

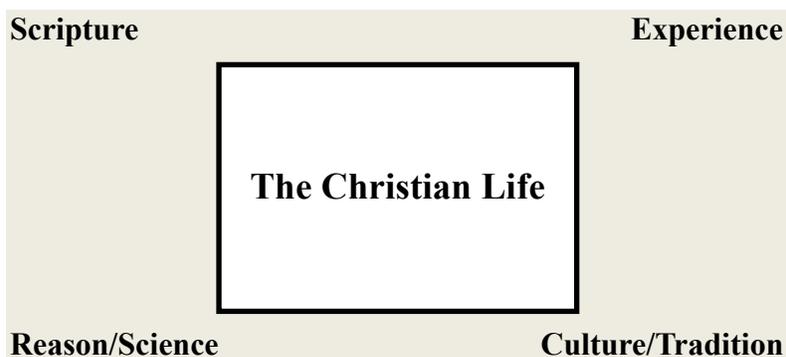
Sanctification in Community: The Doctrine of Scripture

Mark A. Snoeberger
Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary

I. A Few Preliminary Thoughts about a Theology of Sanctification

A. Sources for our Theology of Sanctification

While the Bible is the only independent and authoritative source of everything necessary for life and godliness, this is not to say that sanctification operates in a Bible vacuum. We cannot escape the preunderstandings that we bring to our life and conduct, but we need to be conscious of them. Furthermore, we need to understand the forces that weigh on the worldviews of our brothers and sisters alongside of whom we come in community to grow together in Christlikeness:



1. Christians captive to reason and science may reject biblical counsel because it “doesn’t make logical sense.” One-another ministers does not discard science and reason as enemies, but insists that these be brought under the lordship of Christ and his Word.
2. Christians captive to experience may reject biblical counsel because it disagrees with what “God told me,” what “feels right,” or what “gives peace.” Similarly, they can give in to utilitarian forces: what “works for me.” One-another ministers cannot give in to such subjectivism, but must double down on the Bible’s *objective* authority.
3. Christians captive to any given tradition may reject biblical counsel because it “doesn’t agree with what [X] says.” Depending on who/what X is, a one-another minister may be placed in the delicate situation where he/she is advocating for notions that are held by some competing spiritual authority. In such situations, emphasis must be on what the Bible plainly says.
4. Christians captive to culture may reject biblical counsel because it “doesn’t match what everyone around me is saying/doing.” The one-another minister must not give into the tyranny of the majority when that majority can clearly be seen to in conflict with God’s Word.

While we are far from saying that truth cannot be found outside the Bible, such extra-

biblical sources of counsel can offer value only as they take their place as servants of the singularly validated source of information for life and godliness: the Word of God. Common graces may support our one-another tasks, but, as Warfield notes,

it remains nevertheless true that we should be confined to a meager and doubtful theology were these data not confirmed, reinforced, and supplemented by the surer and fuller revelations of Scripture;... The Holy Scriptures are the source of theology in not only a degree, but also a sense in which nothing else is (“Idea of Systematic Theology,” p. 63).

The Bible gives us everything necessary for sanctification in community. And if alone it is sufficient, then all peripheral sources serve only to supplement or illustrate implicitly what the Bible confirms explicitly.

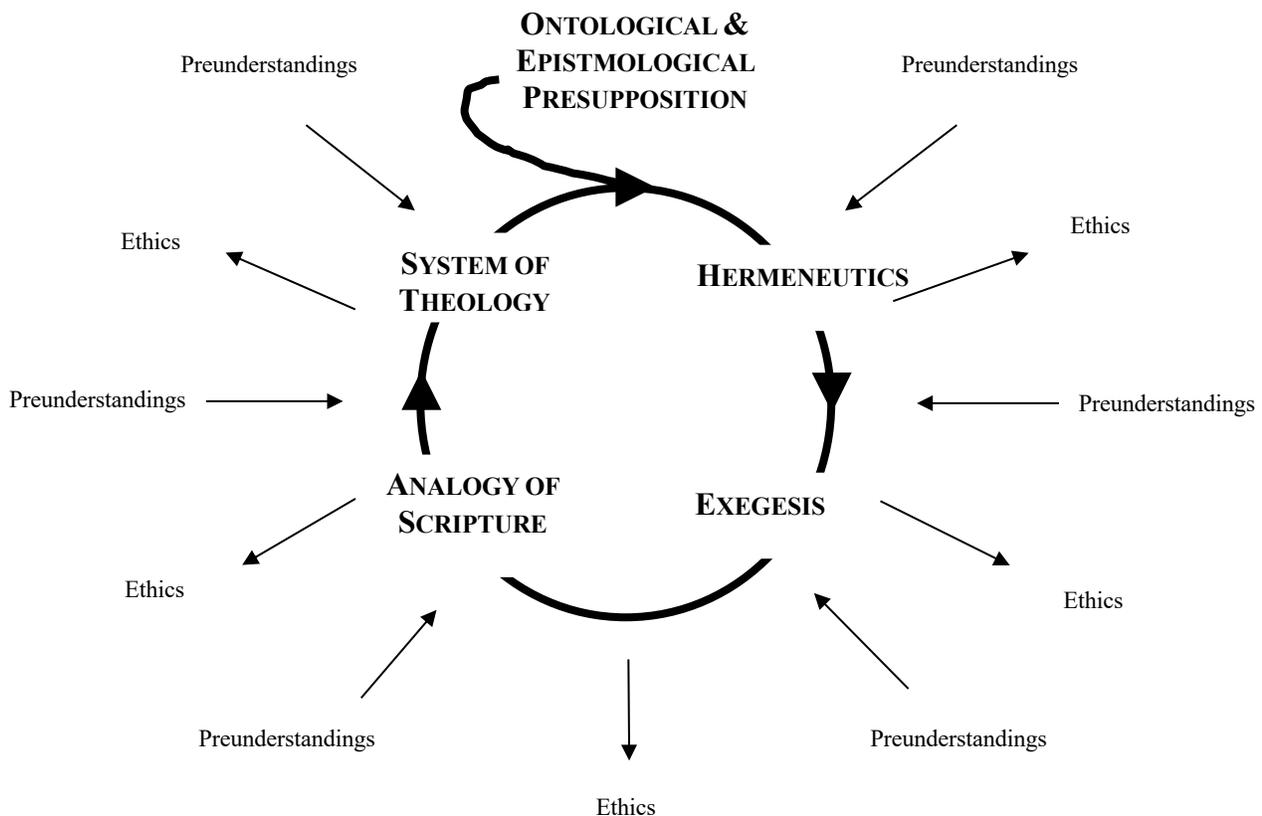
2 Timothy 3:16–17—All Scripture is God-breathed...so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:3, 16ff—We have everything necessary for life and godliness contained in propositional promises and prophecies, which are described as “more certain” even than eye-witness source material.

