



CAPITOL COMMISSION

A Word About The Word--Inspired

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¹What is right? What is wrong? How does one know? Is there a cultural norm by which these things are judged? Is it found in the hands of those in authority—such as government officials, teachers, pastors, parents? Is there something greater than mankind that has decided these standards? As a legislator, how do you determine what legislation should be passed or defeated? Is it all just in the “eye of the beholder” and everyone is free to do what is right in their own eye?

Last week we began a study series on the Bible. It is our desire to understand what the Bible has to say about itself. We started with the truth—“The Bible is God’s written revelation of Himself to mankind.” God has revealed Himself in His creation (Rom. 1:18-21) and in the heart of man (Romans 2:14-15). He further revealed Himself in the life of His Son, Jesus, and in His written word, the Bible. It is through the written revelation we can know of His holiness, grace and justice—as well as, that which He has declared is right and wrong.

As we continue this week in our series, we will examine the Bible’s claims to being inspired by God. What does “inspiration” mean? Why is it important to believe the Scriptures to be inspired by God and not just the musings of ancient people?

It is my prayer that as we walk through this study series together that we will all proclaim with the songwriter: “May Your lovingkindnesses also come to me, O LORD, Your salvation according to Your word; So I will have an answer for him who reproaches me, For I trust in Your word. And do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, For I wait for Your ordinances.” (Psalm 119:41-43)²

INTRODUCTION

Poets, songwriters and singers talk about the *inspiration* they had to write or sing a particular work. Athletes talk about the goals or people that *inspired* them to train hard, to go the extra mile or to find that one last gasp of energy to make the play necessary for victory. Many read incredible stories of people who accomplish great things and these stories become *inspirational* and provide motivation to keep pressing on. Even

Christians look throughout history to see the sacrifices made by other believers and it *inspires* them to persevere.

While this is a good use of the word, *inspiration*, it is not the understanding used in describing the *inspiration* of Scripture. When used in the discussion of the Bible, *inspiration* can be defined as: “A term used by theologians to designate the work of the Holy Spirit in enabling the human authors of the Bible to record what God desired to have written in the Scriptures.”³ In other words, “God superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded without error His message to mankind in the words of their original writings.”⁴

IF THE BIBLE WAS NOT GOD-BREATHED, IT WOULD BE NO DIFFERENT THAN ANY OTHER BOOK WRITTEN.

In this study, we will flesh out the definition of Scripture’s inspiration by examining two passages which deal with this doctrine—2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:19-21. We will also examine a major reason why this is important to a proper understanding of the Bible.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

In a letter of instruction to his young ministerial disciple, Paul tells Timothy that tough times are the way; times in which men will be lovers of self, filled with sin and will be opposed to the truth (2 Timothy 3:1-9). He says that “evil men and imposters” will deceive others while being deceived (3:13). But Paul reminds Timothy to recall how he, Paul, served and taught others (3:10-12) and exhorts him to “continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of” (3:14a) from the “sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (3:15b). Paul then goes on and describes these “sacred writings”:

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...

This passage will be used in several of our future studies, but for now there are two questions to ask this text which concern today’s topic. The first is what does the Apostle mean by “All Scripture”?

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: WEDNESDAYS @ 12NOON, HEARING ROOM #1
ATTORNEY GENERAL’S OFFICE: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, BROADWAY BUILDING 3RD FLOOR CAFETERIA

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

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Graphé is the Greek word employed by Paul in 3:16. In classical Greek, it means “writing,” but the New Testament uses *graphé* fifty times as a reference to the Old Testament writings.⁵ In the previous verse, Paul refers to the “sacred writings” (3:15) which adds contextual emphasis that he is talking about the Old Testament.

So does that exclude the New Testament? In the context of 2 Timothy, Timothy would probably understand Paul’s reference to solely to the Old Testament. Although, it would not be out of the question to imagine that Timothy, being under Paul’s ministry for several years, began to think of the words of Christ and even Paul’s teaching (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians. 2:15; 1 Corinthians 14:37-38) on par with the *graphé*.⁶ Even though Timothy would not think of a new canon for Scripture, which Christians have today, it would not be out of bounds for “today’s interpreter who believes that the same attributes Paul explicitly attached to the OT would apply equally to the NT.”⁷ Therefore, in context, Paul is referencing the Old Testament Scriptures, but in a broader sense, the New Testament would also be included.

IF THE SCRIPTURES ARE NOT GOD-BREATHED, WE COULD NOT BE ASSURED OF ITS TRUTH AND ACCURACY. WE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO VIEW IT AS A BOOK ABOVE ALL BOOKS WHICH CAN COMMAND OBEDIENCE. WE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO USE IT AS A TRUSTWORTHY “LIGHT UNTO MY PATH” FOR IT MAY BE A LIGHT WHICH MISLEADS.

Our second question to ask this passage is what does the Apostle mean when he describes the Scripture as “inspired by God?”

The Greek word Paul uses here, *theopneustos*, is a *bapax legomenon*—a fancy way of saying “only used once in the Bible.” Literally, *theopneustos* means “God-breathed” or “breathed out by God. In other words, Paul is saying “All Scripture is breathed out by God.”

