

Inspiration Illustrated

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[0 : 00] And I'd like you to take your copy of the Scriptures and open up to the book of Romans, chapter 16.

We are very near the end of this book in chapter 16 this morning. And we are going to be taking a look at this morning at only three verses. Verses 21 and 22 and 23 before we close out our study of the book of Romans next week, looking at Paul's closing words, his doxology in verses 25 through 27 at the very end of the chapter.

But now we're going to look at a handful of verses, only three verses this morning, in which Paul sends his greetings to the church at Rome. And in the midst of those greetings, I believe that we can see some crucial truths, not just about this letter to the Romans, but some crucial truths that can help us in our understanding of what this book is, of what the Scriptures are, so that we can have an accurate understanding of what we ought to think about the Word of God.

And so I want us to dive in here this morning at verse 21. And as I said, just read down to verse 23. And I'd like you guys to stand as we read. Paul writes, Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you.

So do Lucius and Jason, and so Siphax, my kinsmen. I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you.

[1 : 45] Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you. Father, we know that these words are written here for our good and for our instruction.

And so though while it is tempting to run quickly through something as seemingly unimportant as a handful of greetings, I pray this morning that as we dwell here, that you would teach us and show us wonderful things from your Word and about your Word this morning.

We ask in Christ's name. Amen. You guys take a seat. I want you guys to imagine for a moment that you have a neighbor. And we're going to say that his name is Joe.

Now, I don't want you to confuse him with Joe here, alright? Joe Flynn. So I want you to picture in your head a younger man, alright? I'm just trying to protect you from being, you know, I don't want to slander you, alright?

So this Joe that we're imagining is a younger man. In his early to mid-twenties. And Joe has a reputation about town. He's known as a guy who will do just about anything to earn a dollar.

[2 : 54] He's cooked up a number of schemes over the years. He's come up with all sorts of ways, all kinds of ideas, ways that he might get a little bit of cash out of his neighbors.

And so he's, for instance, made a habit of making all sorts of audacious claims. Most recently and most frequently he claims that he has an almost supernatural ability to go out into the wilderness and discover hidden treasure.

In fact, he claims to have some stones that aid him in this and help him to discover these hidden treasures. And people actually at times buy into this. They actually pay him to go out and find these treasures for them.

He's not the most trustworthy of characters, you might say. In fact, he's the kind of guy that if you had a daughter around his age, you certainly would not want her to marry him.

In fact, when Joe actually did decide to marry a young lady that lived nearby, he asked her father and her father said, Absolutely not! So they had to run off and elope because her own father wouldn't allow her to be married to this guy who had no real job and no real prospects for any sort of future.

[4 : 02] Now suppose that one day this young man tells everyone that he has had a vision. He's had a vision. An angel has appeared to him and this angel has revealed to him that the entire church worldwide has gone astray from the truth.

But now through him the truth is being restored. In fact, this angel has given to him as a gift golden leaflets on which is written a new message from God.

A message of God, in fact, about events that took place long ago. This is not an imaginary story. This is a story of Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

And he claimed to have received the Book of Mormon from an angel named Moroni who revealed them to him on these golden leaflets or some say golden tablets.

And these new scriptures, as he would call them, were written in a language that he called Reformed Egyptian, which doesn't exist. That shouldn't surprise you.

[5 : 13] I mean, he claims to have stones that lead him to buried treasure if you'll just pay him a little bit of money up front. It shouldn't surprise you that he's made up a language entirely. It doesn't exist. You could have asked at that time and even today with nearly 200 years worth of research, there has never been any language recognized as Reformed Egyptian and fitting the description of the language and characters that he gave to people.

You might say, well, why do we only have a description? Because, of course, he's the only one who has ever allowed to see these golden leaflets. No one else could ever see them. And he himself was burdened with the task of actually translating them into English.

It's strange that the English he translated them into looked oddly like and sounded oddly like King James English, which at that time was already 200 years old and out of date. But nevertheless, that was the case.

You wouldn't buy anything that he said. You wouldn't believe anything that he told you. And you certainly wouldn't buy this idea that he has received these new scriptures that have simply been buried in the earth and now unearthed and revealed directly to him through some angel in a language that doesn't exist written about a people group that never existed in North America.

You would laugh at that. You would laugh at that. And yet there are people who think that Christians have a similar story when it comes to our scriptures.

[6 : 40] There are people who believe that Christians believe that the Bible sort of descended down to us from on high or the Bible was sort of dictated through some heavenly voice in the sky to the men who wrote the scriptures.

