

Sunday, October 11, 2015—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Term 1 Lesson 3—Originals Onlyism: A Position of No Practical Consequence

Introduction

- I would like to begin this morning by just making a general statement about our progression through the content of this class. I am trying to present the information in what I believe to be the most logical progression possible. That being said, with a topic this large it is not possible to say everything one might like at the outset. If I were to address certain topics prematurely before having given you the background or prerequisite information first, you would not understand my reasoning. In other words, I am going to ask your patience that, as the course develops, all of your questions will be answered in due time.
- That being said, this morning we are going to address an issue that I originally planned on tackling a bit later in the class. However, it has come up a couple different times already and is related to the topic of inspiration so I decided to cover it, at least in part, in this lesson.
- The topic relates to what I am calling “Originals Onlyism”, or the belief that only the original autographs of the Biblical writings are inspired and inerrant.
- Last week we learned that the “Bible Issue” is not just a King James versus modern version debate but that not all modern versions say the same thing. Neither is this just a question of translation philosophy and methodology, i.e., dynamic versus formal equivalence. There are substantive differences in meaning between modern versions. Textual scholars cannot even agree among themselves on what verses should be in the text much less how each verse should read.

Originals Onlyism

- For the last 130 years or so, Fundamental and Evangelical leaders have taught that “the real Bible” is not a book anyone today can hold in their hands. Much ink has been spilt defending the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible while “the Bible” they are defending never actually existed in one place at one time in world history.
- The Bible they are defending is one whose text is made up of an unavailable collection of original writings that comprise a book they call “The Original Bible.”
- Dr. Randall Price, Professor and Executive Director of the Center for Judaic Studies at Liberty University summarized the “Original Bible” concept in his book [*Searching for the Original Bible*](#). Dr. Price states:
 - “*Autograph* is the accepted term for the original edition of a particular work, written or dictated by the author. It is the *earliest* copy, from which the *apographs* (all later copies) are ultimately descended. . . **Although neither the Hebrew nor the Greek original manuscripts ever existed in a form resembling our present Bible, and in some cases**

they were edited by others before assuming the form we know today, their collective existence as original manuscripts constitutes the *autographa*, or the “Original Bible.” (Price, 33-34)

- Despite Price’s own admission that no such document ever existed, virtually all Fundamental and Evangelical leaders claim that this unavailable collection of writings ought to be the final authority for Christian belief and practice. Christian scholars boldly utter proclamations such as “I believe the Bible is the inspired and inerrant word of God!” and “The book is our only authority.” Yet they are admittedly speaking about a Bible that they are still searching for. They teach that the only “scripture” that was inspired and without error is this “Original Bible.” They say that the words we have today are inspired and inerrant only so far as they match the wording of the “Original Bible.” Yet they remain unsure as to the exact wording of the “Original Bible.” (McElroy, 4)
- Moreover, these scholars teach that no book in existence today contains all of God’s words and only God’s words. Worse yet, they believe all Bibles today contain errors and/or have readings that may not be “original.” Yet as we saw last week, they cannot even agree on what verses and/or readings are authentic and representative of the “Original Bible.”
- Who is making these claims? For starters, the following Christian leaders and theologians recommend Dr. Randall Price’s book *Searching for the Original Bible* (quoted from above):
 - Kenneth L. Barker, ThM, PhD—General Editor of the NIV Study Bible
 - Dr. Wayne House—Distinguished Research Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Faith Evangelical Seminar in Tacoma, WA
 - Walter C. Kaiser Jr.—President Emeritus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Hamilton, MA
 - Colman M. Mockler—Distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Hamilton, MA
 - Dr. Charles C. Ryrie—former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and author of the *Ryrie Study Bible*.
- Dr. Ryrie is also the author of the introductory systematic theology book *Basic Theology*. In the section on the Bible, Ryrie takes up a discussion of how the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy apply to the original autographs alone. Notice how Ryrie struggles to defend these important doctrines when they are applied to the “originals” only:
 - “The second excuse for diluting the importance of inerrancy is that since we do not possess any original manuscripts of the Bible, and since inerrancy is related to those originals only, the doctrine of inerrancy is only a theoretical one and therefore

nonessential. **We do not possess any of the original manuscripts of the bible, and the doctrine of inerrancy, like inspiration, is predicated only on the original manuscripts, not on any of the copies.** The two premises in the statement above are correct, but those particular premises do not prove at all that inerrancy is a nonessential doctrine.

