

Sunday, April 28, 2019— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 85 Normal Transmission: The Stream of Transmission

Introduction

- In [Lesson 84](#) we continued our discussion of “normal transmission” by considering the four controlling factors identified by Dr. Wilbur N. Pickering in *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV*: 1) access to the autographs, 2) proficiency in the source language, 3) strength of the church, and 4) appropriate attitude toward the text.
- In Lesson 84 we applied these four controlling factors to the historical and textual facts and observed that transmission was both “normal” and “abnormal.”
 - *Normal*—“In sum, I believe that the evidence clearly favors that interpretation of the history of the text which sees the normal transmission of the text as centered in the Aegean region, the area that was best qualified, from every point of view, to transmit the text from the very first. The result of that normal transmission is the “Byzantine” text-type. In every age, including the second and third centuries, it has been the traditional text.

So then, I claim that the N.T. text had a normal transmission, namely the fully predictable spread and reproduction of reliable copies of the Autographs from the earliest period down through the history of transmission until the availability of printed texts brought copying by hand to an end.” (Pickering, 110)

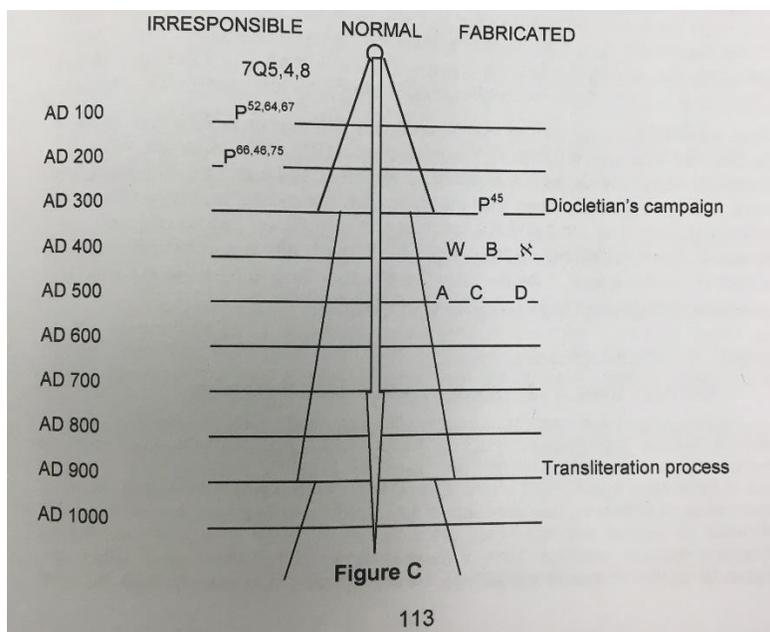
- *Abnormal*—“Turning now to the abnormal transmission, it no doubt commenced right along with the normal. The apostolical writings themselves contain strong complaints and warnings against heretical and malicious activity. As Christianity spread and began to make an impact on the world, not everyone accepted it as “good news.” Opposition of various sorts arose. . . Certain it is that Church Fathers who wrote during the second century complained bitterly about the deliberate alterations to the Text perpetrated by “heretics.” Large sections of the extant writings of the early Fathers are precisely and exclusively concerned with combating the heretics. It is clear that during the second century, and possibly already in the first [II Cor. 2:17], such persons produced many copies of N.T. writings that incorporated their alterations. . . The result was a welter of variant readings, to confuse the unformed and mislead the unwary. Such a scenario was totally predictable. If the N.T. is in fact God’s Word then both God and Satan must have a lively interest in its fortunes. To approach the textual criticism of the N.T. without taking due account of that interest is to act irresponsibly.” (Pickering, 110-111)
- When judged in light of Pickering’s four controlling factors for “normal” transmission, the evidence does **not** point in the direction of Egypt as the propagator of the *pure* form of the New Testament text.
 - “Putting it all together, what are Egypt’s claims upon our confidence? Frankly, it seems to me to be virtually impossible that a faithful, high quality transmission of the New

Testament Text could have taken place in Egypt—it simply lacked the necessary qualifications. Besides the proof is in the pudding. Each of the early MSS that is assigned to the Alexandrian text-type is itself a poor copy—demonstrably so. Not only that, they disagree among themselves to an astonishing extent. Not to mention the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times they disagree, as a group, with the rest of the world.” (Kayser & Pickering, 30)

- The transmission of the text was “normal” and it occurred in the majority text of the Aegean rim otherwise known as the Byzantine text-type.
- In today’s Lesson we want look at the stream of transmission.

