

Inspiration and Revelation

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A Place to Stand: Apologetics in an Uncertain Age

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Inspiration is one of the great issues in apologetics. It lies at the heart of how one views and interprets the Bible, and, in turn, helps to focus one's worldview. It is foundational to what one believes and practices. If God has not revealed Himself to mankind with an inspired message, then ultimately, mankind is left without a guide; and there is nothing in which to trust or hope for in terms of eternity. Life becomes an uncertain course with no real meaning or purpose other than what some person can dream up. That should cause an honest heart to think seriously about the issue.

However, if God has revealed Himself through an inspired message, then it means that the Creator of the universe has spoken with authority; mankind is bound to pay attention to what has been revealed (Jas. 1:19-21). Eternity is at stake. People's lives cannot be more radically affected than by their view of God and His revelation. Apologetics then is grounded in the ability of God to communicate with humans through human language (McGrath 19). If God could not do this, then we have nothing to defend.

The purpose of this study is to examine some of the claims in the Bible, discuss some important terms and items related to the topic, including some of the proofs and implications of inspiration. A consideration of modernism and postmodernism will be in order to keep before us the importance of apologetics as it relates to inspiration.

Biblical Claims of Inspiration

The Bible claims inspiration thousands of times in various ways. Though claims themselves do not prove anything, one would expect that a book coming from God would make the claim. If it did not, then this would be taken as evidence that men were trying to turn it into something it was never intended to be (Casteel 127).

1. The Old Testament. Any time a prophet used a "Thus says the Lord," "the Lord spoke," or "the word of the Lord came to me," it is a direct claim to being inspired by God (e.g., Isa. 7:10; 8:1; 43:1; Jer. 1:4). It has been determined that such introductory formulas occur over 3,800 times in the Old Testament (Witmer 163). Further, many passages show that men like Moses and David were to speak and faithfully deliver God's message (e.g., Ex. 4:12-16; 7:2; 2 Sam. 23:2). God told Jeremiah, "I have put my words in your mouth" (1:9). Later, God told him to speak all that He had commanded, then added, "Do not omit a word" (Jer. 26:2). Many verses give similar statements (e.g., Ezek. 3:26-27; Jer. 23:28). God's very word was what the true prophets of the Old Testament spoke. God also gave several commands to write His message down (Ex. 17:14; Isa. 8:1; Jer. 29:1; Hab. 2:2), and God Himself is identified as the One who wrote the ten commandments on stones (Ex. 24:12).

2. The New Testament. The New Testament writers also bore witness to the Old Testament Scriptures as being from God. Peter wrote that "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:21). This is about the extent that the Bible goes to explain God's exact method of inspiration (Witmer 165). The stress, again, is on the fact that the Scriptures originated with God, not man. However, not only were the Old Testament Scriptures said to be from God, but what the apostles and prophets of the first century spoke and wrote also originated with God.

Paul commended the Thessalonians for receiving the word “as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13). Peter put Paul’s writings on par with “the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Pet. 3:16). He also equated the “commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles” with “the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets” (2 Pet. 3:2). Paul stated that what he wrote “are the Lord’s commandment” (1 Cor. 14:37); and John pronounced a curse on anyone who would add or subtract from the “words of the prophecy” of the book of Revelation (22:18-19). There is no question that they claimed divine inspiration for what they wrote.

3. Jesus’ View of Scripture. Jesus is the final authority on all matters. If one accepts the evidence for who Jesus is (Jn. 20:30-31), then this settles the matter as to the origin of all Scripture.

First, consider Jesus’ view of the Old Testament. He referred to it with an authoritative, “It is written” (Mt. 4:1-11). He confirmed that David spoke “by the Spirit” (Mt. 22:43). He consistently treated Old Testament narratives as facts (e.g., Luke 11:51; Mt. 19:4-5; 24:37-39; Jn. 3:14). To Him, it was “historically true, completely authoritative, and divinely inspired” (Wenham 6). Jesus gave His approval to the Old Testament as being divinely inspired. “What Scripture said, God said.” If Jesus is true, then so is the Old Testament.

Second, consider Jesus’ view of His own words. He spoke with authority (Mt. 7:28-29). He introduced many of His own teachings with, “It was said ... but I say to you” (e.g., Mt. 5:31-32). He taught that His words would not pass away, and that His words would judge in the last day (Mt. 24:35; Jn. 12:48). All of this is consistent with the statement that “God has spoken ... through His Son” (Heb. 1:1-2).