Obviously, **inerrancy can be asserted only in relation to the original manuscripts because only they came directly from God under inspiration.** The very first copy of a letter of Paul, for instance, was in reality only a copy, and not the original that Paul himself wrote or dictated. **Both inspiration and inerrancy are predicated only on the originals.**" (Ryrie, 80)

- In Volume One of his *Systematic Theology*, Dr. Norman Geisler follows suit by stating:
 - "The inspiration of Scripture is the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit who, through the different personalities and literary styles of the chosen human authors, **invested the very words of the original books of Holy Scripture, alone and in their entirety, as the very Word of God without error in all that they teach** (including history and science) and is thereby the infallible rule and final authority for the faith and practice of all believers." (Geisler, 498)
- In *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Paul Enns offers the following definition of inerrancy:
 - "Inerrancy means that **when all the facts are known, the Scripture in their original autographs and properly interpreted** will be shown to be wholly true in everything they teach, whether that teaching has to do with doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, or other disciplines or knowledge." (Enns, 167)
- Lastly, the popular *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* edited by Walter A. Elwell records the following definition for inerrancy (the entry is written by Paul D. Feinberg):
 - "Inerrancy is the view that **when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs** and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences.

A number of points in this definition deserve discussion. **Inerrancy is not presently demonstrable.** Human knowledge is limited in two ways. First, because of our finitude and sinfulness, human beings misinterpret the data that exists. For instance, wrong conclusions can be drawn from inscriptions or texts. Second, we do not possess all the data that comes to bear on the Bible. Some of that data may be lost forever, or they may be awaiting discovery by archeologists. By claiming inerrancy will be shown to be true after all the facts are known, one recognizes this. The defender of inerrancy argues only that there will be no conflict in the end.

Further, inerrancy applies equally to all parts of the Bible as originally written. This means that no present manuscript or copy of scripture, no matter how accurate, can be called inerrant.” (Elwell, 156-157)

- This entry by Paul D. Feinberg is truly puzzling. According to this definition it is totally pointless to affirmatively argue for inerrancy since all of the information is not known. This so called definition proves nothing. All Mr. Feinberg has done is leave the doors open for modern textual critics such as Bart D. Ehrman, author of *Misquoting Jesus*, and his troop to attack the veracity of God’s written word.
- In October, 1978 a group of 300 scholars, pastors, and laymen came together in Chicago, IL for [The International Conference on Biblical Inerrancy](#) (ICBI). Here is sampling of what their document said regarding the doctrines inspiration and inerrancy:
 - Article VI—*WE AFFIRM* that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very **words of the original**, were given by divine inspiration.
 - Article X—*WE AFFIRM* that **inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture**, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. **We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.**
 - Article X—*WE DENY* that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected **by the absence of the autographs**. We further deny that **this absence** renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant. (Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 494-502)
- There you have it. According to leading Evangelical scholars including James Boice, Norman L. Geisler, John Gerstner, Carl F. H. Henry, Kenneth Kantzer, Harold Lindsell, John Warwick Montgomery, Roger Nicole, J. I. Packer, Robert Preus, Earl Radmacher, Francis Schaeffer, R. C. Sproul, and John Wenham:
 - 1) inspiration applies only to the autographic text of Scripture,
 - 2) copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent they faithfully represent the original, and
 - 3) they admit that the autographs are “absent.”
- So how do they really know what they claim to know when their standard for judging, by their own admission, is a document that does not exist? This is a doctrine of no practical consequence.

