



Is the Entire New Testament Inspired by God?



St. Paul, imprisoned, ends the letter to the Ephesians, and hands it over to Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21–23). Wood engraving, Gustave Doré.

Many years ago, I attended a conference where the speaker boldly pronounced, “You only need to read the book of Mark,” (which stresses Jesus’ humanity versus His Deity and the necessity of trusting Him for salvation). In his sermon, he was attempting to dumb down the authority of the remainder of the New Testament. Is his view a correct one? Are only Jesus’ words worth reading? Should those who are followers of Christ mind only His words spoken while He was in His physical body? What about the other writers who authored the books of the New Testament? Are their books inspired and authoritative?

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“Jesus said, *‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’*”

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I encourage all members who desire to grow in their knowledge and relationship with God and to grow closer to fellow believers to give the Bible study a try.”

In this study let’s examine what the Scriptures say about this very important matter. Many are those in the capital who call themselves “Christians” or “followers of Jesus” who hold to this theologically liberal position. What they mean by being a “follower of Jesus” might not be how the Scriptures define a true Christian.

Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

I. INTRODUCTION

Is the entire New Testament (NT) inspired by God? This question can be answered in several ways by the use of Scripture and the testimony of Church history as we will see. Keep in mind that the outcome of this study is extremely important relative to our forming biblical convictions. In other words, the person who sides with the idea that only Jesus’ words need to be studied need not interest himself in the writings of the apostles and all that they instruct about the Christian life. Often what Jesus mentions, the apostles spell out in detail. This includes matters such as the believer’s active commitment to a Bible-teaching local church; steadfastness toward missions, evangelism, and discipleship; and growing in knowledge and understanding of the Word, among other important issues. Accordingly, the purpose of our time together in God’s Word in this study is to build our passion regarding the inspiration and authority of the *whole* of the New Testament’s 27 books.

Holding to or rejecting the conviction that the NT is inspired will drastically impact your life.

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 purpose of God”* (Acts 20:27)¹, he knew how spiritually thwarting and damaging it was to starve a believer from the spiritual food they so desperately need from the Bible. Every Christian needs a consistent diet of Scripture. We need to know what the Word of God says regarding creation, justification, sanctification, and glorification. This is why the primary role of any pastor is to teach, teach, teach, and teach the Word of God (cf. Ephesians 4:11). As you study the description of the priority of the pastor-teacher’s job, throughout the Scriptures there is clearly an emphasis on Bible instruction. Here then are three reasons why the plenary² inspiration of all 27 New Testament books can be trusted.

II. THE TESTIMONY OF THE AUTHORS

If the whole of the NT is to be taken as the authoritative, infallible, inerrant, plenary inspired oracle of God (in addition to the Old Testament), then it would follow that the writers through whom God spoke would testify to their



being used in that way. They did. The following are several such examples:

A. THE APOSTLE PAUL

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 (1 Corinthians 14:37; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:13, 16; 2 Corinthians 2:17).

B. THE APOSTLE JOHN

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 (Revelation 1:1–2; cf. Revelation 1:10–11; 21:5; 22:6; 22:18, 19).

C. THE APOSTLE PETER

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 (1 Peter 1:12b).

D. JESUS (NOT IN QUESTION, BUT INCLUDED)

“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” (John 12:48).

E. PETER TESTIFIES OF PAUL

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 (2 Peter 3:15–16).

F. PAUL TESTIFIES OF PETER

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 (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

G. JUDE TESTIFIES OF THE APOSTLES

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” (Jude 17–18).

In a broader sense, both Paul and Peter attest to the total inspiration of Scripture in their letters. The following are some of the passages.

