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Doubt: The Fruit of Textual Criticism

If Textual Criticism really brought us God's words, we would expect an explosion of faith in God. What is its fruit?

Have you ever looked inside your Bible and seen those notes that say:

"The better manuscripts do not contain this,"

"The best manuscripts do not have these verses,"

"The better manuscripts say this and not that"?

That, brothers and sisters, is called Textual Criticism. I'd like to talk to you about the fruit of Textual Criticism.

Jesus talked a lot about fruit in Matthew 7:15-20. He said:

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

You can't miss it from Jesus' words, can you? Fruit is what God wants, and it's *good* fruit.

What does God call "good fruit"? If you look in Romans 1:13, you would see that conversion of sinners is a good fruit. In 7:4, it's good works. In 15:28, it's giving to missions and to the aid of brothers and sisters in Christ who need something. Those are all good fruits that God likes.

Galatians 5:22-23, of course, is another list of good fruit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

That's the fruit God's looking for. Not one place in the entire Bible is *doubt* called a fruit. Check it for yourself. And yet this is exactly what I find in textual critics, textual criticism, and in the people strongly influenced by textual critics and textual criticism.

It's strange. If all this stuff about "getting back to the word of God" were really true, there would be **fruit** of *faith*, evangelism, giving to missions —there'd be **something!** The fruit of the Spirit!

But all I find are doubters! Like Bart Ehrman. Like Kirsopp Lake. For many years Lake followed the theories of Westcott and Hort, and Von Soden. He wrote, after years of paying attention and following their rules, "In spite of the claims of Westcott and Hort and of Von Soden, we do not know the original form of the Gospels, and it is quite likely that we *never shall*."^[9]

Then another major text scholar, Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare, wrote this before he died in 1924: "...the ultimate text (meaning New Testament), if there ever was one that deserves to be so called, is *forever irrecoverable*."^[10]

Textual Criticism is not an act of faith. It is an act of doubt and leads only to despair.

When you see people who really believe Textual Criticism, do you see them as armed soul winners? or as armchair quarterbacks?

Do you see them fighting the enemy, or fighting the believers?

It is said that those who can, —do. Those who can't —teach. And those who can't do or teach, —are critics.

Brothers and sisters, there are only two options: faith or doubt.

I know so many people who've read the King James Bible and believe it, and the fruit is *faith* and acts of faith, and winning others to the faith.

Faith or doubt: it's your choice.

[9] *Family 13 (the Ferrar Group): The Text According to Mark with a Collation of Codex 28 of the Gospels* by Kirsopp Lake, Silva Tipple Lake and Silva Lake (Christophers, 1965), p. vii. He originally wrote those words in 1941. Emphasis mine.

[10] *History of New Testament Criticism* by F.C. Conybeare (NY: G.P. Putnam's Son, the Knickerbocker Press, 1910), p. 168). Emphasis mine.