Third, consider Jesus’ statements regarding what the apostles would receive. He promised to send the Holy Spirit to them, who would teach them all things and bring to their memory everything Jesus taught (Jn. 14:26). The Spirit would guide them into all truth (Jn. 16:13). Here is a promise that the apostles would be able to carry the Lord’s message by divine guidance. On Pentecost, they would receive the power to be true witnesses throughout the earth (Acts 1:8; 2). Therefore, their claims to have the truth revealed to them through the Spirit is completely in harmony with the Lord’s promises. The miracles and signs they worked served to confirm that God was working with them (cf. Heb. 2:1-4).

Throughout the Bible, the claims to divine inspiration are consistent. No one can rightly argue that the writers did not believe they were teaching God’s word. “Abundant evidences exist to prove that for Christ and the apostles, Scripture in its entire extent was uniquely inspired and normative” (Pinnock 61-62).

What is Inspiration?

Inspiration can mean a number of things, depending upon its contextual use. In one case, one may say that a poem is inspired, meaning that it stimulates creative thinking in the reader. One may think that a person is inspiring because of his or her ability to provoke emotional responses. Generally, if something is motivating and stimulating, then we think of it as being inspired. This concept has been transferred to the Bible, so that one might say it is inspired in the stimulating sense (i.e., it is inspiring). This emphasizes the effect of something rather than its origin (see Warfield 245-296). However, this is not the point in 2 Timothy 3:16. The Biblical doctrine of inspiration refers to the very process of how God’s word was revealed and recorded. It points to the origin of Scripture as being from God Himself, which makes it eminently profitable.

2 Timothy 3:16 says that “all Scripture is inspired by God.” *Theopneustos*, occurring only here in Scripture, means, literally, “God-breathed” (NIV). The idea is that the Scriptures were “breathed out by God.” “All Scripture, therefore, is a product of His creative power, and so is an authentic disclosure of His mind and presentation of His message” (Packer 199). The term expresses the origin of Scripture. The idea is not inspired verses uninspired writings, but rather that the basis for the profitableness of Scripture “lies in its inspired character” (Guthrie 164). After dealing with various views of this term, Warfield concluded: “What it affirms is that the Scriptures owe their origin to an activity of God the Holy Ghost and are in the highest and truest sense His creation. It is on this foundation of Divine origin that all the high attributes of Scripture are built” (296).

Though other texts do not use the term *inspiration*, they do speak of the same concept. Peter affirmed inspiration when he wrote that no prophecy of Scripture was of “one’s own interpretation” (i.e., not of private origin), “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). Paul also affirmed in other texts that the Scriptures originated with God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:11-13; 1 Thess. 2:13).

Revelation

Revelation (*apokalupsis*) carries with it the idea of something that was unknown, but has now been disclosed: “to cause something to be fully known” (Louw and Nida 339). It is an uncovering. This is the idea behind Paul’s statement concerning the gospel: “that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery.” This mystery, in other generations, “was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit” (Eph. 3:3-5). Paul affirmed that what he received was “not according to man.” He did not receive it from man, nor was he taught, but it came “through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12). The fulness of what God has prepared for those who love Him was revealed to the apostles through the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10). They received the revelation and taught by inspiration, ensuring that they accurately conveyed what they received.

Revelation is often thought of in two senses: general and special. General, or natural, revelation refers to that which can be known of God through nature (cf. Psa. 19:1; Rom. 1:19-20). God’s power is manifested through creation, so that no one cannot logically deny His existence. However, the will of God cannot be known through nature alone. Special revelation is the revealing of God’s will in human language so that one may learn about how to be reconciled to Him. This is what the Bible is about.

Revelation involves divine activity. Through His mighty deeds, God revealed Himself. The ultimate expression of this is Jesus Christ coming to this earth, revealing and explaining God (Jn. 1:18; 14:9). Jesus is Himself God who came in the flesh (Jn. 1:1, 14). He is the *Word*, the one through whom God has spoken in the last days (Heb. 1:1-3). Further, God and His will are revealed through the written messages themselves. Peter wrote that “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Pet. 1:3). The only way to truly know God is through His revelation; and the only way to be sure that His revelation is true was by God inspiring men to write infallible Scripture.

The purpose of divine revelation is redemption. It is not just the giving of previously unknown information, but it is information aimed at bringing sinful creatures back into fellowship with God (Eph. 3:3-5). The driving force behind God’s revelation is His grace. If God were content to let us die eternally in our sins, then revelation would be irrelevant. “His attitude

of unmerited favor toward sinners moved Him to disclose saving purposes for man and beckon him into covenant” (Pinnock 30). One is saved by grace through faith, but that faith would not be possible if the revealed gospel could not be heard (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 10:17).

