I seem to get under the skin of a lot of my fellow textual critics. Or at least a lot of them find my views somewhere between troubling and irritating. That became most clear when I published my book *Misquoting Jesus*. From what I can gather, the most common complaints about the book were about its perceived “tone.” Some scholars thought that I made the situation of our manuscripts to be worse than it really is. I, on the other hand, am not so sure about that.

What has probably struck me the most in the years since the book was published (it’s been ten years now! Very hard to believe....) is that critics almost never say that anything I claimed in the book is actually wrong. In fact, so far as I know, everything I said in the book is completely right. How many books are attacked for not saying anything wrong?

Here are the main points that I stress in the book.

- We do not have the originals for any of the books of the New Testament
- What we have are copies – thousands of copies (over 5600), in the (original) Greek language alone.
- All of these copies differ from one another, sometimes in significant ways and lots of times in insignificant ways.
- We do not know how many differences there are among our manuscripts: some scholars think there are 300,000 variant readings, others say 400,000, or even more.
- Most of these differences are immaterial, insignificant, and important for nothing more than to show us that ancient scribes could spell no better than most people can today.
- But some of the differences do matter, and matter a lot, to how a verse, a passage, or an entire book of the NT is to be interpreted.
- Scholars have wide-ranging disagreements about many of these significant differences, so much so that there are places of the NT where we will probably never know for certain what the authors originally wrote.

Is there anything to disagree with in these claims? Nothing that I know of. But some textual critics – especially conservative evangelical ones (not to name names) – took real offense at the book. My occasional sense (maybe just when I’m being cynical?) is that such scholars would prefer that people not know this basic information, that they would rather have the reading public simply trust us that we know what we’re doing and that they can rest assured we have given them the “original” text as the authors originally wrote, so that they can rely on their Bibles.

Even though *Misquoting Jesus* contains what some people see to be the most inflammatory comments I have made about textual criticism, it was not the first time that I ruffled the feathers of my colleagues. Long before that book I made comments that they (some of them) found offensive. There is one comment that I used to make that always elicited some aggravation among fellow experts, a comment in fact that some scholars (e.g., Dan Wallace) have claimed stands directly at odds with my statement that there are places where we will never know what the authors of the NT originally wrote. I think he is completely wrong about that. Completely wrong.

Here is the comment that I used to make (and in fact still make when the occasion arises):

The Rest of this Post is for Members Only. If you don’t belong yet, YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU’RE MISSING. The blog gives a lot and costs just pennies a day, all of which goes to charity.
Textual Criticism Syllabus
Did Scribes Add the Passage of the Bloody Sweat?