

Sunday, October 18, 2015—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Term 1 Lesson 4: Overcoming the Problem of “Exact Sameness”

Introduction

- At this point it seems prudent to take stock of what we have studied so far. Thus far, the course introduction notwithstanding, we have had three lessons that have ranged over a host of introductory topics. In summation, these topics have included the following:
 - Basic presuppositions regarding God and the Bible (Term 1 Lesson 1).
 - Satan’s five part strategy against the word of God: question it, subtract from it, add to it, water it down, and deny it (Term 1 Lesson 1).
 - Lack of textual agreement among modern Evangelical scholars regarding which readings are authentic and which ones are not. This is not just a KJB verses modern version issue. But a problem that exists within the scholarship that is critical of the KJB and promotes the merits of modern versions (Term 1 Lesson 2).
 - The prevailing position within Christian academia (for the last 130 years or so) is that only the original autographs are inspired and inerrant. This assertion is made despite admittance by these same scholars that the original autographs are “absent.” This topic also included a discussion of the overlooked nature of the doctrine of perseveration by leading Fundamental and Evangelical scholars (Term 1 Lesson 3).
- I am aware that these lessons have generated much discussion. As I said, in the introduction to last week’s notes, I request your patience over the coming weeks/months as the class unfolds. I have been praying for myself and all of you students that we can have these hard discussions in a manner that is productive, honoring to the Lord as well as to one another. My prayer is that these lessons will produce light and not heat.

The Continuum of Positions

- For purposes of illustration, please consider the following continuum of views regarding the Bible issue. On one side, let’s place the “Originals Only” position we discussed in the previous lesson. This side says little if anything meaningful about the doctrine of preservation and admittedly relies upon the discipline of textual criticism to reconstruct the “Original Text.” This side generally maintains that the KJB is based upon old or outdated textual theories and therefore advocates for the use of modern versions and their underlying Greek text on account of the fact that they are more accurate.
- On the other side of the continuum we find the King James extreme view that God supernaturally inspired the King James translators in the same manner that the original writers of Scripture were inspired. This group basically believes in the notion of “Double Inspiration” or the idea that God “re-inspired” His word in English in the early 17th century.

- In between these two views there are other less extreme options that have been articulated. Some examples include the following:
 - *I Prefer the KJB or I Like the KJB Best Position*—folks in this group view the KJB as the single best English translation available today. This belief is generally held for any of the following reason: rhythmic beauty, historical importance, or its cultural and literary impact upon the English speaking world.
 - *Majority Text Positon*—is characterized by the common belief that the underlying Hebrew and Greek texts used by the King James translators are superior to those utilized by modern textual scholarship. Those holding this position point to the numerical superiority of the manuscripts found in the Byzantine Text type as a more faithful guide for reconstructing the text. Supporters of this position do not necessarily view the KJB as inerrant but that it more accurately reflects the original writings. Zane C. Hodges stands out as the leading proponent of this position.
 - *Textus Receptus or Received Text Only Position*—this position maintains that the *Textus Receptus (TR)* Greek text preserved the words of the originals in their inerrant condition. This position would not necessarily insist that the KJB is an inerrant translation of these texts, thereby leaving open the possibility for a better translation of the *TR*. The *TR* position acknowledges the importance of the *Majority Text* but takes into the account the testimony of other witnesses such as early translations, patristic quotations, and early church lectionaries in seeking to establish the authenticity of a reading. Dean John William Burgon stands out as a leading proponent of this position. Burgon objected to the replacing of the Traditional Greek Text or *TR* with the new and improved Critical Text of Wescott and Hort.
- I believe that the “Originals Only” position was forged by Warfield and Hodge in the late 19th century in response to a growing chorus of voices that were critical and seeking to undermine the Bible. I further believe that the “Inspired King James” view was a reaction against the “Originals Only” position and its reliance upon textual criticism as well as its promotion of modern versions.

