

GLORIOUS DOCTRINE

THE WORD OF GOD

EXPLORING THE BIBLE'S
INSPIRATION, INERRANCY,
AUTHORITY, SUFFICIENCY,
NECESSITY, CLARITY
AND MORE...

Session 2: Inspiration & Authority

INTRODUCTION

When we speak of Scripture's inspiration, we are speaking about the nature of Scripture - the basic, inherent feature of Scripture which is characteristic about it. When we speak of Scripture's authority, we are speaking of its right to govern, judge and shape all of a Christian's life and beliefs. The two concepts are vitally connected to one another, as we will explore today.

Why are the doctrines of Scripture's inspiration & authority important?

If we do not understand or believe in Scripture's Divine inspiration, we may fall into a wide array of dangers:

"Those systems that do not begin with this belief in Scripture will exhibit a wide range of beliefs that will shift over time in light of the ever-changing whims and views of culture. Almost every single collapse involving denominations and churches in regard to historic Christian beliefs can be traced back to a degradation in that group's view of the Bible as the inspired and inerrant revelation of God's truth. Once this foundation is lost, the house that was built upon it cannot long stand."

(James R. White, Scripture Alone, p.43)

This is clearly seen among many once-strong, faithful churches, who have now gone apostate, turned to theological liberalism and abandoned the faith. At the root of every apostate denomination and church is a denial of scripture's inspiration - as there is little worth in speaking about the usefulness, authority or sufficiency of a non-inspired, merely human, errant collection of ancient works. This sort of view inevitably leads to a denial of the ability of the Bible to function as our sole infallible rule of faith for the church.

“Those who place the Bible upon the same plane as any other human production, even while granting it some level of historic or religious importance, cannot help but look for new sources of authority in ‘tradition’ or ‘new revelation.’”
(James R. White, Scripture Alone, p. 44)

An Example: The United Church of Canada

The following are edited excerpts taken from the TCG Canada article [“The United Church of Canada: What You Need to Know”](#) by Kevin Flatt:

“The United Church was formed in 1925 by the merger of two large Canadian denominations, the Methodists and the Presbyterians, as well as the much smaller Congregationalists. The architects of the union hoped that their new church would eventually encompass all Protestant churches in Canada. They thought cooperation would enable its members to decisively shape the spiritual life of the young Dominion—and to carry on social service, especially to the poor, on a much larger scale.”

Many United Churches bore names like “Knox” and “Wesley” - reflecting their Presbyterian or Methodist origins - coming from deeply evangelical beliefs. From the 1930s to the 1950s, the United Church carried forward evangelical causes through revival campaigns and a focus on “decisions for Christ”. In the 1950s many of its leaders would endorse the evangelistic campaigns of Billy Graham in Canada.

Their original statements of faith were solidly evangelical:

“ We receive the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, given by inspiration of God, as containing the only infallible rule of faith and life, a faithful record of God’s gracious revelations, and as the sure witness of Christ.”
(The United Church of Canada, Twenty Articles of Doctrine (1925), Article III)

“We believe that, while God uttered His Word to man in many portions progressively, the whole is sufficient to declare His mind and will for our salvation...

We believe that in Holy Scripture God claims the complete allegiance of our mind and heart; that the full persuasion of the truth and authority of the Word of God contained in the Scripture is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts... So we acknowledge in Holy Scripture the true witness to God’s Word and the sure guide to Christian faith and conduct.”
(The United Church of Canada, Statement of Faith (1940), Article IX)

However, they were eventually infiltrated by theological liberalism at the end of the century. In 1964, a new Sunday school curriculum was released that taught adults and children to question the historical reliability of the Old Testament and the Gospels.

Fundamentally, the denomination had dropped their functional belief (and eventually their formal belief) in the inspiration of Scripture.

"New officials publicly rejected Billy Graham and the whole idea of evangelistic rallies. They also dropped the church's opposition to premarital sex and lobbied the federal government to legalize abortion, reversing their traditional moral stances."

"The time had come, they said, for the church to stop telling the world what to do, and instead listen to the world's wisdom... Dozens of prominent voices, including a series of moderators, the church's highest post, proclaimed that if the church did not jettison its outdated "dogmas" and "get with it" it would become irrelevant in the new age that was dawning."

In 1997, for example, Moderator Bill Phipps told the Ottawa Citizen, "I don't believe Jesus was God," and "I don't believe he rose from the dead as a scientific fact. It's an irrelevant question." More recently, in 2001, Gretta Vosper - a minister at West Hill United Church publicly described herself as a "non-theist" and later adopted the term "atheist."

"The result? Between 1968 and 2009 the United Church lost over half its members, during a time in which the Canadian population grew by more than 50%."

"We should not be quick to judge. I've met many kind, decent people in the United Church. Many of them genuinely want to follow Jesus' commandment to love others as we love ourselves, and their commitment to helping the poor and disadvantaged is worth imitating.

Nevertheless, the story of the United Church is a sobering one. It's a reminder that strategies formed out of human wisdom rarely work out the way we intend, especially when they leave behind "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). That's a faith worth contending for."

So, here we have a very sad and tragic example of what can happen to a church that loosens its grip on these doctrines of God's Word - Scripture's inspiration and authority. Lest we grow proud - what's at stake here is whether or not we too may end up abandoning the true Gospel and apostolic teaching, and thereby make shipwreck of our faith. This should sober us to the importance of this doctrine.

It is no understatement to say that this is THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE when it comes to our doctrine of the Word of God: Do we, or do we not, believe that it is Divinely inspired?

1. SCRIPTURE'S INSPIRATION

Definition

"Inspiration is the work of God, by His Holy Spirit, communicating His word to the writers of the Bible and enabling them to write that word without error, addition, or deletion. Thus, though fallible human penmen were employed, the Holy Spirit ensured the production of infallible writings, true in all respects, both as to their ideas and their words. These writings are, in the strictest sense, God's word, and are therefore authoritative, the final rule of faith and practice."

