

Sunday, May 5, 2019— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
 Lesson 86 Normal Transmission: The Paulicians and the Preserved Text

### **Introduction**

- Lesson [82](#), [83](#), [84](#), and [85](#) focused on Dr. Wilbur N. Pickering’s argument for “normal” transmission. In these Lessons we have seen how 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; point in the direction of the Aegean rim as the region most qualified to transmit the *pure text* of scripture.
- In Lesson 85 we studied Dr. Pickering’s argument for one stream of transmission existing within the 95% Byzantine majority with “eddies” of aberrant/abnormal MSS existing along the banks of the main stream of transmission. These “eddies” are not only cut off from the main stream of transmission in terms of their readings, they are also cut off from each other. The MSS swirling in the “eddies” of history are so dissimilar from each other in terms of their readings that it is impossible to utilize them in forming a single monolithic archetype to compete with the Byzantine majority. Therefore, the 95% agreement found in the MSS of the Byzantine stream is only mathematically possible if the autographs themselves formed the archetype for the main stream of transmission. I will be elaborating on my illustration of Transmission Turnpike next week in Lesson 87.
- After Lesson 85, there are two topics that one might consider as a logical next step. Option one would be to consider who lived in the Aegean rim that would have possessed an interest in transmitting the *pure text* of scripture. Option two would be to compare the transmissional model presented in Lesson 85 with other conceptualizations of transmission that have been utilized by King James advocates.
- Today, in Lesson 86, I have chosen to focus on the people of the Aegean rim first by looking at the Paulicians and the Preserved Text. In order to accomplish this task we will be considering the following points:
  - Who Were the Paulicians?
  - Beliefs of the Paulicians
  - Paulicians & the Preserved Text

### **Who Were the Paulicians?**

- “From the time of Mani [3<sup>rd</sup> century] the churches of believers who called themselves Christians, thus distinguishing themselves from others whom they called “Romans,” had always been accused of being Manichaeans, though they declared that they were not and complained of the injustice of attributing to them doctrines they did not hold.” (Broadbent, 65)
- The name Paulician was frequently given to these churches.
  - “The persecutions to which they were subjected and the systematic destruction of their literature [which would have included their NT MSS] hide from us all but

occasional glimpses into their history, though what remains is sufficient to show that there were in those wide regions of **Asia Minor**, Armenia, around Mount Ararat and beyond the Euphrates, churches . . . who kept the teaching of the apostles—received from Christ and contained in the Scriptures—in an unbroken testimony from the first.” (Broadbent, 66)

- The Paulicians as well as similar groups rejected the use of icons and images in their worship. They received a bit of reprieve from persecution under the reign of Leo the Isaurian who in 726 issued the first edict against the worship of images. He followed this by a campaign of forcible destruction of images and the persecution of those who held them. (Broadbent, 69)
- “The iconoclastic movement had brought respite to the persecuted brethren in Asia Minor, but when (AD 842), under the Empress Theodora, the supporters of images had triumphed, it was determined to exterminate the “heretics” who had so consistently and powerfully proclaimed that images, pictures, and relics were valueless, and had maintained a spiritual worship and the priesthood of all believers.” (Broadbent, 72)
- “Systematic slaughter, beheading, burning, drowning, began afresh under the Empress Theodora’s orders, and continued for many years. But it failed to shake the steadfastness of the believers. It was claimed that between the years 842 and 867, the zeal of Theodora and her inquisitors had brought about the death of 100,000 persons.” (Broadbent, 74)
- Broadbent reports that many Paulicians politically and militarily aligned themselves with the Muslims due to the ferocity of the persecutions against them by the established church. (Broadbent, 77)
- In Volume III of his legendary *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon states the following regarding the Paulicians:
  - “Three different roads might introduce the Paulicians into the heart of Europe . . . **Under the Byzantine standard the Paulicians were often transported to the Greek provinces of Italy and Sicily**; in peace and war they freely conversed with strangers and natives, and their opinions were silently propagated in Rome, Milan, and the kingdoms beyond the Alps. It was soon discovered that many thousand Catholics of every rank, and of either sex, had embraced Manichaeian heresy; and the flames which consumed twelve canons of Orleans was the first act and signal of persecution.” (Gibbon, 310-312)
  - “The visible assemblies of the Paulicians, or Albigenses, were extirpated by fire and sword; and the bleeding remnant escaped by flight, concealment, or Catholic conformity. But the invincible spirit which they had kindled still lived and breathed in the western world. In the state, in the church, and even in the cloister, a latent succession was preserved of the disciples of St. Paul, who protested against the tyranny of Rome, embraced the Bible as the rule of faith, and purified their creed from all the visions of the gnostic theology.” (Gibbon, 310-312)
- John Urquhart, author of *The Inspiration and Accuracy of the Holy Scriptures* stated the following regarding the Paulicians in 1895:

