

Sunday, April 30, 2017— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 54 The Process of Preservation: Simultaneous Nature of Preservation and Corruption

Introduction

- Since Lesson 48 we have been considering the Process of Preservation. In doing so, we have observed from the scriptures that God’s design was to preserve His work in a multiplicity of accurate reliable copies that are just as authoritative as the original autographs. God did not elect to fulfill the fundamental promise of preservation via preserving the original autographs. This is self-evident or we would possess the autographs today. Lessons 48 and 49 were devoted to establishing this understanding.
 - Review of Lessons Learned From the Book of Jeremiah (Lesson 48)
 - The Apostle Paul on Inspired Copies (Lesson 48)
 - Authoritative Copies: The Process of Preservation (Lessons 48 and 49)
- In Lessons 50 and 51 we studied the people God used in the Old Testament to accomplish the preservation of His word. In order to accomplish this task, we considered the following points:
 - Israel: The Institution for Preservation in the Old Testament (Lesson 50)
 - Importance of the Words “Keep” and “Preserve” (Lesson 50)
 - The Means of Preservation Within the Nation (Lesson 51)
 - The Role of Individuals and Families
 - The Role of the Levites and Scribes
 - The Fall of Israel (Lesson 51)
- At the end of Lesson 51 we discussed the impact of the fall of Israel upon the Process of Preservation. We noted that the Process did not change but those responsible for oversight and execution of the Process did. When Israel fell, the task of preserving the scriptures passed from the nation of Israel to the body of Christ. Lessons 52 and 53 were devoted to looking at the Process of Preservation in the New Testament. In summation, we considered the following points in Lessons 52 and 53:
 - Preservation and the New Testament (Lesson 52)
 - 1st Century Copies of the New Testament (Lesson 52)

- Role of the New Testament Prophets (Lesson 53)
- Preservation after the Prophets: The Role of the Pauline Grace Churches (Lesson 53)
- Now that we have considered the Process of Preservation, it is imperative for us to note that while the process was being executed, corruption of the text was also occurring simultaneously. In this Lesson we want to consider how the forces of preservation and corruption were functioning at the same time.

The Simultaneous Nature of Preservation and Corruption

- In his 2016 publication *In Defense of Textus Receptus: God's Preserved Word to Every Generation*, Dr. Jim Taylor states the following regarding this important matter.
 - “There are two very important facts to remember as we study the doctrine of preservation [A point which we have already studied in detail. See Lessons 31 through 39.]. The first is the fact that God has promised to preserve His Word. But secondly, we should note that there have also been those who would seek to corrupt the scriptures as well. And both of these facts are operating at the same time. And seeing these two forces are happening simultaneously, it is very important to have a good understanding of preservation so that we can come to the proper conclusions.” (Taylor, 47)
- Recall from Lesson 2 that Satan was the first destructive critic of God's word. Genesis 3 outlines the adversary's policy of evil against the word of God. Satan seeks to assail the final authority of God's word through the following five tactics:
 - Tactic 1—Question God's word (Genesis 3:1).
 - Tactic 2—Subtract from God's word (Genesis 3:2)
 - Tactic 3—Add to God's word (Genesis 3:3)
 - Tactic 4—Water down God's word (Genesis 3:3)
 - Tactic 5—Deny God's word (Genesis 3:4)
- Sin, on this planet earth, began with an attack on God's word in Genesis 3. There is a satanic policy of evil against the word of God clearly laid out in the scripture, and the design is simply to destroy the final authority of your Bible. Satan wants to take that word of God and make it less than the final authority.
- Now, how does the adversary seek to accomplish this strategy? Well, if you have a written authority, the tactic is to bring up another authority alongside of it and give it equal weight with the first. Well, then how does one decide which is right? When you have two competing authorities, who decides which is right? A third authority decides – you do, or somebody else does.

- So, Satan’s attempt is to get rid of that final authority that God has placed in His word by putting up a competing authority. Satan does not want you to have the capacity in your hands to know what God said.

