

## **No Other Book**

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A couple months ago I wrote an article on how the Bible was composed and why we believe the books that are included are the only books that we need. That article explored the composition of what is called the canon, or standard rule, of Scripture. It showed that there are certain criteria that all the included 66 books of the Bible meet to be considered a coherent canon. This month I would like to bring the second of a three-part article series on the Bible. This second installment considers the inspiration and authority of Scripture for Christian living. The third article will talk about why certain books are not included in the canon of Scripture.

Do you remember that moment or that process in which God showed you beyond a shadow of doubt that He is God and that you need Him, that time in which you became “saved,” a follower of Christ, or whatever other way you wish to describe this adventurous journey you now walk each day? That was a great time, wasn’t it? There was a sense of calm and security in that time, but yet, there was also a sense of in trepidation. Now what? God saved me from His wrath and my sin and the death that would ensue into His life and an eternal bliss with Him, but now what? How then should I live?

These two doctrines of inspiration and authority help us to lay down a rule of faith and of life. You see, what we believe directly affects how we live. If it doesn’t, then it’s not really faith. Abraham’s faith

made him leave his parents and culture and go into the middle of nowhere, all the while trusting God would take him to the promised land. Faith is action, not simply affirming a belief system. So how do we live now that we know Christ? The Bible was written so that we might have a road map, if you will, a way to get from point A to point B, and so on. God not only saved us, but has prescribed the very best way to live in His Word. So, how do we get to that place of knowing that the Bible we hold in our hands every day and read every day is directly from Him? That’s where these doctrines come into view.

First, we will deal with the inspiration of the Bible. There is internal evidence that the Bible is inspired by God, which is why we call it the Word of God. The Bible claims to be God’s Word, and so we must ask about the process of its writing. That is what the term inspiration considers, how God and humanity worked together to produce the Bible. The Bible tells us a few things about inspiration internally.

Consider the most common appeal to inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 where the special term “God-breathed” is used to describe Scripture. The first part of Paul’s statement affirms inspiration and the second part affirms authority. Let’s deal with the first part. The word for “God-breathed” is sometimes translated “inspired.” The idea of this word is that God Himself spoke these words, the words in Scripture. However, the Bible was written by human beings. So

inspiration seeks to meld these two points together and understand, as best we can, the inspiration of Scripture.

There are up to five different understandings of inspiration ranging from God barely getting his ideas into the writing of Scripture to God directly dictating the words to humans who were like machines. These two extremes, of course, do not seem to take into account that God inspired the Bible and used human beings to write it down. I come down on what is called Verbal Plenary Inspiration, the fourth out of five from barely inspired to direct dictation. Plenary means full and so the definition of this is that the Bible to the words themselves is fully inspired by and breathed by God. God made sure even with the varied vocabularies and occupations and cultures of the biblical authors that His words were recorded in the Scriptures.

Inspiration is the understanding that when I come to Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, I come to the very words of God, spoken by Him into my life. Therefore, every word is important, not just the principles and concepts in the Bible. This is why we do word studies. If we did not believe in Verbal Plenary Inspiration, there would be no need to discover the contextual meaning of the words we read in God's Word.

Returning to those verses in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, you can see from the context that Paul is referring when he says Scripture to the Old Testament. So how can I claim inspiration for the New Testament also? In another place in the New Testament, 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul calls Scripture the quotation from Deuteronomy 25:4, but it is also a quotation from Luke 10:7! That's from the New Testament. In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter comments that Paul's writings are hard to understand,

but then gives them equal footing with the other Scriptures, the Old Testament. The writers of the New Testament realized that there was a special inspiration in their recording of the life and teachings of Jesus.

When we consider inspiration, and there is so much more than just what I have said here, we realize that the whole of our Bible is inspired by God, literally breathed out by Him for our benefit. He speaks to us. He spoke back then and He speaks now. But Scripture itself is His full and complete revelation, as we discussed in the article on canonicity a couple of months ago. Everything we need to know God is contained in those 66 books. No more, no less. When we look at how God led the writers of Old and New Testaments by His Holy Spirit to record the exact words He wanted and yet at the same time allowed for their own personalities, we stand amazed at this wonderful Word of God. There's no other book like it in all the world!

Let us now look at the authority of Scripture. While inspiration explains how God recorded His word for each of us today through human authors with a special inspiration of His Spirit in those authors' lives, authority is concerned with the importance of the Bible in our lives and with its credibility for us. The Bible must have the authority to speak into our lives. That is what we discuss next. Look at the second part of 2 Timothy 3:16 and see the part about the Bible being authoritative. You see that Paul explained to us that the Bible is useful for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness.

Those four categories that Paul lists speak about doctrine and about practice. The writers of the New Testament and the Church considered for the longest time that

the Bible is the only authority for Christian belief and practice. But what right does the Bible have to tell us how to live? That is the understanding we gain through speaking of authority now.

Authority of Scripture concerns the reasons that we have for trusting in Scripture explicitly above all other things. When we need advice, comfort, encouragement, rebuke, or anything else in our walk with God, the Bible is the best place to go. That is because it is authoritative. Authority speaks of the Bible in high honor, as the greatest book that was ever written. It would make sense that the Great God would speak the greatest Word. No other book in all of creation is as helpful to humanity as the Bible.