(Alan Cairns, Dictionary of Theological Terms, p.237)

We will unpack more of what this definition means throughout this class, but first we turn to the Scriptures themselves to see what they say about this then we will turn to look at the testimony of history on the topic.

A. Paul - 2 Timothy 3:16-17

One of the primary texts where we see the doctrine of Scripture's inspiration is in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. In fact, these verses are laden with the doctrine of the Word, and we'll be frequently coming back to them as well as others as we explore more in this class.

The context of these verses comes letter to his son in the faith, young pastor Timothy, and is probably one of his last communications before he was executed in Rome. When a person knows they are about to die, what they communicate as their final message to those they love is of utmost importance. Thus, as some of the apostle's last recorded inspired words - the letter of 2 Timothy's message is urgent and important both for then and us today.

Here in chapter 3, Paul is warning Timothy of false teachers among the people who are taking people captive to lies. In verse 8, these men are not just confused about the truth, but they also stand in opposition to it. Paul says they are depraved in mind, and though they may have once professed faith, they are now "*adokimos*" (ἀδόκιμος) - translated "disqualified" - a word referring to failing the test and hence "worthless".

Paul guarantees Timothy that there is going to be a road of hardship ahead for those who want to live lives that are faithful to God:

"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."
(2 Timothy 3:12-13)

From this warning we see that even from very early in the church, there was the threat of false teaching and imposters who sought to deceive people (v.13). The same is true today. These types of people are self-deceived and seek to deceive others.

What is Paul's admonition to Timothy to combat this threat? He says to him:

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 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."
(2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Sacred Writings and Wisdom for Salvation

If there ever was a time where Paul might have referred Timothy to some other kind of extra-biblical source to equip him, it would be here. As Timothy is facing this threat of false teachers who have snuck in to deceive people, Paul does not point him to look to some sort of papacy, or a charismatic prophet, or traditions or any other new source of revelation. He points him to scripture.

The phrase "sacred writings" refers to the Old Testament writings with which Paul says Timothy has been already well acquainted. Paul doesn't point Timothy to something new, but rather something old, tried, and true - God's trustworthy written Word. Unlike the false teachers who were going after new teachings, Paul reminds Timothy to continue in the firm foundation he had learned from his godly upbringing in the scriptures.

The characteristic of the inspired scriptures here is that they are able to make one wise unto salvation. They aren't just useful for giving a person a more peaceful or successful life in this world, but rather they give spiritual wisdom that leads to eternal salvation.

I. All Scripture

Some people may object to using this verse in reference to the Bible as a whole because in the context of Paul talking to Timothy, he is referring to the Old Testament scriptures. However, as we saw from our first session together, from 2 Peter 3:15-16 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18, the New Testament writers considered their own writings as Scripture and this testimony was affirmed and recognized by the early church.

So, when Paul says that "all scripture" is inspired by God, though at that point he was referring directly to the writings of the Old Testament, this same characteristic is true of the New Testament writings as well because they are Scripture too.

So, what is this characteristic of all scripture?

II. God-breathed

Paul says that all scripture is “theopneustos” (θεόπνευστος). Some translations render the Greek word “theopneustos” (θεόπνευστος) as “inspired by God” (NASB) or “God-breathed” (NIV) or “breathed out by God” (ESV). But what does this word actually mean?

This word is not in reference to the nature or effects of scripture, but rather its origin. B.B. Warfield comments:

“The Greek term has ... nothing to say of inspiring or of inspiration: it speaks only of a ‘spiring’ or ‘spiration.’ What it says of Scripture is, not that it is ‘breathed into by God’ or is the product of the divine ‘inbreathing’ into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, ‘God-breathed,’ the product of the creative breath of God.”
(B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p.133)

“What is theopneustos is “God-breathed,” produced by the creative breath of the Almighty. And Scripture is called theopneustos in order to designate it as “God-breathed,” the product of Divine spiration, the creation of that Spirit who is in all spheres of the Divine activity the executive of the Godhead.”
(B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 296)

What this verse is saying with this word is not that God breathed “into” the scriptures, but rather that they are breathed out by God. It is saying that the Scriptures owe their origin to the activity of the Holy Spirit and are truly and directly the product of His creation.

A good way to illustrate this is to put your hand up to your mouth and exhale and feel the breath. This is what this verse is saying Scripture is like. It is Divine expiration - God-breathed. The direct product of the Spirit of God. **This term is saying that the Scriptures are not primarily human in their origin, but rather they are Divine in origin.**

This is the basis of why we believe that the Bible, the Word of God, is authoritative, inerrant, infallible, sufficient and necessary for the believer. The scriptures are breathed out by God.

III. Profitable to make us complete

Paul goes on to say that all of scripture, because it is breathed out by God, it is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. Some argue that Paul isn't saying that scripture alone is sufficient for doing all of that, but rather it is just profitable or helpful for those things.

“The testimony of this passage is sometimes muted because people emphasize that something may be profitable without being sufficient for the task, as if Paul's point here is that Scripture, like so many other things, is “an assistant” to one who teaches, sort of like crayons and a flannel board might be “useful” in teaching

Sunday school for six-year-olds. This is not the apostle's intention; Timothy didn't need teaching aids, but encouragement about what God has provided for him to fulfill the ministry he was given in light of Paul's soon departure."
(James R. White, Scripture Alone, p.51)

According to this verse, the fact that scripture is God's own words - breathed out by Him - means that it is able to completely accomplish what He sets out to do. This is exactly what God says in Isaiah 55:11, "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

It is by His Word that God created the world from nothing and sustains it. It is by His word that God speaks life into us which was not there before and sustains us. Because the Bible is God's Word - which is active, powerful, sharp and able to accomplish His purposes - it is profitable for us for all of life and ministry.

