

**BREAKING BARRIERS TO INTIMACY WITH GOD:**  
**Overcoming Doubts**  
A Study of Matthew 6:13b

Characteristic of Completeness: Authority of the Bible

Big Idea: The Bible is worthy of our trust.

Related Scriptures: Psalm 19:7-11; 119:105; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12;  
2 Peter 1:16-21

Introduction:

1. Today we are going to consider the final clause of the Lord's Prayer. It comes in the last half of ► Matthew 6:13, which the *New King James Version* renders this way:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Matthew 6:13b “. . . For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

This is called a doxology. A doxology is a kind of hymn or liturgy that expresses praise to God.<sup>1</sup>

- a. If you grew up reciting the Lord's Prayer in a protestant church, this doxology at the end of it is perhaps familiar to you.
- b. On the other hand, if you grew up reciting the Lord's Prayer in a Catholic church, this may come as a bit of a surprise. Catholic Bibles<sup>2</sup> do not include this last clause of Verse 13, and thus, it is normally not recited in Catholic churches.<sup>3</sup>
- c. In fact, quite a few modern translations of the Bible do *not* include the last clause in Verse 13 as part of the text. Those that do are in the minority.

- (1) Among the ► modern translations *including* the doxology are the *King James Version*, the *New King James Version*, and the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*.

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<sup>1</sup> ISBE

<sup>2</sup> Such as the *Douay-Rheims Bible*, the *New American Bible*, and the *New Jerusalem Bible*, (These are Catholic Bibles according to Harrop, *History of the NT in Plain Language*, 144)

<sup>3</sup> Pritchard, *And When You Pray*, 213-214. There are some exceptions. I was at a Catholic funeral service at which the Lord's Prayer was recited. We neared the end, saying, “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Then, there was a pregnant pause during which I sensed that some people were wondering whether the doxology would be added, and, finally, it was. But, I understand that this is not the Catholic norm.

- (2) Among those ► *excluding* the text are the *New International Version*, the *New American Standard Bible*, *The English Standard Version*, *The New Revised Standard Version*, and the *New Living Translation*.

Most of these present the doxology in footnotes or in brackets, with a brief explanation. The explanation from the *New American Standard Bible* is typical. ► It says, “This clause not found in early mss.” ► “Mss” is an abbreviation for “manuscripts.” This means there’s a question as to whether Jesus really said these words. Uh oh.

2. Some of you may be thinking, “You mean to tell me that the last part of the Lord’s Prayer that I’ve been reciting for years is not what Jesus said?” Maybe not.

Well then how can we really trust the Bible when some parts are questionable? How can we rely on the Bible when various English translations can’t seem to agree on what Jesus really said?

This can be very confusing and even discouraging. I want to reduce the confusion and discouragement by offering a plain-language explanation.

Our ► Characteristic of Completeness in Christ for the week is the Authority of the Bible.

- I. First, let’s consider the question: ► What’s wrong with the doxology? Why do some translations include it and others don’t? Did Jesus really say it?

In order to provide some answers, I’ll need to provide a brief explanation of how we got our Bible and, in particular, how we got the New Testament portion of our Bible.

- A. The New Testament was originally written and subsequently copied on perishable materials.
1. The most common writing material was papyrus. It was made from reeds that grew in shallow lakes. The reeds were stripped and cut into narrow slices, then beaten and pressed together to form sheets. It is believed that the New Testament was originally written on papyrus (Denison, 29; Harrop, 51).
  2. Besides papyrus, sometimes parchment was used later to make copies in which animal skins were shaved and scraped to create a more durable writing surface. But, parchment was more expensive and less common than papyrus.
  3. Pens were fashioned from pointed reeds cut to a flat chisel shape at one end for writing. The ink was usually a mixture of charcoal, gum, and water.

- B. Because the original writings were on perishable material, they have been lost; papyrus does not survive for very long. The originals deteriorated long ago. All we have left today are copies called manuscripts. And, these are probably copies of copies.