The Bible's authority starts with its unparalleled and matchless unity for its category among books. No other collection of books contains such a coherent unity while demonstrating such a diversity in languages, authors and cultures. When a person considers all the time and people in the Bible's authorship, there is no question the book is bar none the most authoritative. The Bible also produces an authority on ethics greater than any at the time of writing. The key is that the ethics were not surpassed at the time of writing. Atheists will argue the Bible is rife with ethical quandaries, citing examples such as God calling Israel to kill all of the people in Canaan when they took the land as well as several others. Each of these issues that they bring up are red herrings. We approach the Bible with an understanding that these seeming contradictions or inconsistencies or questionable ethics can be studied and explained. The Bible is not an easy book to interpret by far, and yet its overarching message is simple and complete.

Authority also speaks of the historical accuracy and, as many have suggested, its correctness about each discipline that is intertwined in its pages, such as science and other disciplines. One of the keys to understanding the aspect of science or archaeological inconsistencies some contend the Bible contains is to remember that the perspective of the author and the time of writing must be taken into account. For instance, one example is that of saying the sun rises and sets when actually the world revolves around the sun. From the writer's perspective, this is the most scientific statement in that time by anyone on the earth. So we must take this into account when looking at the science of the Bible. I would firmly add that the Bible is not a science textbook. It is a revelation from God through the understanding of humans. We are finding as we discover more and more in archaeology that the geography and historical people are actually correct and that each discovery helps to firmly fix the Bible's authority in these matters.

One of my favorite points about the Bible's authority is actually an external evidence. The Bible has been around for a long time, for thousands of years from its origins until its completion in the first century AD. It has suffered through attacks upon it, to wipe it out of existence and history. As we looked at the canon of Scripture last time, I showed that the Bible has come through a lot of historical destruction and stood the test of time. That fact is another point in favor of its authority. God has not only allowed His Word to continue through the ages, but has actually protected and preserved it for us today! Through fires, governmental attempts to destroy it, and so many other disasters, the Bible has stood and even advanced against such devastation. It is God's Word

that He spoke long ago, and can still speak to us today because He does not let it fail or fade away with the passage of time.

While some would contend that the Bible contains inconsistencies and wrong things, I would say that each one of these contradictions or consistencies has an answer or solution. Sometimes, the solution is to let go of one's preconceived notions. For instance, the Bible contains what we call predictive prophecy in which God historically calls His shots. If a person does not believe in this, that person would say that the prophecies do not tell of the future and therefore are not predictive. They would say that they became self-fulfilling prophecies. Or perhaps the dates for one author might be different than the dates for another author. Sometimes, we must compare calendars and other avenues of understanding to reach a solution to a perceived contradiction. Perhaps one author is referring to the Hebrew calendar while another author refers to a Roman calendar.

I want to end by examining one more issue in inspiration. Often linked with inspiration are the issues of inerrancy of Scripture and infallibility of Scripture. Inerrancy speaks of the trustworthiness of Scripture while infallibility speaks of the faultlessness of Scripture. Many have come to suggest that the message may be infallible but the text itself may have inconsistencies or errors. In my studies, I have dealt with the original languages of the Bible. In my third year of Greek in my undergrad, I was practicing a discipline called textual criticism where a scholar compares different manuscripts to one another to understand a correct reading. Let me clarify my personal understanding on these two issues of infallibility and inerrancy.

I personally like to use the word inerrant because it is decisive in suggesting that there are no mistakes or errors of any kind in God's Word. If God really did inspire it, there would be no errors, because there is no error in God. I hold that the original autographs of Scripture, the original readings or writings on parchments are indeed both infallible and inerrant. However, the copies, or manuscripts, that we have do contain errors. Don't get too alarmed, though! These errors are almost always detectable and usually are spelling errors. And none of these grammatical errors occur in any major doctrinal understanding the Bible sets forth. So now you can relax and trust in God's Word. As I have studied textual criticism in depth, I can affirm that I believe that the originals were perfect in every way. Now, we do not have the original autographs of Scripture any more, but God has actually preserved His Word better through copies!

Copies do two things to help us make sure we have the perfect and unhindered Word of God that was originally penned. First of all, if there was only one copy, someone could own it or destroy it, and it would not be available to the whole world and permeate all cultures and nations. If one person could control the original text, that owner would get to decide who can come in contact with the Bible. But that is not the case. On the same point, if there was only one copy, it could so easily be destroyed, but if there are thousands, it is virtually impossible to destroy God's Word. This is one way copies preserve God's Word for us today. Second, as we compare copies, we can see how scholars were both excellent copyists and how some have made mistakes in spelling or by skipping a line, or the other ways that a scholar could make a mistake in copying. The more copies we have of a text, the more

we can evaluate and compare those copies to arrive at the most likely original reading. This is a very firm process and you should have no worries about its effect in maintaining a pure word from God.

Finally, our understanding of the inspiration and authority of Scripture should cause us to have great joy and to worship God for His Word. God did not leave us on our own to our own devices to walk this life out. He provided His perfect Word, preserved it through time, and it gives us understanding as it is our authority for how to live for God with everything in us. God inspired people to write the things we would need to be told over and over because they don't come naturally to us. He had these people preserve the most important things we could ever know to know God and serve Him. The Bible is like no other book in all of creation. It serves us in our deep desire to serve God. Let us allow God's Word to speak to us so that we can change the world for God. Let's not worship the Bible because it is such an accurate and authoritative word. Let's worship the God who wrote that wonderful Word and reveals Himself to us. The Bible leads us to God, and that is why it is like no other book!