Verbal, Plenary, and Confluent

Other issues surrounding inspiration help one to understand the concept more thoroughly. First, inspiration is *verbal*, meaning that “inspiration extends even to the words written” (Carson 70). This is affirmed in 1 Corinthians 2: “not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit” (vs. 13). This should not be confused with mechanical dictation, as this seems to ignore the human elements in the Bible such as style and language. Verbal inspiration, however, guarantees that the words teach exactly what God desires. It assures that God’s truth has been “correctly and properly communicated” (Pinnock 90). The words, confirmed by the Holy Spirit, are in commonly-understood human language, but they convey what God wants. No word of Scripture teaches anything other than what God desires to communicate about Himself and His will.

Second, inspiration is *plenary*, meaning that all scripture is inspired (2 Tim. 3:16). The entirety of Scripture is ensured by God to convey what He desires. The whole of Scripture is trustworthy and true; Scripture cannot be broken (cf. Jn. 10:35).

Third, inspiration is *confluent*, meaning that it is a product of both God and man. Though inspiration is verbal, the personalities, language, and styles of the various writers come out. Human authors wrote under divine guidance, thus producing a confluent work: God’s wisdom in human language. “The Spirit controlled the human writers but did not obliterate them. Each had a message to deliver” (Pinnock 57). It is part of God’s master plan that His message be taught through various personalities and styles. God chose these particular men to convey His will in the way that is most effective for their personalities. The language and styles they employed were completely in line with who they were and what God desired. This was no accident. “The writing of Scripture was no last-minute emergency operation in which God had to use whatever He could find to work with” (Lewis 249). He chose these personalities in His own wisdom to reveal Himself to mankind (cf. Gal. 1:15; Jer. 1:5). One writer noted that “divine inspiration so operated that even where the human authors were hammering out their own deeply felt and very personal concerns (for example 2 Cor. 10-13), the result was *theopneustos*, God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), even to the detail of the words used” (Carson 70).

Survey of Proofs

It is not enough that claims to inspiration are made. God has not asked us to be gullible; He invites a look at the evidence. The Bible provides ample evidence of its inspiration. Some of this evidence includes:

1. The Uniqueness of the Bible. The Bible is the most unique book in history. Written over a 1500-1600 year period, with 40 plus human authors from various walks of life, cultures, perspectives, and circumstances, the Bible contains a thematic unity “that defies naturalistic explanations” (Boyd 130). The main theme throughout the Bible is God’s plan for the salvation of mankind. Such a lofty theme with so great a harmony is difficult to explain from a naturalistic worldview.

2. Prophecy. Hundreds of prophecies throughout the Scriptures, with their respective fulfillments, witness to the inspiration of Scripture. Only the true God can infallibly declare

“events that are going to take place” (Isa. 44:7). A study of the prophecies of Christ and their fulfillment demonstrate the divine nature of Scripture.

3. Accuracy. Not only are the prophecies accurate, but so are the historical narratives. The Bible has been attacked both on historical and scientific grounds, and it has been the victim of historical reconstruction. However, these attacks usually come from subjective biases, not objective evidence. Even those of more modernistic persuasion are admitting that the Bible “must be treated seriously as a historical source” (Shanks 52).

4. The validation of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ view of Scripture has already been noted. If He was a liar, then the Bible is a hoax. However, if He is who He claimed, then the entire Bible is validated by His own view. When one considers the historical testimony of Jesus -- His life, death, and resurrection -- then there is an ample foundation for establishing the truth about Jesus. Even when one looks at the Bible from a historical viewpoint, apart from the fact that it is inspired, then there is a consistent testimony about Jesus that cannot be ignored. If there is historical validity to the claims and works of Jesus, then this would also prove that the Bible as a whole is inspired by God, for Jesus said it was. Evidence for the resurrection is the final blow to all skeptics, including their views about the Biblical inspiration.

Inspiration and Modernism

Until the rise of modern criticism, the historic doctrine concerning inspiration is that the Scriptures are the verbally inspired, infallible, and inerrant word of God. Modernism is characterized by an unyielding faith in reason, science and progress, completely apart from anything supernatural. The Renaissance (14th-15th centuries) was a catalyst for modernism, but its “new confidence in reason” broke through in the 17th century. It is based upon “rationality and the Enlightenment, on science and technology, nationalism and imperialism, on humanity’s dominion over itself and the world, and the consequent loss of nature and God” (Kung 5). Modernism is the beast behind efforts to redefine Biblical teaching based on modern assumptions. It “placed unreserved trust in the new critical studies of the Scriptures which contained implicitly or explicitly a denial of the historic doctrines of revelation and inspiration” (Ramm 322). With this came a denial of anything miraculous, and a rewriting of the historical Jesus.