And yet we find that that is not at all the case. The Bible is not something that descended down to us from the clouds. The Apostle Paul did not sit as he wrote Romans and hear a voice from the sky and jot down word for word everything that he heard.

In fact, the Bible gives evidence of having been written by real people in real times to real people about real events. And there is evidence all over the Bible that it is not some fictional tale.

It's not something that someone made up one day in a back room in order to con a bunch of people. It in fact bears within itself all of the marks of real actual historicity.

As I said, real people, real places. And we see some of those real people actually mentioned right here toward the end of this very book. So for instance, take a look.

[7 : 45] I want you to see this. Paul mentions Timothy and he refers to him as my fellow worker. Now we know who Timothy is. We know Timothy because he's found in the book of Acts.

And when we read about Timothy, he sounds like a very real ordinary person who would have lived back then. Paul first encountered Timothy as he passed through the towns of Lystra and Derbe on one of his missionary journeys.

And he met Timothy there who was the son of a Jewish woman and a Greek man. And this Jewish woman happened to be a follower of Jesus Christ. And so Timothy had been raised and taught by both his mother and grandmother from the Word of God.

And he himself, by the time Paul met him, was already a follower of Jesus. And so Paul took Timothy under his wing and Timothy became, over time, Paul's sort of right-hand man.

So much so that two of the letters that we have recorded for us in the New Testament from the Apostle Paul were written directly to Timothy, giving Timothy instructions for how to lead and order and structure other churches that Paul had entrusted to Timothy.

[8 : 52] Timothy, you take care of these things. You take care of these people. So when Paul refers to him as my fellow worker, there's a lot packed into that. And it shows us not only that there were real people at that time that Paul interacted with, but it also shows us that the Apostle Paul was a real man.

He was a human being. He wasn't some supernatural person who was able to accomplish things unheard of. Yes, God did great things through the Apostle Paul. But what do we see over and over in Paul's life?

We see a realistic account of a man who had lots of helpers, lots of co-workers, not just Timothy, but other men like Silas or Titus and others along the way who came alongside the Apostle Paul and gave him help and aided him.

These are real people with real stories. Or consider some of the other people that Paul mentions here. He mentions three people, Lucius and Jason and Sosipater who he refers to as his kinsmen, indicating that they are Jewish followers of Jesus.

That's who these men are. Now, we don't know for sure who this Lucius is. Some think that it might be another spelling of Luke, but that's probably not the case because Paul is very consistent in his other writings when he mentions Luke and the spelling of his name.

[10 : 10] So here's a guy that we don't know, but we know Jason, we know Sosipater. Sosipater is introduced in Acts 20 and Jason even earlier in Acts chapter 17. Jewish followers of Jesus.

And what Paul says about them here, them being his kinsmen, Jewish believers, is confirmed in the book of Acts because Paul meets them in synagogues and they are converted because of Paul's preaching ministry to Jewish people.

So everything lines up and their stories sound very, very believable and authentic. There's nothing that stands out in Luke's account of Paul's interactions with these men that seems fantastical or strange in any sort of way.

It all seems very, very normal. Now jump down to the end. There's someone named Gaius, another person who's mentioned in Acts chapter 20. And he's referred to as, Paul says, he is host to me and to the whole church.

Now we've already said that most likely the book of Romans was written from the city of Corinth. So I want you to picture in your mind the apostle Paul is there in the city of Corinth writing this particular letter to the church at Rome.

[11 : 19] And he mentions to the church at Rome that Gaius, who is host both to me and to the whole church, indicating that it was perhaps in Gaius' home at this particular time that the church was meeting.

And we know, of course, from historians that at this point in time the vast majority of New Testament churches met in people's homes. That's just a matter of historical record.

They didn't build buildings at this time. It's going to be a couple more centuries before Christians began building their own buildings and calling them churches. That's simply not the case at this time.

The church is quite literally the assembly of God's people. That's what the word means. And they met in people's homes. Well, Paul says they met there wherever he is. We think Corinth.

They met in Gaius' home. That makes sense. Because in 1 Corinthians, Paul mentions Gaius. And Paul says that he baptized Gaius. So we're seeing all of these connections, all of these random statements that we find in Acts or Romans or 1 Corinthians, and they're all reinforcing one another.

[12 : 23] And yet they are all fairly normal and ordinary. There's nothing strange about these things. And then take a look at one more name I want you to see here. Erastus, the city treasurer.

