

Saturday, May 26, 2012—Great Lakes Grace Bible Conference—The Paulicians and Preserved Text

Introduction

- The goal of this lesson is two-fold: 1) prove that the Paulicians were Pauline dispensationalists, 2) prove that Byzantine Text Type which contains the multiplicity of copies demanded by the doctrine of Preservation was preserved by Pauline dispensationalists, i.e., the Paulicians.
- In order to accomplish this task we will consider the following points:
 - The Pilgrim Church Concept
 - The Standard View of the Paulician in Church History Books
 - Who were the Paulicians?
 - Beliefs of the Paulician
 - The Preserved Text

The Pilgrim Church Concept

- “The union of Church and State was in all times looked upon by many of the Lord’s disciples as contrary to His teaching; but whenever the Church had the power of the State at its command, it used it for the forcible suppression of any who dissented from its system or in any way refused compliance with its demands, and great numbers through indifference or interest or fear yielded at least an outward obedience.” (Broadbent, 63)
- “There were, however, always some who could not be induced to do this but who still endeavored to follow Christ, keeping the teaching of His Word and the doctrine of the apostles. These were continually objects of persecution.” (Broadbent, 63-64)
- “True histories of these have been obliterated as far as possible. Their writings, sharing the fate of the writers, have been destroyed to the full extent of the power allowed to their persecutors. Not only so but the histories of them have been promulgated by those in whose interest it was to disseminate the worst intentions against them in order to justify their own cruelties. In such accounts they are depicted as heretics, and evil doctrines are ascribed to them which they repudiated. They are called “sects,” and labels are attached to them which they themselves would not acknowledge.” (Broadbent, 64)
- “They usually called themselves Christians, or Brethren, but numerous names were given to them by others in order to create the impression that they represented many new, strange, and unconnected sects, opprobrious epithets being applied to them to bring them into disrepute. It is therefore difficult to trace their history.” (Broadbent, 64)
- “What their adversaries have written about them must be suspect; words from their own lips wrung out by torture are valueless. There is, however, in spite of these hindrances, a large body of trustworthy evidence, continually being added to by further investigation, which shows what they were and did, what they believed and taught.” (Broadbent, 64)
- A group called the Paulicians is one such group.

Standard View of the Paulicians in Church History Books

- “Heretical Sects” is the title of Chapter 12 in Volume 4 of Philip Schaff’s esteemed *History of the Christian Church*. Schaff devotes an entire section of this chapter to discussing the “heretical beliefs” of the Paulicians.
- Please critically consider the following quotations:
 - “The Monothelites, the Adoptionists, the Predestinarians, and the Berengarians moved within the limits of the Catholic Church, dissented from it only in one doctrine, and are interwoven with the development of catholic orthodoxy which has been described in the preceding chapter. **But there were also radical heretical sects which mixed Christianity with heathen notions, disowned all connection with the historic church, and set themselves up against it as rival communities.**” (Schaff, 573)
 - “They (Paulicians) were essentially dualistic, like the ancient Gnostics and Manichaeans, and hence their Catholic opponents called them by the convenient and hated name of New Manichaeans; though the system of the Paulicians has more affinity with that of Marcion.” (Schaff, 573)
- It is important to notice the following aspects of Schaff’s thinking:
 - He judges who is heretical and who is not based on where they stand in light of Catholic orthodoxy.
 - He considers the Catholic Church “historic Christianity.”
 - He proves Broadbent’s point that dissenting groups were labeled by their opponents (i.e., Gnostic, Manichaean, dualistic, Marcionite) with names they had not chosen for themselves.
- Schaff goes on to state, “The doctrines and practices of the Paulicians are known to us only from the reports of their orthodox opponents (those with an agenda against them) and a few fragments of the epistles of Sergius. They were a strange mixture of dualism, demiurgism, docetism, mysticism and pseudo-Paulinism, and resemble in many respects the Gnostic system of Marcion.” (Schaff, 576)
- Why do Schaff, and other Church historians compare the beliefs of the Paulicians with those of Marcion?
 - Because he (Marcion) **believed that the God of the Old Testament loved the Jews exclusively, Marcion rejected the entire Old Testament and also those New Testament writings that he thought favored Jewish readers—for example Matthew, Mark, Acts, and Hebrews.** He also rejected other Christian writings that appeared to compromise his own views, including 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. (Shelley, 63)
 - In the end, Marcion’s Bible contained an altered version of Luke and ten letters of Paul. “The Apostle of the Gentiles, it seems, was the only apostle who did not corrupt the gospel of Jesus.” (Shelley, 63)

