
Glad You Asked (part 2)

SCOTT HOEZEE

Here on *Groundwork*, we believe that biblical inquiry, asking good questions about the biblical text, strengthens our faith; and so, we are always glad when you, our listeners, have joined the conversation. This week once again we are going to dig into scripture together by way of some of the questions you have sent into *Groundwork* over the past year.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and joining us again for the second program in a row here is our producer, *Groundwork* producer, Courtney Jacob, who is at the table with us because she is the one who fields all of the questions. So, Courtney, you have three more for this episode.

COURTNEY JACOB

Yes, I have three more questions for today, and the first I am going to pose to you is from Susie, and she wrote to us on Facebook and asked: Can you possibly explain to me why some Bible translations have many, many verses removed from them? I do not understand why.

DAVE BAST

Yes, we can explain that, I think, fairly simply; this is going to get us into an area – a field of study – called textual criticism, and it is a very important part of New Testament studies in particular; to some degree the Old Testament, but it especially affects the New Testament because there are so many more manuscripts available of the New Testament. It gets a little technical, so this may be boring, and we will have to see how it goes, but I am guessing where she is coming from is reading the King James Bible, because most of the King James bibles are printed straight through from beginning to end, and then you pick up a newer translation and some of the verses in the King James might not be there or there might be more footnotes. Probably the clearest example of this, and the biggest chunk, is the ending of the Gospel of Mark. I am looking right now at Mark 16:9, and there is a line across the page – this happens to be an NIV that I am looking at – the New International Version – and then a bracket that says: The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20; and then they print that, but in italics, to indicate that there is a little bit of a textual problem here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and there are numerous – and I think, Susie, after an initial inquiry from you, Courtney – I think Susie wrote back with a list of a dozen or more individual verses here and there that now... Every once in a while, you read Matthew 20:20, and then it is verse 22, and say, “Where did 21 go?” And now it is in a footnote at the bottom of the page, and it will usually say: Some manuscripts have... but it is removed from the text. Well, the only way to make sense of this is just to remind everyone, how did we get the Bible we have? We do not have – and some people actually do not know this – we do not have, and to my knowledge have never had in the Church, the original copy of anything. We do not have Matthew in Matthew’s handwriting; we do

not have Paul's letter to the Romans in Paul's handwriting. What we have are copies of copies of copies; and of course, for most of Church history – through about the 1400s before the printing press was invented – one of the big jobs that monks in monasteries did as their service to the Lord was to help preserve scripture by copying by hand manuscripts that had been handed down through Church history. So, we do not have any originals, we only have copies of copies, but what happens when you have copies of copies? Well, mistakes get made along the way. Every once in a while, a well-meaning monk might think: That passage is a little hard; I am going to try to explain it. I will add a couple words here that might make it easier to understand. It looks like at the end of Mark's Gospel that somebody concluded that Mark 16:8, where the women flee from the tomb Easter morning, and they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid, they thought...

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is an odd way to stop...

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have to add something here...

DAVE BAST

Let's add something, right; yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, anyway, what textual criticism, Dave, that you referred to, what it does is it tries to get as close back to the original as we can to cut through copy mistakes, well-meaning commentaries that somebody maybe added along the way; and so, there are a whole series of rules that scholars have to decide what is the most likely original version of this text?

DAVE BAST

It is really a fascinating field of study; and great scholars – I think of one great name, Bruce Metzger, the late scholar from Princeton Seminary, pretty much devoted his life to this kind of work, and it goes back into the 19th Century, people like the British scholars Westcott and Hort – just tremendous labor – almost a detective kind of work, or putting a puzzle together... Here is the bottom line for any listener. We do not have to worry that we do not have a good copy of the New Testament, that it is not reliable. There are – just listen to this – just this number: There are over 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament in existence from before the dawn of printing. I think it was 1462, or something like that, when the first book was printed by Gutenberg in Germany, and it was the Bible – prior to that, every book in the world only existed in these handwritten copies. Now, 5,000 copies of some or all of the New Testament – some smaller parts, some the whole thing – the typical book from the ancient world, the writings of Julius Caesar, Aristotle, Plato, all these famous people – there might be 10 or 15 copies in existence – that is it; and thousands of books that we know were written in the ancient world have been lost, because no copies continue. We are many times more certain of the text of the New Testament than of any other book from the ancient world because we have so many copies because it was so important.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and what is also important to notice is that ultimately and inevitably when talking about this, people will mention the King James Version. A lot of people were raised with it. It is beautiful English – Shakespearian – but we do have to remember, the King James Version has just had its 400th anniversary*. It came out in 1611, I believe. Many, many of those 5,000 copies you mentioned, Dave, we have discovered since 1611: The Dead Sea scrolls, the Nag Hammadi papyri, there are a number of... we have found some of the most ancient copies of the Bible that are much, much closer to Jesus' day and Paul's day than anything else. We have discovered them since the King James, and so, now we bring those to bear, because there are several rules that textual scholars use to decide what is the most... when you have five different manuscripts and they disagree on a certain verse or on the end of Mark or something, they have certain rules, one of which is the older the manuscript is, the more reliable it probably is. A shorter version of a verse is more likely to be reliable than the longer, because if anything, somebody added words; and if a text is hard to

