

The Bible: God's Redemptive Words

Lesson 4: Inspiration – All Scripture is God-breathed

Intro

- Thus far we have seen that the Bible is God's revelation which He has chosen to accommodate to our level of weakness and limitation.
- It is authoritative because He is its author and there is nothing higher than God's own testimony which could lend His Words more credibility.
- How then does the bible originate with Him yet come to us through human authors?

What do we mean by saying that the Bible is "Inspired"?

- We get the word "inspired" directly from **2 Tim 3:16** where Paul says:
All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.
- This is the classic passage proving the Christian doctrine of inspiration (as it should be). It states not only that all of scripture has been given to us by God, but that it has also been imbued with the power of the Spirit to perform powerful things in those who hear it.

Calvin

In order to uphold the authority of the Scripture, he declares that *it is divinely inspired*; for, if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that men ought to receive it with reverence. This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. ¹

- Here we must recall the importance of the Bible's "Self-authentication" through the Holy Spirit. Nothing but God Himself can prove that His Word came from Him.

Calvin

If it be objected, "How can this be known?" I answer, both to disciples and to teachers, God is made known to be the author of it by the revelation of the same Spirit. Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have received from their hand, but, speaking at the suggestion of God, they boldly and fearlessly testified, what was actually true, that it was time mouth of the Lord that spake. The

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Second Epistle to Timothy*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 3:16.

same Spirit, therefore, who made Moses and the prophets certain of their calling, now also testifies to our hearts, that he has employed them as his servants to instruct us.²

- Peter goes into even more detail than Paul in describing how God spoke to us through the writers of His Word (here called prophets)

2 Peter 1:17-21

¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ **And we have something more sure**, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that **no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.** ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but **men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

- This means that the Bible does not originate in the mind of man, but instead originates with God, as He works through the people He commissioned to proclaim and record His Word.

B. B. Warfield (1851-1921)

No 'prophecy,' Peter tells us, 'ever came by the will of man; but *as borne by the Holy Ghost*, men spoke from God.' Here the whole initiative is assigned to God, and such complete control of the human agents that the product is truly God's work. The men who speak in this "prophecy of scripture" speak not of themselves or out of themselves, but from "God": they speak only as they are "borne by the Holy Ghost." But it is they, after all, who speak. Scripture is the product of man, but only of man speaking from God and under such a control of the Holy Spirit as that in their speaking they are "borne" by Him. The conception obviously is that the Scriptures have been given by the instrumentality of men; and this conception finds repeated incidental expression throughout the New Testament.³

- So what this "God-breathed" origin of Scripture means is that since it all comes from Him, it is therefore supremely authoritative.

Westminster Confession of Faith 1.8

The Old Testament in Hebrew ... and the New Testament in Greek ... being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal to them.

² Calvin, *Commentary on 2Timothy*, 3:16.

³ Benjamin Warfield, "Inspiration," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr, vol. 3 (Chicago: Howard-Severance Co., 1915), 1473-1483.

- However, it is important to recall that the Scriptures are not designed to be an authority in matters they do not address.
- The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have a particular goal in mind with what they commissioned the biblical authors to write: **they speak supremely of Christ and redemption for sinners.**

Michael Horton

So Scripture is the church's authoritative canon because it comes *from the Father*... Nevertheless, Scripture's authority also derives from *the Son as its content*... Yet our Trinitarian coordinates are not set until we have included in our focus the perfecting agency of the Holy Spirit... The act of speaking is the Father's; the son is the content that is performed by the speaking, and the Spirit works within creation to bring about the intended effect. For example, the Father gives the gospel, the Son is the gospel, and the Spirit creates faith in our hearts to receive it.⁴

- So it's crucial that we not "drag" the Bible into discussions that God does not address; the Bible is not a textbook on economics, science or political theory. God inspired His writers to discuss redemption through Christ.

To what degree is the Bible "from God"?

- The phrase "Verbal/Plenary Inspiration" was developed in response to arguments that reject the orthodox doctrine of the Inspiration of Scripture
- **Verbal/Plenary Inspiration** means that "Scripture is God-breathed both in its words and in its meaning.... However, this does NOT "mean that the prophets and apostles *themselves* were inspired in their persons, as if everything they believed, said, or did was God's Word. Rather, it is their canonical writings that are inspired."⁵
- So all of the writings that God chose to include in the Bible were "breathed out" by the Holy Spirit into the authors who wrote them down.
- How then does this relationship between God and their biblical authors work?

How do we account for the "Human Element"?

- The "human element" to the Bible's composition has caused many to reject the entire notion of a God-inspired Bible.