- Writing around 180 AD Irenaeus states the following regarding Marcion's beliefs, **"with regard to those who allege that Paul alone knew the truth and that to him the mystery was manifest by revelation, let Paul convict himself."** (Bercot, 419)
- Tertullian states the following in 207 AD regarding what the Marcionites believed, **"the Marcionites allege that Marcion did not so much innovate on the rule of faith by his separation of the Law and the Gospel, as restore it after it had been previously adulterated."** (Bercot, 420)
- Tertullian also stated the following regarding Marcion's beliefs regarding Paul, **"the next three passages were written against Marcion, who exalted Paul above the twelve apostles."** (Bercot, 503)
- Bruce L. Shelley, author of *Church History in Plain Language*, reports the following regarding Marcion's view of the Apostle Paul:
 - **"Marcions's worship of Paul was little short of idolatry. As he saw it, Paul was the great enemy of the law and the great spokesman for the gospel. He was in fact the supreme figure in the church. Marcion believed Christ had descended from heaven twice, once to suffer and to die, and once to call Paul and to reveal to Paul the true significance of his death. In heaven, said Marcion, Paul sits at the right hand of Christ, who sits on the right hand of God.**
 - As the North African lawyer Tertullian put it, **"Paul had become the apostle of the heretics."** (Shelley, 63)
- In my view, we need to be very careful when passing judgment on Marcion. The things the church fathers say about Marcion are very similar to the things our critics say about us (mid-Acts, Pauline Grace Believers): we worship Paul, we don't use the entire Bible, we cut and mutilate the Bible, etc.
- So the only reason why we should consider the Paulicians heretics is because they disagreed with Catholic Orthodoxy. Furthermore, the only proof we have according to Schaff is the testimony of Catholics with whom the Paulicians disagreed.
- Kenneth Scott Latourette comments on the Paulicians in a section of his *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500* under the title "Minority Movements Branded as Heretical by the Orthodox." (299)
 - "They called themselves simply Christians and the designation Paulician was given them by their enemies." (Latourette, 299)
- Jonathan Hill, author of *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity*, discusses the Paulicians in a section labeled "New Heresies." While Hill admits that the Paulicians remain poorly understood, he does not hesitate from repeating the party line regarding these saints calling them Manichaeans, Gnostic, and Nestorian. (Hill, 150)

- Andrew Miller agrees with Broadbent. Miller states the following regarding the Paulicians, “The doctrines, character, and history of the Paulicians have been subjects of great controversy; but they have not been allowed to speak for themselves to posterity. Their writings were carefully destroyed by the Catholics, and they are known to us only through the reports of bitter enemies who branded them as heretics. . .” (Miller, 353)

Who Were the Paulicians?

- “From the time of Mani 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 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)
- In 653, after the Muslim conquest of Syria, an Armenian deacon returning from captivity amongst the Muslims became the guest of a man named Constantine in the village of Mananalis, near Samosata. (Miller, 353-354)
- In response to Constantine’s hospitality, the deacon gave him a manuscript containing the four gospels and the epistles of Paul. Rumors abound regarding Constantine’s religious background i.e., trained Gnostic, Manichaean, member of the established Greek church. However, upon studying the manuscript, Constantine renounced his religious past and set about restoring apostolic Christianity. (Miller, 354)
- Constantine changed his name to Silvanus (after Paul’s companion) and began preaching for nearly thirty years in a place called Cibossa, Armenia. Silvanus had many converts from amongst the Catholics as well as the Zoroastrian religion. Over time his group became sizeable enough to attract the attention of the Emperor and an edict was issued in 684 AD against Constantine and the Paulician congregations. (Miller, 355)
- “The execution of the decree was entrusted to an officer of the imperial court, named Simeon. He had orders to put the teacher to death, and to distribute his followers among the clergy and in monasteries, with a view to their being reclaimed.” (Miller 355)
- “Simeon placed Constantine—the chief object of the priests’ revenge—before a large number of his companions, and commanded them to stone him. They refused, and, instead of obeying, all dropped the stones with which they had been armed, excepting one young man; and Constantine was killed by a stone from the hand of that heartless youth—his own adopted son Justus.” (Miller, 355)
- Meanwhile, Simeon was so affected by the testimony of what he witnessed that after talking with the Paulicians he converted to their faith. After spending three years at the

imperial court, Simeon left his earthly position, returned to Cibossa under the name Titus, and became the successor of Silvanus. (Miller, 355)

