

Sunday, March 17, 2019—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 81 Principles for Identifying the Preserved Text in History

Introduction

- In the Introduction to [Lesson 73](#) I stated the following:
 - Before laying out some principles for discerning, locating, or identifying the preserved text in history, we need to consider the following basic points regarding transmission:
 - Materials Used in Transmission (Lesson 73)
 - Witnesses to the New Testament Text (Lesson 73)
 - False Assumptions Concerning Transmission (Lessons [74](#), [75](#), & [76](#))
 - Textual Variants & Corruption (Lessons [77](#) & [78](#))
- In addition to considering these basic points regarding transmission, we also proved in Lessons [79](#) and [80](#) that textual variants do impact fundamental Christian doctrine despite the claims of leading Evangelical textual critics.
- Now, with these preliminary considerations out of the way, we are in position to set forth some principles for identifying the preserved text in history. In order to accomplish this task, we will consider the following:
 - Biblical Principles Regarding Preservation/Transmission
 - Historical Realities & Considerations

Biblical Principles Regarding Preservation/Transmission

- Please recall that in [Lesson 69](#) we concluded that “when approached from a believing viewpoint, a study of transmission is a study of the history of preservation.”
- Once again, our job as believers is not to reconstruct the text as though it has been lost. Rather, our job is to allow the scriptures to be our guide in identifying the text God has preserved from generation to generation.
- The following scriptural principles will assist the believer in identifying the preserved text:
 - *Multiplicity of Copies*—in Lessons [48](#), [49](#), [50](#), [51](#), [52](#), and [53](#), we studied the Process and People of Preservation in both the Old and New Testaments. In doing so, we observed that God’s design was to preserve His word in a multiplicity of accurate reliable copies that were just as authoritative as the originals. Therefore, we ought to be able to observe in history a collection of manuscripts that are plenteous and in substantive agreement

with each other regarding doctrinal content despite not possessing *verbatim identity* of wording.

- *Available/Accessible*—this principle was covered in [Lesson 55](#). The Preserved Text would not only exist in a multiplicity of copies, but these copies would be available to God’s people to possess, study, copy, believe, translate, and preach from. They would not be hidden under a rock, buried in the sand, or in an inaccessible library or monastery.
 - *In Use*—a third Biblical hallmark of the Preserved Text would be use by God’s people for generations. God’s word was preserved through the dynamic of people handling it, not in one copy sitting on a bookshelf for 500 or 1000 years far away from God’s people who were actually doing the work of the ministry. That is not the way God preserves His word. He preserves His word by it being in the hands of Bible believing people, and those people are charged with the responsibility to execute God’s purpose.
- When these three Biblical principles are applied to the historical and textual FACTS, they point toward the *Textus Receptus (TR)*, the text of the Protestant Reformation, as being the printed form of the Preserved Text in Greek. The *TR* is supported by the vast majority of extant Greek manuscripts (*multiplicity of copies*) as found in the Byzantine Text-type. Moreover, it represents a text that was clearly available, accessible, and in use by Bible believing people throughout the history of the dispensation of grace. Its availability, accessibility, and use are seen not only in the MSS of the Byzantine majority, but also in the early versions, patristic quotations, and Lectionaries; all of which support the readings found in the *TR* (see the table on page 6 for statistical data on the Lectionaries).
 - When discussing the Canon in Lessons 57 through 67 we discussed the Self-Authenticating Model as being the correct Canonical Model. Recall that the Self-Authenticating Model holds that the scriptures authenticated themselves in the hearts and minds of believers when they were written.
 - “What is needed, then, is a canonical model that does not ground the New Testament canon in an external authority, but seeks to ground the canon in the only place it could be grounded, its own authority. After all, if the canon bears the very authority of God, to what other standard could it appeal to justify itself? Even when God swore oaths, “he swore by himself” (Heb. 6:13). Thus, for the canon to be the canon, it must *be self-authenticating*. A self-authenticating model of canon would take into account something the other models have largely overlooked: the *content* of the canon itself. Rather than looking only to its reception (community determined), or only to its origins (historically determined), this model would, in a sense, let the canon have a voice in its own authentication.” (Kruger, 89)
 - The same factors that self-authenticated the canonical books in the hearts and minds of believers were also active in the authentication of the Biblical text contained in those books.
 - Corporate Exposure ([Lesson 63](#))

