

Can the Bible Be Trusted?

Principles of the Divine Preservation of Scripture

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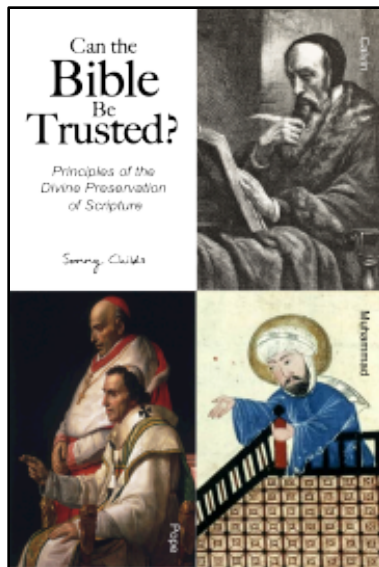
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Introduction

Recently, an avid defender of Reformed Theology suggested that human filtering from Reformation leaders was necessary. He claimed that Scripture had been lost for a time, then rediscovered by Catholicism and misinterpreted. It was implied that without human filtering the biblical message would be unknowable.

To illustrate the very sad results of what dependence upon human filtering can do, please consider the words of John 3:16.

If the humanistic filters of Calvin's T.U.L.I.P. are applied to the most quoted verse in all the Bible, this would be the sad results.

"For God so loved some of the world ("Unconditional Election") that He gave His only begotten Son, that just a select few ("Limited Atonement") who are made to believe by God's unconditional predestination ("Irresistible Grace") will be once saved always saved ("Perseverance of the Saints") and cannot possibly lose their everlasting life because they are not free to make freewill choices."

On the other hand, John 3:16 according to Jesus reads like this:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (KJV)

Q: Who are you going to trust, human filtering or the undiluted, Divinely preserved words of Jesus?

Far too many start with Calvin and make the Bible adapt to his views. Others start with the Bible and quickly discover that many of Calvin's views cannot adapt to the Bible.

On the following pages you will find 7 principles of the Divine preservation of Scripture.

1. God's Promise
2. God's Presentation
3. God's Parallels
4. God's Protection
5. God's Prophecy
6. God's Priming
7. God's Prime Directive

Yes, you can trust in the Divine preservation of the inspired Word. Use it in your personal Bible study. Test every preacher, teacher and church leader by it. Filter all doctrines through it.

Man cannot be trusted with the greatest message of all time. In order to be sure of God's message, always let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Questions

Introduction

1. What are the four doctrines of Calvinism listed within the misquote of John 3:16? (Note: They are within parenthesis.)
2. Can you complete the quote? "Far too many start with _____ and make the _____ adapt to his views."
3. What are the seven principles of Divine preservation to be covered in these lessons?
4. Who are the three people mentioned that need to be tested by Scripture?
5. Can you complete the phrase, "always let the _____ interpret the _____"?

Principles of the Divine Preservation of Scripture

#1 God's Promise

Can the Bible be trusted? There are two major views of the providential preservation of the Bible record. One group believes that God preserves biblical accuracy in spite of human influence. The other group believes that He preserves accuracy because of human influence.

The great irony is this, the same ones who teach that humans are "totally depraved" are the ones who depend upon human influence in order to know God's will (Calvinism, Catholicism, etc.).

(Side note: Calvinists and Catholics are not the only ones to make arguments against the providential protection of Scripture. Muslims also believe that Muhammad's words (the Qur'an) were necessary in order to edit out the biblical errors brought on by human tampering. [For more information see <http://www.heybrothersonny.com/reach.html>.] Apparently, Muslims quote Muhammad because the Bible can't be trusted, Calvinists quote Reformation leaders because the Bible can't be trusted and Catholics quote the Pope... well, you get the idea.)

Warning! It is a very slippery slope to conclude that God requires human editing in order to keep His Word accurate.

In response to this humanistic accusation against the purity of Scripture, I would like to offer you several promises from God.

Matthew 24:35 (NIV) "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

Mark 13:31 (NIV) "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

Luke 21:33 (NIV) "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

Proverbs 30:5-6 (NIV) "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar."

But perhaps the most explicit teaching on the trustworthy nature of Scripture comes from the inspired words of Peter.

1 Peter 1:23-25 (NIV) "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All people are

like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever."

Conclusion

I realize that I have quoted Scripture in order to validate the accuracy of Scripture but that IS the point. Let's revisit the original statement of this article, "There are two major views of the providential preservation of the Bible record. One group believes that God preserves biblical accuracy in spite of human influence. The other group believes that He preserves accuracy because of human influence."