Isaiah 8:20—To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

John 8:31, 32—If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

B. A Model for Doing Sanctification in Community



C. Limitations of Sanctification

1. The Absence of Regeneration

While an unbeliever may understand the grammar and vocabulary of the Bible, he will never accept the Bible in its entirety as *truth* or as a guide to life. He lacks the motivation to harmonize its teachings, apply its precepts, or treat it as the mirror that it is. In fact, he has a positive bent to distort God's truth.

Proverbs 1:7—The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

1 Corinthians 2:14—The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

2 Peter 3:16—Ignorant and unstable people distort...the Scriptures to their own destruction (cf. v. 5).

2. Ignorance and Spiritual Lethargy

Hebrews 5:11–14—We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again.

Matthew 22:29—You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures.

3. Failure to Develop Biblical Discipline, Wisdom, and Discernment

2 Peter 2—The Believer's Virtues

Galatians 5—The Fruit of the Spirit

Philippians 4—The Noble Life of the Mind

II. Divine Revelation

Revelation from God comes to man in "various ways" (Heb 1:1) that are categorized into two broad classes: *general* and *special* revelation. The Bible is categorized under the latter category, but we must examine the former to fully understand the import of the latter.

A. *General revelation* is God's public witness of himself to all men without distinction.

1. The Scope of General Revelation

- It gives mankind general knowledge of God.
- It is supplied to mankind generally. That is not to say that all people without exception receive every bit of general revelatory data, but all people have access to general revelation, and the bits of general revelation accessible only to some are not deliberately restrictive or based on any artificial distinctions.

2. The Primary Vehicles of General Revelation.

- a. The material creation (Romans 1:18–32, Psalm 19:1–6) and God’s providential supply of common grace (Acts 14:17).
- b. The image of God in man’s constitution (Gen 1:26–27; Ps 139:14) and conscience (Rom 2:15).

3. The Content of General Revelation

(1) Theologians differ as to how much information is communicated through general revelation. At a very minimum it communicates that

- God exists (Ps 19:1; Rom 1:19)
- God is eternal (Rom 1:20)
- God is powerful (Rom 1:20)
- God is righteous (Rom 1:32)
- God will judge evil (Rom 1:32, 2:15–16)

(2) The critical issue here is not so much a comprehensive listing of what general revelation includes, but what it *excludes*. General revelation tells mankind nothing about the redemptive grace of God, the true character of sin, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the need and means for repentance and faith unto forgiveness, the specifics of godly living, or the afterlife.

B. *Special Revelation* is God’s private witness of himself to particular persons or groups.

1. The Scope of Special Revelation

- a. It gives mankind specific, concrete, propositional information about God that could not be communicated other than by supernatural means—it is a special message.
- b. It is supplied exclusively to individual persons and groups—it has special recipients.

2. The Vehicles of Special Revelation.

- (1) Direct revelation—the phrase “God said” appears 3000 times in the OT alone.
- (2) Mighty acts (Exod 5:1–2 cf. 6:1)
- (3) The lives of believers (Matt 5:13–16; 1 Cor 11:1)
- (4) The Bible (Heb 1:1)
- (5) Jesus Christ, both theophanic and incarnate (Heb 1:2)

3. The Content of Special Revelation

Collectively, special revelation supplies us “everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3; 2 Tim 3:16)—for further detail, see below under the sufficiency of Scripture.

4. Primacy Among Vehicles of Special Revelation

- a. While the Bible does describe Christ in superlative terms as the greatest manifestation of the invisible God (Heb 1:2; John 14:6ff; Col 1:15), the Bible nonetheless reigns today as the privileged form of special revelation.

2 Peter 1:19–21—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, 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.

- b. The special revelation contained in Scripture is the most important vehicle of revelation for believers today for the following reasons:
- It is the only form of God's self-disclosure that properly partakes of *inspiration*, ensuring both its *sufficiency* and its *preservation* (2 Tim 3:16).
 - It is the only form of revelation that contains all the information *necessary* for life and godliness (1 Cor 2:6–13).
 - It is *propositional*, that is, it utilizes human language—words and sentences—to convey absolute truth about God (**1 Cor 2:9–13**).
 - It *objectifies* the knowledge of God and removes it from the realm of pure sense experience, supplying man the means necessary to a genuine cognition of God and then limiting man's conceptions of God to conform with the content of the Scriptures. Unlike the Barthian scheme, in which revelation is necessarily subjective and transitory, the Bible stands as an objective and permanent deposit of God's sovereign will for all mankind.
 - It is *complete*, that is, it comprises a whole *tradition* (John 17:20; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6; Jude 3) that is able to equip believers thoroughly (2 Tim 3:16), giving them everything necessary for a life of godliness (2 Pet 1:3ff).

III. Inspiration

The divine purpose for God's self-revelation is incomplete if it stops at revelation. God's intent was that his revelation be sufficient to thoroughly equip the man of God in every generation (2 Tim 3:17) and give us a deposit of information that perpetually supplies us everything necessary for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). As such it was necessary for him to create a permanent, infallible in order to fulfill his purpose. Inspiration is the mechanism that God used to accomplish this purpose. Succinctly defined, Inspiration is

“A divine act that creates an identity between a divine word and a human word.”

