

Sunday, January 29, 2017—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 46 Final Thoughts on the Corollary and the Extent of Preservation

Introduction

- Last week in Lesson 45 we finished our two-part discussion of Matthew 5:17-18 and its impact upon the doctrine of preservation. In conclusion, we observed:
 - Matthew 5:17-18 is simply teaching that no detail of the Law is going to go unfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the perfect fulfillment of the righteous requirements of the law.

Given that the passage is not asserting that the Old Testament was preserved with exact identity, there is no reason to argue by extension that Matthew 5:18-19 is teaching the verbatim preservation of the New Testament. This is a King James Only argument used to buttress their position of perfect or verbal plenary preservation.

If God intended to preserve His word with verbatim identity we would have historical/textual evidence that preservation occurred with that level of precision. No such evidence exists.

This does not mean that one must abandon belief in the promise of preservation in the face of variant readings. Rather, it means that one must amend their understanding of preservation to match what the Bible teachers teach about the matter.

To be clear, I do believe in a perfect Bible if, by perfect, one means the following:

- I believe in “perfect preservation” if, by perfect, one means the existence of a pure text **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.”** (Lesson 45)
- In Lessons 41 and 42 we considered whether preservation was the corollary of inspiration. We concluded that a corollary between the two doctrines does exist in a general sense but that there is an inherent danger in overstating the connection. We concluded that the corollary is carried too far when one demands that preservation occurred with verbatim identity. In Lesson 43 we looked at four categories of scriptural proof demonstrating that it was excessive to demand verbatim identity as the standard for preservation in the first place: 1) how the Old Testament quotes the Old Testament, 2) how the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, 3) how the New Testament quotes the New Testament, and 4) II Kings 19 and Isaiah 37.

- Having considered how Matthew 5:17-18 fits into this discussion we are ready to conclude our discussion of the corollary and the extent of preservation. To accomplish this task, we will look at the following points in this lesson:
 - The Argument from Authority
 - Final Thoughts on the Extent of Preservation

The Argument from Authority

- Once again, Dr. William W. Combs of Detroit Baptist Seminary raises this point in his essay “The Preservation of Scripture.” Combs states:
 - “Closely tied to the argument for preservation based on a correlation between inspiration and preservation is another corollary between the *authority* of Scripture and preservation.” (Combs, 29)
- Essentially this argument is based upon the notion that for the scriptures to possess any *authority* they must have been preserved in some sense. Combs quotes Harold Stigers essay “Preservation: The Corollary of Inspiration” to illustrate this secondary use of the corollary.
 - “The preservation of the Scriptures is bound up with their authority so that the two are really indissoluble. The former is a most necessary outgrowth of their inspiration.” (Stigers, 217)
- In essence Stigers is arguing that “. . . since the Scriptures are authoritative, an authority that comes from inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16), the Scriptures can have no continuing authority unless they are preserved.” (Combs, 29) In other words, the scriptures possess their authority precisely because they were given by inspiration of God. Likewise, if the words given by inspiration were not preserved the scriptures would not retain their authority. This is a different approach to the corollary than what we have seen thus far in our study of the corollary based upon verbatim identity of wording.
- In his 1973 essay “Autographs, Amanuenses, and Restricted Inspiration” Greg L. Bahnsen states the following regarding “dependable” preservation:
 - “It is certainly legitimate for us to maintain that God in His sovereignty has preserved His Word in dependable form for all generations. To be a Christian *requires* the possession of God’s words as a basis for faith and direction in life...and men in all generations are *responsible* to be Christians.” (Bahnsen, 110)
- Concerning the *authority* of scripture, Dr. Wayne Grudem stated the following in his popular *Systematic Theology*:

- “The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.” (Grudem, 73)
- This type of authority is found in the fact that these words were given by inspiration of God (II Timothy 3:16-17). The purposes for which scripture is profitable—namely, doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness—cannot be fulfilled unless the scriptures are preserved. This is where Combs sees the impact of texts such as Matthew 5:17-18 and John 10:35 upon the doctrine of preservation.
 - “This is where Matthew 5:17–18 and John 10:35 also tie into the doctrine of preservation. Since both passages teach a continuing authority for Scripture, as we have demonstrated, they indirectly support a doctrine of preservation. But the same can be said for numerous texts that command the believer’s obedience. If these texts are essential to the believer’s sanctification, and they are, they must have been preserved.” (Combs, 30)
- In this way Combs and others maintain a belief in the promise of preservation in a general sense. Preservation must have occurred or else the scriptures would have no enduring authority. In this way preservation is the corollary of inspiration.

