

Sunday, November 15, 2015—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 8: Understanding Basic Terminology: Preservation

Introduction/Review

- Last week, in Lesson 7, we continued our consideration of Basic Terminology by looking at the terms inspiration and illumination.
- Essentially we defined inspiration as “the supernatural process whereby God the Holy Spirit moved upon human authors to have them record in writing those aspects of God’s revelation (written revelation) that He wanted mankind to possess forever (Isaiah 30:8).” (Lesson 7)
- Furthermore, we studied the occurrence of the word “inspiration” in Job 32:8 and learned that inspiration was the supernatural process whereby God: 1) created the heavens and the earth (Psalms 33:6), 2) brought life to the first man Adam (Genesis 2:7), and 3) recorded in writing (*graphē*) those aspects of His revelation that He wanted mankind to possess forever (II Timothy 3:16, Isaiah 30:8).
- This understanding of inspiration helps one understand how the word of God can be “quick and powerful” (Hebrews 4:12-13). God literally breathed His own life into His word just as He did into mankind and all of creation. Inspiration sets the Bible apart from any other book of antiquity.
- Second, we discussed illumination as a term used by theologians to describe the process whereby the truth of Scripture gets off the page and into the soul of the believer. Illumination is the spiritual process that occurs in the inner man of the believer as God the Holy Spirit takes the written word of God that the Spirit wrote, and communicates it to the believer’s inner man. This is how spiritual growth and learning take place and how sound doctrine is stored up in the believer’s soul.
- I Corinthians 2:9-16 is the Pauline passage that sets forth the normative ministry of God the Holy Spirit in terms of illumination for the body of Christ during the dispensation of grace. Other passages such as John 16:7-15 and I John 2:20-27 describe illumination in terms God’s dealings with the nation of Israel in time past and in the ages to come.
- In this lesson we want to conclude our discussion of Basic Terminology by looking at some information regarding preservation as well as consider the terminological relationships of all four of our basic terms: revelation, inspiration, illumination, and preservation.

Preservation

- Preservation deals with **the process** whereby the words of Scripture, given by inspiration, are passed on from generation to generation.
- *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* defines the English word “preservation” as follows:
 - The act of preserving or keeping safe; the act of keeping from injury, destruction or decay; as the preservation of life or health; the preservation of buildings from fire or decay; the preservation of grain from insects; the preservation of fruit or plants. When a

thing is kept entirely from decay, or nearly in its original state, we say it is in a high state of preservation.

- Last week we observed from Dr. R.B. Ouellette’s book *A More Sure Word: Which Bible Can You Trust?* that “. . . inspiration was completed in the past, preservation began in the past and carries through today . . .” (Ouellette, 34)
- There are a host of verses that could be used to establish this doctrine.
 - Psalms 33:11—The **counsel** of the Lord **standeth for ever**, the thoughts of his **heart to all generations**.
 - Psalms 105:5—He hath remembered his covenant **for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations**.
 - Psalms 119:89—**For ever**, O LORD, thy **word** is settled in heaven.
 - Psalms 119:111—**Thy testimonies** have I taken as an heritage **for ever**: for they *are* the rejoicing of my heart.
 - Psalms 119:152—Concerning **thy testimonies**, I have known of old that thou **hast founded them for ever**.
 - Psalms 119:160—**Thy word** *is* true *from* the beginning: and **every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever**.
 - 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**.
 - Isaiah 40:8—The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: **but the word of our God shall stand for ever**.
 - Matthew 24:35—Heaven and earth shall pass away, **but my words shall not pass away**.
 - I Peter 1:23-25— Being born again, not of corruptible seed, **but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever**. 24) For all flesh *is* as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: 25) **But the word of the Lord endureth for ever**. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.
 - Regarding this passage Ouellette points that “this is a quotation of Isaiah 40,” (see above) and thereby serves as “an indirect ‘proof’ that this Scripture had already been preserved for over seven hundred years.” (Ouellette, 33)
- One will notice that I did not include Psalms 12:6-7 in the preceding list. This was done on purpose to make a point. Psalms 12:6-7 is shrouded in some controversy as to whether or not God is preserving his “words” or his “people.” For the sake of clarity, I am not abandoning this

passage to the opposition. We will deal with it in great detail and specificity when we study preservation. For now what I am saying is that one does not need Psalms 12:6-7 to understand and establish the doctrine of preservation. The verses outlined above establish the doctrine quite clearly without needing to appeal to the passage in question.

- According to R.B. Ouellette, the verses quoted above are sufficient for establishing the doctrine of preservation irrespective of Psalms 12:6-7.
 - “There are seminaries that exist today that seem to ‘explain away’ every verse that teaches preservation. I have a problem with some who feel that verses or doctrine must be ‘explained away.’ I prefer to read the Bible and understand it literally. When God says His word will last forever, that it will last for a thousand generations, I believe that means God will preserve His word forever.