Now there's another one after that, Quartus, but he's another, like Lucius, that we don't know anything about. But Erastus, the city treasurer. What do we know about Erastus? We really don't know much at all.

But it is very, very interesting that while he is referred to here as some sort of city official, and archaeologists have in fact uncovered at this point in time in the place where we would expect Erastus to have lived in this century, a stone, which was at one time part of a building, that has the name Erastus engraved upon it.

And it is indicated there that he was a city official. Is it the same Erastus? We can't prove it, but how many Erastuses were there in Corinth at this time that were officials in the city of Corinth?

How many? Probably not a lot. So there we have evidence of normal people who really did live at that time in these places. And I say all of this to remind us of what kind of book we have in the Bible.

[13 : 37] The Bible was written by real people in real human languages, not made up things. In fact, the New Testament was written in something known as Koine Greek, which was just the common everyday language of average people who lived all around the Greco-Roman Empire at that time.

Just normal people so that if you lived at that time and you were going to say, write a letter to your cousin, just letting them know, getting an update about what's happening in your life, you would have written it in the exact same language that Paul writes this letter in.

Or if you were going to write out a grocery list or a list of things that you needed to do, you would have written it in this particular language. So even the language that the Bible is written in, particularly the New Testament and the book of Romans, is the common everyday language of the people.

The Bible is a book that bears all the marks of having been written by real people in real places, in real human languages.

And that should not surprise us. In fact, I want you to hold your place here in Romans 16 and I want you to turn closer to the back of your New Testament to 2 Peter chapter 1.

[14 : 47] So turn further back in your Bibles to 2 Peter chapter 1. If you're using one of our Bibles that we've got scattered around here, you can just turn to page 1018 and you'll find it right there. But I want you to listen carefully to what Peter has to say about the Scriptures and how he describes them.

Verse 21, 2 Peter chapter 1. He says, no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man and we will come back to that. But men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Now we are apt to focus on the beginning and the end of this verse which we will come to in a few minutes that no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man and these men were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

But I want for just a moment your eyes to linger on the middle where it says, men spoke from God. That is significant.

This book, the Scriptures, were written by men, by real people, not imaginary people and they were not dropped down on golden leaflets from some angelic messenger.

[15 : 56] This book, as I have said, bears all the marks of being historically accurate and real and having come into the world through the writings of real people.

And that should impact the way that you read the Bible. So for instance, if you were to compare the way that the book of Romans is written, the style of Romans, the word choice of Romans, the kind of phraseology that the Apostle Paul uses, the kind of sentences that he writes, if you were to compare that, let's say with 1 John, which is written in the same language but written, of course, by someone else, you would see that there are great differences not just in the words that they choose to use but in the kinds of sentences that they put together, in the ways that they talk about things.

Because Romans is written by Paul, 1 John is written by John, and since the Bible is written by real people, it is written in such a way that you can actually see when different parts of it are written by different people with different personalities, different vocabularies, and different ways of speaking.

Just as if I wrote a letter to you and someone else in this room wrote a letter to you, even if we were writing about the same things, we would write differently. We wouldn't use the same vocabulary. We wouldn't use the same sentence structure.

We see that all over the Scriptures and especially in the letters that we have preserved for us in the New Testament. This is real. These people existed.

[17 : 26] These people wrote Scripture. And when they wrote Scripture, it wasn't as if their eyes went glassy and they suddenly began to just sort of write without looking on paper whatever it was they heard in their mind.

No. That is not how the Bible was inspired. That is not how the Bible came into existence. That is not how the Scriptures themselves came into existence.

God has given us the Scriptures and He has inspired them in such a way that they are able to be written by real people and in them we can see the personalities and the writing styles of those real people.

That should affect the way that you read the Bible. Not only in recognizing the differences between those books, but also recognizing that some writers use different words in different ways.

I'll give you a really fairly simple example. Alright? Consider for instance something that we have seen throughout the book of Romans. And that is the way that Paul uses a particular word. The flesh.

[18 : 32] He uses it several times throughout Romans. And a couple of times it refers just to a physical body the way that we might use the word flesh. But over and over many times Paul uses the word flesh not to refer to our physical bodies but to refer to our sinful nature.

And in fact if you're reading from the New International Version you'll have to look long and hard to actually find the word flesh in the book of Romans because they translate it most of the time as the sinful nature to avoid confusion.

Because that's what Paul means when he uses the word flesh. Paul uses it to reference that part of us which is born in sin that we inherit from Adam our sinful nature.