understand, the harder version is more likely the authentic one because if anything, somebody tried to smooth it out. So, when you bring all of these together, since the King James Version we have a much more accurate picture. It is not a lot of texts, to tell you the truth, that are controversial, but we actually have a much more reliable version now.

DAVE BAST

Yes; the King James itself is reliable because we are talking about 98% is the same, maybe 99%. It is just a few little here and there things; and the most glaring example is the one we talked about, the ending of Mark. So, you do not have to worry that you are not really getting the authentic New Testament; no matter what version you are reading, God's Word can come through that, and does.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And maybe that is a good tagline pastorally, here, too. We know that the Holy Spirit inspired scripture and we know it is God's Word, but we also have to know that the Holy Spirit was behind all of those copies of copies. Why do you think we have 5,000 copies of the Bible, and only just a few of Plato? Because the Holy Spirit was behind keeping the Bible alive. The Holy Spirit worked through all of those monks laboring in lonely isolation in monasteries copying the thing. We have to believe that the Holy Spirit is in the whole process of Bible transmission, not just in the original writing, and thanks be to God for that; that is why we have the scriptures today.

DAVE BAST

Amen!

COURTNEY JACOB

I like that thought. So, there could be many reasons the texts are different, but if you are choosing a translation that is a commonly accepted translation across denominations, and so on, and not a random one that Thomas Jefferson picked his favorite verses out of, you are safe.

DAVE BAST

You are.

COURTNEY JACOB

Okay; the next question we would like to look at brings us to another big deal in the Church. We want to look at the sacrament of baptism. So, let's talk about that in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and our producer, Courtney Jacob, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are answering listener questions, and Courtney has another one.

COURTNEY JACOB

And this one actually comes from a number of people, so I cannot give a specific source or person because I have recently had a lot of questions about baptism. Someone asked: How do I know I am baptized? Another said: Is baptism necessary? And someone else asked: Why do you baptize children? I thought it would be helpful for us to respond to these questions, but then also discuss our understanding of baptism and the scriptures on which we base our understanding.

DAVE BAST

You know, maybe I will start with the last one: Why do you baptize children? Well, some churches do and some do not, clearly. I have been making radio programs – biblical teaching-based radio programs – for just almost 20 years now, and I have never addressed the subject of baptism in any program, and that is quite intentional, because it is a divisive subject and I do not think it is of first importance. Honest Christians who love the Bible and believe the Bible and have it as their authority honestly disagree on a question of

interpretation or doctrine. Fortunately, it is, I do not think, a major point. So, I always like to quote what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1: God did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel. I thank God that I did not baptize any of you, he says, except for... oh, yeah, there were one or two maybe, but apart from them, I did not baptize anyone.