The four phrases Paul uses - "teaching," "reproof," "correction" and "training in righteousness" - encompasses the whole of Christian discipleship and life. Then to emphasize the point, the last phrase "equipped for every good work" makes it clear - there is no good work which scripture does not equip us for. If this is what the scriptures are profitable for, then scripture is able to make us completely equipped for the Christian life. This is why every discipleship endeavor or book must be grounded in scripture.

The Greek word ἄρτιος (artios) used means "fully qualified, proficient, fully ready, complete or capable." This is what scripture is able to make us because it is God's Word.

B. Peter - 2 Peter 1:20-21

Here again, there is the threat of false teachers in the church, and this time instead of Paul, Peter is responding. He reassures the believers that they did not follow cleverly devised myths (v.16), but rather he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses themselves of God's amazing revelation in Jesus Christ. He goes on to direct them to "the prophetic word more fully confirmed."

I. A "More Sure" Prophetic Word

The adjective used here of this 'prophetic word' is βέβαιος (bebaios) is used "of something that can be relied on not to cause disappointment, reliable." (BDAG) This is why the ESV translated it as 'more fully confirmed'. Peter is saying that this prophetic word which he is directing his readers towards is something reliable and having continuing validity so that you can be confident in your trust of it.

What is this more fully confirmed prophetic word? Is it some charismatic prophet? Is it traditions of the church or Jewish leaders?

Here's what he says:

“...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.” (2 Peter 1:20-21)

The prophetic word to which Peter directs them is Scripture! Even though Peter had this amazing charismatic experience of seeing the transfigured Christ in his glory on the mountaintop - Peter directs his readers to scripture as the more sure prophetic word.

II. The Origin of Scripture

Many misinterpret these verses as focusing on the individual's interpretation of these divine prophecies. However, that is not the focus of these verses. The focus is on the origin and nature of the prophecies themselves.

Before these verses, Peter recounts his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration where he saw Jesus for a time reveal his glory (see Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9). It is in comparison to this amazing miraculous experience that Peter points his readers to scripture! That is significant, especially in a day where we have people who are seeking after signs, wonders and miracles. Here we have the apostle Peter himself, who could have legitimately pointed to signs and wonders, instead redirect his readers to scripture because they are “more sure” and reliable. The reason for this type of certainty is because of the origin of the scriptures.

The scriptures don't come from anyone's own interpretations or private opinions.

The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament states that this word used for “interpretation” means “releasing, solving, explaining, interpreting. The word almost comes to mean inspiration.... The gen[itive] ... here indicates source. Peter is talking about the divine origin of Scripture, not about its proper interpretation.” (p.584) This is clear when we look at the rest of the passage. It does not speak of how they are interpreted but rather of how they came into being. He says that scripture is not the opinions of the prophets but the very words of God.

Peter emphatically denies emphasis on the human origin of the prophetic word by saying, “No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will.” The prophets did not just wake up one day and decide to write some prophecy. The repeated phrase throughout many of the prophetic books is “the word of the Lord came to me.” The origin of the word was not from within them, but from without them - from above - from God himself.

III. Carried Along by the Spirit

“They spoke in their tongue, they spoke from their contexts, they spoke within their cultures, but what they spoke they spoke from God and only as they were carried along (or moved) by the Spirit. Here is the mysterious yet wondrous interface of the

human and the divine in Scripture's origination: While men are speaking, they are doing so under the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, so that the result of this divine miracle is, as Paul put it, God-breathed. It is not the men themselves who are "inspired" but the Scriptures, the result of this divine initiative in revelation."
(James R. White, Scripture Alone, p.59)

God carried the prophets and biblical authors along by His Spirit so that what they wrote was exactly what He wanted to say. This did not override the human writer's personalities and style, but rather it God worked through them, in concert with their humanity to produce something that was wholly from God.

This truth is of primary importance. Notice Peter's words, "but know this first" or literally "knowing this first of all", which emphasizes his stress on the truth that scripture is primarily and wholly a work of God. If Peter's readers don't recognize this truth, they will easily fall prey to the false teachers that threaten them. This is also true for us today. If we do not realize that it is scripture alone that is the "more fully confirmed" fully reliable word to us from God, then we may also be led astray by charismatic personalities and worldly wisdom.

C. Jesus - Matthew 22:29-32

So far we've looked at Paul's and Peter's views of scripture's inspiration. But what does our Lord think? What was Jesus' view of scripture's inspiration?

Here in Matthew 22, the Sadducees (who did not believe in the resurrection) approached Jesus with a question to try to trip him up. They ask about a hypothetical woman who successively marries seven brothers, and after they all die - so who's wife would she be in heaven? Perhaps the bigger question is why did all the brothers keep marrying her when it seems like every one of them who married her died! Surely by the third brother they must have thought something was fishy about this... But in any case, Jesus responds to them as follows:

But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living."
(Matthew 22:29-32)

Jesus doesn't mince words with them. He plainly tells them they are wrong and don't understand the scriptures. However, for what we're talking about today we will focus more on what Jesus says about the scriptures in these verses. If we don't read carefully we might miss it.

Note what Jesus asks them: “have you not READ what was SAID to you by GOD?”

Jesus doesn't say, “have you not read what was written to you...” but rather what was SAID to you by God! Here, Jesus is affirming that the written scriptures are God speaking!

He goes on to cite Exodus 3:6, which was written more than a thousand years before, yet Jesus says that they should have heard God speaking to them through it! Jesus held them accountable to what they had heard read in the scripture as if God himself had spoken to them - because He had! And it is the same with us. Scripture's inspiration means that when scripture speaks, God speaks to us.

If this is the view of scripture that Jesus held, then as followers of Jesus, we must hold the same view of scripture as Jesus!

(Some other key scriptures you can look at on Scripture's inspiration are: Matthew 19:4-5, John 10:35; Acts 4:24-26; 1 Corinthians 2:10-12)

D. Verbal Plenary Inspiration

These three passages illustrate for us what is technically called “the verbal plenary inspiration of scripture.”