The fact that we have no originals of the Bible can be unsettling to some. I know it was to me when I first found out. But this needn't be alarming inasmuch as an absence of originals is the norm for virtually all ancient literature.

We don't have the originals. But, we have many manuscripts or copies. And, the fact is, some of these manuscripts have discrepancies; they don't all match perfectly in every detail. These discrepancies are called textual variants. The doxology in Matthew 6:13 is one such textual variant. Some manuscripts contain the doxology; others don't.

- C. How did these discrepancies creep into the manuscripts? Well, there were no copy machines or printers in the early church. They couldn't take the originals to Kinkos. All copies of the New Testament books and passages had to be made by hand. The people who made such copies are called scribes or copyists.
1. You can imagine how some scribal errors may have been made unintentionally in the copying process. The New Testament was originally written in Greek and there are over 138,000 words in the New Testament (Bibleworks). Some mistakes like misspellings and omissions are bound to be made when copying by hand.
  2. Nevertheless, our textual variant in Matthew 6:13 is rather long, as variants go. We are left with two questions.
    - a. Was the doxology in the original, and did some scribe somewhere along the line accidentally leave out the whole thing? It's possible.
    - b. Or, was the doxology not in the original, and did some scribe somewhere along the line insert the whole thing? It's possible.

- D. How do we determine whether or not the doxology was in the original? How do we know if Jesus really said it?

1. These are the kinds of questions that a field of study known as textual criticism seeks to answer. In a nutshell, textual criticism considers things like the age, origin, author, and number of manuscripts we have; and things like the nature of and likely explanations for existing errors to determine what the originals really contained where variants occur.

Textual criticism is an evolving blend of science and art. And, as you might imagine, not everyone agrees on every point.

2. Nevertheless, it seems that the prevailing opinion among textual critics today is that the doxology at the end of the Lord's Prayer is *not* original. Not everyone agrees on this, but most of the sources I consulted believe that the doxology does not belong. In fact, one of the most widely respected committees on textual criticism (Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*) is of the opinion that it is "virtually certain" (an "A" rating) that the doxology is not in the original. Let me give you just a sampling of reasons:

- a. The footnote provided in the New American Standard Bible gives us a clue about one of the reasons. Remember ► it says, "This clause not found in early mss." The clue is the word, ► "early." There is a line of thinking that says that earlier manuscripts are better because they are closer in time to the originals. And, the fact is, the earliest manuscripts we have do not contain the doxology.
- b. Also, the later manuscripts that do have the doxology ► vary among them as to which specific parts of the doxology are and are not included. This makes textual critics suspicious about the authenticity of the doxology.
- c. Also, the Bible has a separate account of the Lord's Prayer recorded in Luke 11:2-4. The words of Jesus in Luke were probably spoken on a different occasion, and there is no question at all that the Prayer in Luke ► does *not* include the doxology. This is not proof positive that the doxology should be omitted in Matthew, but it's a supporting piece of evidence.
- d. So, why would a scribe want to insert a doxology that wasn't there in the first place? Some scholars have speculated, and there is some evidence to suggest, that the early church recited the Lord's Prayer at its ► worship services, and added the doxology as a suitable ending. As such, the additional doxology crept into some of the later manuscripts. (By the way, this is evidence that worship leaders were troublemakers even in the early church ☺.)

E. In preaching circles, particularly among guys like me who are preaching through the Lord's Prayer, ► this situation is known as a bummer. Instead of ending the Lord's Prayer with a dramatic crescendo, we end it with a textual variant. But, it is what it is. And, I think that ignoring the problem might be worse than admitting it.

II. Some of you may be thinking, "Bob, why bring this up at the risk of destroying the faith of our children?" I bring it up because I don't want you or your children to first hear about this from some skeptic who brings it up for the sole purpose of destroying your faith. I want to take you right back into the boiler room of Christianity to show you how we got the New Testament, imperfections and all.