The question is this, "To which group are you loyal?"

I find it perversely ironic that the same group who preaches "faith only" can't seem to muster enough faith to trust that God can preserve the accuracy of Scripture without human input.

Beware of the doctrines of human filtering which dominate the hermeneutical agenda of Calvinism, Reformed Theology, Catholicism, Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, Islam, etc. In order to be sure of God's message, always let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Questions

#1 God's Promise

1. What are the two major views on providential preservation of the biblical record?
2. What two groups teach that humans are totally depraved?
3. What two things will pass away, but God's words will never pass away?
4. How long will the word of the Lord endure?
5. Can you complete the quote, "I find it perversely ironic that the same groups who preach 'faith only' can't seem to muster enough faith to trust that God can preserve the accuracy of Scripture _____."

Principles of the Divine Preservation of Scripture

#2 God's Presentation

Can the Bible be trusted? Not only did God promise to protect the Word, the way He presented it speaks volumes about the attention He gives to preserving its purity.

2 Peter 1:19-21 (NIV) "We also have the prophetic message as something COMPLETELY RELIABLE, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by THE PROPHET'S OWN INTERPRETATION of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God AS THEY WERE CARRIED ALONG BY THE HOLY SPIRIT."

Notice three descriptions of the presentational approach of God.

1. Peter assures the readers that they could take full confidence in the messages of prophecy because they are "completely reliable."
Conclusion: God presents and protects reliability.
2. God did not depend upon the "prophet's own interpretation" for sourcing. Peter seems to go out of his way to say that readers need not be concerned about human influence. Conclusion: God safeguards His presentation from human interpretation.
3. Inspired presentations did not originate in the human will but came about as humans were "carried along by the Holy Spirit." Conclusion: God maintains control over the Source of His presentation.

While explaining the inspirational process might very well be outside the ability of the human mind to grasp, we can know this, God's message is "reliable", safeguarded from human "interpretation," and the Source is fully controlled by Him. As a result of that Divine effort in presentation, it seems reasonable to conclude that the same efforts are Divinely assigned to the preservation of Scripture?

When leaders within Calvinism, Reformed Theology, Catholicism, etc., make the elitist claim that they must filter Scripture in order for us common folks to understand it, they return us to the Dark Ages. Not only does God promise to protect His Word (see #1), He even presented it in such a way that elitist tamperers were put on notice. (See also Revelation 22:18-19.) In order to be sure of God's message, always let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Questions

#2 God's Presentation

1. What was principle #1?
2. What was the first presentation assurance drawn from 2 Peter 1:19-21?
3. What was the second presentation assurance drawn from 2 Peter 1:19-21?
4. What was the third presentation assurance drawn from 2 Peter 1:19-21?
5. What passage from the book of Revelation puts folks on notice who would tamper with God's message?

Principles of the Divine Preservation of Scripture

#3 God's Parallels

par·al·lel (ˈperəəˌleɪ/)

having the same direction, course, nature, or tendency; corresponding; similar; analogous

Can the Bible be trusted? When the awesome God of Scripture wants a principle understood, He does not simply state it, He weaves that message in and out, round and round and side by side.

Consider baptism and each of these three Divine harbingers of harmony.

1. In and Out- The doctrine of baptism has been woven in and out of the timeline fabric since the opening chapters of the human story. Consider Noah, 1 Peter 3:19-21. Notice what is said about Moses, 1 Corinthians 10:1-2. Think about the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist, Matthew 3:4-6. Look at Jesus, John 4:1. Is it any wonder then that the early church continued that in and out woven pattern of baptism, Acts 2:38, 8:12-13, 38, 9:18, 10:48, 16:15, 33, 18:8, 19:5 etc. In and out preserves purity!
2. Round and Round-The doctrine of baptism is presented as a Divine dance between two realms. The physical and spiritual interlock in complimenting motions that circle round and round the same principle - birth, a new beginning. Read John 3:5 and 1 Peter 1:3. Notice the use of both physical and spiritual birth to explain the essential nature of baptism. Round and round preserves purity!
3. Side by side- Lest we miss the importance of baptism, God also uses multiple side by side illustrations to impress upon our hearts and minds the purpose of immersion. In 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 baptism parallels a planting. In Romans 6:3-4 baptism parallels a death burial and resurrection. In the connection between John 3:5 and 1 Peter 1:3 baptism parallels a birth. In Acts 22:16 baptism parallels a bath. Side by side preserves purity!

