

Lesson 2

Inspiration of the Bible

A) Definition of Inspiration

God's superintendence of human authors, so that using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original manuscripts.

B) The Characteristics of Inspiration

1) Verbal Inspiration

- a. Verbal inspiration means that the superintendence of God extends to the very words of scripture, not just the thoughts.
- b. Applies only to the original manuscripts. A translation is not inspired though it should convey the same truths as the original.

READING #1 ^[1]

“. . . the sacred writers were the organs of God, so that what they taught, God taught. It is to be remembered, however, that when God uses any of his creatures as his instruments, He uses them according to their nature. He uses angels as angels, men as men. . . Men are intelligent voluntary agents; and as such were made the organs of God. The sacred writers were not made unconscious or irrational. They were not like calculating machines which grind out logarithms with infallible correctness. . . Their self-consciousness was not suspended; nor were their intellectual powers superseded. Holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. It was men, not machines; not unconscious instruments, but living, thinking, willing minds, whom the Spirit used as his organs. Moreover, as inspiration did not involve the suspension or suppression of the human faculties, so neither did it interfere with the free exercise of the distinctive mental characteristics of the individual.

- If someone was a Hebrew, he spoke Hebrew
- If a Greek, he spoke Greek
- If an educated man, he spoke as a man of culture
- If uneducated, he spoke as such a man is wont to speak
- If his mind was logical, he reasoned, as Paul did
- If emotional and contemplative, he wrote as John wrote

All this is involved in the fact that God uses his instruments according to their nature . . . the inspired penmen wrote out of the fullness of their own thoughts and feelings, and employed the language and modes of expression which to them were the most natural and appropriate. *Nevertheless, they spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and their words were His words"*

[end of Reading #1]

READING #2 ^[2]

The Inspiration of the Scriptures extends to the Words.

- **Thoughts** are expressed thru **words**. The two are inseparable. If the words, "priest, sacrifice, justification, and the like", have no divine authority, then the doctrine which they embody has no such authority.
- Christ and his Apostles argue from the very words of Scripture (see examples below: "Evidence for verbal inspiration -> Arguments were based on single words").
- The very form in which the doctrine of inspiration is taught in the Bible, assumes that the organs of God in the communication of His will were controlled by Him in the words which they used.
 - "I have put My words in your mouth." (Jeremiah1:9)
 - "It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you." (Matthew 10:20)
 - They spoke "as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:4)
 - "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)

All these, and similar modes of expression with which the Scriptures abound, imply that the words uttered were the words of God.

[end of Reading #2]

c. Evidence for verbal inspiration

1. Christ's *words* (not thoughts) are spirit and life (John 6:63)
2. The prophets' *words* were from God (Jeremiah 1:7, 9; 26:2; 36:2)
3. Arguments were based on single *words*
 - Matthew 22:32 / Exodus 3:6 In saying, "I am the God of Abraham," the Lord was demonstrating that the patriarchs were still alive, thus proving the reality of life after death and the possibility of resurrection - both of which the Sadducees denied. The argument hinges on the tense of a *single word* (the word "am"). If hundreds of years after Abraham had died God could still say that He IS the God of Abraham (instead of, I WAS the God of Abraham), one would have to conclude that Abraham was still alive - even after he had died physically.
 - John 8:58 / Exodus 3:14 "Before Abraham was, I am." If all that Jesus meant to say was that He was alive before Abraham, he would have said, "Before Abraham was, I *was*." However, by saying "I am" Jesus emphasized His eternal nature -- the same nature that God Himself is said to possess in Exodus 3:14. The Jews understood exactly what He meant so "they picked up stones to stone Him" for blasphemy (Jn. 8:59). Again, everything turns on the tense of a single word.
 - Matthew 22:45 / Psalm 110:1 David called Christ Lord (God) which showed that David viewed Him as more than just a descendant in the flesh. This attests to the deity of Christ - - but the entire argument is based on *the words* of the inspired writer.
 - John 10:33-36 / Psalm 82:6 God had called men "gods" in the Old Testament. Jesus is arguing that if the term can be used of someone other than God Himself why should anyone object if Jesus calls Himself "God's Son"? Again, the accuracy of *one word* ("gods") is the foundation for Jesus' defense.
4. Paul emphasized the importance of each word (1 Corinthians 2:13).

2) Plenary Inspiration

- a. Plenary inspiration means that **every part** of the Bible is equally inspired in every part

READING #3 ^[3]

Inspiration is not confined to **moral and religious truths**, but extends to **scientific, historical, and geographical** facts, or anything else that the sacred writers asserted to be true.

Plenary inspiration:

- is the necessary consequence of the sacred writers being the organs of God. If what they said, God says, their assertions must be free from error in all they say.
- is expressly stated by the Lord when He says, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35), *i.e.*, it cannot err.
- was assumed by Christ and his Apostles who refer to all parts of the Scriptures as the word of God. . . They quote the Pentateuch, the historical books, the Psalms, and the Prophets, as all and equally the word of God.