On the other hand open up the gospel of John and you begin to read in John chapter 1 and you read at the beginning that in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God this incredible statement about the divinity of Jesus.

But as you move down through John you get to verse 14 where we're told this about the word Jesus. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. Now if you assumed even for a moment that John and Paul must use the word flesh in exactly the same way then you would be assuming that John is telling us that when Jesus came into the world when he was born he was born with a sinful nature.

[19 : 57] He became a sinful nature and that is the complete opposite of what we are told throughout scripture because John uses the word flesh in the same way that we normally use it just to refer to the physical body.

And John's point is that he became a real physical fleshly human being. So there we can see a really easy clear example where the personalities and writing styles of the individual writers of scripture shows itself on the surface.

And if we are going to interpret this book correctly we need to be aware of these kinds of things. We need to know that when we say that the Bible is inspired by God we do not mean that men sat without any of their own personality entering into it and they simply recorded word for word what they heard coming down out of the sky.

That's not at all what we mean when we talk about the inspiration of the Bible. This book is a human book written by real people in real languages. It is though of course not just a human book.

It is also a divine book. It is. It is a divine book and it not only bears within itself all the marks of having been written by real people in real times in real places but it also bears within itself the marks of being the word of God itself.

[21 : 19] Go back to what we were looking at there and we'll look at now at the beginning and end of that verse in 2 Peter 1.21. Peter is very clear that though the scriptures are written by men he says that these men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

So that mysteriously in some way though these men were actually speaking though their personalities shine through in their writing styles and their vocabulary preferences shine through in their writings nevertheless everything that they wrote was exactly what God intended as the Spirit of God carried them along.

These books these writings did not come into existence by the will of man they came into existence by the will of God through the Spirit at work through real people to cause them to write what God wanted to write but not in some mechanical fashion.

Not in some way that seems crazy and unbelievable but through real and somewhat normal and somewhat ordinary means the Spirit comes in and through supernatural means causes these people to write exactly what God wants them to write without erasing their personality without erasing the importance of these people as individuals.

It really is miraculous. There's no other writing that compares. There's nothing else that has ever existed in the history of humankind that compares to this book.

[22 : 55] In fact, turn over to 2 Timothy. I want you to see Paul's understanding of the Scriptures. I want you to see what Paul thinks about the Word of God. 2 Timothy 3, verse 16.

This may be a verse with which you are familiar. Paul says, all Scripture, now underline that in your Bibles, all Scripture is breathed out by God.

All of it, Paul says, it's breathed out by God. When we say that the Bible is inspired, this is exactly what we mean.

We don't mean when we say that the Bible is inspired that Paul or Peter or John or Moses or David or any of the other writers of Scripture, we don't mean that they were inspired in the same way that we might say Shakespeare was inspired when he wrote his plays.

Or in the same way that we might say that any great work of literature is an inspired or inspirational work. That's not what we mean when we use the word inspired to describe the Bible.

[24 : 03] What we mean when we use that word is that the Bible, the Scriptures themselves were breathed out by God. That's what we mean. so that though we can attribute these writings to real people who lived at a real time, we can also say that every single word is exactly what God wanted to say because God breathed these out.

Now why do I say every single word? Why am I so specific in saying it that way? Why not say that well, in general, the Spirit sort of guided them in what to write, but you know, maybe not every single word.

Maybe there are some things in there that could be mistaken or maybe there are a few things in there that probably could have been said in a better way. Why don't we say that?

We don't say that because that's not the view of the Scriptures that Jesus Himself had. That's not how Jesus conceived of the Word of God. Hold your place one more time.

I want you to turn to one more passage with me. All the way back to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5. Because I think it's very important for us as followers of Jesus to recognize how Jesus honored and revered and treated the Scriptures themselves.

[25 : 20] Matthew, chapter 5, verse 18. Jesus is speaking more specifically of a portion of Scripture, the Torah, or the Law, but what He says here can be expanded to the rest of the Bible as well.

He says in verse 18, For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Now these words, iota and dot, they most likely refer to the smallest bits of writing in the Hebrew language.

Because as I said earlier, the New Testament was written in Koine Greek, a real language spoken by real people. The Old Testament as well was written in a real language spoken by real people. And that language is Hebrew.

There are some portions of the Old Testament, small parts, that were written in a language called Aramaic. But the vast majority of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. But Hebrew and Aramaic both share the same alphabet.

[26 : 24] And when Jesus uses these terms, He is most likely referring to the smallest strokes of ink that make up the letters of that alphabet. So the word iota, it's a Greek letter, the Greek letter I.