Note: The doctrine of marriage is validated in the very same way. This confirms that homosexuality is a perversion. Unfortunately, Calvinism, Reformed Theology, Catholicism, etc., have promoted such a lack of trust in Scripture that the Pandora's Box of selective obedience is now wide open. With the popularization of such pick and choose doctrines is it any wonder why so many of our young are struggling to accept the Scriptural condemnation of this perversion?!

Conclusion

There is a great difference between human filtering and human discovery. The first starts with man's agenda. The second pursues God's agenda. The awesome God of Scripture longs for human discoverers, but He does not need human editors! His promise, His presentation and His providential parallels ensure that the living word of God (1 Peter 1:23) is more than capable of defending itself - in and out, round and round and side by side. In order to be sure of God's message, always let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Questions

#3 God's Parallels

1. What are the other principles of Divine preservation that have been mentioned thus far?
2. What descriptive phrase was given as the first Divine harbinger of harmony?
3. What descriptive phrase was given as the second Divine harbinger of harmony?
4. What descriptive phrase was given as the third Divine harbinger of harmony?
5. What perversion has gained footing because of the selective obedience promoted within Catholicism, Calvinism, Reformation Theology, etc.?

Principles of the Divine Preservation of Scripture

#4 God's Protection

Perhaps the most dramatic evidence that the Bible is trustworthy comes from the way its message has been protected by God throughout history. Notice just a few examples.

- Judaism tried to destroy the Bible. In Jeremiah 36:22-23, Jehoiakim tried to eliminate its message, but he failed. In 100 B.C., Antiochus IV tried to destroy the Bible, but he failed. And shortly after Jesus ascended back into Heaven, the Jewish Sanhedrin forbade preaching in Jesus' name. Yet today, the book which contains His life-story is read in nearly every corner of the world.
- Muslims tried to destroy the Bible. In 732 A.D., they attempted to eliminate all Bibles and kill all Christians, but they failed.
- Catholicism tried to destroy access to the Bible. In 1494-1516 A.D., Ferdinand and Isabella forbade the common people to have Bibles. In 1600, Ferdinand II caused ten thousand Bibles to be burned in his attempt to limit its influence. In 1637, Jesuits caused sixty thousand Bibles to be burned. In 1713, Pope Clement II condemned Bible reading. In 1844, Pope Gregory XVI said that Bible societies were guilty of the greatest crime against the church.
- The French skeptic, Voltaire, once said, "In less than one hundred years the Bible will be discarded and Christianity will be swept from the earth." One hundred years later, Voltaire was dead and his house was being used as a depot for the International Bible Society.

Because of the eternal, indestructible, ever harmonious nature of this book, the Bible has never lost its place on the bestselling list! In fact, there is no other book throughout all history that remotely compares with the popularity of the Bible. Parts of the Bible have been translated into more than 1300 languages. About 75 million Bibles are sold each year. Well over one billion copies of this book have been printed. There have been enough Bibles printed to make a solid ribbon of Bibles all the way around the world, not just once or twice, but three times.

Conclusion

God doesn't just promise and present His message in providential parallels, He takes an active role in protecting it. In order to be sure of God's message, always let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Questions

#4 God's Protection

1. What are the other principles of Divine preservation that have been mentioned thus far?
2. Can you give one example of Catholicism attempting to destroy access to the Bible?
3. What happened to the home of French skeptic, Voltaire, after claiming that in less than 100 years the Bible would be discarded?
4. What unique status does the Bible hold with regards to sales?
5. If all the Bibles that have ever been printed were laid end to end, how far is it estimated that the ribbon of Bibles would reach?

Principles of the Divine Preservation of Scripture

#5 God's Prophecy

Prophecy is not just an evidence of God's power, it is also a preservative. By predicting events long before they become reality, God ensures that the message came from Him because only He has the power to bring about such fulfillment. The completion of prophetic predictions is nothing less than Divine evidence that His words are prompted and protected by Him.

Both Zechariah and Isaiah lived over 500 years before Christ was even born. They wrote the books which bear their names and are credited for recording numerous prophecies about the death of Jesus. The ancient book of Psalms, which is also rich in prophecies, can be dated even earlier than Isaiah and Zechariah. Even though these men lived so far apart in time and predicted events that would occur hundreds of years after their deaths, the harmony and accuracy of their prophecies is almost unbelievable. Notice just a few of these amazing prophecies.