So, I would like to just not address the whole why we baptize children and why some do not; and maybe I will just say this about it. All of us deep down, I think, whatever our tradition, feel somehow that our children belong to God; that they are not in the same category as atheists or agnostics, and so we have some way of acknowledging what we call in our tradition The Covenant – that God is a God to us and our children, and some of us bring our children for baptism to claim that covenant. Other traditions dedicate their children, but somehow we all have this sense that our children, too, are embraced by God and part of his family, and most of us – almost all of us – also have a sense that our children at some point need to stand up and say: I believe this for myself. I accept this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; one thing that is universal among Christians, as far as I know, is baptism. Everybody baptizes. It is a matter of whether you do it as children or when someone comes of age and can make a verbal profession; but I think one thing that all Christians agree on is that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; and so, even though I may disagree with Baptist sisters and brothers about baptizing my child as opposed to their waiting for the child to grow up, once they are baptized we all agree it is the same spirit, it is the same baptism, it is the same sacrament; which leads to the other questions, then, that were asked in this sequence, including the question: Is it necessary? On that question, I think also, most churches would agree; I mean, the Catholics and the Orthodox, and most Protestant groups say: Is it necessary? Well, how do you mean that question? Do you mean that it is magic such that if it does not happen a person cannot go to heaven when they die? Well, in that sense, no. If a child were to die before the parents could get it baptized, or if a person became a believer but was in a situation of persecution where there was no one to baptize and they got killed before anybody got a chance to baptize them, would that mean they could not go to heaven? No, of course not. They are in God's love; they are in God's grace, so there is nothing magic about baptism. If you are a true believer and you are in a circumstance where baptism just could not happen, there is no one to do it or it was not practical or you died too quickly after becoming a believer, God is not going to refuse you admission to heaven because you do not have your baptism ticket. So, on that level, the answer is no, it is not necessary that it automatically saves you; but on another level, and maybe here is what we could talk about for a minute, if you do have the opportunity to get baptized – if the question is: Is it necessary or optional? Well, that is a different question. If your church baptizes, why would anyone say: I'm not sure I want it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly. The reason we would want it is because Jesus commanded it, and Peter proclaimed it in the first Christian sermon; so, we have the so-called Great Commission at the end of Matthew, where Jesus says, "Go into all the world; make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," and that has become, for almost all Christians – again, there are a couple of splinter groups that do not like that formula, but that is the name in which we baptize – the Triune name of God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

COURTNEY JACOB

And we find that in Matthew 28:19.

DAVE BAST

Very good. Thank you for the reference. So, Jesus commanded that, and I think he commanded it because he envisions people making a decisive break with their old life and an identification with him and his life. Paul says in Romans 6: We are baptized into his death and then we are raised again with Christ into newness of life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the key. It is easy for people to think this is just a ritual – it is a human ritual. I saw that even sometimes as a pastor, where sometimes people would want... It was a couple where she was from the Roman Catholic Church and he was from the Reformed Church, and so they asked if it would be okay to have the baby baptized one week at the Catholic Church for her side of the family, and then have it baptized the next week at my Reformed Church, and both the Catholic priest and I refused, because we said: No, this is not something we do. This is not like getting a six-month portrait taken at Wal-Mart. This is an act of God's Spirit. It is an action of God that Paul, as you just said, Dave, Paul said this is what makes us one with Christ. This is where our old self drowns in the waters of baptism, the new self is raised to life by the Holy Spirit – so, you would want to be baptized because it is what makes you one with Jesus. It is the work of the Spirit that is key.

DAVE BAST

Right; and you know, here is another reason why it is important. There are a lot of people today sort of drifting along who think: You know, everybody is in, more or less; hey, if you are a good person; God is not going to condemn anybody. My question to those people is always, "Why did Jesus and the Apostles make baptism so important? Why did Peter say on the Day of Pentecost in response to the crowd saying: What must we do? Repent and be baptized. Because there has to be this response – this identification – this act of faith – and without it, we have no grounds for assurance that we actually belong to Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think when people understand that, they will, indeed, say: Oh yes, it is necessary. In fact, I absolutely want it.

COURTNEY JACOB

All right; now our final question might ring true for many of us. It comes from a mother concerned about the faith of her children, and I want to discuss her question next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and Courtney Jacob, our *Groundwork* producer, is here. We are answering listener questions on this program, and here is our third one for this program, and Courtney is going to read it now.

COURTNEY JACOB

I think this one many people will identify with. I have heard it in conversation many times, and it comes from a mother concerned about her adult children; and she asks: How does one pray for someone who voluntarily walks away from God without violating the character of God? What can you pray for specifically? Yes, I know, for salvation, but what about when there is violent opposition?