Trite, superficial answers to the question of the Bible's reliability will not do. I believe we need to deal with our concerns and questions and doubts openly and honestly. There is nothing to hide. God is perfectly able to defend Himself and His Word; He doesn't need our help in trying to make things look better than they really are.

This leads us to a second, bigger question that flows from the first: ► Is the New Testament reliable? Honestly, if the doxology of the Lord's Prayer doesn't belong, how much of the rest of the New Testament is up for grabs? And, if all we have are copies of copies, how can we be confident that what we have today is the Word of God as it was originally written?

Three criteria are used to evaluate the reliability of manuscripts for any piece of ancient literature, not just the Bible. Let's consider each one.

- A. First, the reliability of ancient manuscripts is judged by the ► number of manuscripts that exist. All other things being equal, more is better. Bible scholar, Dr. Bruce Metzger explains the value of a larger number of manuscripts. He says, ". . . the more often you have copies that agree with each other, especially if they emerge from different geographical areas, the more you can cross-check them to figure out what the original document was like (Strobel, 59)."

Let me give you a simple example. Let's say you are a student and you know you're going to miss some school. So, you ask three of your friends to copy word for word the homework assignment that your teacher always puts up on the board. The ► teacher writes, "Read Chapter 5" on the board. Here's what the boys copy down:

- Joe correctly writes, "Read Chapter 5."
- Billy writes, "Reed Chapter 5," misspelling the word, "read."
- Carl writes, "Chapter 5," omitting the word, "read" altogether.

Even though every copy of the teacher's original assignment is slightly different, you can be reasonably sure that the original assignment was to read Chapter 5 because you can cross-check the copies. As long as the copies aren't wildly different, the more copies you have the more confidence you have in the substance of the original assignment, even if some of the copies don't match up exactly.

► Well, how does the New Testament stack up to other ancient literature with respect to the number of manuscripts that exist? You be the judge.

1. Consider the epic poem called ► *The Iliad*, which is traditionally ascribed to the Greek poet, Homer, and was revered as a kind of bible among the ancient Greeks (Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 60).

As with most other ancient documents, we don't have the originals for *The Iliad*, only copies. Apart from the Bible, *The Iliad* has more existing

manuscripts than any other piece of ancient literature in all of antiquity. No piece of ancient literature, apart from the Bible, has more manuscript support than *The Iliad*. We now have ► 643 ancient manuscripts of *The Iliad*. This is an enormous number. As such, modern scholars have absolutely no reluctance to treat the existing text of *The Iliad* as true to the original (Strobel, 61).

In contrast, we have only ► 7 copies of the writings of Plato, and even these are considered to reliably represent Plato's original work (McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 33-35).

2. By comparison, how many ancient manuscripts of ► the New Testament do we have? Currently, we have ► 24,970! This includes ► 5,686 manuscripts in the original Greek, over 10,000 translated into Latin, and the remainder translated into various other languages (McDowell, 34). To say that the New Testament is number one among ancient literary works in term of the quantity of manuscripts is an understatement. The New Testament has 39 times more manuscripts than the runner-up!

Let me quote Bible scholar, Dr. Norman Geisler with respect to the importance of having this many New Testament manuscripts:

*The importance of the sheer number of manuscript copies cannot be overstated. As with other documents of ancient literature, there are no known . . . [currently existing] original manuscripts of the Bible. Fortunately, however, the abundance of manuscript copies makes it possible to reconstruct the original with virtually complete accuracy* (McDowell, quoting Geisler, 35).

- B. The reliability of ancient manuscripts is judged not only by the number of manuscripts, but also by ► the date of the manuscripts relative to the original. The closer in time the manuscripts are to the original, the more reliable the manuscripts are considered to be.

This makes sense. The greater the time gap is between the original and the oldest or earliest available copy, the greater the chance that errors have been introduced.

Let's go back to the ► example I gave about your friends copying the homework assignment that was originally written by the teacher on the board in your absence.

Remember, Joe writes, "Read Chapter 5."

Billy writes, "Reed Chapter 5," misspelling the word, "read."

Carl writes, "Chapter 5," omitting the word, "read" altogether.

