

Inspiration of the Bible / COB / 10.27.13

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: blank]** I have been coming to work dressed like this, in layers. There is the thermal underwear layer, the flannel shirt layer, the sweatshirt and the cardigan. I take off my coat, because it seems appropriate to do so once inside, but it is cold enough in my office that I could wear the coat. I do put my fingerless gloves on.
- It snowed on Thursday, did you see that? Little flurries outside that put little flurries in my heart. Deb and Donna were here scrubbing the place down, so we all celebrated seeing the first snow of the year.
 - I am not sure how to interpret Mandie's facial expressions yet, but I am pretty sure she looked at me like I was crazy when I excitedly told her that it had snowed. That's ok. I remember being young and looking at older people like they were crazy.
- † I pray often for our young people, students like Mandie, and our college students, Allison, Eric, Ryan, and Lori. I pray that this will be a time of life when they make this faith their own and blossom in their relationship with God. I pray they will not stray like I did at their age. I believed, but I drifted off into worldly living. And now I have a lot of regrets.
- I will share one regret with you now. When I was a young man and walking in the flesh instead of with God, I wrote a racy romance novel. I am embarrassed to tell you that, but there it is. It was an awful book. But still, I would say I felt compelled to write, so how many of you would believe that the compulsion came from God, that God could have inspired that racy romance novel? None...
- † Later, when I was not in such a bad place, I wrote another novel, and this one was a good read. It had mystery, adventure, action, romance; it had witty dialogue, at one point two of the characters even discussed whether mathematics was the language of God! And the book was all about trying to find your purpose and trying to find God, so it was a spiritual book in the end. How many of you would believe that God inspired this novel? I can see it is going to be a bad day for the pastor's ego. Y'all know this is pastor appreciation month, right? You are supposed to be nice to me.
- † How about this. When I was a seminary student and an intern at a church, I wrote sixty pages of theology. Now, theology is a frightening word for some people, but it simply means what we believe, so I wrote sixty pages summarizing what Christians believe, so the church could use it to teach new believers and new members. I was walking with God then, I was prayerful about this project, I researched carefully in the scriptures, and I relied heavily on good theologians, like Ryrie. Would you say it was possible that God inspired this booklet?
- † I hope the Holy Spirit did guide me in writing that theology, but that is not quite the same as what we mean when we say God inspired the Bible. The Spirit also might guide me to preach something that has a tremendous impact on you, the Spirit might even give me something specific to say to one of you to encourage your walk of faith – I do believe in the Spirit's leading and use of gifts – but that is not quite the same as what we mean when we say the Bible is inspired. So what's the difference?
- † **[Slide 2: Title]** How many of you believe that the Bible was inspired by God?
- Was it the authors who were inspired or what they wrote?
 - Was it the thoughts that were inspired or the specific words?

- Did God dictate audibly or were there other methods, even a variety of methods?
- If God inspired the Bible, why do we see the personalities of the human authors in the text?
- These are all good questions, so let's discuss what we mean when we say we believe in the doctrine of inspiration. First, let's pray...

What we believe

- † What if Jesus was not resurrected? What if he was just "a good man" as some people say? What good would our faith be then?
 - Other people have various different religious beliefs and they might each cherish them and hold them to be true regardless of anything else; but Christians don't have this luxury: Christians have a historical faith. If the events recorded in the Bible did not happen, then we have nothing.
 - As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15.17 NET: "... if Christ has not been raised, your faith is useless; you are still in your sins."
 - Everything we believe about salvation depends on the truth of the Bible's teachings about history, not just theology; because our theology is derived from our history with God. Our theology is derived from our history with God.

- † If we believe in Christ, then we must have a basis for what exactly to believe. It is not sufficient to say we have a general belief that Christ existed, or that he was a good fellow and even a wise teacher. Even if that was the extent of what we believed, how would we know he was good or what wisdom he taught? We would need some record of these things.
 - For those of us who believe that Christ is the Son of God who came from Heaven and died on the cross as a human sacrifice to save us and then was resurrected from the dead, it is even more important to have a trustworthy account of these events.
 - Also, if we say we believe in God and desire to know him, we have to have some basis for what we believe and how we will go about knowing him. And really, we cannot know God unless God reveals himself to us.

