

Sunday, April 23, 2017— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
Lesson 53 The Process of Preservation: The Preservation of the New Testament, Part 2

### **Introduction**

- A few weeks ago in Lesson 52 we looked at how the process of preservation established in the Old Testament was continued in the New Testament despite the fall of Israel. The process is simply that God will preserve His word through a multiplicity of reliable, accurate copies of the original manuscripts. Copies of copies eventually were handed down to us, and they are reliable and accurate. That is how God has preserved His word.
- We have seen how God preserved His word in time past. He used a special group of people in the Old Testament—the nation Israel. Within the nation of Israel, He had the Levites (the priesthood) as well as scribes to preserve His word. We saw that process demonstrated in the Old Testament beginning with the books that Moses wrote and then other books were continually added to the Torah.
- In our last lesson we saw that with the fall of Israel the process remained the same. In other words, God is still preserving His word through a multiplicity of copies, rather than just preserving one original manuscript or one copy of the original manuscript.
- But, with the fall of Israel, the following question arises. What about the people? Who are the ones responsible for preserving the New Testament? In the New Testament there was also a special group of people during the days of the apostles, people whose function (one of their functions) it was to identify, copy, and collect together the word of God just as in the Old Testament. These are the folks who accomplished the copying and dissemination of the New Testament documents as we studied in Lesson 52.

### **Role of the New Testament Prophet**

- Ephesians 4:8, 11-12—Paul is talking about Jesus Christ after His ascension, not prior to it. The earthly ministry of Christ takes place, then Christ dies on the cross, He spends the forty days on earth and then He ascends into heaven. The Holy Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost. Then the fall of Israel takes place in Acts 7 with the stoning of Stephan. The apostle Paul gets saved on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. Then the Lord Jesus Christ, from heaven's glory, reaches down, and not only saves Paul, but he commits to Paul a new system of knowledge and information – a new realm, a new program called the mystery.
- Paul says that He gave certain gifts to the body of Christ – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Christ ascended up on high, (and in the passage it is not necessarily His ascension after His resurrection, but is an ascension far above all heavens), which is where Christ is when Paul gets saved. He ascends far above all heavens, and from that position, He gives these offices to the church. The twelve apostles were made apostles before the crucifixion of Christ but there were men that were made apostles after the ascension of Christ; therefore, they are not one of “the twelve apostles.”
- I am trying to point out that there are prophets that were given to the body of Christ. There are prophets that affect the ministry of the body of Christ during its infancy before the full revelation of the mystery was made known to the Apostle Paul.

- Ephesians 2:19-20—the household is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Thus, I know something about apostles and prophets. Apostles and prophets are “foundational” gifts. It is the function of an apostle and a prophet to lay the foundation of the house.
- I Corinthians 3:10—the apostles and the prophets are foundational gifts to the body of Christ. They lay out the foundation upon which the ministry of the rest of the body was built upon. Now, one of the functions of a prophet in the Bible is to be God’s spokesman. That was not a prophet’s only function, but it was one of them. He speaks for God.
- Exodus 4:15-16—Aaron was Moses’ spokesman; he was Moses’ mouthpiece. He spoke Moses’ words.
  - Exodus 7:1—by comparing scripture with scripture, the definition of “a prophet” is “a spokesman.” God puts His words in the prophet’s mouth, who in turn speaks the word of God. One of the functions of a prophet is to identify the word of God.
- Ezekiel 3:17—Ezekiel is to get God’s word, know what it is, and then send it out to the people.
- Jeremiah 15:19—the prophet Jeremiah is God’s mouth piece.
- II Chronicles 36:12—I am just trying to impress upon you the idea that a prophet is a man that speaks God’s word.
- I Corinthians 14:23, 29-32—God Almighty gave His word through these people; He gave revelation and information through these people. These prophets have the capacity to identify what God is saying to the body of Christ. This gift of prophesy was one of the foundational gifts used in the establishing of the body of Christ. Paul was “the apostle of the gentiles” (Romans 11:13) and yet there were a number of other apostles in a secondary sense.
  - Acts 14:14—Barnabas, was an apostle in a secondary sense. Barnabas does not directly receive information from Jesus Christ, but he receives it from Paul, and he is sent out in that sense.
  - Timothy and Silas, along with other men, are identified in the scripture as apostles. Epaphroditus is an apostle and he is identified as such in Philipians 2.
- One of the functions of the prophets given to the body of Christ during its infancy was to identify God’s word. The prophets in those churches were the men in the local churches who actually did the copying of the epistles. When the prophets got a collection of letters together from a bunch of different churches, they would read those letters; and they would say, “This copy is the word of God; this is scripture. But this letter is not scripture.” They would say, “This letter that Paul wrote, I Corinthians, is the second letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, but this is the word of God. The other letter, the first one that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, was just personal correspondence. The third letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians was not scripture; but the fourth one is, and it is II Corinthians, and it is to be in the bible.”

