

# DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

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## Lecture 1: Types and Functions of General Revelation

Today we open the first section of our new Defenders survey of Christian doctrine which will be on the doctrine of revelation. In surveying Christian doctrine, we are going to be looking at the traditional so-called *loci communes* of Protestant theology. The *loci communes* is Latin for the common places or chief themes or topics of Christian theology. Traditionally the *loci communes* would include things like doctrine of God, doctrine of Christ, doctrine of man, doctrine of salvation, and so forth. We will be opening our study of Christian doctrine by looking at the locus called doctrine of revelation.

Key to the study of Christian theology is the question of authority. Who has the authority to speak about matters of God and our relationship to him? Is it sacred Scripture, or is it the church? I want to suggest that authority ultimately lodges in God himself. Any other authority is a derivative authority that comes from God being, for example, the author of Scripture or his providential guidance over the church. Ultimate authority lodges in God himself. He is the one who has the ability to speak authoritatively about himself and his truth.

When we talk about authority, what do we mean? I am defining authority to mean the right to demand belief and obedience. We are all familiar with authorities in human affairs. For example, the state has a certain authority within a sphere of jurisdiction. Parents have authority in the family. Employers have a certain type of authority at the workplace. These authorities have a derivative power, and they also have a limited sphere in which that authority is exercised. By contrast, God's authority is ultimate. There is no higher court of appeal from which God's authority is derived. God is the final court of appeal. Moreover, God's authority is unlimited. He has sovereignty over everything. Therefore, God speaks authoritatively on all matters.

The practical question then becomes: how do we discover God's will and mind on these matters? How do we come to know what God thinks about these things and what he wants us to do? The answer is revelation. God has revealed his will and mind to us. So in talking about revelation, I am not speaking of the book of the Bible that has that title; rather, I am speaking of God's revealing his truth and himself to us.

What do we mean by revelation? The word itself in the Greek has the notion of unveiling something that is hidden so that it may be seen and known for what it is. Revelation in this sense is the disclosure or the discovery (taking away the cover, taking away the thing that hides it) so that we can see a matter for how it actually is.

Immediately we confront a difficulty because typically Scripture is thought to be God's propositional revelation to us. His revelation to us in the form of sentences. Yet it is very clear that not all of Scripture is a revelation in this sense of unveiling something hidden or disclosing something that otherwise would be unknown.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this was one of the real struggles of early biblical critics in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century – to understand in what sense the Bible could be said to be a revelation from God when so much of it was knowable through mundane knowledge. For example, Luke in his Gospel talks about the sources that he consulted for writing his Gospel, how he interviewed witnesses to the events. These witnesses would have been accessible to anyone. It is not as though Luke was imparted some revelation from on-high of these matters independently of his work as a historian in interviewing people and compiling things. Again, when Paul writes his letter to Philemon about forgiving a runaway slave, Paul doesn't seem to have any sense that he is disclosing mysteries hitherto unknown by God. Yet we regard Philemon as a book that is inspired and part of the New Testament and therefore part of God's revelation to us. Some of the early biblical critics wondered how we can speak of the New Testament, for example, as being a revelation from God when so much of it was really just mundane ordinary sorts of things that could be known by anyone wholly apart from some sort of a divine disclosure.

I think this makes it evident that when we talk about revelation there are really two senses here that is at work. One is this very narrow sense that is implied in the etymology of the word itself – namely, unveiling something previously unknown so that it can be seen and known for what it is. That is a very narrow sense of revelation. In that sense, not all of the New Testament is a revelation. There are revelations of that sort to be found in the New Testament. One thinks, for example, of the book of Revelation where John describes how the Lord has revealed to him what must soon take place. Or in Corinth, Paul talks about New Testament prophets who would stand up in the meeting of the New Testament Christians and would have a revelation from the Lord which they would then share with the others. Paul says you should listen carefully one at a time to these prophets and weigh with discernment what they are saying to be sure that this really is of the Lord and not just something from themselves.

Not everything in the New Testament is like that. As I said, much of Paul's correspondence concerns just ordinary church affairs about which he wrote. Other historical books in the New Testament use sources. They copy or borrow from other sources. They are not just given from on-high so to speak. So although the New Testament has revelation in this very narrow sense in it, not all of it is revelation in that sense.

But then there is a broader sense of the word revelation, I think, in which we can speak of the New Testament and the Bible as God's revelation. Namely, it is a communication from God. This is what God wants to communicate to us. That is perfectly consistent with the human authors of Scripture using historical sources, using mundane knowledge, to write what they did. In that broader sense, you don't need to have a special revelation from God in order for this to be God's Word to us. So in the broader sense of revelation the Scripture is a communication to us from God. It is God's Word to us, and therefore is revelation in that broad sense even if in the narrow restricted sense it is not revelation in being imparted directly from God without any sort of human intermediary or investigation.

### **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* Witness accounts – even if they are viewing something miraculous – are considered general revelation?<sup>2</sup> Or are those special revelations?

*Dr. Craig:* OK, you have introduced another distinction that could easily be confused with what I am saying here. I will talk in just a moment about the distinction between general revelation and special revelation. I would call those two *types* of revelation. But what I am talking about here is two *definitions* of revelation – not kinds of revelation, but two definitions of the word “revelation.” In a narrow restricted sense a revelation is a disclosure from God of something so that it can be seen and known for what it really is – something previously unknown or hidden. But in a broader sense, a revelation is simply a communication from God. Those are the narrow and broad sense (or definition) of the word “revelation.” In a moment we will talk about the ways in which God has, in fact, chosen to reveal himself. That is a different distinction. But that is a good point to make and to bring out that difference.

### **END DISCUSSION**

Let's now talk about two different kinds of revelation. Theologians typically have distinguished between God's *general* revelation and his *special* revelation.

General revelation is so named because it is general in two senses. First, it is general in the sense that it is *generally available to mankind as a whole*. This is a revelation which is universal. Everybody is a recipient of God's general revelation. So the first sense in which this is general is in its universality. Secondly, however, it is also general in that it *provides merely general knowledge or information about God*, not specific information about God. For example, from general revelation you can know that God exists – that there is a Creator and Designer of the universe. But you wouldn't learn that he is a Trinity. From general revelation alone you wouldn't have any idea that there are three

persons in the godhead. You would just have the idea that there is a personal Creator and Designer of the universe. Again, from general revelation alone you wouldn't know that Jesus Christ was both human and divine – that he had both a divine nature and a human nature. That doesn't belong to general revelation. Rather, general revelation will give you a broad-strokes picture of God – a kind of generic monotheism, if you will – that would be common to Jews, Christians, as well as certain pagans (for example, deists who believe in a personal Creator and Designer of the universe). Those would be the two senses in which general revelation is general. Namely, in its scope and then also in the kind of information that it gives about God.

### **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I've always heard that general revelation was all of creation, a part of which was a general knowledge of God. But the whole working of the universe is the first creation.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, I am going to say in a moment here what kinds of general revelation there are. We will see that the way in which God is generally revealed will be through creation – through the works of creation. We see the handiwork of the Creator in the things that have been made.

### **END DISCUSSION**

Now let's talk about types of general revelation. I've already indicated the first type. It will be God's revelation of himself in nature. God, as the Creator of the universe, has left his fingerprints as it were in creation so that you can discern the potter in the clay.<sup>3</sup> As you look at the works of creation you can see certain qualities or traits of the author of nature in it. Paul talks about this revelation in Romans 1:18-20. Look at what Paul has to say about God's general revelation in nature:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse;

Here Paul says that all men everywhere at any time in history are responsible for recognizing at least the existence of the Creator of the universe. He specifically says that from the created order around us God's invisible nature (and then he specifies two things – his eternal power and his deity) has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. Therefore, although people wouldn't know from God's general revelation in nature that this is the Christian God or even the Jewish God for that matter, they should be able

to discern that there is a Creator who has eternal power and deity who has made the world. So all persons are without excuse for acknowledging at least that much about God simply on the basis of his self-revelation in nature.

Secondly, though, over in Romans 2 Paul seems to speak in a second way in which God has revealed himself generally to mankind, and that is through conscience. Through one's conscience you apprehend the moral law which God has implanted within you. In Romans 2:14-16, Paul talks about non-Jews (Gentiles) who do not have the Jewish law and nevertheless seem to apprehend the basics of what the law requires. Paul says,

When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Here Paul says that even those who do not have the Jewish law (for example, the Ten Commandments) nevertheless have a basic apprehension of right and wrong, of the requirements of the law. This is something that is written innately on their hearts by God. Therefore, they are held morally responsible for this knowledge. Just as all persons everywhere are held responsible for acknowledging the existence of God, so also all persons everywhere are held responsible for the demands of God's moral law upon them.

Those would be the two types of general revelation that are mentioned in Scripture: God's revelation in nature and also in conscience through his implanted moral law.

### **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* In all of your dealings and discussions with atheists, do you feel that there are some people who, for whatever reason, general revelation just doesn't speak to them? Are their consciences just seared – they've denied it for so long that they've just talked themselves out of it?

*Dr. Craig:* This is a really good question.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes people will say there really are no sincere atheists – that somehow deep down inside they know that God exists. When you read Romans 1 you can see why someone might say that. He says that what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. Then he goes on in verse 21 to say,

although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images.

Then in verse 25 he says, “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever!”

So Paul seems to think of atheism, or polytheism here, as being a suppression of the truth that is evident to them. I think some people can be sincerely self-deceived. I don't think this means that atheists are just liars; that they really believe in God but they are lying about it. I think a person can become so self-deceived that he sincerely thinks that God doesn't exist. But he does so only by, as Paul says, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. Alvin Plantinga, the most famous Christian philosopher writing today, has argued that atheists are actually dysfunctional cognitively. They have a cognitive dysfunction that prevents them from apprehending God in the way that God created them naturally to do. It is a very bold thesis. Yet, Plantinga has defended this at some length. I think that Paul would probably agree with him based upon what he says here. A person whose cognitive faculties are functioning properly in the way that God intended them would form the belief that God exists. He would either form it instinctively or he would infer it based upon God's revelation in nature and conscience. As Paul says here, a person who turns his back upon God has a darkened intellect. He says their minds were darkened so that they no longer saw the truth. So it is not that they are lying. It is not that they see the truth and won't acknowledge it. The darkened intellect is dysfunctional – it doesn't see the truth anymore. So, as Plantinga emphasizes, part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to restore proper functioning to their cognitive faculties so that they can now begin to think correctly as their faculties were intended to. That, I guess, would be how I would understand your question.

*Student:* Is it accurate to state that these moral values that are implanted in us are the result of being created in God's image?

*Dr. Craig:* I think that Christian theologians would affirm that and would say that is what sets us apart from the rest of creation. Because we are made in the image of God and bear his likeness we have intrinsic moral worth in the way that mere animals or non-sentient beings (rocks and trees and so forth) do not. That doesn't mean that there isn't an environmental ethic. Indeed, as bearers of God's image, we should treat nature and the oceans and the forests in certain ways, but not because they have intrinsic moral worth. They are not persons in the way we are. Rather, it is because we are persons, we are in God's image, that we bear certain moral responsibilities to the rest of creation as well as to each other. So, yes, I would say that this grasping of moral duties and values would, at its most fundamental level I think, be grasping that other persons are intrinsically valuable. Therefore, they are to be treated as ends in themselves and not just as means to

your ends. That fundamental grasping of the intrinsic value of other persons would lie right at the heart of this apprehension of the requirements of the law.<sup>5</sup>

*Student:* Do you think that that conscience was created in Adam and Eve? Created as God's image? Or did they kind of apprehend it for all humanity when they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

*Dr. Craig:* If I understand your question correctly, I would say quite definitely that as created in the image of God, as I said earlier, Adam and Eve would have this implanted moral sense and proper functioning conscience so that they would know that what they were doing was wrong.

*Student:* So what opened their eyes? The knowledge of good and evil sounds to me like they wouldn't have known the difference between good and evil before that.

*Dr. Craig:* Oh. All right. It would seem to me there one is talking about an experiential knowledge of evil. As innocent persons, they didn't have that kind of experiential knowledge of what is evil. But they certainly knew the difference between right and wrong.

*Student:* They consciously decided to disobey.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, right. They chose to go against God, and then they had this experience or the knowing experientially good and evil.

*Student:* This might be dissecting it too finely but I wondered why Paul distinguished between knowing God's eternal power and his deity? I thought maybe one would imply the other.

