Another tool that is both helpful and necessary for The Toolbox for the Body of Christ is some basic insight on textual criticism.

Textual criticism is defined as the study of the copies of any documents where the original (the autograph) is unknown or nonexistent. The primary goal is to determine the exact wording of the original. Original text is the form of the text when it left the author’s hands (also known as the Ausgangstext or autograph text).

Some might ask - Why do we need this tool? It is because of Satan. As Jesus says in the Gospels, Satan is the father of lies. Satan, through the serpent, in Genesis 3:4-5 accused God’s Word of being untrue, this with the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden. They were the human race and everyone born of them, to the present time and into the future, are condemned. Death and judgment for sin is all there is - eternal separation and punishment. Death in Genesis means separation. The spirit in a member of mankind is eternal and will, unless rescued from eternal death (separation), be judged and punished while separated from God, his creator, for eternity. Physical death is a separation of the soul and spirit from the body. Men live on earth in a body which is made of earth and is referred to as a tent in 2Corinthians 5. Satan deceived Eve and when Adam took the fruit and ate it in disobedience to the words of God his creator and gave birth to sin, sin entered the world. He was separated spiritually (became unrighteous in God’s sight) immediately and separated from his body (tent or dwelling) hundreds of years later (see Genesis for Adam’s years and Romans 5 for sin and death entering our race).

God’s plan is constantly explained as God carries it out through the ages. It will ultimately be fulfilled. While God’s words go out from Him to man, whether it is when there are no nations until the tower of Babel, whether it is when there are nations until the Christ returns after Daniel’s 70th week of years or whether it is from Israel’s creation to the return of the Christ to rule the world for 1,000 years, Satan calls God a liar. Jesus, in the Gospels, calls Satan the father of lies (see John 8:44). Satan is, today, calling the Word of God a lie by saying that our Greek manuscripts are thoroughly corrupted and we cannot know what the original documents of the Greek New Testament really said. These claims defy the overwhelming riches of manuscripts in not only Greek, but in Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Georgian, etc. There are well over 25,000 manuscripts in the combined languages (and that is a conservative number). We have manuscripts that go back to the 2nd century. These are copies. The scholarship of the textual criticism discipline agrees that the scribes always added to what they would copy and by all accounts never deleted any text so that we have the words of the originals. We have to decide what they are and this discipline has a methodology of making those choices. The more manuscripts we have the more comparisons we can make in determining the original words. If ninety manuscripts from as early as the 2nd century to 3rd century say the same thing in a verse and one manuscript from the 4th century has one word that is different, we have every reason to believe the earlier, overwhelming evidence of the word found in the ninety manuscripts (this example is just to help one see the point – we have no certain word in mind).

In January 2016, the number of Greek manuscripts was 5,856. There are some manuscripts still to be translated. Some manuscripts are only fragments but the average manuscript is 450 - 500 pages.

The Bible claims authorship by God. Is the Bible thoroughly corrupt? If our Bible translations, which come from ancient manuscripts, are totally corrupt as atheists believe, then the whole plan of God is clearly affected and we cannot possibly know the truth about God and His will or if there is a God in the first place. Some basic textual criticism will demonstrate that these ungodly individuals are steeped in
The Greek New Testament is the main focus in textual criticism for the church. Greek New Testament scholars agree that no cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith is affected by the 400,000 - 500,000 variants found in the Greek manuscript traditions. The truth is there is no cardinal doctrine from Genesis to Revelation, God’s plan, affected by the enormous amount of variants. If we had only one manuscript, there would be no variants. If we had two manuscripts, there would be variants. The two closest manuscripts have 6 - 10 variants per chapter in the New Testament. At face, without knowledge of the facts of textual criticism, it is easy to understand that the claims of corruption of the manuscripts could easily shake or shatter the faith of many believers, turn the unsaved away from hearing the gospel and harden those who have heard the gospel but have yet to act by believing in Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

The following list includes some basic facts of textual criticism:

1. As already stated, it is estimated that there are 400,000 - 500,000 textual variants among the Greek New Testament manuscripts.

2. There are 138,162 words in the Greek New Testament most translators today use from these manuscripts.

3. 99.6 percent approximate variants are not meaningful or viable. They do not change the meaning in any meaningful way and do not have the pedigree to go back to the original autographs. There are four types of variants:

   A. not meaningful but viable
   B. meaningful but not viable
   C. neither meaningful nor viable
   D. both meaningful and viable

   Textual criticism is only concerned with this fourth type in their goal to go back to the original autographs. Dr. Daniel Wallace, a Greek scholar, says in a lecture in 2016 that only 1/5 of 1 percent of variants in the Greek New Testament are meaningful and viable (see You Tube video Spring Cooley Lecture – Dr. Daniel Wallace – Part 1 and 2)

4. The more manuscripts we have the more variants we will have, 75 percent of which are simply nonsense and spelling errors. An example of nonsense: onion instead of union. These variants are immediately recognized, just as when we read a newspaper today where we have any number of misspellings or typos that stand out to us. We read and simply chuckle and move on. Anyone who reads newspapers often even expects these errors before they begin to read the next day’s copy.

5. Word order variants - Jesus Christ instead of Christ Jesus.

6. Similar endings - A copyist saw a sentence, looked away to write and looked again and saw the same sentence ending but didn’t realize he skipped the line. He was actually copying from a sentence which had a similar ending.