- “In one quarter alone did the scattered ashes grow bright under the Spirit’s breath, and break forth into flame. Paul had spent his strength in planting and watching over the churches **in Asia Minor**. His toil was neither fruitless nor forgotten. Paul-like men, who were hailed as such by their contemporaries, and named *Paulikoi*, were stirred amid the growing need to imitate the Apostle to the Gentiles in his zeal and self-sacrifice for threatened truth and endangered souls. **They wrote and multiplied copies of the Scriptures, especially of the Pauline Epistles.** . . They returned to the sweet, glad, holy light of New Testament belief, and to the simplicity of New Testament worship. . . The followers of these *Paulikoi* were called *Paulikianoi*, and the Paulicians have taken their place in history, written by their ecclesiastical enemies . . . armies were sent against them. . . But the fleshy arm could not stay the truth. . . They were banished from Asia Minor, and, leaving their fatherland for ever, passed over into Europe. They traveled along the valleys and rivers of their new world, and settled in quietness here and there, taking with them, as their choicest treasure, the Word of God and the simplicity of worship for which their father died. **The historian meets them again in communities and peoples that live apart, and which Rome stamps out one by one. But the truth they preserved lived on, and burst forth at last in the splendors of the Reformation.**” (Urquhart, 101-103)
- Spanning a period of time from about 600 AD until the 14<sup>th</sup> century with a few lingering into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Gibbon considered the Paulicians the first reformers who scattered over the West the seeds of the reformation. (Gibbon, 302)

### **Beliefs of the Paulicians**

- Church historian Phillip Schaff articulates the standard party line regarding beliefs of the Paulicians.
  - Dualism was their fundamental principle. The good God created the spiritual world; the bad God created the sensual world. The former is worshiped by the Paulicians, i.e., the true Christians, the latter by the “Romans” or Catholics.
  - Contempt for matter. The body is the seat of evil desire, and is itself impure.
  - Docetism. Christ descended from heaven in an ethereal body, passed through the womb of Mary as through a channel, suffered in appearance, but not in reality, and began the process of redemption of the spirit from the chains of matter.
  - The Virgin Mary was not the “mother of God”
  - **They rejected the Old Testament and the Epistles of Peter. They regarded Peter as a false prophet, because he denied his master, preached Judaism rather than Christianity, was the enemy of Paul (Gal. 2:11) and the pillar of the Catholic hierarchy. . . At a later period, however, they seem to have confined themselves, like Marcion, to the writings of Paul and Luke. . .** (Schaff, 577)

