

The Bible- Revelation and Inspiration

“We teach that the Bible is God’s written revelation to man, and thus the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We teach that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Genesis 1:31; Exodus 31:17). We teach that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We teach that God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God’s Word to man (2 Peter 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matthew 5:18; 2 Timothy 3:16). We teach that, whereas there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal grammatical-historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully the true intent and meaning of Scripture, recognizing that proper application is binding on all generations. Yet the truth of Scripture stands in judgment of men; never do men stand in judgment of it.”

Excerpt from What We Teach (Christ Fellowship Bible Church)...language concerning revelation and inspiration emphasized

Westminster Confession of Faith (doctrinal emphases supplied and highlighted)

Chapter I. Of the Holy Scripture.

Revelation...

I. Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; (a) yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of His will, which

is necessary unto salvation.(b) Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church;(c) and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing:(d) which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary;(e) those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.(f)

(a) Rom. 2:14, 15; Rom. 1:19, 20; Ps. 19:1, 2, 3; Rom. 1:32, with chap. 2:1.

(b) I Cor. 1:21; I Cor. 2:13, 14.

(c) Heb. 1:1.

(d) Prov. 22:19, 20, 21; Luke 1:3, 4; Rom. 15:4; Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Isa. 8:19, 20.

(e) II Tim. 3:15; II Pet. 1:19.

(f) Heb. 1:1, 2.

Authority...

IV. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.(i)

(i) II Pet. 1:19, 21; II Tim. 3:16; I John 5:9; I Thess. 2:13.

V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture.(k) And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.(l)

(k) I Tim. 3:15.

(l) I John 2:20, 27; John 16:13, 14; I Cor. 2:10, 11, 12; Isa. 59:21.

Sufficiency and Perspicuity...

VI. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or

traditions of men.(m) Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word:(n) and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.(o)

(m) II Tim. 3:15, 16, 17; Gal. 1:8, 9; II Thess. 2:2.

(n) John 6:45, I Cor. 2:9 to 12.

(o) I Cor. 11:13, 14; I Cor. 14:26, 40.

VII. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all:(p) yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.(q)

(p) II Pet. 3:16.

(q) Psalm 119:105, 130.

VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical;(r) so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.(s) But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them,(t) therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come,(u) that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner;(w) and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.(x)

(r) Matt. 5:18.

(s) Isa. 8:20; Acts 15:15; John 5:39, 46.

(t) John 5:39.

(u) I Cor. 14:6, 9, 11, 12, 24, 27, 28.

(w) Col. 3:16.

(x) Rom. 15:4.

IX. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.(y)

(y) II Pet. 1:20, 21; Acts 15:15, 16.

X. The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined; and in whose sentence we are to rest; can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.(z)

(z) Matt. 22:29, 31; Eph. 2:20 with Acts 28:25.

The original text of 1646, from the manuscript of Cornelius Burges, Assessor to the Westminster Assembly, with the Assembly's proof texts, as published in the modern critical edition of 1937 by S. W. Carruthers.

Excerpts from “The Reformed Doctrine of Inspiration”

Hugh Cartwright

• What is the Reformed Doctrine of Inspiration?

Two closely related but separate works of God must be noted at this point – revelation and inspiration. We are dependent upon God’s revelation of Himself for all the knowledge we have of God. And we are dependent upon God’s inspiration of the writers of Scripture for the infallible and unerring communication of that revelation to us. **James Bannerman summed up the relation between revelation and inspiration: “A supernatural communication of truth from God is a revelation; the supernatural transference of the truth to the spoken or written word is inspiration” (Inspiration, p.151).**

God can only be known in so far as He reveals Himself. Man cannot find out God by his own searching. **Revelation of God’s goodness, wisdom and power, sufficient to leave man without excuse, has been given in the light of nature and in the works of creation and providence, but that revelation is not sufficient to give the knowledge of God and of His will which is necessary for salvation. If men are to know God as Saviour, it is necessary that He make Himself known.** God made known to chosen men what He intended to reveal of Himself. (See Westminster Confession 1:1)

Inspiration is God’s method of ensuring that those, to whom He revealed Himself and the mystery of His saving purpose, communicated that revelation precisely as He wished it to be communicated. It is something very different from the “inspiration” felt by

poets. It is something other than the gracious enlightenment which is given by God to all whom He purposes to save. **Recording what God revealed was not left to the natural, or even the gracious, abilities of men. God took steps to ensure that not only were His revealed thoughts conveyed to us in a generally accurate way, but in words which precisely communicated what was in His mind.** “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (**2 Pet 1:20,21**). They were not left to interpret as best they could what God revealed to them, but God moved them – carried them along – in such a way that the words they used give the precise record of His revelation which God intended.

