

Introduction:

- The doctrine of Inspiration builds on Revelation, but asks, “How did God give special revelation? Where did the Bible come from? How did we actually get these written words on the page? And how do we know that they are actually from God? B/c, after all, mere men held the quill and wrote them.”
- Further, the doctrine of Inspiration answers the questions:
 - How do we know that the Bible is inerrant (without error)?
 - How do we know that it is authoritative in all matters to which it speaks?
- “No element is more central to Scripture’s testimony to its own nature than the concept of inspiration.”¹
- “The doctrine of Scripture is not an opinion of this or that school, not the dogma of a particular church or sect, but a fundamental article, an article of faith of the one holy universal Christian church.”²

1. The Word of God is the Voice of the Spirit.

“If you want to hear from God, read your Bible. If you want to hear Him audibly, read it out loud.” (Justin Peters)

- Jesus promises in John 14 & 16 that the Holy Spirit would bring to remembrance everything that the disciples would need to record.
- Jesus said that the Spirit is (3x) “the Spirit of truth.” He promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into “all truth.” So this sets up the question from Jesus promise: did the Holy Spirit accomplish what Jesus promised? The answer of the NT is a resounding “yes”!

A. Foundation: Where the Word is, there is God’s Spirit³

- Gen. 1:2 (The Spirit of God creating and bringing order)
- Psalm 33:6
- John 6:63; 16:13
- Eph. 5:18/Col. 3:16
- 1 Thess. 1:5
- 2 Thess. 2:2

¹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, “How Does the Bible Look at Itself?” in *Thy Word is Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation To Today*, Edited by Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2013), 1213.

² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:435.

³ See John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2010), 64–65.

B. Inspiration Defined:

- What biblical inspiration does not mean:
 - That the biblical writers felt a subjective enthusiasm or stir, such that the Bible came to be.
 - That Scripture is the product of significant human achievement. (It is against human nature to conclude that all humanity is justly deserving of God's wrath in eternal hell).
 - That God acted on the general thoughts of those who wrote Scripture, but did not give the exact words. (This view would say that the Bible contains the word of God, but is not the word of God in every word. It would deny the fact of plenary (all) verbal (words) inspiration of Scripture).
 - Existential inspiration; the idea that inspiration is the work of God acting upon the reader of Scripture. When an individual reads Scripture, God will perform the act of inspiration with the result that the reader is ethically or morally motivated in a new way. This view would say that the Bible is the word of God, but the definition of what that means is erroneous.
 - Rather, God objectively acted upon them in a real context, with real need, to exercise his care for his people.

- However:
 - “The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times” (Ps. 12:6).
 - “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether” (Ps. 19:9).
 - “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:7).
 - “The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting” (Ps. 119:142).

What biblical **inspiration** is:

- God superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded without error His message to mankind in the words of their original writings.” (C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 38)

- “Inspiration is . . . a supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given divine trustworthiness.” (Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 131)

- “Biblical inspiration [is the] . . . work of the Holy Spirit by which, without setting aside their personalities and literary or human faculties, God so guided the authors of Scripture as to enable them to write exactly the words which convey His truth to men, and in doing so preserved their judgments from error in the original manuscripts.” (K. S. Kantzer, “The Communication of Revelation,” in *The Bible: The Living Word of Revelation*, ed. M.C. Tenney, 180.)

- “It’s more correct to say that the letter is inspired, not the writer.” (Andy Snider, and others)
- A few passages from which we derive the correct understanding of biblical inspiration:

2 Tim 3:16: “all Scripture is inspired by God”

- “All Scripture”—51 occurrences of *graphe* (“scripture”) in the NT, it always refers to OT Scriptures. In 1 Tim 5:18 and 2 Pet 3:16, *graphe* includes NT writings as well.⁴
 - 1 Tim 5:18 For the Scripture says, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.”
 - The words of Jesus recorded by Matthew in Matt 10:10 are “scripture” on par with Deut 25:4.
 - 2 Pet 3:15-16 ...just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also **the rest of the Scriptures**, to their own destruction.
 - Peter says that Paul’s writings are considered “scripture” along with the OT.
- “is inspired by God” – θεόπνευστος, lit. “God-breathed.”
 - It is a passive⁵ verbal form, which means that Scripture is a result of divine action (as opposed to human ingenuity or invention).
 - The key idea here is not to just highlight a process but to show the divine origin of Scripture.
 - It is the words/text of the Bible that is inspired. This does not mean that all other things they thought or wrote on different occasions were inspired. Inspiration was the act of God to produce his very word in every word of Scripture.
- Everything that belongs to the category of Scripture had the character of being “God-breathed.” Scripture’s words were God’s words.
- “Paul appears to be saying, therefore, that all Scripture has as its source God’s breath and that this is its essential characteristic.”⁶

⁴ “The way in which he makes this affirmation gives us warrant to relate that truth to “all” of the NT, since it is recognized to be γραφή (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16–17, where this has already taken place in the NT age)” (George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids; Carlisle, England: Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992], 448).