- † Now, we do believe that God has chosen to reveal himself to mankind. We believe God has revealed himself in a general way through creation and he has revealed some specific knowledge to specific people for specific purposes in a variety of ways.
 - But we also believe that God wanted to reveal specific knowledge universally to all people, and he did so by direct inspired communication through those who wrote the content of the Bible. The Bible is the collection of what God wants people to know.
 - This brings out the differences between the theology I wrote and the Bible. First, we believe that God gave the biblical authors perfect objectivity and discernment, that they wrote exactly what God would have them write; though I think I am good at discerning God's voice and I think God helped me write, I cannot assert such perfect objectivity; I know I might make mistakes.
 - Second, while God might have guided me to write accurately, what he gave me was not universal: only the Bible is the collection of exactly what God wants all people to know.
 - So when we say the Bible is inspired, we are using technical language to mean that God carefully laid out what he wanted included in his authoritative Bible. If you see something in the Bible, you know it is from God; if I say something to you, you have to discern whether it is from God. That's why I aim to teach the Bible: rather than push my human views, I want you and me to learn from what God has revealed.

- † **[Slide 3: John]** The Bible includes some of the words and actions of Jesus, who came in part to reveal God to us. John wrote [1.18 NIV]: “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”
 - Jesus reveals God to us, because he is both human and the divine Son of God, the one person who is the perfect image of God the Father. And our best historical resource for who Jesus is, and what Jesus said and did, is the Bible.

- † Christianity is based on the apostolic teachings and practices which were recorded in the New Testament. John 20.31 is one example that shows the importance of basing our faith on these writings: they show us who Jesus is, what he accomplished, and therefore what we need to believe in order to be saved.
 - John 20.30-31 NET: “Now Jesus performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”
 - This verse also shows us that not all revelation from God is scriptural. Obviously, everything Jesus said and did was revelation from God and thus could be considered inspired in the normal sense; but not everything Jesus said and did was included in the Bible. When we say we believe God inspired the Bible, it is not only that God was the source but that God directed what would be included and what not.

- † **[Slide 4: inspiration verses]** Let’s summarize what we believe about inspiration of the Bible, and then we will ask why we believe it.
 - 2 Peter 1.21 NASB: “...for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”
 - 2 Timothy 3.16 NET: “Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...”
 - We believe the content of the Bible is inspired by God, which is to say that God inspired people to write what he would have them write; and though these writings took on the personalities of the human authors in terms of form, their content was directly from God.

Why we believe

- † **[Slide 5: Clement of Rome]** Next we ask, “Why do we believe in the inspiration of the Bible?” How did we come to this belief and why do we hold it to be true?
 - † One reason we believe in the inspiration of the Bible is because of church tradition. The people of God have throughout the past 3500 years believed certain works collected in the Bible were inspired by God. Let me give you a sampling of what the early church believed about 2000 years ago.
 - Clement of Rome, *1st Clement* 45.2-3 [written in the late first century by one of the elders of Rome]: “You have searched the holy scriptures, which are true, which were given by the Holy Spirit; you know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them...”
 - **[Slide 6: Irenaeus]** Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.28.2 [second century]: “... [we] being most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit...”
 - **[Slide 7: Origen]** Origen, *First Principles* 1.3.1 [early third century]: “... [we] believe that it is possible in no other way to explain and bring within the reach of human knowledge this ... Son of

God, than by means of those Scriptures alone which were inspired by the Holy Spirit, i.e., the Gospels and Epistles, and the law and the prophets, according to the declaration of Christ Himself.”

- These quotes serve as examples of what the early church believed: these disciples of Christ’s disciples, and then their disciples after them all believed that God inspired the scriptures. We could progress to show that the believing church has always trusted in the inspiration of the Scriptures by God.

† **[Slide 8: experience]** A second reason we believe in the inspiration of the Bible is because of experience. We have seen the usefulness of Scripture bear out in the lives of countless people who have devoted themselves to applying the content of the Bible. There is a power in the Bible that is evidently supernatural, in that the Holy Spirit uses the content of Scripture to enlighten us to saving faith, to grow us spiritually to be more like Christ, and to guide us in knowledge of God and his ways.

- Also, there is an inner testimony of the Holy Spirit which verifies to us that these words are from God. 1 John 2.27 NLT: “But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don’t need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what he teaches is true-- it is not a lie. So just as he has taught you, remain in fellowship with Christ.” Thus the Spirit testifies to the Word of God.

† **[Slide 9: reason]** A third reason we believe in the inspiration of the Bible is because of reason. As theologian Greg Bahnsen put it, “If we do not assume that God has spoken clearly and given us an adequate means of learning what He has actually said, then the entire story of the Bible and its portrayal of the plan of God for man’s salvation makes no sense whatever.”¹ In other words, if the Bible is not inspired, then we have little basis for our faith.

