



New Testament Inspiration and Values Formation

TO: LEGISLATORS

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How one views the inspiration of Scripture—was it penned by God or is it a fabrication of man—is critically important relative to what is deemed authoritative in one's life. I was recently speaking to a friend on the Hill who said "Ralph, you have almost convinced Congressman _____ that Scripture is inspired by God. He realizes that if he agrees with you, then the Bible will become the final arbitrator for his life and policy decisions. You've got him thinking!" He went on to encourage me to continue to work through this with him. What follows is the case for the inspiration of the New Testament; and as illustrated above, this study has huge implications: Where you come down on inspiration will ultimately determine if you are the judge of Scripture or if Scripture is the judge of you. Heavy stuff my friend! My God bless you and buoy your confidence in His Book as a result.

INTRODUCTION

There are several means by which the question of God's inspiration of Scripture should be addressed. The first is by the use of Scripture. Did the authors of the Bible know they were penning Holy Writ or not? Secondly, what is the testimony of the early Church regarding the books that now make up the Bible? And thirdly, how exactly did the canon of Scripture manifest itself? Again, and akin to my above prologue, the outcome of this study is extremely important relative to one's formation of convictions. *If or not the Bible is authoritative in one's principles, values and policy formation stems from if or not one believes the Scriptures are from God. Are they inspired by Him or not?* The late Francis Schaeffer called this the watershed issue of the Christian faith¹. Accordingly the purpose of this week's study is intended to build one's visceral understanding of, and passion regarding the inspiration and authoritativeness of the whole of the New Testament's (NT) 27 books.

HOLDING TO, OR REJECTING INSPIRATION GREATLY IMPACTS VALUE FORMATION

Foundational to one participating in our Members Bible Study is understanding why one should hold the Bible on a pedestal and with great rigor block and protect their schedule for the regular consumption of God's Book. Why do that if you don't believe it is God's Book? Conversely, why do you not (perhaps) discipline yourself to be in Bible study if it is His Book? Fundamental to all of that are one's convictions, or lack thereof regarding the inspiration of Scripture.

When Paul said to the Ephesian Elders whom He had ministered to for over three years, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:17)² (a passage we recently studied in detail) his statement, any and all apostolic statements to this effect, promulgate their presupposition of scriptural inspiration. Paul here expresses his conviction that it is spiritually thwarting and damaging to starve a believer from the spiritual food they so desperately need from the Bible. Such statements are ridiculous if Paul held not to a high view of scriptural inspiration. Elsewhere Paul states that one of the primary roles of a pastor is to teach the Word of God (cf. Eph. 4:11). As one studies the priority of the Pastor-Teacher's job description which is to teach the Scriptures, it bespeaks of a conviction pertaining to their inspiration. Here then are three reasons why one can trust in the *plenary inspiration*³ of all 27 New Testament books.

I. THE TESTIMONY OF THE AUTHORS

If today the whole of the NT is to be taken as the plenary-inspired authoritative, infallible, inerrant, oracle of God (in addition to the OT), then it would stand to reason that the writers whom God spoke through would testify to the same. Such evidence is foundational to the case for inspiration. Note the following in this regard:

MEMBERS WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CONCLUSION OF FIRST-VOTES-BACK (MONDAY OR TUESDAY NIGHT)

THE CAPITOL FAMILY ROOM

DINNER SERVED

SPOUSES WELCOME



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A. THE APOSTLE PAUL. 1 COR. 14:37

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. (Cf. 1 Cor. 2:13, 16; 2 Cor. 2:17).

The Apostle Paul herein testifies that he realized he was writing for God.

B. THE APOSTLE JOHN. REV. 1:1-2

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. (Cf. Rev. 1:10-11; 21:5; 22:6; 22:18, 19).

The Apostle John realizes and testifies that he is penning what Jesus Christ told him to write.

C. THE APOSTLE PETER. 1 PET. 1:12

...these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.

The Apostle Peter testifies that the other Apostles who preached the Gospel did so via the **Holy Spirit**, the message being sent from heaven.

D. JESUS. JOHN 12:48

He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

Jesus speaks of God the Father's judgment for one who rejects what Jesus says.

The discerning skeptic will reason that since the NT did not exist when these men penned the aforementioned

testimonies regarding the inspiration of Scripture, that they must have been referring to the OT. Note however that the Apostles cross-pollinated one another. For instance, Peter testifies that Paul was writing Scripture, Paul testifies that Peter was writing Scripture, etc. Note that in these following passages.