Final Thoughts on the Extent of Preservation

- It is only when one demands that preservation requires the same precision as inspiration i.e., verbatim identicality that the corollary runs into trouble. Lessons 42 through 45 were devoted to highlighting this point.
- When discussing the extent of preservation one must clearly identify what they mean by the words “perfect,” “pure,” and “error.” By perfect most commentators on both sides of the issue mean verbatim identicality. Consider the following statements made by Dr. Combs:
 - “How pure have the original words of the biblical writings been preserved? It is an indisputable fact, proven by the manuscripts and versional evidence, that God has not perfectly (that is, without error) preserved the Scriptures throughout their long history of transmission. There is no single manuscript, printed text, or version that can be shown to be error free. This is patently obvious to anyone who is at all familiar with the transmission history of the Scriptures. First, we should note that no two Greek manuscripts of the New Testament agree exactly; these thousands of manuscripts all differ from one another to some degree. No one has ever suggested, even within the KJV/TR camp, that a particular one of these manuscripts is a perfect copy of the autographs—that it is error free. This conclusively demonstrates that God has permitted errors to enter the transmission process, which is the inevitable result of providential preservation.” (Combs, 49-50)

- Mark well that for Combs an “error” constitutes a textual variant of any kind. In this way he is assuming verbatim identity as the standard for preservation. When one Biblically amends their position on preservation (See Lessons 42 and 43) and thereby realizes that preservation did not occur with exact identity; it brings the entire discussion on the extent of preservation into focus. On this amended view of preservation, an “error” would constitute a variant that substantively alters the doctrinal content of the Bible. Variants that constitute a different way of saying the same thing are not “errors” because they are substantively equivalent.
- According to this Biblically adjusted view of preservation, the terms “pure” and “perfect” do not demand exact identity of wording but simply substantively equivalent meaning. I have no problem speaking about “pure” or “perfect” preservation if by perfect one means
 - “the existence of a pure text **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.”**”
- If preservation did not occur with this level of “perfection” or “purity” then how could the scriptures have any authority as identified in point one.
- Combs is correct to point out that the textual facts do not seem to matter to most King James Only advocates, “So we see that the evidence of manuscripts, texts, and versions means nothing to those in the KJV/TR camp.” (Combs 35) Most are content to double down on faith for faith’s sake in the promise of preservation. After quoting statements regarding the need for faith in God’s word by King James advocates David Cloud and Jack Moorman; Combs states the following:
 - “In one sense Moorman is absolutely correct. What the Bible teaches about its own preservation is to be accepted by faith. But that can be said of everything the Bible teaches—everything the Bible teaches is to be accepted by faith. This argument from faith or “the logic of faith,” as Hills likes to call it, actually boils down to faith in the KJV as the perfectly preserved Word of God, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. This is not faith, at least not in the biblical sense, but pure presumption.

The fundamental fallacy in KJV/TR position can be traced to the faulty premise that the Scriptures themselves teach a perfect and inerrant preservation of the actual words of the autographs. We saw this earlier in Flanders’s statement that “the actual existence of the original text will continue eternally....” It is not enough to hold a Bible in one’s hand, even a King James Bible, and say this is the Word of God; the KJV/TR position insists that one must be able to say that these are the *Words* of God. Anything else, according to Waite, is “an apostate, heretical, modernistic, and liberal position.” (Combs, 36)

