tempe, AZ: Comma Publications, 1995). The data he provides is thoroughly documented.

<sup>116</sup>A facsimile of the Vatican mss is pictured in Unholy Hands on the Bible, Ed. by Jay P. Green (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Trust Fund, 1990), ii.

*APPENDIX B*

*THE JOHANNINE COMMA AND THE SEVEN NOTES OF TRUTH*

Having refuted the customary arguments against the *Johannine Comma*, it becomes appropriate to evaluate the textual evidence. This is best done perhaps by applying Dean Burgon's "Seven Notes of Truth."<sup>117</sup> Burgon, a contemporary of Westcott and Hort, believed that the science of textual criticism should be approached with an attitude of faith, for the Bible is an inspired Book; it should not be treated and evaluated like any other book. "The Bible is different because it is divine."<sup>118</sup> Therefore, Burgon set forth seven tests of truth that he believed would best help a person evaluate the evidence for any given passage. Concerning these tests, he comments:

. . . although no doubt it is conceivable that any one of the seven might possibly in itself suffice to establish almost any reading practically this is never the case. And why? Because we never meet with any one of these Tests in the fullest possible measure. No test ever attains to perfection, or indeed can attain. An approximation to the Test is all that can be expected, or even desired. And sometimes we are obliged to put up with a very slight approximation indeed. *Their strength lies in their cooperation.*<sup>119</sup>

For this cause, the author shall apply the "Seven Notes" to the *Johannine Comma* on a pass or fail basis. By their cooperation, it will be seen that a case can be constructed for the inclusion of this important passage within the text of Holy Scripture.

The Test of Antiquity

"The more ancient testimony is probably the better testimony."<sup>120</sup> A word of caution, however, is in order. The "oldest is best" philosophy is sound only on the surface, for there is much more to judging the age of a reading than simply determining the age of any given manuscript. After all, the oldest reading is not necessarily found in the oldest manuscript. For example, although *Codex Vaticanus* (ca. 4<sup>th</sup> century) is far older than the few Greek mss that do contain the *Comma*, the passage is quoted by Cyprian, as noted, in the third century.<sup>121</sup> In that respect, the reading of *Comma* is actually older than the oldest Greek manuscript which attests to I John 5.

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<sup>117</sup>John Burgon, "The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels" in *Unholy Hands on the Bible*, 22-35. The "Seven Notes of Truth" are as follows: Antiquity, Number Variety, Respectability, Continuity, Evidence of the Entire Passage, and Reasonableness.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 35 [emphasis mine].

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>121</sup>The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Church Fathers Down to A.D. 325, 5:423.

When considering this test, one must not forget that the worst corruption to which the New Testament has perhaps ever been subjected originated within a hundred years or so after the originals were penned.<sup>122</sup> According to Scrivener, the African Church corrupted the New Testament as far back as A.D. 150.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, an ancient Western (Rome) Church Father by the name of Caius (2nd century) once wrote:

For this reason is it they have boldly laid their hands upon the divine Scriptures, alleging that they have corrected them. And that I do not state this against them falsely, any one who pleases may ascertain. For if any one should choose to collect and compare all their copies together, he would find many discrepancies among them . . . their disciples were very zealous in inserting the corrections, as they call them, i.e., the corruptions made by each of them . . . For one may compare those which were formerly prepared by them with those which have been afterwards corrupted with a special object, and many discrepancies will be found. And as to the great audacity implied in this offence, it is not likely that even they themselves can be ignorant of that. *For either they do not believe that the divine Scriptures were dictated by the Holy Spirit, and are thus infidels; or they think themselves wiser than the Holy Spirit, and what are they then but demoniacs* [emphasis is mine]? Nor can they deny that the crime is theirs, when the copies have been written with their own hand; nor did they receive such copies of the Scriptures from those by whom they were first instructed in the faith and they cannot produce copies from which these were transcribed.<sup>124</sup>

The point of drawing attention to this fact is that it is not the oldest document for which one must search, but the oldest reading. Does the *Johannine Comma* represent an early reading?

Tertullian and Cyprian cite the passage in the third century; it is utilized at the Council of Carthage in 485; and it can be traced back through the Old Latin of the Waldensian Church (The Old Itala was translated in the second century). In addition to this, one must consider that all extant Greek papyri are silent to the issue. However, Tertullian, Cyprian, the African Bishops at Carthage, and the Waldenses had to get the reading from somewhere. Therefore, the *Comma* passes the test of antiquity.