In the Bible, the writers had no problem quoting Scripture that had been preserved up to that time. Peter quotes Isaiah 40 (I Peter 1:23-25); Paul quotes extensively from the Old Testament in Romans 9-11. Each time a New Testament writer quotes from the Old Testament, he is demonstrating that God has been able to preserve His word.

Preservation is highly debated today because ultimately, the preservation issue will decide the translation issue—and preservation is completely a matter of faith in God’s power.” (Ouellette, 33)

- Elsewhere Ouellette states the following regarding Matthew 24:35, Psalms 119:60, and Psalms 119:89 (see list of verses above):
 - “It sounds to me as though God is teaching us a doctrine of preservation. The Scriptures clearly teach that even if Heaven and Earth were to pass away, the words would not. We are clearly taught that the righteous judgements of God endures forever, and that His Word has been forever settled in Heaven.” (Ouellette, 47)
- We have already seen in Lesson 3 that any discussion of the doctrine of preservation is largely omitted from the Systematic Theology books authored by the following leading Evangelical authors.
 - 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*

- When not outright silent on the doctrine of preservation, Ouellette points out that many within Evangelical academia seek to “explain away the clear teaching of Scripture” with respect to preservation. Ouellette cites the following statements issued by Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary (DBTS) and Gordon Fee in his book *The Textual Criticism of the New Testament* as a case in point.
 - “While the Bible teaches the ultimate indestructibility of the verbal revelation of God (Matthew 24:35; I Peter 1:25), it does not tell us how and where the written manuscript lineage of that word is preserved. We believe that God has providentially preserved His Word in the many manuscripts, fragments, versions, translations, and copies of the Scripture that are available and that by diligent study, comparison, and correlation, the original text (words) can be ascertained. We therefore hold that the integrity of any text type, translation, version, or copy of the Scriptures is to be judged by the **autographs (original manuscript) only . . .**”(DBTS Statement from 1996 quoted in Ouellette, 47-48)
 - “The doctrine of preservation of Scripture . . . is not a doctrine that is explicitly taught in Scripture, nor is it the belief that God has perfectly and miraculously preserved every word of the original autographs in one manuscript or text-type. It is the belief that God has providently preserved His Word in and through all the extant manuscripts, versions, and other copies of Scripture. . . God has wonderfully and providently preserved His Word in a multiplicity of extant manuscripts. No passage of Scripture promises this, but the evidence of history leaves no doubt that such is the case.” (Fee, 420 quoted in Ouellette, 50)
- In response to these two statements quoted above, Dr. Ouellette states:
 - “Based on this view, how can the Christian be sure that he has the right words—which ones did God preserve and which ones did over-zealous scribes add? Apparently he must diligently compare, correlate, and study the manuscripts, fragments, versions, translations, and copies of scripture that are available. The statement made above sounds academic, theological, and spiritual, but it has no practical value to a searching Christian. The end of the logic, if you hold to that statement, is that, due to our endless comparisons and discovery, we cannot ever believe that we have the authoritative Word of God in English. . .

There are serious problems with the logic that is used to come to such conclusions and with the obvious denial of a basic Bible promise. For example, we read that “no passage of Scripture promises” preservation. This is simply a false statement. All would agree that the originals were given by inspiration of God—there is no room for question or debate concerning inspiration. Again, we have no inspired originals today. Therefore, when someone states that we are to determine the accuracy of the copies we have based upon their correlation to the original autographs, we find ourselves in an indefinable position. The Bible can no longer be our final authority. Rather, we must look to God’s working in history and to the expert opinions of scholars to validate our translations.

Those who would hold to the Critical Text position believe we can know by studying history that God has preserved His Word. Yet, how can one know by looking at history, when, to begin with, no one knows what it looked like? There is no way that historical observation can give documented proof that nothing has been changed. This is against the laws of scientific observation. Our position on preservation must be a “faith-based” approach. Certainly this is a watershed issue, but we must let the Bible speak for itself.

. . . issues related to the biblical text are matters of faith—regardless of which side of the issue one takes. Textual scholarship should not operate solely upon scientific principles as though there was nothing divine about the origin of our Bible. **The Bible does have something to say about its own preservation, thus necessitating a doctrine of preservation.**

Bible-believing Christians, whether ministers or laymen, must go about the process of identifying the correct biblical text within the context of the biblical doctrine of preservation. The question that must be answered is: For what will you trust the scholars, and which scholars will you trust?

. . . While there is more to what the Bible says about its own preservation, enough has been given to demonstrate that those who take the Critical Text approach to the textual issue have to “explain away”—under the guise of scholarship—what the Bible clearly teaches.