But Jesus is probably referring back to the Hebrew letter yod. Which if you want to try to imagine how big that letter would be in a writing or in a word or what it would look like, it's about the size and looks a whole lot like an apostrophe.

So imagine, imagine if I handed you a book and I said, there's not a single apostrophe in this book that is mistaken. Everyone ought to be there. That's essentially what Jesus is saying.

The very smallest letter, the yod, will not pass away. There is not one tiny little thing, not one letter, even the smallest of letters, that are not to be regarded and treated as the very word of God that cannot be violated and will not pass away.

They will not be. But then He adds to that what we're told in the ESV is a dot. And I think most likely this is a reference to a tiny little bit of a letter.

[27 : 32] So now we're getting even smaller than the smallest letter. Now we're getting to the smallest little point on a letter. Now for this, the best I can tell you to do is to visualize for yourself, not your own handwriting,!

Certainly not my handwriting, but say a printed text in your mind. If you were to envision a printed text, then let's just pick the letter B out of all letters. And so if you have letter B written in a printed script, most of the time on the back side of that B at the top and bottom, the line will come slightly through.

Can you picture that? Are you envisioning that in your head? Printed script on a B on the back side of the B, the very top and bottom, it might just jut out just a little bit. Nobody's going to write that in their handwriting, okay?

But that's how most typed or printed letters are. And that would be equivalent, that little speck that sticks out would be the equivalent of what Jesus here calls a dot.

The smallest little bit of a Hebrew letter. And Jesus says it will not pass away. In other words, when Jesus thinks about the Word of God, He thinks of the Word of God as inviolable and also, in all of its parts, absolutely true.

[28 : 41] Even in its tiniest, smallest parts, it is absolutely true. That's how Jesus thinks of the Bible. So that when we talk about the inspiration of the Scriptures, we mean that down to the very words themselves, everything that we find in the Scriptures is exactly what God intended to be there.

And yet, miraculously, in such a way that the evidence of it having been written by real people in real times is not erased.

It's still there. Now I want you to take that conception of inspiration breathed out by God yet written by real men. I want you to take that in your mind and now we're going to return to these verses in Romans chapter 16 and we are going to look at a couple of places here that I think can help us, can inform us, and can sharpen our understanding of what we mean when we say the Scriptures are inspired.

The first is something that might have stood out to you as we read these verses. that you might have been sort of scratching your head and thinking, what in the world? Verse 22. There's this fellow named Tertius that I didn't mention a minute ago.

It says, suddenly, I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. Wait a minute. Paul wrote this letter.

[30 : 08] Who's this guy and why is he saying that he wrote the book of Romans? Why would he make this sort of claim? What's happening here? Well, it's not complicated to be honest with you.

See, there was a common practice in the ancient world and this just gives more evidence of the New Testament and Paul's writings in particular being real documents written in a real time and real place. But in the ancient world, it was very, very common for writers to use something called an amanuensis.

It's basically a fancy word for a secretary. And their job was to write down the things that the person who employed them told them to write.

And so, what would have been happening is Paul would not have been sitting down at a desk with some sort of quill and writing down on paper. It wouldn't have actually been paper back then, but writing down the book of Romans.

No. Paul would have been dictating the book of Romans. He would have been saying it and Tertius would have been because he's a professional. He would have been meticulously writing down every word that Paul says.

[31 : 13] Now, Paul arrives near the end of his letter and he's giving these final greetings and we don't know exactly how this wording came to be, but it's not difficult to imagine how it might be.

We might see Paul coming to the end and then giving the greetings. Timothy greets you. Lucius, Jason, so sipper to greet you. And Tertius, who's writing this letter, greets you. And perhaps Paul paused and said, put that in your own voice.

Put that in your own voice. Perhaps. We don't know. But for whatever reason, the Apostle Paul was gracious enough to allow Tertius' voice to come through in this particular verse so that his secretary, his scribe, if you will, who was responsible for the actual physical writing down of the book of Romans to the church at Rome was able to write this verse and send his personal greetings to the church at Rome.

Now, this reminds us that these books again, are not dropped down from the clouds but are written by real people in a real time in a real place.

And recognizing that Paul had a secretary like this is no challenge to our understanding of inspiration. It is no challenge to our view of the Word of God if we've already recognized and understood that while the Bible is entirely divine, it is also entirely human.