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

It is worth noting that liberal theologians interpret this important passage incorrectly. Misquoting Scripture, they teach “*All Scripture inspired by God is...*” which leaves open the possibility that some Scripture is not inspired by God, implying that it is incumbent upon man to figure out what is and what is not. However, similarly constructed passages

VERSE OF THE WEEK



Acts 20:27

“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

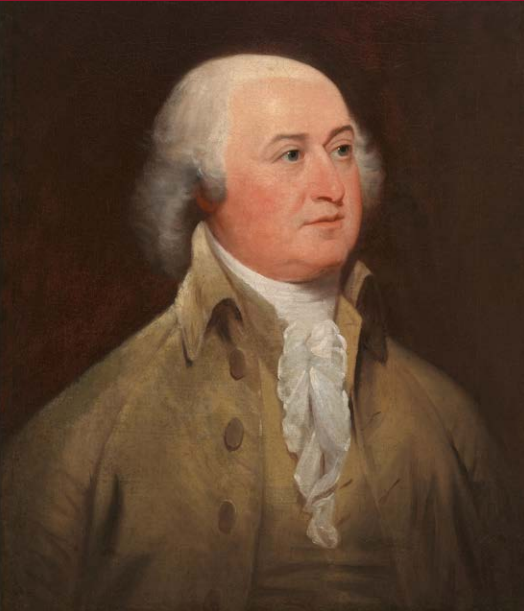


Every Christian needs a consistent diet of Scripture! Know what it says regarding creation, justification, sanctification, and glorification.





John Adams



“I have examined all religions, and the result is that the Bible is the best book in the world.”

— John Adams, second president of the United States, signer of the Declaration of Independence, judge, diplomat, one of two signers of the Bill of Rights.

John Adams, *Works, Vol. X*, 85, letter to Thomas Jefferson on December 25, 1813.



in the Greek NT (Romans 7:12; 2 Corinthians 10:10; 1 Timothy 1:15; 2:2; 4:4; and Hebrews 4:12) 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 Peter 1:20–21).

WHAT “INSPIRATION” REALLY MEANS

1. It does not mean that the writers were inspired.

Specifically, it’s not the writers; it’s the Scriptures that are given by inspiration of God. It is *All Scripture* (*graphe*) that is *inspired* (*theopneustos*) (or God-breathed). When speaking and scripting apart from the penning of Scripture, the writers of the NT were human and subject to fallibility and inaccuracy.³

2. God worked in unison with the writer’s mind.

Sometimes God dictated through them (Jeremiah 1:9b, “*Behold, I have put My words in your mouth*”), but most often He utilized the personality of His prophet or apostle.⁴ 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.⁵

3. Only the original *autographa*⁶ were inspired.

However, the fact that none of the original manuscripts (mss.) are in existence today does not pose a problem. Copying scribes could and did err.

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.⁷



It is also important to comment on the quote of 2 Peter 3:15–16. Since this is such a strong and straightforward passage of the Apostle Peter’s attesting to the Apostle Paul’s writing of *Scripture* (again, *graphe*), many liberal theologians in their desperate bias have attempted to discount the epistle’s authority by questioning its authorship (by Peter) and by vastly pushing back the date of its writing. However, that twentieth century attempt to diminish the book runs cross-grain to 2 Peter’s inclusion by the leaders of the second-century Church with the other 26 NT books.

III. 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 written by the Apostle John around AD 94–96. Thus, the era of the first-century Church came to a close, and the writing of the NT was completed. 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 papyrus⁸ manuscripts that contained the NT books were passed around and 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. The second-century Church never had any reason to doubt that the apostles were Christ’s spokesmen after the ascension and the day of Pentecost. Accordingly, their writings (given their own testimonies about their writings as previously seen) were henceforth viewed and accepted as authoritative. There was never any doubt.

This fact is further and convincingly witnessed in that the apostles’ writings contained commands in them to be read in the church services. The early Church patterned their services after those of the Jewish synagogues where the reading of Scripture was preeminent. The internal demand by the apostles to have their writings read alongside of Scripture communicated a huge message relative to what we’re studying. The apostles were saying that their writings were equally Scripture! Note 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