The Stream of Transmission

- Chapter 5 of *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV* by Dr. Wilbur Pickering is titled “The History of the Text.” Within this Chapter there is a subsection titled “The Stream of Transmission” in which Dr. Pickering applies the four controlling factors and his resultant findings regarding “normal” and “abnormal” transmission to give his readers an understanding of the history of transmission.
 - “Now then, what sort of a picture may we expect to find in the surviving witnesses on the assumption that the history of the transmission of the New Testament Text was predominately normal? We may expect a broad spectrum of copies, showing minor differences due to copying mistakes but all reflecting one common tradition. The simultaneous existence of abnormal transmission in the earliest centuries would result in a sprinkling of copies, helter-skelter, outside of the main stream. The picture would look something like *Figure C*.” (Pickering, 113)



- Dr. Pickering explains his diagram as follows:
 - “The MSS within the cones represent the “normal” transmission. To the left I have plotted some possible representatives of what we might style the “irresponsible” transmission of the text—the copyists produced poor copies through incompetence or carelessness but did not make deliberate changes. To the right I have plotted some possible representatives of what we might style the “fabricated” transmission of the text—the scribes made deliberate changes in the text (for whatever reasons), producing fabricated copies, not true copies. I am well aware that the MSS plotted on the figure above contain both careless and deliberate errors, in different proportions (7Q5, 4, 8, and P⁵², ⁶⁴, ⁶⁷ are too fragmentary to permit the classification of their errors as deliberate rather than careless), so that any classification such as I attempt here must be relative and gives a distorted picture. Still, I venture to insist that ignorance, carelessness, officiousness and malice all left their mark upon the transmission of the New Testament text, and we must take account of them in any attempt to reconstruct this history of that transmission.” (Pickering, 114)
- Later, Pickering explains how his diagram in Figure C fares when compared against the extant manuscript evidence.
 - “What we find upon consulting the witnesses is just such a picture. We have the Majority Text (Aland), or the Traditional Text (Burgon), dominating the stream of transmission with a few individual witnesses going their idiosyncratic ways. We have already seen that the notion of “text-types” and recensions, as defined and used by Hort and his followers is gratuitous. Epp’s notion of “streams” fares no better. There is just one stream, with a number of small eddies [a circular movement of water, counter to a main current, causing a small whirlpool] along the edges. When I say the Majority Text dominates the stream, I mean it is represented in about 95% of the MSS.” (Pickering, 114)
- Anticipating an objection from his opponents regarding his 95% number in the preceding quote, Dr. Pickering offers the following clarification.
 - “Actually, such a statement is not altogether satisfactory because it does not allow for the mixture or shifting affinities encountered by individual MSS. A better, though more cumbersome way to describe the situation would be something like this: 100% of the MSS agree as to, say 50% of the text; 99% agree as to another 40%; over 95% agree as to another 4%; over 90% agree as to another 2%; over 80% agree as to another 2%; only for 2% or so of the Text do less than 80% of the MSS agree, and a disproportionate number of those occur in Revelation. And the membership of the dissenting group varies from reading to reading. . . Still, with the above reservation, one may reasonably speak of up to 95% of the extant MSS belonging to the Majority text-type.

I see no way to account for 95% (or 90%) domination unless that text goes back to the Autographs. Hort saw the problem and invented a revision. Sturz seems not to have seen the problem. He demonstrates that the “Byzantine text-type” is early and independent of the “Western” and “Alexandrian text-type” and, like von Soden, wishes to treat them as

three equal witnesses. But if the three “text-types” were equal, how could the so-called “Byzantine” ever gain a 90-95% preponderance?” (Pickering, 115)