† In support of our confidence in inspiration, we recognize that the Bible is an amazing document:

- Though it was composed in pieces by dozens of human writers over about sixteen centuries, the Bible has consistent themes and teachings throughout;
- it has incredible foreshadowing and prophesying of events that happened many centuries later;
- it has intricate coordination and cohesiveness of what is revealed; and
- it has literary brilliance when viewed in the original languages.
- It is impossible to believe this book could come together as it has, without God’s inspiration.

† **[Slide 10: Jeremiah 30.1-2]** Last but not least, we note that our confidence in the Bible’s inspiration is consistent with the scriptural account of itself. Jesus always taught from the Old Testament scriptures, and treated them as the Word of God.

- In the Old Testament, the authors often mentioned that God told them to write. For example, Jeremiah 30.1-2 NIV says, “This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ‘This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: “Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.””
- **[Slide 11: 2 Peter 1.19-21]** In the New Testament, the apostle Peter wrote two letters about his witness to the life and ministry of Christ and the supernatural events surrounding him. Peter also stated his confidence in the scriptures of the Old Testament and declared that the Holy Spirit inspired them.

¹ Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler, 151-193 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House; 1980], 185.

- 2 Peter 1.19-21 NET: “Moreover, we possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing. You do well if you pay attention to this as you would to a light shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet’s own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”
- † **[Slide 12: 2 Timothy 3.14-17]** The apostle Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy to continue in the things he had learned from Paul, which included the gospel, the early writings of the church, and Paul’s other teachings. Paul then said the Old Testament writings were sacred and could lead one to salvation in Christ, after which he said “*Every scripture is inspired by God*”
 - 2 Timothy 3.14-17 NET: “You, however, must continue in the things you have learned and are confident about. You know who taught you and how from infancy you have known the holy writings, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work.”
 - In that passage, “inspired” translates a Greek compound word, and if you translated each part of the compound, it would literally mean “God-breathed.”
 - Paul went on in his letter to Timothy to say that Timothy should preach “the word,” meaning the apostolic message, which became the New Testament teachings and included the Old Testament teachings.
- † **[Slide 13: 2 Peter 3.15-16]** Paul testified to the inspired writing of Luke by quoting Luke 10.7 as scripture in 1 Timothy 5.18. Peter referred to Paul’s writings as equal to scripture.
 - 2 Peter 3.15-16 NET: “And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as also our dear brother Paul wrote to you, according to the wisdom given to him, speaking of these things in all his letters. Some things in these letters are hard to understand, things the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they also do to the rest of the scriptures.”
 - By comparing Paul’s writing to the rest of the scripture, Peter implied that Paul’s writing was to be taken as inspired scripture.

How Inspiration Works

- † I know of at least six theories about how inspiration works. I don’t think we need to learn all of them today. Instead, let’s see if we can make sense of what the Bible itself says about its inspiration.
- † **[Slide 14: prophecy]** As we know, the Holy Spirit worked through human authors. Acts 1.16 NET: [Peter speaking] “Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled that the Holy Spirit foretold *through David* concerning Judas– who became the guide for those who arrested Jesus...”
 - The Holy Spirit was the primary source of predictive prophecy. In this case, David was the conduit through whom the Spirit spoke. The result was prophecy that had to be fulfilled.
- † Paul wrote in Romans 1.2 NET: “This gospel he [God] promised beforehand *through his prophets* in the holy scriptures...”
 - God was the primary source for the biblical promises. The prophets were the conduits through whom God spoke. The result was a promise that would be fulfilled.
- † **[Slide 15: 2 Timothy 3.16]** 2 Timothy 3.16 NET: “Every scripture is inspired by God...”