[end of Reading #3]

- b. Evidence for plenary inspiration

- Matthew 5:18
- 2 Timothy 3:16

READING #4 ^[4] (The meaning of 2 Timothy 3:16)

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

- "All" has a collective sense and means the whole of Scripture; the entirety of the Bible, including all its parts.
- "Scripture" literally means "writing" and is called the "sacred writings" (the Old Testament) in verse 15.
- "Inspired," in Greek is literally "God-breathed." Here scripture is personified as having received its breath from God (also see Hebrews 4:12-13). In the Old Testament the "breath" of God is His creative power (Job 32:8; 33:4; 34:14) (see also Genesis 2:7 and Psalm 33:6). The Scriptures are a product of the divine breath; they find their origin in God, not in the

genius of man. Though Paul is referring to the Old Testament, the same truth applies to the New Testament in principle.

On what grounds can we extend the idea of inspiration to the *New Testament* writings?

- Peter refers to Paul's writings as Scripture (1 Peter 3:14-16).
- Paul instructed churches to read his writings publically (presumably along with the Old Testament - Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27), making them equal in authority.
- Paul called his message "the word of God" in 1 Thessalonians 2:13.
- Paul refers to what God has revealed to him (1 Corinthians 2:13) as "words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit."
- In 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul indicates that there is more to Scripture than the Old Testament: he places Luke's gospel (Luke 10:7 - "the laborer is worthy of his wages") on a par with Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 25:4 - "you shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing"), referring to them both as "the Scripture."
- if the Scripture was not entirely without error it would be difficult to see how it could be "profitable" and contribute to our "instruction" in righteousness.

[end of Reading #4]

- c. Verbal, plenary inspiration allows for:
1. God's superintendence without dictation
 2. differences in personalities and writing styles
 3. the use of diverse expressions (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19)
 4. the use of phenomenal language (Matthew 5:45; Genesis 15:12) - e.g. the sun rising and setting
 5. the use of figurative language (John 10:9), hyperbole (Matthew 19:24; Mark 1:5), symbols (or symbolic terms) and other literary devices (i.e. 1 John 1:4 "we" could be a literary plural referring to John alone)
 6. the use of source materials (Luke 1:1-4) or personal experiences (1 John. 1:1-4)

C) The Process of Inspiration

- 1) God is the divine source (2 Timothy 3:16)
- 2) Man is the instrument (2 Peter 1:21)
 - As a boat is pushed along, being directed by the wind, so the men who wrote scripture were **controlled**, or **moved** by the Spirit of God (Acts 27:15, where the same verb is used).
- 3) The written word is the product

D) Additional Proofs of Inspiration

READING #5 ^[5]

Argument from the meaning of the word Prophet:

The Old Testament concept of a prophet was that of a spokesman, one who spoke for another, in his name, and by his authority; so that it was not the spokesman but the person for whom he acts, who is responsible for the truth of what is said.

In Exodus 7:1, God said to Moses, "See, I make you *as* God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet." *i. e.*, your spokesman.

This is explained by Exodus 4:14-16: "You [Moses] are to speak to him [Aaron] and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth *for you and you will be as God to him.*" (see Jeremiah 36:17-18)

This defines what a prophet is. He is the mouth of God (Jeremiah 1:9; Isaiah 51:16); one through whom God speaks to the people; so that what the prophet says, God says. The words, "Thus says the Lord," were continually in his mouth implying that what he said, he said in God's name and by his authority.

This is precisely what the Apostle Peter teaches when he says (2 Peter 1:20-21), "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 things a prophet said were not human, but divine. It was not the prophet's own interpretation of the mind and will of God. He spoke as the organ of the Holy Spirit.

Argument from the Testimony of Paul: (1 Corinthians 2:7-13)

The Corinthians objected to Paul's preaching because he did not attempt to give any rational or philosophical proof behind the doctrines he propounded. He answered these objections by saying that the doctrines he taught did not come from his own reason or the wisdom of men, but were matters of divine revelation; they were simply what God declared to be true; Paul was a mere organ of the Spirit of God.

In 1 Corinthians 2:7-13, he sets forth this whole subject in the clearest and most concise manner. The things he taught, which he calls "the wisdom of God," or "the things of the Spirit," had never entered into the mind of man. God had revealed those truths to him by His Spirit; for the Spirit is the only competent source of such knowledge. Verse 11 states, "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." Paul could not know the thoughts of God; the Holy Spirit had to be the source of his knowledge and it was the ground on which the doctrines he taught were to be received.

This then is the ground on which the sacred writers rested their claims. They were the mere organs of God. They were his messengers. Those who heard them, heard God; and those who refused to hear them, refused to hear God (Matthew 10:40; John 13:20).

Jesus' View of Scripture

Consider the people and events of the Old Testament, for example, whom/which Jesus frequently mentioned. He refers to:

- Abel, Noah and the great flood, Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot,
- Isaac and Jacob, the manna from heaven, the serpent in the desert,
- David eating the consecrated bread and his authorship of the Psalms,
- Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, and Zechariah, etc.

