

In my previous post I indicated that there are three major kinds of evidence for reconstructing the text of the New Testament: the surviving Greek manuscripts (obviously our best source of evidence), the early versions (ancient translations into such languages as Latin, Coptic, and Syriac), and the quotations of the church fathers. Moreover, I indicated that one advantage of the citations of the church fathers is that this kind of evidence can be dated and located far more easily than can the Greek manuscript evidence. But now in looking back over the post, I realize that I never indicated why that might matter.

As with all things dealing with textual criticism (which I use strictly in the technical sense: textual criticism is NOT simply the scholarly study of texts - e.g. as literary critics engage in - it is the *reconstruction* of texts, that is, the attempt to get back to the text as written by an author given manuscripts that have differences in them; textual criticism is used for every literary text of the ancient world, middle ages, and even up to modern times; it is a thriving discipline for 19th century authors for example, who wrote, obviously, by hand....), the matter is a bit complicated. But here are two factors to consider.

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