*Dr. Craig:* I don't know the answer to that. It is intriguing that he mentions God's eternal power – there you actually have two attributes of God, don't you? God never began to exist (he is eternal), and then also God's power. But he distinguishes that from deity. I honestly don't know why he would make that distinction except perhaps to say that deity is an even fuller concept than just eternal power. It is not enough just to have eternal power. This needs to be God. The word for deity (we will talk about this later) *theotes* is uniquely used here in the New Testament. This is the only place in the New Testament where this word appears. It is probably an indication that Paul is in touch with Greek philosophical traditions about God and so is wanting to affirm that this is a divine being who exemplifies the divine nature. It is not just some sort of eternal power. But beyond that I could only speculate.

**END DISCUSSION**



Let's say something about the functions of general revelation. There are several functions that general revelation carries out.

1. *To show forth God's glory.* Psalm 19:1. The psalmist says,

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Here the psalmist says that the beauty and the grandeur of the heavens above (he is thinking, of course, of the stars) tell forth the glory of God to all humanity. There is no verbal speech that is spoken – no human language that is spoken – but nevertheless he says this message goes out to the whole world of showing forth the glory of God. So one of the functions of general revelation is to declare God's majesty and glory. As we've come to learn more about the universe, I think we've only increased in our awe of God's power and majesty in creating this incredible universe in which we live. When you think that what the psalmist could see with the naked eye were only stars within our own galaxy (he had no idea of the untold billions and billions of galaxies that are out there beyond the sight of the naked eye) you can only see how incredibly grand and majestic God is through his revelation in nature as the Creator of the magnificent universe.<sup>6</sup>

2. *To render people morally culpable before God.* Let's go back to Romans 1:19. There Paul says,

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

So general revelation serves to remove any excuse that people might have for their unbelief in God's existence. It renders them culpable or responsible before God for acknowledging his existence.

Then over in Romans 2:15-16 he says,

They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Here he says that people will be judged on the basis of their innate knowledge of God's moral law. They will be accused or excused on the judgment day based upon their innate

knowledge of the moral law written on their hearts. So one of the functions of general revelation is to remove any excuse that people might have before God. Rather, it serves to render people culpable before God.

One of the questions that arises in this connection is whether general revelation could also provide saving knowledge of God. Are those who never hear the Gospel during their lifetime uniformly lost forever? Do they go to hell never having heard of Christ? How will God judge them? Is it possible that through their response to general revelation they might come to a saving knowledge of God? That will be the question that we will turn to and take up next time.<sup>7</sup>

## Lecture 2: More Functions of General Revelation

We have been talking about God's general revelation in nature and conscience. I pointed out that general revelation serves a number of functions which we want to continue to talk about today.

1. The first function of general revelation is *to reveal God's glory*. In the marvelous universe around us we see the majesty and the greatness of God revealed.
2. As a result of this, Paul says that *this renders all persons culpable before God*. All persons are responsible to recognize God's existence based on his revelation in nature and his moral law and its demand upon them in light of the moral law implanted on their hearts.

So if we turn to Romans 1:20 we read, "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." Then over in Romans 2:15 Paul says that the Gentiles who do not have the law "show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them."

So all persons are held responsible for believing in an eternal, powerful Creator of the universe, and for recognizing the demands of his implanted moral law upon their lives.

The question would be then: does this provide information about God that is sufficient for a person to come not merely to a knowledge *that* God exists but to come to a saving knowledge of God? Is it possible through general revelation to come to know God in a redemptive way and not simply as the Creator before whom one stands morally fallen and guilty?

This is a matter of considerable controversy. For example, Jack Cottrell, in his book *What the Bible Says about God the Creator*, argues that the purpose of general revelation is to provide information about God's grandeur and power. It is not to provide redemptive knowledge of God, and therefore general revelation is not a source of redemptive knowledge. This is what Cottrell writes on pages 342 and following of his book:

The Bible nowhere teaches that a person can be saved from sin and condemnation through his response to the light of creation alone. General revelation simply does not give us any knowledge of redemption or of the redeemer. . . . Does this mean [people] are condemned on account of their ignorance? Not at all. This would be very unjust. True, they do not know the Gospel, but they are not condemned for not knowing the Gospel. Why then are they condemned? Because they do know general revelation and have not lived up to it. They do know God, and they do

know that they should honor him as God and give him thanks, but they do not do this. This is why they are condemned. Not because of what they are ignorant of, but because of what they know. That they have not heard the Gospel is besides the point. When a person is condemned for his abuse of general revelation, the condemnation is just. . . . General revelation grows solely out of the work of creation. It is a revelation of God as Creator, not God as Redeemer. It speaks to man as creature, not to man as sinner.<sup>8</sup> This is how it was intended to function from the beginning, and this is how it still functions. From the beginning man has been able to respond either positively or negatively to this revelation. By responding positively, man is able to avoid condemnation. By responding negatively man comes under God's just condemnation. The fact is that mankind uniformly responds negatively and thus all are without excuse. Does this mean, then, that general revelation has only a negative function? That it only damns and does not save? No, to put the question in this way is to renew the fallacy that such a revelation is not a function of creation but somehow has an intended purpose for the post-fall world. The point is that general revelation was not intended either to save (positive) or to condemn (negative). It was intended only for the positive purpose of declaring the glory of God the Creator and giving general guidance to the creature.<sup>9</sup>

So on Cottrell's view, the purpose of revelation is simply to show forth the glory and the power of the Creator. It doesn't serve a redemptive purpose. Nevertheless, if a person shuns the light of general revelation that he has and ignores God and plunges himself into immorality, he is culpable and condemned before God because of his rejection of general revelation. God will judge those who have never heard the Gospel not on the basis of what they've done with Christ but rather what they've done with general revelation. So in that sense general revelation has the effect of condemning people – leaving them condemned before God – but not saved.

At the same time, however, did you notice that Cottrell says that by responding positively to general revelation man is able to avoid condemnation. That is a very interesting admission. That puts a very different perspective on it. He says by responding positively man is able to avoid condemnation. What that would suggest is that even if no one does, in fact, access saving knowledge of God through general revelation, nevertheless they could. It is possible. One is able to avoid condemnation by responding properly to God's general revelation in nature and in conscience.

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8 5:03

9 Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says about God the Creator* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1983), pp. 341-346.

I want to be clear about what this means. This does not mean that a person would be saved through his own good deeds or righteous living. It would rather be that he accesses the salvation that is wrought by Christ but without having a conscious knowledge of Christ. General revelation simply serves as a channel by which he comes to a knowledge of God, and by his positive response to it, just as a positive response to the Gospel brings salvation, so here it could help this person to escape condemnation.

In fact, I think there are some reasons to think that that is possible. Look at Romans 2:7. Here again Paul is speaking to those who are apart from the Jewish law – non-Jews. In verse 7 of chapter 2 he says, “to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.” I take this to be a *bona fide* offer on God’s part. If someone will respond in a positive way to God’s general revelation in nature and conscience seeking God and his glory then God will give him eternal life. Does that mean that a person can be saved apart from Christ? No! It would simply mean that he would be saved without having a conscious knowledge of Christ. Is that possible? Clearly that is possible because that is true of Old Testament saints.<sup>10</sup> People like Abraham and Moses and King David never heard of Christ and yet obviously they were saved only through Christ’s atoning death. So the example of Old Testament believers shows us clearly that a person doesn’t have to have a conscious knowledge of Christ in order to be a beneficiary of Christ’s death.

Now you might say, “But they looked forward to Christ” or, “They looked forward to the Messiah.” While that may have been true with respect to some of the prophets, that couldn’t be said with regard to, for example, Abraham or some of the very early Jews where there weren’t yet any Messianic prophecies given at all. They were simply faithful to the revelation that God had given them.

Could this apply to people who were not Jews? Again, the Old Testament, I think, gives us the clear answer to that question. Yes. There are certain figures in the Old Testament who are non-Jews and yet who clearly have a saving relationship with God. Sometimes these are known as the Holy Pagans of the Old Testament. Whom am I thinking about here? I am thinking, for example, of Job. Job was not a Jew. He was from Uz in Chaldea. Yet if anyone in the Old Testament had a proper relationship with God it was Job. God refers to him as “my righteous servant.” Clearly Job knew God and was rightly related to him even though Job was not a Jew. Another example is this mysterious figure of Melchizedek that Abraham met and then offered sacrifices to. He was called the priest of the most high God, king of Salem. He wasn’t a Jew. He wasn’t obviously a descendant of Abraham – he met Abraham. Yet Melchizedek was a priest of God. Or in Genesis 20 we have the king of one of these small Canaanite clans, King Abimelech, to whom God

speaks in a dream and God preserves him from sin. He preserves him from the sin of adultery, of marrying Sarah whom Abraham had lied about saying that she was his sister so that Abimelech took her to be his wife. God prevented him because God didn't want Abimelech to fall into this sin. Here we have examples of people who are non-Jews in the Old Testament that seem to be rightly related to God.

One might say, "Perhaps God offered them special revelations of a different sort." They clearly didn't have Scriptures, right? But maybe they had dreams, as Abimelech did, or special revelations. That is possible, I think. We just don't know for sure. But I think it is at least suggestive that a person who is not Jewish but who does properly respond to the revelation and the light that God has given him can thereby access a saving knowledge of God. God could then apply to him the benefits of Christ's death.

So I think what Cottrell says is correct; namely, that through a positive response to general revelation a person can avoid condemnation but, as Cottrell points out, scarcely anybody does so. The sad fact of the matter is the mass of humanity do not respond to God's general revelation in nature and conscience and so find themselves condemned before God. This is what Paul indicates in Romans 1:20ff. Three times in the passage he says God gave them up, God gave them up, God gave them up. He then describes how they were filled with all manner of immorality and disobedience. Then in verse 32 he says, "Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them." So the picture here is not a cheery one. I think that we could say that through general revelation it is possible to avoid condemnation. No one is going to hell simply because he was born at a time and place in history where he failed to hear the Gospel.<sup>11</sup> There is salvation accessible for that person. But unfortunately few apparently seem to actually access salvation in that way.

So my second point here in the functions of general revelation is to say that it does render people culpable before God.

3. But then thirdly *it can provide access to salvation*. Not that it does provide salvation to many, but there is access there at least. There is fairness on God's part.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I guess it would follow that even today where so many have heard of Christ but many have not they could avoid condemnation through response to the revelation that they have received in nature. Is that a true statement?

*Dr. Craig:* I think that is true. That would be my view. It seems to me that the switch from the old covenant to the new covenant doesn't occur instantaneously worldwide when Jesus died on the cross for example. Rather, this transformation progresses

geographically as the Gospel spreads throughout the world. So people who are still living in, say, central China or northern Siberia where they have no access to the Gospel whatsoever in effect still find themselves in the condition that these pre-Christian persons did before Christ came. They would be judged on that sort of basis. There is probably around 15%-25% of the world's population that has yet to hear the Gospel for the first time. So there still are people that find themselves in this so to speak pre-Christian era.

*Student:* What about folks who have heard of Christ but have heard only a distorted view of Christ. Where would they fit in?

*Dr. Craig:* I think you are absolutely right. In Latin America, for example, the Christo-Paganism that is dominant in many of these Latin countries – a kind of syncretism between Roman Catholicism and pre-Christian pagan superstition – is a distorted and twisted image of Christ. When a person rejects that he is not really rejecting the Gospel. He is not rejecting Christ but something else. So I would say in cases like that God is loving, he is fair, and we can trust him to judge that person on the basis of his response to the light that he did have. At least these persons have the light of general revelation in nature and conscience.

*Student:* What you are describing sounds a lot like the Roman Catholic doctrine of implicit faith. I am not sure, now that we have the special revelation that Christ gave us when he came, that we can then compare ourselves to the Old Testament saints like Noah, Melchizedek, and the others that you have identified. Because now God has revealed himself to the world through Jesus Christ.

*Dr. Craig:* The question for us is: did that transition occur worldwide instantaneously like the flip of a switch, or is it a transition that occurs gradually as the Gospel expands geographically. It seems to me that the latter makes more sense. These persons have never heard of Christ – the ones we are talking about – so they find themselves in a situation that is not qualitatively different from the people who were chronologically prior to Christ even though, as you say, Christ has come and God has revealed himself in a special way and in the Scriptures now. But they haven't got the Scriptures, they've never heard of Christ. So at least in a qualitative sense, it seems like they are more like the people who existed before Christ came than those after.

*Student:* I hear what you are saying. I am also thinking about Romans 10 – which is further down in Romans – verse 13 where it says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Then it is addressed – “How, then, will they call on him whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him whom they have not heard?” It goes on, and the answer is “How beautiful are the feet of those who preached the good news.” That is where evangelism comes in. That is why Philip had to go and explain to

the Ethiopian eunuch what he was reading.<sup>12</sup> Otherwise it would not be necessary for Philip to have done that.