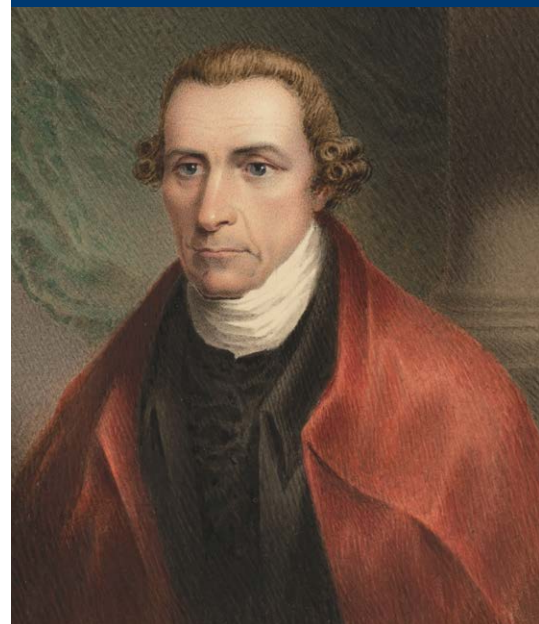
I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.

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.

First Thessalonians 5:27 needs elaboration. The Greek word for *adjure* (*enorkizo*) means “to put under an oath.” This very strong language 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, you would possess a similarly authoritative vocabulary. The fact that all of these verses explicitly say to read the apostolic

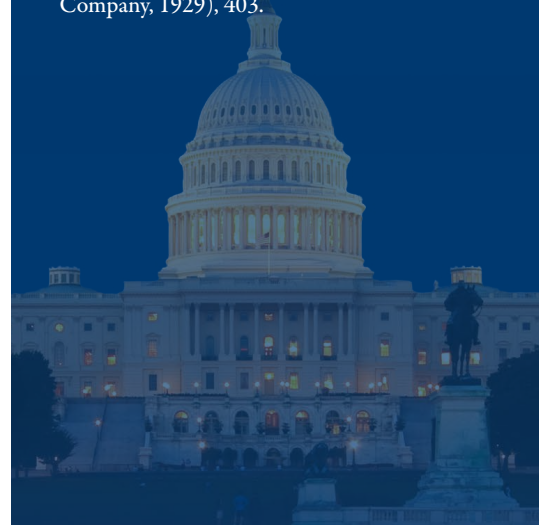
Patrick Henry



“The Bible ... is a book worth more than all the other books that were ever printed.”

— Patrick Henry, revolutionary general, legislator, ‘The Voice of Liberty,’ ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, governor of Virginia.

William Wirt, *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry* (Philadelphia: James Webster, 1818), 402; see also George Morgan, *Patrick Henry* (Philadelphia & London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1929), 403.





John Jay



“The Bible is the best of all books, for it is the Word of God and teaches us the way to be happy in this world and in the next. Continue therefore to read it and to regulate your life by its precepts.”

— John Jay, president of Congress, diplomat, author of *The Federalist Papers*, original chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, governor of New York.

John Jay, *John Jay: The Winning of the Peace. Unpublished Papers 1780–1784*, Richard B. Morris, editor (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980), Vol. II, 709, to Peter Augustus Jay on April 8, 1784.

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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.” 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 books had 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.

Looking back, they could see the beginning through their binoculars.

The second-century Church had a much greater vantage point than do we.

Their assent to apostolic authorship and scriptural authority carries much more sway than the present-day deviations of

wayward liberal theologians commenting some 2000 years later. In comparison, these later attempts to superimpose personal ideas on apostolic authority are almost laughable.

IV. THE TESTIMONY OF THE CANONIZING PROCESS

The canonization of Scripture did not occur until the early fourth century. From AD 200 to 300, everyone in the church knew of the basic contents of the NT and continued to view them as 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 comes from the same basic Greek word (in other words it is *transliterated* from Greek into English). Its etymology stems from meaning a “reed” or a “rod” or a “bar.” And since those are devices used for 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.”¹⁰ 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 in the body that later “canonized” them.¹¹

Importantly, the Canon consists of those God-inspired books penned by God’s agents.



Although much more could be said historically about the authenticating events that led up to the official recognition of the Canon of the NT and more of the authenticating aspects of the third century, for the sake of brevity, we will cut to the chase.