Verbal simply means it has to do with the words themselves. God inspired the very exact words which were used by the human authors to write scripture. This is why it is important for us to pay close attention to them, to study the original languages and the context of the text.

There are some cult movements which hold to only a specific translation of the biblical text - such as the King James Only movement. However, God chose to speak through the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek - thus when we interpret a passage, it must be faithful to the meaning of the original. Today we are fortunate to have many faithful English translations of the original text. However, when a translation deviates from or miscommunicates what the original text says, it is the original text to which we must appeal as God-breathed, not the translation.

Plenary is just a fancy way of saying “all of scripture” as we saw from 2 Timothy 3:16-17. God inspired all of it. There are not some parts that are more inspired than others - yes, even the genealogies! We don't get to pick and choose as some Christian theologians do.

E. Major Errors Regarding Scripture's Inspiration

I. The denial of Scripture's divine origin

This position reduces the Bible to a merely human book. It fails to listen to scripture's own testimony about itself as seen in many passages (e.g. Deut. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). To deny the divine origin of scripture is to deny the salvation it offers as well. If this book is merely

human, how can it offer any solution to the human dilemma and problem of sin? If we believe in the hope which the Bible presents us, we must believe that it is from God, otherwise our hope is only in the fallible writings of other people.

We see this affirmation in many places in scripture itself. For example, the early church in Acts attributed the words of David recorded in Psalm 2:1-2 as being from God. They said, "Sovereign Lord... who through the mouth of our father David... said by the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 4:24-26)

II. The denial of Scripture's human authorship

This view sees the human authors of scripture as mechanically writing down what was dictating to them like some sort of robot without their own personalities and unique writing styles, cultures, etc. It makes them to be passive secretaries without any willful participation in what they wrote. This position cannot explain the various personalities, writing styles, perspectives, cultural influences and more that we clearly see expressed throughout the books of the Bible.

Some people believe this view for fear that acknowledging the human authorship of scripture would be to introduce the possibility of errors since "to err is human." However, this fails to understand the superintending operation of the Holy Spirit in protecting the Word from error and guiding the authors to produce exactly what God intended (as we saw in 2 Peter 1:20-21).

Charles Hodge remarks:

"Each sacred writer was by God specially formed, endowed, educated, providentially conditioned, and then supplied with knowledge naturally, supernaturally, or spiritually conveyed, so that he and he alone could, and freely would, produce his allotted part."

B.B. Warfield comments, "If God wished to give his people a series of letters like Paul's, he prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul he brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters." (Warfield, Inspiration, p.155)

The Dual-Nature of Scripture

"Inspiration is concursive: the Spirit and the human authors wrote together." (Gregg R. Allison)

Similar to Jesus Christ - the Word of God who was truly God and truly man - the scriptures likewise have a dual-nature to them: human and divine. The one does not eliminate the reality of the other. Just as Jesus has a true human nature which was weak and lowly yet free from sin, so also, Scripture is conceived without defect or stain. The scriptures are uniquely truly from God - His very Word - and also truly the product of real human authors

who wrote in time in their contexts, language and with their own personalities and style. This is the marvel of God's Word in scripture to us!

The Scriptures are God's Word to us in servant form.¹

III. The denial of plenary inspiration

This view denies that ALL of scripture is inspired. It says that God's Word is contained in the Bible - not that the Bible is God's Word. It basically asserts that some parts of scripture are inspired, and some parts are not. For example, some parts about gender roles are explained away as merely the product of the patriarchal culture of the ancient times and thus not really applicable for us today.

However, the major problem with this view is the need for a reliable criteria by which to decide which parts are inspired and which are not. Who gets to decide that? And whoever that is, there is the true source of authority! Because whoever can propose to be the Bible's editor, is also claiming to have the authority over it. This view puts humans over God's Word - editing it according to their own preferences and fallible wisdom. Not only that, but if parts of scripture are not inspired, then what confidence can we have that the parts which talk about our salvation and eternal hope are actually inspired?

If the whole Bible is not inspired, we can have no certainty that any of it is inspired.

IV. The denial of verbal inspiration

This position denies that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit does not extend to the very exact words the biblical authors wrote. It does not see as important the languages they wrote in, or the specific way they phrased things, or the intentional usage of specific words.

This position fails to recognize scripture's own claims about its verbal inspiration - God inspired precisely and exactly the words He intended to be recorded. That is why Jesus himself could appeal to the exact wording of scripture!

THE HISTORICAL TESTIMONY OF INSPIRATION

We see this doctrine affirmed by church writers from very early on.

Clement of Rome (35-99 AD) said to the church of Corinth, speaking of the letter Paul had written to them:

"You have searched the Scriptures, which are true, which were given by the Holy Spirit... Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the apostle. What did he first write to

¹ Phrase taken from Letham, Systematic Theology, p. 196

you in the 'beginning of the gospel?' Truly he wrote to you in the Spirit."
(Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians, ANF, 1:17-18 - as quoted in Allison, p,60)

Justin Martyr (100-165 AD) said that the ability of the biblical prophets to foretell the future was because the "Spirit of Prophecy" inspired them and "they only spoke those things which they saw and heard, being filled with the Holy Spirit." (Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew, 7, in ANF, 1:198)

Hippolytus (c. 170–235 AD) noted:

"Just as it is with musical instruments, so they always had the Word, like the pick, in union with them, and when moved by him, the prophets announced what God willed. For they did not speak of their own power (let there be no mistake as to that), neither did they declare what pleased themselves. But first of all they were endowed with wisdom by the Word, and then again were rightly instructed in the future by means of visions. Finally, when they were fully convinced themselves, they spoke those things which were revealed by God to them alone, and concealed from everyone else."
(Hippolytus, Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, 2.2, in ANF, 5:204–5)

Hippolytus showed that the prophets weren't just puppets on a string - but rather, God prepared, instructed and persuaded them before they engaged in writing scripture so that the work they produced could be properly called theirs, but at the same time also the work of God himself.