- Now here comes the real reason why Catholics and Roman Catholic sympathizing Protestants like Schaff consider the Paulicians heretics.
  - **“They rejected the priesthood, the sacraments, the worship of the saints, the sign of the cross, and all externals in religion. Baptism means only the baptism of the Spirit; the communion with the body and blood of Jesus Christ is only a communion with the word and doctrine.”** (Schaff, 577)
- Regarding the Paulician belief about baptism, Edward Gibbon states:
  - “In practice, or at least in the theory of the sacraments, the Paulicians were inclined to abolish all visible objects of worship, and the words of the Gospel were, in their judgment, the baptism and communion of the faithful.” (Gibbon, 329)
- In Volume III of Neander’s *Church History*, we learn the following regarding the beliefs of the Paulicians.
  - **“Indeed, they went so far on this side as to wholly reject the outward celebration of the sacraments. They maintained that it was by no means Christ’s intention to institute the baptism by water as a perpetual ordinance, but by baptism he meant only the baptism of the Spirit. . .”** (Neander, 263)
  - “As they rejected outward baptism, so they seem also to have rejected altogether the outward celebration of the Lord’s Supper; probably understanding the Lord’s supper spiritually and symbolically of the communion with Christ, as the bread of life that came down from heaven.” (Neander, 589)
- Even Dr. Peter S. Ruckman, a committed Baptist, is forced to concede the following:
  - “The real problem was that the Paulicians rejected the Catholic priesthood, the Catholic sacraments, the worship of relics and crosses, and they thought the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5 was the Holy Spirit putting the believer into Christ: they were the Stamites and Bullingerites of their day. At their worst they were at least five times as Scriptural as any bishop or archbishop in the ruling church.” (Ruckman, 304)
- The 1908 book, *The Inquisition: A Critical and Historical Study of the Coercive Power of the Church* by E. Vacandard connects the so-called Catharan heresy to the Paulicians. (69) To the Cathari the following belief is ascribed, **“Baptism of water was to them an empty ceremony, as valueless as the baptism of John.”** (Vacandard, 74)
- Gibbon reports that Constantine (Silvanus) attached himself with particular devotion to the writings and character of St. Paul. (Gibbon, 302) “The Epistles of Paul, made a deep impression on his mind, and gave a new direction to his thoughts and to his life,” so wrote August Neander of Constantine/Silvanus. (Neander, 247)
- Neander tells us the following regarding the beliefs of the Paulicians:

- **“Strove to derive their doctrine from the New Testament: and particularly from the writings of the Apostle Paul.”** (245)
- **“It was by a Christianity drawn from the writings of St. Paul. . .that the Paulicians were, from this time onward, bent on bringing about a renovation of the church, a restoration of the pure Apostolic doctrine.”** (248)
- **“Gave special weight to the authority of the apostle Paul; and his epistles must have been considered by them as the main sources of the knowledge of Christian doctrines.”** (Neander, 268)
- In the October 1901 edition of *Things To Come*, E.W. Bullinger wrote an article titled, “The Paulicians: A Lesson From the Past,” in which he connects the Paulicians with the Pauline dispensational movement of his day. Bullinger stated the following regarding these precious saints:
  - “But all through the ages God has had His people, who cherished His truth and witnessed for Him. Known by different names at different times and in different places: scattered abroad singly, in small companies, or in communities, they kept the faith.

One of the most noted examples of those who struggled against the advancing heathen darkness as it gradually overspread the Church is found in the people known as “Paulicians” . . .

**By whatever name we may be called or known, we are, in witnessing for the teaching of God in the Pauline Epistles, the true successors of the Ancient Paulicians: holding aloft the same banner; holding forth the same word; and holding fast the same truth.”** (Bullinger, *Things to Come* Vol. 8, 39)
- Bullinger viewed himself as carrying on the legacy of the ancient Paulicians. I believe that, as modern-day mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalists, we should follow Bullinger’s lead on this point.

### Paulicians & the Preserved Text

- So, who was living in Byzantium that would have possessed a vested interest in copying, preserving, and transmitting the *pure text* of scripture? The Paulicians.
- Recall the words of church historian John Urquhart regarding the Paulicians:
  - **“They wrote out and multiplied copies of the Scriptures, especially of the Pauline Epistles. . . They were banished from Asia Minor, and, leaving their fatherland for ever, passed over into Europe. They traveled along the valleys and rivers of their new world, and settled in quietness here and there, taking with them, as their choicest treasure, the Word of God . . . But the truth they preserved lived on and burst forth at last in the splendours of the Reformation.”** (Urquhart, 102-103)