- Corporate Reception ([Lesson 65](#))
 - Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit ([Lesson 64](#))
 - Ministry of the New Testament Prophets ([Lesson 65](#))
- At this point it is imperative to remember that according to the Self Authenticating Model of Canonicity, the books of the New Testament received *corporate exposure* via the copying process (preservation). The *corporate exposure* furnished by the multiplicity of copies in turn led to the *corporate reception* of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament Canon. It would be a mistake to think that this process was limited to the books of the Bible in terms of its “Table of Contents” without extending to text or readings found within these books. The doctrinal substance of the Biblical text, not just its “Table of the Contents”, authenticated itself to the body of Christ.
 - Throughout the history of the dispensation of grace, the body of Christ had access to and utilized a *pure text* (Psalm 12:6-7) that was in substantive agreement with the *TR* in Greek and the King James Bible in English despite not having been transmitted in a state of *verbatim identity*. Please recall my definition of a *pure text*:
 - The existence of a *pure text* (Psalm 12:6-7) 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 *character* or *doctrinal content* despite not being preserved in a state of *verbatim identity*.
 - The authentication and use of this *pure text* by the body of Christ occurred organically through the internal witness of God the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the New Testament prophets, not through the rulings and decrees of church councils and/or actions of an organized state church such as the Roman Catholic Church.
 - The very fact that this *pure text* was **not** preserved/transmitted in a state of *verbatim identity* speaks to the organic nature in which the text was preserved and transmitted throughout the dispensation of grace. This *pure text* was used and copied by independent Bible believing individuals and assemblies spanning a time period of nearly 2,000 years. There was no centralized authority such as the Roman Catholic Church controlling and overseeing the transmission of text to ensure that no differences of any kind entered the text. When viewed in this fashion, the presence of variances within the textual witnesses to this *pure text* are not a problem but an assurance that preservation occurred in a manner that is consistent with how God works today during the dispensation of grace.
 - In stark contrast, the Critical Text supporting Modern Versions fails on all three counts to pass the tests of scripture: 1) it has few manuscript witnesses that substantively disagree with each

other, 2) its principle manuscripts were not accessible or available to believers throughout the dispensation of grace, and 3) given their lack of availability, they certainly were not copied and/or used by Bible believing people during the church age.

- The Modern Critical text was a 19th century creation of textual critics based upon the primary witness of two Greek Codices: Vaticanus (B) and Sinaiticus (Σ). These two codices disagree with each other in over 3,000 places in the gospels alone, many of which are substantive. Moreover, they were inaccessible to the body of Christ throughout the dispensation of grace because they were not even known to exist until the 15th (B) and 19th (Σ) centuries respectively. Lastly, they have no history of ever having been used and/or copied by the body of Christ.
 - “No amount of subjective preference can obscure the fact that they are poor copies, objectively so. They were so bad that no one could stand to use them, and so they survived physically (but had no ‘children,’ since no one wanted to copy them). (Pickering, 2)
- The Critical Text is a Frankenstein text that was cobbled together by text critics in the 19th century using an eclectic method. No member of the body of Christ had ever seen such a text; much less used a text like the one printed by Westcott and Hort in 1881. The publication of the Critical Text was the fruit of lower criticism’s application of Enlightenment Rationalism upon the Biblical text.

Historical Realities & Considerations

- First, the transmission of the *pure text* occurred in the 1st and 2nd centuries as God used Bible believing members of the body of Christ to protect and propagate His word in the face of heretical attacks against the text as well as physical persecution against their persons and property which would have included their manuscripts. Recall the simultaneous nature of preservation and corruption from Lesson [54](#) and again in Lessons [77](#) and [78](#).
- A second important feature in the transmission of the text occurred in the 4th and 5th centuries when the persecution of the previous centuries ceased, at least temporarily. In 314 AD, Emperor Constantine virtually created a state-church when he allowed for the recognition of Christianity within the Roman Empire and promoted it above all other religions. Eventually the Roman Catholic Church emerged and used its new-found power to persecute believers who would not submit to the authority of the newly formed state religion (Parties interested in this history are encouraged to see Lessons 8 through 15 of the [Grace History Project](#).) In the interim, the body of Christ enjoyed a respite from persecution. This reality impacted the transmission of the text in the 4th and 5th centuries. Even textual critics Kurt and Barbara Aland acknowledge that these centuries saw many copies of the New Testament text being made and distributed worldwide.
 - “Innumerable manuscripts were destroyed during the persecution and had to be replaced. The result was a widespread scarcity of NT manuscripts [I am not sure I wholly agree with this statement given the three Biblical principles of preservation presented above.

