

Before we get to the actual how-to of our class, we need to spend some time talking about the Bible itself. This is where our first two classes will focus. Today's class is called About the Bible, and then next week we will look at English Bible translations, how we have the Bible of today, and then how we know that our English translation is trustworthy and accurate.

### The Doctrine of Revelation

The Definition of Revelation: The Greek word for revelation in the New Testament is *apokalypsis* and means basically "to make fully known, to disclose or to reveal." God, for His own glory, has created with the purpose of **making known** the majesty of His character and conduct among those He has created in His own image. God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself to us in two primary ways: General and Special Revelation.

### General Revelation

General revelation is the manifestation of certain attributes of God's character to the entire world through the creation.

- General revelation is **universal** in scope touching all people at all times in every corner of the globe. It is a clear revelation about God made evident by God to each individual. (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20)
- What exactly can be known about God simply by observing creation (General Revelation)?
  - His **glory** (Ps. 19:1)
  - His almighty **power** (Rom. 1:20)
  - His divine **nature** (Rom. 1:20)
  - His providential **control** of nature (Acts 14:17)
  - His **goodness** (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:15-17)
- According to Scripture, the rejection of this basic general revelation is the **basis** for the just condemnation of all mankind because they suppress and distort the truth revealed to them by God in creation and refuse to **worship** Him. (Rom. 1:18-23)

### Special Revelation

The Bible is not General Revelation. It stands in another category, and that is Special Revelation.

Special revelation is **direct** communication by God to men. While general revelation reveals something of God, it was never designed to supply us with all that God desired to reveal to mankind concerning Himself.

Special revelation is **required** for a person to come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

God has revealed Himself in history not only through His creation, but also through other means including His direct actions and words, through visions and dreams (Daniel), through angelic messengers, through the prophets, and through His Son.

God has now spoken to us these last days climactically and finally in His Son, Jesus Christ, and as such we are not to expect further special revelation from God than what we already have in the Scriptures (Hebrews 1:1-2). Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...

- *John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made him known.*

Special revelation then, involves God taking the initiative to reveal Himself through His direct acts and words, culminating in the sending of the living Word into the world, and providing the written record of God's special revelation to men, the **Bible**.

The Bible therefore records special revelation and is special revelation. It is a **supernatural** living book. *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).*

### **Doctrine of Inspiration**

You've probably heard that the Bible is inspired by God, right? Well what does that mean?

Paul writes in *2 Tim. 3:16-17* *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

The literal meaning of the word "inspired" theopneustos is **"God-breathed."** Essentially this means that God is responsible for every word given to us in the Bible. It is important to understand that Paul here is not simply talking about the Old Testament Scriptures. The New Testament uses the word for "Scripture" fifty-one times and always in reference to some part of the Bible. Sometimes it refers to the entire Old Testament (Luke 24:45; John 10:35); sometimes to a particular Old Testament passage (Luke 4:21); sometimes, to a particular New Testament passage (1 Tim. 5:18); and sometimes to a larger portion of the New Testament (2 Peter 3:16, referring to Paul's writings)."<sup>1</sup>

So, when Paul states that *"all Scripture is inspired by God"* he, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is including the New Testament canonical books as well as those of the Old Testament.

The doctrine of inspiration brings us to the issue of the divine authorship of Scripture. The words of the Bible are God's words; the thoughts conveyed are God's thoughts.

In the twentieth century J. I. Packer, wrote this: "Scripture is (called) infallible and inerrant to express the conviction that all its teaching is the utterance of God 'who cannot lie,' whose word, once spoken, abides forever, and that therefore it may be trusted implicitly."<sup>2</sup>

### **Now let's make some clarifications and qualifications regarding inspiration:**

- The locus (point) of inspiration is the **text**, not the human authors themselves (2 Tim 3:16)
- The inspired text is the **original** autograph. Subsequent copies could differ from the originals.
- The **entirety** of the text is inspired. We do not need to search through the Bible to find what is and what is not inspired.
- Inspiration implies **truth** and **authority**. If God's speech is always truth, then the Bible is entirely true, i.e., inerrant. If His speech is always authoritative, then the Bible is the supreme authority.
- Obviously humans also authored the Bible. Inspiration doesn't deny this.

Let's talk about the human authors. God superintended the human authors of the Bible in the process of inspiration.

- Peter speaks about how God did this in *2 Peter 1:20-21*, *"knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 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."*

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<sup>1</sup> Ryrie, Basic Theology, 68

<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 95.