- There had to be somebody in the local assembly who had the capacity to identify what God's word was when that assembly received copies from different places. They were getting all of this information from all over the place and they indicated what was scripture and what was not.
- II Thessalonians 2:1-2—there were phony letters floating around the churches that claimed to be from Paul. Therefore, when those churches received one of those letters, they had to know if it was scripture or not.
- Thus, God Almighty in the founding of the church gave some prophets so they could identify “Thus saith the Lord.” It was not the only function of the prophets, but it was one of their functions. The evangelist, the pastor and teacher, took the copies and did the work of the ministry with them. They did not make the copies, but they used the copies. They preached the word from the copies that they had. But, the prophet's function was to say, “This is God's word.” Then they made accurate, reliable copies of the word and distributed them. The apostles took them out to the various churches.
- I Corinthians 12:28—God put prophets in the church. He put them in the local churches.
- I Corinthians 14:36-37—in other words, are you the only people that received a copy of the word of God? Are you the only people that sent copies of the word of God out? Those people are receiving and sending copies of the word. There were people in the Corinthian church who were suppressing the gift and the function of the prophet, and they were trying to exalt other gifts above it. Thus, the work of the prophet was not getting done, and consequently the word was not getting out. Paul was rebuking them about that. Paul was rebuking these people for their frustration of the function of the prophet.
- I Timothy 6:3
- I am saying to you that “the scriptures of the prophets” are the scriptures that the prophets copied down. Those prophets in those New Testament churches (the Pauline churches) collected the word of God together. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, Peter, I John, II John, III John, Jude, Revelation were the books that these prophets collected together. They said, “These are scripture.” They identified them as what God Almighty said, and they authoritatively said, “These are the scriptures.”
- According to II Peter 3, Peter had all of Paul's epistles. All of those people in Galatia that Peter wrote to had Paul's epistles. They had them because of the functioning and the activity of these prophets, who Christ gave as foundational ministries to the body of Christ to produce that book and to authoritatively identify it.

### **Preservation after the Prophets: The Role of the Pauline Grace Churches**

- God had a process to preserve His word through copies. He had a people to preserve His word. He had a people to identify the word of God, to collect it and to preserve it in the New Testament. But, these prophets died and there are no longer any prophets today. We enjoy the apostle's ministry and the prophet's ministry by having the written word of God. So, who preserves the word of God after the prophets have died out?

- Human viewpoint would say, “The prophets are gone so there are not any more authoritative copies of the word of God.”
- I Timothy 3:14-15—Notice that Paul talks about the “house of God.” That is the local church that Timothy is involved with. It is the church of the living God, which is the body of Christ. The body of Christ is the “pillar and ground of the truth.” Folks, the word of God was committed to local assemblies for them to teach and distribute. This process of preservation works in the body of Christ on the idea of what the Protestants used to call “the priesthood of the believer.” That means that in the Old Testament there was a “priesthood;” but God has done away with the Old Testament priesthood now, and every believer can go to God for himself. In the Old Testament, you needed a priest to go in and represent you, but now, you are a priest, and you can represent yourself.
  - I Peter 2:9—“the priesthood of all believers” is a bad term because they use this verse as a proof text. We understand that, dispensationally, that is not good terminology and yet the truth of the concept is real. You and I function today on a personal basis with God Almighty. We do not need any “go-betweens” or mediators (I Timothy 2:5); we go straight to God Almighty.
- Now, the one thing you want to guard against is this—please remember this!—the issue in preservation is not an authoritative church but rather, an authoritative bible. The Roman church will take what I am telling you and say this, “See, since the church has the responsibility of preserving the word of God, therefore, the church has the power to say what is right and what is wrong. The church can tell you what the bible says.”
- I Timothy 3:15—the local assembly is the pillar and ground of the truth. What is the foundation of the truth? In the passage, it is the local assembly. The local assembly is responsible for the maintenance of the truth. Thus, it is the responsibility of the local assemblies, the bible-believing people, to teach and distribute the word of God today. God preserves His word through history in the hands of bible-believing people that study the word of God, and that teach the word of God, and that preach the word of God from a believing viewpoint.
- Regarding the role of the believing church in preserving the scriptures, Dr. David Sorenson states the following in his book *Touch Not the Unclean Thing: The Text Issue and Separation*:
  - “. . . Some proponents of the critical text position will say that God may have preserved His Word, but He did not say how He would do so. To the contrary, the New Testament does provide insight into how God has promised to preserve His Word . . . (quotes II Timothy 3:15) . . . The Apostle makes it clear that the church is both the foundation as well as the support of the truth.