*Dr. Craig:* Remember what I said. Even if this is possible, very few do, in fact, access salvation in this way. The mass of humanity is described in Romans 1 as lost in sin and therefore, as you say, desperately in need of hearing the Gospel. The Gospel communicates the saving knowledge of God with a clarity and power that general revelation cannot do. So it will be far more effective in bringing people to salvation than just leaving them to languish in spiritual darkness with only general revelation to go by. So, yes, Romans 10 is right. They desperately need to hear the Gospel if they are going to be saved.

*Student:* I'll just close by saying it is my personal belief that if someone is responding to general revelation and they are truly seeking then God will (supernaturally if necessary) provide the special revelation of the person of Jesus Christ to them.

*Dr. Craig:* OK. You are saying that if a person were to respond positively to general revelation then God will bring him more light. He will bring him a dream or he will bring him a missionary or a Gospel tract, and if he responds to that God will bring him more light. So there are a number of different ways of dealing with the problem of the unevangelized. That would be one of them. I think we will come back to this problem later on when we talk about the problem of Christian particularism – that is to say, how can salvation be only through Christ? Isn't this some way unfair or unloving to those who never get the chance to hear about Christ? We will revisit this question.

*Student:* Would possible examples of response to general revelation leading to salvation be on Paul's second missionary journey – Acts 10. That wasn't a missionary journey but before that when Cornelius responded to what he knew, and Peter came to him. It said his family feared God and he was praying. Peter came and presented to him the Gospel. Another example might be – this was on a missionary journey – Lydia in Philippi. She heard Paul at the river. It says that she worshiped God. Then Paul explained to her the Gospel and she responded.

*Dr. Craig:* These are great examples, I think, of what earlier we were talking about. In Acts 10, living in Caesarea is this Cornelius who is a centurion, part of a Roman cohort, and yet he is described as a God-fearer. He believed in the God of Jewish monotheism but he wasn't a Christian yet. But God knew that Cornelius was someone who would respond to the Gospel and so he sends Peter to him, and lo and behold the Gospel is received and the Holy Spirit bestowed on the Gentiles. That is a perfect example of where God does exactly what the earlier questioner was imagining.



*Student:* It seems to me in reading Romans 1 that general revelation applies to today also because the atheist and the deniers are the evolutionists. They are denying God in that they are denying that he created all of these things. Therefore when they deny God then it follows they deny Jesus also. If they deny that God created, they are denying everything else that follows. If you deny that God created things and all the beauty of the world and all the living creatures – if he didn't create anything – then you don't go beyond that.

*Dr. Craig:* I think that is exactly right. If there is no God then obviously he doesn't have a Son. Right? So the description in Romans 1 is very apt for contemporary atheism in certain respect. Perhaps not the polytheism, but certainly in the denial of the creator, thinking that there is no Creator behind the world that we perceive.<sup>13</sup> And also, I think, in rejecting the moral law. Many naturalists would see moral obligations as just societal conventions that have been ingrained into us by parental and societal conditioning, but they are not really objective. The opening chapters of Romans, I think, are very applicable to the contemporary situation.

*Student:* I am with the earlier questioner on these revelatory instances. Sometimes missionaries will have this where they will come and see people that are completely counter-cultural and really being persecuted in their context because they have a vision of God that is different than what is going on around them. But even if you take Abraham and Melchizedek; Melchizedek, I think, is a form of theophany because it says he paid tithes to him and Hebrews tells us Melchizedek had no father, mother, no beginning of days but is like the son of God. So clearly he is something different than a human.

*Dr. Craig:* Maybe. What you are referring to is the description of Melchizedek in the book of Hebrews which is very different from what you read in Genesis. The question there, I think, is when he says, "He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life"<sup>14</sup> does he literally mean that Melchizedek is an eternal person that has existed forever? Some would say, yes, he is pre-incarnate Christ. But it just may be that what the author means is that his genealogy isn't listed in the narrative. He has no description of his beginning of days, end of life, mother, or father. It doesn't say he was "the son of . . . the son of . . . the son of." So in that case it is not what one might think with regard to his divinity.

*Student:* This may be just a slight variation but it seems to me one of the purposes of general revelation is to sort of pave the way, if you will, for accepting something. In other words, if you really ponder and you really are open and you really assess the world around us and the creation, there is a logical leading toward a Creator. It is just sort of a natural evolution if you will (sorry for the word, but); it would follow that it would have

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13 25:07

14 c.f. Hebrews 7:3

to be with the balance of life and the understanding of how fragile it is and what kind of environment would be required for the world to exist and even the universe. It seems to me then the mind and the heart becomes more open to carry you to the next level or the next step. I think either through God bringing some instrument into your life or your acceptance of a Creator in your own mind you are then in discussion with, and I think open to, an understanding of salvation.

*Dr. Craig:* I don't know how I could have overlooked this point! I am almost embarrassed. Of course you are right about that! The book of Hebrews said, "He who would come to God must believe that he exists and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him."<sup>15</sup> So one of the purposes of general revelation is to fulfill that first condition: believe that God exists. So you are right. This is a *praeparatio evangelicum*; it is the preparation for the Gospel to make people disposed to believe the Gospel when it comes.

#### **END DISCUSSION**

4. Let me just say one more thing before we close, because I like to end on the joints rather than in the middle. That is the fourth function of general revelation would be its function in *stabilizing human society*. The notion here is that God's general moral law is written on the hearts of all persons, and this serves then to allow human society to exist and function in a stable way instead of being every man for himself – a sort of mad house option. You have here a kind of mutual agreement about the worth of human persons and getting along in society and functioning well. So general revelation would also have this stabilizing effect upon human culture and society.<sup>16</sup>

#### **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I think since China has a lot of great philosophers and it comes down to whether their conscience is one of the fear of the heavens, an abstract concept, or you can kind of divide all humanity into an obedient or rebellious conscience. So those obedient consciences will eventually seek out truth and will never reject Jesus when they hear the Gospel. But the other side will stand against it. That is why Jesus comes as a dividing factor. Then the Gospel comes basically dividing the two and allows the obedient half a tool to use as a converting and second chance and redemptive plan.

*Dr. Craig:* That is very helpful, especially with regard to this last point that I just made about stabilizing human society. In Confucianism, or pre-Communist Chinese society, there was this idea of an abstraction heaven which is a kind of vague divinity concept or something. But the problem is now in the post-Marxist era, that has been sort of lost in materialism and atheism with Marxism. When Jan and I were in Fudan University at a

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15 c.f. Hebrews 11:6

16 30:17

conference of philosophers there, the Chinese philosophers (not the Americans, the Chinese philosophers!) were saying Confucianism is dead, Marxism has nothing to offer, if modern China is to go forward with a social fabric for our society that will make it function and cohere we need Christianity to provide that moral fabric for society. They said we should not be afraid to embrace this because Christianity is an indigenous Chinese religion. It has been here for centuries. They were freely advocating Christianity precisely for this fourth reason, which I thought was just mind boggling.

### **END DISCUSSION**

That completes our lesson for today. Next time we will ask the question: Is perceiving God through general revelation a matter of inferring God's existence? Is it an argument for God's existence? Or is it some sort of insight where you simply see that God exists via his revelation?<sup>17</sup>

## **Lecture 3: Natural Theology and Special Revelation**

We have been talking about general revelation. Last time we looked at some of the functions of general revelation. Today we want to turn to the topic of the relationship of general revelation to natural theology.

Natural theology is that branch of theology which explores justification for God's existence apart from the resources of authoritative divine revelation. Set aside what we know about God from his authoritative revelation in Scripture, for example, and what can be known about God simply on the basis of human reason alone? The project of natural theology is to construct various arguments for God's existence. The question we want to ask now is: What is the relationship between general revelation in nature and the project of nature theology of arguing for God's existence?

The question that arises in this context is: how should we understand what Paul says in Romans 1 about the knowledge of God that is available through his revelation generally in nature and in conscience? Namely, is this revelation such that it is an inference to God's existence from, for example, the order in nature or just the existence of the creation or the moral law written on our hearts and our grasp of objective moral values and duties? Do we then infer that God exists? Is there a sort of argument here that Paul is presenting? Is he endorsing, in other words, the project of natural theology in Romans 1? Or, rather, is the knowledge of God that is available through general revelation more like perception? That is to say, as you look at nature you just sort of see that it was created by God. It is not an inference to God's existence. It is not an argument. It is more like an insight. You look at nature, or you sense the moral law within, and you simply perceive in that God's existence and goodness.

It seems to me that either of these is a defensible interpretation of Romans 1. But let me point out some reasons to think that this is not just a perception but that this is, in fact, an inference. Notice that Paul says in Romans 1:20, "Ever since the creation of the world [God's] invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." What Paul says in the Greek here is that these invisible things are clearly perceived through reflection on the things that have been made. It is by reflecting on the creation that one does perceive that this is created by God. This would suggest that indeed there is a sort of inference involved here. We do perceive God in creation, but it is through rational reflection upon creation that God's existence is perceived.

Moreover, it is very interesting that this passage in Romans 1 bears a great resemblance to Greek philosophical thought about God and how God can be known through creation. The Greek in this passage is among the clearest examples of classical Greek to be found

in the New Testament which suggests that it bears the imprint of Hellenistic or Greek philosophy. For example, the word *aidios* for God's eternal nature – when it speaks of God's eternal nature being perceived – is a Greek word which is found only two times in the entire New Testament.<sup>18</sup> It is not part of the normal vocabulary that you would find there. Similarly, the word *theotes*, which signifies the divine nature, – when it says his eternal nature has been clearly perceived – is a word which is found only here in the New Testament. It is unique. It is a Greek word referring to deity – the nature or essence of God.

Moreover this passage in Romans 1 bears a clear resemblance to an inter-testamental Hellenistic Jewish work called *The Wisdom of Solomon*. This is not part of the Bible. It is not actually written by Solomon. It is an inter-testamental work that is ascribed to Solomon but is in fact an example of Greek or Hellenistic Judaism that existed during the inter-testamental period prior to the advent of Jesus. I want to read to you verses 1-9 of *The Wisdom of Solomon* chapter 13. Notice the similarities between this passage and what Paul says in Romans 1:

For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him. For as they live among his works, they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things.

That sounds like an echo of Romans 1 (or better, Romans 1 is an echo of this passage)! The author here speaks of how all people are without excuse for not recognizing the existence of the Creator because of his marvelous works through reflection on which one can perceive their Creator. So it is folly – it is inexcusable – to worship the works themselves or to think that these were formed by gods rather than to worship the

transcendent Creator who formed these works. In *The Wisdom of Solomon*, clearly the author is talking about a reasoned inference from the created works back to God as their Creator. It is through the creation – through his works – that one can infer that God exists and all men are responsible for making such an inference.

This would suggest that what Paul is talking about in Romans 1 may well be an inference to God as the Creator and Designer of the universe and the source of the moral law written within. So this would be an endorsement of the project of natural theology.

Moreover, look over at Acts 14:17. This is a description of Paul and Barnabas' ministry in Lystra.<sup>19</sup> The men of that city, seeing the miracles that they had wrought, think that the gods have come down from heaven. The priest of the temple of Zeus comes out to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas thinking that these are gods. What Paul says is that this is not true. Notice what he says in verse 15, "We also are men, of like nature with you, and bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them." This is the Creator of the universe that they ought to turn to. Then in verse 16, "In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways." This is people who had only general revelation. God had not specially revealed himself to them. They had not heard of Christ. He permitted the nations to walk in their own ways. But, in verse 17, "yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." Here Paul says that the seasons and the fruitfulness of nature, God's revelation in creation, is a witness even to these Gentile nations who had not yet heard the Gospel. So he had provided evidence to them even as he had overlooked them in not yet bringing the Gospel to them.

It seems to me that we do have in Paul's thinking an endorsement of the project of natural theology; that it is quite legitimate to construct arguments and evidence for God's existence.

If that is right, what is the relationship then between general revelation and the arguments of natural theology? Clearly they are not identical. The arguments of natural theology are man-made products. They are human creations and formulations. They will need to be redone every generation as people continue to think and explore and reflect on these matters. It is not a static project that is once and for all finished. Every generation needs to reflect upon these matters in formulating good arguments for God's existence. But general revelation has been there from the beginning. General revelation, I think, is as it were the traits of the artist in his artifact. You can recognize a Rembrandt through the traits of the artist; that is, in his paintings. Similarly with other artists. Or the fingerprints of the potter that are left in the clay. God is revealed in the created world that he has

made. This then produces the stuff upon which human beings can reflect and formulate arguments for God's existence. So arguments for God's existence are fallible and revisable and you can feel free to reject them if you are not convinced by them. But that doesn't affect God's general revelation of himself in nature and conscience which is sufficiently clear to render all men inexcusable for not recognizing the existence of an eternal, powerful Creator and the demands of his moral law upon their hearts.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* What was that reference – *The Wisdom of Solomon*?