—John Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 140.

A. The Biblical Concept of Inspiration— “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16).

1. The Meaning of *Theopneustos*

a. The NIV reading is the most literal of the standard translations—“God-breathed.” The term occurs only here in the New Testament and found nowhere else in Greek literature prior to this time.

b. The *concept*, however, is an Old Testament one:

Psalm 33:6—By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

Genesis 2:7—God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

Job 33:4—The breath of the Almighty gives me life.

c. Explanation:

- Scripture is in the same category as the heavens and man’s spirit as being produced by God’s creative power.
- This term has to do with the *origin* and not the *effect* of Scripture. The Bible is not “inspiring,” nor does it give “inspiration” subjectively. Instead the term carries the Hebrew idea that the Bible’s origin is God.

2. The Meaning of *graphe*

Graphe has to do with *writing* or *script*. The writings, not the writers, partake of inspiration. The writers were not breathed into nor were they the product of God’s creativity (as far as the context of this verse is concerned). The writings were the product of God’s creative breath. In the New Testament, this term always appears with reference to the Jewish canon, though on two occasions it also references material by NT authors (1 Tim 5:18; 2 Pet 3:16). The major NT discussions of inspiration (e.g., 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20) deal without exception to what is inscripturated, identifying these as correlate ideas.

Note: That other expressions of God’s word (i.e., unrecorded words, prophetic utterances by spokesmen for God) are properly true and authoritative, the designation *inspiration* is here limited to the Scriptures. See the material below under the purposes and corollaries of inspiration.

3. The Meaning of *pasa*

Whether this term is rendered “all” (collective in sense) or “every” (distributive in sense) does not of itself materially affect the meaning. The point is that all writings that fall within the category of sacred Scripture (which in any scheme of interpretation includes the entirety of the Torah) are God-breathed.

B. The Method of Biblical Inspiration

1. Inspiration is not a matter of the prophet’s “own interpretation” (2 Pet 1:20).

Scripture does not “become” by the human author’s “own interpretation.” This means that (1) that Scripture does not *originate* in human reflection, imagination, or stimulating solutions to his own cultural/moral milieu and that (2) Scripture is not a

human condensation, interpretation, or translation of ineffable divine ideas and principles. Scripture is a propositional phenomenon sourced in God himself.

2. Scripture was produced as men were “carried along” by the Spirit (2 Pet 1:21).

The Greek word employed here means to “carry” or “bear.” Here it is a present passive participle meaning to be “borne along” (cf. Acts 27:15, 17 where ships are borne on their courses by the wind and waves). While the Bible writers were active in using their rational faculties and personalities, they were passive in terms of the ultimate origin of Scripture.

3. The Holy Spirit superintended the words and styles used by the biblical authors (1 Cor 2:10–13). As we have seen above, this does not demand a mechanical dictation, but something of a “confluence” (Warfield) of the Word of God and the word of man. In Kaiser’s words, “a living assimilation of [the human author’s] style, vocabulary words, and divine truth took place” (Kaiser, “A Neglected Text in Bibliology Discussions: 1 Corinthians 2:6–16,” *WTJ* 43 [Spring 1981]: 317).

The process of preparing men and shaping their rhetorical skills no doubt, began long before the writing actually took place. God prepared the writers in disposition, training, experience, etc., even going back in their genetic lines and remote ancestry.

Jeremiah 1:4–9:

Yahweh: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

Jeremiah: “Ah, Sovereign LORD, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”

Yahweh: “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’... I have put my words in your mouth.”

Galatians 1:15–16—[God] set me apart from birth...to reveal his son in me.

C. The Proof of Biblical Inspiration

1. Scholars sometimes present an array of biblical and extra-biblical proof as a corroboration of divine inspiration. They demonstrate that the Bible is consistent with our knowledge of science and history, that the Bible has proved indestructible through the ages, that its prophecies have been fulfilled, that the information in it has transformed lives and societies, etc. While all these things are true, they fail for several reasons:

- Reliance on external proofs for proof of inspiration cedes the Bible’s own, inherent authority to other, “higher” authorities.

Hebrews 6:13 (in principle)—When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself.

- Reliance on external proofs for proof of inspiration requires that the ground of faith be reduced to a scientific demonstration that the Bible’s teachings are self-consistent and true.

2. The question of proof of biblical inspiration instead rests on what the Bible says of its own character. Like all doctrines, proof of the Bible's inspiration is found in its intrinsic claims to authority, which are legion. The Bible's own inherent truth claims and intrinsic perfections make it authoritative. Such authority cannot be *delegated* to the Bible from without; rather it can only be *recognized* and *received* by means of the Spirit's regenerating/illuminating work. As the Westminster Confession opines, "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God" (WCF 1.4).

1 Corinthians 2:14ff—"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 'For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ."

1 John 2:27—"You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know."

Thomas Thomas writes,

The Christian must begin, in his approach to the Scriptures, with the assumption that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. And we hold to this view as to the nature of the Bible not as a result of some logical argument or series of empirical proofs but because God, in His sovereign grace, has regenerated us, has infused spiritual life into spiritually dead sinners—we have been born again; and He has ripped those blinders from our spiritually blind eyes so we can see, and receive, and understand the things of the Spirit of God." Now we can recognize the Bible for what it is, the very Word of God, whereas we were not able to before (*The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 14).

Question: Why don't all men recognize God's Word for what it is?

It goes without saying that the witness of the Bible to its own inspiration is unconvincing to many. This is not due to any deficiency on its part—the Holy Spirit's work in inspiring the Scriptures precludes this. But something must occur in the recipient of revelation in order for the inspired authority of the Word of God to be embraced as such. This work takes three distinct forms.

a. **Recognitive Certainty of Inspiration**

- (1) Romans 1:21 informs us that all people everywhere *know God* by means of his revelation in creation and conscience. Note that this does not say that all people can postulate "godness" via revelation; rather, it says that they *know God*. Such knowledge is not existentially communicated; rather, all persons, being created in the image of God, intuitively know their Creator. They recognize him. They know who he is, what he is like, and what he demands (1:32; 2:15). This does not mean that they embrace him for who he is, but it does mean they know him, however fleetingly, before they willfully suppress him (1:18, 28) and purge him from their consciences (a la 1 Tim 4:2).