- At this point, Pickering’s “argument from statistical probability enters with a vengeance:”
 - “Not only do the extant MSS present us with one text form enjoying a 95% majority, but the remaining 5% do not represent a single competing text form. The minority MSS disagree as much (or more) among themselves as they do with the majority. For any of them to agree so closely as to P⁷⁵ and B is an oddity. We are not judging, therefore, between two text forms, one representing 95% of the MSS and the other 5%. Rather, we have to judge between 95% and a fraction of 1% (comparing the Majority Text with P⁷⁵, B text form for example). Or to take a specific case, I Timothy 3:16, some 600 Greek MSS (besides the Lectionaries) read “God” while only nine read something else. Of those nine, three have private readings and six agree in reading “who.” So, we have to judge between 98.5% and 1%, “God” versus “who.” It is hard to imagine any possible set of circumstances in the transmissional history sufficient to produce the cataclysmic overthrow in statistical probability required by the claim that “who” is the original reading.” (Pickering, 115-117)
- Next, Dr. Pickering points out how scholars who reject the transmissional model as found in the Majority Text have a serious ideological hurdle that they need to try and overcome.
 - “It really does seem that those scholars who reject the Majority Text are faced with a serious problem. How is it to be explained if it does not represent the Original? Hort’s notion of a Lucianic revision has been abandoned by most scholars because of the total lack of historical evidence. The eclecticists are not even trying. The “process” view has not been articulated in sufficient detail to permit refutation, but on the face of it that view is flatly contradicted by the argument for statistical probability. How can any amount of “process” bridge the gap between B or Aleph and the TR?

But there is a more basic problem with the process view. Hort saw clearly, and correctly, that the Majority Text must have a common archetype. Recall that Hort’s genealogical method was based on community of error. On the hypothesis that the Majority Text is a late and inferior text form, the large mass of common readings which distinguish it from the so-called “Western” or “Alexandrian text-types” must be errors (which was precisely Hort’s contention) and such an agreement in error would have to have a common source. The process view fails completely to account for such an agreement in error (on that hypothesis).

Hort saw the need for a common source and posited a Lucianic revision. Scholars now generally recognize that the “Byzantine text-type: must date back at least into the second century. But what chance would the original “Byzantine” document, the archetype, have of gaining currency when appeal to the Autographs was still possible?” (Pickering 117-118)

- Pulling multiple lines of reasoning together, Pickering concluded this subsection of Chapter 5 on the “stream of transmission” by stating the following:

- “Candidly, there is only one reasonable explanation for the Majority Text that has so far been advanced—it is the result of an essentially normal process of transmission and the common source for its consensus is the Autographs. Down through the centuries of copying, the original text has always been reflected with a high degree of accuracy in the manuscript tradition as a whole. The history of the text presented in this chapter not only accounts nicely for the Majority Text, it also accounts for the inconsistent minority of MSS. They are remnants of the abnormal transmission of the text, reflecting ancient aberrant forms. It is a dependence upon such aberrant forms that distinguish contemporary critical/eclectic editions of the Greek New Testament and the modern translations based upon them.” (Pickering, 118)
- In the next subsection of Chapter 5 titled “What is the Actual Evidence”, Dr. Pickering presents a host of highly technical information regarding the extant uncial and cursive MSS to support his diagram for the stream of transmission in Figure C. Rather than trying to convey the technical intricacies of Pickering’s charts and tables, we can accomplish the same thing by revisiting some data that we have already studied.
- Recall that according to Pickering’s argument for “normal” transmission based upon the four controlling factors of: 1) access to the autographs, 2) proficiency in the source language, 3) strength of the church, and 4) attitude toward the text, the text proliferated around the Aegean rim, otherwise known as the Byzantine text-type, was already the dominant form of the text by 200 AD.
- Moving forward in time, 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](#) and [81](#):
 - “The following chart (from Floyd Nolan Jones’ book) illustrates the degree of conformity that four types of manuscripts (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 (Gen. 3:1-6, II Cor. 2:17, II Thess. 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 his “Concluding Remarks” to Chapter 5, Dr. Pickering reminds his readers that it is impossible to establish an archetype for the so-called Alexandrian text-type based upon the inconsistency of its principle witnesses.
 - “In his book Aland’s discussion of transmission of the NT text is permeated with the assumption that the Byzantine text was a secondary development that progressively contaminated the pure Egyptian (“Alexandrian”) text. But the chief “Alexandrian” witnesses, B A (except e) and Ⲛ (The Text, p. 107), are in constant and significant disagreement among themselves; so much so that there is no objective way of reconstructing an archetype. 150 years earlier the picture is the same; P⁴⁵, P⁶⁶, P⁷⁵ are quite dissimilar and do not reflect a single tradition. In A.D. 200 “there was not a king in [Egypt]; everyone did what was right in his own eyes,” or so it would seem. But what if we were to entertain the hypothesis that the Byzantine tradition is the oldest and that the “Western” and “Alexandrian” MSS represent varying perturbation on the fringes of the main transmissional stream? Would this not make better sense of the surviving evidence? Then there would be no “Western” or “Egyptian” archetypes, just various sources of contamination that acted in such a random fashion that each extant “Western” or “Egyptian” MS has a different ‘mosaic.’ In contrast, there would indeed be a “Byzantine” archetype, which would reflect the original. The mean text of the extant MSS improves century by century, the XIV being the best, because the worst MSS were not copied or worn out by use; whereas the good ones were used and copied, and when worn out discarded.” (Pickering, 125-126)

