

Systematic Theology Pt. 4

Bibliology (C)

“Inspiration”

I. The Necessity and Importance of Inspiration

- If the Bible is not inspired by God, how can it be a revelation from God?
- If God has revealed Himself, but the record of that revelation is not accurately recorded, then God’s revelation in scripture is subject to question.
- Hence, inspiration guarantees the accuracy of the revelation.

II. The Biblical Data on Inspiration

- The doctrine of inspiration is not forced on the Bible, the Bible itself claims to be inspired by God.
- Some say the Bible’s self-testimony is not valid.

A. Inspiration in the Old Testament

- Deut. 18:18 - God said to Moses, “I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the everything I command him.”
- 2 Sam. 23:2 - The last words of David, “The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue.”
- Isa. 59:21 - “...my words that I have put in your mouth...”
- Matt. 22:43 - Jesus said, “How is it then that David speaking by the spirit, calls Him Lord?”
- Acts 4:24-25 - Peter referred to “God... who spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David...”

B. Inspiration in the New Testament

- The New Testament writers considered their writings to be inspired Scripture. 2 Pet. 3:15-16
- Paul cites the gospel of Matthew as Scripture along with the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, asserting, “For the Scripture says [in Duet. 25:4], ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and, [Matt. 10:10] ‘The worker deserves his wages’”(Tim. 5:18). -Norman Geisler
- Paul declared in 1 Corinthians that his “words” are “taught by the Spirit” (2:13), for “*God has revealed it to us by his Spirit*” (v. 10). *The apostle concludes his exhortation by saying, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1Cor. 14:37).* -Norman Geisler
- John the apostle opens the book of Revelation with “*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him*” (Rev. 1:1), and he concludes the book with the declaration that he is a prophet (alongside the Old Testament prophets): “*I [the angel speaking to John] am a fellow servant, with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book*” (Rev. 22:9).

-Norman Geisler

C. Two Key Texts on Inspiration

- 2 Tim. 3:16 - “All scripture is given by inspiration of God...” or literally, “Breathed out by God” or “God-breathed”

- The entire Bible is God-Breathed! The Bible is the result of the Breath of God. Yes, God used human authors, but the Bible originated as the action of God who breathed it out. God is the ultimate cause, and the scriptures are the authoritative result.

Note: Inspiration applies only to the original autographs of scripture.

- 2 Pet. 1:20-21

Key verse 21, “moved by the Holy Spirit.”

“This verse tells us as much as any single verse how God used the human writers to produce the Bible. The Holy Spirit moved or bore them along. The use of the same verb in Acts 27:15 illuminates our understanding of what is meant by “bearing” or “moving” the human writers. Just before the ship was taking Paul to Rome was wrecked on the Island of Malta, it ran into fierce storm. Though experienced men, the sailors could not guide it, so they finally had to let the wind take the ship wherever it blew. In the same manner as the ship was driven, directed, or carried about by the wind, God directed and moved the human writers He used to produce the books of the Bible. Though the wind was the strong force that moved the ship along, the sailors were not asleep and inactive. Similarly, the Holy Spirit was the guiding force that directed the writers who, nevertheless, played their own active roles in writing the Scriptures.”

-Charles Ryrie

III. Definition of Inspiration

Inspiration may be defined as the Holy Spirit’s superintending over the writers so that while writing according to their own styles and personalities the result was God’s Word written- authoritative, trust worthy, and free from error in the original autographs. Two definitions by prominent evangelical theologians are as follows:

Benjamin B. Warfield: *“Inspiration is, therefore, usually defined as a supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given Divine trustworthiness.”*

- Edward J. Young: *“Inspiration is a superintendence of God the Holy Spirit over the writers of the Scriptures, as a result of which these Scriptures possess Divine authority and trustworthiness and, possessing such Divine authority and trustworthiness, are free from error.”* -Paul Enns

- A proper definition must be formed from the data taken from Scripture.

- *“Inspiration is...God’s superintendence of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs.”* -Charles C. Ryrie

- There are several important elements that belong in a proper definition of inspiration: (1) the divine element - God the Holy Spirit superintended the writers, ensuring the accuracy of the writing; (2) the human element- human authors wrote according to their individual styles and personalities; (3) the result of the divine-human authorship is the recording of God’s truth without error; (4) inspiration extends to the selection of words by the writers; (5) inspiration relates to the original manuscripts.