The English word “inspiration” or “inspired” does not do justice to the meaning of *theopneustos*. In Genesis, Adam was just a lump of dust until God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7b)—which is how we understand inspiring. But this is not an accurate picture of what God did with the Scripture. Men did not write words and then God blew His breath of approval and power on them. Rather, the words of Scripture are “produced by the creative breath of God.”⁸ John MacArthur

writes, “‘All Scripture is God-breathed’—that is, Scripture is not the words of men into which God puffed divine life. It is the very breath of God! Scripture is God Himself speaking.”⁹

A number of Scriptural considerations under gird this truth stated by the Apostle Paul:

- OT records direct speech from God to people (Exodus 20; Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 3:1-4:23)
- Prophets saying “Thus says the Lord” (1 Kings 20:13; Jeremiah 31:2, 7—among many) or “declares the Lord God (Ezekiel 20:44).
- Some of God’s words were commanded to be written (Exodus 17:14; Jeremiah 30:2)
- NT writers thought of the OT as God’s speech (Matthew 1:22—among others)
- OT was taught by Jesus to be believed (Luke 24:25-27)
- Paul saw them as the “oracles of God” (Romans 3:2).

While the use of the word “inspiration” or “inspired” does not fully encompass the whole meaning of *theopneustos*, it can still be used to deliver the understanding that Scripture’s origin is not the mind of man, but rather from the mouth of God Himself.

Before moving on, make note that the Apostle Paul is stating that the *writing* is God-breathed, not the authors who wrote it. We know that Paul wrote other letters. By reading 1 & 2 Corinthians, we know Paul sent a letter before 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5:9), and another between 1 & 2 Corinthians (2 Corinthians 2:4). In Colossians, he makes reference to a letter he sent to the neighboring church in Laodicea (Colossians 4:16). No doubt these were filled with good, solid Christian teaching. But in God’s providence, these were not preserved. Therefore it seems reasonable to understand that they were not God-breathed.

Our next passage gives insight as to how regular ordinary men, coming from a variety of backgrounds and eras, could write God-breathed words.

2 PETER 1:19-21

In this letter, the Apostle Peter is encouraging his readers by confronting the accusations and words of false prophets and false teachers. In chapter one, he writes of his commitment to always remind them of the eternal kingdom which awaits God’s people (1:12-15). He teaches them that what he and his fellow apostles taught did not come from “cleverly devised tales” but rather they were “eyewitnesses of His (Jesus’) majesty” and He makes reference to what they saw and heard at the time of the Transfiguration (1:16-18; cf. Matthew 17:1ff; Mark. 9:2ff; Luke 9:28ff).

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As amazing as that event was, Peter though, talks about something more certain than his own experience. He writes:

2 Peter 1:19-21 *So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

The “prophetic word” was one reference used of the Old Testament Scriptures in Peter’s day. All of the Old Testament is implied in this “prophetic word” and not just those prophesying the coming Messiah. Just like Paul in the above passage (cf. Romans 16:25-27) and just like Jesus who affirmed the Old Testament as Scripture (John 5:39; Luke 24:27, 44-45), Peter held a very high view of the Old Testament. Peter also goes a step further later in this letter to make note that the writings of the Apostle Paul were also to be considered as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16).

This prophetic word, the Scripture, is more sure than his own eyewitness testimony. The English Standard Version translates verse 18 “And we have something more sure, the prophetic word...” This certainty comes from two truths, according to Peter. The first is that the prophetic word did not come from people’s imaginations and dreams (1:20). The Greek word ἐπιλύσεως is translated in most English versions as “interpretation.” The word and sentence structure here, though, tells the reader that this is a reference to source. He is not referring to an explanation of Scripture, as we normally understand it, but to the origins of the Word. Peter is basically saying that the source of the prophetic word did not originate from someone’s own thoughts. The Old Testament writers did not sit down and come up with their own message in which God either gave His “O.K.” and called it inspired or other people concluded was inspired.¹⁰

Instead of being “made by an act of human will”, the Scriptures were produced by “men moved by the Holy Spirit.” This second truth paints a picture of how these men wrote the word of God. Peter uses a play on words in verse 21. One could understand Peter’s sentence “no prophecy was ever *carried* by human will, but men who were *carried along* by the Holy Spirit...” The verb translated *moved* (NASB, NIV, KJV) describes how the wind moves sailing ships on the water. It is the word Luke uses to describe Paul’s ship in the midst of a storm driving the ship in the

direction it blew. “For Peter, it was as if the writers of Scripture raised their spiritual sails and allowed the Spirit to fill them with His powerful breath of revelation as they penned its divine words (cf. Luke 1:70).”¹¹ Since, it is only the Holy Spirit who knows fully the mind of God (Romans 8:27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13), only the Spirit could have inspired the Scripture.