Through the multiplicity of copies, the *pure text* would have been available to anyone who desired it.], which became all the more acute when the persecution ceased. For when Christianity could again engage freely in missionary activity there was a tremendous growth in both the size of the existing churches and the number of new churches. There also followed a sudden demand for large numbers of N.T. manuscripts in all provinces of the empire.” (Aland, 65)

- At the same time (during the 4th & 5th centuries), the *pure text* was being translated into the languages of the nations. For example, the Gothic Bible was a Germanic translation that occurred between 330 and 350 AD. A textual analysis of the Gothic Bible reveals that its readings possess a high level of agreement with the MSS of the Byzantine majority. Other translations of the Byzantine Text from this period included the Armenian, Palestinian Syriac, and Philoxenian Bibles. Regarding the affinity these translations show for the Byzantine majority, Dr. Jim Taylor states the following:
 - “These were all very clearly taken from the Byzantine family. All of these translations are understandable in that they were done by missionaries from Antioch and Constantinople where the Byzantine family was predominant.” (Taylor, 95)
- Regarding this historical preference among Bible believers for the Byzantine majority in the 4th and 5th centuries, Dr. Edward F. Hills stated the following in *The King James Version Defended*:
 - “Thus, during the 4th and 5th centuries among the Syriac-speaking Christians of the East, the Greek speaking Christians of the Byzantine empire, and the Latin-speaking Christians of the West the same tendency was at work, namely, a God-guided trend away from the false Western and Alexandrian texts and toward the True Traditional Text.” (Hills, 188)
- It is important to point out the following, scholars date the two so-called oldest and best manuscripts, Codex Vaticanus (B) and Codex Sinaiticus (ℵ), to the 4th century or the 300s AD. Note that the Gothic Bible dates from 330 to 350 AD and is emblematic of the Byzantine Text in terms of its readings. This means that Byzantine Text is at least as old as the so-called Alexandrian text (4th century) or it would not have bequeathed to the body of Christ the translations noted above. Put another way, the Byzantine text must have existed in the 4th century or else translations from that century could not have possessed Byzantine readings. Moreover, as Dr. Harry A. Sturz pointed out in his book, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism*, there are distinctly Byzantine readings in the papyri which predate ℵ & B. The surviving data from the 4th century suggest that both the Alexandrian and Byzantine Text-types were in existence at this early date. Therefore, it is academically dishonest to not consider the witness of the Byzantine majority as representative of the so-called original text when it is not only of equal antiquity with the Alexandrian but has an established history of being both available and in use by the body of Christ.
- A scriptural analysis of the evidence suggests that, if ℵ & B are emblematic of the Alexandrian Text, it was unsettled, given the fact that these two codices substantively disagree with

themselves. Moreover, there is zero historical evidence that the great Uncials were ever copied and transmitted by anyone outside of Egypt. In short, the greater body of Christ did not view the text of Alexandria as the correct form of the text because the two so-called oldest and best MSS exhibit zero evidence that they were ever used and or copied by the greater body of Christ.

- “. . . if, as reported, the Diocletian campaign was most fierce and effective in the Byzantine area, the numerical advantage of the Byzantine Text-type over the Western and Alexandrian would have been reduced, giving the latter a chance to forge ahead. But it did not happen. The church, in the main, refused to propagate those forms of the Greek text.” (Pickering, *Identity of the New Testament Text II*)
- Moving forward in history, Dr. Jim Taylor points out the fact that between the 5th and 9th centuries, the period when Uncial texts were being utilized, the Byzantine Text became the dominant text. Note that in the following table, 258 (97%) of the 267 extant Uncial manuscripts support the Byzantine Majority against \aleph & B. That is not to say, however, that the Alexandrian Text completely faded into oblivion. The extant evidence suggests that the text of Egypt persisted as a distinct minority, only 9 (3%) of the surviving Uncials support the readings found in \aleph & B. Therefore, the Alexandrian Text is probably best viewed as a regional text that never enjoyed widespread usage by the body of Christ. (Taylor, 95-96)
- Recall the following data presented in [Lesson 73](#):
 - “The following chart (from Floyd Nolan Jones’ book) illustrates the degree of conformity that four types of manuscript (papyri fragments, uncials, cursives and lectionaries) have to either the Majority Text or to Sinaiticus and Vaticanus (the primary text underlying most modern translations).