Diocletian was the Roman emperor during the turn of the fourth century. He was a vicious man who ordered all religious books to 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 (AD 270–340). He was a respected church leader and historian and spent a great amount of time and attention to 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 conquered the Roman Empire and declared Christianity as a legal religion. Soon thereafter he commissioned Eusebius to make 50 copies of the NT for him. Eusebius' following through led to the actual "sewing together" of the books of the NT. Until this time the NT existed in various *codices*,¹² and the criteria for determining which books would 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 was codified and ratified by the Church Council of Laodicea in AD 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."¹³

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 AD 393 and The Council of Carthage in AD 397. In this latter counsel, 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,

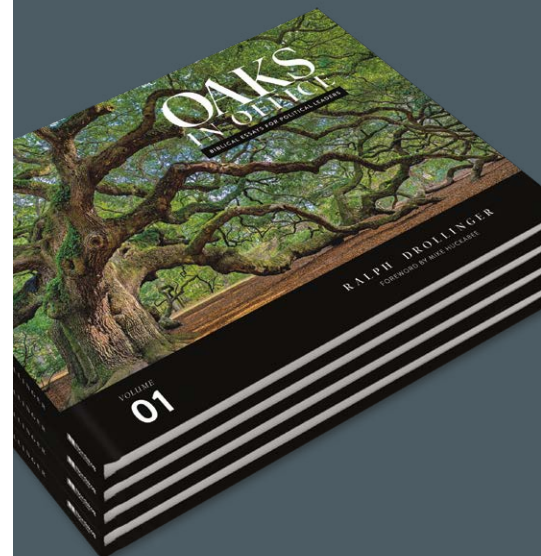
"General accord with this decision was evidenced in the practice of all the churches from that point on."¹⁴

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.

V. SUMMARY

To say that only the words of Jesus in the book of Mark are worth reading is to starkly and blindly obliterate the testimony of the New Testament writers, the testimony of the third-century Church, and the testimony of the canonizing process. It is to commit intellectual sin to side with liberal theologians, and it will surely lead to an immature Christianity, if not heresy in your own life.

This spiritual immaturity is clearly seen in Markan¹⁵ adherents; they are characterized by thwarted personal growth in Christ and all that He expects of His



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called-out ones in terms of a high view of the local church, evangelism, discipleship, missions, stewardship, and the like. One can certainly question if those who follow a Mark-only theology are truly Christians or saved, for they have gone so far as to redefine who Jesus Christ is. Theirs is not the Jesus of the whole of Scripture.

Are the Christian leaders you follow—including the pastor of your local church—in compliance with Paul’s conviction?

“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27).



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1. Note, too, that Paul and other NT authors strongly condemned those who in any way adulterated or diminished the Scriptures (cf. Galatians 1:6–9; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 2 Timothy 4:3,4; Revelation 22:18–19).
2. *Plenary*, according to *Merriam-Webster*, means “complete in every respect: ABSOLUTE, PERFECT, UNQUALIFIED.”
3. As a matter of fact, nowhere in Scripture, including Matthew 16:18–19, can one support the idea of *ex cathedra* (Latin, “from the chair”), which purports that supposedly a lineage of leadership stems from the apostle Peter to the present-day Pope who, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, is speaking for God.
4. Sometimes this included the use of an *amanuensis*, which is a secretary to whom they dictated.
5. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1995), 143.
6. Autographs or manuscripts written by the author.
7. Dr. Robert Thomas, *The Canon of the New Testament*, excerpted article, 2.
8. 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 to copy NT books.
9. Dr. Robert Thomas, *The Canon of the NT*, excerpt notes, 13.
10. Merrill Tenney, *The New Testament, A Survey* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017), 417.
11. 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 latter stresses the authority of the collection agency, i.e., the church rather than the books.
12. A *codice* was an early, primitive form of a modern-day book, contrasted with a scroll, which was a rolled-up papyrus ms.
13. William Henry Green, *General Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon* (London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898), 164.
14. Westcott, *The Bible*, 189.
15. Those who hold only to the book of Mark as the original Gospel (which stresses His humanity) and that all the other Gospel writers copied it. The Markan priority hypothesis is led by a similar group of people who lead The Quest for the Historical Jesus movement—a view of Jesus that denudes Him of being Lord and Savior.