Had good men been left to themselves to communicate the revelation God gave them, we would have a human, fallible account and could not be sure of the divine truth of what was written. But God gave them not merely the thoughts, but also the words, which convey these God-given thoughts in the best possible way, so that when we read their words we are reading the very words of God. They were the mouth through which God spoke His own words. The Holy Spirit of God so controlled the writers of Scripture that their words were the words spoken by the Holy Spirit. All of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation – in its words as well as its thoughts – is the product of a supernatural work of God which ensures that it is inerrant, infallible, wholly trustworthy.

The Bible was written by men, not by machines. **The circumstances, experiences and characteristics of these men come through in many of their writings. Even the style of one is different from that of another. When they wrote they were generally exercising their own faculties, although there were times when they wrote things by the direction of God which were well beyond their own comprehension.**

(See 1 Pet 1:9-12).

But the men, their circumstances, characteristics, experiences and faculties were prepared by God. God made Moses what he was, and used Moses to write the law. God made Paul what he was, and used Paul to write his various epistles. **God took these men whom He had prepared and carried them along supernaturally so that they wrote exactly what He intended them to write. It was their writing, but it was God’s words that were written.**

God the Holy Spirit brought directly to bear on the writers of Scripture a divine influence which ensured that, as long as they thought and spoke and wrote under this influence, all their statements accurately conveyed what God revealed to them of His mind. Thus we have the thoughts of God infallibly communicated to us in what are the words of God as well as the words of men. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16) – it is God-breathed – the exact formulation of what God wished us to know. Inspiration preserved the writers from error, which would be natural to them as sinful men, and guided them in their expression of thoughts and use of words so that what they wrote is God’s own Word – “making the voice of God speak to us in a human accent, and His Word to address us in our own tongue”, as Bannerman puts it.

It is one thing to say what inspiration is – it is something else to explain the divine mode of inspiration. The Bible defines inspiration but does not explain what we might call the mechanics of it. **The exercise of their own faculties was harnessed and controlled by the Holy Spirit, so that the human authors spoke the pure truth of God. The manner in which the Spirit’s activity and the writer’s faculties combined in this work has not been revealed to our finite minds.** Even on the human level we can be influenced by others in ways which affect our thoughts and utterances.

- **The Reason for Believing It**

The fundamental reason is that it is taught in the Bible. This is not unwarranted circular reasoning. We are dependent on the Bible for all we know of God’s special revelation of Himself. **If we cannot believe what the Bible says about itself, we cannot believe what it says about anything. If it is trustworthy at all, it is trustworthy in what it says about itself. The divine Word carries its own authority, and all who are given spiritual perception believe it on account of that authority.** “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (**1 Cor 2:14**).

Scripture does not depend on something outside itself for testimony or verification. If it did, we would be putting our confidence in that “something” instead of in the Word itself. **The inspired Word has authority in itself, whether or not we recognise it, though we need to be enlightened to that fact.** “The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and

therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God” (**Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:4.**).

Scripture bears witness to its own character. This does not mean that human testimony does not corroborate the truth and authority of the Word of God. In all areas in which men have any competence to ascertain truth the Bible emerges with its integrity intact. Every human means of testing what can be tested by human means testifies to the integrity of the Bible. And the testimony of the Spirit in the souls of His people promotes “our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof” ([1]Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:5).

- **What is the Bible’s testimony to itself?**

Two passages summarise the biblical account of the origin of Scripture:

- **2 Tim 3:16**
- **2 Pet 1:19-21**

These passages refer to “all scripture”, the “word of prophecy”, and every “prophecy of the scripture”. The prophets were God’s spokesmen, and the Scriptures are the written record of what they spoke in God’s name. Without twisting these statements, no one can deny that the Bible teaches that Scripture has been breathed by God, that holy men, chosen and equipped by God, produced it when God moved and directed them, and that the end product of their inspiration by God is our possession of the revelation which God wished us to have in the terms in which He wished it to be expressed.

- **The Old Testament bears witness to its own inspiration...**

This appears from its testimony to the prophetic function to which its authors were called.

God spoke through the prophets. They were moved to speak only the words which He gave them. Isaiah often expressed his sense of divine inspiration by using such terms as “thus saith the Lord”. Jeremiah is introduced as one “to whom the word of the Lord came” (Jer 1:2).

