

## A Theological Exploration of the Scriptures

### I. Origin

The Scriptures<sup>1</sup> have their origin in God Himself.<sup>2</sup> Just as the sun's rays travel from the sun to the earth in the form of light and heat, so God's word traveled from Him to the earth in various forms in the past but is now contained in the written Scripture which brings forth spiritual light and life. Just as the rays of the sun are *part* of the sun but not the sun in *total*, so the Word of God is *part* of God, but it is not God.<sup>3</sup> The purity of Scripture is connected to the purity of God; if one is tainted, so is the other.<sup>4</sup>

Though Scripture was written by the hands of men, God was there overseeing and directing the writing, like a father helping a young child write a letter to her grandparents. Scripture's authors were taught by God the words to say through His sovereign governance.<sup>5</sup> The writers of Scripture, through a special communion with the Holy Spirit, "spoke from God" and not of themselves.<sup>6</sup> God did not put these men into "a state of suspended animation", but He used all of "their gifts of training and native talent" as they wrote His revelation.<sup>7</sup> Though God commissioned humans and was pleased to allow their personal accents to be visible in the text, He kept the Scriptures from error. Thus, the Scriptures were not given to us through the erroneous "mechanical dictation theory" but instead were written in real life situations through the pens of real men who were inspired (*theopneustos*) by God.<sup>8</sup>

If God is *not* the source of Scripture, then we have no reason to read it. The Bible makes many claims to be from God.<sup>9</sup> If this is not the case, then the whole book is built on a falsehood and should be discounted as important for any purpose other than literature or a sociological/anthropological look at Judeo-Christian history.

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Scripture and the Bible are referring to the Protestant *closed* canon of 66 books

<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16 English Standard Version

<sup>3</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Volume One: First Through Tenth Topics*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1992), 63

<sup>4</sup> E.J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth: Some Thoughts On The Biblical Doctrine Of Inspiration*. (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1963), 86-87

<sup>5</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 57

<sup>6</sup> Vern Sheridan Poythress *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 141

<sup>7</sup> Young, *Thy Word Is Truth*, 69

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 65 & 69

<sup>9</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:21, John 10:35 & Luke 24:44-45 and any time a prophet says "Thus saith the Lord".

The source of Scripture is what gives it its value and authority.<sup>10</sup> If Scripture is solely written by men then it has no more value or authority than any other book. But if it is written by God it is like no other book and should be treated as such, contra higher criticism and other hermeneutics of doubt and skepticism.

## II. Purpose

The primary purpose of Scripture is the revelation of God to humanity.<sup>11</sup> While creation attests to the existence and nature of God (general revelation),<sup>12</sup> only Holy Scripture (special revelation) gives a *consummate*, *sure*, and *final* picture of God this side of eternity.<sup>13</sup> Without the special revelation of Scripture, humanity would grope around in darkness, not understanding or knowing God or even themselves.<sup>14</sup> Thus, all religions not established in the Bible are humanity's feeble attempt at worshipping god(s) of their own creation.<sup>15</sup> Because Scripture is a *closed* canon, there are no more books being added to it, any "new" revelation, whether through humans, angels or (what may appear as) the Holy Spirit is to be promptly rejected.<sup>16</sup>

Secondarily, the Bible is the only guide for the way of salvation, how to worship God, how to operate the church, as well as how we are to live our lives. Put another way, the Bible is the standard and rule to govern every aspect of our lives in the only ways that are pleasing to God. Principles and instructions for matters of sexuality, marriage, gender roles, racial/ethnic differences, business ethics, and childrearing are in the Bible, along with matters of doctrine, corporate worship services, evangelism, prayer, and church polity.<sup>17</sup> The Bible is not just for Sunday morning; it applies to every sphere of our existence.<sup>18</sup> Scripture is the lens through which we should view *everything*. Nothing is outside of the scope of Scripture.

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<sup>10</sup> G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2004), 10

<sup>11</sup> John 5:39, 1 John 1:1-4 & Revelation 1:1-3

<sup>12</sup> Romans 1:18-20

<sup>13</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Volume One*, 134-143

<sup>14</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. One: Prolegomena*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 344-346

<sup>15</sup> Romans 1:21-25

<sup>16</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* Chapter I Para. I & VI and Galatians 1:8-9. Space does not permit me to speak on the revelatory gifts of the Holy Spirit such as prophecy, words of knowledge and words of wisdom in depth. These gifts do not provide "new" revelation but Spirit inspired illumination and application of Scripture to a person(s) and/or church. The belief in their continuing operation in the present-day church does not undermine the sufficiency of Scripture if they are conducted in the Biblical manner laid out in 1 Corinthians 14.