- *“Inspiration is the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit, who through the different personalities and literary styles of the chosen human authors invested the very words of the original books of Holy Scripture, alone and in their entirety, as the very Word of God without error in all that they teach or imply (including history and science), and the Bible is thereby the infallible rule and final authority for faith and practice of all believers.”* -Norman Geisler

IV. False Views of Inspiration

1. Natural Inspiration. This view teaches that there is nothing supernatural about biblical inspiration; the writers of Scripture were simply men of unusual ability who wrote the books of the Bible in the same way that an individual would write any other book. The writers were men of unusual religious insight, writing on religious subjects in the same way a man like Shakespeare would.

2. Spiritual Illumination. The illumination view suggests that some Christians may have spiritual insight that although similar to other Christians is greater in degree. In this view any devout Christian, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, can be the author of inspired Scripture. Adherents to this view suggest it is not the writings that are inspired, rather it is the writers who are inspired.

3. Partial or Dynamic Inspiration. The partial inspiration theory teaches that the parts of the Bible related to matters of faith and practice are inspired whereas matters related to history, science, chronology, or other non-faith matters may be in error. In this view God preserves the message of salvation amid other material that may be in error. In this view God preserves the message of salvation amid other material that may be in error. The partial theory rejects both verbal inspiration (that inspiration extends to the words of Scripture) and plenary inspiration (that inspiration extends to the entirety of Scripture). Despite the presence of errors in Scripture, partial theorists teach that an imperfect medium is a sufficient guide to salvation. Problematic questions may be posed to adherents of this view: what parts of the bible are inspired and what parts contain errors? Who determines what parts of the Bible are trustworthy and what parts contain errors? (Errantists differ with one another on their listings of errors.) How can doctrine be separated from history? (For example, the narratives about Jesus’ virgin birth contain both history and doctrine.) How can the Bible be trustworthy in one area while in error in another area?

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4. Conceptual Inspiration. This view suggests that only the concepts or ideas of the writers are inspired but not the words. In this view God gave an idea or concept to the writer who then penned the idea in his own words. According to this view there can be errors in Scripture because the choice of words is left to the writer and is not superintended by God. In response, however, it is noted that Jesus (Matt. 5:18) and Paul (1 Thess. 2:13) both affirmed verbal inspiration. Pache rightly concludes, *“ideas can be conceived of and transmitted only by means of words. If the thought communicated to man is divine and of the nature of a revelation, the form in which it is expressed is of prime significance. It is impossible to dissociate the one from the other.”*

5. Divine Dictation. The dictation view states that God dictated the words of Scripture and the men wrote them down in a passive manner, being mere amanuenses (secretaries) who wrote only the words they were told to write. This claim would render the Bible similar to the Koran which supposedly was dictated in Arabic from heaven. Although some parts of the Bible were given by dictation (cf. Ex. 20:1, “Then God spoke all these words”), the books of the Bible reveal a distinct contrast in style and vocabulary, suggesting the authors were not mere automatons. The beginning student in Greek will quickly discover the difference in style between the gospel of John and the gospel of Luke. John wrote in a simple style with limited vocabulary, whereas Luke wrote with an expanded vocabulary and a more sophisticated style. If the dictation theory were true, the styles of the books should be uniform.

6. Neo-Orthodox Opinion. The neo-orthodox view emphasizes that the Bible is not to be exactly equated with the Word of God because God does not speak in mere propositions. God does not reveal mere facts about Himself; He reveals Himself. The Bible is not the substance of the Word of God, but rather the witness to the Word of God. It becomes the Word of God as the reader encounters Christ in his own subjective experience. Moreover, the Bible is enshrouded in myth necessitating a demythologizing of the Bible to discover what actually took place. The historicity of the events is unimportant. For example, whether or not Christ actually rose from the dead in time and space is unimportant to the neo-orthodox adherent. The important thing is the experiential encounter that is possible even though the Bible is tainted with factual errors. In this view the authority is the subjective experience of the individual rather than the Scriptures themselves.

To these views the evangelical Christian responds with contrasting points. The Bible is the objective and authoritative Word of God whether or not a person responds to it (John 8:47; 12:48).

Furthermore, there are no objective criteria for evaluating what would constitute a “legitimate” encounter with God.

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