Jeremiah 1:7,9

Ezekiel 1:3

What was true of the prophets applied to the law and to the psalms...

Malachi 4:4

2 Samuel 23:2

Our Lord testifies to the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures...

John 10:34,35 (cf. Psalm 82:6)

Luke 24:25-27,44-46

Mark 12:36

Matthew 4:4,7,10

He did not refer specifically to each book of the Old Testament, but in His time the canon, or content, of the Old Testament Scriptures was not in doubt and His statements applied to the entire Old Testament canon.

The authority of Scripture was upheld by Him after His resurrection, when He impressed on the disciples that what was spoken by the prophets and written in the Scriptures – in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms – had to be fulfilled

This view is the teaching of the Apostles...

This view of the Old Testament Scriptures as inspired and infallible is also set forth by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament in the teaching of the Apostles.

They refer to God speaking through men...

Matthew 1:22

Acts 1:16

Acts 4:24,25

Romans 1:1,2

Hebrews 1:2

They ascribe to men what was spoken by God...

Matthew 15:7,8

Mark 7:10

Romans 10:5,19,20

They say that Scripture spoke when it was God who spoke.

Galatians 3:8,22

Galatians 4:30

They quote what is spoken in Scripture by man as spoken by God.

Acts 13:35

Hebrews 3:7,8

They refer to the Old Testament Scriptures as the oracles of God.

Acts 7:38

Romans 3:2

Hebrews 5:12

The New Testament, referring to the Old, manifests a high view of the divine origin and infallibility and authority of Scripture.

- **The New Testament witnesses to itself as part of Holy Scripture, with the same divine origin, infallibility and authority as the Old Testament...**

2 Peter 3:15,16

2 Peter 1:19-21

1 Timothy 5:18 (cf. Deut. 24:4; Luke 10:7)

The view of the New Testament Scriptures taken by their writers is clear.

1 Corinthians 2:9-13,16

1 Corinthians 14:37

1 John 4:6

We can reasonably assume that God, having taken such care in communicating His revelation in Old Testament times, a revelation preparatory to the coming of Christ, took equal care with the fuller revelation accompanying that coming. The Old and New Testaments are parts of the one revelation of God. We need the same authority for believing what is written in the New as for believing what is written in the Old. That this is no mere assumption is clear when Paul writes in Ephesians 3:2-7 of “the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel; whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power”.

The inspiration claimed by Paul was promised by the Lord to His apostles.

John 14:25,26

John 16:12-14

Hebrews 2:4

- **How a Sinner Comes to Recognise the Inspiration of the Bible**

How do we become assured that the Bible is the inspired Word of God?

The conclusive evidence for the inspiration of the Bible comes from “the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts. . . . The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or Church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), and the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.” (Westminster Confession of Faith)

The primary reason for believing that the Bible is the inspired Word of God is that it claims to be such. The difference from other books which claim to be the Word of God is that the claim of the Bible is validated, particularly by the work of the Spirit causing the soul to concur in the claims which the Bible makes for itself.

How does the Holy Spirit convince a sinner that the Bible is the inspired Word of God? Not by justifying the claims of Scripture at the bar of reason, so that man rather than God is the foundation of faith, although He will show that acceptance of these claims is most reasonable.

Louis Gaussen suggests that the Reformed Confessions teach that “to every truly converted Christian the Bible is presented in some way to his soul, with evidence, as a miraculous book – as a living and efficacious word, which ‘pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit’; illumines in a moment the inmost depths of his being and reveals to him the features, hitherto unknown, of his inner man; softening, persuading and subduing it with incomparable power. . . . Henceforth the soul can no longer be under a mistake about it. To it this book, in the whole or in part, is certainly from on high. The seals of the Almighty are attached to it. But this ‘witness of the Holy Spirit’, of which our fathers spoke, and which every Christian has more or less acknowledged when he has read his Bible with vital efficacy – this witness may at first be heard by him only in a single page of the Scriptures; but this page suffices to spread over the book which contains it an incomparable lustre in his eyes.”

- **The Relevance of the Doctrine for Today**

Rejection of the divine inspiration of Scripture removes from Scripture its unquestioned authority over the faith and life of man. Rejection of the divine inspiration of Scripture leaves us with a fallible and erring Bible and with a fallible and erring Christ, if any Christ at all.