- This means that the human authors were not **inactive** puppets or robots. They were active writers. Under the Holy Spirit's superintending each author wrote in accordance with their own personalities, levels of learning, literary skills, and culture.
- God used the writers of Scripture with their unique talents and insights and perspectives to give us His very words. Hebrews is an example. He was a highly educated individual, not only in the OT, but also in Greek Philosophy and argumentation, and he makes use of those things in his letter.

### **Doctrine of Inerrancy**

The doctrine of Inerrancy is connected to the doctrine of inspiration. If the Bible is inspired by God then it must reflect the very character of God in its content. This means that when it speaks to an issue it speaks truth. In many passages the Bible clearly teaches that God cannot lie or speak falsely (2 Sam. 7:28; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

As Grudem puts it, "The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact." He goes on to say, "The definition in simple terms just means that the Bible always tells the truth, and that it always tells the truth concerning everything it talks about."<sup>3</sup>

### **Why is the doctrine of inerrancy so important? Get thoughts.**

- If every word of Scripture is inspired then to deny inerrancy is to question the **truthfulness** of God's character. God cannot lie.
- If we deny inerrancy how do we know we can trust God in **anything** he has said?
- If we deny the total inerrancy of Scripture then we set **ourselves** up as the final standard of judging truth from error in the Scripture. We have no standard of objective truth.
- Finally, if we deny inerrancy we undermine the **authority** of the Scriptures.

### **Some qualifications and clarifications on Inerrancy:**

1. Real **errors** of fact or faith in translations and copies have happened. The New Testament has about 5,000-6,000 Greek manuscripts, with roughly 400,000 textual variants among them. Most differences are minor—spelling, word order, or synonymous words—but some affect interpretation. Yet no manuscript radically changes the core gospel message.
2. Spelling or grammatical **anomalies** are present.
3. Errant statements in reported **speech**. (Job's friends)
4. Phenomenological, **poetic** or mythological language.
5. Round numbers, **paraphrases** or ambiguities.
6. Figures of **speech**.

### **Authority of the Scriptures**

The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey **God**.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, when the Scriptures speak, they give us God's authoritative and truthful perspective.

### **Sufficiency of the Bible**

The natural question we must ask ourselves is that though the Bible is the authoritative source for truth, is this authoritative source (written so long ago) sufficient in all matters of faith and practice for us today? In other words, —Do I need to look elsewhere to live rightly in a modern world?

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<sup>3</sup> Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 91.

<sup>4</sup> Grudem, 73

The Bible does not claim to be a book that gives instruction on how to balance a check book or start a business or how to cook a dessert, but it does give us principles that can be applied to those things, doesn't it? It teaches us wisdom, calls us to deal uprightly in business, to cook a dessert as an expression of the creativity God has given to us as those made in His image. The Bible gives us information that pertains to the world around us and how to live in it. The extent of its sufficiency is truly amazing. Let's see what Scripture itself says:

*2 Peter 1:3: His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature...*

How much has been given to us that pertains to life and godliness? – Everything! All things!

*2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

The Bible is **completely** sufficient for life and godliness. It is not deficient when it comes to understanding and knowing God, comprehending reality, having a right relationship with the Lord, and knowing how to live for God's glory. And in areas where Scripture does not directly address something, we can often utilize principles gained from God's Word to make wise, God-honoring choices.

The point of the sufficiency of the Bible is that we have all we need to honor God. We are not lacking or missing anything, and **Scripture** should be the first place we go for wisdom and understanding.

## **The Importance of Language in Revelation**

The Bible is of course written and communicated through human language. That's something we take for granted but think on this a little more with me. God as Creator is the author of language and communication.

Humans made in the image of God have the ability to communicate with God and other people through language. When God spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden, He was immediately understood by them. **Language** is the primary way God has chosen to communicate truth about Himself to men.

So, this means that we need to take language and the interpretation of language seriously if we truly wish to know God through His Word. It isn't something to be taken for granted.

## Preservation of Scripture

God, in His providence, has made sure that His inspired, inerrant word has been preserved throughout history. We do not have any of the original manuscripts, or autographs, of either the Old or New Testaments.

God has **preserved** His word through people who have copied the text by hand until the time of the printing press and modern printing methods.

We will get into this in more depth next week, but this is an essential presupposition for believers who read and study the Bible. If we don't have confidence that what we are reading is actually what God originally intended, then we are already positioned to fail.