- August Neander gives the Paulicians credit for translating and circulating portions of Scripture amongst the laity. After discussing how the Paulicians “presented religion to them (people of their day) more as a matter of inward experience,” as opposed to the external system of Rome, Neander wrote:
  - **“This was the peculiar bent of the Paulicians, made them better acquainted with the Scriptures; for there can be little doubt that by means of the Paulicians, translations of particular portions of Scripture were already circulated among the laity.”** (Neander, 600)
- Not only were the Paulicians Pauline dispensationalists, they were also the ones chiefly responsible for preserving and transmitting the *pure text* of the New Testament. When weighed against Dr. Pickering’s four controlling factors for normal transmission the Paulicians stand out as the prime candidates for so acting in church history.
  - *Access to the autographs*—the Paulicians hail from Asia Minor around the Aegean rim where 2/3 of the autographic text was originally sent.
  - *Proficiency in the source language*—for most of their history, the Paulicians were the subjects of the Byzantine Empire. The portion of the Old Roman Empire that spoke and wrote in Greek until the fall of Constantinople until 1453.
  - *Strength of the church*—in Asia Minor, “the heartland of the church” when compared to Egypt, the Paulicians represented the silver line of truth that was founded upon the Pauline Epistles themselves. Rather than bow the knee in subjugation to the ruling church the Paulicians were willing to die for their beliefs.
  - *Attitude toward the text*—who has a better attitude toward the Biblical text than a rightly dividing Pauline dispensationalist? Dispensationalism is predicated upon the belief that the scriptures should be interpreted literally. Recall, from Lesson 83 that Pickering addressed the literal versus allegorical interpretation of scriptures when discussing his fourth controlling factor of “attitude toward the text.”
- A comparison between the dates of known persecution against the Paulicians with the number of manuscripts by century in the Byzantine text-type reveals a direct correlation between periods of Paulician persecution and a decrease in the number of surviving manuscripts in the Byzantine text-type.
- One reason there are not more manuscripts in the Byzantine text-type is because they were destroyed by the organized church along with their owners via systemic persecution. All of this leads to the following potential conclusion. Could the reason that there are not **more and earlier witnesses in the Byzantine majority be because of the widespread persecution of the Paulicians by the organized church?**
- The Byzantine Text (the Preserved Text), the text of the Aegean rim was preserved by the Paulicians who introduced the text into Eastern Europe as they migrated across the Bosphorus Straits to escape persecution. In this sense, not only did they spread the

doctrinal seeds of the Reformation into Europe, they also disseminated the text of the Reformation as well.

### **Conclusion**

- For too long, Pauline dispensationalists have viewed themselves as an insignificant minority in church history. In my opinion, I feel this study challenges this commonly held misconception in the following four ways.
  - Pauline dispensationalists stood for Paul’s unique apostleship from the earliest stages of church history. These folks viewed the Pauline epistles as containing the correct gospel as well as the precepts of true Biblical Christianity.
  - The Paulicians rejected all the Catholic hierarchy and sacraments including water baptism. The only baptism that mattered was the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
  - The Paulicians copied, translated, and disseminated God’s word within the very region (Aegean rim) identified by Pickering’s four controlling factors as the place to look for the *pure text* of scripture. As such, the Paulicians are one of the groups of saints that were chiefly responsible for the preservation and transmission of the *pure text* of the New Testament. Not only did these saints reject the ceremonial trappings of the Catholic Church, they also rejected aberrant forms of the Biblical text.
  - The Paulicians, through migration as a result of persecution, spread throughout Europe the text and doctrines of the Reformation.

### **Works Cited**

Broadbent, E.H. *The Pilgrim Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Gospel Folio Press, 1931.

Bullinger, E.W. “The Paulicians: A Lesson From the Past,” in *Things to Come Volume VIII*. October 1901.

Gibbon, Edward. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire Volume III*.

Miller, Andrew. *Miller’s Church History*. Addison, IL: Bible Truth Publications, 1999.

Neander, August. *General Religion of the Christian Religion and Church*. London, England: W. Cloves and Sons, 1851.

Ruckman, Peter S. *The History of the New Testament Church, Vol. I*. Pensacola, FL: Bible Baptist Bookstore, 1982.

Schaff, Phillip. *History of the Christian Church Volume IV*. New York, NY: Scribner, 1926.

Urquhart, John. *The Inspiration and Accuracy of the Holy Scriptures*. London: Marshall Brothers, 1895.