[32 : 33] These sorts of things shouldn't surprise us. Maybe you're familiar with the end of the book of Galatians where there's a strange little verse at the end of the book of Galatians where Paul says in order to authenticate the book of Galatians as being really from him, he says, look with what large letters I'm writing.

All of a sudden at the end of Galatians, Paul describes to go all caps, I guess. I mean, it's just all of a sudden big, right? Why would he do that? Well, because the rest of the letter was being written down by his secretary.

We don't know who his secretary was. Maybe it was Tertius again. We don't know. But the letter's being written down by his secretary and as he gets to the end, he says, basically, you guys know how bad my handwriting is.

He may have had poor eyesight. We don't know. But for whatever reason, Paul had large handwriting and he's saying, look how big, this is definitely my handwriting that you're saying. It's much bigger than the writing of this professional Emanuentus described his job it is to write neatly and clearly everything that I say.

This is how the New Testament came into being. This is how Paul's letters came into being. Showing us that the inspiration of the Bible does not hang upon some strange, odd theory that the Bible was dictated to its writers out of the air.

[33 : 50] Not at all. God is fully capable through regular human beings of ensuring that His Word in perfection comes through real people.

He is capable of that. And when we say that the Bible is inspired, what we are saying is that these letters and Gospels, that these individual writings as they were originally written by their authors, they are completely trustworthy and true and without any sort of error.

you understand what I'm saying? When we talk about, when we throw around words like inspiration or when we use this other catch word, inerrancy, which is simply a fancy way of saying the Bible has no errors in it.

It never messes up. It never makes a mistake. Whether it's addressing historical issues or theological issues or issues of how the world operates that impact our understanding of science, whatever the Bible speaks to, it is never wrong.

It is never, ever in error. But when we say that, we are making reference to what Paul spoke and dictated out loud to Tertius.

[35 : 05] We are not making reference to, for instance, the English translations that we hold in our hands. I preach from the English Standard Version. I just find it to be a good version to preach from.

But obviously, Paul did not write the book of Romans in the language of the English Standard Version. And some of you might be using the New International Version or the King James Version or the New King James Version or the New American Standard Version.

We have all of these different translations. Why do we have all of these different translations? Because going from one language to another is not always an easy task. And when you do that, you make mistakes here and there.

You make judgment calls when you're translating from one language into another. And one scholar may disagree with another scholar about a judgment call that one makes. And that results in multiple translations.

These scholars also approach the Bible with different philosophies of translation. Some say, I want to get almost word for word as best I can. I want to get the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into English almost word for word.

[36 : 09] But the more you do that, the more you press in that direction, the sillier the English sounds. It almost sounds sometimes like Yoda has been drinking a little bit too much and he put things down.

I mean, if you go too word for word, it just gets very confusing. The word order is all strange. But then if you go in the other direction, the other spectrum, some have the philosophy of saying, we don't need to worry about the exact words, we just need to get the general idea of the phrases and sentences.

But the more that you do that, the more you distance yourself from what was actually inspired and what is actually inerrant. And so we have all these varied translations and we need to be very clear.

When we say that the Scriptures are inspired, when we say the Scriptures are inerrant, when we use these words, we're not talking about our English translations. We are talking about the originals as they were given and written by the apostles and the prophets.

That's what we mean. Now, I bring that issue up because it bears heavily upon something that I'm guessing most of you have not even noticed yet.

[37 : 15] Now, you've noticed it perhaps if you're reading this morning from the King James Version or the New King James Version. In fact, as Kay earlier was typing in the verses to put them on the screen for you, she said, I was sitting on the front just sort of looking through things while you guys are in Sunday school and she's looking and she says, wait a minute, Chris, where's verse 24?

Where is it? Look down in your Bibles. Unless you're reading the King James or New King James, we jump from verse 23 to 25. Can you guys see that? You're looking there.

What's happening here? Did the people who put the verses in here, did they forget how to count? What's going on here? Of course, the verse numbers and the chapter numbers are not inspired. They weren't there originally.

They came hundreds of years later. The verse references even almost a couple of thousand years later. They've only been in here for a few centuries. But when they added these, when they put these in for ease of reference so we can find things, did they just forget how to count suddenly?

Well, no, they didn't forget how to count because when they inserted these verses, they did them around the time that the King James version was actually written, which is why in the King James version of the Bible you will actually find a verse 24.

[38 : 34] Now, what does verse 24 say? Well, if you don't have the King James, I'll tell you what it says. It says almost the same thing as the end of verse 20. We have, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and you need to add one more word, all.