The fundamental significance of the doctrine of the divine, full, verbal inspiration of the Scriptures today, as in every age, is that it makes all the difference between a Bible which is inerrant and authoritative on every matter with which it deals and a Bible which is subject to the judgement of man and leaves man as the infallible authority. Either man is to sit in judgement on the Bible and accept its teachings, not because they are given by the Word of God, but to the extent that they fit in with his own view of things; or man is to sit before the Word of God and bow to the authority of God who speaks there – his belief and experience and action being determined by the revelation given by God.

The Reformed and Biblical doctrine of Inspiration means that we must be dependent upon, and submissive to, the Bible in its entirety as God’s Word and as our only “rule of faith and life”. As soon as it is clear what the Word of God says, we must concur with it in our thinking and practice, “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). **An inspired Bible is the last word on every subject with which it deals, the last court of appeal in every controversy.**

The inspiration of the Bible is of fundamental relevance to the principles applied in the translation of the Scriptures from the languages in which they were originally given. It is also of fundamental relevance to the choice that is made of a version of Scripture. Scripture ought to be translated to give, not only the thought, but also the very words of God. We should be concerned to have a version of Scripture which we can depend upon as an accurate translation of God’s words – a translation which reproduces as closely as possible the grammatical and idiomatic forms of the original text, a translation based upon the principles of formal equivalence rather than dynamic equivalence.

The Reformed, Protestant Church was built upon the supreme, sole and sufficient authority of the inspired Word of God, and when it loses that it loses the reason for its existence and loses its divine strength.

Indeed, the continuance of Christianity as we have known it depends upon acceptance of the divine inspiration of the Bible...A trustworthy Bible provides us with a definite system of theology. Take away confidence in the Scriptures as the infallible and unerring Word of God, and there is no basis for asserting the truthfulness of the Christian religion. Men left to themselves will come up with a gospel very

different from that proclaimed in the Bible...If men do not accept what the Bible says about itself, why should they accept what it says on any subject?

What is Christianity? It makes all the difference whether one seeks the answer to that question from an inspired, infallible Bible or somewhere – anywhere – else. The Christianity which obtains when the Bible is supreme is very different from the Christianity so-called which will prevail when anything else takes that place and subjects the Bible to it. The one is genuine and the other is false, even if they happen to correspond in some of their ideas.

The inspired Word of God determines the message of the Church to the surrounding world. It determines the methods which the Church is to use in her attempts to make that message known.

It is itself the great instrument which the Church is to use; she is to spread the Word of God and preach that Word faithfully. The possession of the inspired, infallible Word of God is a large part of the strength which the Church possesses in her endeavour to fulfil her mission. Her mission is, in essence, to bring the Word of God to bear upon men, to summon men to hear the Word of God and to submit soul and mind and morals to it. Her preachers have much encouragement to proclaim the message of the Bible accurately and faithfully in the assurance that it is divine truth itself, and that the conviction of this is wrought in the souls of sinners by the power of the Holy Ghost. **We can see the effects today on her message, of the professing Church departing from the inspired and infallible Word of God, and also on her methods and her warrant for demanding the attention of men...**We do not have to apologise for the inspired Word of God but only publish and preach it.

As far as our approach to those who do not bow to the authority of Scripture is concerned, the doctrine of Inspiration suggests that we should not deal with them in such a way that they are made to feel that they have the capacity or the right to judge the credentials of the Word of God. While we should endeavour to remove any doubts, more or less honestly held, which are capable of being removed by human testimony or evidence, we should begin with them from the assumption that God is and that God has spoken. **We should encourage them to read the Bible for themselves.**

On the personal level, the doctrine of inspiration provides us in the Word of God with a divine foundation for our faith and with a divine authority for our lives. It gives us direct access to what God has spoken. It

brings the Word of God directly to bear upon us. It searches us to the depth of our being. It provides us with a basis for the most sure hope. It makes it possible for us to have fellowship not only with the writers of Scripture in their beliefs and experiences and way of life but also “with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:3). It is the means of making possible in this twenty-first century a personal religion that is identical in every essential aspect with that of the first disciples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and all those down through the preceding centuries who were looking for His appearing. True personal religion in all its aspects is a response to the Word of God – faith, repentance, love, obedience, hope and every other Christian grace is wrought in the regenerate soul by the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of His Word.

The relevance of this doctrine to us will manifest itself supremely in our own attitude to the Scriptures.

Hebrews 2:1-4

1 Peter 1:22-25

2 Peter 1:19-21

<https://www.monergism.com/reformed-doctrine-inspiration>