Inspiration Without Preservation Is Meaningless

- In 1980, Normal Geisler edited a book called *Inerrancy*. This book contained fourteen scholarly essays that had been edited from the transcripts of lectures presented at the ICBI in 1978. One of the essays, written by Greg L. Bahnsen, is titled “The Inerrancy of the Autographa.” We will have more to say about Bahnsen’s article at a future date when we discuss the doctrine of inerrancy in greater depth. For the now, please note that all of these quotations come from the same essay.
 - *No Originals No Scripture*—“We can believe our copies of Scripture and be saved without having the autographic codex, for the Bible itself indicates that copies can faithfully reflect the original text and therefore function authoritatively. Second, **the paramount features and qualities of Scripture—such as inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy—are uniformly identified with God’s own original word as found in the autographic text, which alone can be identified and esteemed as God’s own word to man.**” (Geisler, 169-170)
 - *The Logical Implication*—“There is circulating at present a rather serious misunderstanding of the evangelical restriction of inerrancy (or inspiration, infallibility) to the autographic text and the implications of that restriction. DeKoster claims that there are only two options: **either the Bible on our pulpits is the inspired Word of God, or it is the uninspired words of man. Because inspiration and inerrancy are restricted to the autographa (which are lost, and therefore not found in pulpits), then our Bibles, it is argued, must be the uninspired words of man and not the vitally needed word of God.** Others have misconstrued an epistemological argument for biblical inerrancy and hold that, if the Bible contains even one mistake, it cannot be believed true at any point; we cannot then rely on any part of it, and God cannot use it to communicate authoritatively to us. **From this mistaken point critics go on to say that the evangelical restriction of inerrancy to the autographs means that, because of errors in all present versions, our Bible today cannot be trusted at all, cannot communicate God’s word to us, and cannot be the inspired word of God. If our present Bibles, with their errors, are not inspired, then we are left with nothing (since the autographa are lost).**” (Geisler, 172)
 - *Mistaken Bibles Are Still the Word of God*—“It needs to be reiterated quite unambiguously that evangelical restriction of inerrancy to the autographa 1) is a restriction to the autographic text, thereby guarding the uniqueness of God’s verbal message and 2) **does not imply that present Bibles, because they are not fully inerrant, fail to be the Word of God. . . So also my American Standard Version of the Bible contains mistaken or disputed words with respect to the autographic text of Scripture (how would he actually know this), but it is still the very Word of God, inspired and inerrant—to the degree that it reflects the original work of God (because of the objective, universally accepted, and outstanding degree of**

correlation in the light of textual criticism) is a qualification that is very seldom in need of being stated.” (Geisler, 173)

- *No Promise of Preservation*—“God has not promised in His Word that the Scriptures would receive perfect transmission, and thus we have no ground to claim it a priori. Moreover, the inspired Word of God in the Scriptures has a uniqueness that must be guarded from distortion. Consequently, we cannot be theologically blind to the significance of transmissional errors, nor can we theologically assume the absence of such errors. We are therefore theologically required to restrict inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy to the autographa. . . Scripture nowhere gives us grounds to maintain that its transmission and translation would be kept without effort by God. **There is no scriptural warrant for holding that God will perform the perpetual miracle of preserving His written Word from all errors in its being transcribed from one copy to another.** Since the Bible does not claim that every copier, translator, typesetter, and printer will share the infallibility of the original document, Christians should not make such a claim either. The doctrine is not supported by Scripture, and Protestants are committed to the methodical principle of sola Scriptura.” (Geisler, 175-176)

- *Theological Double-Talk: Providential Bible Copying*—“. . . the preservation of the text of Scripture is part of the transmission of the knowledge of God, it is reasonable to expect that God will provide for it lest the aims of His revealing Himself to man be frustrated. The providence of God superintended matters so that copies of Scripture do not become so corrupt as to become unintelligible for God’s original purposes in giving it or so corrupt as to create a major falsification of His message’s text. . . Faith in the consistency of God—His faithfulness to His own intention to make men wise unto salvation—guarantees the inference that He never permits Scripture to become so corrupted that it can no longer fulfill that end adequately. We can conclude theologically that, for all practical purposes, the text of Scripture is always sufficiently accurate to not lead us astray. If we presuppose a sovereign God, observes Van Til, it is no longer a matter of great worry that the transmission of Scripture is not all altogether accurate; God’s providence provides for the essential accuracy of the Bible’s copying. . .our copies virtually supply us with the autographic text. All the ridicule that is heaped on evangelicals about the “lost autographa” is simply vain, for we do not regard their text as lost at all! . . . The doctrine of original inerrancy, then, does not deprive believers today of the Word of God in an adequate form for all the purposes of God’s revelation to His people. Presupposing the providence of God in the preservation of the biblical text, and noting the outstanding result of the textual criticism of Scriptures, we can have full assurance that we possess the Word of God necessary for our salvation and Christian walk. As a criticism of this evangelical doctrine, suggestions that the autographic text has been forever lost are groundless and futile. The Bibles in our hands are trustworthy renditions of God’s original message, adequate for all intents and purposes as copies and conveyors of God’s authoritative word.” (Geisler, 185-189)

- To say there is confusion in Bahnsen’s essay quoted above would be an understatement to say the least.
- Perhaps sensing the inconsistency of Christian academia’s position, Geisler hedges as to the reliability of the available copies. In Volume One of his Systematic Theology, Dr. Geisler seeks to debunk ten of the most common objections to the doctrine of Inerrancy. In the section, “The Objection That Inerrancy Is Based on Non-Existent Originals,” Geisler offers the following counterpoint:

- “Some object to inerrancy because it affirms that only the original text is inerrant (there being admitted errors in the copies), and the originals are not extant. Hence, all the doctrine of inerrancy provides is a non-existent authority; supposedly, this isn’t any different than having no Bible at all.