- Paul declares here that the output is inspired by God, every sentence. The actual content of the Bible is inspired by God.
 - Putting together what we know – that the Holy Spirit spoke through human authors and that God inspired the actual content of the Bible, we could represent it with this graphic, showing the inspiration of God flowing through the human author to produce the scriptures.
- † **[Slide 16: 2 Peter 1.20-21]** 2 Peter 1.20-21 NET: “Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, *men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*”
- Again, we see no verse is of human origin. What we have is the Holy Spirit inspiring the authors to write what God wanted them to write. So the output was inspired, but also the authors were inspired – carried along by the Holy Spirit – to write what God desired them to write.
- † **[Slide 17: 2 Peter 3.15-16]** 2 Peter 3.15-16 NET: “And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as also our dear brother *Paul wrote* to you, according to the wisdom given to him, *speaking of these things in all his letters.*”
- Paul received wisdom from God, which he conveyed in his letters. God inspired the *thoughts* Paul taught.
- † **[Slide 18: 1 Corinthians 2.13]** 1 Corinthians 2.13 NET: “And *we speak* about these things, not with words taught us by human wisdom, but with those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.”
- The apostles and their envoys, particularly those who wrote the New Testament, were teaching spiritual concepts from God using spiritual *words* from the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, the plural of *λόγος* always means “words,” not “sayings” or something else. So this suggests the words themselves were inspired, not just the thoughts.
- † **[Slide 19: human personality]** It is worth observing that the way God inspired the author, his thoughts, and the final words, involved using the personality of each human author.
- We see a very different approach between the terseness of Mark, perhaps writing down Peter's teachings, and the careful elaboration of Luke, who researched from many sources.
 - We see John's personality come through in both his gospel and his letters, which is distinct from any other New Testament writer.
 - The argumentative nature of Paul, the directness of James, the literary brilliance of Moses, the complaints of Jeremiah, all show that the personality of the human authors was part of this process of inspiration.
- † **[Slide 20: literary forms]** We also should note that God inspired the human authors to use literary forms that were contemporary to their neighboring cultures. This allowed the human authors to express themselves in ways that would be easily understood by their contemporary readers.
- For example, Moses wrote Genesis almost entirely using Hebrew poetic forms.
 - Moses wrote Deuteronomy consistent with Egyptian and Hittite legal code and covenant structures. From the human perspective, this makes sense, since Moses had trained in Egypt at the height of the Hittite empire, and Egypt and the Hittites had treaties in this form at that time. God used Moses' education when he inspired Deuteronomy.

- Joshua's accounts of military victories is consistent in form with those of other ancient near east military accounts.
 - Biblical prophecies have similar form structure to Mesopotamian prophetic forms; biblical proverbs have similar forms to Egyptian wisdom literature; the Song of Songs is similar to Egyptian love poetry.
 - Throughout the Old Testament, God used specific imagery or even stories from other cultures to provide an effective attack on the false beliefs of the other cultures.
 - The New Testament epistles have a lot of the same qualities as secular Greek letters.
 - Knowing these things helps scholars to understand the biblical writings and to verify that they really do date to specific times in history. It helps you and me to see that God's method of inspiration was very creative so that it could be more effective.
- † **[Slide 21: various sources]** God also was creative in how he used various sources to help with the process of inspiration.
- Many of the New Testament authors walked with Jesus and learned from him in the flesh. Peter, John, and Matthew quote Jesus often, providing their own eye witness accounts.
 - Others, like Luke, had to learn from the original disciples and do careful research to seek out accurate truth.
 - We see from Paul's story that while he had to learn from the original disciples he also received a lot of direct communication from God, which is true for all of the writers.
 - God sometimes would speak directly to an Old Testament prophet, telling him exactly what to say or write.
 - Other times, God "carried" the author along, allowing the author to discover and discern the truth or to use his education to relate.

Implications

- † **[Slide 22: implications 1-3]** Ok, before we close, we need to consider six implications of a belief in the inspiration of scripture.
- † One... If scripture is inspired by a perfect and truthful God, then scripture must be inerrant. Can you see that? If God inspired not only the process but also the result, if God inspired not just the ideas but the very words, then scripture must be without error. We will discuss what inerrancy means another day, but for now you can be sure that whatever God inspired is perfect.
- † Two... If scripture is inspired by God, then scripture must be sufficient for its declared purposes of knowing God, being saved by Christ, and being led by the Spirit to victorious life. Whatever God intended for Scripture, it must accomplish, because a perfect God inspires exactly the right product.
- † Three... If scripture is inspired by God, then scripture must be authoritative for our lives and ministries. If our Lord and master, our creator and sustainer, gave us inspired revelation, then it must have the same authority as God himself. If scripture is God's words to us, then we must allow those words to guide us.
- † **[Slide 23: implications 4-6]** Four... If scripture is inspired by God, then we can trust that he controlled what was included in it, that we have the full content of scripture in our Bible.

- † Five... If scripture is inspired, inerrant, sufficient, canonical, and authoritative then we are dependent on it for God's specific revelation that he wants us to know. If God provided this revelation for us, then we must depend on it to know God, the way of salvation, and the way of victorious Christian life. To rely on anything else would be foolish.
- † Six... If we are dependent on scripture, then we should be devoted to studying it. Knowing that we need to understand God's revelation in order to be saved and to walk daily with God and please God, we should be devoted to learning and understanding scripture.
- † Seven... If we believe all this to be true, then we can understand our church's name of Church of the Open Bible and our motto of Read it, Live it, Share it.
- † **[Slide 24: blank]** Let's pray...