

The Earliest Evidence for the Text of the New Testament

Though we think of the New Testament as a text that has been copied by hand for 14 centuries, this does not mean that we have to assume that the wording is unreliable. The first argument why this is not a logical conclusion is that of chronology. There is very little time between the writing of the originals and our first complete evidence. In this talk we will have a look at this evidence and see what we can learn from this.

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- I. The Luxury of Early Evidence
 - A. Glimpses into the earliest transmission history
 - B. Limited geographical area of origin
 - C. Dating matters
 - D. Distinction between the date of a 'work' and the date of the earliest physical witness
 - E. Why old evidence is a luxury but not a necessity
- II. Exercise: One of the Oldest Papyrus Fragments of the NT
 - A. Dating disputed
 - B. What to learn from fragments
 - C. Textual variants are early
- III. What Early Evidence Do We Have?
- IV. How to Use the Existence of Old Evidence Apologetically
 - A. Avoid 'mine is older than yours' school yard contests
 - B. Emphasize the positive contribution to knowledge
 - C. There are no 'dark ages' in the transmission history of the NT