Scriptural Examples of 1st Century Corruption

- The question before us in this lesson is the following; is there any scriptural evidence to suggest that the New Testament text was being corrupted while it was still being written?
- II Corinthians 2:17—“For we are not as many, which **corrupt** the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.”
 - First, the verb translated “which corrupt” is in the present tense and the active voice. This means that while Paul was writing II Corinthians (present tense) people were actively engaged in seeking to “corrupt the word of God” (active voice).
 - Second, there is controversy concerning the translation of “corrupt” in the KJB. Many modern versions read some form of “peddle” in verse 17.
 - NIV—“. . . we do not **peddle** the word of God for profit.”
 - ESB—“. . . **peddlers** of God's word . . .”
 - NASV—“. . . **peddling** the word of God . . .”
 - Footnote on verse 17 reads, “Or corrupting.”
 - *Strong’s Concordance* defines the underlying Greek verb *kapēleuō* as follows:
 - to be a retailer, to peddle
 - to make money by selling anything
 - to get sordid gain by dealing in anything, to do a thing for base gain
 - to trade in the word of God
 - to try to get base gain by teaching divine truth
 - to corrupt, to adulterate
 - peddlers were in the habit of adulterating their commodities for the sake of gain

- There is no reason to change the King James's rendering of *kapēleuō* as “corrupt.” Whether one says “corrupt” or some form of “peddle”, the bottom line is the same; the word of God whether written or spoken is being “adulterated” for the sake of gain. Coupled with the present tense and the active voice it is clear that Paul viewed corruption of God's word as a present reality that he was facing in the first century.
- Third, this was not an isolated problem. Paul explicitly states in verse 17 that “many” people were involved in this process. Dr. Jim Tayler states the following regarding the circumstances outlined in II Corinthians 2:17:
 - “It would appear that even in the first century, there were those who were bent on presenting a corrupted message. Presumably, this would be both verbally as well as in written form.” (Taylor, 50)
- II Thessalonians 2:1-2—“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him, 2) That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, **nor by letter as from us**, as that the day of Christ is at hand.”
 - In his essay, “First Century Textual Attack” Kent Brandenburg states the textual attack exhibited by II Thessalonians 2:2”
 - “The false teachers shook and troubled the Thessalonian believers through three different means, swaying the beliefs of church members and then affecting them emotionally. Firstly, deception came by means of “spirit,” supposed prophetic revelation or supernatural communications that were concocted by the deceivers. Secondly, distortion of Scriptural truth came by “word,” probably sermons they preached which contained their false teachings. Lastly, deceiving counterfeiters of the Apostle Paul penned bogus letters in his name.” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 133)
 - Not only was Paul dealing with those who sought to “corrupt” to word of God (I Corinthians 2:17) but we learn in II Thessalonians 2:1-2 that he was also dealing with a forgery problem. People had written a false letter to the Thessalonians posing as the Apostle Paul. It is clear from the context, that this letter was filled with false doctrine regarding the timing of the catching up of the saints (rapture) and the resumption of the prophetic program.
 - That this false/forged letter had a psychological impact upon the saints at Thessalonica is evident from verse 2: “That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled.” It was troubling for these saints who had rejoiced in the truth of I Thessalonians 4:13-18 to read a spurious letter claiming they had missed the event.
 - This passage in II Thessalonians 2 provides tangible evidence of the culture of “corruption” that Paul was speaking about in II Corinthians 2:17. As soon as his epistles

began to be circulated in the first century, they were met with opposition from those who opposed Paul's message and apostleship.