- (2) By implication, people necessarily recognize the voice of God directly, apart from any discursive, validating evidence. There is no room for divorcing the appropriation of natural revelation from the appropriation of special revelation. Man was created to know the voice of God and he does.

b. Conviction

John 16:8–11—When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

- (1) Conviction is, very simply, the “convincing” work of the Holy Spirit, a work whereby he specially impresses upon a man the truth of specific Scriptures to which that man finds himself at odds, specifically his sin, his lack of conformity to God’s standard, and his resulting culpability.
- (2) The work of conviction exceeds the testimony of intuited certainty to include the activity of the Holy Spirit, whether directly (John 16:8–11) or indirectly (Prov 15:12; Amos 5:10; Matt 18:15; John 3:20; 2 Tim 4:2).
- (3) Conviction does not, however, accomplish all that the work of illumination (below) accomplishes. Conviction sometimes contributes to repentance (Matt 18:15; 1 Cor 14:24–25), but sometimes does not (Matt 18:16ff; Jude 14–15). Conviction is merely a convincing work, one by which the Spirit renders the unbeliever acutely and self-consciously aware of his suppression of God and his Word.

c. The Internal Testimony of the Spirit

- (1) Illumination is the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit whereby he not only convinces believers of the authority of Scripture, but also makes them favorably inclined to yielding to it.

1 Corinthians 2:4–5, 14 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.... The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Thessalonians 2:13: We also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

- (2) This illuminating work, which is synonymous with the regeneration of the human mind, causes the believer to “accept” or “welcome” the Word of God for what it truly is. It causes the believer to “appraise” the Word correctly as inspired and authoritative, with the result that it effectively “does its work” in the heart and life of the believer rendered favorably inclined to it.

D. Corollaries of Inspiration

The Bible's inspiration is the centerpiece of the doctrine of Scripture. If it is destroyed, then the whole of our system of theology collapses. But inspiration does not stand alone. There is a network of other doctrines that we may infer from the doctrine of inspiration, and these, when demonstrated by Scripture, contribute to our understanding and certainty of the inspiration and authority of the Word of God.

1. Authority

The Corollary: Since God breathed out all of Scripture, it follows that the Bible is authoritative.

It has been assumed in the foregoing that inspiration and authority go hand in hand, but it is helpful to formalize this relationship. The authority of the Bible is the first and greatest corollary of inspiration. The Bible's binding authority does not flow from its inerrancy (important as that doctrine is), but from the fact that God breathed out its words. We do not first evaluate Scripture's parts and then submit to them as their accuracy and/or importance emerge. We submit to the authority of the Scriptures because God produced them.

2. Infallibility/Inerrancy

The Corollary: Since God, who is truth and cannot lie, is the author of Scripture, it follows that the Bible is also true and has no errors.

Infallibility is the incapability of error or mistake in the Bible. *Inerrancy* also refers to the incapability of error or mistake in the Bible. This more precise term emerged in the mid-20th century to replace *infallibility* when critics redefined "infallible" as merely "trustworthy." In actuality, the terms mean exactly the same thing and many use the terms interchangeably.

John 10:35—Scripture cannot be broken.

Matthew 5:18—Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

See also Matt 21:42; 26:54; Mark 14:49; etc.

a. Proof of the Bible's Inerrancy:

(1) The Corollary from Inspiration in the Form of a Syllogism

A: God's Word is true (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Psalm 12:6; Prov 30:5; John 17:7; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18).

B: The Bible is God's Word (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19–21).

∴ The Bible Is True.

Note: By thus interrelating the doctrines of divine fidelity and biblical inerrancy, the Bible clearly views each doctrine as indispensable to the

other. It is not just a word or story that is at stake in inerrancy debates, but the very character of the Triune God. The kind of a Bible we believe in is directly proportionate to the kind of God we really believe in.

(2) Direct Statements of Biblical Inerrancy

Psalm 19:7–9—The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

(3) Biblical Inerrancy Implied

Matthew 22:29—You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures.

Mark 14:49—The Scriptures must be fulfilled.

Acts 17:11—The Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they...examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

That “the Scriptures” were the final authority in all matters of faith and practice also points to the biblical writers’ assumption of inerrancy (Dan 9:2; Acts 17:2; 18:28; 1 Cor 15:3–4).

d. Qualifications on the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy

(1) The doctrine of inerrancy speaks to accuracy, not to exactness.

- The doctrine of inerrancy can accommodate imprecision.

Number 1:21–46—The number of fighting men from each tribe was rounded to the nearest fifty or hundred.

1 Kings 7:23—The pool at Solomon’s palace was 10 cubits in diameter but only 30 cubits in circumference.

- The doctrine of inerrancy can accommodate language of appearance:
Ecclesiastes 1:5: The sun rises and the sun goes down.
- The doctrine of inerrancy can accommodate paraphrase and abridgement.

Note the freedom Jesus and the Scripture writers employed in quoting from the Old Testament. Asked to summarize the Law

Deuteronomy 6:5 (LXX)—Love the Lord your God with (ἐξ) all your heart (καρδία) and with (ἐξ) all your soul (ψυχή) and with (ἐξ) all your strength (δύναμις).

A man replied...

Luke 10:27—Love the Lord your God with (ἐξ) all your heart (καρδία) and with (ἐν) all your soul (ψυχή) and with (ἐν) all your strength (διάνοντα) and with (ἐν) all your mind (ἰσχυς).

...whereupon Jesus replied, “You have spoken correctly” (v. 28).