	Total # of MSS	Support \aleph & B	Support Majority
Papyri	88	13 (15%)	75 (85%)
Uncials (all caps)	267	9 (3%)	258 (97%)
Cursives	2764	23 (1%)	2741(99%)
Lectionaries	2143	0	2143 (100%)
Total	5262	45 (0.9%)	5217 (99%)

This chart shows that the Majority Text is truly majority. The Majority Text is also equally old to the supposed “oldest and best” referred to in the ancient versions. It also represents the widest geographic distribution: across Greece, Asia Minor, Constantinople, Syria, Africa, Gaul, Southern Italy, Sicily, England, and Ireland. In contrast, the text that modern versions are based on is found in Egypt, a place that had no letters sent to it, but where most of the early heresies originated.” (Kayser & Pickering, 4-5)

- In the 9th and 10th centuries, scribes began converting upper case uncial manuscripts to lower case cursives manuscripts. Dr. Jim Taylor points out that purely Byzantine manuscripts comprise the vast majority of MSS converted during this time period:

- “As of this writing [2016] over 2,911 minuscules [cursives] have been discovered. Of this astounding number of manuscripts, 2,840 are purely Byzantine. 13 more are primarily Byzantine with mixed or Critical Text readings, 31 are Critical Text manuscripts, 3 are Mixed Texts which cannot be classified as either Critical Text or Byzantine, and 1 manuscript which has not been classified. I think it is pretty clear which family of manuscripts was favored and intentionally transmitted.

. . . In the main, those who made copies from the uncials to the minuscules [cursives] chose the most important Byzantine uncials for use in the transliteration process. Modern textual critics should consider this matter with great care because many of the manuscripts that they would have used are no longer extant today. If the Alexandrian manuscripts truly are superior to the Byzantine manuscripts, then why did the 8th and 9th century scribes reject their use?

Supporters of the Critical Text maintain that the wrong manuscripts were copied and handed down, and this is supposedly proven with the statement that “the older minuscules have a different text.” But the oldest known minuscule is Minuscule 461 dated at 835 AD and it is purely Byzantine. Until the discovery of Minuscule 461, Minuscule 14 was the oldest known minuscule, and it has been dated at 964 AD. It is also Byzantine. So the statement that “the older minuscules have a different text” is absolutely false. Those who make such a claim are too educated to be called ignorant. The only other conclusion I can come to is that they are not being academically honest.” (Taylor, 97)

- Lastly, the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 greatly impacted the historical transmission of the *pure text*. Between 330 AD and 1453 the Byzantine Empire served as a continuation of the old Roman Empire in which Greek was the principal language. “This was crucial because the Koine form of the Greek language had begun to die out as a living language in areas outside of Asia Minor and Greece starting in the 2nd century and 3rd century. The areas that spoke Latin, Syriac, or Coptic were moving away from Greek in favor of local languages.” (Taylor, 97) Dr. Taylor points out that this was not the case in the Byzantine Empire:
 - “. . . Bible believers in the Byzantine Empire guarded the Greek biblical manuscripts through the Dark Ages. Then, in 1453, at the end of the Byzantine Empire, Byzantine manuscripts were taken to Europe after the fall of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. It is interesting, and I believe providential, that this was also around the time when Johannes Gutenberg invented the now famous “Gutenberg Printing Press” which was the first printing press with moveable type. In 1455 AD, Gutenberg printed the “Gutenberg Bible” and the world moved into a new era of manuscript preservation.” (Taylor, 97-98)
- The scriptural model of preservation requires both the existence of the Byzantine Text and the Critical Text. Put another way, if the Greek manuscript evidence was 100% Byzantine, that would be an unbelievable state of affairs, given the clear Satanic policy of attacking the word of God (Genesis 3:1-6, II Corinthians 2:17, II Thessalonians 2:2). Prior to even looking at the

evidence, a Bible believer would expect to find: 1) a dominant *pure text* that has been widely copied and extensively utilized by the believing church throughout time (which is an accurate description of the Byzantine Text), and 2) a minority text for which there is clear evidence of its existence but which has been rejected by the believing church and not consistently utilized throughout time (which is an accurate description of the Critical Text). Thus, the state of the evidence turns out to be exactly what one would expect to find based upon what scripture teaches as to God's manner of preservation of His word and Satan's attempts to corrupt it.

- In the next Lesson we will begin looking at Wilbur Pickering's model of "normal" transmission as a framework for discussing how preservation/transmission was accomplished.

Works Cited

Aland, Kurt & Barbara Aland. *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism 2nd Edition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.

Hills, Edward F. *The King James Version Defended*. Des Moines: IA, Christian Research Press, 1956.

Kayser, Phillip & Wilbur Pickering. *Has God Indeed Said? The Preservation of the Text of the New Testament*. Omaha: NE: Biblical Blueprints, 2009.

Kruger, Michael J. *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

Pickering, Wilbur N. "[The Root Cause of the Continuous Defection from Biblical Infallibility and Consequent Objective Authority.](#)"

Pickering, Wilbur N. [The Identity of the New Testament Text II.](#)

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