- The betrayal money of Judas - Read Matthew 26:14-16, 27:3-6 then compare it to the words in Zechariah 11:12-13 which were written some 500 years earlier.
- The tortures of Jesus - Read Matthew 26:65-68 then compare it to the words in Isaiah 50:6 which were written over 600 years earlier.
- The silence of Jesus at His trial - Read Matthew 27:13-14 then compare it to the words of Isaiah 53:7 which were written over 600 years earlier.
- The clothes of Jesus - Read John 19:23, 24 then compare it to the words of Psalm 22:16-18 which were written 1,000 years earlier.
- The phrases of mockery at the crucifixion - Read Matthew 27:42-43 then compare it to the words of Psalms 22:7-8 which were written 1,000 years earlier.
- The torturous thirst of Jesus on the cross - Read John 19:28-29 then compare it to the words of Psalms 69:21 which were written 1,000 years earlier.
- The exact words of Jesus on the cross - Read Matthew 27:46 then compare it to the words of Psalms 22:1 which were written 1,000 years earlier.

And the list goes on and on...

Prophecy emphasizes the attention God has give to His message. If He took the time to connect all those prophetic dots back then, why would He not take the time to protect His message for us today?

Conclusion

Yes, you can trust Scripture and depend upon it to test all doctrines. God's prophetic preservative says so.

In order to be sure of God's message, always let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Questions

#5 God's Prophecy

1. What are the other principles of Divine preservation that have been mentioned thus far?
2. Can you complete the quote? "Prophecy is not just an evidence of God's power, it is also a _____"?
3. Why does prophecy ensure that the message came from God?
4. Can you list three of the amazing prophecies about Christ's crucifixion that were made hundreds of years before Christ was born?
5. Can you finish the quote, "If He took the time to connect all those prophetic dots back then, why would He not take the time to _____?"

Principles of the Divine Preservation of Scripture

#6 God's Priming

As a child, I remember visiting a very old home tucked back in the hills of northwest Pennsylvania. There was an old-fashioned water pump out front and I remember cranking the handle repeatedly but never getting water. My father explained to me that the old well needed priming. It was not that the water source was unavailable or even forgotten, it had just been neglected.

Throughout the centuries, God has repeatedly "primed the well" of Scripture. It has never been unavailable or totally forgotten, it has just been neglected.

One of the most vivid illustrations of the priming principle comes from story of Josiah and the discovery of the ancient Book of the Law (2 Kings 22). Read the story for yourself and notice the Divine validation that was given to Josiah because he set out to restore, *not reform*, a renewed commitment to the Law.

In truth, God's priming has occurred at every major event in human history.

- At creation He walked and talked with Adam and Eve.
- At the flood, He visited Noah and prompted sermons as he built the ark.
- By faith, Abraham left his homeland and was led on a very personal pilgrimage as God re-primed His message and the covenant of redemption.
- Moses grew up at the epicenter of human wisdom, yet God "primed the pump" during the last 80 years of his life when he was far away from human academia.
- John the Baptist certainly was not held in high regard as a refined scholar, yet God used him as a catalyst for a re-priming in time for Christ's ministry.
- Paul was knocked to the ground and blinded on his way to Damascus then spent time alone in the desert as God primed him to write almost 75% of the New Testament.
- And lastly, it was on the very isolated island of Patmos that the apostle John was given the final inspired priming, Revelation 1:9-10.

Conclusion: Re-priming comes by God's determination and is often separated intentionally from human wisdom in order to emphasize the Source and the Protector of the message which endures forever - God.

Q: But how do we know that God doesn't "prime the pump" today with new messages? The Pope certainly claims that right. Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism claimed that ability. Muhammad believed he was divinely empowered to establish Islam. What evidence is there that these messages aren't providential priming?

First, notice four things about the double curse which is assigned within the words of Galatians 1:6-9. "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!" (NIV)

1. Paul considered it astonishing and a desertion of their calling to accept a supplemental gospel.
2. Paul says that a supplement of the gospel is "no gospel at all" because it prompts "confusion" and is a perversion of "the gospel of Christ."
3. Paul eliminates the possibility of even "an angel from heaven" bringing a true supplement to the gospel.
4. Paul emphasizes the grievous nature of a supplemental gospel by assigning a double curse to anyone who played the role of false prophet.