(2) The doctrine of inerrancy is not threatened by disparate translations

- Inspiration does not mean that there is only one correct way to translate a text from one language to another.
- Inspiration does not mean that syntactical forms must be preserved in the translation process or that precisely equivalent vocabulary must be used. In fact, this is almost always impossible, because languages simply do not correspond at the word level.
 - ⇒ *Idioms* cannot be translated word for word and retain their original meaning.
 - ⇒ *Paratactic* languages cannot be translated structure for structure into hypotactic languages and retain their original meaning.
 - ⇒ *Vocabulary sets* of different languages are never identical.
 - ⇒ Verb *tense* and *aspect* do not have precise equivalency from language to language.
 - ⇒ Hebrew poetry is not equivalent to English poetry.
 - ⇒ *VSO* (verb-subject-object) languages like Hebrew do not translate directly into *SVO* (subject-verb-object) languages like English.
- Verbal-plenary inspiration means that *functional* accuracy is more important than *formal* accuracy in faithful translation.

Conclusion: Translators most committed to preserving the intention of the original text, irrespective of their preservation of specific lexical terms and syntactical forms, are most faithful to the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy.

(3) The doctrine of inerrancy is not threatened by changes in human culture.

- (a) As we have noted above, each of the human biblical authors assumes his own culture, including issues of dress, agriculture, architecture, music, marriage customs, etc. Also included here are issues of linguistic development, vocabulary, etc. This is the case because language and culture are inseparable.
- (b) Scripture thus speaks from the standpoint of specific cultures and to specific cultures, none of which are wholly free from error but, due to common grace, none of which are wholly corrupted (1 Cor 9:23).
- (c) Scripture may consistently be shown not to be a partaker of that which is evil in culture. In fact, the Bible regularly confronts and regulates cultural vices (e.g., divorce, slavery, etc.) rather than accommodating them.

3. Sufficiency (see esp. Frame, *DWG*, chap 32)

The Corollary: Since God's purpose in inspiration was to equip believers of every age, it follows that the Bible is a complete and objective body of truth from God that is entirely sufficient for its divinely intended purpose.

a. Definition

By *sufficiency* is meant that Scripture speaks authoritatively *to everything*, giving mankind everything necessary for every aspect of life.

b. Biblical Support

2 Timothy 3:16–17—All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be *thoroughly equipped* for every good work.

2 Peter 1:3—His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness [Note the context of God’s *promises* (v. 4) and the *Scriptures* (vv. 19–21)].

c. Qualifications

- (1) Sufficiency does not mean that Scripture speaks comprehensively *about* everything or that nothing can be known apart from direct confirmation of Scripture (i.e., a proof text). The sufficiency of Scripture does not forbid the quest for knowledge additional to Scripture, but it does insist that there are no more *divine words* for us to receive.
- (2) The sufficiency of Scripture does not mean that the Spirit is not also necessary for life and godliness. The Scriptures give us all of the necessary *content*, and even carry in themselves all of the *warrant* necessary for faith; the *cause* of faith, however, does not lie in its words: this is the purview of the Spirit of God (see above and below under *illumination*).
- (3) Sufficiency does not mean, either, that the purview of Scripture is limited to *spiritual* truth. Scripture not only gives us everything necessary to life and godliness, but also gives us the transcendentals necessary to the correlation of all truth. Though Scripture does not include truth in all its infinite specificity, it does not follow that there is a separate, neutral realm for secular “truth” that is free from the authority of the Bible. Instead, all other disciplines (e.g., the sciences and psychology) must defer to the authority of Scripture; they find legitimacy only as they submit to the biblical worldview. There is no “neutral” discipline or practice that has independent authority in one-another ministry.

As such, the truth system contained in Scripture is such that it can validate or invalidate all truth claims, even those external to its own, explicit statements. It is an epistemological arbiter for all truth even though it does not actually contain all truth. As Van Til notes, “The Bible speaks to *everything*.” More specifically, he notes that “the Bible, as the infallibly inspired revelation of God to sinful man, stands before us as that light in terms of which all the facts of the created universe must be interpreted” (*Defense of the Faith*, p. 107).

d. Implications of Scriptural Sufficiency for Sanctification in Community

- (1) The sufficiency of Scripture establishes the Bible as the *norma Normans non Normata* governing the legitimacy of every bit of counseling advice and every counseling strategy we might use. That does not mean that we must find a “proof text” or biblical example for every counseling stratagem to certify its legitimacy. It does not even mean that secular science, properly chastened by biblical principle, cannot offer assistance to the counselor:

- Gluttony *is* a spiritual problem. But since humans are psychosomatic unities, their spiritual vices can result in physical symptoms. In no case should a counselor advise a glutton, say, to stop taking insulin or blood pressure medicine on the grounds that his problem is strictly spiritual or that obedience to Bible is sufficient to solve his problems.
- More controversial is the prescription of medication to correct chemical imbalances of the brain. However, following the principle in the previous example, such medications potentially have legitimate value *is in keeping with biblical sufficiency*, to (1) correct problems that are genuinely physical in nature, to (2) calm people or prevent self-harm, etc. While it is doubtless true that such drugs are sometimes over-prescribed or prescribed as physical panaceas for ultimately spiritual problems, the medically untrained counselor should never usurp the role of the medical professional in such matters.
- Utilitarian checklists or steps may at times be compiled to assist the counselee in systematically and objectively addressing his problems. That does not mean that such checklists may be constructed apart from biblical principle, but neither does it mean that they must provide a specific proof text for every step in order to stand.

The sufficiency of Scripture *does* mean, however, that the Bible stands as a theological/philosophical arbiter over the entire counseling task, that its own ethical principles must govern at all points the utility of counseling, and that no “natural” solution will ever wholly resolve man’s spiritual problems.

- (2) The sufficiency of Scripture establishes that both the canon and the universe are closed. If indeed the Bible is sufficient as it stands, it cannot countenance any changes to the created order (to which it speaks with perpetual sufficiency) that would require additions to its message. It furthermore establishes that additional revelation is not only unnecessary, but also unwelcome. The sufficiency of Scripture immediately renders suspicious all additional revelations.