*Dr. Craig:* It was *The Wisdom of Solomon* 13:1-9. I am sure you can just Google that and it will bring up a copy of it on the Internet for you to read.<sup>20</sup> It is a fascinating passage I thought, isn't it? It is just remarkable. There are also passages in Aristotle where he reflects upon how God is revealed in the created world that just sound like Romans 1. Paul was clearly in touch here with Greek philosophy, I think, and what Greek philosophers had said about how God's existence is evident through the created world. But *The Wisdom of Solomon* is certainly a striking Jewish passage on this.

*Student:* I am trying to read this in Romans 1:18. It is saying, "so was uncovered the anger of God from heaven on all irreverence. The unright of men, the ones the truth and unright holding down, therefore the known of God is evident in them." So it is saying that general revelation – everybody has some degree of truth from it, and God holds you accountable for suppressing that and living it out in your life. That is the evidence. Not that everything is so plain but just what we know we are held accountable for (what we can see in it).

*Dr. Craig:* What he says is that it is plain. He says in verse 19, "God has shown it to them." Then in verse 20 he says, "It has been clearly perceived and therefore they are without excuse." But you are quite right in saying in verse 18 he says that people suppress this truth. In their wickedness and moral darkness they suppress this natural knowledge of God that is available through general revelation.

*Student:* So the eternal power is plain and the splendor is plain, but what you are held accountable for is what you are suppressing because that is proof that you know it – because you are suppressing it.

*Dr. Craig:* That seems right. Yes. He says that God's deity (his invisible deity) – and then he specifically names his eternal power – as being perceived in the things that have been made. Then also over in chapter 2 you get the moral law that is written on the hearts of all people as well. So you get attributes of God from creation but then also these moral attributes of God, too, from conscience. So it is a fairly significant knowledge of God, I

think, that is available through general revelation alone. The idea that you only know about God through special revelation – through the Bible or the Gospel – I think is completely foreign to the New Testament, indeed to the whole Bible, which says that there is a general revelation of God in nature as well as conscience that is available to everyone.

*Student:* Just a comment. I see the connection between this view of inferring God's existence from general revelation to God's desire for man to seek him out later on in Acts. I think there is a connection there where God really wants us to think and try and reach out to him and find him in that way.

*Dr. Craig:* Let's look at that passage in Acts 17 because it is also relevant to what I quoted from Paul in Lystra where he says, "God has not left himself without a witness." In Acts 17:22ff you have Paul's address on Mars Hill in Athens, and specifically identified in the group of listeners to him are Stoic and Epicurean philosophers – ancient Greek philosophers who have come to hear Paul!<sup>21</sup> As the questioner pointed out, what he says here is in verse 24,

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.

Here this is the God of Jewish monotheism that he is proclaiming to these Greek pagans – the God revealed in nature who has created the world. He says that he has then fixed the places that everyone should live in verse 27, "that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us for 'In him we live and move and have our being.'" So Paul is saying that even to these Gentiles who haven't yet heard the Gospel there is this knowledge of God that is available. Notice again in verse 30 we have this same expression, "The times of ignorance God overlooked." He overlooked this time of ignorance, but he hasn't left himself without a witness, right? Then he says, "now he commands all men everywhere to repent," and he proclaims the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. So even during this time of ignorance, as Paul calls it, when God overlooked the sins of prior generations that had not yet received a special revelation from him he hadn't left himself without a witness. And that is the witness of general revelation that reveals God to us so that, as Paul says, every one of us is not far from him. We live and move and have our being in him, and God's hope is that we will seek him, reach out, feel for him, and perhaps find him, he says.

## **END DISCUSSION**



Let's turn to a discussion of special revelation. In what sense is special revelation special? What do we mean by the word "special" in this context? Again, two things.

1. It means that God reveals himself more clearly than he has in general revelation.
2. It is a fuller revelation of himself to human beings.

So special revelation is given with a clarity and a fullness of the nature and purposes and plans of God than can be had through general revelation alone. Here we have greater clarity and more information about who God is.

What are the various types of special revelation? Typically, theologians will say that God's special revelation comes through his Word. It is through the Word of God as opposed to nature that God specially reveals himself. That Word can take two forms: either the living Word (Jesus Christ, who is the full revelation of God), or else Holy Scripture which is the written Word of God.

Concerning Jesus Christ as God's Word, see John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Then in verse 14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." Then verse 18, "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." In fact, the best manuscripts of verse 18 say, "The only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." So here Jesus Christ is declared to be the Word of God, the very expression of God, in human flesh to reveal to us God's grace and truth in this fuller way than is available through general revelation.

As for the revelation of God in Holy Scripture, see 2 Timothy 3:16.<sup>22</sup> Here Paul writes, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The notion there of being inspired means literally "God-breathed." Scripture is God-breathed. So it becomes God's Word to us.

So special revelation can take the form of Jesus Christ who fully reveals God the Father to mankind, but then also God's revelation in Holy Scripture.

As I say, that is usually as far as folks go with regard to special revelation. But it seems to me there is a third form that special revelation can take, and that is what I would call particular revelations. These would be revelations in dreams, visions, prophecies, and so forth. It seems to me that these fit our definition of what a revelation is. Remember that we said a revelation is the unveiling of something hidden so that it can be seen and known for what it is, or more generally, a revelation is a communication from God.

Scripture, I think, abundantly testifies to the fact that God communicates to people via dreams, visions, prophecies, and so forth, that are not in Holy Scripture and are obviously not Jesus Christ. For an example of this, look at 1 Corinthians 14:26, 29-30. Here Paul is laying down regulations for how worship should proceed in these New Testament churches when they gather together. There would be prophets who would claim to have a revelation from God and would speak in these assemblies. Paul gives some regulations here about how these prophets are to behave. 1 Corinthians 14:26, 29-30 says,

What then, brethren? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. . . . Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent.

Here Paul uses the word “revelation” to describe these New Testament prophets who communicated some word from the Lord. Paul gives advice on how these prophets are to behave. He tells the people who are sitting there to listen to them critically to weigh whether or not this really is a word from the Lord, whether or not this is a genuine revelation or prophecy.

So it seems to me that there are these particular revelations. What differentiates them from Holy Scripture is, I think, that even though God’s revelation in Scripture is special in that it is clearer, it is fuller, nevertheless it is still general in the sense of its applicability. It applies to everyone. The truths that are laid down in Scripture are applicable universally. So the revelation in Scripture is universally applicable. But these particular revelations are not universally applicable. These are made at a specific time and a specific place for the people involved there. If God, for example, gives someone like Paul a revelation to come over into Macedonia and preach the Gospel, that is a revelation given just to Paul that he is obligated to obey. That doesn’t mean that you are obligated to go to Macedonia and preach the Gospel. These particular revelations are not universally applicable but are intended just for the time and place and persons that were there and received them.<sup>23</sup>

These seem to be the ways in which God specially reveals himself in addition to general revelation: through his Son Jesus Christ who is the full revelation of God the Father, through his revelation in Holy Scripture, and these particular revelations through prophecies, dreams, vision, and so forth.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* It seems like in the early days that you would have to have more particular emphasis on special revelation because the Scripture wasn’t written yet. So Paul, when he

says “my Gospel,” he is giving them an oral tradition when he relates that. It would seem like that would be in use before Scripture was penned. Then afterward Scripture becomes the standard by which you test these . . .

*Dr. Craig:* I think you are making a very good point. You notice that I didn’t address the issue whether or not these particular revelations still occur today. Our charismatic brethren believe that God does give these kinds of special words to people. Other Christians would say, I think as you did, that once the canon of Scripture was given and we had God’s revelation in the New Testament that then there was no further need for these particular revelations which would have been very important prior to Scripture’s being written down and widely disseminated. I am leaving that an open question at this point. I am just looking at the New Testament material on this question. It does seem to me that, at least in the New Testament period, that (and I would say in the Old as well) God on occasion did specially reveal himself in these ways whether or not he still does so today.

*Student:* There are so many people that are saying they are getting messages or revelations or prophesy from God based on dreams and things that they are having. What is your take on that? What is your philosophy on these types of individuals?

*Dr. Craig:* I think my attitude is an attitude of humility with respect to people claiming these things. The New Testament teaches that these sorts of things did occur in New Testament times. I am not convinced by the arguments that say that they’ve ceased. When you look at the so-called cessationist arguments, they are not very convincing, I think, to say that God doesn’t do this anymore. So I feel, who am I to say that God hasn’t spoken to someone in a special way? Giving them a dream or a word or something of that sort. I am not in a position to judge. I can only judge whether or not *I’ve* been given such a word or revelation. Of course, if this person claims to have some word from God that is contrary to Scripture – for example, I know cases of people who say, “God told me it is all right to divorce my wife and marry this other woman in the church. This is his will for me.” That is contrary to Scripture. You know then that that is this person’s own subjective impression because God doesn’t contradict Scripture which is the universally applicable revelation. But in other cases where someone says, for example, – you hear this all the time – “God told me to speak to this person sitting next to me on the airplane or in the restaurant, and I shared with him and this person came to Christ.” Who am I to say that God didn’t do that? Maybe that was just a prompting from the Holy Spirit. Certainly, that could take place. But in other cases people do claim to have actual information from God. I just feel like I have to be open to it, but not so open-minded that

my brains fall out.<sup>24</sup> You are open-minded but that doesn't mean you have to be gullible about these things.

*Student:* I agree with you. Ephesians talks about the oneness: the one Spirit, the one God. The oneness is that all communication with God are consistent. So whether it is special revelation or it is the living Word or Scripture, they are all consistent. I don't think God is boxed in by human minds, say, you cannot go beyond what is already written. God can still work in ways beyond our understanding, but it is all consistent. It is consistent with the living Word, it is consistent with the Scripture, so everyone can, as you say, judge or discern whether it is of God or not.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes. I want to second what you said about the importance of discernment here. Let me just quote from 1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world." So we are called upon to be discerning.

*Student:* One support of particular revelation in the present day is the fact that many, many Muslims are coming to Christ in the Middle East. I follow this because of my interest in prophecy in the Middle East. This is from many different countries and from sources that I trust. They have visions, and they are saved. They come to Christ. They are saved just as you and I are. And they got that from a vision. Well, they don't have Scripture there – it is illegal and a threat to their life. As someone brought up earlier, in the early days we didn't have Scripture. For them we are kind of back like the early days. I think we are getting particular revelation.

*Dr. Craig:* Thank you. I think that does relate to what I said last week about the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant not occurring instantaneously worldwide, but it occurs as the Gospel message geographically spreads from first century Palestine throughout the world. So people such as who you mentioned are in a sense still living in this earlier period – these times of ignorance that God overlooked – where these sorts of special revelations as well as general revelation might be more important.

## **END DISCUSSION**

Next week we will talk about Scripture. We will look at theories of the inspiration of Scripture with a view toward formulating a defensible theory of how God has inspired Holy Scripture.<sup>25</sup>

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24 35:03

25 Total Running Time: 38:30 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

## Lecture 4: Inspiration

In our lessons we have been thinking about how God reveals himself in special ways to mankind through his living Word (his Son Jesus Christ), through his written Word in Holy Scripture, and through particular revelations made to individuals such as dreams, visions, and so forth. The principal way in which we know God's Word today is through the Holy Scripture. Few of us are beneficiaries of particular revelations, and Jesus Christ is now ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father, so we are relying upon God's revelation in Holy Scripture as his Word to us.

This then brings us to the question of the inspiration of Scripture. The Scriptures are inspired of God. 2 Timothy 3:16 is the *locus classicus* for this teaching: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Notice what is said here about the inspiration of Scripture. It is the Scripture itself that is inspired by God. The word here means "God-breathed." Inspiration is not primarily a property of the *authors* of Scripture. It is a property of *the text itself*. Very often people will think the authors of Scripture were inspired by God to write what they did. But that is not, in fact, what 2 Timothy 3:16 says. It is not that the authors of Scripture were inspired; it is rather that the end product is inspired – what they wrote (the text) is God-breathed. So inspiration is first and foremost a property of the text, not of the authors of the text. I think we will see that that is very important.

