

QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE

How do we talk about Biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility? How did these ideas emerge?

*2 Timothy 3:16—“All scripture is *inspired by God* (God-breathed in some translations) and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work...”

Interpretation: as a result of divine inspiration, some believe that the Bible is completely without error and that its statements are always true and accurate regarding anything it speaks about, including theological assertions, science and history. (Dogma of inerrancy and infallibility)

***To many Christians, the word “inspired” or “God-breathed” mean something very close to God dictated. Adam Hamilton suggests that inspiration is not dictation but divine influence on the writer and the reader.**

*“Inspired by God” appears only in 2 Timothy—Greek words, *theopneutos*, meaning God, and *pneo*, meaning “to breathe out” or “to blow”—these words appear nowhere else in the Greek language until long after Paul’s time.

*Scholars concur that it is a mystery when it comes to understanding exactly what Paul meant. Some suggest the following:

Genesis 2	God forms the human. God breathes into him. He becomes a living being.	Scripture	Authors write scriptures. God breathes on them. The words come to life.
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*No clear definition of what Paul meant but can say that the apostles believed the sacred writings were influenced by the Holy Spirit in some, that those writers spoke to the people in their time but the Holy Spirit would continue to use these words and give them new meaning, making them alive and active and useful unto today.

How are we inspired by God today—a feeling or nudge, a friend or loved one, a special book, music, worship, a gorgeous sunset—none of the New Testament authors, except John in Revelation, claimed an extraordinary inspiration beyond what is available to anyone who believes and is led by the Spirit.

- **The divine influence on the writers was not too different from the way God inspires or influences us through the Spirit today.**

DEFINITIONS:

**verbal, plenary inspiration doctrine*—God dictated and influenced the choice of every word and every idea, so that the words written were literally words of God.

1. The modern adoption of this doctrine came in response to the Enlightenment when those thinkers began to critically study the Bible and question virtually everything in it.

2. Christians responded by articulating this doctrine of inspiration. Why—because if inspiration means that God chose every word, and God is all-knowing and without error, and totally trustworthy, then the book he authored must be without error and totally true and trustworthy—the Bible then is above question!

3. Verbal, plenary inspiration and the doctrine of inerrancy and infallibility go hand in hand.

4. Problems

a. These doctrines are not taught in the Bible, nor in the church creeds, and extend way beyond what Paul meant when he used “inspired by God.”

b. Must recognize that some things taught in scripture may not represent God’s character nor his will for us today and may never have captured God’s will (slavery, misogyny, genocide)

HAMILTON’S CONCLUSIONS:

The books of the Bible were written by people who were shaped by their own historical times and the limitations of their knowledge. They wrote as they drew upon the data they had access to and based upon the needs of their particular community. They were devout followers of God trying to understand God’s will—yet they were human beings who were influenced by the Holy Spirit.

The litmus test for divine inspiration: the Holy Spirit continues to speak today. The scriptures are inspired and inspire. The words with the Spirit’s power are useful “for teaching, for reproof. . . . 2 Timothy 3:16.

***The way the Bible works –it is both the Word of God and the words of the people.**

IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD?

*John 1:1, 14—“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us. . . .”

*Jesus Christ is the definitive, unmitigated Word of God—the only Word from God that does not come to us through the minds, the ears, and the hearts of fallible human authors.

*The Word of God by which all other words of God are measured must be the Word that was made flesh, Jesus.

*“the word of God” appears approximately 49 times in the Bible (“the word of the Lord” some 260 times) and, as used in scripture, it is almost always a message from God—an attempt to reveal God’s purposes, character, and will.

*“the word of God” does not seem to refer to something written down in a scroll or book.

***N.T. writers always referred to “the word of God” as the message of the good news of Jesus Christ. This word of God is inerrant and infallible and fully inspired.**

Consider:
Luke 3:2-3

Luke 8—parable of the sower—“The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11) and the seed is the preaching and teaching of the good news of the kingdom.

Acts 4:31

Acts 8:14

Acts 10:38-43

Karl Barth, in attempting to answer the question of whether the Bible is the Word of God, said: “The Bible contains the word of God found within the words of its human authors.”

IS THE BIBLE INERRANT AND INFALLIBLE?

Inerrancy—means without error or incapable of error.

Infallible—means that the Bible does not deceive, it is incapable of being wrong.

These words have become a kind of litmus test for some Christians regarding the orthodoxy of one’s faith.

***Definitive statement on inerrancy** drafted in 1978 by 300 conservative evangelical theologians, biblical scholars, pastors, and laity who met in Chicago and produced the “Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy.”

**This statement has 19 articles, summed up by Norman Geisler who wrote: “inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs (original document of a biblical book as drafted by its original author) and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with social, physical or life sciences.”*

Why not accept this doctrine of inerrancy?

*The Bible doesn’t teach it.

*The Bible can easily be demonstrated as containing errors and inconsistencies.

*Inerrantists acknowledge that there are inconsistencies regarding modern science, archaeology, and history but they smooth over these errors by saying that science, or archaeology, or history is wrong and the Bible is right regardless of opposing evidence or that these errors occurred from a copyist of the original manuscript.

In other words, the biblical teachings regarding creation and the flood are accurate regardless of what science can discern.

Consider discrepancies in the biblical stories:

Matthew 28

Mark 16

Luke 24

John 20-21

Two questions supporters of inerrancy ask:

*How could God, in his providence, allow biblical authors to make mistakes?

*If there is an error anywhere in the Bible, can we believe or trust anything the Bible says?

What should our doctrine of scripture be?

*Articles of Religion adopted by the Church of England in 1571 and held by United Methodists which all started with God, not scripture.

*Article 6: *“Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of an*

*The statement avoids trying to define inspiration.

*It makes no claim that the Bible is without inconsistency or error.

*Points of doctrine and moral imperatives that are not clearly found in scripture must not be considered requirements of God nor necessary to our salvation.

*Wesleyan theology tells us that Scripture, interpreted with the help of church tradition, reason, and experience, helps us to know and understand God and God’s will for our lives. The Bible is the primary source document for understanding God’s heart, character, and will.

***We read scripture in the light of the life, ministry, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We address inconsistencies by asking questions, wrestling with the biblical texts, and ultimately, letting Jesus serve as the final Word by which other words of scripture are to be judged.**