- Five years after the martyrdom of Constantine, Justus betrayed the Paulicians again. He went to the bishop of Colonia, and reported the revival and spread of the so-called heresy. The bishop communicated his information to the Emperor Justinian II and, in consequence, Simeon and a large number of his followers were burnt to death in one large funeral pile. (Miller, 355)
- Justinian would not succeed in wiping out the memory of the Paulicians. Influenced by the blood of the martyrs and a new succession of teachers, congregations arose from their ashes and spread over all the adjacent regions. (Miller, 355)
- The Paulicians as well as similar groups rejected the use of icons and images in their worship. They received a bit of reprieve from their 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 and Ruckman both report 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; Ruckman, 303)
- Under severe persecution, many Paulicians migrated across the Bosphorus Strait into Bulgaria and the Balkan mountains and from thence into northern Italy and Yugoslavia where they produced Christians called Waldenses and Albigenses. (Ruckman, 304)
- 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 14th century with a few lingering into the 18th century, Gibbon considered the Paulicians the first reformers who scattered over the West the seeds of the reformation. (Gibbon, 302)

Beliefs of the Paulicians

- Once again 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 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 have a new direction to his thoughts and to his life,” so wrote August Neander of Constantine/Silvanus. (Neander, 247)

- Neander tells us that 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 *Thing 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.”** (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 so should we.

The Preserved Text

- Last year as part of the 400th Anniversary of the King James Bible we studied how God’s design was to preserve his word through a multiplicity of accurate reliable copies that are just as authoritative as the originals. This majority witness is found in what textual critics call the Byzantine Text Type.
- According to D.A. Carson, author of *The King James Bible Debate: A Plea for Realism*, the Byzantine Text is “the textual tradition which, in large measure, stands behind the KJV. It was largely preserved in the Byzantine Empire, which continued to use Greek, unlike the (western) Roman Empire and its offshoots, for which Latin was the common language. There are far more manuscripts extant in this tradition than in the other three

- combined; but on the other hand, most of these manuscripts witnesses are relatively late. . . The dominant manuscripts of the TR (Textus Receptus underlying text of the KJB) were taken from the Byzantine tradition. . . Thus the Byzantine tradition reigned supreme for more than two centuries.” (Carson, 26)
- P.W. Comfort, author of the entry, “Textual Criticism and Theology” in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* states the following regarding the connection between the Byzantine Text and the TR, “In recent years those who argue for the superiority of the TR call it by a different name—“the Majority Text”—because the majority of the manuscripts, being Byzantine, usually support the TR, which was based on a few Byzantine manuscripts. These scholars content that since the majority of the manuscripts support the TR, this is the text that was affirmed by the church throughout the ages and therefore must be the right one.” (Elwell, 1178)
 - James R. White, author of *The King James Only Controversy*, offers the following explanation of text-types or text-families, “a text-type or text-family refers to a groups of manuscripts that share common readings or characteristics that distinguish them from other text-types.” (White, 42) White states the following regarding the Byzantine Text:
 - “The Byzantine text-type is found consistently in the area around Byzantium. . . The Byzantine text-type represents the vast majority of the Greek manuscripts we have available to us today.” (White, 43-44)
 - “. . . the Byzantine text-type is not found in full form until the fourth century, and does not become the majority until the ninth century. Graphically we can compare the number of Alexandrian manuscripts to the Byzantine manuscripts . . . if we were to graph the total number of manuscripts would dwarf the Alexandrian. But the fact remains that the closer we get to the original writing of the New Testament, the less prevalent is the Byzantine manuscript tradition. (White, 152-153)
 - “. . . historical events shaped the history of the text in such a way as to make the text-type found in the area around Byzantium the “majority” text. The largest number of handwritten manuscripts today contains the Byzantine text-type. But, of course, the majority of handwritten manuscripts that exist were made long after the writing of the New Testament, too. Because Erasmus used these later manuscripts, the TR is a Byzantine text, and hence the KJV’s New Testament reflects this same manuscript tradition.” (White, 151)
 - Despite the claims of modern scholarship, the viewpoint of faith leads one to look for the multiplicity of accurate reliable copies that the doctrine of Preservation demands when endeavoring to reconstruct the New Testament text. When one sets out to locate this multiplicity of copies they are drawn geographically to the lands which comprised the Byzantine Empire. Who was living in Byzantine controlled lands that would have had an interested in preserving Biblical manuscripts? 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 choices 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 give 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 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 one chiefly responsible for preserving the true text of the New Testament. 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.
- The reason there are not more manuscripts in the Byzantine text-type is because they were destroyed by the organized church along with their owners. All of this leads to the following potential conclusion, could the reason that there are not more and earlier witnesses in the Byzantine textual tradition be because of the widespread persecution of the Paulicians by the organized church.
- The Byzantine Text 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, we have viewed ourselves (Pauline dispensationalists) as an insignificant minority in church history. In my opinion, I feel this study challenges this commonly held misconception in the following ways.
 - Pauline dispensationalists stood for Pauline authority 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. As such they are one of the groups of believers that is chiefly responsible for the preservation of the true text of the New Testament. Not only did these saints reject the ceremonial trappings of the Catholic Church they also rejected the Roman Catholic text.

- The Paulicians through migration as a result of persecution spread through Europe the text and doctrines of the Reformation.

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