- Combs is correct that faith in “the perfectly preserved Word of God” cannot be maintained by faith in God’s word if by “perfect” one means matching the original autographs with exact identity. That is a presumption because the word of God teaches no such doctrine.
- Before we are too hard on the likes of Cloud, Waite, and Moorman it needs to be made clear that the Originals Only position is equally guilty of making unbiblical rationalistic presumptions. There is no verse of scripture that teaches that inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy are confined to the non-existent original autographs alone. Therefore this position cannot be held by faith in God’s word either. It was a position forged as a rationalistic response to German Higher Criticism and Rationalism during the latter half of the 19th century. It was largely on account of the existence of textual variants that inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy were confined to the original autographs.
- Once again, both positions are forged by taking an equally presumptuous approach to how to account for the lack of verbatim identity in the surviving manuscript copies. Differences in wording are not inherently a problem so long as they do not report information that is false or contradictory. This is where we must recognize the difference between 1) a different way of saying the same thing, and 2) substantive differences in meaning. I know from personal experience that this distinction is lost on many King James Only advocates. For many King James Only advocates such as Waite, any difference of any kind constitutes a situation where one is forced to declare which reading is the word of God.
 - “Thus one cannot honestly, according to Waite, say that the NASB is the Word of God. He complains that if one holds “his King James in his hand and the New American Standard in his hand with 5,604 differences in their Greek texts in the New Testament alone, how can they both be the ‘Word’ of God? ‘Word of God’ could not mean the ‘Words of God’ because of these differences in the Words.”” (Quoted in Combs, 36)
- Waite fails to distinguish between the nature of these differences. I reject the Critical Text and the NASB because many of these 5,604 differences are substantive, not merely different ways of saying the same thing. But mark well that is not what Waite is saying, he is making the categorical statement that any differences of wording of any kind is an attack on the word of God. The problem here is one of consistency. The printed editions of the KJB contain different wording yet Waite is not willing to identify which edition of the KJB got all the words “perfect.”

Concluding Thoughts From Combs

- Professor Combs concludes his section on “The Extent of Preservation” with the following paragraph.
 - “The true situation is this: God has preserved his Word to this day, but because of the means he has chosen to use to accomplish this preservation—providentially, through secondary causation—the words of the autographs have not been inerrantly preserved.

Instead, God has chosen to allow for variations to occur—variants within the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek copies of the autographs. God has providentially provided all these copies in order to preserve the Scriptures. So it is proper to say that preservation has taken place in the totality of manuscripts. Because God chose this method of preservation, it was not possible to provide a perfectly pure text with no variations (errors). It was sufficient for God’s purpose to preserve his Word in copies of the autographs whose exact wording contains some variation. This level of purity is sufficient for God’s purposes.” (Combs, 37)

- In the end, Combs is partly right and partly wrong. Combs doubles down in the opposite direction of Waite. He insists that “the words of the autographs have not been inerrant preserved” because he is assuming verbatim identity as his standard for inerrant preservation. Therefore, inerrancy is only applicable to the original autographs. Combs insistence upon exact identity of wording is reiterated in his statement that “it was not possible to provide a perfectly pure text with no variations.” For Combs the mere presence of textual variants negates perfect/inerrant preservation because of how he is using those words.
- I also disagree with his conclusion that preservation occurred in the “totality of manuscripts.” This is not possible since some of the manuscript copies do possess substantive differences in meaning and some, in some cases, actually teach opposites.
- In contrast, I believe Combs to be correct with respect to the following statements.
 - “God has preserved his Word to this day”
 - “God has chosen to allow for variations to occur”
 - “It was sufficient for God’s purpose to preserve his Word in copies of the autographs whose exact wording contains some variation. This level of purity is sufficient for God’s purposes.”
- Next week we will begin discussing the method of preservation by looking at whether “providential” is an appropriate descriptor to utilize when discussing how preservation occurred.

Works Cited

- Bahnsen, Greg L. “Autographs, Amanuenses and Restricted Inspiration,” in *Evangelical Quarterly* 45 (April-June 1973).
- Combs, William W. “The Preservation of Scripture?” in *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*. Fall 2000.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.
- Stigers, Harold. “Preservation: The Corollary of Inspiration” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (September 1979).