For now, it is important to remember that not only is the doctrine of preservation diluted or deleted, but that there is also a subtle attack on doctrinal purity as well. (Ouellette, 48-52)

- In a later chapter Ouellette summarizes his thoughts regarding preservation with the following statement, “Those who advocate the Westcott and Hort position (i.e., the Critical Text) always have trouble with the preservation issue because it negates their practice. In the question of Bible translations, one either has a “preserved” Bible or a “restored, reconstructed” Bible.” (Ouellette, 83)
 - The central question is: Do we have a preserved word or a restored, reconstructed word?
- Majority Text proponent Wilbur Pickering contributed an essay titled “John William Burgon and the New Testament” to David Otis Fuller’s 1973 publication *True or False?* In addition to proving that Burgon believed in inspiration, preservation, and inerrancy, Pickering states the following about the need for preservation.
 - “. . . if the Scriptures have not been preserved then the doctrine of Inspiration is a purely academic matter with no relevance for us today. If we do not have the inspired words or do not know precisely which they be, then the doctrine of Inspiration is inapplicable.” (Fuller, 269)
- While it is necessary to acknowledge the Bible’s own teaching regarding preservation, it is equally important not to demand more from the doctrine than can be historically and/or textually proven. Regarding the doctrine of preservation Dr. Edward F. Hills states the following in *The King James Version Defended*:
 - “If the doctrine of divine inspiration of the Old and New Testament Scripture is a true doctrine, the doctrine of the providential preservation of the Scriptures must also be a true doctrine. It must be that down through the centuries God has exercised a special providential control over the copying of the Scriptures and the preservation and use of the copies, so that trustworthy representatives of the original text have been available to God’s people in every age. God must have done this, for if He gave the Scriptures to His Church by inspiration as the perfect and final revelation of His will, then it is obvious that

He would not allow this revelation to disappear or undergo any alteration of its fundamental character.

Although this doctrine of the providential preservation of the Old and New Testament Scriptures has sometimes been misused, nevertheless, it also has been held, either implicitly or explicitly, by all branches of the Christian Church as a necessary consequent of the divine inspiration of these Scriptures. (Hills, 2)

- Please note that even Dr. Hills acknowledges what preservation does and does not assure. Preservation does not assure the “exact sameness” or “verbatim wording” across every manuscript copy ever made. Rather preservation secures that God will not allow his “revelation to disappear or undergo any alteration of its fundamental character.” (Hills, 2)
- Elsewhere in *The King James Bible Defended*, when discussing the minor differences that exist in the various editions of the *TR*, Dr. Hills recognizes a difference between what he calls providential and miraculous preservation.
 - “The texts of the several editions of the Textus Receptus were God-guided. They were set up under the leading of God’s special providence. Hence the differences between them were kept to a minimum. But these disagreements were not eliminated altogether, for this would require not merely providential guidance but a miracle. In short, God chose to preserve the New Testament text providentially rather than miraculously, and this is why even the several editions of the Textus Receptus vary from each other slightly.” (Hills, 222-223)
- In order to accomplish preservation of “exact sameness” God would have had to supernaturally overtake the pen of every scribe, copyist, typesetter, and printer who ever handled the text to ensure that no differences of any kind ever entered the text. That God did not choose to accomplish preservation in this manor is apparent because there are slight differences even in the manuscripts comprising the Byzantine Text Type not to mention the various editions of the *TR*.
- This is where we must recognize the difference between: 1) different ways of saying the same thing and 2) substantive differences in meaning. The manuscripts of the Byzantine Text Type as well as the various editions of the *TR* contain **an agreement as to the doctrinal content of the readings**. Conversely, when the *TR* is compared with the Critical Text there **are substantive differences in meaning as to the doctrinal content of the readings**.
- Psalms 12:6-7—what the doctrine of preservation assures is exactly what verse six states, namely the preservation of a **Pure Text i.e., a text that does not report information about God, His nature or character, His doctrine, His dispensational dealings with mankind, history, archeology, or science that is FALSE. In short, God’s promise to preserve His word assures the existence of a text that has not been altered in its “fundamental character” despite not being preserved in a state of “exact sameness.”**
- If “exact sameness” were the issue with God in preservation then why did He not just preserve the originals and remove all doubt? The main reason is that God, at every turn, is testing the believer to see if he or she is going to walk by faith in what God said.
 - I Corinthians 1:27-29, 2:5

- Hebrews 11:6
- I believe that God preserved his word for the same reason I believe that God inspired it. Preservation is the Bible's claim for itself. **The doctrine of preservation impacts how one ought to look at the textual and translational issues and ensures that we have more than just a shell of the “original Bible” as the Originals Only position maintains.**

Works Cited

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