"The early church clearly and unanimously affirmed the plenary and verbal inspiration of Scripture. Representing the church's consensus, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, in its statement about the Holy Spirit, confessed 'he spoke by the prophets.'"
(Gregg R. Allison, Historical Theology, p. 62-63)

Gregory of Nyssa (335-394 AD) said,

"The Scripture, 'inspired by God,' as the apostle [Paul] calls it, is the Scripture of the Holy Spirit, and its intention is the profit of men.... Thus it is by the power of the Spirit that the holy men who are under divine influence are inspired, and every Scripture is for this reason said to be 'inspired by God,' because it is the teaching of the divine breath."
(Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, 7.1, in NPNF2, 5:192–93 as rendered in Allison, p.60)

This view of the inspiration of scripture was consistently held through the Middle Ages by theologians such as John Scotus Eriugena (815-877 AD) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274

AD).² This was reasserted by the Reformers such as Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD) and John Calvin (1509-1564 AD).

Calvin, commenting on 2 Peter 1:20 wrote:

“God speaks to us, and not mortal men. Then Peter especially bids us to believe the prophecies as the undoubted oracles of God, because they have not emanated from men’s own private suggestions.... They did not of themselves, or according to their own will, foolishly deliver their own inventions.... He says that they were moved—not that they were out bereaved of mind ... but because they dared not to announce anything of their own, and obediently followed the Spirit as their guide, who ruled in their mouth as in his own sanctuary.”

(John Calvin, Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles, p. 390–91)

And commenting on 2 Timothy 3:16 he said:

“Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have received from their hand, but, speaking at the suggestion of God, they boldly and fearlessly testified, what was actually true, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spoke.... We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it.”

(John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, p. 249)

For Calvin, he saw that the only assurance we can have of our Christian beliefs was in this doctrine of inspiration. He said:

“Credibility of doctrine is not established until we are persuaded beyond doubt that God is its Author. Thus, the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it.”

(Calvin, Institutes, 1.7.4, LCC, 1:78)

The fact that scripture is inspired by God is also the basis for our confidence in their preservation (which we will look more specifically at in later sessions). Francis Turretin (1623-1687 AD) argued:

“[We cannot] readily believe that God, who dictated and inspired each and every word to these inspired (theopneustois) men, would not take care of their entire preservation. If men use the utmost care diligently to preserve their words (especially if they are of any importance, as for example a testament [will] or contract) in order that it may not be corrupted, how much more, must we suppose, would God take care of his word which he intended as a testament [will] and seal of his covenant with us, so that it might not be corrupted; especially when he could

² Aquinas noted: “The author of Holy Scripture is God,” explaining that “The Holy Spirit decides by what terms spiritual things are to be signified in certain passages of Scripture...” and that “the literal sense is that which the author intends.” in his *Summa Theologica*.

easily foresee and prevent such corruptions in order to establish the faith of his church?"

(Turretin, Institutes of Elenctic Theology, 2nd topic, 5th q., sec. 7, 1:71)

In October 1978, at the Hyatt Regency in O'Hare, Chicago, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was held with evangelical scholars, pastors and leaders from around the world in response to the growing threat to the historic beliefs on Biblical inerrancy. In November of 1982, that resulted in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which included several statements on the doctrine and was signed by nearly 300 noted evangelical scholars. The Chicago Statement upheld the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture:

"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."

(Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, art. 6)

While defining inspiration as a work of the Holy Spirit in the biblical writers, the Chicago Statement clearly distanced the evangelical view from the mechanical dictation theory of inspiration:

"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."

(Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, art. 8)

The Chicago Statement continues about Scripture's inerrancy:

"We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Bible 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."

So, we see from the consistent testimony of the church throughout history that his doctrine of Scripture's inspiration has played a vital and central role in the church's view about the Bible. But why does this matter? What does it matter that the Bible is inspired by God? It matters because this necessarily implies that it has an authority that no other piece of writing or any other source can rightly claim to have. That is what we will next turn to examine.

DISCUSS IN GROUPS

- Why is it important for us to understand and believe in BOTH the Divine and Human origins of scripture? What do you lose if you deny one or the other?
 - Have you ever heard the term “verbal plenary inspiration” before? Why is it important that all of scripture and all of the words of scripture are inspired?
 - How are these doctrines useful to us today in the church and life?
-

2. SCRIPTURE'S AUTHORITY

Definition

Grudem helpfully states it succinctly:

“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.” (Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.73)

This doctrine of the authority of God’s Word is closely tied to its inspiration. It is because the Bible is inspired by God that it bears His authority. If the Bible is God-breathed, then it means that God is fully invested in His Word, acting through it to save and transform the church. So then, it means that when the Bible is read, proclaimed and rightly understood, God speaks to us - with all the authority of God himself.

A. SOLA SCRIPTURA

This doctrine of the authority of scripture was what was labeled in the Protestant Reformation the doctrine of “Sola Scriptura” - a latin phrase meaning “Scripture Alone.” It was called the “formal principle” of the Reformation - meaning that it was on the basis of this doctrine that the Reformers challenged and opposed the Roman Catholic church of the 16th century. Scripture “formed” or was the foundation of the Reformers’ beliefs on Christian doctrines and practice.

It was because of this doctrine that we saw that historic split between the Roman and Protestant churches which has remained until this day, and it was because of this doctrine that we saw one of the biggest revivals of the Gospel in history since the times of the apostles. It was a movement that even reverberates until this day - and we are heirs of this Reformation principle if we call ourselves Protestants and Evangelicals.

