

Sunday, December 9, 2018—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 69 Introduction to Transmission: The History of Preservation

Introduction

- Last week in Lesson 68 we sought to forge a link between canonicity and transmission by looking at early manuscripts and Christian book production. In doing so, we considered the following general topics:
 - *The Quantity of Early Manuscripts*—on this point we observed a large numerical discrepancy between extant Greek manuscripts (MSS) containing readings from canonical books when compared with available MSS containing apocryphal readings. “. . . the overall trend of early Christian papyri is still clear: early Christians were prolific users of books, especially those books that were to become part of the New Testament canon.” (Kruger, 239)
 - *Early Manuscript Collections*—here we saw that there is no historical evidence of any apocryphal gospel ever being included in a collection with the four canonical gospels.
 - *Early Christian Use of the Codex*—scholars agree that the early Christians clearly favored the use of codices over rolls from very early in church history. Possible reasons that have been given include the following: 1) convenience, 2) size, 3) cost, and 4) lack of education. Kruger argues the most plausible explanation links the Christian use of the codex with the development of the New Testament canon. Moreover, no canonical book from the first three centuries of church history has been found to be preserved on a roll.
- When New Testament manuscripts (MSS) are viewed as the “husks” that carried the “kernels” of the New Testament text, they can provide important clues as to the way early Christians viewed the boundaries of the canon. In this we observed a link between how the text was being transmitted (early MSS and codices) and the boundaries of the New Testament canon. In short, the early church transmitted, i.e., copied, those books that were deemed canonical at a far higher rate than those viewed as non-canonical.
- Today, in Lesson 69 we want to begin our discussion of the transmission of the New Testament text throughout the dispensation of grace. How did the text (the “kernels” not the “husks”) given by inspiration of God traverse the seas of time and history so that they would be available to us today in the 21st century?

Defining Transmission

- At the outset of this study it is vitally important that we take the necessary time to define our terms. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), “the definitive record of the English language”, offers the following basic definition for the English word transmission:
 - “The action of transmitting or fact of being transmitted; conveyance from one person or place to another; transference.”

- According to Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language*, the word transmission means the following:
 - "The act of sending from one place or person to another; as the *transmission* of letters, writings, papers, news and the like, from one country to another; or the *transmission* of rights, titles or privileges from father to son, and **from one generation to another.**"
- In the case of the Biblical text, "transmission" is dealing with how the text set forth via inspiration was passed on or transferred "from one generation to another." Put another way, how did the text written in the 1st century under divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit experience a "conveyance" or "transference" (see OED definition above) to us in the 21st century?
- Borrowing an example from Michael J. Kruger, when we speak of the transmission of the text we are speaking about the "kernels", i.e., the words, set forth by inspiration, not the "husks" or the physical pieces of papyrus or parchment they were originally written on. All sides in the textual debate concede that the "husks" of the original autographs have been lost to time and history. Therefore, it is not the "husks" that concern us when discussing transmission but the "kernels" set forth on those original "husks." Have the "kernels" of God's words been lost with the passage of the "husks" or have they been available "from one generation to another" through transmission?
- In his book *In Defense of the Textus Receptus: God's Preserved Word to Every Generation* author Jim Taylor answers this question by stating the following regarding transmission:
 - "As we speak of transmission, we are talking about how the scriptures were passed from one generation to another. So in this section, we will be taking a closer look at how the original autographs were copied and distributed. . . we no longer have the original manuscripts penned by Peter, Paul, and so on. Today, we have over 6600 copies of what they wrote. The originals no longer exist. . . But since we don't have the originals anymore, we have nothing to compare the existing manuscripts to. Therefore, it is absolutely impossible to say what the originals looked like. All we have to go on is the promise of God's preservation." (Taylor, 87)
- The believing position is that God's words, i.e., the "kernels", themselves have been available to all generations. To assert otherwise would be to doubt the promise of God to preserve His word. In this we see a linkage between preservation and transmission. It is impossible for a Bible believer to study the transmission of the text through history without considering the impact of the Biblical promise of preservation. The doctrine of preservation and the text's transmission are inextricably linked.
- Therefore, it is essential at the outset of our study of transmission that we take some time to review the Biblical promise of preservation. What one believes about preservation will impact their views on transmission. Consequently, by way of review we will revisit the following points from Term 2 (Lessons 28-56) of this class:
 - *Preservation: The Promise of God*
 - *Preservation: God Keeps His Promises*