Far more pervasive a barrier to successful biblical counseling than the intrusion of secular techniques is the proliferation of competing sources of spiritual authority such as “words from the Lord,” “burdens,” feelings of “peace,” divination through contrived “fleece,” or even simple “feelings” that not only supplement, but also exceed and contradict biblical revelation in incidental importance.

Question: Could the doctrine of biblical sufficiency allow for God’s Spirit to deliver fresh information to people’s minds in the form of verbal/non-verbal prompts that are not “necessary” or even inerrant?

A recent trend in Reformed life (historically a bulwark for cessationism) has been to affirm lesser forms of prophecy/revelation that continue in the present day but lack the authority that the Scriptures possess. Note the following:

- Wayne Grudem argues for a continuing form of prophecy that is “not equal to Scripture in authority, but simply a very human—and sometimes partially mistaken—report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone’s mind” (*Gift of Prophecy*, 14).
- John Frame also entertains this idea, arguing that “something *like* inspiration” occurs when “the Spirit take[s] away the errors that the pastor may intend to make, and replace[s] those errors with sound, edifying, biblical teaching.” Frame adds that the pastor’s words “will not be fully identical with God’s own speech.... There may be errors in it.” Still, “in that sermon the Word of God will be on our pastor’s lips. And insofar as the biblical Word is on his lips, it is as authoritative as if it were on the pages of Scripture itself” (*DWG* 314).

In both cases, the modern “prophecy” in view is regarded as (1) something less than Scripture, that (2) may have errors, but nonetheless (3) remains generally authoritative.

Note, however, the following in response:

- (1) Prophecy is carefully defined as something wholly supernatural (Exod 4:10–12; Jer 1:4–10) and necessarily inerrant (under pain of the death) and necessarily as authoritative as the words of Moses and of God himself (Deut 18:19; Exod 4:16 with 7:1; cf. Jer 26:4–6).
- (2) Only a false prophet mingled his own words with God’s (Jer 23:16–36; 2 Pet 1:21), and anyone who did so was to be rejected and killed (Deut 18:20, 22).
- (3) There is no reason to think that this definition of prophecy has changed (see esp. Farnell, “Fallible NT Prophecy/Prophets? A Critique of Wayne Grudem’s Hypothesis,” *TMSJ* 2.2 [Fall 1991]: 157–79).
- (4) Practically, the idea of semi-authoritative prophecy is disastrous. Not only does it draw attention away from the sufficient Scriptures to something else (suggesting that the Scriptures are *insufficient*), it also holds out to the church tainted data that it cannot trust. Whyever would the church want that?

4. Preservation

The Corollary: Since God’s purpose in inspiration was to provide a deposit of truth that thoroughly equips believers in every age, it follows that God must have preserved it for us, or else his purpose in inspiration would be thwarted.

a. Biblical evidence for preservation.

There are a number of texts to which many appeal to establish the preservation of Scripture (Isa 40:8; Matt 5:18; 24:35; 1 Pet 1:23–25; etc.; cf. Isa 55:11). These do not speak, however, to the *preservation of the Bible*, but to the *abiding certainty and authority of the word*

A few passages may suggest that the Bible’s words will survive (Ps 119:152, 160), but these are limited to the Torah, and may also speak to abiding authority:

In any case, the direct biblical argument for its own preservation is very thin. The corollary from inspiration offers proof more certain than these texts.

b. The means of preservation

(1) That the Bible has in some sense been preserved is patently obvious. As is the case with a variety of ancient texts, the Bible has survived to the present day. And since God is the sovereign, controlling force in the universe we may say that the survival of all of these texts is owing to an act of divine providence. The question under consideration here is whether God used miraculous means to preserve the Bible more perfectly than these other ancient texts.

(2) In view of the virtual silence of the Scriptures on this topic, several theories have emerged

(a) **View 1:** Miraculous, Perfect Preservation of the exact words of Scripture in a single manuscript or version.

Example: some expressions of the TR-Only and KJV-Only positions.

(b) **View 2:** No Doctrine of Preservation

Examples: Wallace, Glenny.

(c) **View 3:** Providential, Essential Preservation in the totality of manuscripts and versions.

Examples: Warfield, Combs.

(3) Analysis

(a) While many advocates of view 1 claim not to hold to a miraculous view, but a providential one, they do so by special pleading. Hills, for instance, calls for a “special providence” that preserves the Bible “infallibly.” By using such terms, he effectively conflates providence and miracle such that a doctrine of “re-inspiration” cannot be credibly denied.

This position cries out for biblical corroboration and historical evidence, leads to absurd defenses of impossible readings, and almost expressly demands schism in the church on entirely unsustainable grounds (special pleading, tradition and personal preference).

(b) While View 2 is valid strictly from the standpoint of explicit proof texts, the corollary from the purpose of inspiration demands some kind of preservation. This view seems over-reactionary and leaves the believer rather unmoored and uneasy in the outworking of his Christian life.

(c) View 3 seems to be the most defensible position.

- It moves preservation to the realm of normal providence, eliminating the need for miracle and re-inspiration.
- It calls for the preservation of the Bible’s essential message, leaving room for imperfect translations, transcription and typographical errors, etc., but leaving intact “everything necessary for life and godliness.”

- It accords with the historical fact that no one manuscript, text-type, version, or translation is demonstrably perfect (see, e.g., 1 Sam 13:1).

5. Canonicity

The Corollary: Since God’s purpose in inspiration was to provide a deposit of truth that thoroughly equips believers in every age, it follows that God must have equipped believers with the ability to correctly identify and collect the Word of God.