The word translated pillar refers to an architectural support such as a load-bearing column. One illustration which comes to mind is that of a lighthouse. The structure of the light is that which upholds it and supports it. Is not this a careful illustration of the relationship of the church and the Word of God? The word translated “ground” refers to a foundation. The church is therefore that pillar which supports the truth. The church of Jesus Christ is both the foundation as well as the pillar of support which hold forth the truth. . .

The church, like a lighthouse, shines forth the light of the Word of God upon a dark world. Lighthouses serve two purposes: 1) to warn of danger or 2) to point to safety. The local church does both through the preaching of the Word. It warns of the danger of hell ahead. It also points to safety of heaven through our Lord Jesus Christ. The connection of the local church to the truth of the Word of God should be only too apparent.

However, there very well may be a deeper truth. That is, the church is the structure which God has ordained to uphold the truth of the Word of God through the centuries. The view of the writer is that God has used the believing churches down through the ages as the primary structure by which the New Testament has been preserved. That certainly was true in the first century. The same remains true today. And as we shall see, it has been the case through the course of history. Thus, the contention of this writer is that the church is the pillar and the ground by which the truth of the Word of God has been preserved.” (Sorenson, 58-59)

- The idea that the New Testament text was preserved via “the priesthood of all believers” shows up over and over in pro-King James literature. Those who are King James advocates who also happen to be mid-Acts Pauline Dispensationalists have a unique problem with citing these writings to bolster their position on preservation because they are full of unsound dispensational reasoning and examples. For example, *Thou Shalt Keep Them: A Biblical Theology of the Perfect Preservation of Scriptures* contains an entire section on “God’s Method of Preservation” containing four essays. The first essay titled “Israel, the Means of Preservation in the Old Testament” by Kent Brandenburg was quite good and was quoted in Lesson 50. The two of the remaining three essays are questionable from a dispensational/doctrinal standpoint.
- The fourth essay titled “Stewards of the Mysteries of God: I Corinthians 4:1-2” is worthy of consideration for any King James advocate who also happens to be a mid-Acts Pauline Dispensationalist. Please consider the following excerpts from Gary La More’s essay along with my commentary:
  - “First of all, in the light of the foolishness of worldly wisdom, Paul wanted his missionary companion, the church at Corinth, and him to be recognized as “ministers of Christ.” He includes his audience, the church, with the use of the plural pronoun “us”. This identifies Paul, his church-planting associates, and the Corinthian church. . . .” (La More *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 123)
    - In the context, I believe Paul is referring to himself, Apollos, and Timothy.
  - “Secondly, Paul wanted the Corinthian church to see himself and themselves as “stewards” of the mysteries of God.” The word “steward” carried with it the idea of a “custodian” of the mysteries of God. A steward was an administrator, a trustee, or an overseer of an estate. . . The word “steward” can also signify “overseer,” “superintendent,” or distributor.” The apostles (Paul particularly) and comrades were responsible to God since they were charged with the task of disseminating the Divine message found in the Word of God. The message therefore is not of apostolic origin, but has God as its source. The Apostles were not responsible for the ultimate truth of it, but only for the fidelity with which they conveyed it.” (La More in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 124)