#### The Test of Consent of Witnesses

By this, Burgon means number. Unfortunately, most modern textual critics argue that manuscripts should be weighed rather than counted. Burgon asserted that this maxim “may be said to embody much fundamental fallacy.”<sup>125</sup> The traditional text of the *Textus Receptus*, for the most part, is based upon the readings of the majority of manuscripts. However, these manuscripts are generally late (8th-11th centuries) and consequently discarded by modern critics such as the UBS editors. The question that such critics refuse to ask is where did this great number of manuscripts come from? They must have been copies of earlier uncials and/or papyri

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<sup>122</sup>Burgon, “Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels,” 22.

<sup>123</sup>Scrivener, 453.

<sup>124</sup>Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 5: 602.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, A-23.

that were perhaps lost or destroyed. If ten students were asked to copy a paragraph off the chalkboard, and nine of the ten copies agreed, which best represents the true text? Logic is in favor of the nine copies as opposed to the one disparate copy. The same holds true for New Testament manuscripts. Logic is in favor of the great majority of witnesses. As convincing as this argument is, it must not be utilized as the sole test of truth, for there are several passages in the *Textus Receptus* that are not found in the great majority of witnesses (e.g. I John 5:7-8). Therefore, as James Borland argues, “Number must be considered as an important factor, but only as *one* of the tests of truth.”<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, the *Comma* enjoys at least 19 witnesses prior to the ninth century and numerous witnesses thereafter. Granted, the number is a minority. Were there only two or three witnesses, the *Comma* could legitimately be said to have failed this test. However, 19 witnesses prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> century does not bespeak failure. I John 5:7-8 passes the test of consent of witnesses.

#### The Test of Variety

“The greater the variety of witnesses there are, the less chance there is for collusion or deceit to spring from the few.”<sup>127</sup> This, of course, can apply to both geographical location and kinds of witnesses. Burgon argues that this is the strongest ally that any reading can have.<sup>128</sup> The *Johannine Comma* definitely has variety on its side, despite a weak attestation in extant Greek manuscripts. It is found in eight Greek manuscripts, the Old Latin, the Old Syriac, various Waldensian Bibles, numerous German manuscripts, and a few Armenian and Slavonic copies. Moreover, it enjoys early patristic evidence (i.e. Cyprian, Tertullian, Council of Carthage, Cassiodorus, *et. al.*). These witnesses represent a wide geographical spread—North Africa, Italy, Asia Minor; Syria; the Caucasus; Russia; Germany; and even England (i.e. the work of Venerable Bede in the 8<sup>th</sup> century). The *Comma* passes the test of variety.

#### The Test of Continuity

A fourth test of truth considers the continuity or unbroken testimony of witnesses in favor of a particular reading. As Burgon argued, “this principle is often illustrated in the independent yet consentient testimony of the whole body of the cursives and the later uncials,”<sup>129</sup> not the so-called “oldest and best” readings of the modern Greek editions. For the most part, the readings

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<sup>126</sup>Borland, *A General Introduction to the New Testament* (Lynchburg: VA: University Book House, 1995), 162.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid.

<sup>128</sup>Burgon, “The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels” in *Unholy Hands on the Bible*, 27.

contained in the *Textus Receptus* have continuity on their side. I John 5:7-8, for example, appears consistently throughout history from A.D. 200 to A.D. 1500 just prior to Erasmus' compiling of the first printed Greek edition. On that basis, the *Comma* again passes the test.

#### The Test of Respectability of Witnesses

Another test of truth involves weight or respectability. In other words, "if a manuscript proves itself to be erroneous on a frequent basis by a number of acceptable standards, then it loses its respectability."<sup>130</sup> It is safe to say that both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus do not satisfy this category, for their differences from the majority of manuscripts as well as from each other are horrific. Therefore, they should be overlooked. Maybe modern critics should take a lesson from Erasmus when he was approached with readings from Vaticanus; he rejected them.<sup>131</sup> With specific regard to the *Comma*, witnesses such as Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius, orthodox African writers, the Vulgate, and the Waldensian Bibles certainly stand out as respectable witnesses. Again, the text passes.

#### The Test of the Evidence of the Entire Passage

This test is concerned with the behavior of a certain witness in the immediate vicinity of the problem being considered. In other words, if a manuscript can be shown to be faulty in several instances in the context of a particular reading, then it is logical that "mistakes have a tendency to repeat themselves in the same or other shapes."<sup>132</sup> With regard to the *Comma*, all of the above state witnesses exhibit unsullied integrity in the first few verses of I John 5.