Modernism’s conclusion was that the Bible was just a work of man and past experiences. It contains errors and contradictions, we are told. “Modernists interpret everything, or at least everything miraculous or supernatural (or morally unpopular) nonliterally, and insist right from the start on an unbelieving, skeptical attitude toward the Bible” (Kreeft and Tacelli 205). Because of modernism’s rejection of divine inspiration, the worldview has demanded a new interpretation of the Scriptures. This is why one’s view of the origin of the Bible is paramount. The Bible itself does not allow for such a redefinition of truth (Gal. 1:8), and this puts those who accept divine inspiration at great odds with those who reject it out of hand.

There are several points at which the Bible contradicts modernist ideas (Kreeft and Tacelli 206). We note a few in the form of questions:

1. Is there a true supernatural world? Did Bible miracles happen?
2. Is there a law given by God from above? Are there standards and moral absolutes?
3. Is Jesus Himself divine and therefore infallible and authoritative in all that He says?
4. Are heaven and hell real? Is there a true spiritual war taking place? Do choices that we make ultimately matter?

5. Is there one, and only one, true way to heaven? Is Jesus what He claims in John 14:6? Or are all religions equally valid?

How one answers any of these questions will depend upon whether or not one accepts the reality of God and inspired revelation. Of course, one of the problems of modernism, and now postmodernism, is that they can give no valid replacement to these Biblical concepts that give to life ultimate meaning (cf. Jn. 6:68). If there is no God, or if He has not communicated with mankind, what is the point of life? Sartre, an atheist, argued that if God does not exist, then “it is necessary to draw the consequences of his absence right to the end.” To him, this included the idea that “everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself” (352-353). There would be no God or divine revelation on which to depend. On the other hand, “If God exists, miracles are not a problem. And, we may add, if God does not exist, everything everywhere is a problem” (Pinnock 32). For those who accept the evidence for God, inspiration and revelation are not a problem. As Paul asked Agrippa about the resurrection, “Why is it considered incredible among you if God does raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8), we ask, why should one who claims belief in God find it incredible that God can infallibly communicate His will to His creatures? When we start doubting the validity of revelation and inspiration, we are doubting the reality of God Himself.

Postmodernism is the new calling card of the uncertain age in which we live. It is somewhat difficult to define as a concrete philosophy, but there are some characteristics of which Christians should be aware. Postmodernism is a worldview that looks at everything in relative terms. There is no such thing as absolute truth. Everything is subjective and situational. Kung refers to it as “ecumenical, in the sense of a new global understanding of the various denominations, religions, and regions” (4). Another points out that the “movement is characterized by a rejection of all authority and a corresponding radical pluralism that welcomes all fresh ideas” (Osborne 22). *Relativity* is the key word, and *tolerance* for all (?) ideas is the door that it opens.

Allan Bloom noted that “almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative” (25). These students come from all the various religious and economical backgrounds. They see relativity as a moral postulate, the “condition of a free society.” This is what they have been taught from early on. Bloom continues:

The danger they have been taught to fear from absolutism is not error but intolerance. Relativism is necessary to openness; and this is the virtue, the only virtue, which all primary education for more than fifty years has dedicated itself to inculcating. Openness -- and the relativism that makes it the only plausible stance in the face of various claims to truth and various ways of life and kinds of human beings -- is the great insight of our times. (25-26)

This describes well the idea behind postmodernism. People who think they are right are to be regarded as dangerous. It is the truly enlightened who can think that everybody is right. Of course, in this view, everyone is right except the one who believes the Bible is right. Nothing is absolute except the idea that nothing is absolute. Never mind that it is a self-contradictory position.

This was in reference to higher education, but it illustrates the predominant thinking of today, which, in turn, filters into the religious world and Biblical interpretation. One should immediately begin to see the contradiction between relativism and the Bible. If the Bible is the inspired word of God, then the whole foundation on which modern relativistic society stands is worthless. Is it any wonder that divine inspiration and revelation are considered to be relics of

the unenlightened past? Such notions are not even allowed into one's thinking by the postmodern worldview. The Bible would just breed intolerance ... and we cannot tolerate that!