Let's say our three scribes, Joe, Billy, and Carl first copied the assignment onto ► their hands and they don't relay the assignment to you right away. After school, they get into

some trouble for which they are forbidden to call or e-mail friends for a week. You're absent from school all that week, and as the days pass, your friends realize that the assignment is wearing off their hands and they need to get it to you. So, they each copy the assignment from their hands ► onto a piece of paper. That would be a second-generation copy. Here's what ends up on the papers:

Joe's writes, ► "Read Chapter 5." No change from the first copy.

Billy writes, ► "Reed Ch. 5," perpetuating the misspelling of the word, "read," and now abbreviating the word, "Chapter."

Carl writes the same thing he did the first time, ► "Chapter 5," again omitting the word, "read" altogether.

Then, these guys give the papers to some classmates at school with instructions to copy the assignment ► from the papers to an e-mail message to be sent to you. That would be a third-generation copy. So, you receive three, third-generation copies of the assignment via e-mail several days after the assignment is given.

In Joe's message, some letters are transposed in the word, "Chapter," so, it comes through, ► "Read Chpater 5."

Billy's comes through intact; the misspelling and the abbreviation are retained: ► "Reed Ch. 5."

Carl's handwriting is not the best. His e-mailer mistakes the 5 for a 50. And, the message comes across all lower-case: ► "chapter 50."

You see, the more time passes, the more copy generations there are likely to be. And, the more copy generations there are, the more likely changes are to creep in, making it more difficult to reconstruct the original.

► How does the New Testament stack up to other ancient literature with respect to date of the manuscripts we have relative to the originals? You be the judge.

1. Once again, ► *The Iliad* is the non-biblical standard of comparison. The earliest existing copy of *The Iliad* was written about ► 400 years after the original. Four hundred years may sound like a long time, but this is a very short time gap when judging the reliability of ancient manuscripts. The time gap for *The Iliad* is considered by experts to be very good.
2. The put this is some perspective, in high school, I think I remember reading some stuff written by a guy named ► Sophocles, an ancient poet and playwright. Seems like I had to read *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*. The time gap for the manuscripts of the existing plays of Sophocles is ► 1,400 years.

British scholar, Frederic Kenyon, considered to be an expert in textual criticism, says this of the plays of Sophocles: "We believe that we have in all essentials an accurate text of the seven extant plays of Sophocles; yet the

earliest substantial manuscript upon which it is based was written more than 1400 years after the poet's death (quoted by McDowell, 35)."

3. So, the texts we have for *The Iliad* and the plays of Sophocles are considered quite reliable with time gaps of 400 and 1,400 years, respectively.

By comparison, what's the corresponding time gap for the ► New Testament? Because the various parts of the New Testament were written at different times, the gap ranges from ► 50 to 225 years. This is an extraordinarily small gap.

A team of scholars headed by Dr. David Dockery made this related comment in 1994: "It must be said that the amount of time between the original composition and the next surviving manuscript is far less for the New Testament than for any other work in Greek literature (quoted by McDowell, 35)."

- C. Finally, the reliability of ancient manuscripts is also judged ► by the consistency of the manuscripts that exist.

This makes sense. The more that the copies agree with one another, the more reliably we can reconstruct the original. A number of factors are considered in determining the consistency of available manuscripts.

1. First of all, consistency is related to ► the number of variant readings there are among the existing manuscripts.

How many variant readings are there in the New Testament? Some estimate that there are about 200,000 of them in the Greek manuscripts alone (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 532). When I first read that number, I was deflated. I thought, "What? You've got to be kidding. That's astronomical."

But it's not so astronomical if you think about it. Let's ► return to our example of the homework assignment to see just how quickly variants can add up.

To this point we have traced the transmission of the homework assignment from the perspective of an omniscient, third-person observer. But, you wouldn't have the luxury of this much information as the absentee recipient of the homework assignment. You ► wouldn't have seen the original writing of the teacher. In fact, you ► wouldn't have the first- and second-generation copies. All you would have are the three resulting e-mail messages.