⁴ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 156-157.

⁵ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 160.

- Additionally, it has caused many to opt for unorthodox versions of inspiration to accommodate those who struggle to grasp how God could speak perfectly through fallible humans.
- Theories of Inspiration:

Dynamic Inspiration

- This view denies that the Holy Spirit communicated actual “revelation” and instead “enlightened” the authors, by heightening their “spiritual awareness.” Thus they were “inspired” as people, but did not receive specific revelation from the Spirit. As Louis Berkhof explains:

This inspiration was a permanent characteristic of the writers, and therefore incidentally also influenced their writings. It does not differ essentially but only in degree from the spiritual enlightenment of believers in general. It penetrates all parts of Scripture, but not all in the same measure ... And while it renders the Biblical writings generally trustworthy, it allows for the possibility of errors, especially in the historical books. This theory certainly does not do justice to the Biblical data on inspiration. It robs the Bible of its supernatural character, reduces it to the level of general revelation, and destroys its infallibility.⁶

- This view accommodates many of the modern accusations which claim either that Scripture is full of errors, or that God cannot speak through humans.
- Thus this view makes the Bible only the words of enlightened men, not the Word of God.

Mechanical Inspiration

- Somewhat in response to the attacks on the orthodox doctrine of inspiration, Mechanical Inspiration (also known as the “dictation theory”) essentially removes the human element altogether and argues that the Spirit “dictated” every word to those who wrote them down.
- For instance, W.A. Criswell went so far as to refer to the biblical writers as merely “penmen.”

When we open the Scriptures, we find that sometimes the penman is Moses, sometimes it is David, sometimes it is Amos or Hosea... But did these men claim to be the authors of the Bible? Did they compose this tremendous volume? No! For this volume is the writing of the living God. Each sentence

⁶ Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, 41.

was dictated by God's Holy Spirit... Everywhere in the Bible we find God speaking. It is God's voice, not man's.⁷

- But this does no justice to the way the Bible actually reads. Clearly the personalities and experiences of the biblical authors come through in their writings and shape what they wrote.
- Additionally, this raises the question of the truthfulness of Scripture if the personal greetings that the apostles give in their epistles were not actually their words.
- This view also unnecessarily ties the Holy Spirit's hands and assumes that He is unable to communicate exactly what he wants to say through the writer's own personality and experiences.

Organic Inspiration

- Striking the balance that Scripture describes for us the Organic view affirms that the Holy Spirit communicates exactly what he wants to say through the humans authors that He "carries along". However it also affirms that the Spirit does this while utilizing the personalities, gifts and experiences of the biblical authors.

Berkhof

God did not employ the writers mechanically, but acted on them in an organic way, in harmony with the laws of their own inner being. He used them just as they were, with their character and temperament, their gifts and talents, their education and culture, their vocabulary, diction, and style; illumined their minds, prompted them to write, repressed the influence of sin on their literary activity, and guided them in the choice of their words and in the expression of their thoughts. This view is clearly most in harmony with the representations of Scripture. It represents the writers of Scripture not as mere amanuenses but as real authors who, while sometimes recording direct communications of God, yet on other occasions set down in writing the results of their own historical investigations or register their experiences of sin and forgiveness, of joy and sorrow, of threatening dangers and gracious deliverances. It also accounts for the individuality of the books of the Bible, since each writer naturally had his own style and put on his literary productions his own personal stamp and the stamp of the time in which he lived.⁸

⁷ W. A. Criswell, *Why I Preach that the Bible is Literally True* (Nashville: Broadman, 1969), 68.

⁸ Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, 42-43.

- Douglas Moo summarizes well this organic balance as it is described in 2 Peter 1:21(as we read above):

The prophets then speak God's words. But do they also speak their own words? Some theologians have so emphasized God's role in prophetic (and biblical) inspiration that they have viewed the prophets themselves as passive mouthpieces. But not what Peter says here: "Men spoke from God." He is not denying that the prophecies were genuinely the words of the prophets themselves, men who consciously chose their words in accordance with their own vocabulary, style and circumstances. What Peter does affirm, however, is that the words they chose to use were also the words that God wanted them to use to communicate the message he intended.⁹

Conclusion

- Thus the Bible is the very Word of God which He has revealed to us through the human authors which He guided to communicate what He wanted us to hear.
- The whole process of revealing these things to us originates with God, NOT with man.
- Because of this, we need not fear that erroneous assumptions on the part of the human authors were mixed with the truth of God's revelation.
- It is all God-breathed and thus is imbued with the power to bring us the message of salvation in Christ.

⁹ Douglas Moo, 2 Peter & Jude: NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 79.