- “When 2 Thessalonians was written in the middle of the first century, Satan already was using men to purposefully attack Scripture. Certainly this particular attack altered the text even more than changes made to single paragraphs, sentences, or words, by adding to the Scripture an entire epistle. However, it does reveal the existence of textual variants in the first century. Forgers who would add an entire epistle would not scruple to make smaller changes with canonical books.” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 133)
 - In a footnote (#223), Dr. Brandenburg states the following regarding the textual variations found in the book of I Thessalonians.
 - “A major variation such as the addition of an entire epistle was obviously very damaging to the eschatological belief of the church at Thessalonica. The variations of I Thessalonians in the CT [Critical Text] continue to significantly affect eschatology (1:10; 2:11, 12, 15; 3:2; 4:8, 13; 5:27). Those changes alter eschatological understanding even before 2 Thessalonians.” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 133)
 - While II Thessalonians 2 does not indicate who these forgers/false teachers were, we have a clue in II Timothy 2. In II Timothy 2:16-18 Paul identifies two men (Hymenaeus and Philetus) who were teaching that the “resurrection is past already” and thereby “overthrow the faith of some.” Ill intended men such as these would not have hesitated to alter legitimate scripture and/or forge scripture in order to accomplish their corrosive purposes, “their word will eat as doth a canker.” Ill intended men such as these would not have hesitated to alter legitimate scripture and/or forge scripture in order to accomplish their corrosive purposes, “their word will eat as doth a canker.” We know from history, and will demonstrate in a future Lesson on transmission, that heretics altered the Biblical text in various ways so as to conform it to their heretical teaching.
 - This culture of corruption prompted Paul to take steps to ensure the authenticity of his epistles.
 - II Thessalonians 3:17
 - Galatians 6:11
 - Philemon 19
- II Corinthians 4:1-2—“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2) But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, **nor handling the word of God deceitfully**; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

- We see from this verse that “there were those who corrupted the scriptures as well as others who mishandled the scriptures.” Given what we have already seen in this section, this deceitful handling of the word of God would have no doubt taken the form of false verbal teaching such as tampering with the text of scripture.
- Galatians, I and II Thessalonians, as well as I and II Corinthians were some of the first epistles written by Paul. Written before Acts 20, these books were drafted between 54 and 60 AD, according to most commentators. These facts established the reality that the adversary was already seeking to corrupt the New Testament text while it was still being written.
- II Corinthians 11:3—what means did the serpent use to beguile Eve? He used “any means” necessary up to and including tampering with God’s word. We see the results of this “any means” strategy in verse 4 where we see that false teachers were presenting a false Christ, by a false spirit, through another gospel.

Implications of Scriptural Observations

- The above Pauline texts established that a culture of corruption with respect to the scriptures existed during the first century while the New Testament was being written. This culture of corruption include the following minimum components:
 - Corrupting the word of God (II Corinthians 2:17)
 - Forging the word of God (II Thessalonians 2:2)
 - Handling the word of God deceitfully (II Corinthians 4:2)
 - Any means strategy (II Corinthians 11:1-4)
- Please note that all of these components of corruption imply intentionality on the part of the corruptor. Once again, those holding to unsound doctrine would have ample motivation for tampering with the text so as to hide the heretical nature of their teaching.
 - “There are many reasons why men would desire to change God’s words. In many cases, the changes are effected as a result of a desire to adhere to some false teaching. Since the scriptures condemn their heresies, some go so far as to change the scriptures in order that the heresies can go undiscovered.” (Taylor, 52)
- The scriptures anticipate this situation by issuing three strategically placed warnings against tampering with the word of God.
 - Deuteronomy 4:1-2

- Proverbs 30:5-6
- Revelation 22:18-19
- The presupposition of Westcott and Hort that the shorter reading is to be preferred over a longer reading is not based upon scripture. According to the word of God, it is just as easy for someone with ill intentions toward the scripture to take away words as it would be for them to add them. The very fact that there are upwards of 3,185 differences in wording between the Critical Text and the Traditional Text (*TR*) implies God's scriptural warnings noted above need to be taken seriously.
- We have already established that God promised to preserve His word. If we do not believe this then any discussion concerning the two texts become a matter of personal preference based upon man's intellect or will. But since we firmly believe that God has made good on His promise and preserved His word, we must conclude that one text or the other has been corrupted. This is not based upon the false standard of "verbatim identity" of wording but upon the fact that the two texts differ substantively from each other i.e., they report contradictory information. They do not agree regarding what verses should and should not be included in scripture.
- Put another way, if we believe that God has preserved what He initially gave by inspiration, then we are forced to conclude that one text or the other is corrupt. Both texts cannot be pure because they differ from each other substantively.
 - "The only other option would be to conclude that our understanding of plenary-verbal inspiration is somehow flawed. And there are those who believe just that way. They contend that even though God promised to preserve each word, He never said that it would all be in the same text. But it is a very confusing and complex position because we are left with nothing to guide us into what is the pure reading and what is corrupt. How is a person to know? Again, rather than having concrete, scripturally based evidence, we are left to our own intellect, opinions, theories, and suppositions. Any variant in readings become subject to human reasoning and choice based upon everything but the promises of God." (Taylor, 56)
- As we have seen above there are numerous reasons why and how the text became corrupted. At this point, the reason why corruption exists is not the real issue. The reality that the two texts differ substantively is plain for all honest observers to see. The facts of the case are in reality simple.
 - God promised to preserve His word.
 - The two texts differ substantively.
 - Only one of them can unequivocally qualify as the preserved word of God.