#### The Test of Internal Considerations

This final test of truth focuses upon internal evidence, particularly of a grammatical and scientific nature. "If a particular reading is grammatically, geographically, scientifically, and historically impossible, then it must not be accepted if other readings do not present such problems."<sup>133</sup> For example, the UBS<sup>4</sup> accepts a variant reading in Luke 23:45 that is a scientific impossibility. Each of the synoptic Gospels contains the phrase "σκοτος εγενετο" (there was darkness) (cf. Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). However, Luke adds an additional phrase regarding the sun. The *Textus Receptus* reads "και εσκοτισθη ο ηλιος" (and the sun was darkened) while the UBS<sup>4</sup> reads "του ηλιου εκλιποντος" (The sun was eclipsed). Like the

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>130</sup>Borland, A General Introduction to the New Testament, 162.

<sup>131</sup>Maynard, 89.

<sup>132</sup>Burgon, "The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels" in Unholy Hands on the Bible, 34.



UBS's faulty readings in Matthew 1:7,10, this reading implies an error in Luke's original autograph: "A solar eclipse is impossible astronomically during the full moon of the Passover when sun and moon are 180 degrees apart in relation to the earth."<sup>134</sup> Luke, being an astute physician, would not have made such a blundering mistake. This reading fails the test of reasonableness because it is scientifically impossible. Therefore, it needs to be added to the long list of corrupt readings found in the UBS<sup>4</sup> that should be discarded.

The *Johannine Comma*, on the other hand, has much on its side in the area of internal considerations. It not only fits the structure, style, and immediate context of I John, but its omission presents a bald grammatical difficulty—three neuter nouns governed by a masculine participle. Let the *Comma* stand, and "the power of attraction" goes into effect. The *Comma* thus passes the seventh and final test.

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<sup>133</sup> Borland, *A General Introduction to the New Testament*, 164.

<sup>134</sup> Borland, "Re-examining New Testament Textual-Critical Principles and Practices Used to Negate Inerrancy," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (December 4, 1982), 504.

## APPENDIX C

## A NOTE ON BAPTIST HERITAGE AND THE RECEIVED TEXT

The inseparable relationship that exists between the inspiration and preservation of Holy Scripture has been an important issue particularly in Baptist heritage. For example, the *London Confession of 1644*, a creed of the English Baptists reads:

The Rule of this Knowledge, Faith, and Obedience, concerning the worship and service of God, and all other Christian duties, is not mans inventions, opinions, devices, lawes, constitutions, or traditions unwritten whatsoever, but onely the word of God contained in the Canonically Scriptures . . . In this written Word God hath plainly revealed whatsoever he hath though needfull for us to know . . .<sup>135</sup>

It was clear to the English Baptists that God had plainly revealed to them His words in the Holy Scriptures which had been inspired and passed down through the ages as the absolute “Rule of Faith.” Only through perfect preservation could this possibly have been true.

In 1833, the American Baptists drew up the *New Hampshire Confession*. Concerning the Scriptures, it reads,

We believe [that] the Holy bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter . . . and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true centre of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.<sup>136</sup>

This could only be true if God’s words had been inspired and perfectly preserved.

For Baptists to deny the perfect providential preservation of the Holy Scriptures is to defy their Baptist heritage as well as the general consensus of the Christian Church for most of history prior to the modern era. Unfortunately, this has occurred all too often as Baptist schools and seminaries are rejecting the doctrine of preservation in favor of naturalistic textual criticism. Michael Maynard, while speaking of Baptist scholars such as A.T. Robertson, J.A. Broadus, J.P. Boyce and D.A. Carson, all of whom regarded the Received Text as an inferior Greek text, argues that they “betrayed their Baptist heritage when they adopted the textual theories of the Anglican scholar F.J.A. Hort, the Presbyterian B.B. Warfield, and the Lutheran K. Tischendorf.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>*First London Confession*, VII-VIII, quoted in W.J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 176.

<sup>136</sup>*New Hampshire Confession*, I, quoted in W.J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 302.

<sup>137</sup>Maynard, 330. Hort, Warfield, and Tischendorf were all prominent naturalistic textual critics. Baptist scholars such as John Gill and Andrew Fuller, both of whom argued for the inspired preservation of the Received Text, have largely been ignored by modern Baptists in favor of the claims of men from other denominations.

With regard to the *Johannine Comma*, Baptist views in favor of the passage have long been in print. John Gill (1748) and Andrew Fuller (1815), two Baptist scholars, argued for the authenticity of the *Comma* long before A.T. Robertson came along. When Robertson, however, did show up on the scene, he was completely oblivious to the views of his Baptist predecessors; he did not even acknowledge them in his works on textual criticism. All in all, Baptist heritage and the *Johannine Comma* goes all the way back to the Swiss Reformation, the Anabaptists, the Waldensians *et. al.* All of these groups have their place in the lineage of modern-day Baptists, and all of them held to the Received Text of Scripture which included I John 5:7-8 as it stands in an Authorized King James Bible. Therefore, to deny the authenticity of the *Johannine Comma* is in a sense to deny Baptist heritage.

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