The discussion of biblical canonicity is in many ways the least satisfying of all the discussions of bibliology. No Scripture conclusively proves the identity of the biblical canon (especially the NT canon), with the result that wranglings over the exact identity of Scripture continued in the early church for nearly 300 years after the canon was closed. So how do we know that we have the Word of God in our hands? Very simply, from the corollary from the purpose of inspiration.

a. The Definition of Canonicity

- (1) The English term *canon* comes from an ancient root discoverable not only in Greek and Hebrew, but also Sumerian, Akkadian, and Ugaritic. It carries the idea of an authoritative, norming standard, usually in the form of a measuring rod or common ruler.
- (2) Applied to Scripture, then, the term has two senses:
 - Actively, Scripture is a canon in that it norms faith and practice.
 - Passively, Scripture is “canonical” when it is recognized for its norming authority and added to the official “list” of authoritative books.

It is the latter sense that is under consideration here. The former sense is true in that a book, once inspired, has canonical or norming authority. The question here is how believers successfully *identify* what is canonical.

b. The Idea of Canonicity

Connected with the production of the various portions of the Bible is something of a “canonical consciousness,” a thread that weaves its way through Scripture.

- (1) Certain writings were collected in the tabernacle/temple (Exod 25:16, 21; 40:20; Deut 31:24–26; Josh 24:26; 1 Sam 10:25).
- (2) Christ displayed familiarity with a specific, exclusive body of literature—the law, the prophets, and the Psalms—that he apparently viewed as the OT canon (Luke 24:44).
- (3) The fact “the Scriptures cannot be broken” (John 10:35) demonstrates that Christ viewed the Bible of his day as a fixed and inviolable unit.
- (4) Christ anticipated a completed body of authoritative truth that would be completed by the apostolate (John 14:24–26; 16:13–15).

- (5) The NT writers viewed “the Scriptures” as a specific and growing aggregate in the era of the apostles (1 Tim 5:18; 2 Pet 3:15–16).
- (6) The warning passages against adding to or deleting from these authorized materials assumes that the Scripture writers had an exclusive canon in view (Deut 4:2; 12:32; Eccl. 12:11; Rev 22:18–19).

c. Old Testament Canonicity

- (1) The idea of canonicity as an aggregate “testimony” (Exod 25:16, 21) is reflected in the pattern of collecting various scriptures for safekeeping (Deut 10:1–5; 31:24–26; Josh 24:26; 1 Sam 10:25; Eccl 12:11).
- (2) The criteria of canonicity are not spelled out. However, priority was given to the writings of prophets and wise men (Deut 18:18–22; Eccl 12:9–11), and the Law was viewed as an arbiter of later claims to divine authority (Isa 8:20).
- (3) The identity of the OT canon was not the subject of as much scrutiny in the early Church as the NT canon, however, because Christ himself expressly identified the OT canon as “the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44), the traditional threefold Jewish division of the OT containing no more and no less than our present 39 books of the OT. It is also interesting to note every OT book except Esther is quoted in the NT, while the not one of the 14 apocryphal books is cited.

d. New Testament Canonicity

- (1) While there are several objective criteria that help to narrow the candidates for NT canonicity, there is no combination of such criteria that successfully yields the precise 27 books we call canonical today.
 - (a) Since Christ specifically indicated that “all” of the material necessary for the Christian church would be given through the apostles (John 14:26, 15:26–27, and 16:13–15, 25), it is possible to narrow the candidates for inclusion to apostolic writings (see also Eph 2:20). This criterion of *apostolicity*, however, is not ultimately determinative.
 - It must make awkward explanations how contributors such as Luke, James, Jude, Mark, and the unknown author of Hebrews qualify.
 - It is immediately excepted by the most voluminous author of the NT, Paul, who was not present at the John 14 event, but was rather an “abnormally born” apostle (1 Cor 15:8).
 - It fails to explain why some of the writings of the apostles were excluded from the canon. Further, if the qualification is broadened to include “close associates” of the apostles, it fails to explain why the writings of other associates (e.g., Polycarp) were excluded.
 - (b) Another test of canonicity is that of *orthodoxy*. This criterion, which appears as a test both of extra-biblical prophecies (Deut 18) and extra-apostolic teachings (Gal 1:9), reasons that, since the Bible is true, it can

have no internal contradictions. Again, however, while this criterion effectively weeds out some writings, it cannot conclusively identify the exact canon we use today.

- This test begs the question, esp. for the NT—it logically only works if a valid canon is already assumed.
 - This test cannot explain the exclusion of other orthodox writings (e.g., Polycarp’s epistles, the Shepherd of Hermas).
- (c) Another proposed criterion of canonicity is *catholicity*, or universal acceptance by the Christian majority. This test likewise finds validation in principle in the NT (2 Cor 11:4; 2 Thess 3:6). Again, however, this criterion cannot by itself, or even in conjunction with the other criteria, produce our exact canon:
- Some canonical books were not “received” as readily as others by the early church (e.g., James, Philemon, 2 Peter, 2–3 John).
 - Some extra-canonical books, on the other hand, were extremely highly regarded in the early church, even appearing on some early canonical lists (e.g., 1 Clement, Shepherd of Hermas).

(2) The Validating Criteria of Canonicity

In the absence of conclusive, objective criteria for canonicity, it seems necessary to argue for the present canon on the following two points:

- (a) **The corollary from inspiration.** Since God’s purpose in giving us his inspired Word was to equip believers thoroughly in every age, it follows that we must have successfully discovered it in the 27-book NT canon.
- (b) **The uniform internal testimony of the Holy Spirit.** Since God’s Spirit effectively works to make believers “know” the truth (John 10:27; 1 John 2:27), it follows that, allowing for some discrepancy due to self-deception, the Spirit’s collective witness to the Christian majority is determinative.

e. The Closure of the Canon

The preceding arguments further suggest that the canon is necessarily closed. Note the following:

- (1) Christ states that the apostles would remember and record *all* truth (John 14:26). This clearly does not mean that they would record everything that Jesus ever said (see e.g., 21:25); instead this apparently means that they would record everything intended by God for inscripturation.
- (2) The repeated warnings against adding to the authorized collection assumes that the Scripture writers had an exclusive and fixed canon in view (Deut 4:2; 12:32; Prov 30:5–6; Eccl. 12:11; Rev 22:18–19).
- (3) The arguments from God’s purpose for inspiration (a truth deposit that is sufficient for the present age) precludes the possibility of an open canon.