- *Preservation: The Superiority of the Fideistic (Faith) Approach*
- *Preservation: The Historic Position of the Reformers*
- *Preservation: Connection with Transmission*

Preservation: The Promise of God

- Psalm 12:6-7—establishes the clear promise of God that His words would be preserved “from this generation for ever.” For many King James advocates these verses comprise the clearest statement of God’s promise to preserve His “words” found in the entire canon of scripture. It is from this passage that many derive their belief in the doctrine of preservation. This is due largely to the fact that the King James uses the word “preserve” in verse 7.
- Note how the wording of verse 7 mirrors the definition of the word *transmission* provided above:
 - Psalm 12:7—“Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them **from this generation for ever.**”
 - Webster’s Definition—“The act of sending from one place or person to another; as the *transmission* of letters, writings, papers, news and the like, from one country to another; or the *transmission* of rights, titles or privileges from father to son, and **from one generation to another.**”
- According to this passage, God is going to “keep” and “preserve” His “words” so that they are perpetually available from generation to generation. Thus, biblically speaking, it is impossible to discuss the transmission of the Biblical text without at the same time speaking about the preservation of the of text. Therefore, transmission is best viewed as the active process of preservation or preservation in “real time.” Put another way, God’s promise to “keep” and “preserve” His “words” “from this generation for ever” was accomplished through the process of transmission. These two concepts are inextricably linked.
 - In Lessons 31 and 32 we dealt with the controversy surrounding Psalm 12:6-7 in terms of its proper reading and exposition. In these Lessons we concluded that the King James reading is the correct one. For a full treatment/exposition of this topic interested parties are encouraged to read the combined notes titled “[Do Psalms 12:6-7 Teach the Preservation of God’s Words?](#)”
- While I believe that Psalm 12:6-7 is teaching the preservation of the “words” I do not believe that the Psalmist penned these verses with an early 17th century English translation in mind. Rather, David is referring to the “words” he is in the process of writing in Hebrew.
- It was those Hebrew words that God preserved, thereby giving the King James translators something to translate into English. This is not to say that translations cannot be part of the preservation process, it simply means that David is not referring to or speaking about the KJB in Psalm 12.

- While I am not willing to concede Psalm 12:6-7 to text critics and modern version advocates, there are many other passages that established the fundamental promise of preservation. Recall from our study of the doctrine of preservation in Lessons 28 through 39 that the following texts also establish God's promise to preserve His word.
 - Psalm 119:89, 111, 152, 160—the entire chapter is about the word of God.
 - D. A. Waite views these additional Psalms as dealing with preservation. In the interest of time and space, I have just provided the reference followed by Waite's comments on each verse.
 - Psalm 78:1-7—"These verses certainly indicate that God intended to preserve His Words for all time." (Waite, 7)
 - Psalm 105:8—"If a "generation" is twenty years, this would be 20,000 years. If a "generation were thirty years, it would be 30,000 years! God wants us to clearly see His promise of Bible preservation." (Waite, 7)
 - Isaiah 30:8
 - Isaiah 40:8 and I Peter 1:23-25—these two verses from Isaiah (30:8; 40:8) stand out as clear eternal witnesses to Biblical doctrine and promise of preservation.
 - Besides Psalms 12:6-7, Psalms 119:89, 111, 152, 160 as well as Isaiah 30:8; 40:8, there are other Old Testament passages that some preservationists have identified as having an impact upon the doctrine of preservation. Some of these include the following:
 - Proverbs 22:20-21—"Here is a clear statement by the Lord that He has given us things in WRITING so that we might have "certainty" about them. The only way we can have that certainty today is for God to have preserved every one of His "words of truth." This truly is a promise of Bible preservation." (Waite, 8)
 - Ecclesiastes 3:14—"If God has done anything or given us anything, it is perfect. He has given us His words, therefore His Words are perfect. We can't add to it or take away from it. It has been **preserved exactly**." (Waite, 8)
 - Please note that Waite's standard of preservation is "exact identity" of wording. It is on this point, i.e., the extent of preservation, that I would disagree with Waite.
 - Matthew 4:4