The Problem of “Exact Sameness”

- In reality, both of these views, the “Originals Only” and “King James Inspired” positons are seeking to address the problem of “Exact Sameness.” It is a known fact that there are textual variations in the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts supporting the English Bible. One side seeks to deal with the problem by appealing to the nonexistent “Originals” while the other side sees the KJB as a divine act on par with the inspiration of the originals in the first place.
- The “Originals Only” position, as we saw last week, largely ignores the doctrine of preservation. Meanwhile, many King James defenders want to argue that preservation assures the “Exact Sameness” of every word as originally written under inspiration. Unfortunately, this type of “Exact Sameness” or verbatim wording understanding of preservation cannot be sustained by a consideration of the historical and textual facts. Even among the manuscripts comprising the Byzantine Text Type and utilized by both the Majority Text and the *TR* positions, there is not “Exact Sameness” or verbatim wording across all the manuscripts witnesses.
- The manuscripts in the Byzantine Text Type, while not possessing “Exact Sameness” or verbatim wording across the board, demonstrate an “agreeance” as to how passages should read.

- This is important because it recognizes the difference between 1) different ways of saying the same thing and 2) substantive differences in meaning. Even within the King James Bible one is forced to acknowledge the existence of different ways of saying the same thing. Consider the following example:

| Isaiah 61:1-2 | Luke 4:18-19 |
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| <p>“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the <u>LORD</u> hath anointed me to preach <u>good tidings</u> unto the <u>meek</u>; he hath sent me <u>to bind up</u> the brokenhearted, to <u>proclaim liberty</u> to the captives, and the <u>opening of the prison</u> to them that are <u>bound</u>; To <u>proclaim</u> the acceptable year of the LORD,</p> | <p>“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because <u>he</u> hath anointed me to preach <u>the gospel</u> to the <u>poor</u>; he hath sent me <u>to heal</u> the brokenhearted, to <u>preach deliverance</u> to the captives, (and recovering of sight to the blind), to <u>set at liberty</u> them that are <u>bruised</u>, To <u>preach</u> the acceptable year of the Lord.</p> |

- These passages from within the KJB do not exhibit “Exact Sameness” yet the Lord Jesus Christ called the copy He was reading from in Nazareth ‘Scripture’.
- Problems are compounded from the standpoint of modern scholarship when one considers there are two so-called oldest and best manuscripts: Codes Vaticanus (B) and Siniaticus (Ⲙ). After completing a complete collation of these manuscripts against that TR and each other, Dean Burgon concluded the following:
 - “. . . all four are discovered on careful scrutiny to differ essentially not only from ninety-nine out of a hundred of the whole body of extant MSS besides, even from one another... they stand asunder in every page; as well as differ widely from the commonly received Text, with which they have been carefully collated. On being referred to this standard, in the Gospels alone, B is found to omit at least 2,877 words; to add 536: to substitute 935: to transpose 2098: to modify 1132 (in all 7,578):--the corresponding figures for Ⲙ being 3455, 839, 1114, 2299, 1265 (in all 8,972). **And be it remembered that the omissions, additions, substitutions, transpositions, and modifications, are by no means the same in both. It is in fact easier to find two consecutive verses in which these two MSS differ one from the other, than two consecutive verses in which they entirely agree.**” (Burgon, 11-12)

- In the previous lesson we considered an essay titled “The Inerrancy of the Autographa” by Greg L. Bahsen found in Norman L. Geisler’s book *Inerrancy*. As part of that consideration we looked at the following quotes:
 - *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 ground 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 not to 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 a trustworthy rendition of God’s original message, adequate for all intents and purposes as copies and conveyors of God’s autoreactive word.” (Geisler, 185-189)
- I think Bahsen is partly right and partly wrong. He is right in the sense that God did not supernaturally overtake the pen of every scribe, translator, and typesetter to ensure the preservation of “Exact Sameness” or verbatim wording. To think otherwise is to stand in opposition to the plain historical and textual facts. Yet, the doctrine of preservation necessitates

that we have more than just a shell of the “Original Bible.” In other words, the truth lies in the middle between the two extreme positions identified above.

- One position leaves believers without a Bible they can hold in their hands today while the other goes beyond the confines of the textual facts and creates the opposite problem.
- Overcoming the problem of “Exact Sameness” is the key to forging an accurate meaningful position that does not over or understate the case and is in line with the historical and textual facts. After all, I stated the following in the Course Introduction:
 - “I have come to believe that it is incumbent upon Pauline Dispensationalists to forge and advance our own position on the KJB that is in line and consistent with both the historical and textual facts as well as our dispensational beliefs regarding God’s working in time.”
- The goal of this class is to attempt such an articulation. To this objective we will now turn our attention.

Works Cited

Burton, John William. *The Revision Revised*. 1883.

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