Be with you all or be with all of you. And that's what verse 24 says in the King James version and the New King James version. Roughly, I'm putting it in ESV English. But that's roughly what it says.

Why is that missing from the ESV or the NIV or any other modern translation? This is an important thing for us to understand as we think about what we believe about the Bible and what we mean when we say the Bible is inspired or the Bible is inerrant without error.

What we mean is that what was originally written and revealed to the apostles and prophets is exactly what is inerrant and inspired. But of course, over the years, those things have to be copied and passed around to the various churches, right?

They have to be copied and at this time, if you're going to make a copy until the invention of the printing press, it has to all be done by hand. One scribe looking at a manuscript and copying it onto a fresh manuscript.

[39 : 49] And then another scribe taking that and making another copy. Sometimes multiple copies being made at one time by multiple scribes looking at the same copy. Sometimes one copy of a copy of a copy being passed on to a church here and they want their own copy so they make their own copy and then they pass it off to somebody else.

But it's got to be done by hand. For centuries it was done by hand. And when anything is done by hand like that, apart from the inspiration of God and these copyists were not inspired, only the original prophets and apostles, apart from the inspiration of God, you can't avoid error because you're just a human being and if God doesn't superintend it directly, you're going to make mistakes.

And so occasionally words were changed. Occasionally words were left out. Occasionally words were added in. Occasionally words were flipped around. And so how do we arrive and how do we know what the originals said?

Because we don't possess any of the originals. We don't have the original copy that Paul dictated to Tertius. We don't have it. It's gone. It doesn't exist. It doesn't exist because the materials that they used back then were very difficult to preserve.

And the only really truly old, old manuscripts that we have from close to the time of the New Testament, they were all found down in the desert near Egypt because in a dry climate things last.

[41 : 10] But everywhere else it doesn't last well at all. So we don't have any of the originals. What we have are copies of copies of copies. And not all of those copies agree with one another in the exact wording.

So how do we know what the original wording was? How can we say? How can we know? It's not difficult. There is an area of expertise in study called textual criticism.

You might have heard that term before. There are scholars who have devoted their lives and their careers to examining all of these various manuscripts. And as they compare and contrast the manuscripts, they're able to determine what the originals said.

And there are a lot of principles and rules that guide them in making those decisions. For instance, you want to give priority to a manuscript that was written previously, right? If you have a manuscript that is 400 years older than another one, well, it's probably more accurate than the newer one because there's probably a lot of copies in between those.

It's much closer to the original. So you would say the older manuscript, generally speaking, it's probably more accurate. And then you want to look and say, well, if I see a particular word occurring in manuscripts from this part of the world and this part of the world and this part of the world and all the manuscripts that have a different word all came from this area, probably this area.

[42 : 38] At some point in time, some scribe made a slight change and it stuck there. But I'm going to go with what I see spread broadly. So these scholars look at how old manuscripts are. They look at how spread out a particular reading of a text is.

They do all of these things so that they can determine what the original said. And these text-critical scholars, almost uniformly, almost all of them, whether they're Christian scholars or non-Christian scholars, and they're both doing this work on the New Testament, they say that with at least 98, 99% accuracy, we know with certainty down to the very word what belongs in the New Testament.

We're not left to wonder and doubt. We can look and we can use common sense and we can use these various principles of textual criticism. And we know. We know with great accuracy what the original said.

And what about those places where we're not sure? Well, most of the time it consists of something like this. Half the manuscripts say Jesus Christ and the others half say Christ Jesus. Not a big difference, right?

Not something that's going to affect our doctrine of the Trinity or our understanding of justification or anything like that. These are minor little differences where they go, ah, not really sure about some of those things.

[43 : 54] So coming back to Romans chapter 16, let's apply those observations to the missing verse. Why is it missing? Where has it gone? And should it be in there? Well, the answer is it should not be in there because this particular verse is only found in much later manuscripts.

It's not found in the earliest manuscripts and it's not found in a broad distribution of those... I mean, it's not... It's found... The verse is not found in a broad distribution of those manuscripts early on.

What you find is that it's missing in the best manuscripts and it's missing from manuscripts all over the place. But when you have the later manuscripts, it's in those.

Well, the King James Version, the Greek that lies behind the King James Version, was based on only a handful of very late manuscripts.

They didn't have full access to all of these early manuscripts that we now have access to. Some of them were hidden away in monasteries and you would have to travel all over Europe to gather even a fraction of what we're able to have access to today.