- Matthew 24:35—the totality of the Biblical evidence is overwhelming, Matthew 24:35 is teaching the eternal preservation of the words of Christ. To claim otherwise creates more problems than it solves.
- After reviewing the relevant passages, I unequivocally maintain that preservation is the Bible's claim for itself. In other words, the Bible does assert a promise of preservation thereby establishing a doctrine of preservation. Preservation is a Biblical doctrine that cannot be ignored, swept under the rug, or explained away. The cumulative force of the relevant passages is clear and irrefutable, God has promised to preserve His word.

Preservation: God Keeps His Promises

- Given the fact that God has indeed promised to preserve His word, the belief in preservation is really a question of faith in the promises of God. The following scriptures demonstrate that God keeps His word and is incapable of lying.
 - I Kings 8:24—"God promised and fulfilled with His hand. He promised the temple. It was built by Solomon who praised God for His faithfulness in keeping His promises." (Waite, 15)
 - Romans 4:20-21—"Here, the capability of God is exalted, as well as the fact that God keeps His promises. Though both Abraham and Sarah had passed the age of being parents, God told Abraham that he would have a son by Sarah. He was "fully persuaded" to believe "the promise of God.'" (Waite, 15)
 - Titus 1:2—"Here is a promise-keeping God, One who has not lied, One who cannot lie, and One Who keeps His promises." (Waite, 15)
 - Hebrews 10:23—"Yes, God is faithful and He keeps His promises." (Waite, 15)
- If God did not preserve His words as He said that He would (Ps. 12:6-7), then He has done two things He has never done before. First, God has wasted His own time by inspiring them in the first place. Second, if God did not do that which He promised He would in preserving His words, that would make Him a liar for failing to keep His word. This is an untenable position for a Bible Believer to accept.

Preservation: The Superiority of the Fideistic (Faith) Approach

- God's fundamental promise of preservation coupled with His inability to lie as well as His faithfulness to accomplish His promises, serve as the basis for the Fideistic (Faith) Approach to transmission and textual criticism. Either God kept His promise regarding preservation or he did not.
- If God did act in history to preserve His word, it would be inappropriate and high minded for humans to think they can "reconstruct" what God promised to preserve.

- “The hypothesis that God did not preserve His Words, so man needs to restore them, lies at the root of textual criticism. This line of thinking rejects what Scriptures state about preservation, depending instead on the uninspired words of men, both contemporary and historical. . . Any application of the pertinent passages on preservation that does not leave one with the assurance the he has a Bible with all the Words of God cannot be accepted from a position of faith. The position that all the Words exist somewhere, but are still yet to be found, does not fit into the teaching of Scripture, and, therefore must be rejected.” (Brandenburg in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 262)
- Man’s wisdom works contrary to God’s wisdom as a host of scriptures attest. We will consider but a few below:
 - Proverbs 3:5
 - Isaiah 55:8-9
 - I Corinthians 1:27-31; 2:5—what is your faith about God’s word standing in? The wisdom of men or the power of God.
- Many in our day such as Dr. Daniel B. Wallace of Dallas Theological Seminary and Dr. W. Edward Glenny of Central Baptist Theological Seminary, deny that the promise of preservation is a Biblical doctrine. Consequently, they ridicule those who approach the topic of transmission from the presupposition that God promised to preserve His word. These men argue that a naturalistic or neutral approach to the topic of transmission is to be preferred to a faith-based one. Please recall from our recent discussion of canonicity that so-called neutrality, when dealing with God or His word, is not possible. Why would it be any different when dealing with the matter of the text’s transmission through history?