This allegation is unfounded. First of all, it is not true that we do not possess the original text. We do possess it in **well preserved copies**; it is the original manuscripts we do not have. We do have an accurate copy of the original text represented in these manuscripts; the nearly 5,700 New Testament manuscripts we possess contain all or nearly all of the original text, and we can reconstruct the original text with over 99 percent accuracy. . .

In brief, the Bible in our hands is the infallible and inerrant Word of God insofar as it has been copied accurately. And it has been copied so accurately as to assure us that nothing in the essential message has been lost.” (Geisler, 503)

- Geisler’s double speak is compounded in the next section where he tackles “The Objection That Inerrancy is Unnecessary”:
- “The answers to the previous objections lead to another: If errant copies of the original text are sufficient, then why did God have to inspire errorless originals? If a scratched record can convey the music of its master, then an errant Bible can convey to us the truth of the Master.

The response is simple. The reason the original text cannot err is that it was breathed out by God, and God cannot err. The copies, while demonstrated to have been **providently preserved from substantial error**, are not breathed out by God. Hence there can be errors in the copies.” (Geisler, 503-504)

- Notice that Geisler mentions the issue of providential preservation, yet he does not define it or elaborate upon it in any way. Is Dr. Geisler really saying that God is incapable of accurately preserving that which He inspired?
- All of the confusion we observed in our last lesson regarding the reconstruction of the Biblical text stems from an improper understanding of the twin doctrines of inspiration and preservation.

- Systematic Theology books are filled with information about inspiration and inerrancy but none of them contain any exposition of the doctrine of Preservation. In preparation for these studies I searched the Systematic Theology books by the following Christian authors looking for information on the doctrine of preservation.
 - Norman L. Geisler—*Systematic Theology, Volume I*
 - Lewis Sherry Chaffer—*Systematic Theology*
 - Charles C. Ryrie—*Basic Theology*
 - Paul Enns—*Moody Handbook of Theology*
 - Wayne Grudem—*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*
 - Millard J. Erickson—*Christian Theology*
 - Alister McGrath—*Christian Theology: An Introduction*
 - Charles F. Baker—*A Dispensational Theology*

- Why did former evangelical Bart D. Ehrman (graduate of Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College) become an agnostic? It was largely due to his lingering doubts over the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. In *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, Ehrman gives his reasons for opposing the historicity of both the original text and the transmission of the text:
 - “. . . the reality is that we don’t have the originals—so saying they were inspired doesn’t help much, unless I can reconstruct the originals. Moreover, the vast majority of Christians for the entire history of the church have not had access to the originals, making their inspiration a moot point. . . I came to realize that it would have been no more difficult for God to preserve the words of scripture than it would have been for Him to inspire them in the first place. If He wanted His people to have His words, surely He would have given them to them (and possibly even given them the words in a language they would understand, rather than Greek and Hebrew). The fact that we don’t have the words surely must show, I reasoned, that He did not preserve them for us. And if He didn’t perform that miracle, there seems to be no reason to think that He performed the earlier miracle of inspiring those words.” (Ehrman, 10-11)

- Ehrman’s honesty regarding the implications of his evangelical training led him to agnosticism.

- By limiting inerrancy to the originals and failing to acknowledge the doctrine of preservation, Evangelical scholars neglect to protect the doctrine of inspiration. Dr. Samuel C. Gipp, discusses how inspiration without preservation renders inspiration incomplete. Dr. Gipp demonstrates this reality by asking and answering a couple of questions. “Why did God inspire His word perfectly?

