

The seemingly minor matter of punctuation in biblical texts can have profound theological implications. Since the original biblical manuscripts contained minimal or no punctuation, modern translators must make interpretive decisions about where to place commas, periods, and quotation marks. These choices are not merely grammatical; they can fundamentally alter the meaning of passages and impact core doctrinal positions. This session examines several key biblical passages where punctuation choices significantly affect theological interpretation. From the timing of paradise in Luke 23:43 to the deity of Christ in Romans 9:5, we'll explore how these small marks shape our understanding of major Christian doctrines. These cases demonstrate that punctuation is not a neutral technical matter but often reflects and reinforces particular theological perspectives. As we navigate these examples, we'll see how different translations handle these punctuation challenges, how their choices align with certain theological traditions, and what this means for careful biblical interpretation. This analysis serves as a reminder that even the smallest elements of biblical text require thoughtful consideration.

GALATIANS 2:14–15 – QUOTATION BOUNDARY AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

- The Interpretive Question: Where does the quotation end?
 - KJV doesn't use quotations
 - NASB/NIV: Quote is vv. 14-21
 - ESV: v. 14
- The Issue:
 - If it extends to v. 15, Paul is not only calling out Peter's hypocrisy, but teaching him (and those present) the doctrine of justification by faith in that moment.

LUKE 23:43 – COMMA PLACEMENT AND THE STATE OF THE DEAD

- The Interpretive Question: Where should the comma be?
 - All major translations place it before "today"
 - The New World Translation places it **AFTER** "today."
- The Issue:
 - **Traditional (KJV):**
 - Promise made **today** about immediate presence in paradise.
 - New World Translation
 - "I say unto thee today..."—timing of fulfillment unspecified.
- Doctrinal Implications
 - **Traditional:** Immediate conscious afterlife (Abraham's bosom).
 - **Alternative:** Supports soul sleep or delayed reward.

JOHN 3:10–21 – RED LETTER MISLABELING

Note: this is both red letter mislabeling and a quotation issue.

- The Interpretive Question:
 - Red-letter Bibles extend the quotation by virtue of red-letters
 - All versions begin the quotation at verse 10 (KJV implied)
 - Most end the quotation at verse 21 (NASB, ESV, NLT, CSB)
 - NIV ends at verse 15.
- The Issue:
 - If John 3:16 was quoted by Jesus at the beginning of His ministry, then the dispensation of the grace of God had already begun, which is in conflict with Pauline testimony.
- Doctrinal Implications:

- The integrity of Paul's testimony is at stake.

LUKE 2:14 – ONE GREEK LETTER DIFFERENCE

- The Interpretive Issue: who gets the good will?
 1. **Textus Receptus (KJV):** εὐδοκία (nominative) – general goodwill.
 2. **Critical Text:** εὐδοκίας (genitive) – "to men of good will" or "those favored."
- The issue:
 - Does the Messiah come to bring "Peace" and "good will" (as per KJV)?
 - Or does Messiah bring conditional peace to the favored ones?
- The doctrinal implication:
 - One inherently requires Calvinism, the other doesn't

EPHESIANS 4:12 - CLERGY AND LAITY

- The Interpretive Question:
 - Are the "five-fold ministries" given for three tasks or two?
- The Issue:
 - The KJV has three roles: the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, the edifying of the body.
 - All other translations have two roles: Perfecting saints and edifying the body.
- The Doctrinal Implication:
 - Is there a clergy/laity distinction of roles?

EPHESIANS 1:4–5 - IN LOVE

- The Interpretive Question:
 - Where does "in love" belong?
- The Issue:
 - KJV: it modifies "holy and blameless"
 - NASB, ESV, NIV put a period after "blameless" and make "in love" to modify God's predestination of the elect unto adoption.
- The Doctrinal Implication:
 - The shift creates a subtle nuance that shifts focus to a favorable view of predestination.

ROMANS 9:5 - IS CHRIST GOD?

- The Interpretive Question:
 - A comma, a period, or nothing?
 - KJV: Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.
 - Modern Translations:
 - NIV: "Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."
 - New World Translation: "To them the forefathers belong, and from them the Christ descended according to the flesh. God, who is over all, be praised forever. Amen."
- The Issue:
 - Comma placement implies or demands that Messiah is God.
 - A period implies or demands that He is not God.
- The Doctrinal Implication:
 - Because the grammar does not include punctuation, this is not the best passage from which to argue the Trinity.