

BIBLIOLOGY – The Doctrine of the Bible (Part 1)

DEFINITION: The Bible is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Tim. 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God breathed. The Bible is God’s written revelation to man, and thus the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21) and as such, Fellowship Bible Church teaches the literal, grammatical historical interpretation of Scripture.

The Bible is the book of the Truth, testifying of life and imparting life, given by the Holy Spirit and accompanied by the Holy Spirit. Without it the church of God would be given up to hopeless wandering and ignorance. Instead of light and faith there would come religious twilight, in place of sobriety, fanaticism, instead of clarity, a misty obscurity, and more and more would God’s word be exchanged for the subconscious voice, the so-called “inner light,” and in the course of centuries the objective testimony of God would evaporate into a general subjectivism. (Erich Sauer, From Eternity to Eternity, p. 101).

The Bible conveys a great deal of information – true, reliable, authoritative information about God, history, theology, and how we should live. But we must remember that God’s revelation is more than information. He reveals not only facts about himself – he reveals himself. His Word acts in a personal way upon the hearts of those who hear or read it. . . . Reading the Bible keeps us personally connected to God. (Gene Edward Veith, Why God Gave Us a Book, p. 13).

REVELATION: The process by which God communicates to man truths which man did not know and could not discover for himself.

Revelation is a divine activity: not, therefore, a human achievement. Revelation is not the same thing as discovery, or the dawning of insight, or the emerging of a bright idea. Revelation does not mean man finding God, but God finding man In revelation, God is the agent as well as the object. It is not just that men speak about God, or for God; God speaks for Himself, and talks to us in person God has spoken a word for the world, a word to which all people in all ages are summoned to listen and to respond. (J. I. Packer, God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible, 3rd ed., p.47).

Christianity differs from religion, commonly understood, in that it involves God’s gracious quest for the person rather than the person’s groping search for God. Central to the Christian way is the claim that God has taken the initiative and has, in intelligible ways, disclosed himself to people. (Gordon R. Lewis & Bruce A. Demarest, Integrative Theology, Vol. 1, p. 61).

The essential purpose of revelation is life: the gift of the life of God to the life of man. Its practical character is stamped on every part. The “chief end of revelation” is not philosophy, though it has a philosophy profound and worthy. It is not doctrine, though it has its experiences precious and lasting. It is not even morality, though it has its ethic unique and powerful. Christianity has all these, but is far more than them all. It is the religion of redemption, including salvation from sin, equipment for holiness, and provision for life to be lived in fellowship with God and for His glory. The “chief end” of revelation is the union (communio) of God and man, and in that union (communion) the fulfillment of all God’s purposes for the world. The elements of sonship, worship, stewardship, fellowship, heirship, practically sum up the purpose of Divine revelation as it concerns man’s life – a life in which he receives God’s grace, realized God’s will, reproduces God’s character, renders God service, and rejoices in God’s presence in the Kingdom of glory below and the Kingdom of glory above. (W. H. Griffith Thomas, “Revelation” in Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, ed. James Hastings, 1909, p. 797).

THE TWO TYPES OF REVELATION:

- General Revelation: *“The knowledge of God’s existence, character, and moral law, which comes through creation to all humanity.”* (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 122). e.g., Psalm 19; Romans 1:18-20
- Special Revelation: In the broadest sense, special revelation refers to *“those acts of God whereby He makes Himself and His truth known at special times and to specific peoples.”* (Henry C. Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology, rev. ed., ed., p. 10).

Examples:

- The lot (Prov. 16:33; Acts 1:21-26)
 - The Urim & Thummim (Ex. 28:30; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6)
 - Dreams (Gen. 20:3, 6; 31:11-12, 24; 40-41; Joel 2:28)
 - Visions (Isa. 1:1; 6:1; Ezek 1:3)
 - Theophanies (Gen. 16:7-14; Ex. 3:2; 2 Sam. 24:16; Zech 1:12)
 - Angels (Dan. 9:20-21; Luke 2:10-11; Rev 1:1)
- Scripture is the final and chief special revelation for us. It contains everything we need to know in order to be complete and fully equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It alone is the standard of all truth.

The Fellowship Bible Church doctrinal statement:

“We believe the Bible consists of the Old and New Testaments and every word is the verbally inspired Word of God. The Bible is without error in the original manuscripts and is the only and final authority for faith and practice in all matters of which it addresses.”

INSPIRATION:

Definitions of Inspiration :

“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.” (Charles Ryrie, Basic Theology).

“By inspiration of the Scripture we mean that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God.” (Millard Erickson, Christian Theology).

“God supernaturally moved the writers of Scripture so that, although they wrote in accord with their own interests, style, and abilities, the resultant documents are His Word, authoritative in matters of faith and practice, and truthful in all they affirm.” (Gordon Lewis & Bruce Demarest, Integrative Theology, Vol. 1).

Verbal Inspiration:

The very words of Scripture, even down to the last letter, jot, and title, are inspired by God. Jesus said, *“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter (iota, jot) or stroke (tittle) shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished* (Matt. 5:18).