[45 : 02] Others hadn't yet been discovered and so when the King James Version was being translated, the Greek that the New Testament was being translated was a Greek based upon only a handful of manuscripts, all of which were very late.

And those manuscripts tend to contain an additional verse right after verse 23. Where did it come from? Why did it make its way into those? Well, because when you're reading, Paul moves pretty abruptly from greetings to, boom, all of a sudden a closing word.

So at some point in time, some scribe grabbed the end of verse 20 and tacked it after verse 23 and created a smooth transition into verse 25.

And then, when they came to put the numbers on the verses, they marked that out with a separate verse number. It's not complicated. It's not difficult. It's easy to ascertain.

It's easy to see. This is one of those instances where we know with certainty that something was added much later on and there's no scholar who believes that verse 24 was written by the Apostle Paul or dictated by the Apostle Paul to Tertius.

[46 : 16] It doesn't belong there. Does it impact our theology? No. It's already there at the end of verse 20. Like I said, these differences and these differences among manuscripts, they're not going to change our theology whichever way we go, but we also need to recognize that we know with a high degree of certainty that that didn't belong in there.

We know, even on something as trivial as the repetition of a little greeting like this, we know whether or not it belongs in there. We have every reason to be confident that we know what the originals said.

And so when we affirm that the original Scripture, the originals, are inspired and they are there without error, we can know that that applies to a very specific text that we have access to.

It's not lost to time. God has indeed preserved His Word through the centuries. Maybe not in the way that you and I would do it. If you and I were going to do it, we would want to remove all ambiguity and we would want to do something supernatural and make sure that every scribe that wrote, wrote word for word exactly the same thing.

And yet, that's not how God chose to preserve the New Testament. But He has indeed preserved it for us. There are more manuscripts available for the New Testament by multiples of hundreds than there are of any other ancient document.

[47 : 50] And what you need to understand is that you have every reason to be fully confident in the Word of God. Even when you're reading through a passage like this and you see a strange statement about a man named Tertius that you've never heard of having written Romans or when you see that there's a verse missing from your ESV or your NIV, you need to know with confidence that those things do not in any way affect what the Scriptures are and what they say.

Now you might be thinking to yourself, that's fine and well. I'm glad to know that we have access to the original texts reconstructed by scholars.

I'm glad to know that and I'm glad to know that I can affirm that it's inspired by God and that it's inerrant and all of those things. Fine, that's nice to affirm. But what ultimate significance does any of this have?

It has ultimate significance because if you cannot have confidence in the Word of God, you cannot have confidence in the Gospel that saves you. I say that for a couple of reasons.

Turn back to the beginning of Romans. I want you to see this clearly and then we'll close. Paul says here in Romans 1, verse 1, he describes himself as a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle.

[49 : 12] Now, notice this. Set apart for the Gospel of God. Verse 2, he's going to elaborate on this word Gospel. which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

The Gospel was promised beforehand in the Holy Scriptures. In other words, it is the Scriptures themselves that tell us of the Gospel.

They bring the good news to us. Without the Scriptures, we don't have access to the good news. So important is that that Paul says it at the very beginning of this letter. A letter in which he has set out, he has stated that it is his purpose to describe and define for the Roman church exactly what Gospel he preaches.

And Paul considers it of grave importance to say at the very beginning, before he goes into chapter after chapter of description and defense of the Gospel, he wants them to know that the Gospel is something that was proclaimed, which was promised in the Scriptures.

That's where it's to be found, Paul says. And then he says almost the exact same thing at the very end of this book. Look down to chapter 16 past the verses we're looking at this morning.

[50 : 26] In verse 25, he refers to my Gospel. Again, back to... I'm summarizing, I'm closing out here for you. I want you to know everything I've said about my Gospel is true.

And that's how he describes it. My Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. According to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed through the prophetic writings.

How has the Gospel been disclosed? That is, made known to us through the Scriptures, through the prophetic writings. It matters what you believe about the Bible and its inspiration and its inerrancy because it impacts whether or not we have a Gospel at all and whether or not that Gospel message is reliable.

and I bear witness to you, I promise you, it is a reliable message. The good news as news that can be trusted because the vehicle that conveys it to us can be trusted all the way down to the smallest, smallest detail.

It is trustworthy and it is true. And this Gospel that proclaims forgiveness of sins through the death of Jesus Christ and eternal life through His resurrection. This Gospel that holds out righteousness to all those who trust in Jesus.

[51 : 43] This Gospel finds its support and foundation in the Word of God. And you have every reason, every reason to fully trust the Word of God.

Let's pray.