

There may be no more heated debated encircling local assemblies today than that of Biblical preservation. Past theological battles regarding other issues are notable, such as: the inspiration of scripture, the origin of the earth, Old Testament authorship, even the identification of the “historical Jesus”. Many of these issues were debated during the early 20th century throughout the famous “Fundamentalist-Modernist” Controversy. A man who settled down on the side of the Modernists with regard to inspiration and inerrancy would not need to concern himself with issues of Bible preservation – it goes without saying that one cannot have a correct Biblical stance on preservation without first accepting the fact of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures.

The issue at hand is not inspiration, but rather preservation. Did God preserve what He inspired? Where and how did He accomplish this? Are their Biblical promises regarding Scriptural preservation? Can God provide perfect *inspiration* without perfect *preservation*? Of course, in order to understand preservation one must first accept inspiration.

Defining the term “inspiration” in its modified forms is necessary. Bible believers claim that Scripture is verbally and plenary inspired. Hodges *Outlines of Theology* affords helpful explanation regarding *plenary* inspiration: “What is meant by ‘plenary inspiration’? A divine influence full and sufficient to secure its end. The end in

this case secured is the perfect infallibility of the Scriptures in every part . . .”¹ Another theological modifier of inspiration is the word *verbal*. Again, Hodge:

“What is meant by the phrase ‘verbal inspiration,’ and how can it be proved that the words of the Bible were inspired? It is meant that the divine influence, of whatever kind it might have been, which accompanied the writers in what they wrote, extends to their expression of their thoughts in language, as well as to the thoughts themselves. The effect being that in the original autograph copies the language expresses the thought God intended to convey with the infallible accuracy, so that the words as well as the thoughts are God’s revelation to us.

That this influence did extend to the words appears (1) from the very design of inspiration, which is, not to secure the infallible correctness of the opinions of the inspired men themselves . . . but to secure an infallible record of truth. But a record consists of language. (2) Men think in words, and the more definitely they think the more are their thoughts immediately associated with an exactly appropriate verbal expression. Infallibility of thought cannot be secured or preserved independently of an infallible verbal rendering. (3) The Scriptures affirm this fact (I Cor. 2:13; I Thes. 2:13). (4) The New Testament writers, while quoting from the Old Testament for purposes of argument, often base their argument upon the very words used, thus ascribing authority to the word as well as the thought . . .”²

As to the credibility of the Bible, unbelieving man claims that a consistent doctrine of preservation cannot be arrived at with employing “circular reasoning.” This can be viewed as true, because “. . . theological systems employ circular reasoning to establish their final authority.”³ While this is the case, it does not invalidate the truth of the premise, because “Circular reasoning is acceptable as long as the internal testimony is credible. The Bible’s internal testimony consists of the Character of God and the Claims of the Bible.”⁴ The point here is that a man must determine properly his theological presuppositions. Everyone has them. For instance, the Bible presupposes God. Genesis 1:1 is a statement of what God did, not a defense of His existence. He is “presupposed”.

¹ A. A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology. (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1879), p. 66.

² Hodge, p. 66-67.

³ Thomas Strouse, The Lord God Hath Spoken: A Guide to Bibliology. (Newington, Connecticut: Emmanuel Baptist Theological Press, 1992), p. 39.

⁴ Strouse, p. 39.

It is the job of the Biblicist to find his presuppositions from the statements of scripture, receive them, and then work out his doctrinal and practical theology based upon them.

B. B. Warfield, though not a promoter of Bible preservation, nevertheless offers usable information on the idea of inspiration. After a lengthy discussion on the Biblical idea of inspiration, he summarizes his thoughts on the Greek word (*theopneustos*) which underlies the word *inspiration*: “In a word, what is declared by this fundamental passage is simply that the Scriptures are a Divine product . . . No term could have been chosen, however, which would have more emphatically asserted the Divine product . . .”⁵ Thus, inspiration is God’s words breathed out.