That doesn't mean, of course, that the authors of Scripture were bereft of the direction of the Holy Spirit in what they said or wrote. Look at 2 Peter 1:19-21:

And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Here, at least with respect to prophecies that are contained in Scripture, he says that the Holy Spirit was involved in carrying along (and the word there for "moved by the Holy Spirit" means literally "borne along" or "carried along"). So these prophets – when they spoke a revelation from God – it was the Holy Spirit which was moving them or bearing them along so that what they spoke was from God.

In the passage in Timothy we see that inspiration is first and foremost a property of the text. It is the text that is God-breathed and is inspired by God and therefore is God's

Word to us. But secondly we see from 2 Peter that the authors of Scripture were also moved by the Holy Spirit to say what they did say.<sup>26</sup>

That is the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. We want to ask then, “What about the extent of inspiration?” Here we want to note three properties of inspiration of Scripture.

1. Scriptural inspiration is *plenary*. That is to say, all of Scripture is inspired by God. That is what 2 Timothy 3:16 says. All Scripture is inspired by God. So it is not just some of it that is inspired by God, but all of it. The Scripture bears the property of plenary inspiration. So you can’t set aside certain books of the Bible as uninspired and regard others as genuinely inspired. All Scripture is inspired by God.

2. Scriptural inspiration is *verbal*. That is to say, the very words of Scripture are inspired. The property of plenary inspiration speaks to the breadth of inspiration. Verbal inspiration speaks to the depth of inspiration. It is not just all of the books of the Bible are inspired by God. That is the plenary inspiration. But it is also right down to the individual words that are used. The individual words are inspired by God. That is what is meant by verbal inspiration.

To show that this is the attitude of the authors of Scripture toward Scripture, look, for example, at the way in which the authors of Scripture will sometimes base an argument upon a single word or even a single letter in the text in order to make a theological point. For example, in John 10:34-36, Jesus is disputing with religious leaders of his time about his claim to be the Son of God. In John 10:34-36 we read:

Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? [quoting from the Psalms.] If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be broken), do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?”

Never mind the argument here that Jesus gives for why he is not blaspheming. That is not the key. What we want to notice is that when Jesus quotes the Psalms it concerns a single word that is found in Psalm 82:6, namely, the word “gods.” If the psalmist can call these people gods then Jesus says, *Why am I blaspheming when I say I am the Son of God.* His argument relies on a single word in the Old Testament text – the word “gods.”

Similarly, look at Paul’s argument in Galatians 3:16. Here he is talking about the promises made to Abraham and his seed. Paul says,

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many; but, referring to one, “And to your offspring,” which is Christ.

Again, never mind the argument that Paul is giving here. The point is that the argument he is giving depends upon the single word “offspring” or “seed,” whether it is in the plural or the singular. He says the prophecy doesn’t say plural (to your “seeds” or to your “offsprings”), but to your seed (your offspring) – singular – and that is Jesus Christ. He sees this passage as referring primarily to Christ. Whatever you think of Paul’s argument, the point is that the argument hinges upon the difference between a single word of Scripture, whether it is in the plural or the singular.<sup>27</sup>

So inspiration of Scripture cannot be taken to be just a sort of general ideas of Scripture being inspired – that what God has inspired is the sort of idea in a verse or a passage – but it doesn’t extend to the very words. I think we have seen that the argument that is often given is sometimes dependent upon a single word or verbal form, therefore it cannot be treated as simply the general idea that the author is sharing as inspired, but the author was able to pick whatever words he wanted to express it.

Theologians are wont to speak of Scripture as God’s propositional revelation. When you hear this term you must not take the word “propositional” to mean what philosophers mean by propositions. This can be very confusing. When a philosopher talks about a proposition, he means the information content of a sentence. The same proposition can be expressed by completely different sentences. For example, the sentence “snow is white” is an English sentence. “Der Schnee ist weiß” is a completely different sentence. They don’t have any words in common. The German has four words in it; the English has three words in it. Yet they both express the same proposition. They have the same propositional content – the same information content – namely that snow is white. So when philosophers talk about propositions, that is what they mean. They mean the information content that is expressed by sentences. But that is not what theologians are talking about when they talk about God’s propositional revelation. What theologians mean by propositional, I think, would be better expressed by the word “sentential.” That is to say, the sentences of Scripture are inspired by God. God has revealed himself in his Word, Jesus Christ, in a living person, but he has revealed himself in Scripture in sentences. He has inspired certain linguistic utterances. These are, therefore, his Word to us. So don’t confuse the notion of propositional revelation with what philosophers mean because otherwise you wouldn’t get verbal inspiration. If you say that God has merely inspired the propositional content of a sentence in the philosopher sense then that won’t give you, for example, “snow is white,” “la neige est blanche,” or “der Schnee ist weiß.”

Any of those would be a verbal expression of the same propositional content. So there is a temptation, I think, to say as a philosopher, “What God has inspired are not really the words of Scripture; he has inspired the propositional content of Scripture and this can come to expression in different ways.” So a German Bible, for example, is just as much inspired as an English Bible. They both have the same inspired propositional content. But that is, again just to emphasize this, not what theologians mean when they talk about propositional revelation. They really mean sentential revelation – that God has revealed himself in Hebrew and Greek sentences (linguistic utterances). He hasn’t revealed himself in German, or English, or Sanskrit. He has revealed himself in Hebrew and Greek sentences.

This has the rather odd implication, I think, that only the Greek and Hebrew text is actually the inspired Word of God. If you take verbal revelation seriously then it is these Hebrew and Greek words that are inspired by God. It is not my English Bible. These words were not inspired by God.<sup>28</sup> The words that God inspired that are God-breathed are these original Greek and Hebrew words, which is why I think we have such a tremendous incentive to learn the biblical languages so that we can work with Greek and Hebrew dictionaries and other tools to understand the text and the original meaning.

I must say, as I think about this, the notion of verbal inspiration actually comes, I think, very close to the Muslim idea of the Qur’an. The Muslim would say that when you read your English Qur’an that you are not really reading the Qur’an because you are not reading the original Arabic. So if you look at an English Qur’an, it will typically say on the front cover, “The translation of the Qur’an.” This is not really a Qur’an. It is a translation of the Qur’an. I reluctantly think that this is pretty much the position that verbal inspiration also commits us to as Christians. The text that is inspired of God is the original Hebrew and Greek sentences. What I have here is an English translation of the Word of God. If it is a good translation, it is going to give me in the philosopher’s sense the same propositional content. I will be able to understand the propositional content that the Hebrew and Greek expressed. But in terms of what is inspired – remember we said all Scripture is inspired by God; it is not the authors of Scripture that are inspired, it is the text that is inspired of God and that is God-breathed – what text are we talking about? It seems to me the conclusion is inescapable – it is the Hebrew and Greek text. That is what is inspired by God. It underlines the importance of trying to get back to the original text when we are doing exegesis or Bible study to make sure we understand it because sometimes our translations are inadequate or misleading.

## **START DISCUSSION**



*Student:* Beyond the languages that we would study, would we also ask the question which version? Let's say we have multiple transcripts – which one is correct?

*Dr. Craig:* Absolutely! I hope you understand his question. His question is about, "What is the original text?" We don't have the autographs anymore, which are the original manuscript that Paul actually wrote, for example, to the Colossians, or the Gospel of Luke that was actually written by Luke. What we have are copies of copies of copies. We know that in the transcription and handing on of the text, lots of copyist errors get introduced. Hundreds of thousands of copying errors get introduced into the transmission of the text. So biblical scholars are vitally concerned with being able to reconstruct the original text as accurately as possible. Fortunately, in the case of the New Testament, we have been able to do this with an enormous degree of accuracy. Of the 138,000 words contained in the New Testament, I believe it is only around 1,400 words that are still uncertain. We are not exactly sure what the text read in those cases. None of these are significant. No doctrine hangs upon one of these textual variants. For example, one would be in 1 John when he says, "We write this that our joy may be full." Other manuscripts say, "We write this that your joy may be full." The difference is the personal pronoun "our" or "your." We are not sure what the original text said in that case. So if you have a Greek New Testament, at the bottom of the page it will have what is called an apparatus where it will list the various textual variants and the degree of confidence that we have in the text that we have reconstructed.

Unfortunately, some unscrupulous persons, such as Bart Ehrman, have tried to exploit this uncertainty on the popular level by implying that the text of the New Testament is hugely uncertain because all these copyist errors have been introduced.<sup>29</sup> But what he doesn't make clear to the layperson is that it is the very task of the critical scholars to compare the wealth of manuscripts that we have so as to be able to determine what is the original reading. I remember hearing an interview with Ehrman on a radio talk show where the radio interviewer at one point said, *Well, what do you think the original text of the New Testament really said?* And Ehrman said, *What do you mean?* And he said, *You explained all these copying errors got introduced. So what do you think the original really said?* And Ehrman said, *It said pretty much what the text we have today says.* And he said, *But I thought you said there were all these uncertainties and errors and so forth in the transcription?* And Ehrman said, *Oh, well, yeah, but we've been able to reconstruct the original text. So we now know with like 99% confidence what the original text said.* So you can see that that puts a very different complexion on the matter.

But your question is quite right. If it is the original Greek and Hebrew that is God-breathed then absolutely it is going to be important that we reconstruct the original text to

the best of our ability, and that we read Bibles that are based upon translations of the very best and oldest manuscripts. That is why, for all its literary beauty, the King James Bible really shouldn't be used by Christians in serious Bible study today. It is based upon the Byzantine family of texts which is the worst and most corrupted family of New Testament texts. But when you have a modern translation like the Revised Standard Version, or the American Standard Version, or the English Standard Version, or the NIV, you are going to be reading an English translation based upon the very best manuscripts that are available today. So you can have a very high degree of confidence that when you read these words, at least in the original Greek, you are reading the very words that Paul or Luke or John wrote.

*Student:* I've heard it said that in some of these situations you can debate what the intent of the Scripture was. You go back to how one would interpret a Greek or Hebrew word. For example, the defense of homosexual behavior. I've heard said that in the original text the word used sometimes means "relationships between men and boys" not necessarily just between two men. Was the intent that, instead of homosexual behavior between two men? How does one then sort through this – even though you have the original word, the intent of that use of that word?

*Dr. Craig:* You are pointing out that this sort of word study is crucial and common in exegeting the New Testament. You are right in your example in Romans 1, some will try to defend homosexual relations by saying what is really being condemned here is pederasty, the use of boys by men for sexual pleasure. But then others will look at the text and defend that that is not at all really what the text is about, particularly when he talks about women having unnatural relations with other women. But this is the way exegesis proceeds. It is just inevitable that people will appeal to the original Greek text in order to justify their interpretation. Here the layperson is frankly at the mercy of these scholars because he doesn't know who is right. So I think that the best thing that the layperson can do (apart from learning Greek himself or learning how to use Logos software<sup>30</sup>, for example) would be to find scholars that you have real confidence in that you can trust and whose judgment then you can put your confidence in as making a reliable verdict.<sup>31</sup> I just don't see any way to get around that.

*Student:* What role does a concordance play in moving a layperson closer to, for example, the King James Version is notoriously unreliable but there is a concordance that they have for that. Does that in any way help bring the layperson closer to what either the intent or what the actual words could have been translated?

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30 See <http://www.logos.com> (accessed December 7, 2014)

31 25:05

*Dr. Craig:* Not as I understand the word concordance. My English Bible has a concordance in the back which is sort of like a verbal index. If I look up the word “rejoice” it gives me all of the biblical references to where “rejoice” is used. Here is “reign” and all the verses where that word appears. Or “remembrance” or “remove.” A concordance is just like an index to the translation. It is a subject or name index. But it is based upon the English (in this case) and not on the original Greek or Hebrew. So the concordance isn’t really what you need. What you need is a Bible dictionary, not a concordance. If you get a Bible dictionary, it will go from A to Z on these different topics, and it will give you the original languages and the nuances and so forth. So, for example, if you were to pick up your Bible dictionary and look up the entry on “Satan” (you want to read about Satan) it will tell you about the different words that are used in Hebrew and Greek for this figure, where he appears in extra-biblical literature of the time, and give you this kind of deeper knowledge of the way the words are used. I think every mature Christian should have a good Bible dictionary on his shelf that he can turn to when he is doing serious Bible study.

*Student:* There seems to be this assumption that 2 Timothy 3:16 is also applicable to the New Testament – that the New Testament is also inspired. How do we know that all the New Testament qualifies as Scripture?