Going back to ancient times, God instilled within the people of Israel a reverence for His written word so that the Hebrew scribes and also those in the Christian church who copied it were meticulous in their work. One example would be the work of the Masoretes (500-1000 AD) whose diligent labors have given us the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament. "These scribes were extremely careful and treated the text with great reverence. They made meticulous notes regarding the text, from recording the number of letters used in the book to indicating the middle letter of a book."<sup>5</sup>

There are many great reasons to have a deep confidence in the Scriptures that we have access to today. Praise God that He has preserved His Word. More on this next week.

## When was the Bible Written?

The Old Testament: The Old Testament was written over a period of about 1000 years. This spans from Moses' writing of the Pentateuch in 1406 BC to the prophet Malachi's book written in 433 BC.

The New Testament: The New Testament books were written over a period of about 50 years. The epistle of James is dated in the early to middle 40's with Revelation dating approximately 90-95 AD.

## Progressive Revelation

God, over time, gave more and more details concerning His person and work. The Bible is a **gradual** revelation of the person, plan and purpose of God as He interacts with His creation in the unfolding of history.

Progressive revelation does not mean that doctrinal truth evolves or **changes**. It does mean that additional truth is added to what is already previously revealed.

From the beginning of God's revelation in Genesis, the truths that are revealed to us about God and His purposes do not change as we get more information throughout Scripture. For example, "*in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" remains an eternal truth, **but later we read** "*in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.*"

God does not change and He cannot lie, so, His truth and His word remain sure and dependable as the Bible unfolds.

Another good example of how revelation progresses is the unfolding of God's statement to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 "*And I will put enmity between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.*" As the Scriptures unfold, we learn more about the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent and how the seed of the woman

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Wegner, The Journey from Texts to Translations, 172.

will crush the head of the serpent. Eventually we understand that God as the divine author of the text laid the foundational truth in this verse that points to the victory by Christ over Satan at the cross.

Another example would be the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church as believers saved by Christ in the book of Acts. Was this “new” revelation that contradicted the Old Testament? No, in fact there were clear prophecies in the Old Testament about how God would save the Gentiles through the Messiah as well. The truth was already there, but the additional revelation to the early church in Acts made their path clear.

All of that is simply to say that we should keep in mind where we are in the “progress” of revelation when we study the Bible. Are we in Genesis before Israel received the Law from Moses? Are we in the prophets? Are we in the gospels, prior to the writing of apostolic letters to established churches?

### Knowing the Historical Context

On a related note, knowing the historical and chronological **context** of each book is immensely helpful in understanding what we are reading.

For example, if you don’t have a basic understanding of what was going on in Israel and the surrounding nations when the Old Testament prophetic books were written, you are going to have a very hard time with those books. Near the end of this course we will dig into these specific things more.

### The Unity of Scripture

Though the Bible was written by about 40 different human authors, it is the work of God Himself, and so it shows an amazing unity. Because the Bible is inspired by God, it presents a **unified, non-contradictory message**.

Since this is the case, what can we say about understanding and interpreting the Bible?

- The God presented to us in Genesis is the **same** God reflected to us in the face of Jesus Christ. We do not have (as some people think) one God in the Old Testament and another in the New.
- The Scriptures will form a coherent and consistent **whole** with all the parts fitting together to give us God’s eternal purpose and goal in the creation of all things.
- Passages that seem to have discrepancies need to be interpreted in light of the **harmony** of the Scriptures. An example of this would be Peter’s words, “*Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*” (Acts 2:38). This should not be understood that salvation comes from water baptism. It is clear from other passages that forgiveness of sins is by grace through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). Even Peter makes it clear that being immersed in water does not remove sin but rather, “*an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 3:21b). Salvation comes by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

Another common example would be how Paul and James described justification by faith and how good works play into this.

- This also means that we can build a systematic theology from the Scriptures founded upon a solid interpretive method. The theological truths that we glean from the study of Paul’s writings will not **contradict** the truths presented to us by Moses in the Pentateuch or James in his letter.
- The unity of Scripture means that the Bible often **interprets** itself. The Reformers called this the “analogy of Scripture” or “Scripture interprets Scripture.”
- This means that when we come across a passage that is hard to understand it is quite possible that other passages or even statements within the immediate context will shed light on a difficult text. The parables of Jesus are a good example: Jesus Himself explains the parable of the sower and the soils to his disciples (Matt. 13:1-23).

The Bible is an immeasurably awesome gift from God to us. I hope we have been reminded of that today. We need to treasure it and treat it like the gift it is. Since we have the inerrant, inspired Scriptures, let's do as the Lord commands us in *2 Timothy 2:15: ...Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.* That's what we will seek to do in this class over the next few months, and we will return to that verse in a couple of weeks.