Misunderstanding Sola Scriptura

Unfortunately, many people - even Protestant and Catholic theologians - misunderstand or misrepresent this phrase. It tends to be taken as saying that we believe that it is scripture in isolation, or apart from the rest of God's work in the church as a whole. It is the idea of "me and my Bible alone in my room and what I feel it means to me." It is often expressed at bible studies as "well - what does that passage mean to you?" We will touch later on in this class about interpretation, but for now let it be understood: THIS IS NOT WHAT SOLA SCRIPTURA MEANS.

Dr. James R. White, an accomplished Christian apologist who has publicly debated numerous Catholic theologians defines it this way:

"The Bible claims to be the sole and sufficient infallible rule of faith for the Christian church. The Scriptures are not in need of any supplement; their authority comes from their nature as God-breathed revelation; their authority is not dependent upon man, church, or council. The Scriptures are self-consistent, self-interpreting, and self-authenticating. The Christian church looks to the Scriptures as the only infallible and sufficient rule of faith, and the church is always subject to the Word, and is constantly reformed thereby."

(James R. White, *Scripture Alone*, p. 28)

Because of the ultimacy of their Author, the Scriptures are in need of no higher authority to attest to the truth that they give to us. However, this does not mean that scripture is to be understood in isolation. Let us note how the Reformed Confession of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647):

"We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church of God to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts." (WCF 1:5)

Here we see both the affirmation that Scriptures must be understood and read corporately in the Church and also that it is the testimony of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures which helps us understand personally. The Church aids us in our interpretation, appreciation, esteem and reverence of scripture - meaning that the scriptures are never meant to be read only in isolation apart from the rest of the body of Christ. We have many able and competent ministers, fellow-believers, theologians and pastors today to help us

understand and appreciate God's Word and many from the past as well from whom we can learn.

Many Christians today don't make use of the 2000 years of amazing church writers and theologians who have gained many insights into scripture and instead practically try to reinvent the wheel every time they approach scripture leading to new and erroneous interpretations. We can and must be humble enough to learn from those in our church community today and the Church throughout history. However, ultimately the scriptures themselves are what bear God's authority. These other aids are only useful so far as they make clear to us what the Scriptures themselves mean to say and communicate to us.

Again the WCF helpfully summarizes the point:

"The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word..." (WCF 1:6)

In summary, the doctrine of Sola Scriptura simply means that the Bible is the only ultimate infallible authority for us. Scripture is, as R.C. Sproul put it, the "norma normans non normata" - that is, Scripture is the rule of rules which cannot be ruled - it is the norm of norms. **All other 'authorities'** (such as teachers, church confessions, books, etc) **are only authoritative in so far as they point to the ultimate authority of God's Word and clearly and accurately communicate its intended meaning.** This is because Scripture is the only thing which is "God-breathed" (theopneustos) which we saw from 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Nothing else is called "God-breathed" - not tradition, not popes, not additional writings like the Book of Mormon or other religious works - nothing but scripture alone.

B. THE BIBLICAL CASE

This is probably one of the most attested doctrines in scripture - and there would be too many references to do a thorough study here. Hopefully a few case study examples will suffice.

I. The Bible is God's Word

In the Old Testament we see the Bible's claim to be God's own words by the often used introductory phrase, "Thus says the Lord" which appears hundreds of times. Grudem notes:

"Thus, when the prophets say, "Thus says the Lord," they are claiming to be messengers from the sovereign King of Israel, namely, God himself, and they are claiming that their words are the absolutely authoritative words of God. When a

prophet spoke in God's name in this way, every word he spoke had to come from God, or he would be a false prophet (cf. Num. 22:38; Deut. 18:18–20; Jer. 1:9; 14:14; 23:16–22; 29:31–32; Ezek. 2:7; 13:1–16).”
(Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.74)

Furthermore, God speaks “through” the prophets (see 1 Kings 14:18; 16:12, 34; 2 Kings 9:36; 14:25; Jer. 37:2; Zech. 7:7, 12). Thus, everything the prophets say in God's Name is what God says (see 1 Kings 13:26 with v. 21; 1 Kings 21:19 with 2 Kings 9:25–26; Hag. 1:12; cf. 1 Sam. 15:3, 18). Therefore, to disbelieve or disobey what the prophet said is to disbelieve and disobey God himself (see Deut. 18:19; 1 Sam. 10:8; 13:13–14; 15:3, 19, 23; 1 Kings 20:35, 36).

In Matthew 19:5, in resolving a challenge posed to him by the Jewish leaders, Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 - which was written by Moses - and attributes it to God. The Pharisees asked him if there is any lawful reason to divorce one's wife. Jesus' response is astounding:

He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6)

Notice how Jesus responds to these Jewish religious leaders who were highly respected in His day as experts in the law. He begins by quoting Genesis. They ask him, “Is there any lawful reason to divorce your wife?” and he responds in effect, “OK you religious experts, have you not read Genesis? Did you not get at least that far - the first book of the Bible!?” One cannot miss the humor of this interaction! Then Jesus quotes what Moses wrote in Genesis as a commentary on the creation account as if God himself had said it and he uses that as the basis for his conclusion on the matter. God had spoken in His word and that settled it!

Many other passages could be cited (see Luke 1:70; 24:25; John 5:45–47; Acts 3:18, 21; 4:25; 13:47; 28:25; Rom. 1:2; 3:2; 9:17; 1 Cor. 9:8–10; Heb. 1:1–2, 6–7). As we saw in the first session of this class, Paul and Peter considered the writings of the New Testament also to be scripture. Thus, they also belong in the category of ‘scripture’ which bears the ultimate authority of God himself.

II. The Bible is Truthful

God cannot lie or speak falsely. Our God never lies (Titus 1:2) and in fact, it is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18). Our God is not like sinful humanity that He should lie (Numbers 23:19). All His Words are true (2 Samuel 7:28). Thus, because we have seen that the Bible is God's Word, we are also assured that it is truthful - because it is the unlying God speaking. Every word of God proves true (Proverbs 30:5). Not just some words. Every word.