6. Perspicuity.

The Corollary: Since God’s purpose in inspiration was to provide a deposit of truth that thoroughly equips believers in every age, it follows that its message must be sufficiently clear for believers to understand it.

a. Definition:

By *perspicuity* is meant the clarity of Scripture. In Thomson’s words, perspicuity is “that quality of the biblical text that, as God communicative act, ensures its meaning is accessible to all who come to it in faith” (169–70). Grudem defines the idea with a slightly different emphasis, describing perspicuity to mean that “the Bible is written in such a way that all things necessary for our salvation and for our Christian life and growth are very clearly set forth in Scripture.” Together these definitions communicate that no Christian who uses his regenerated mind and the normal laws of language can fail to learn from Scripture’s univocal words all that he needs to know for his spiritual welfare.

Psalm 119:130—The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple (also 19:7).

Note also that much of the Bible is addressed not to ecclesiastical elites, but to the *churches* (1 Cor 1:2, etc.).

b. Qualifications

(1) Perspicuity does not mean that all of Scripture is *equally* easy to understand.

2 Peter 3:15–16—[Paul’s] letters contain things that are hard to understand.

(2) Perspicuity does not mean, therefore, that believers cannot misunderstand Scripture.

- Jesus’ disciples regularly misinterpreted Christ and the OT prophets (Matt 15:16; Mark 4:10–13; 8:14–21; John 8:27 etc.).
- Uncertainty about the role of OT structures in the NT community resulted in “much debate” and the need for the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:7).
- Obdurate hearts caused some to miss the significance of God’s words (Matt 13:10–13; John 5:39–40).
- Others erred by failing to correctly apply the received laws of language (2 Pet 3:16).
- Others exceeded the intent of Scripture in their application (Matt 15:1–6).

(3) Perspicuity does not mean that there is no need for trained teachers in the church (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). In the words of the *Westminster Confession*, a sufficient understanding of Scripture employs the use of “ordinary means,” which includes prayer and the assembled church (with its officers).

(4) Perspicuity does mean, however, that ordinary saints can understand and apply the Word of God for themselves.

IV. Illumination.

A. Definition: *Illumination* is the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit whereby he convinces the believer that the Bible is, indeed, the Word of God and makes him favorably inclined to yielding to it.

B. The Need for Illumination

Having a written revelation from God preserved and issued in one's language is still not enough to complete the communication of divine truth to man. Because of the supernatural, infinite and pure nature of Scripture, and because of the finiteness and sinfulness of man, there must be a further work of God to overcome the experience of every "natural" man, who uniformly "exchange the truth of God for a lie" (Rom 1:25; 1 Cor 2:14).

C. The Biblical Basis for Illumination

1 Corinthians 2:4–5, 14–16: My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on the men's wisdom, but on God's power.... The man without the Spirit [the natural man] does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment. For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

1 John 2:20, 21, 27: You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know [the truth]. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. His anointing teaches you about all things.

1 Thessalonians 2:13: We also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

D. The Explanation of Illumination

1. What Illumination Does Not Do

- a. Illumination does not impart new *revelation*. The Scriptures are complete, leaving no need for special revelation. The only thing lacking is a mind "opened" to accept the revelation already possessed.
- b. Illumination does not supply *hidden* or *deeper meaning* that eludes un-believers. Because of some unfortunate translation work in 1 Corinthians 2, one might read some of the versions as suggesting that the meaning of the text of Scripture is lost to a person apart from the aid of the Holy Spirit. This understanding flies in the face of the grammatical-historical principle of interpretation and places the locus of meaning above the text rather than the in text itself.

An unbeliever can, in fact, learn the laws of language and grammar and emerge with an understanding of a text's meaning that is equal to or even superior to that of a believer. But what the unbeliever cannot do is welcome the Word eagerly as absolutely authoritative and personally applicable.

- c. Illumination does not delegate *authority* to the Bible. The self-attesting Bible is authoritative and true because God wrote it. The Holy Spirit is not necessary to establish its authority or even to “prove” its authority. Instead, it illumines the darkened mind to accept the *abundantly clear self-testimony* of Scripture that it already possesses.
- d. Illumination does not grant *perspicuity* (clarity) to the Bible. The clarity that the Bible possesses is innate and cannot be “activated” by external forces.
- e. Illumination does not *remove the need to develop hermeneutical skills* essential to uncovering the meaning of Scripture. The fact that the believer has “no need for anyone to teach him” does not mean that he can forego the hard work of exegesis or neglect the teaching and preaching of the Word. In fact, John is saying just the opposite. John is saying that all believers have the equipment necessary to do exegesis—they can detect truth by means of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit without a secret “key” to meaning possessed only by some spiritually elite group (note the context of both 1 John 2 and 1 Corinthians 2).

2. What Illumination Does

- a. Illumination *imparts certainty* that the self-authenticating words of Scripture are true and authoritative. This accounts for (1) the determination of the Bible's identity (canonicity), and (2) the acknowledgement of its absolute authority.
- b. Illumination *removes the native hostility* of the depraved mind to the Word of God. The depraved mind is hostile to God and to his Law (Rom 8:7) and resistant to the truth, preferring falsehood (Rom 1:18–20, 25, 28). This cannot be overcome with the use of independent evidences. It is only by the Holy Spirit that the believer can “accept” (i.e., *welcome*) the Word of God, “know” the Word of God (i.e., *embrace* it for the truth that it is), or “appraise” (i.e., positively evaluate, appreciate, and apply) the Word of God.
- c. Indirectly, it would seem that the acceptance of the inerrant authority and unity of Scripture *supplies the basis for the valid correlation of truth* into a unified system. This is not to say that illumination improves one's correlative skills, *per se*, but it makes a believer *want* to correlate this accumulated corpus of biblical data that an unbeliever sees as incoherent, self-contradictory, and thus beyond the pale of correlation. In short, illumination is necessary to a valid systematic theology.