Now, one should note though, there is an element of mystery in inspiration. These are truly human words, yet truly divine words. The Holy Spirit used the different styles of the different writers:

- Matthew was eyewitness of Jesus’ life and ministry;
- Mark, according to the church fathers, used the sermons and words of Peter to compile his gospel;
- Luke investigated and interviewed to write out his gospel for Theopholis (Luke 1:1-4);
- Paul wrote letters to churches and individuals;
- John received visions to declare that which was to come;
- Many received direct revelation and boldly declared and wrote “Thus saith the LORD.”

The methods of writing were different, but all were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Without changing the author’s personality, style, and vocabulary, the Holy Spirit supernaturally “guided the authors of Scripture as to enable them to write exactly the words which convey His truth to men, and in doing so preserved their judgments from error in the original manuscripts.”¹²

WHY IS INSPIRATION IMPORTANT?

In future weeks we will be examining the inerrancy, authority and sufficiency of the Bible. Inspiration is essential for it is the foundation upon which these characteristics firmly stand.

It seems to be fashionable today to conclude that the Bible is just a book written by men and this thought leads to various conclusions, such as:

- Errors are to be expected and are “found.”
- It has no inherent authority and should not be considered any more important than any other religious book.
- It can be useful in helping a person, up to a point.
- It is not relevant to our world today since it was written by men who lived 2000+ years ago.
- It cannot be trusted to be a reliable source of history or science.

And in reality, they would be right. If the Scriptures are not God-breathed, we could not be assured of its truth and accuracy. We would not be able to view it as a book above all books which can command obedience. We would not be able to use it as a trustworthy “light unto my

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path” for it may be a light which misleads. If the Bible was not God-breathed, it would be no different than any other book written.

But those who assert the Bible is just a book written by men (which include some of those in the “church”) are not giving honest credence to the Bible’s own claims. These claims are ignored or “proved” to be erroneous. A person’s presuppositions concerning the Bible prohibit them from taking a candid evaluation of its claims (such as—“God doesn’t reveal Himself” or “There is no God”). One’s antagonistic attitude toward the Bible blocks him or her from taking an unbiased position (in other words—“I don’t like what it says, therefore, it can’t be from God”).

Someone reading this may object to the circular reasoning which draws this conclusion. He or she may say, “You believe the Bible to be inspired because it says it is inspired and you believe it to speak truthfully because it is inspired.” One answer to this objection would be the inappropriateness to attach “inspiration” to a book that did not claim it for itself first. None of Louis LaMour’s books that I have read (which is most of them) claimed to be “God-breathed” so we don’t label them as such. But the Bible does make this claim, so something has to be done with that claim. A defendant on trial who pleads, “Not guilty,” cannot have his claim ignored, it must be taken in consideration (regardless of the evidence against him). Likewise, the claims of inspiration made by the Bible must be evaluated. This claim should lead the reader to examine its contents to see if there is evidence within it to confirm it. Are there any errors or contradictions? Does it show the accurate fulfillment of prophecies? Are there attempts to hide stories or characteristics that may impugn those involved in the action of the book? Is it consistent in its theme? Is the claim to inspiration consistent throughout the book? Does it reflect the God which it claims to have “breathed” it? When these types of questions are asked of the Bible, the evidence points to inspiration (more will be discussed along these lines in future studies).

The bottom line is that it comes down to faith. Belief in the inspiration of Scripture is an issue of faith; faith in its claims and trusting in its truth. Non-belief is also an issue of faith; faith in one’s own ability to reason properly and trust in one’s own conclusions. The Bible has laid out a good case for believing in its inspiration. It has also laid out a good case for not trusting in our own logic and deductions--*The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?* (Jeremiah 17:9)

CONCLUSION

The Bible is the God-breathed written revelation of God Himself. His Holy Spirit carried men along to write the things He desired to be written. Therefore, as we will see next week, it is an accurate, trustworthy record of God’s work throughout history. In it, He shows mankind the desperate plight they are in and the glorious works He performed so they may be reconciled back to Him.

Psalm 119:143-144 *Trouble and anguish have come upon me, Yet Your commandments are my delight. Your testimonies are righteous forever; Give me understanding that I may live.*

¹ This study was originally written while the author served with Capitol Ministries™.

² All passages quoted from the New American Standard Updated Version.

³ Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 66.

⁴ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Publisher, 1999), 38.

⁵ Edward W. Goodrick, “Let’s Put 2 Timothy 3:16 Back in The Bible” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25/4 (Dec 1982): 480.

⁶ Other passages to cross reference this thought are Hebrews 1:1-4 and 2 Peter 3:15-16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 481. Goodrick immediately follows this statement by saying “In fact, I find no way to avoid this conclusion.”

⁸ B.B. Warfield, “God-Inspired Scripture” in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), 270.

⁹ John F. MacArthur, “Does God Still Give Revelation?” *The Master’s Seminary Journal*. 14/2 (Fall 2003): 217-234.

¹⁰ Jeremiah explains that this is how the false prophets spoke. God revealed to Jeremiah that the false prophets came up with their own ideas and dreams and He detested them (Jer. 23:16-25).

¹¹ John F. MacArthur, *2 Peter & Jude* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2005), 65.

¹² K.S. Krantzer, “The Communication of Revelation,” in *The Bible: The Living Word of Revelation*, ed. by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 180.