⁵ The passive as opposed to the active is defended well by B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), 275–81. .

⁶ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids; Carlisle, England: Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 447.

- “It was not only ‘God-breathed’ at the time it was written; it IS ‘God-breathing.’”⁷

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

- The context: Peter is relaying that his message is reliable not because of him, but who the message is from.
- “No prophecy of Scripture is a matter...”—what the prophet said was not his own ideas but ones divine. It is not his interpretation of what he *thinks* God might like to say...it is God speaking in his words.
- ‘Prophecy’ – all of OT, Law, Psalms, Prophets.
- ‘Interpretation’ -includes idea of origination; someone who had God’s words and faithfully gave them to others.
- He’s not speaking of our interpretation (subjective understanding) of Peter’s message, but an author who is delivering the text to the reader from God (to the target audience).
- “Men moved/carried by the Holy Spirit”—has the sense of “produced/borne” and puts the emphasis on the active agent.
- Same word used in Acts 27:15 – speaks of a ship being carried along.
- The writers spoke as they were carried along.
- Not always dictation (often in OT, ‘thus says the Lord’).
- Element of mystery: truly human words, yet truly divine words.
- So while men are the instruments of the work, the point is that these men spoke a direct word given by the Holy Spirit.

“It is not Peter’s intention to deny completely human volition or personality in the writing of Scripture (he says that the men ‘spoke’, but rather to say that the ultimate source of every prophecy was never a man’s decision about what he wanted to write, but rather the Holy Spirit’s action in the prophet’s life, carried out in ways unspecified here (or, in fact, elsewhere in Scripture). This indicates a belief that all of the Old Testament prophecies (and, in light of vv. 19–20, this probably includes all of the written Scripture of the Old Testament) are spoken ‘from God’: that is, they are God’s own words.”⁸

“Why is there so much similarity in these books [i.e., the Gospels], and how could these men be reminded of so much? Because it was the Holy Spirit who recalled everything to the mind of the disciples who has been present with the Lord.”⁹

Scripture was inspired through some 40 different authors, on a few different continents, over about 1600 years. Considering the diverse cultures, contexts, and personalities, the unity of Scripture is best explained by a single Author who inspired every word of the text. The 66 books of the Bible have their origin in God. Thus, Scripture is rightly called, “the word of God.”

⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:385.

⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids: IVP; Zondervan, 2004), 75.

⁹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Christian and the Old Testament* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1998), 226.

C. Witnesses to the Inspiration of Scripture

1. Christ's witness to the inspiration of the OT (that the OT is the very word of God).

What did Jesus think of the Bible?

a. It is the final authority.

“[A]nd he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.’¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY’” (Matt. 4:9-10, cf. vv. 4, 7).

b. It will necessarily be fulfilled.

“Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED’” (Matt. 26:31).

“How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, *which say* that it must happen this way?” (Matt. 26:54).

c. It assumes the historical truth of OT miracles.

“For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark” (Matt. 24:37-38).

Christ also refers to the historicity of events such as the burning bush, the destruction of Sodom, Manna in the wilderness, the healing of Naaman, Jonah and the fish, etc.

d. It is consistently accurate.

“...and the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

e. There is no distinction in value among the various parts of the OT.

“Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27).

Everything is considered to be a unified witness.

2. Christ's witness to the inspiration of the NT.

What did Christ have to say about the inspiration of the New Testament?

(Note: None of NT written while Christ was on earth. The first book, James, was written around 45-49 AD).

- a. Jesus left revelation unfinished.

“I have many more things to say to you...” (John 16:12).

- b. Jesus prophesied the completion of Biblical revelation.

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13)

- c. Jesus pre-authenticated the New Testament Scriptures.

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26, cf. John 16:13a).

The Holy Spirit guided the Apostles to provide the church with inspired truth.

“We believe in the 39 books of the Old Testament, because the Lord Jesus Christ *affirmed* the Old Testament. And we believe in the 27 books of the New Testament, because the Lord Jesus Christ *authorized* His Apostles to write the New Testament. The doctrine of canonicity ultimately comes back to the lordship of Jesus Christ. If we believe in Him and submit to His authority, then we will simultaneously believe in and submit to His Word. Because He affirmed the Old Testament canon, we also affirm it. Because He authorized His Apostles to write the New Testament, we likewise embrace it as well.”¹⁰

3. The Apostles witness to biblical inspiration.

What did the Apostles think of the inspiration of Scripture?