Having the testimony of scripture to its inspiration, the issue turns to the question, “Since God inspired His words, does that guarantee a perpetual preservation of them? And if it does, then how is this preservation manifested?” Charles Nichols, pastor of Independent Baptist Church in Ramsey, Minnesota, contributed to the recently published *Thou Shalt Keep Them* (2003), a compilation of textual based essays on the topic of Scriptural preservation. Nichols writes not from the perspective of a parachurch theologian, but rather as a pastor of a New Testament Baptist church. He is responsible for chapter six, entitled, *Inspiration Implies Preservation – II Timothy 3:15-17*. By using Paul’s words to Timothy, Nichols skillfully points out:

⁵ B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1948), p. 133.

“The role of the pastor in leading a local church to keep the Words of God (1:13,14) combines with the doctrine of the perfect inspiration of those Words (3:15-17) to provide the clear and dynamic teaching of the perfect preservation of Scripture.”⁶

If the words of scripture have not been generally accessible to believers since the time of their origin, then the command to keep, guard, and protect them would be an impossibility. Nichols continues:

“Inspiration without preservation undermines the revealed character of God. Every God-breathed writing is said to be sufficient to make one wise unto salvation, teach, reprove, correct, and completely furnish. To argue that God only provided those Words to those who received the original manuscripts calls into question His goodness and fairness.”⁷

New Testament writers recognized that the Old Testament Scriptures they had access to were “holy”. Paul so calls them in II Timothy 3:15. No one would argue that Paul had access to original autographs, but rather to preserved copies. Once again, consider Nichols:

“The Spirit of God in this passage used the term “holy” to describe the Scriptures that Timothy had come to know intimately. This clearly implies that the unadulterated Words, recorded up to or more than a thousand years earlier, were available to Timothy in the first century. Furthermore, the emphasis of the inspiration of the available letters and writings assumes their perfection. The necessity of Scripture for the perfect preparation of the man of God also demands the preservation of every Word of God for every man of God in every generation.”⁸

David Sorenson deals skillfully with the issue of promised preservation in his book *God's Perfect Book*. As he argued effectively for verbal and plenary inspiration, he does also for verbal, plenary preservation. In defense of the link between plenary inspiration and preservation, he says, “Just as the Bible teaches that God inspired the

⁶ Charles Nichols, *Inspiration Implies Preservation In Thou Shalt Keep Them: A Biblical Theology of the Perfect Preservation of Scripture*, Kent Brandenburg, ed. (El Sobrante: California, Pillar and Ground Publishing, 2007), p. 65

⁷ Nichols, p. 67.

⁸ Nichols, p. 68.

Bible in its totality (i.e., plenary inspiration), it likewise foretells that God will preserve His Word as a whole.” Sorenson then uses the internal evidence of the Bible to build his case. The following passages upholding the truth of plenary preservation are cited:

I Peter 1:23-25 “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever, For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.”

Psalm 119:89 “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven. The word translated as ‘settled’ (*natsah*) in its most basic sense has the idea ‘to stand’.

I Chronicles 16:15 “Be ye mindful always of his covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations.”

Psalm 119:160 “Thy word is true from the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”⁹

Sorenson moves to the issue of verbal preservation, when he says, “If there is skepticism that God has directly preserved His Word on a plenary level, there is outright denial that there is such a thing as verbal preservation.”¹⁰ Scriptures that teach this are:

Psalm 19:7 “The law of the LORD is perfect.”

Matthew 24:35 “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

Matthew 4:4 “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

Matthew 5:18 “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”

Proverbs 30:5-6 “Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.”

Ecclesiastes 3:14 “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.”¹¹

Inspiration and preservation are Biblical truths that have much in common, yet function as two distinct truths. Inspiration was a one-time phenomenon. Inspiration (God’s out-breathing of actual words) was a book-by-book event, culminating with the

⁹ David Sorenson, God’s Perfect Book. (Duluth, Minnesota: Northstar Ministries, 2009), p. 69-72.

¹⁰ Sorenson, p. 73.

¹¹ Sorenson, p. 73-91.

book of Revelation. When Revelation was completed, inspiration stopped. Since that time, the process of the promise of preservation has been working.

If a man does not believe in Biblical preservation, he is in essence, casting doubt upon God's promise. Additionally, what use is inspiration without preservation?

Furthermore, how can a person prove verbal inspiration without verbal preservation?

These truths form an inextricable link between inspiration and preservation.

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