

The past two days I have been giving lectures at Michigan State University. It's been great. I've had a number of people ask me after my talks if it is possible to be a Christian and still hold the historical views I do. My answer — as many on the blog will know — is OF COURSE! And that has prompted me to want to repost this guest-post from my historian/Christian friend Jeff Siker, posted exactly four years ago today. Here (over the course of two posts) he explains a bit about his faith journey and how he has held on to his faith despite his knowledge of biblical criticism. I'll post part 2 tomorrow:

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Jeffrey Siker is an ordained Presbyterian minister and New Testament scholar. Jeff is senior professor of New Testament at Loyola Marymount University. He and I have been friends for over thirty years; he was two years behind me in my PhD program at Princeton Theological Seminary. I have asked him to explain why he is still a Christian, even though he knows and agrees with most of what I think, from a historical perspective, about the New Testament. I have cut his answer into two parts to make them fit the format of the blog. Part 2, where he gets most directly to the question, will be in tomorrow's post. He, and I, welcome any feedback (which, of course, can be more informed after tomorrow's post). The following are his words:

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When I first went to Princeton Theological Seminary to begin the Ph.D. program there in New Testament Studies, one of the first individuals I met in the graduate study room was Bart Ehrman. (This was back in 1983.) There were several long tables with chairs in the room, and each graduate student had managed to commandeer an end of one of the tables, marked by various piles of books and coffee cups. Bart had his own stack of books and 3 x 5 note cards as he was busy collating (collecting and comparing) the Gospel citations from the 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian Didymus the Blind (Bart's first published book). I remember asking him what it meant for a blind man to use a particular version of the Gospel text. His response was something like, "Good question!" And we've been friends ever since! He regularly whipped me in racquetball (and I mean *whipped*), and we spent many long evenings playing backgammon, smoking a cigar or two, and talking NT and theology, among other things. At the time he was working part-time pastoring a Baptist church in the Princeton area. His educational pedigree demonstrated a clear fundamentalist-conservative trajectory (Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton College, then Princeton Seminary for his M.Div. and finally his Ph.D. in text criticism with Prof. Bruce Metzger, the most important and prolific text critic of the time; and Bart was his prized student). Despite his very conservative background, he was open to all kinds of questions and issues, and he had clearly moved significantly away from his most fundamentalist days that had included the assertion of biblical inerrancy. His understanding of the Bible had developed a critical edge, which often happens to individuals with conservative theological roots.

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