Just how many textual variants are represented in the e-mail copies from Joe, Billy, and Carl?

First, you'd have to do our best to reconstruct the original message based on the copies you have. Let's say you conclude that the original message was two words and a number: ► "Read Chapter 5." That's your best guess as to what the text is. Based on this text, let's count up the variants.

There are 2 textual variants from the word, "Read." It's ► misspelled once. It's ► omitted once.

There are another three textual variants from the word, "Chapter." It's ► misspelled once due to transposed letters. It's ► abbreviated once. And, ► once it's spelled with a lower-case "c."

There is another textual variant from the number. One says, ► "50." The others say, "5."

You see, textual variants can add up fast. From a text of just 3 words (2 words plus 1 number) derived from just 3 available copies we get 6 textual variants.

► Let's put this in perspective. We can get some idea of the potential or possibility for variants in these homework assignment manuscripts if we simply ► multiply the number of words in the text ► (3) by the number of copies of the text ► (3). So, in our homework example, the total possible number of variants ► equals 9. We actually have ► 6 variants out of 9 possibilities, which doesn't seem very good. But, after all, Joe, Billy, and Carl and their e-mail friends are boys, not professional scribes.

Let's ► compare that with the New Testament. It has been estimated that there are ► 200,000 textual variants in the New Testament. Remember, the Greek text for the New Testament contains over ► 138,000 words. And, we have ► 5,686 available Greek manuscripts. Multiply 138,000 words by 5,686 manuscripts and you get ► 784,668,000. The 200,000 actual variants does not look so bad now in light of the enormous number of possibilities.

Now, I want to be quick to point out that this ► exaggerates the potential for variants because most of the manuscripts we have do not contain the entire New Testament. Nevertheless, I hope this gives you a very general sense of just how many opportunities for variants there really are given the very large number of words and manuscripts that are being considered. So, 200,000 textual variants does not look so big in its proper context.

2. Moreover, 200,000 textual variants does not look so big when you consider the ► nature of the textual variants. The nature of the variants is a second factor to consider when evaluating the consistency of manuscripts.

The vast majority of the 200,000 variants are trivial, insignificant, grammatical things—things like obvious misspellings, or transpositions of words, which in Greek do not affect the meaning. Moreover, if there is one misspelling based on one letter of one word in one verse in 2,000 manuscripts, it's counted as 2,000 variants (Geisler, 532).

- a. Let's return to our ► homework assignment example to see that textual variants can be insignificant. In some cases, they are easily explained and give us no cause for concern about what the original message really was.

For example, the ► misspelling of the word, "read" is not that bothersome. It is ► reasonable to assume Billy made a mistake. (He never was a good speller.)

Also, the absence of the word, ► "read" in Carl's message is not all that bothersome either. It seems clear from the other two copies and from what you know about your teacher that Chapter 5 is something to be read, ► not burned or torn out (as appealing as those options might be for other reasons ☺).

And, you're probably pretty sure that the original assignment involves a chapter, even though the word, "chapter" is ► misspelled, abbreviated, and not capitalized. It's still ► reasonable to conclude that we're talking about a chapter here.

The most problematic textual variant involves the one assignment copy from Carl that says, ► "chapter 50." But even that might not be too big of a problem if you know that your textbook has only 12 chapters. You would ► probably assume that a zero got tacked on accidentally.

So, even though Joe, Billy, and Carl messed things up pretty good, the message still got through.

- b. ► A number of experts in textual criticism have set about the task of identifying those New Testament textual variants that are truly significant—variants that cast real doubt about what was written in the original. These experts set out to answer the question: ► How accurate is the New Testament when you consider the significant variants?

Let me report two independent results from two of the best-known sources in the field of biblical textual criticism.