The inspired apostle John also places a curse on those who add to or take away from the words of the Book of Revelation. Revelation 22:18-19 (NIV) "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll."

But perhaps my favorite illustration is the stubborn persistence of those in Berea. Acts 17:11-12 (NIV) "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12 As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men."

Notice why the Berean Jews were validated by the Holy Spirit as being "of more noble character."

1. They "examined the Scriptures every day." These were the Divinely preserved writings of the Old Testament. Presumably, the Holy Spirit felt that the preservation of ancient Scripture was pure enough to designate the Bereans "more noble" for using them.
2. Notice who it was they were holding accountable to these Divinely preserved ancient texts, none other than the former pupil of Gamaliel, the inspired prophet who will go on to write nearly 75% of our New Testament, Paul himself. Not even the apostle Paul was above being judged by the ancient manuscripts of Scripture!

And lest we miss the grand application, notice again the words of verse 12, "As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men." Yes, God's priming is effective and can be trusted.

Conclusion

Be noble like the Bereans. Be a person who "correctly handles the words of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, NIV). Trust in God's power to preserve His Word.

In order to be sure of God's message, always let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Questions

#6 God's Priming

1. Who was presented as one of the most vivid illustrations of the priming principle?
2. Can you list 3 major events in history when God's priming occurred?
3. What passage places a double curse on those who add to the Gospel message?
4. What was the first reason given for the Berean Jews being of more noble character?
5. What was the second reason given for the Berean Jews being of more noble character?

Principles of the Divine Preservation of Scripture

#7 God's Prime Directive

Several of my online Calvinist combatants regularly mock Scripture referencing as being essential to a credible post. One Calvinist even posted the following equation "Human wisdom > God's word."

I have two emotions when I see their mockery:

1. Blessed by association- "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:11-12, NIV)
2. Concerned for their soul- "ALL AUTHORITY" in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and MAKE DISCIPLES of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have COMMANDED you." (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV)
Those who mock the use of Scripture, mock the commands of Christ!

The final principle from God's preservation of Scripture is the prime directive found in Matthew 28:18-20 (above), otherwise known as the Great Commission.

Before leaving the planet, Jesus gave His followers an assignment to work on while He was away. He commissioned us to go into all the world and acknowledge that only He has "authority" as we train "disciples" in the principles that He "commanded." Without providential protection of that resource, all three of those assignments would be impossible.

1. "all authority"-Today we have Catholic Popes who claim to speak in God's place (ex cathedra). We have Calvinists who exploit their supposed "election" and slant the message in order to validate Calvin. We have Muslims who dismiss the biblical record in favor of the words of Muhammad. And the list goes on. Without the heavenly assurance that "ALL authority" remains in the hands of Jesus, there is no basis for personal Bible study.

2. "make disciples"-The only way to safeguard this process is for the Lord to remain the standard. The moment we begin to distrust the providential protection of Scripture, we begin to make disciples of ourselves.

But how do we know for sure what is of the Lord and what is not? See the third part of this commission.

3. "commanded"- Without God preserving these commands, the attempt to pass them on is futile. As in the second point ("make disciples"), the Lord's commands

will quickly become man's commands unless there is some kind of Divine record to hold man accountable.

Conclusion

The prime directive of Matthew 28:18-20 demands that the message of Scripture is providentially preserved, otherwise fulfillment of "The Great Commission" is impossible. In order to be sure of God's message, always let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Questions

#7 God's Prime Directive

1. What are the other principles of Divine preservation that have been mentioned thus far?
2. What was mentioned as the first part of the prime directive in Matthew 28:18-20?
3. What was mentioned as the second part of the prime directive in Matthew 28:18-20?
4. What was mentioned as the third part of the prime directive in Matthew 28:18-20?
5. Can you complete the quote? "The prime directive of Matthew 28:18-20 demands that the message of Scripture be providentially preserved, otherwise _____ . _____ ."?

Principles of the Divine Preservation of Scripture

Conclusion

In this study we have looked at 7 important principles of the Divine preservation of Scripture.

1. God's Promise
2. God's Presentation
3. God's Parallels
4. God's Protection
5. God's Prophecy
6. God's Priming
7. God's Prime Directive

Yes, you can trust in the Divine preservation of the inspired Word. Trust in it for your personal Bible study. Depend upon it to test ever preacher, teacher and church leader by it. Believe that it is capable of filtering out all false doctrines.

Man cannot be trusted with the greatest message of all time. In order to be sure of God's message, always let the Bible interpret the Bible.