E. PETER TESTIFIES OF PAUL. 2 PET. 3:15,16

And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Peter directly testifies that what Paul wrote was Scripture. What do the skeptics say? Since this is such a strong and straightforward passage of the Apostle Peter attesting to the Apostle Paul's writing of **Scriptures** *graphie*, many liberal theologians (who discount inspiration) have attempted to undermine the epistle's authority by questioning its authorship (by Peter) and by vastly pushing back the date of its writing thereby casting doubt on the legitimacy of this otherwise straightforward confirmation of inspiration. This not-until-the-20th-century attempt to diminish the book's integrity runs cross-grain to 2 Peter's inclusion by the leaders of the second century Church with the other 26 NT books. It's important to note that the Church Fathers were much closer to the book's publication and did not question it.

F. PAUL TESTIFIES OF PETER. 1 THESS. 2:13

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

Paul is referring not only to himself but to the other apostolic preachers as recorded in the birth of the church account located in the Book of Acts. **Heard from us** then is a referral to the other preachers, such as the



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Apostle Peter. Next, note that Jude, Jesus' half brother, makes reference to the authority of the Apostles:

G. JUDE TESTIFIES OF THE APOSTLES. JUDE 17-18

But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts."

Having established this encompassing and universal back and forth apostolic attestation to God's inspiration of their writings, notice in a broader sense that both Paul and Peter attest to the total inspiration of Scripture in their various respective letters. Here are several examples:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (2 Timothy 3:16).

It is very worth noting that liberal theologians attempt to interpret this important passage in another way.

They try to interpret this to mean *All Scripture inspired by God is...* thereby leaving open the possibility that some Scripture is not inspired and therefore it is incumbent upon man to figure out what is and what isn't. Similarly-constructed passages in the Greek NT (Rom. 7:12; 2 Cor. 10:10; 1 Tim. 1:15; 2:2; 4:4; and Heb. 4:17) indicate very convincingly, that from a grammatical perspective such a translation is impossible. **All Scripture is inspired** is the proper translation. Peter adds:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Pet. 1:20-21)

This is a weighty passage in the case for inspiration: That the Bible was not and is not the product of human effort is clearly stated here. The writers were carried or borne along by the Spirit of God. Scripture was **spoke from God**. Now, note some insightful specifics as to what is meant and what is not meant by inspiration:

SPECIFICS ON WHAT INSPIRATION REALLY MEANS

1. IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE WRITERS WERE INSPIRED.

It is **All Scripture** *graphe* that is **inspired** *theopneustos* (or God-breathed). Specifically it's not the writers; it's the Scriptures that are given by inspiration of God. When speaking and scripting apart from the penning of Scripture the writers of the NT were human and subject to fallibility and inaccuracy.⁴

2. IT MEANS THAT GOD WORKED IN UNISON WITH THE WRITER'S MIND.

Sometimes God dictated through the writer (Jeremiah 1:9, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth") but most often God utilized the personality of His Prophet or Apostles.⁵ Note the following quote:

"But, as clearly seen in Scripture itself, God's divine truth more often flowed through the minds, souls, hearts, and emotions of His chosen human instruments. Yet, by whatever means, God divinely superintended the accurate recording of His divinely breathed truth by His divinely chosen men. In a supernatural way, He has provided His divine Word in human words that any person, even a child, can be led by His Holy Spirit to understand sufficiently to be saved."⁶

3. IT MEANS THAT ONLY THE ORIGINAL AUTOGRAPHA⁷ WERE INSPIRED.

Given the fact that none of the original manuscripts (mss.) are in existence today does not pose a problem relative to the inspiration debate: Copying scribes could and did err. Being pro-inspiration means one believes in the error-free original autographa. Note the following in this regard:

"The NT Scholar is not significantly hampered by the unavailability of the autographa, however, because of the science and art of textual criticism. The abundance of manuscripts of the NT or portions thereof and the earliness of their dates in relation to the original compositions places him in a better position to know precisely what was originally written than for any other ancient writing."⁸



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In summary of Roman numeral one, the testimony of the authors of Scripture indicates they knew what they were writing was unique and from God: inspired.

II. THE TESTIMONY OF THE SECOND-CENTURY CHURCH

The last book of the NT to be written was the apocalypse, or as we better know it today, the book of Revelation. It was written by the Apostle John around A.D. 94-96. Thus the era of the first-century church came to a close and the writing of the NT was completed (cf. Rev. 22:18-19). Many of the NT books were known as encyclicals, meaning they were intended for more than one audience to read. Soon all 27 books would become encyclicals as the various papyrus⁹ manuscripts that contained the NT books were passed around and oft recopied as they circulated from church to church during this period. Importantly, they were immediately viewed as authoritative because in addition to Christ's words, the Apostles had always been seen as Christ's representatives, having been appointed by Him (cf. Acts 1:8). There was never any reason for the second-century church to doubt that the Apostles were Christ's spokesmen. As a matter of fact, after the ascension and the day of Pentecost they were even given miraculous sign gifts by Him to further legitimize their appointment and authority. Accordingly their writings, given their own written affirmations (as previously seen in this study) were henceforth viewed and accepted by the early church leaders as authoritative. There was never any doubt.