Conclusion

- “Biblical principles and promises are the basis of a Scriptural Bibliology. No verses in Scripture teach a theory that the oldest manuscripts are the best, . . . [the passages considered above] reveal intentional corruption of the New Testament text in the first century. The Scriptures themselves denounce the theory of “oldest is best.” These passages all indicate that the Bible was intentionally changed in the first century.” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 135-136)
- “Those who weigh manuscripts using criteria such as age believe that people today should labor at restoring the text of the New Testament to a condition closer to that of the originals. This ongoing process of textual criticism does not represent the Biblical doctrine of the perfect preservation of Scripture. The contention that “oldest is best” is at best a rationalistic speculation. . . The Bible contains no verses espousing the “oldest is best” criterion. Instead, it teaches early and often that textual attack will come from Satan and his human instruments (Gen. 3:1-6; Matt. 4:1-11). (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 131)
- “Bible believers maintain a distinctive bias toward what Scripture teaches. Scripture says God will preserve every word. Scripture declares God will use His ordained institution, Israel in the Old Testament and churches in the New Testament, to preserve every word. Knowing that God says this, believers assume He will do what He says. They trust Scriptural criteria and not human reasoning. It might make sense in man’s thinking that old, rarely used manuscripts are superior to newer, often-used ones.” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 131-132)
 - The “oldest is best” mantra of the Critical Text position is repeated simplistically as if it is a universal truth. In reality it is not. Oldest is only best if all other things are equal which they hardly ever are. Blind commitment to the mantra does not, however, work for a book claiming to be of divine origin such as the scriptures. A divinely inspired book such as the Bible needs to be approached in the manner stated therein.
- “Pure manuscripts and readings were embraced while others were rejected [This was one of the functions of the New Testament prophet in the early church.]. This behavior stemmed from authoritative warnings concerning tampering with Scripture. The Bible establishes clearly that there were corruptions of first century manuscripts by means of purposeful textual attack. . .” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 132)
- Through the ministry of the New Testament prophets, the Holy Spirit guided the churches to reject corrupt manuscripts and readings as well as to copy and distribute authentic ones. This ministry set the body of Christ on the firmest possible ground once the gift of prophecy ceased. Believers, who had convictions about preservation of scripture, were careful to make their copies as accurately as possible. Meanwhile, manuscripts that were deemed spurious were either discarded or destroyed along with old/worn out copies of authentic manuscripts.

- “It was not uncommon among Jews to copy an Old Testament manuscript, and after having verified that the copies were accurate, to destroy the original manuscript. Since the Jews made up a segment of the New Testament churches, it is possible that they followed already established practices and did the same thing with the original autographs.” (Taylor, 60)
- All the age of a manuscript can tell us is that it existed. It does not tell us anything about whether or not it was in use in the churches.
- In the next Lesson we will discuss the matter of availability as we begin to wrap up our study of the doctrine of preservation.

Works Cited

Brandenburg, Kent. “First Century Textual Attack: 2 Peter 3:15-17 and II Thessalonians 2:2” in *Thou Shalt Keep Them: A Biblical Theology of the Perfect Preservation of Scripture*. El Sobrante, CA: Pillar & Ground Publishing, 2003.

Taylor, Jim. *In Defense of the Textus Receptus*. Cleveland, GA: Old Path Publications, 2016.