*Dr. Craig:* Right. Obviously, 2 Timothy isn’t talking about the New Testament. It is talking about the Jewish Scriptures that Timothy had learned since he was a child. Your question will be having to do with why we should regard the New Testament as inspired. We will take up that question a little bit later. But you are quite right in saying 2 Timothy is speaking about the Old Testament Hebrew Bible.

*Student:* What about a commentary?

*Dr. Craig:* I think commentaries are also very illuminating on the text. I would encourage you, when you are doing a Bible study or a book study, to get some good commentaries by, again, trusted authors. For example, one of the things that I did in my devotions several years ago was I got the commentary by William Lane (no relation!). He was a fine New Testament scholar on the Gospel of Mark. This is a small, one-volume commentary on Mark written by a fine New Testament scholar. What I would do is read a little passage in the book of Mark for that morning and then I would read Lane’s comment on the book of Mark. And, wow, was that illuminating! It just really shed lots of background information on the text and helped me to see applications and meanings that Mark had that I might have missed. So quite definitely, commentaries are also, I think, a great tool for us to use especially when we are doing book studies.

I guess here we are sort of talking about what ought to be in a Christian’s library. I think it is sad how the average Christian is just completely unaware of these resources. Yet

they are abundant. There are just hundreds of these things that are out there if you just know where to look for them. Every one of us ought to have a Bible dictionary, we ought to have several different translations of the Scriptures so we can compare them with each other, then if we are doing a book study I think we should get some good commentaries on these. If you don't want to buy them, you can check them out of the library. In fact, here at the church you can get these sorts of things free.<sup>32</sup>

*Student: [inaudible]*

*Dr. Craig:* Really? Crosswalk.org? OK.

## **END DISCUSSION**

That brings us to the end of the session. What we will do next time is talk about the property of Scripture being confluent, that is to say, both the product of human authorship and divine authorship, and ask what theory of inspiration can help us to best understand how Scripture can be both the Word of God and the word of man simultaneously.<sup>33</sup>

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32 30:05

33 Total Running Time: 30:57 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

## Lecture 5: Theories of Inspiration

In our Defenders class we have been thinking about the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. We have been looking at the qualities of inspiration.

This section of the outline is entitled the *extent* of inspiration – that is probably misleading. It should probably be the *properties* of inspiration because, although the first two properties do deal with the extent of inspiration, the third one does not.

With respect to inspiration, we have seen that inspiration being plenary means that the entire Scripture is inspired by God. It is not as though there are simply some books or some portions of those books that are inspired, but the entirety of Scripture is the bearer of God's inspiration. So inspiration is plenary.

The second quality has to do with the depth of inspiration. That is that inspiration is verbal. It is not only the breadth of Scripture in its entirety, but it goes down to the very words of Scripture which are inspired.

So the first two properties of inspiration speak to the extent of inspiration – its breadth and its depth. But the third property is that inspiration is *confluent*. This comes from the word meaning “to flow together.” The idea here is that Scripture is the product of both human authors and the divine author. God is the author of Scripture, but also the Scriptures are human products as well. People wrote Scripture. The books that they wrote reflect their individual personalities, their vocabularies, their education, their training, and so forth. These are very much human products. A correct doctrine of inspiration needs to be confluent to allow the Scripture to be both a human and a divine product.

### START DISCUSSION

*STUDENT:* For interpreting the Scripture, what would we consider the book of Maccabees, since this is not catholic? [*ed: the questioner appears to be asking about the books 1 & 2 Maccabees which are in the Roman Catholic Bible but not in the Protestant Bible and thus are not “catholic” or universal.*]

*DR. CRAIG:* This has to do with the question of the canon of Scripture, which we will discuss later. The question of the canon of Scripture has to do with what books actually belong in the Holy Scriptures. Which books are actually God-breathed? Here Catholics and Protestants differ with respect to some of these books, such as 1 and 2 Maccabees. Protestants regard these books as apocryphal books in the sense that they are not part of Scripture. They are not inspired by God even though they may be, and are, valuable historical sources for learning about intertestamental Judaism and the history of Israel.

The Protestant Reformers like Calvin and others thought very highly of these apocryphal Catholic Scriptures and thought that they could be a source of real wisdom and teaching and help, but they denied to them the canonical status of being inspired. We will take up that question a little bit later on. It doesn't affect anything so far that we've said.

*STUDENT:* Extending on that question, all of revelation is from God. Just like the Bible accurately recalls the fall and sins of David, then if you had . . . in one sense all of creation is accurate Scripture. If you had God's perspective you can see through . . . in other words there is one sense in which everything when viewed through God's eyes to see the error in what it is is just accurately recounting what is wrong. It is misconceptions people have had. Do you follow what I am saying?<sup>34</sup>

*DR. CRAIG:* Are you saying that in a sense all of creation is a revelation of God?

*STUDENT:* Right. By seeing how people have misinterpreted different things. Like the Maccabees may not be the same sense – a true Scripture, error-free. I am questioning what is error-free because people can take the absolute true Scripture and misinterpret it.

*DR. CRAIG:* Certainly that is true but I think it is important that we recognize that we haven't raised yet the issue of inerrancy of Scripture. A book could be inerrant and not be inspired. You might have a telephone book, for example, that has been so carefully proofread and put together that it is inerrant. But that wouldn't make it inspired. Similarly, the question as to whether or not inspiration entails or implies inerrancy is a question we haven't yet raised. That will be a further question that we will take up later on. Many people would think that the inspiration of Scripture doesn't imply that Scripture is inerrant. Even those who think that it does imply inerrancy will always limit that in some respect rather than say it applies to simply everything that can be read in Scripture. So the question of inerrancy is a question that we will take up later on. It hasn't yet arisen. Right now we are talking simply about this property of being God-breathed – the being inspired by God. What that implies with respect to truthfulness and inerrancy is a subsequent question that we will take up later.

*STUDENT:* We spoke about the Wisdom of Solomon a few weeks ago. Paul quoted from that. I know it is not part of the canon but would it be considered inspired?

*DR. CRAIG:* No, not by Protestants at least. It is very interesting that you do have quotations from some of these extra-biblical books right in Scripture itself. You mentioned the similarity of what Romans 1 says to Wisdom of Solomon, which could show that perhaps Paul knew that. But in addition to that there are passages in Scripture that seem to actually refer to these apocryphal books. I am thinking here of, for example, Jude. Turn to Jude 14: "It was of these also that Enoch in the seventh generation from

Adam prophesied, saying,” etc., etc. Here he is referring to this non-canonical book of Enoch and quoting it. So even the authors of Scripture will sometimes quote these non-canonical books. That doesn't mean they are endorsing them as being Scripture or being inspired, but in the same way that Paul will quote from Greek poets and Greek literature they will sometimes even quote from these non-canonical or apocryphal books. But that isn't to be understood to imply that these are, therefore, Scripture and had this property of being God-breathed or inspired.

*STUDENT:* The third element in this consideration is truth. Something can be true – like these citations from Enoch, for example, or what have you – and not necessarily be inspired. There are things we read that are true but that doesn't mean inspiration.

*DR. CRAIG:* Absolutely. As I say, truth isn't indicative of being inspired. Here is the other example I was thinking of: Acts 17, Paul's address on Mars Hill, verse 28. He quotes from the Greek poets. He says,

[God] is not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.” Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver . . .

He takes it that what this poet has said is true and he quotes the poet as a way of connecting with his audience. Just by virtue of quoting something doesn't mean that one is saying this is an inspired document breathed by God.<sup>35</sup>

*STUDENT:* I am having a hard time following. What then is your definition of inspiration if we have the extent – the properties – of it? So how do we determine that something has been inspired if we are not looking in what they've said in the canon has been referred to as God-breathed quotes from previous Scriptures. I am a little lost as to what is, in fact, the definition of inspiration.

*DR. CRAIG:* We defined revelation as saying it is a communication from God. So if something is inspired, that means literally God-breathed. This text which has the property of being inspired is God-breathed; that is to say, it is God's Word to us. It is his communication to us, and therefore it is revelation. Now, as such, these revelations from God can quote from other sources without saying that those things are also revelation and are God-breathed. As to how we know which documents are inspired, that is a further question that we will take up later on. In a sense, that is the question of the canon again. How do we know that some purported revelation from God is inspired? We will take that up later. But one step at a time. Right now we are simply looking at the properties of inspiration – it is plenary, it is verbal, and it is confluent. That, in itself, will raise some

very interesting questions before we get to these subsequent questions about what does inspiration entail with respect to inerrancy, and how can we know if something is inspired. Those are logically subsequent questions that we will get to later on.

These are excellent questions that we will come to.

## **END DISCUSSION**

So inspiration of Scripture is plenary, verbal, and confluent. The question then is: how do you get such a text? How is such a text inspired? This brings us to theories of inspiration.

The first theory of inspiration that might seem the most obvious would be a *dictation* theory of inspiration; namely, God tells the human author what to write and the human author simply records what God has dictated to him. On this view the authors of Scripture are essentially stenographers. They take dictation from the Lord and write down what he says when he tells them to, and hence Scripture is God's Word to us.

This is essentially an Islamic view of inspiration. This is what Muslims believe about the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not written by Muhammad. The Qur'an is dictated by Allah to Muhammad, and Muhammad is simply a recorder – a stenographer – who writes down the dictation that God has given him in the Qur'an. So the question is: is this sort of theory of inspiration one that is also applicable to the books of the Bible in the same way that the Muslim thinks, at least, that it is applicable to the Qur'an.

It is agreed by virtually everyone – I think this is universal – that a dictation theory of inspiration is inadequate. It doesn't explain the nature of Scripture adequately, particularly with respect to this property of being confluent. Certainly, dictation could give you a plenary inspiration. It could give you a verbal inspiration if the person doing the dictation gives you the actual words. But it won't give you a confluent inspiration because the human author here plays no role. He simply writes down what God tells him to. So it is not really a product of that human author.<sup>36</sup>

This is difficult to square with some of the data of Scripture. For example, the so-called *levicula* of Scripture. That is to say, those elements in Scripture that are literally lightweight or trivial, if you will. To give an example of this, look at the last chapter of Romans, Paul's letter to the Romans, where he sends all these greetings to these various Roman Christians. So he says things like, in verse 16:6,

Greet Mary, who has worked hard among you. Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are men of note among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles,



who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord, also his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brethren who are with them. . . .

Are we really to think that these greetings are dictated by God and that they are the same sort of inspiration that attends the teaching of the book of Romans in the first twelve chapters? These lightweight or seemingly trivial parts of Scripture don't seem to be things that would be appropriately ascribed to divine dictation. Certainly they might be of some historical interest but for the most part we don't even have any idea who these people were that Paul has greeted here. So these seemingly trivial parts of Scripture don't seem to accord very well with a dictation theory to think that God has dictated to Paul to greet these various people or to say a lot of the other things that he will say particularly in the closing sections of his letters.

The other part that is difficult to square with dictation would be those passages expressing the very human emotions of the authors where the authors' own personality and emotions come very much into view. This certainly doesn't look like a dictation from the Lord. It looks like the author is really expressing his own anger or joy in his written word. One very powerful example of this would be the Imprecatory Psalms. These are the Psalms that express terrible anger on the part of the psalmist where he is calling down God's curse upon people and which seem very ill-suited to think that God dictated these. Look at Psalm 139:19-24 for example:

O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God,  
and that men of blood would depart from me,  
men who maliciously defy thee,  
who lift themselves up against thee for evil!  
Do I not hate them that hate thee, O Lord?  
And do I not loathe them that rise up against thee?  
I hate them with perfect hatred;  
I count them my enemies.  
Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
Try me and know my thoughts!  
And see if there be any wicked way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting!

Here, and in other Imprecatory Psalms, the psalmist expresses his own emotions and anger that do not seem to be very plausibly ascribed to dictation.

So the dictation theory cannot really account for a confluent Scripture which is the product of both the human authors and the divine author. It makes the only author of Scripture God, and there really isn't place for these very human elements in the Scripture.<sup>37</sup>

### **START DISCUSSION**

*STUDENT:* Is dictation the theory that the Catholic Church holds to?

*DR. CRAIG:* No, no. Why would you say that?

*STUDENT:* I've heard that there is a view that is different from the Protestant view.

*DR. CRAIG:* I can't think of any reason to think that the Catholic Church would be committed to a dictation theory of inspiration. As I say, I can't think of anyone who holds to this. It is usually just sort of set up as a straw man to knock down because the Scripture is so obviously a human product as well as a divine product. So, no, I think that would be unfair.

*STUDENT:* Sometimes clearly it is dictation, right? But not every word. So like Jeremiah says, "The word of the Lord came to me and said, 'Go and proclaim the heirs of Jerusalem.' Thus says the Lord."