- Pickering also points out the “surviving MSS from the first ten centuries are not representative of the true state of affairs at the time.”
 - “Those who catalog NT MSS inform us that the 12th and 13th centuries lead to pack, in terms of extant MSS, followed by the 14th, 11th, 15th, 16th, and 10th, in that order. There are over four times as many MSS from the 13th century as from the 10th, but obviously Koine Greek would have been more of a living language in the 10th than in the 13th, and so there would have been more demand and therefore more supply. In other words, many hundreds of really pure MSS from the 10th perished. A higher percentage of really good MSS produced in the 14th century survived than those produced in the 11th; and so on. That is why there is a progressive level of agreement among the Byzantine MSS, there being a higher percentage of agreement in the 14th than in the 10th. But had we lived in the 10th, and done a wide survey of the MSS, we would have found very nearly the same level of agreement (perhaps 98%). The same obtains if we had lived in the 8th, 6th, 4th, and 2nd century. In other words, THE SURVIVING MSS FROM THE FIRST TEN CENTURES ARE NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE TRUE STATE OF AFFAIRS AT THE TIME.” (Pickering, 126)
- Dr. Pickering concludes Chapter 5 with the following paragraph.
 - “Aland seems to grant that down through the centuries of church history the Byzantine text was regarded as “the text of the church,” and he traces the beginning of this state of affairs to Lucian. He makes repeated mention of a “school of/at Antioch” and of Asia Minor. All of this is very interesting, because in his book he agrees with Adolf Harnack that “about A.D. 180 the greatest concentration of churches was in Asia Minor along the Aegean coast of Greece. This is the area where Greek was the mother tongue and where Greek continued to be used. It is also the area that started out with most of the Autographs [2/3 of the autographic text]. But Aland continues: “Even around A.D. 325 the scene was still largely unchanged. Asia Minor continued to be the heartland of the church [Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 53].” “The heartland of the Church”—so who else would be in a better position to identify the correct text of the New Testament? Who could ‘sell’ a fabricated text in Asia Minor in the early fourth century? I submit that the Byzantine text dominated the transmissional history because the churches in Asia Minor vouched for it. And they did so, from the very beginning, because they know it was the true text, having received it from the Apostles. The Majority Text is what it is just because it has always been the Text of the Church.” (Pickering, 127)

Conclusion

- Based upon the historical and textual evidence we have considered, if one were to diagram the stream of transmission it would resemble a highway, Transmission Turnpike if you will, stretching from the 1st century to the 21st and beyond into the “ages to come” (Eph. 2:7). Remaining squarely on the highway, and thereby safely traversing time and history are the Greek MSS of the Byzantine majority, as well as translations, patristic quotations, and lectionaries that are in substantive doctrinal agreement with each other despite not possessing *verbatim* wording. This mass of textual witnesses preserved and transmitted the *pure text* of scripture.

- In addition, we should expect to find some textual witnesses driving with wheels on both the highway and the shoulder. These witnesses are best viewed as *mixed texts* in that they contain *pure* readings as well as corrupted ones to varying degrees. While they may have begun squarely on the highway, they have drifted to the shoulder over time. Therefore, we would expect to find MSS in this category traveling with varying degrees of recklessness i.e., differing amounts of purity and corruption.
- Lastly, Bible Believers should expect to encounter “FORDs” or Found On Road Dead MSS littering the ditches of history. These MSS not only disagree with the readings of the majority but they also disagree with each other. These are the left for dead MSS of history that have no evidence of ever having been copied or used by the body of Christ. Their existence in the present is due to their intentional abandonment by the believing church in the past. It is these discarded vehicles (MSS) along the ditches of the Transmission Turnpike that have been revitalized by modern textual critics and foisted upon to the body of Christ as the original text of scripture.

Works Cited

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