- a. The Apostles continued the appeal to the Old Testament as justification for their Gospel.

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day **according to the Scriptures**” (1 Cor. 15:3). [Paul assumed that Christ’s death was in accordance with previously-written Scripture, which, at this time, meant the OT].

- b. The apostolic preaching and teaching were tested by the Scriptures.

“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily [to] [find] [out] whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

¹⁰ Nathan Busenitz, <http://www.tms.edu/preachersandpreaching/why-these-66-books>.

- c. The Apostles assumed that it was necessary for OT prophecy to be fulfilled.
“Men [and] brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus” (Acts 1:16).
- d. The Apostles identified God with the Scriptures and vice versa.
“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth’” (Rom. 9:17).
- e. The Apostles regarded other NT authors as writers of Scripture.
“[A]nd consider [that] the longsuffering of our Lord [is] salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable [people] twist to their own destruction, as [they] [do] also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Pet. 3:15).
- f. The Apostles regarded their own writings as from God.
“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed [it] not [as] the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13).

2. Key Questions about Inspiration

A. Does inspiration apply to the entire Bible?

- *Plenary*—means “full” carrying the idea that all the words of Scripture are God’s words. Everything in Scripture is God’s word. One of the implications of this is that we are not in a position to pick and choose what is inspired.
- *Verbal*—means that the very words of Scripture, not only the ideas of concepts of the biblical writers. This encompasses the propositions, concepts, events, promises, feelings, tone, etc. So this means that inspiration pertains to far more than the general message of Scripture, but also down to the individual words, even the letters. It “claims that the Bible says *exactly* what God wants to say because the Holy Spirit was responsible for every word written in Scripture.”¹¹

Inspiration includes the grammar and syntax of the text (i.e. mood, voice, verb tense, sentence structure, etc.).

B. *READ ON OWN: How did the Spirit inspire the message?

- Organic inspiration or concursive operation

¹¹ Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009), 86.

“The phrase ‘concurvive operation’ is often used to describe the process of inspiration, meaning that God used the intellect, skills, and personality of fallible men to write down what was divine and infallible.”¹²

“Scripture is both a divine book and a human book... I have chosen, rather, at the risk of being criticized as old-fashioned, to begin with God’s intention to speak personal words to his people. I assume here that God is able, one way or another, to get his words to us.”¹³

- Examples¹⁴ of concurvive/organic inspiration:
 - In Matt 1:22, the words of the prophet Isaiah (in Isa 7:14 are cited as “what the Lord had spoken.”
 - In Matt 4:4 Jesus repeatedly cites Deuteronomy, which is from the pen of Moses, noting that it falls within “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”
 - In Matt 19:5, Jesus cites Moses’s words in Gen 2:24 as words that God “said.”
 - In Acts 1:16, the words of David in Psalms 69 and 109 are said to be the words which are “Scriptures... which the Holy Spirit” gave to David.
 - Joel’s prophecy in Joel 2:28–32 is what “God declares” according to Peter in Acts 2:16–17.

“Scripture is totally the product of the Spirit of God, who speaks through the prophets and Apostles, and at the same time totally the product of the activity of the authors.”¹⁵

“...it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men.”¹⁶

- Various writers, genres, etc. (Propositions, information, tone, emotion, perspective)

[W]e observe that the prophets and Apostles, as they proceed to write, completely remain themselves. They retain their powers of reflection and deliberation, their emotional states and freedom of the will. Research (Luke 1:1), reflection, and memory (John 14:26), the use of sources, and all the ordinary means that an author employs in the process of writing a book are used. So far from being spurned or excluded by divine inspiration, these means are incorporated into it and made to serve the goal that God has in mind.¹⁷

3. Implications for Us? (Because the Bible is God speaking to us...)

¹² Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 37.

¹³ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2010), 140.

¹⁴ Many other examples of this can be seen in Luke 1:70; 24:25; John 5:45–47; Acts 3:18, 21; 4:25; 13:47; 28:25; Rom 1:2; 3:2; 9:17; 1 Cor 9:8–10; Heb 1:1–2, 6–7.

¹⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:435.

¹⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville: WJK, 1960), 1:80.

¹⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:433.

- A. The church did not decide what should be in the Bible, but merely recognized the product of God-breathed inspiration.

The act of inspiration by God the Holy Spirit was the act of God deciding what would constitute Scripture; the contents of the Bible. Thus, the Bible is absolute and objective, being preserved from man’s subjectivity.

“The church no more gave us the New Testament canon that Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity, by His work of creation, and similarly He gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up.” (James Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (London: Hodden and Stoughton, 1965), p. 81).