This fact is further and convincingly witnessed in that the Apostle's writings contained commands in them to be read in the church services. In that the early church patterned their services after those of the Jewish synagogues (where the inspired OT Scriptures were given preeminence and authority by their regular reading in the worship service) the internal demand by the Apostles to have their Apostolic writings read along side of the OT readings communicated a huge message to the audience then and to the reader of the Bible today: That the apostolic writings are equally Scripture! Note such in the following passages:

A. COLOSSIANS 4:16

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea [Ephesus].

B. 1 THESSALONIANS 5:27

I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.

C. REVELATION 1:3

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Letter B, 1 Thess. 5:27, is in need of further elaboration. The Greek word for **adjure** *enorkizo* means "to put under an oath." It is very strong language and is indicative of Paul's intent. Paul put the Church at Thessalonica under oath by God to read his letter to them and in the main service. It stands to reason, if you were commanded by God to write Scripture, that you would possess a similarly stern and dogmatic vocabulary. Again: *The fact that all of these verses explicitly say to read the Apostolic writings in the church services is akin to placing them on par with OT Scripture.* Therefore these passages more than suggest a foreseeable implication.

By the *middle* of the second century, "the authority of the apostles was accepted as equal to that of the OT. Apostolic writings were read in church services along with those of the OT. By the end of the period the principle of a fixed and written NT canon was established."¹⁰

By the *end* of the second century the classification of the NT writings as scriptural is evident in the apologetic writings of Irenaeus. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John. Irenaeus wrote to defend the faith from heretical teachings in his compendium of books titled, *Against All Heresies*. In his treatment he quotes 21 of the 27 NT books as his authority in refuting doctrinal errors. And his NT quotes far outweigh his use of the OT. As of yet, the 27 NT



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books have still not been formally “sewn together” in what is referred to as the canonization of Scripture.

What is especially important about the aforementioned is the acceptance and adherence of the second-century church leaders and believers to the scriptural authority of the apostolic writers.

THE SECOND-CENTURY CHURCH HAD A MUCH GREATER VANTAGE POINT THAN WE DO.

LOOKING BACK THEY COULD SEE THE BAKERY THROUGH THEIR BINOCULARS

My above metaphoric caption means this: Who do liberal theologians, 2000 years later think they are? They are vastly late to the party compared to the second and third-century church leaders who personally witnessed and supervised the germination of the encyclicals into the formal canonization of the Scriptures. *Their assent to inspiration, apostolic authorship, manuscript veracity and internal authority carries much more sway than present-day theologically liberal deviations relative to the same.* Comparatively speaking, today’s attempts to superimpose personal ideas on, in an attempt to discount apostolic authority are not only arrogant, but almost laughable.

III. THE TESTIMONY OF THE CANONIZING PROCESS

The canonization of Scripture did not occur until the early fourth century. From A.D. 200 to 300 the church knew of the basic contents of the NT and continued to view them as inspired and authoritative (although precise limits had not yet been defined). Prior to discussing the actual formalizing of the canon, it is essential to point out what the word means.

Canon is from the same basic Greek word (in other words it is *transliterated* from Greek into English). Its etymology stems from meaning a “reed” to a “rod” (since a reed, like a yard stick could be used as a measuring device) thus a “bar.” And since a reed became related to the idea of measuring, the word took on the metaphorical meaning of a “standard.” Used in literature, it meant, “A list of words correctly attributed to an author.”¹¹ Used in English it means the authoritative books accepted as Holy Scripture.

In a proper sense, the canon actually came into existence when the original penning of the autographa occurred—even though it took the church many years to *recognize* that. In other words, the authority is latent in the books themselves—not the body that later “canonized” them.¹²

IMPORTANTLY, THE CANON CONSISTS OF THOSE GOD-INSPIRED BOOKS WHEN PENNED BY GOD’S AGENTS

Much more could and should be said about the historical authenticating events that led up to the official recognition of NT canonization. It is a fascinating aspect of history. But for the sake of attention spans and brevity I will cut to the chase...

Diocletian was the Roman Emperor during the turn to the fourth century. He was a vicious man who ordered all religious books be burned in his attempt to have everyone worship him as god. The risk in hiding a copy of Scripture was personal death. One person who lived through the ordeal was Eusebius of Caesarea (A.D. 270-340). He was a respected church leader and historian who spent a great amount of time and attention on the canon. The future of the Scriptures was at stake. In his book, *Church History*, he speaks much about the subject of the canon.