*DR. CRAIG:* Yes. It does seem like, in the case of prophesy at least, there God is giving him these words to say. But that only serves to underline the difference between, say, Jeremiah's prophesy and the book of Philemon in the New Testament where Paul is writing this very personal letter about this runaway slave and trying to secure his freedom and forgiveness. It doesn't look like prophesy. If you recall when we first introduced this subject, that was one of the reasons that led to an undermining of belief in the Bible as revelation. They thought of revelation as being all like prophesy, and so much of the Bible is not like that. Much of the Bible is historical, the result of historical research like Luke's Gospel or the book of Acts. Other parts of it are like Paul's occasional letters that he writes to various churches. It seems clear that if you think of revelation as this prophetic model that a lot of the Scripture would not be revelation. But that is why we need to construe revelation more broadly to be some sort of a communication from God but not a word-for-word dictation.

*STUDENT:* Later in the same book there is a conversation between Jeremiah and God.

*DR. CRAIG:* Right. I think that is obvious that that is not dictated by God.

### **END DISCUSSION**

Let's look at a second view that one might adopt to try to take account of these factors. That would be an *accommodation* view. On this view, the idea is that God accommodates himself to the limitations and the vocabulary of the human author so that what is written has these human qualities to it.

John Calvin pointed out that any sort of divine revelation from God in human language is going to involve this kind of accommodation. God is already accommodating himself to us in speaking in Greek or Hebrew, right? Because that is not God's natural language. He is already accommodating himself by adopting human languages to reveal himself in. But then Calvin would say that God stoops even lower. He says God lisps in Scripture in the way that we might talk to a baby when adults will sometimes coo and talk in baby talk to a little child. This is the way in which God speaks to us in Scripture – by accommodating himself to our limitations.

While I think the accommodation view certainly does have valuable insights – it obviously is true that God has to condescend and accommodate himself to us in order to reveal himself to us in language – still it doesn't really get at the problems of the dictation theory raised by things like the *levicula* and the human emotions that are expressed. We still want to say that there is some way in which the human author has input into Scripture that would explain things like the phenomena that we've looked at.<sup>38</sup> The accommodation theory doesn't really allow that sort of human input.

So the view that is adopted by most persons who believe in the inspiration of Scripture would be a view called a *supervision* view of inspiration. That is to say, the Holy Spirit doesn't dictate to the human authors what to write, but he supervises the writing of Scripture in such a way that the human author will write what God or the Holy Spirit wants him to write. So the author is under the direction of the Holy Spirit in spontaneously writing what then is God's Word.

That seems to get it right, doesn't it? That would give us a confluent Scripture. It would explain how the Scripture could be the product of human authors and reflect their personalities and emotions and limitations, but it could also be from God in that God is supervising the writing of Scripture. But I think the difficulty is understanding how that is going to give you verbal inspiration. How can the Holy Spirit supervise the writing of Scripture in such a way that the very words of Scripture are inspired but they are not dictated by God? This is the real problem. How can God or the Holy Spirit supervise the human author in such a way as to produce a verbal, plenary, inspired text but without dictation. That will be the question that we are going to take up next time.<sup>39</sup>

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38 25:03

39 Total Running Time: 27:25 (Copyright © 2014 William Lane Craig)

## Lecture 6: Confluence of Scripture

We have been talking about the doctrine of inspiration. The question that we closed with last time was how inspiration can be plenary, verbal, and yet confluent. We saw that no one wants to defend a dictation theory of biblical inspiration. Muslims hold to something like that for the Qur'an, but Christians theologians recognize that the Scriptures are the products of their human authors as well as the divine author. So some sort of supervision theory of inspiration seems best. But the problem is enunciating such a theory – showing how we can make sense of God's superintending work so that the final product will be verbal, plenary, and confluent in its inspiration.

How can inspiration be verbal, plenary, and yet confluent? Here contemporary theologians have not had a whole lot to say. Let's look at the bewilderment that is expressed by some representative Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed theologians. These are not contemporaries. These are classical thinkers that represent these traditions.

First from the Catholic perspective, John Henry Newman, the great British cardinal, in his *Lectures on the Scripture Proofs of the Doctrines of the Church* in 1838, has the following to say about this question.

In what way inspiration is compatible with that personal agency on the part of its instruments, which the composition of the Bible evidences, we know not; but if any thing is certain, it is this, – that, though the Bible is inspired, and therefore, in one sense, written by God, yet very large portions of it, if not far the greater part of it, are written in as free and unconstrained a manner, and (apparently) with as little consciousness of a supernatural dictation or restraint, on the part of His earthly instruments, as if He had had no share in the work. As God rules the will, yet the will is free, – as He rules the course of the world, yet men conduct it, – so He has inspired the Bible, yet men have written it. Whatever else is true about it, this is true, – that we may speak of the history, or mode of its composition, as truly as of that of other books; we may speak of its writers having an object in view, being influenced by circumstances, being anxious, taking pains, purposely omitting or introducing things, supplying what others had left, or leaving things incomplete. Though the bible be inspired, it has all such characteristics as might attach to a book uninspired, – the characteristics of dialect and style, the distinct effects of times and places, youth and age, or moral and intellectual character; and I insist on this, lest in what I am going to say, I seem to forget (what I do not

forget), that in spite of its human form, it has in it the spirit and the mind of God.<sup>40</sup>

Here Newman expresses very eloquently that, while God is the author of Scripture, in some inexplicable way it is also very much a human product which evinces all of the characteristics of its human authors.<sup>41</sup>

From a Lutheran perspective, listen to what Robert Preuss, in his book *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* published in 1970, has to say. Preuss writes,

The Lutheran doctrine of inspiration presents a paradox. On the one hand it was taught that God is the *auctor primaries* [that is to say, the primary author] of Scripture, that He determined and provided the thoughts and actual words of Scripture and that no human cooperation concurred *efficienter* [that is to say, as efficient causes] in producing Scripture. On the other hand it was maintained that the temperaments (*ingenia*), the research and feelings (*studia*), and the differences in background (*nationes*) of the inspired writers are all clearly reflected in the Scriptures; that there is nothing docetic about Scripture;

[Docetism was an early heresy that thought that while the spiritual is good, the material and physical is evil. Therefore Christ could not truly become incarnate. He only appeared to be incarnate. The human nature and body of Jesus was in fact illusory – not real. What Preuss is saying here is that there is nothing docetic about Scripture. It really is the product of these human authors as well as the divine author. We should not think that these human authors are mere stenographers who take a dictation. They really have a role in it.]

that God's spokesmen wrote willingly, consciously, spontaneously, and from the deepest personal spiritual conviction and experience; that psychologically and subjectively (*materialiter et subjective*) they were totally involved in the writing of Scripture. These two salient features of the doctrine of inspiration must be held in tension. . . .

Now it may seem utterly inconsistent that the Spirit of God could in one and the same action provide the very words of Scripture and accommodate Himself to the linguistic peculiarities and total personality of the individual writer so that these men wrote freely and spontaneously. But this is precisely what took place according to the Biblical evidence and data. And if Scripture does not inform us how both of these facts can be true, we must not do violence to either or try to

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40 John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Scripture Proofs of the Doctrines of the Church*, Tracts for the Times 85 (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1838), p. 30.

41 4:53

probe the mystery of inspiration beyond what has been revealed. The Lutheran teachers are well aware that there is a lacuna [or a “gap”] in their theology at this point. . . . ; and they are content to retain this logical gap and accept the paradox.<sup>42</sup>

On Preuss’ view, the doctrine of inspiration is inherently paradoxical and mysterious and it is no good trying to probe this mystery to resolve it.

Finally, from the Reformed perspective we have this from the great Princeton theologian of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, B. B. Warfield, in his book *Calvin and Calvinism*. Warfield wrote the classical doctrine of inspiration,

purposely declares nothing as to the mode of inspiration. The Reformed Churches admit that this is inscrutable. They content themselves with defining carefully and holding fast the effects of the divine influence, leaving the mode of divine action by which it is brought about draped in mystery.<sup>43</sup>

Once more we see from Warfield’s point of view the doctrine of inspiration is simply mysterious and should just be left at that.

I think that while we may sometimes be forced to advert to mystery in doing theology, we should only do so as a last resort after attempts to make sense of Christian doctrine have failed. I don’t think that we’ve reached that point yet with the doctrine of inspiration. Let’s try to probe this a little farther and see what sense we can make of a doctrine or theory of inspiration that would allow inspiration to be verbal, plenary, and confluent.<sup>44</sup>

As our springboard for discussing this, I want to look at an article published several years by a pair of Christian philosophers, Randy and David Basinger, entitled “Inerrancy, Dictation, and the Free Will Defence” which was published in the *Evangelical Quarterly*.<sup>45</sup> What Basinger and Basinger argue is that if you hold to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy then you cannot use the free will defense to answer the problem of evil.

For those of you who are not familiar with that, in response to the atheist argument that there is suffering and evil in the world that a good and all-powerful God would not and could not permit, the free will defender will say that evil in the world is possibly the result of the free actions of creatures – either human or demonic. Therefore, God cannot guarantee that a world of free creatures with as much good as this world has would not also have less evil. That is the free will defense against the problem of evil. It appeals to

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42 Robert D. Preuss, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. (St. Louis; Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 1: 290-291.

43 Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (Oxford University Press, 1931; rep. ed.: Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), p. 62.

44 10:18

45 Randall Basinger and David Basinger, “Inerrancy, Dictation and The Free Will Defence,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): pp. 177-180.

creaturely freedom to explain how God can be all-loving and all-powerful and yet suffering and evil still exist.

What Basinger and Basinger want to say is that if you hold to the free will defense, you cannot believe in biblical inerrancy. Why is that? They give this following argument which they imagine in favor of biblical inerrancy. This is how the biblical inerrantist might argue, they think.

1. The words of the Bible are the product of free human activity.

That just is to say that the Scripture is confluent in its inspiration. It is not dictated by God. The words of the Bible are the product of free human activity.

2. Human activities, such as penning a book, can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom.

This is the supervision view of inspiration that says God can supervise the writing of Scripture without violating the freedom of the human authors.

3. God totally controlled what the human authors did, in fact, write.

So you get verbal inspiration.

4. Therefore, the words of the Bible are God's utterances.
5. Whatever God utters is errorless.
6. Therefore, the words of the Bible are errorless.

This is an argument for biblical inerrancy based upon the words of the Bible being the product of human activity and God's total control of those free human authors.

Basinger and Basinger say that, in light of the endorsement of premise (2) by the defender of inspiration (namely that human activities can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom), that person cannot utilize the free will defense in response to the problem of evil. He can't say that evil was somehow then outside of God's control. If human activities can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom then God should be able to totally control the world so that evil and sin never occurs. Given the reality of human evil and the fact that God cannot be the author of evil they say premise (2) must be false. If you are going to hold to the reality of evil and yet God's superintendence over the world, you've got to say that human activities cannot be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom. That is to say, (2) is false.

But then you can present the following argument:

1. The words of the Bible are the product of free human activity.

2'. Human activities, and their products, cannot be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom.

Now a new premise (7):

7. The doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible entails God's total control of the words of the Bible.

8. Therefore, the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible is false.

That is to say, a confluent view of verbal and plenary inspiration is false.<sup>46</sup>

If one persists in affirming the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration then since (7) is true virtually by definition (that the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible entails God's total control of the words of the Bible) you've got to deny (1) – that is to say, you've got to affirm that verbal, plenary inspiration implies a dictation theory of inspiration. They think that that denies confluence if you hold to that. That is to say, you must hold that verbal, plenary inspiration does require dictation. This is the only way in which the words of the Bible could be totally controlled by God. You wind up with dictation.

### **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I don't understand why it is not confluent if God uses his sovereignty to ensure circumstances that they, with their own free will, will choose the same word. Then they chose of their own free will that word even though God orchestrated it in a superset of sovereignty.

*Dr. Craig:* I think you are beginning to see the weakness of the argument. Hang on to that and we will pull on that thread and see if that will cause this to unravel.

*Student:* I was just thinking of the third option which comes to mind – that you can have God set circumstances in place that would fulfill his will and therefore you still have the freedom but you will execute according to his plan.

*Dr. Craig:* You folks are too well taught! *[laughter]* I can't get anything past you!

*Student:* I've been here for years, I must have picked up something!

*Dr. Craig:* Yeah, right. You are making the same point. We will say something to that effect.