- I Timothy 1:11
- Ephesians 3:3—the mystery i.e., the body of truth pertaining to the body of Christ for the dispensation of grace was committed to the trust of the Apostle Paul.
- “The “mysteries of God” and the Word of God are synonymous. The root of the word for “mystery” is *muein* meaning “to close” (the mouth, the lips). When a mystery is made known, instead of the mouth staying closed, it is now opened. What was not known is now known and what was not revealed is now revealed. Mysteries of God are known by special revelation. . . The mystery is disclosed by revelation, so that making it known is revelation. For this reason, mystery is very often used with the term for revelation (Rom 16:25-26; I Cor. 2:10; Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 5, 8; 6:19; Col. 1:26-27; 4:4). . . In I Corinthians 4:1 the word “mystery” is plural. The plural intimates the Words or passages of scriptures, the various special revelations of God. Each mystery is important, and the faithful steward will put forth due diligence to lose none of them, but to faithfully keep them with the house given the authority by his Master to do so. The Master is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, the house in which the stewards labor in keeping the mysteries.” (La More in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 124-125)
  - Ephesians 3:2—this message was given to Paul so that he could give it to the body of Christ.
  - Romans 16:26—this message is for “all nations for the obedience of faith.”
  - Acts 20:32—Paul commends the Ephesians elders unto the “word of his grace.”
  - I Timothy 3:15—Timothy is the pastor of the church at Ephesus. It was the job of the Pauline assemblies to “keep” and “preserve” the scriptures during the dispensation of grace.
- “Finally, Paul wanted to be known as a faithful man. Having designated himself as a steward of the mysteries of God in the preceding verse, Paul now sets forth the primary requisite for a steward—he must be “faithful,” true and worthy of trust and confidence (I Tim. 1:12). Since his stewardship involved the mysteries of God, he accurately and aggressively proclaimed these truths.” (La More in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 125)
  - II Timothy 2:1-2—Paul wants the doctrine passed on from generation to generation. How is that going to happen?
    - II Timothy 4:1-2—by preaching the word. In order for Timothy, and those that follow after him to follow Paul’s instruction, what are they going to need to have? The word of God.
  - The primary job of preserving the word of God during the dispensation of grace is going to fall to Pauline grace believing and preaching assemblies. The very people whom the organized hierarchical sacramental church persecutes as heretics.

- “Since the philosophy of heaven, the message for which the steward is held responsible, is nonsense to the unsaved world (I Cor. 1:18), he should not be interested in trying to please it. In fact, he must not concern himself in the least with what the world thinks of his stewardship. The faithful steward must please his Owner, God. Strong temptation exist for the steward, especially today and particularly on the issue of perfect preservation of God’s Words, to please the academic crowd, which is most likely to reward his subjugation with a false label of scholarship. The seduction is a self-serving lure of intellectual pride. . . God did not commit this stewardship to textual critics. He works the best through stewards in His church who are faithful to His Word and its message. Paul knew that God had preserved His Word: otherwise he would not have written I Corinthians 4:1-2. The faithful members of the church today, like those members of the Corinthian church, are given the stewardship of the Words of God. This is the message of the Apostle Paul in this text. The members receive the Words, guard the Words, and pass on those very Words to the next generation of local church members.” (La More in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 126-127)
  - This is why what one believes is critically important in any discussion of preservation. In future Lessons we will demonstrate the historical veracity of this point by looking at the role the Paulicians played in the preservation of the New Testament text.

### **Conclusion**

- The word of God is not preserved in a beautifully bound copy of a vellum scroll sitting on a library shelf in the Vatican. The word of God is preserved out there in the hands of soul-winning, bible-believing, bible-preaching people. That is where God’s word is, because God the Holy Spirit in us bears witness to His word. Bible-believing people use God’s word, and the copies of the word of God that they use get worn out. Thus, the necessity for faithful reliable copies to carry God’s word for generation to generation.

### **Works Cited**

Brandenburg, Kent. *Thou Shalt Keep Them: A Biblical Theology of the Perfect Preservation of Scripture*. El Sobrante, CA: Pillar & Ground Publishing, 2003.

Sorenson, David H. *Touch Not the Unclean Thing: The Text Issue and Separation*. Duluth, MN: Northstar Baptist Ministries, 2001.