Note - This is not exactly the same but the following example will give one an idea what the text being copied would have looked like until the 9th century - all caps with no punctuation, no verse numbers or breaks, no chapter breaks. This example is with English words so that one using this tool will understand
how easy it would have been for a person copying a manuscript to make an error, quite unintentionally if
 copying letter for letter. Greek has accents over some letters which can be very difficult to see. There are
 also lines through such as the letter O (example Θ) which in papyrus could be difficult to distinguish because
 papyrus was made from pressed and dried leaves which had lines or veins running through them. Beginning
 in the 4th century other materials, such as parchment and vellum – which was a higher quality of parchment,
 were used to write on. Parchment is made of animal skins (especially young animals).

7. Piety - Out of reverence sometimes a copyist would add, for example, the words Lord and Christ
to the name Jesus. The manuscript being copied said Jesus and the new copy now says Lord Jesus Christ in
the same verse. This changes nothing essentially because all of the doctrines teaching that Jesus is Lord
and/or Christ are contained in many other verses throughout the earlier manuscripts. The shorter readings
of verses are usually in the older manuscripts. Greek scholars of the New Testament want to know what
the authors of the original text actually said and sometimes they simply said Jesus.

8. Sometimes a copy would have a word noted in the margin, maybe the previous copyist missed it
when copying or put it there as a variant he corrected. The new copy now ends up containing the word
because the copyist thought it was put there, having been missed.

9. Harmonization - An example of this would be as follows: Ephesians 1:2 Grace to you and peace
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:2 ....Grace to you and peace from God our
Father. A later scribe would add “and the Lord Jesus Christ” to Colossians 1:2 in order to harmonize the
statement, perhaps because it was a phrase the scribes were used to quoting, making it say the same thing.
The early manuscripts only contained the shorter reading but now the later manuscripts contain the longer
reading.

10. Lighting, eyesight, etc. - Centuries ago there were no reading glasses or light bulbs. Men had to
 copy by candlelight or daylight. They had a limited amount of years for being able to copy before their sight
would fail them. To make matters worse, before the 4th century, papyrus was used to copy on and this
could be difficult to copy with good eyesight. As already stated, papyrus was made from pressed papyrus
leaves which had lines throughout them. It could be very difficult to distinguish, for example, the letter O
from the letter Θ which would mean something altogether different. Whether it was papyrus or other
materials used to write on, scribes worked under primitive conditions by today’s standards.

These are just some of the types of variants and/or causes of variants found in the vast majority of
the 400,000 - 500,000 estimated to be in the Greek manuscripts. We are not expert scholars in this
discipline of Greek and Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. We have to investigate this discipline
just as anyone else would. We will provide, however, one such expert scholar who is one of the most
prominent in our present time. He will discuss these and other variants as well as the transmission of the
text.

Dr. Daniel Wallace is an expert we would recommend everyone to find on You Tube and search for
the video called Daniel Wallace The Basics of New Testament Textual Criticism. Dr. Wallace gives a clear explanation of basic textual criticism including all this tool has mentioned and more, such as the internal and external evidence explanation, including examples of variant passages.

Dr. Daniel Wallace is also the founder of The Center for the Study of the New Testament Manuscripts or CSNTM. Their goal is to digitize every Greek manuscript in the world, some 2.5 million pages. Along the way they have discovered many new manuscripts and on their website, they will make all of their discoveries and digitized work available. We have not researched their website fully as of the present time. We are primarily concerned with textual criticism of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament for this Toolbox for the Body of Christ.

Another prominent Greek New Testament scholar and church historian is Dr. James White. Before we mention more on James White, we must make something very clear. Dr. White is what is termed Calvinist. For anyone who is not familiar with this term, it means they believe what John Calvin taught in the 16th century right after the reformation early that century. Calvinists are sometimes called Reformed Baptists, as Dr. White is. Calvinism became known for the acrostic TULIP or the 5 points of Calvinism. We point this out because we may be accused of being Calvinists by recommending one of Dr. White’s books. We are members of the Body of Christ and we follow no sect. We are saved by grace through faith as Scripture clearly says for obtaining salvation. The message of repentance today is “God commands all people everywhere to repent” Acts 17:30. Dr. White is a textual criticism expert and has a superb book called The King James Only Controversy. By addressing this controversy with textual criticism, Dr. White dispels the King James Only sect’s claims of thorough corruption of God’s word by modern translations. This sect is a movement which absolutely ignores the facts of textual variants in their venerated translation first published in 1611. Most people in this movement do not even have a 1611 King James translation. They have a 1769 Blayney revision. The letter written by the 1611 translators, which was in the front of the translation, disagrees with the movement in every point. Every single claim King James Onlyists have against the so-called modern translations could be said about the 1611 King James translation and the 1611 translators would agree.

Something everyone listening to Dr. Daniel Wallace or Dr. James White can be assured of, at least by the writers of these tools for the Toolbox for the Body of Christ, is that they do not try to incorporate their beliefs except that they know that the members of the Body of Christ are saved by grace through faith, as Scriptures say clearly. Dr. White does debate other believers concerning his beliefs in Calvinism. He is a superb and thorough Greek manuscript scholar because even while he is giving all of this clear refutation of the King James Only belief in his book, he remains focused on textual criticism, proving that we have in the modern text or translations a much clearer text of some doctrines than the King James translation (such as the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ). He refutes their claims that the modern translations have taken God out the Bible. Dr. White gives a great deal of explanation concerning the types of materials written on, types of writing itself, reasons for variants and transmission of texts through the centuries. He explains about the printed manuscripts used by the translators of the 1611 King James translation and what is contained in their letter to the readers which today’s King James translation leaves out.

Dr. White brings his expertise of church history into the mix as well. He also lectures about his book and one who is interested can find other videos to that effect. We only recommend his videos on textual criticism.

This tool is only to bring attention to textual criticism for bringing understanding about our modern translations and reliability in them. Not all modern translations are good translations as some are very liberal. We can recommend the NIV, NASB, ESV and NRSV, just to name a few.