<sup>17</sup> MacArthur, "Embracing the Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture" in *Think Biblically!*, 22-26

<sup>18</sup> John Murray "The Finality and Sufficiency of Scripture" in *Collected Writing of John Murray 1: The Claims of*

Beyond being a divine revelation of God or sacred manual for human existence, the Scriptures are also “living and powerful.”<sup>19</sup> The Bible “generates faith and piety in the minds of its hearers, as well as invincible firmness in its professors, and always victoriously triumphs over the kingdom of Satan...”<sup>20</sup> The Word of God is a weapon against sin, Satan and the world, it is a source of comfort for the afflicted, it can be a heart piercing spear of conviction for a sinner, a shining light during dark times, a wellspring of hope, it gives motivation for holy living, and it is the primary tool in “the renewing of [the Christian’s] mind.”<sup>21</sup> The Bible will all of this for the reader and more. Reading Scripture is like breathing in the breath of God, it always accomplishes God’s purposes in the reader.<sup>22</sup>

Scripture must thus be rightly *interpreted*, taking into consideration the historical settings and audience, the linguistic style, genre, anthropomorphism, etc. The science of hermeneutics is vital toward “rightly handling the word of truth.”<sup>23</sup> Some things are plain in the text, while other matters may appear complicated and puzzling. The most reliable hermeneutical key to understanding the Scriptures is the Scriptures. Scripture interprets Scripture; what may not be fully clear in one area is better expounded elsewhere in the Scriptures.<sup>24</sup> This is where the gifts of human intellect and reason, empowered by the Holy Spirit, are important. We are called to “love the Lord... with all [our] mind”<sup>25</sup> and Biblical interpretation is an avenue to use our intellects to glorify God. Having a pious heart does not mean having an empty head.

### III. Inerrancy & Infallibility

Biblical infallibility testifies that “Holy Scripture is a sure, safe and reliable rule and guide in all matters” and inerrancy attests that “Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.”<sup>26</sup> What we have in Scripture is exactly what happened historically, is accurate on all counts, and is the very *Word* of

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*Truth* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1976), 21

<sup>19</sup> Hebrews 4:12 New King James Version

<sup>20</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Volume One*, 64

<sup>21</sup> Romans 12:2 Holman Christian Standard bible

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah 55:11

<sup>23</sup> 2 Timothy 2:15 English Standard Version

<sup>24</sup> *The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith 1689* Article 1 Para. 9

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 22:37 Holman Christian Standard Bible

<sup>26</sup> *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*

God. This doctrine makes the principles in Scripture absolute and not just reflections of the time period during which they were written. Fornication, lust, and lying are as sinful now as they were 2,000 years ago.

The inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures must be affirmed and believed as they are not mere “peripheral” matters but are the “whole compass of” the Christian faith.<sup>27</sup> Our understanding of God is interconnected with our understanding of the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible. If God is not *God* enough to preserve His Word throughout the transcribing, translating, and all else that has happened through the ages, then He is not a God that deserves our *time* or our *worship*. Who would read a book that was supposedly written by George Washington or Winston Churchill but turned out to have been written by an imposter and was full of factual errors? Why should we read, let alone care about, the Bible if it has errors and falsehoods weaved through it? Scripture is like a chain; one weak link destroys it all.

It must be made clear that Biblical inerrancy and infallibility only apply to the *original manuscripts*.<sup>28</sup> God has chosen, in His wisdom, for the originals to not survive the ages. While we do not have the originals, God has providentially given a supply of hundreds of thousands of copies of the original manuscripts. These copies are *not* free from error, but contain *minor* omissions and other scribal mistakes that are typical of copying a document.<sup>29</sup> Through *textual criticism*, as opposed to higher criticism, scholars are able to compare and contrast the different manuscripts, correcting errors and mistakes.<sup>30</sup> Because the copyist errors are of a minuscule nature, usually involving issues of numbers, dates, but not doctrine, scholars have been able to piece together what the originals said in full.<sup>31</sup>

The inerrancy, infallibility and ultimate authority of Scripture do not rest on the mountain of scholarship that support this view, supernatural confirmation via miraculous healings, signs and wonders, or even logical deduction rooted in the sovereignty of God. No, the “full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth of Scripture and its divine authority, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness...in our hearts.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>John Murray, “The Infallibility of Scripture” in *Collected Writing of John Murray 1: The Claims of Truth* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1976), 15

<sup>28</sup> *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*

<sup>29</sup> Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, 56

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 57-58

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 61

<sup>32</sup> *The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith 1689* Article 1 Para. 5

Christ said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth.”<sup>33</sup> Biblical inerrancy and infallibility are confirmed by the Holy Spirit’s witness in our hearts. We believe the Bible because the Holy Spirit testifies within us that this is indeed the very Word of God; all else is secondary confirmation to this fact.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, if Scripture is inaccurate, then the Spirit’s witness is as well.<sup>35</sup>

As we affirm the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture we must be honest about the fact that there do *appear* to be some contradictions in Scripture.<sup>36</sup> There are no *true* contradictions in Scripture at all; there are no more than a dozen places that to our finite and sinful minds *appear* to be issues. We should not see this as a hole in the doctrines of inerrancy and infallibility but a window into the nature of God and the nature of humanity. God has chosen for there to be a few areas that we cannot fully make sense of to our liking. This reminds us that He has all of the answers.<sup>37</sup> We are dependent on Him and not our reason, intellect, or scholarship in these areas, but this does not mean we should not explore answers to these questions. In the end, God’s revelation to humanity in Scripture is “perfect”, “trustworthy”<sup>38</sup> and we should put our hope in His word.<sup>39</sup> We can trust that our Bibles are truly the word of God and the light that leads us to Christ.

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<sup>33</sup> John 16:13 Holman Christian Standard Bible

<sup>34</sup> Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 12

<sup>35</sup> Judge Paul Pressler, *A Hill On Which To Die: One Southern Baptist’s Journey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 115

<sup>36</sup> Young, *Thy Word Is Truth*, 59

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 60

<sup>38</sup> Psalm 19:7 Holman Christian Standard Bible

<sup>39</sup> Psalm 119:147 Holman Christian Standard Bible