Preservation: The Historic Position of the Reformers

- Belief in the promise of preservation was the historical position of the Protestant Reformers.
- The following doctrinal Confessions of the Reformation Era all allude to the doctrine of preservation.
 - 1646—[*The Westminster Confession of Faith*](#) (Reformed)
 - 1658—[*The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order*](#) (Reformed)
 - 1689—[*The London Baptist Confession*](#) (Baptistic)
 - 1742—[*The Philadelphia Baptist Confession*](#) (Baptistic)
- Given that the wording is virtually identical in all four Confessions, we will limit our quotes to Chapter I Of the Holy Scriptures, Article VIII from *The Westminster Confession of Faith*:

- “The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, **by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic**; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated in to the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.”
- All four *Confessions* hold that Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament were “inspired by God” and “kept pure in all ages.” If this is not a belief in preservation, I do not know what is. Moreover, the saints responsible for these *Confessions* assert the need for these pure Hebrew and Greek words to be translated in the “vulgar language of every nation unto which they come.” This is a strong appeal for the accurate and proper translation of the pure Hebrew and Greek words into the vernacular languages of all peoples.
- These *Confessions* demonstrate the historic Protestant belief in the notion of preservation or the idea that God kept His word pure in all ages. This belief was held across denominational traditions (Reformed and Baptist) as well as geographical boundaries (Old and New World).
- It is also important to note that the drafters of these *Confessions* were ascribing these statements to the Masoretic Hebrew Text and the Greek *Textus Receptus*, the only Greek text they had available to them. It was the act of translating the *Textus Receptus* into the vernacular languages of Europe that drove the Reformation and touched off the greatest era of Christian mission work the world has ever seen. These are historical FACTS that cannot be disputed.

Preservation: Connection with Transmission

- Christians need to believe what the Bible teaches about itself. We need to remember that the Bible is God’s book. Recall from our studies of inspiration in term one, when we deal with the Bible, we are dealing with God himself. We need to adopt the viewpoint of faith in our approach to transmission, just as we did when discussing canonicity.
- If God promised to preserve His word, cannot lie, and always fulfills His promises, then it would make more sense to believe in the promise of preservation than to deny it. In order to adopt a contrary position, one would have to subscribe to one of the following suppositions regarding God’s foundational nature and character:
 - God did not mean what He said (Never issued such a promise.).
 - God’s word cannot be trusted (Because He can and has lied.).
 - God is unwilling or unable to fulfill His promises.

- How many of you believe the following?
 - God created the world in six days.
 - God destroyed the earth through a flood saving only Noah and his family.
 - God confounded the languages of men and scattered them across the face of the earth.
 - God, through Moses, delivered Israel out of Egyptian slavery through the Red Sea.
 - David killed Goliath.
 - Jonah was swallowed by a whale.
 - Jesus Christ was the incarnate, virgin born Son of God who died on the cross for our sins and rose again the third day.
 - The resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road.
- Why do you believe these things? Because you believe the Bible.
- So, when it comes to the issue of the transmission of the Biblical text, why do so many believers leave the viewpoint of faith in favor of naturalistic textual theories? In short, one's belief in the promise of preservation, or lack thereof, will impact their thinking about the transmission of the text. We will begin to see this very clearly next week when we consider the two main approaches to the transmission of the text.
- When approached from a believing viewpoint, a study of transmission is a study of the history of preservation.

Works Cited

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

Waite, D.A. *Defending the King James Bible*. Collingswood, NJ: The Bible For Today Press, 2006.