In 313 Constantine conquers the Roman Empire and declares Christianity as a legal religion. Soon thereafter he commissioned Eusebius to make him 50 copies of the NT. Eusebius followed through and this led to the actual “sewing together” of the books of the NT. Until this time the NT existed in various codices¹³ and the criteria for determining which books would actually be in the canon had not been solidified. Eusebius may be credited with achieving that amongst the church leaders.

Athanasius then completed Eusebius’ work. Therein the extent of the NT is codified and ratified by the Church Counsel of Laodicea in A.D. 365. The pronouncement of this gathering read, “Psalms composed by private men must not be read in the church, nor books not admitted into the canon, but only the canonical [books] of the New and Old Testaments.”



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Following this gathering was further ratification by church leaders throughout the world and in two subsequent church leader councils the canon was further verified and ratified. These councils were: The Council of Hippo in A.D. 393 and The Council of Carthage in A.D. 397. It is in this later counsel that Augustine said, “[It is decreed] that nothing except the canonical Scriptures be read in the church under the name of divine Scripture...Of the New Testament the four gospels, Acts, thirteen epistles of St. Paul, the epistle of the same to the Hebrews, Peter (2), John (3), James, Jude, Apocalypse...” States Westcott,

“GENERAL ACCORD WITH THIS DECISION WAS EVIDENCED IN THE PRACTICE OF ALL THE CHURCHES FROM THAT POINT ON.”¹⁴

The NT was now canonized. The latently authoritative writings had been recognized as such, collected and bound. The church had assented unanimously, recognizing them for what they had always been from their point of origin—God’s oracles.

SUMMARY

Many are the opponents of inspiration. Why? Is the Word inspired by God or is it not? That is a watershed issue. Where one lands on inspiration will either solidify or discount the Bible as authoritative in terms of one’s personal formation of principles and values, and in terms of the profession of a legislator, one’s policy decisions. If one accedes to inspiration, then it follows that the Word becomes authoritative in one’s life. If one rejects inspiration, one thinks they are free to choose authorities that are subject to their personal authorization—when you think about it, a clever way of making self the final authority of self.

It follow that one’s intellectual arguments against inspiration could be a smokescreen for a heart in rebellion to God’s precepts. If this is descriptive of you, argue not against the authors and those who knew the authors, for one argues against history and the internal attestation of Scripture itself. Submit to Scripture, submit to the revealed Christ of Scripture and follow the precepts of His Book. If you do, you will always be on

the right side of every argument and position, be it personal or policy-related.

**DETERMINE POLICY NOT BY POLLS,
DETERMINE POLICY BY PRECEPTS**

His precepts that is. Isn’t that a tremendous thought? How can one be right on the personal decisions of life, and in office, the complex issues of lawmaking and budgeting? It is not as if God created mankind and left him without a manual to guide him. All the right solutions to our personal and national problems are right there in His inspired Book!

“The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple, states Psalm 19:7. God’s Word will give you the skill to live life (wisdom). And He promises He will reward you if you obey Him. Verse 11 of the same Psalm states, “In keeping them there is great reward.” Inspiration is a watershed issue. Accede to inspiration!

¹ Schaeffer, Francis *He is There and He is not Silent* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972)

² Note too that Paul and other NT authors strongly condemned those who in any way adulterated or diminished the Scriptures (cf. Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Cor. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:3,4; Rev. 22:18,19)

³ Plenary Inspiration is an historic reformation term that codifies the belief that God is the ultimate author of the Bible in its entirety. That is, God’s superintending work in inspiration extends to the whole Bible and to each part of the Bible...and that it is authoritative. (Cf. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*).

⁴ Nowhere in Scripture, including Matthew 16:18-19, can one support the idea of ex-cathedra (Latin, “from the chair”). I.e. that there is supposedly a lineage of leadership stemming from the Apostle Peter to a present-day church leader, who when he speaks ex-cathedra is speaking for God.

⁵ Sometimes this included the use of an amanuensis, which is a secretary to whom they dictated.

⁶ John MacArthur *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1995) p 143

⁷ Autographs, or manuscripts written by the author.

⁸ Dr. Robert Thomas *The Canon of the New Testament*, excerpted article. p. 2

⁹ This was (and still is) a sedge plant that was made into a primitive form of paper. Later, vellum or parchment, a processed animal skin that was much more expensive than papyrus, was used in the copying of NT books.

¹⁰ Dr. Robert Thomas *The Canon of the New Testament*, excerpt notes, page 13

¹¹ Merrill Tenney, *The New Testament, A Survey*, p. 417

¹² In theology this is termed “a collection of authoritative writings” versus, “an authoritative collection of writings.” Whereas the former stresses the latent authority of the documents, the later stresses the authority of the collection agency—i.e. the church rather than the books.

¹³ A codex was an early, primitive form of a modern day book, contrasted with a scroll, which was a rolled up papyrus mss.

¹⁴ Westcott, *The Bible* p. 189