This is why Jesus can pray to the Father for us, “sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). The Greek text of that verse does not say just “your word is true” in an adjectival way, but rather it uses the noun form (ἀλήθεια) to say that God’s word is not just true, but it is truth itself! His word doesn’t just conform to some higher standard of being ‘true’ - rather His Word is the final standard of truth!

III. The Bible is our Final Authority

It is God’s written word that is our final authority.

Grudem notes:

“It is important to realize that the final form in which Scripture remains authoritative is its written form. It was the words of God written on the tablets of stone that Moses deposited in the ark of the covenant. Later, God commanded Moses and subsequent prophets to write their words in a book. And it was written Scripture (γραφῆ, G1210) that Paul said was “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). Similarly, it is Paul’s writings that are “a command of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37) and that could be classified with “the other scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16).”
(Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 84-85)

Note that even our Lord Jesus Christ himself, when tempted in the wilderness in Matthew 4, did not appeal to human words or traditions, nor did he even appeal to his own opinions or preferences (though he was the Son of God, the Word incarnate!). NO. He instead appealed to the written word of God to rebuke the Devil three times by quoting from Deuteronomy! Scripture had spoken on the matter and that settled it. If that is the view of our Lord - so too must it be ours. God’s written word is our authority.

The written word is the more sure prophetic word (cf. 2 Pet. 1:19-21) to which we must look as our final authority.

C. HISTORICAL SUPPORT

This Biblical affirmations are supported by the testimony of the church. I will only briefly here note a few early church writers, but a more thorough treatment can be found in chapter 4 of Gregg R. Allison’s book *Historical Theology*.

For Justin Martyr, the authority of Scripture was due to its divine authorship; indeed, Scripture demands to “be believed for its own nobility and for the confidence due to him who sends it. Now the word of truth is sent from God.... For being sent with authority, it were not fit that it should be required to produce proof of what is said; since neither is there any proof beyond itself, which is God.”
(Justin Martyr, *Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin on the Resurrection*, 1, in ANF, 1:294)

"He, then, who of himself believes the Scripture and the voice of the Lord, which by the Lord acts to the benefit of men, is rightly regarded [as] faithful. Certainly, we use it as a criterion in the discovery of things.... We are by the voice of the Lord trained up to the knowledge of the truth."

(Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 7.16, in ANF, 2:551)

Irenaeus called the Bible "the ground and pillar of our faith."

(Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1, in ANF, 1:414)

Tertullian affirmed that heresy - a belief that is to be rejected by the church - is that which "lacks the authority of Scripture"³ and Clement said that heresy does "violence to the Scriptures... opposes the Scriptures... [and] dismisses the Scriptures."⁴ Augustine said that truth is to be discovered "both by sure reason and authority of holy Scripture ... not by human judgment, but by authority of divine Scripture."⁵ Elsewhere he wrote that, "holy Scripture sets a rule to our teaching.... Therefore, let it not be for me to teach you any other thing except to expound to you the words of the Teacher, and to treat them as the Lord will have given to me."⁶

The Cambridge Declaration (April 1996)

With almost prophetic foresight, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals produced The Cambridge Declaration which speaks directly to the issues facing the church today about the authority of scripture. They said:

"Today the light of the Reformation has been significantly dimmed. The consequence is that the word "evangelical" has become so inclusive as to have lost its meaning. We face the peril of losing the unity it has taken centuries to achieve. Because of this crisis and because of our love of Christ, his gospel and his church, we endeavor to assert anew our commitment to the central truths of the Reformation and of historic evangelicalism. These truths we affirm not because of their role in our traditions, but because we believe that they are central to the Bible."

This is even more true in our day and context. We see churches everywhere abandoning the central authority of God's Word to rule and govern His Church in favor of the wisdom and strategies of fallible men. We see churches devoting themselves to catering to the 'felt needs' of people outside the faith - turning to attractional methods and spectacles to allure people to the church - or caving on biblical ethics and morals in order to seem more 'inclusive' to attract people to the church. However, all of these methods have failed and will fail - because none of them come with the authority and power of God Himself.

³ Tertullian, *On Fasting*, 10, in ANF, 4:109

⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 7.16, in ANF, 2:552

⁵ Augustine, *Of Holy Virginitly*, 19, 21, in NPNF1, 3:423

⁶ Augustine, *On the Good of Widowhood*, 2, in NPNF1, 3:442

God help us to continue to believe and practice Sola Scriptura - for the health of the Church, the proclamation of the only Biblical Gospel which saves and the glory of His Name!

D. TWO MAJOR ERRORS

There are two major errors which people fall into regarding the authority of God's Word:

- I. The rejection of the inspiration & authority of Scripture
- II. The neglect or functional denial of Sola Scriptura

I. The Rejection of the inspiration & authority of Scripture

This position contradicts the testimony of scripture itself and hence cannot even be properly called "Christian". If we reject God's word - how can we say to be followers of Him? This view is held by 'liberal Christians' - however, this is a whole other religion to Christianity entirely. To reject the inspiration and authority of the Bible is to invent some other religion than Christianity.

II. The neglect or functional denial of Sola Scriptura

This position is far more subtle and easy to fall into for us. The first error is obvious. This one is more sneaky - and even Christians can slip into either neglect or a functional denial of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. How so?

Functional Denial - is to put some other authority alongside scripture and consider it either equally authoritative or more authoritative. One example of this is Roman Catholicism which puts its Tradition and Papal Magisterium alongside Scripture as sources of divine revelation. Some Catholics describe it as the three legged stool upon which God rests His revelation - all three legs are needed for the structure not to topple. Some compare it to the Trinity - that the Triune God of Father, Son and Spirit also gave us His Revelation in the Bible, Tradition and the Papal Magisterium.

This can sound great on the surface, but when it is examined more closely that the Roman Catholic rejection of Sola Scriptura puts in its place Sola Ecclesia - that is, "The Church Alone". This is because it is the Roman Catholic Church through its Papal Magisterium of Popes and Magisterial Teachers that defines what is Church Tradition, and also which determines what is the accepted interpretation of that Tradition and of Scripture.