- B. The Spirit of God cannot be separated from the word of God.

His work of inspiration binds him to the word.

Ephesians 5:18–19 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, **but be filled with the Spirit,**¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

Colossians 3:16 **Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you,** with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

“Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18) = “let the word of Christ richly dwell within you” (Col. 3:16). These two phrases are in parallel.

Can doctrine be elevated over the Spirit? To say, “Don’t elevate doctrine above the Holy Spirit,” is to make a boogeyman distinction.

John Calvin: “[T]he office of the Spirit promised to us, is not to form new and unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new form of doctrine, by which we may be led away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but to seal on our minds the very doctrine which the gospel recommends. Hence it is easy to understand that we must give diligent heed both to the reading and hearing of Scripture, if we would obtain any benefit from the Spirit of God...and, on the contrary, that any spirit which passes by the wisdom of God’s Word, and suggests any other doctrine, is deservedly

suspected of vanity and falsehood...what authority can the Spirit have with us if he be not ascertained by an infallible mark?" (*Institutes* 1.9.1)

John Owen: "He that would utterly separate the Spirit from the word had as good burn his Bible."

Calvin: "We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it" (*Calvin's Commentary*, 2 Tim. 3:16).

Therefore, elevating doctrine and God are one in the same act of worship. Objective biblical doctrine is traction for relationship with, and worship of, God through the work of the Spirit.

Thus, the colloquialism, "Don't elevate doctrine above the Holy Spirit," is to divide the Spirit against himself, or God against God.

C. We have the illuminating light of His presence.

- Psalm 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."
- Psalm 119:130 "The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple."

"Scripture is the word of God because the Holy Spirit testifies in it concerning Christ, because it has the Word-made-flesh as its matter and content."¹⁸

D. We have the chief instrument of our salvation and sanctification.

"The goal of revelation is not information only, but affection, worship, and obedience."¹⁹

- Those who tend to deny inspiration often admit to wanting to be freed from its claims.
- Scripture both exposes and pronounces what is exposed. Hebrews 4:12 "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
- Scripture is the means of sanctification. John 17:17 "Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth."

"...all right knowledge is born of obedience.... It is better to limp along this path than to dash with all speed outside it."²⁰

¹⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:443.

¹⁹ Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 36.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville: WJK, 1960), 1:72–73.

- (affections) Psalm 119:111 “I have inherited Your testimonies forever, For they are the joy of my heart.”
- (worship) Psalm 119:175 “Let my soul live that it may praise You, And let Your ordinances help me.”
- (dealing with sin) Psalm 119:11 “treasured...that I might not sin” Psalm 119:133 “Establish my footsteps in Your word, And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me.”

“For errors can never be uprooted from human hearts until true knowledge of God is planted therein.”²¹

- The idea which Paul wrote to young Timothy: Timothy, the sacred writings have led you to salvation as a child and now, these writings which are Scripture, are able to complete you as a man of God. “All Scripture [as a whole] ...is profitable” (2 Tim 3:15–17)
 - 2 Timothy 3:17 “...so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

“It remains the duty of every person...to put aside his or her hostility against the word of God and ‘to take every thought captive to obey Christ.’” [2 Cor. 10:5]²²

“The Holy Spirit does not, after the act of inspiration, withdraw from Holy Scripture and abandon it to its fate but sustains and animates it and in many ways brings its content to humanity, to its heart and conscience.”²³

E. We have a certain voice in uncertain times.

- (e.g., “the exact truth” in Luke 1:4)

“If Scripture obviously intends to present a story as historical, the exegete has no right, at the discretion of historical criticism, to turn it into a myth.”²⁴

“You have studied the Holy Scriptures, which are true, and given by the Holy Spirit. You know that nothing unjust or counterfeit is written in them.”²⁵

- 2 Pet 1:19—“a more sure word”

“All Scripture, as it has been given to us by God, will be found to be harmonious.”²⁶

²¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville: WJK, 1960), 1:73.

²² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:440.

²³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:440.

²⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:447.

²⁵ 1 Clement 45:2-3.

²⁶ From Irenaeus cited in Edward J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth: Some Thoughts on the Biblical Doctrine of Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957, 1963), 38.

- 1 John 5:13 “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”
- “we know” 15x in 1 John

John Calvin: “By countless wondrous means Satan with the whole world has tried either to oppress it or overturn it, to obscure and obliterate it utterly from the memory of men—yet, like the palm, it has risen ever higher and has remained unassailable... The whole power of earth has armed itself to destroy it, yet all these efforts have gone up in smoke.”²⁷

²⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville: WJK, 1960), 1:91.