In each case He treats the Old Testament narratives as straightforward records of historical fact. Skeptics sometimes respond by saying that Jesus was simply *accommodating* himself to the mistaken beliefs of his contemporaries. That is, they say that He met His contemporaries on their own ground without necessarily committing Himself to the correctness of their views. Perhaps He graciously chose not to upset them by questioning their belief in the truth and authority of the Bible.

HOWEVER,

- Jesus was not at all sensitive about undermining mistaken beliefs among the people of his day. He loudly and often denounced the traditions of the Pharisees and took on their distortion of the Old Testament law in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Jesus challenged nationalistic conceptions of the kingdom of God and the coming of the Messiah. He was even willing to face death on a cross for the truth of what he declared.
- In referring to the Old Testament, Jesus declared that "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35) and, "It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to

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drop out of the law" (Luke 16:17, see also Mark 7:6-13; Luke 16:29-31). He rebuked the Sadducees saying, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matthew 22:29).

- When faced by Satan's temptations, it was to the truth and authority of the Old Testament that he appealed (Matthew 4:4). Note especially his words: "It has been [it stands] written."
- Jesus didn't hesitate to deliberately offend the religious sensibilities of his contemporaries when he chose to eat and socialize with both publicans and prostitutes.

. . . *In his article on "Inspiration", Packer unpacks the significance of this principle:*

Christ and his apostles quote Old Testament texts not merely as what Moses, David or Isaiah said (Mark 7:10, 12:36, 7:6; Romans 10:5, 11:9, 10:20, etc.)

- but also as what God said through these men (Acts 4:25, 28:25, etc.)
- or sometimes simply what '**He**' (**God**) says (2 Corinthians 6:16; Hebrews 8:5,8)
- or what the **Holy Spirit** says (Hebrews 3:7, 10:15)

Furthermore, Old Testament statements are quoted as utterances of God (Matthew 19:4; Hebrews 3:7; Acts 13:34; citing Genesis 2:24; Psalm 95:7; Isaiah 55:2 respectively). Paul also refers to God's promise to Abraham and his threat to Pharaoh, both spoken long before the biblical record of them was written, as words which *Scripture* spoke to these two men (Galatians 3:8; Romans 9:17); which shows how completely he equated the statements of Scripture with the utterance of God.^[7]

E) Related Concepts to Inspiration (the accurate recording of that truth)

• Revelation

Revelation is the act of disclosing truth. It is a divinely initiated disclosure, not an effort or endeavor or achievement on the part of mankind. "Revelation does not mean man finding God, but God finding man, God sharing His secrets with us, God showing us Himself. In revelation, God is the agent as well as the object".^[8]

All history is, in one sense, God's deed, but none of it reveals Him except in so far as He Himself talks to us about it.

"For no public historical happening, as such (an exodus, a conquest, a captivity, a crucifixion, an empty tomb), can reveal God apart from an accompanying word from God to explain it, or a prior promise which it is seen to confirm or fulfill. Revelation in its basic form is thus of necessity propositional; God reveals Himself by telling us about Himself, and what He is doing in His world".^[9]

Another characteristic of revelation is that it is *progressive*, i.e., cumulative. God has not revealed Himself comprehensively at any one stage in history or in any one event. Revelation is a series of divine disclosures, each of which builds upon and unpacks or unfolds that which preceded it. Revelation moves from what is piecemeal and partial (Hebrews 1:3) and incomplete (but always accurate) to what is comprehensive and final and unified.

- **Authority**

Authority is the consequence of inspiration. Since God is the supreme authority, His words as recorded in the Bible are binding upon man.

The Holy Spirit acted to insure that what the human authors intended by their words is equivalent to what God intended. The Spirit thus brought the free and spontaneous thoughts of the human author into coincidence with the thoughts of God.

Thus there is no significant difference between the ultimate authority of God and the immediate authority of Scripture. "The authority of Scripture is the divine authority of God Himself speaking".^[10]

- **Inerrancy**

Inerrancy refers to the fact that the Scripture is free from errors. Because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) nor make a mistake, His words are without error in the original manuscripts.

"Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences".^[11]

- **Illumination**

Illumination is the act of God whereby He enlightens the minds of those who read what has been written so they can understand it (1 Corinthians 2:6-16).

Footnotes:

[1] Hodge, Systematic Theology, Vol. I, 156-157 (adapted from)

[2] Hodge, Systematic Theology, Vol. I, 163-165 (adapted from)

[3] Hodge, Systematic Theology, Vol. I, 163-165 (adapted from)

[4] Truth and Power, 46 (adapted from)

[5] Hodge, Systematic Theology, Vol. I, 161-163 (adapted from)

[6] Paul Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," 294 (adapted from)

[7] The New Bible Dictionary, ed. J. D. Douglas et al. [London: IVP, 1962], 564 (adapted from)

[8] Packer, God Has Spoken, 47 (adapted from)

[9] Packer, God Has Spoken, 76-77 (adapted from)

[10] Packer, God Has Spoken, 96 (adapted from)

[11] Packer, God Has Spoken, 96 (adapted from)