John Cochlaus (1479 - 1552), a Roman Catholic counter-reformer and opponent of Martin Luther (whose life and work helped spark the Protestant Reformation) said:

"How necessary to us is the authority of the most holy church and of the apostolic see to provide the whole meaning and the authority of Sacred Scripture."

(Cochlaus, *De Auctoritate Ecclesiae et Scripturae adversus Lutherum* (1524), bk. 2, chap. 12, in Tavad, 126)

Therefore, if the Church defines what is Tradition, and also how to interpret Tradition and the Bible, it is the Church that actually holds ultimate authority. This view goes against the testimony of scripture itself as the final and ultimate authority on the faith.

The irony of this view is that prior to the Reformation, even the official position of the Catholic church was that Scripture and the traditional understanding handed down (Tradition) were both harmonious or compatible. Allison comments:

"In Eck, Cochlaus, Pigge, and others, the Roman Catholic Church reacted to the Protestant doctrine of the authority of Scripture. In so doing, it departed from its own traditional perspective of the coincidence of Scripture and its own historical understanding handed down throughout the ages. In its place, the Catholic Church affirmed a novel idea of its own supremacy over Scripture while insisting also on church tradition as another inspired revelation from the Holy Spirit of equal value to the Word of God."

(Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology*, p.92)

This still remains the position of the Roman Catholic Church today, as shown in this pronouncement from the Vatican Council:

"It is a dogma divinely revealed: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks ex cathedra, that is, when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal church, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer will that his church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals; and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the church."

(Dogmatic Decrees Of the Vatican Council Concerning The Catholic Faith and the Church of Christ, 4th session (July 18, 1870), First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, 4, in Schaff, 2:270–71)

Martin Luther wrote against the Roman Catholic church with regards to extra biblical doctrines and the authority of scripture:

"Since, then, God wants no one to feel obligated to hold to anything not offered by Scripture, we should likewise reject all non-Scriptural doctrine. This injunction can be used against the sacrilege of the pope and the papists who ... shamelessly declare that we must accept more than Scripture contains.... Beware of this, and be certain that all you need to accept is in Scripture. But concerning anything not found

in Scripture, you should say ...: When did God ever make that statement?"
(Martin Luther, WLS, 1:85)

Even Protestants and Evangelicals today can slip into this error by holding some other source of authority over the written word - such as influential pastors, leaders, other books, social media posts, pop-culture wisdom or private opinions. Some charismatics functionally look to modern words of prophecy as sources of revelation, chasing after modern day self-proclaimed 'prophets' instead of picking up what we know is surely God's Word. Some look to cultural gurus such as Oprah or Jordan Peterson or politicians for advice and wisdom on life's issues instead of what God's Word says. In all these ways and more we functionally deny the authority of God's Word.

Have you ever deferred to some other authority to settle a matter of faith and practice which was not based on or derived from the ultimate authority of scripture? Have you ever been persuaded by or simply uncritically accepted the opinion or teaching of someone on a topic of faith (even this teacher!) without seeing how they based it on the proper interpretation of scripture? If anything or anyone else has ever been your functional ultimate authority, then you have slipped into this error.

Neglect - is perhaps even more subtle. This happens when we close our Bibles and function in the world without the light and guidance of God's Word. It happens when we trust our instincts and gut more than we trust the wisdom of God's revealed Word. It happens when we forget what God has said and replace it with what the world says or what our friends or family say or what our own personal preferences are.

Sadly, many Christians today live with closed Bibles and do not daily meditate upon His Word and diligently apply themselves to correctly understand and apply God's Word to their lives. Thus, they neglect the authority of Scripture by treating it as something less than the ultimate authority to which we are held accountable in all areas of our life.

Ask yourself - is there an area of my life where I have not sought to apply the truth of God's Word? Is there an area of my beliefs or lifestyle where I do not know what God says about it? Does my Bible stay unopened daily? Do I forget to apply myself to the study and memorization of God's Word? If so, then you may have also slipped into this area.

The Lord delights in everyone who 'trembles at His Word' (Isa. 66:2).

"Throughout the history of the church the greatest preachers have been those who have recognized that they have no authority in themselves and have seen their task as being to explain the words of Scripture and apply them clearly to the lives of their hearers. Their preaching has drawn its power not from the proclamation of their own Christian experiences or the experiences of others, nor from their own opinions, creative ideas, or rhetorical skills, but from God's powerful words. Essentially they stood in the pulpit, pointed to the biblical text, and said in effect to the congregation, "This is what this verse means. Do you see that meaning here as

well? Then you must believe it and obey it with all your heart, for God himself, your Creator and your Lord, is saying this to you today!" Only the written words of Scripture can give this kind of authority to preaching."
(Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.82)

Herman Bavinck says of scripture:

"It was not only 'God-breathed' at the time it was written; it is 'God-breathing.' It was divinely inspired, not merely while it was written, God breathing through the writers; but also, whilst it is being read, God breathing through the Scripture," so that "divine inspiration, accordingly, is a permanent attribute of Holy Scripture."
(Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, 1:385)

God continues to speak to us in and through Scripture today.

So the question to us is - are we listening to God speaking to us through the Bible and do we tremble at His Word?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Because authority can be abused, isn't it dangerous to talk about biblical authority?
- What about when Christians feel that God speaks to them directly apart from the Bible? Is this to be considered as authoritative?
- What about other religions that claim their books are authoritative? Is it possible that both the Bible and some other books can be Divinely authoritative?
- How does your life practically show that you really believe in the inspiration and authority of the Bible? What are some ways that this doctrine impacts the way you live your life and shapes your beliefs?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- [Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority and Authenticity](#) by James R. White
- [God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters](#) by Matthew Barrett
- [Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine](#) by R.C. Sproul