Plenary Inspiration:

The entirety of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is inspired, not just portions of books. Jesus said, “It is written, ‘*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*’ ” (Matt. 4:4).

Men and Materials:

When God chose men to write their portions of the Bible, He did not suddenly select any man and dictate it from heaven. Rather, God sovereignly prepared that man through physical, intellectual, spiritual processes over time and life experiences to write down precisely what He wanted written down without overruling the man’s human personality or distinctives.

And in addition to directly conveying His message to the writers, the Lord also directed writers to research or record known historical, geographical, and sociological information from outside sources or personal observation and experiences.

Key Biblical Passages:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 -- *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.*

- The entire Bible is in view.
cf. 2 Peter 3:15-16; 1 Timothy 5:18
- The entire Bible is God breathed.
- The entire Bible is profitable.
 - for teaching = it’s God’s revelation of truth
 - for reproof = to produce conviction; to refute & dispel error
 - for correction = to lead a wandering child of God back to the right path
 - for instruction . . . in righteousness = equipping & establishing in ways of God
(*getting into proper working condition*)

NOTE: Some have attempted to improperly translate this verse as: “All Scripture inspired by God is profitable . . .” implying not all Scripture is inspired and therefore profitable. However, in the Greek text, both adjectives – “inspired by God” and “profitable” are predicate adjectives meaning they should be taken together in parallel describing “Scripture.”

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.***

- Though the phrase “prophecy of Scripture” refers to the coming of Christ and His kingdom, it is not unreasonable for this phrase to be seen as equivalent to the phrase “all Scripture” in 2 Tim. 3:16.
- This verse affirms that Scripture was not merely the product of the mind of the prophet, that is originated in his own mind. It was a revelation from God Who is the ultimate Author.
- Verse 21 explains the process of inspiration as ***“men moved by the Holy Spirit.”*** The word “moved” can be translated as “carried along” or “conveyed to” describing that the human authors were not the originators of Scripture, but were conduits of God’s Truth and carried along or moved upon by the Holy Spirit to write down what God was conveying to them.

This word “moved” or “carried along” is found in 1:17 – ***“For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him (NKJV – “came to Him”; ESV – “was borne to Him”; NIV – “was conveyed to Him”) by the Majestic Glory. . .”***

[Cf Acts 27:14-17 – the boat was “driven along” by the wind = same word as in 2 Pt. 1]

INERRANCY: Inerrancy means that regardless of the subject (history, science, geography, or redemption), the Bible in its original manuscripts is without error.

Inerrancy is the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences.
(Paul D. Feinberg, in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter Elwell, p. 142).

The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. (Wayne A. Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 90).

The question of inerrancy is a question related to the integrity of God, the Holy Spirit. Is and was He able, through His work of inspiration, to put down special revelation which is free from error?

Since the Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of truth” (John 16:13), the Bible, having its source in the Spirit, must be true and trustworthy in all that it teaches. Inerrancy attests that the Bible always tells the truth and is free from all falsehood or mistakes.

Inerrancy applies to the *autographa* (original autographs), not to copies or translations of Scripture. This qualification is made because we realize that errors have crept into the text during the transmission process. It is not an appeal to a “Bible which no one has ever seen or can see.” Such a charge fails to take into account the nature of textual criticism and the very high degree of certainty we possess concerning the original text of Scripture.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why is it important to hold to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures? What's at stake if we don't? Would a Bible that is merely "generally reliable" be enough?

2. If someone says that the basic concepts in the Bible are inspired (e.g. love God and love others) but the words of Scripture are not, what would you say in response?

TAKING IT A STEP FURTHER:

1. **On objective truth vs. the "inner light":** Erich Sauer warned that without the Bible, the church would exchange "God's word . . . for the subconscious voice, the so-called 'inner light,'" and that "the objective testimony of God would evaporate into a general subjectivism." Where do you see this drift happening today — even inside the church? When someone says, "I just feel that God is telling me . . ." how do we lovingly test that against the objective, propositional revelation of Scripture without dismissing the genuine work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life?

2. **On revelation as a Person, not just information:** Packer reminds us that "God speaks for Himself, and talks to us in person," and Veith adds that God "reveals not only facts about himself — he reveals himself." If revelation is ultimately God disclosing *Himself*, what's the difference between studying the Bible to gather information *about* God and reading it to actually *meet* God? Honestly evaluate your own time in the Word this past week — which of the two were you doing? And what practical changes might shift you from one to the other?

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy 1978:

Article I

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.

We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition or any other human source.

Article II

We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.

We deny that Church creeds, councils or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

Article III

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.

We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

Article IV

We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's Work of Inspiration.

Article V

We affirm that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive.

We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.

Article VI

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.

We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

Article VII

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.

We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

Article VIII

We affirm that God in His Work of Inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

Article IX

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.

We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

Article X

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

Article XI

We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

Article XII

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

Article XIII

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of materials, variant selections of material in parallel accounts or the use of free citations.

Article XIV

We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

Article XV

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

Article XVI

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.

We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

Article XVII

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.

We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

Article XVIII

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching or rejecting its claims to authorship.

Article XIX

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.