Obviously the answer comes back, So that man could have every word of God, pure, complete, trustworthy, and without error.” (Gipp, 18)

- If God went to the trouble to perfectly inspire His word only to allow errors and mistakes to creep into the text, it would be inconsistent with His nature and character. Gipp demonstrates the foolishness of limiting inspiration and inerrancy only to the originals when he asks:
 - “Could God, who overcame time (about 1,700 years transpired from the writing of the oldest Old Testament book and closing of the New Testament in 90 A.D.) and man’s human nature to write the Bible perfectly in the first place, do the same thing to preserve it?” (Gipp, 18)
- The obvious answer to this question is “yes”, since God can do one, He is perfectly capable of doing the other. In fact, just as the Bible internally claims to have been given by inspiration of God it also says that God intends to preserve the very words that God breathed. However, one does not learn about preservation in the evangelical systematic theology books because the topic has been totally overlooked.
- Just as the Bible claims to be inspired it also records God’s promise to preserve that which He inspired.
 - Psalm 12:6-7—The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times. 7) Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, **thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.**
 - Psalm 33:11—The counsel of the Lord **standeth for ever**, the thoughts of his **heart to all generations.**
 - Psalm 119:152—Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou **hast founded them for ever.**
 - Psalm 119: 89—**Forever**, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.
 - Isaiah 30:8—Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, **that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever.**
 - Matthew 5:18—For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, **till all be fulfilled.**
- Believers are thus forced into an interesting predicament. One can either believe these verses or not. As we have already established, none of the original autographs remain, yet God promises that his words will remain throughout all eternity. Therefore, God did not use the original manuscripts as the vehicle through which preservation would take place.

- So then, where does this eternal preservation take place if not in the original autographs? The believing Bible student will let the Word of God answer this question as well. Consider II Timothy 3:15:
 - And that from a child thou hast known the **holy scriptures** which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
- Paul, writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit, tells Timothy that from the time of his childhood he knew the Holy Scriptures. Did Timothy's family possess the original manuscripts for every book of the Bible written at that time? No, they had copies. Notice that Paul calls the copies Timothy's family possessed Scripture. In other words, the copies in their possession were just as authoritative as the original manuscripts.
- It is God's design to preserve His word through a multiplicity of accurate, reliable copies that are just as authoritative as the original. During his earthly ministry, Jesus Christ expressed the same attitude as Paul in regard to the copies that were available to Him. Please consider Matthew 22:29-31:
 - Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. 30) For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. 31) But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying. . .
- Christ rebukes the Sadducees because they did not know the Scriptures. Does this mean they did not possess the original manuscripts? Certainly not, it means, as verse 31 states, they did not know the Scriptures because they had not read the copies they had in their possession.
- If God has not preserved His words as He said that He would (Psalms 12:6-7), then He has done two things He has never done before. First, He has wasted His own time in perfectly inspiring them in the first place. Second, God did not do that which He promised He would which would make Him a liar. Dr. Gipp summarizes the believing viewpoint regarding the connection between inspiration, inerrancy, and preservation when he writes, "it is always to be remembered that the Bible is a spiritual book which God exerted supernatural force to conceive, and it is reasonable to assume that He could exert that same supernatural force to preserve." (Gipp, 22)

Conclusion

- Eloquent arguments aside, the prevailing wisdom within Christendom regarding the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scripture is meaningless because leading theologians only apply these doctrines to the originals which no longer exist. The Bible teaches that God has promised to preserve the inerrant words of His inspiration through a multiplicity of accurate copies that are just as authoritative as the originals.

- A side by side examination of modern versions with the King James text reveals startling differences that impact the major doctrines of the faith. These differences cannot be attributed to differences in how words are translated out of Greek and Hebrew into English. Rather the underlying manuscripts used by the translators are different thereby resulting in different readings.
- As we saw last week, the same problem exists for modern version proponents when dealing with what verses should and should not be included. Logic dictates that when two things are different they cannot be the same thus making it impossible for divergent translations containing substantive differences in meaning to both be the Word of God.
- God did not go through all the trouble to perfectly inspire His word only to have it disappear with the originals.

Works Cited

Ehrman, Bart. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. Harper One, 2005.

Elwell, Walter. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology 2nd Edition*. Baker Book House, 2001.

Enns, Paul. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Moody Press, 1989.

Geisler, Norman L. *Inerrancy*. Zondervan, 1980.

Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology Volume I*. Bethany House, 2002.

Gipp, Samuel C. *An Understandable History of the Bible*. Bible Believers Baptist Bookstore, 1987.

Price, Randall. *Searching for the Original Bible*. Harvest House Publishers, 2007.

Ryrie, Charles R. [*Basic Theology*](#). Moody Press, 1999.