Within the field of interpretation itself, postmodernism undermines the authority and absolute nature of truth. One is free to interpret the text in any subjective way desirable, as there are no specific meanings. The intended meaning of the author is not a factor anymore. "Therefore any idea of a divinely inspired revelation is discarded by definition" (Osborne 22). All authority resides within the reader; inspiration refers to one's own clever way of interpreting a text.

All of this should tell us that Christians have much fundamental ground to cover in evangelism. One cannot assume that people believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible, even if they claim belief in God. It must be affirmed and defended. Apologetics is becoming more of a vital part of evangelism. As Paul approached the Athenians by introducing God the Creator (Acts 17), so we must teach people of today with the same basic approach. We must begin with God the Creator, show the need and reasonableness of His communicating His will to mankind by revelation, and then show how He executed the plan for the salvation of mankind through Jesus Christ. People must see the need for God revealing Himself.

Implications of Inspiration

If the Scriptures are inspired by God, then there are some inescapable conclusions that may be drawn from this. In fact, it is more likely these implications that relativists scoff at than anything else. If there was a God who did not call for any changes in life, who did not bother or inconvenience anyone, and who let all people do whatever they wanted, then this God would be fine by today's standards. However, people know that ideas have consequences, and the idea that the Almighty Creator has revealed His will through divine inspiration is not a lofty theory that has no effect on life and conscience. If true, divine Scripture would have greater consequences than anything else. This is exactly what one would expect if God has spoken (Heb. 4:12). Without question, the Bible effectively works in those who believe (1 Thess. 2:13). Space forbids a detailed examination of these, but note some the following implications of divine inspiration:

1. Reliability. If the Bible is inspired, then we can rely on it for all matters on which it speaks. We can trust it to bring about God's desired effect of salvation. It is trustworthy and faithful because God Himself is the same (1 Cor. 1:9; Heb. 13:8).

2. Inerrancy and infallibility. The original autographs were without error (inspiration and inerrancy do not refer to copies, though we can rest assured that what we have today accurately reflects the originals). If God's word is truth, then it is not going to be wrong (Jn. 17:17; 1 Jn. 1:5-6). Infallibility refers to the fact that the Bible is trustworthy in a way that means it will not teach something that will misinform or mislead. It is not based on deception, nor will it deceive (cf. Jn. 10:35).

3. Authority. Because the Bible is the word of God, it is our only source for faith and authority. It is authoritative because it is the word of the Author of all things. When it speaks, we must follow; where it limits, we must cease. To think beyond it is to go without God (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 Jn. 9). To abide within it is to be true disciples of Jesus (Jn. 8:31).

4. Absolute Standard. Only an inspired revelation can serve as an absolute standard. Postmodernism is a rejection of absolutes, but the Bible is absolute because it ultimately comes from God, not men. Without such a standard, society falls into an abyss of confusion and

anarchy. No human standard can ultimately serve this function; only one that comes from God can do this. The Bible is it; it is truth (Jn. 17:17).

5. Relevancy. If inspired, then the Bible is relevant to all areas of our lives. It is “living and powerful,” able to judge and effect our lives (Heb. 4:12). The Bible is not a dead relic of an unenlightened past, but a living testimony to a true and powerful God who can transform us from sinners to saints.

6. Clarity. God is capable of communicating His will to us in a way that is clear and understandable. To argue that the Bible cannot be understood would be to indict God of not clearly communicating His will. This would also mean that God has commanded something from us that we cannot perform (Eph. 5:17). This itself would argue that God is unreasonable. However, the Scriptures are clear enough to be understood, even when passages are difficult.

Conclusion

Without an inspired revelation, what would we have? One could then only echo the words of Ingersoll at his brother’s grave: “And every life, no matter if its every hour is rich with love and every moment jeweled with joy, will, at its close, become a tragedy sad and deep and dark as can be woven of the warp and woof of mystery and death” (317). Humanity is capable of better worldviews than this. Our longing and desire for more is satisfied by the revelation of the Almighty. Because it comes from God, the Bible is the source of teaching and instruction in righteousness. It is a rock on which we may build the houses of our lives. It is that which brings us the ultimate hope of heaven, and without which hope would be nothing more than a dream.

If God is, then the thought that He is able to communicate to His creatures should present no problem. The Bible is the written communication from God to mankind. It expresses His will for the redemption of sinners; but this is meaningful only if the Bible comes from God. Several lines of evidence testify of its divine nature.

Modernism has denied the divine nature of Scripture; and postmodernism has rejected its authority as an absolute standard. Christians need to be reaffirmed in their beliefs and stand to defend the inspiration of God’s revelation. With this foundation, we have solid reason to give an answer for our hope (1 Pet. 3:15).

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