

Sabbath School

Topic: WCF 1.8 (3): The Providential Preservation of Scripture

Date: 5/3/20

WCF 1.8

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, **and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic;**[a] so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them.[b] But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them,[c] therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come,[d] that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner,[e] and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.[f]

Scripture Proofs

[a]: **Mt. 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.

Related Texts

WCF 5.7

As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures, so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of his Church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof.

WLC 18

Q. What are God's works of providence?

A: God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures; ordering them, and all their actions, to his own glory.

Outline

§1. Why the Scriptures need to be preserved

A. Hand-written and hand-copied text of Scripture

§2. Providential Preservation Defined

A. General and Special Providence

B. The Providence of God in Preserving Scripture

John Owen¹:

“It can, then, with no colour of probability be asserted (which yet I find some learned men too free in granting), namely, that there hath the same fate attended the Scripture in its transcription as hath done other books. Let me say without offence, this imagination, asserted on deliberation, seems to me to border on atheism. Surely the promise of God for the preservation of his word, with his love and care of his church, of whose faith and obedience that word of his is the only rule, requires other thoughts at our hands. We add that the whole scripture entire, as given out from God, without any loss, is preserved in the Copies of the Originals yet remaining; What varieties there are among the Copies themselves shall be afterwards declared; in them all, we say, is every letter and Tittle of the Word. These Copies we say, are the Rule, standard and touch-stone of all Translations ancient or modern, by which they are in all things to be examined, tried, corrected, amended, and themselves only by themselves.”

Christ gave Scribes to his church for the task of copying Scripture (Mat. 13.52, Mat. 23.34). Examples: Ezra the Scribe, Tertius (Rom. 16.22), (Silas) 1Pet. 5.12. The task of copying Scripture continues to belong to Doctors of the Church duly called and appointed to that task.

§3. Collation and Variants

Rules for navigating variants, and for collation

William Perkins²:

If a word given in the Bible, whether it bee an Hebrew word or a Greek, if first it do agree with Grammatical construction, and with other approved copies: if also it doe agree in respect of the sense with the circumstances and drift of the place, and with the analogy of faith, it is proper and natural.

I lay down this rule, not because I think that the Hebrew and Greek text is in all copies corrupted through the malice of the Jews, as Lindanus doth wickedly calumniate, and after him all Papists: but that the divers readings, which in some places have crept in, either by reason of the unskillfulness or negligence and oversight of the Notaries, might be scanned and determined. As, Psal. 22. 16. In ordinary copies the words run thus; Caari, that is, As a Lion my hands and my feet. In other copies the reading is divers, after this manner: Caaru, They have digged (or pierced) my hands and my feet. Now the rule propounded doth teach that this latter reading is to be followed. For it agreeth. 1. with Grammatical construction: 2. with the circumstances of the Psalme: 3. with some ancient copies: yea even by the testimony of the Jews.

¹ John Owen, *Of the Divine Original, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scriptures* (Oxford: Printed by Henry Hall, printer to the University, for Tho: Robinson., 1659), pp. 173-4.

² William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecy* (London: By Felix Kyngston for E.E., 1607), pp. 88-9.