DAVE BAST

Oh, my dear; do not stop praying, is what I would say. You cannot pray and violate the character of God. There is nothing you can ask for in prayer when you come with your heart laid bare before him that would violate God's character. He welcomes all of our prayers; all of our cries; all of our pleas; and you do not need to be worried about somehow praying for something that is against God's will because he can take that all up and make something of it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, Courtney, the question you just read is fraught with pain – parental pain. Many parents worry about their children – grandparents about their grandchildren; so, it is a very painful question and a pastorally acute situation; but the question ultimately is – it applies to prayer no matter what you are praying for, right? If God has his plan – if God has everything laid out, why does he need input from us? Why would he need to hear from little old us about what we want? But, you know, God does – again and again throughout scripture – God invites us to pray – all but commands us to pray, and so, however it all works out in the mysteries of life and of providence and of us as finite creatures – however that all goes in terms of how God takes into account our requests and our petitions over against his larger, unfolding plan of providence and upholding the universe and moving history and the Church forward – however that goes, it is genuine; it is not fake on God’s part. He is not just asking us to pray so that we will feel better. It is a genuine conversation that the Bible from start to finish indicates God delights in.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and you know, I do not think you need to worry about even praying for a child who is violently opposed, seemingly, to God, or to the Gospel or to the Church, as is the case, I think, with this listener. I love the story of St. Augustine’s mother, Monica – Ste. Monica, she is called in the Catholic Church. Augustine was a headstrong young guy; he was very gifted, very talented; and he was not a believer, and was dabbling in Eastern religions. Monica prayed for him faithfully. She was very devout; and at one point, she was speaking with another of the great Church fathers, Ambrose, who knew Augustine, and Augustine was listening to his preaching, and Ambrose told Monica: The child of so many prayers will never be lost; so, in a sense, do not worry, just keep praying, and have confidence. If we pray for his will, he will do it, and surely his will is that those whom we love should be saved.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we wish we could know in every case that the faithful of the Monicas of the world that it would result in the return to the faith of the child. We know there are no guarantees; but above all, Dave... I think Frederick Buechner, the Christian pastor and author, once said: If you look at everything Jesus ever said, or everything the New Testament ever said about prayer, it all boils down to one thing: Keep at it. Just keep praying. I remember my Great Grandmother Hoezee had a son named Marv; my great uncle Marv; and he moved back – he had lived in the Pacific Northwest for a while; had not been a believer; had walked – he had been baptized as a child – but he walked away. I think he was divorced multiple times; he drank too much; he lived kind of a wild life; moved back here when he was in his 70s, married a devout Christian woman and his whole life turned around. He became an elder in his church. I remember sitting in my great grandmother’s living room and she looked at me and my family and she said: I prayed for that boy for 50 years, that he would come back. That just shows what a little prayer will do for you. Well, I was 20 years old at the time; 50 seemed like an eternity to me; she had been praying for her son for 50 years and she referred to it as just a little prayer?! But, she kept at it, and in this case, thankfully, she lived to see her son return to the faith; but again, I think that is what the Bible says: Whether you live to see it or not, do not ever stop. Do not ever conclude that what you can see with your eyes is the whole story.

DAVE BAST

The thing is, prayer is so much more than just asking God for things. It is that. We have the parables: Knock, seek, ask; Jesus says the importunate widow who keeps after the judge to give her her justice. All of these stories about asking; but fundamentally, prayer is the way we carry out our relationship with God. It is at the heart of it. He speaks to us through his Word; we speak back to him; we share, even with sighs and groans too deep for words, Paul says; even if you do not have the right words, do not worry about it because the Holy Spirit will interpret that and share your heart. We have, in that same passage (that is from Romans 8) this incredible picture that Jesus himself is praying for us, and I think we could say praying with us as we bring before him the deepest needs of our heart; our deepest desires. Yes, you keep at it because, man, that is the life of God, and he is sharing his life with you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Reformed document, the Heidelberg Catechism calls prayer: The most important part of the gratitude we owe God. In other words, every time you pray, whether you are asking for something, thanking God for something, confessing something, God hears all of it as a thank you because it keeps the relationship with God alive.

COURTNEY JACOB

The verse that stuck out to me as I responded to this faithful listener were the words of James 5:16b: The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. I just thought that was an impactful statement.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think that is a good summary, that God always hears our prayer, and amen to that as well.

Well, thank you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and today, our producer, Courtney Jacob. We would like to know how we can continue to help you dig deeper into scripture, even as on this program we answered several questions that were sent to us; so please, visit groundworkonline.com and tell us topics or passages you would like to have us dig into next, as well as your questions.

*Correction: In the audio of this episode, host Scott Hoezee misspeaks and says the “King James Version has just had its 500th anniversary,” when he meant to say the “King James Version has just had its 400th anniversary” as the KJV celebrated its 400th anniversary in 2011.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/glad-you-asked-part-2>

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