- (1) Scholars, ► Westcott and Hort concluded that only 1 out of 60 textual variants is significant. This translates to a New Testament text that is ► 98.3% accurate.
- (2) More recently, scholar, ► Dr. Bruce Metzger came to essentially the same conclusion, although he believes there are slightly fewer significant variants. Metzger was born in 1914. He holds A.B. and D.D. degrees from Lebanon Valley College, a Th.B. and Th.M. from Princeton Theological Seminary, an A.M. and a Ph.D. from Princeton University, and honorary doctorates from five other colleges and universities. (He hopes to further his education some day ☺.) He has authored or edited 50 books, mostly on the text of the New Testament to which he has dedicated his career (Strobel, 57-58; Geisler, 737)

Metzger contends that the New Testament text is ► 99.5% accurate (Geisler, 532-533). This is phenomenally accurate.

Based on this consistency of the New Testament manuscripts, and based on the extraordinary number and dates of these manuscripts as previously discussed, the New Testament stands alone as the most remarkably reliable work of ancient literature ever. The Bible is worthy of our trust. In fact, that's the ► Big Idea of my sermon: the Bible is worthy of our trust. We can depend on it. It is a firm foundation for our faith.

At 84 years of age looking back over his many years of research, Dr. Metzger had ► this to say about his research:

*. . . it has increased the basis of my personal faith to see the firmness with which these materials have come down to us, with a multiplicity of copies, some of which are very, very ancient. . . . ► I've asked questions all my life, I've dug into the text. I've studied this thoroughly, and today I know with confidence that my trust in Jesus has been well placed. . . . Very well placed (Strobel, 71).*

- c. ► Well, all this looks pretty good, but a knit-picker like me wants to know how many doctrines of the Christian faith are affected by the

textual variants. How many Christian beliefs are made doubtful by the variants? The overwhelming consensus of opinion is that the answer is zero, zilch, none. The textual variants cast no doubt whatsoever on anything we are to believe or do, according to the Bible (Shaff in Geisler, 532, Metzger in Strobel, 65).

The dubious ► doxology in the Lord's Prayer is a good example.

<sup>NKJ</sup> Matthew 6:13b “. . . For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

It may be in doubt that this was ever in the original writing, but it certainly doesn't contradict anything in the Bible. In fact, it provides a pretty good closing summary of the Lord's Prayer. I mentioned that the early church probably added it for their worship services. I suspect they did so because it's a truthful expression of worship and praise.

This is indeed God's kingdom. He *is* the source of our power. And, He *is* the only One deserving of glory forever.

III. Therefore, in spite of the dubious doxology, the Bible is worthy of our trust.

Well, so what? What does that mean for you and me? A few things occur to me.

- A. First, as individuals, we need to return to the Bible as our only fully reliable authority for what to believe and how to live. Are you reading it? Are you applying it to your life?
- B. Second, as a church family, we need to return to the Bible to refocus on what our mission is as a church. What is our mission in this community? What is our assignment from God? More on this in the weeks to come.

For now, we're simply going to observe communion because the Bible tells us we should. And we're going to build communion around the Lord's Prayer because it's in the Bible, too.

- 1. As the servers distribute the bread, representing Christ's body given for us on the cross, I invite you to pray the first part of the Lord's Prayer—the part that says,

► <sup>NKJ</sup> Matthew 6:9 “. . . Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven.”

Prayerfully reflect on what this really means and examine yourselves. Is God your Father? Are you close? Are you hallowing His name, building His kingdom, doing His will?

After you've all been served, then we'll recite the prayer and eat the bread together.

2. As the servers distribute the juice, representing Christ's blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins, I invite you to pray the next part of the Lord's Prayer—the part that says,

▶ <sup>NKJ</sup> Matthew 6:11 “Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.”

Prayerfully reflect on what this really means and examine yourselves. Do you have a daily-bread mindset? Do you need to seek God's forgiveness? Or do *you* need to forgive someone? Are you struggling with temptation?

After you've all been served, then we'll recite the prayer and drink the cup together.

3. Let's stand together and recite the doxology that comes at the end of the Lord's Prayer.

▶ <sup>NKJ</sup> Matthew 6:13 “. . . For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”