### **END DISCUSSION**

Let's now look at a response to Basinger and Basinger that was written by Norman Geisler. He wrote an article in the *Evangelical Quarterly* entitled "Inerrancy and Free



Will: A Reply to the Brothers Basinger.”<sup>47</sup> He says there is a hidden assumption behind Basinger and Basinger’s reasoning; namely:

9. If God can infallibly guarantee what some men will do, then he can do the same for all.

Geisler writes to the contrary:

It may have been because only some men freely chose to co-operate with the Spirit, so that he could guide them in an errorless way. Or it may have been that the Holy Spirit simply chose to use those men and occasions which he infallibly knew would not produce error.

What Geisler is suggesting is saying that there are certain men that God could pick to use to write Scripture knowing that they would write exactly what he wants to doesn’t mean that he can infallibly control everybody in every circumstance so that evil would never result. It may well be the case that God cannot so totally control everything that evil would never freely be committed even though he did have the ability to pick certain people like Paul and Luke and Matthew so that in these certain occasions they would write infallibly exactly what he would have wanted them to say.<sup>48</sup>

Notice the second sentence of Geisler’s suggestion. “It may have been that the Holy Spirit simply chose to use those men and occasions which he infallibly knew would not produce error.” What kind of knowledge is Geisler attributing to God in saying that? Middle knowledge! That is exactly right. He is saying that God knew what these authors would freely write in certain sets of circumstances. So by placing the authors in those circumstances and leaving them free he knew that they would freely write exactly what God wanted them to write. This suggests, I think, a middle knowledge solution to the problem of biblical inspiration; namely, you can get an inspiration which is truly confluent but also verbal and plenary by attributing to God middle knowledge of what these human authors would write if they were placed in certain circumstances.

It is interesting to me that B. B. Warfield, in his article “The Biblical Idea of Inspiration,” which I am going to quote in a moment, offers a view which is almost exactly this. It is a beautiful description of what a middle knowledge perspective on biblical inspiration entails. Here is Warfield:

So soon, however, as we seriously endeavor to form for ourselves a clear conception of the precise nature of the Divine action in this ‘breathing out’ [remember that is what inspiration means: “God-breathed”] of the Scriptures –

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47 Norman L. Geisler, “Inerrancy and Free Will: A Reply to the Brothers Basinger,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 57 (1985): pp. 347-353.

48 20:20

this ‘bearing’ of the writers of the Scriptures [remember in 2 Peter it says that the authors of Scripture were borne along by the Holy Spirit to write what they did] to their appointed goal of the production of a book of Divine trustworthiness and indefectible authority – we become acutely aware of a more deeply lying and much wider problem, apart from which this one of inspiration, technically so called, cannot be profitably considered. [So Warfield says this problem of biblical inspiration is just an example of a much wider problem. What is it? He says:] This is the general problem of the origin of the Scriptures and the part of God in all that complex of processes by the interaction of which these books, which we call the sacred Scriptures, with all their peculiarities, and all their qualities of whatever sort, have been brought into being. For, of course, these books were not produced suddenly, by some miraculous act – handed down complete out of heaven, as the phrase goes; but, like all other products of time, are the ultimate effect of many processes cooperating through long periods. There is to be considered, for instance, the preparation of the material which forms the subject-matter of these books: in a sacred history, say, for example, to be narrated; or in a religious experience which may serve as a norm for record; or in a logical elaboration of the contents of revelation which may be placed at the service of God’s people; or in the progressive revelation of Divine truth itself, supplying their culminating contents. And there is the preparation of the men to write these books to be considered, a preparation physical, intellectual, spiritual, which must have attended them throughout their whole lives, and, indeed, must have had its beginning in their remote ancestors, and the effect of which was to bring the right men to the right places at the right times, with the right endowments, impulses, acquirements, to write just the books which were designed for them.<sup>49</sup> When ‘inspiration,’ technically so called, is superinduced on lines of preparation like these, it takes on quite a different aspect from that which it bears when it is thought of as an isolated action of the Divine Spirit operating out of all relation to historical processes. Representations are sometimes made as if, when God wished to produce sacred books which would incorporate His will – a series of letters like those of Paul, for example – He was reduced to the necessity of going down to earth and painfully scrutinizing the men He found there, seeking anxiously for the one who, on the whole, promised best for His purpose; and then violently forcing the material He wished expressed through him, against his natural bent, and with as little loss from his recalcitrant characteristics as possible. Of course, nothing of the sort took place. If God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul’s

He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul He brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters.<sup>50</sup>

This is a perfect description of middle knowledge in its superintending the writing of Scripture. God knew what Paul would freely write if he were in such-and-such a circumstance and presented with certain needs to address and be corrected. He knew that Paul would write, for example, the letter to the Romans. Thus, by putting Paul in those circumstances which of course required (as Warfield says) a whole series of ancestors and events leading up to that point, God can guarantee that Paul would write exactly what God wanted expressed to us.

You will notice that that accords very well with the notion that inspiration is primarily a property of the text. It is primarily a property of the end product. It is not, as Warfield says, some sort of an influence that comes upon the author and leads the author to write something. Perhaps the Holy Spirit did in some way come upon these men and bear them along, but the writing of the Scriptures is much more of a historical process than that imagines. It involves the preparation of the author, the preparation of the circumstances, and it may well be that given God's middle knowledge there didn't need to be any sort of influence of the Holy Spirit added on to this. Yet the end product is God-breathed. It is inspired.

This helps to explain, for example, the so-called *levicula* or the trivialities or light things in Scriptures like Paul saying, "I left my coat at Troas" or "Please bring the books that I left" or the greetings that he gives. It is not to say that God wouldn't have been pleased if Paul had greeted somebody else or if Paul had given some other instructions. God allows him freedom to spontaneously greet whom he wishes to, and this is all right with God. God is quite happy. This would allow for freedom in Paul's choice of vocabulary. It may be that what God wanted him to express could have been just as well expressed by other words. It could have been that God wouldn't have minded if he greeted other people or greeted them with other terms. But nevertheless God knew what Paul would write in those circumstances, and he was satisfied with what Paul would write that this would be God's Word to us.

This would also make sense of passages where the emotions of the author are expressed. I mentioned the Imprecatory Psalms which are difficult to understand if you think of those as dictations directly from God. On a middle knowledge view, God knew that this author, if he were in these anguished circumstances, would rail against his enemies, he would cry out for their destruction, and curse them.<sup>51</sup> But that doesn't mean that that is necessarily

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50 Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig with an Intro. by Cornelius Van Til (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970), pp. 154-155.

51 30:05

something that God wants us to do. It may be that the purpose God has in allowing the author to express these emotions is to say to us, *You can bring your doubts and your anger and your emotions to me. Go ahead and express yourself in prayer to me with all of the feelings that are pent up within you, and I will listen to you. And I will attend to those prayers.* So it puts a very different perspective on those elements of Scripture that are so much the product of human emotion and anger and so forth.

You might say, *Wait a minute, Bill. Isn't this overkill?* Because given God's middle knowledge and providence, isn't everything that a human author writes in that sense ultimately under God's control? He knew what you would write when you were in such and such circumstances. Does that make your philosophical article inspired by God? No, obviously not. I think the difference would be in the intention of God with respect to what is written. Certainly God knew what I would write freely in such-and-such circumstances, but it is not God's intention that that would become his Word to us. That is what serves to differentiate the books of Scripture and set them aside as inspired in a special way, namely, God intends that in having this author write these words, this would become God's own Word to us. So it is both the product of the human author, but then it is also God's Word to us. That is what sets it aside as inspired and therefore authoritative and all the rest.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* Are there two parts? One is writing the text – is it perfect? And the second part is, of the texts that are written, which ones are protected and which ones are selected by God as Scripture? I think there are lots of texts that were written that aren't Scripture, right? I am sure there were even letters by Paul that we don't have. But it looks to be that the Bible was protected and selected by God and that is why it became Scripture.

*Dr. Craig:* That is raising the question of the canon of Scripture that we postponed addressing the other day; namely, which books are these that God has specially set aside to be his Word to us? We will take up that question later in this class. What we are simply trying to do here is to formulate a theory of inspiration that will allow books to be written by human authors but so superintended by God that what they write is God's own Word to us.

*Student:* What is the difference between this and an open theism point of view? It seems very similar in the way that it . . .

*Dr. Craig:* Oh, no, no, no. Either you are misunderstanding open theism or you are misunderstanding middle knowledge because these are antithetical to each other. The open theist view is that God does not know the future and he doesn't know conditional statements either about what people might do in the future. On the open theist view, God doesn't know what the apostle Paul would write if he were in such-and-such

circumstances. He doesn't know what Paul would say to the Roman church or even if he would write a letter to the Roman church if he were in certain circumstances. So the open theist has a very difficult problem explaining God's providence and sovereignty over history because he doesn't know what human agents would freely do in various circumstances. The middle knowledge perspective says God knew exactly what this person would freely do if he were in this set of circumstances. Therefore, by creating that person, putting him in these circumstances, he knew that, for example, the letter of 1 Corinthians would result and that what he would say would become God's Word to us. These are very different perspectives.

### **END DISCUSSION**

Let me say this. When we get to the section of the course on the doctrine of God, we will have a lengthy section on the attributes of God including God's omniscience; that is to say, God's being all-knowing. There we will go into much more depth about theories of divine knowledge like open theism, middle knowledge, simple foreknowledge, and so forth. So if you are interested in that, hang on, we are going to get to it when we get to the doctrine of God.

That brings us to a close in the class today. What we will look at next time will be the authority which Scripture has in virtue of being inspired by God.<sup>52</sup>

## **Lecture 7: Biblical Inerrancy**

We have been talking about the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Last time I presented a model for the inspiration of Scripture which enables us to affirm that scriptural inspiration is plenary, verbal, and confluent. The key to this was God's so-called middle knowledge. That is to say, God knows what every person would freely do if he were placed in any circumstances in which God might create him. So by choosing a certain set of circumstances and placing people (like Paul or Luke or John) in those circumstances, God knew exactly what they would write. Then he appropriates this human writing to become his Word to us. It is via that human speech that God speaks to us as his inspired Word.

We will proceed to the next point which is the authority of Scripture. If God has appropriated these human writings like the Gospels and the epistles of the New Testament to be his Word to us then that means that God's Word carries the authority of God itself. It is God's communication to us. Therefore, it speaks to us with divine authority.

Therefore, what God says to us is true. God communicates to us what he wants us to believe and think about these matters that are important to him and that he wants to communicate to us. One of the implications of this would be the inerrancy of the Bible. How shall we define biblical inerrancy? Clearly, biblical inerrancy cannot mean that everything the Bible says is true because the Bible records, for example, false statements by Job's counselors that are not accurate. Or it reports speech by people like Pontius Pilate who even mocks the truth. So we cannot say that biblical inerrancy simply means that everything the Bible says is true, much less literally true in view of the poetry and the hyperbole and metaphor that Scripture often involves. So how should we understand the doctrine of biblical inerrancy?

Those who defend this doctrine would say that the Bible is truthful in everything that it affirms or everything that it teaches. So the inerrancy of the Bible doesn't extend to those portions of the Bible that are so to speak incidental to Scripture but are not part of the teaching or the affirmations that God wants to communicate to us. God has appropriated human speech as his Word to us, and there are things he wants to affirm or teach or communicate to us through these writings. The claim of biblical inerrancy is that the Bible is truthful in all that it affirms or teaches.

This understanding of biblical inerrancy comes to expression in the so-called Chicago Statement on biblical inerrancy. This was a statement issued by a council of evangelical theologians who got together in 1978 with a view toward enunciating exactly what

biblical inerrancy is committed to. Let me highlight a couple of points from the Chicago Statement.<sup>53</sup>

In their short statement, the second paragraph reads:

Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit [notice that is exactly what the model of inspiration that I laid out affirms – the Bible is God's Word written by men who were prepared and superintended by God], is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

Then in the fourth paragraph, the statement goes on to say:

Being wholly and verbally God-given [it is plenary and verbal in its inspiration], Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

In these paragraphs we have a number of expressions with respect to what biblical inerrancy concerns. The first one says, "All matters upon which Scripture touches." That isn't defined as to what it means by saying Scripture "touches" upon these things. It is not entirely clear. But then it goes on to say more clearly "in all things Scripture affirms." Then in that fourth paragraph, it is without error "in all that it teaches." So biblical inerrancy, I think, ought to be defined in terms of the intention of Scripture or of the scriptural authors as to what they want to affirm or assert or teach.

In the explication that the Statement gives of Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Interpretation, they distinguish between infallibility and inerrancy in the following way:

Infallible signifies the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so safeguards in categorical terms the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe, and reliable rule and guide in all matters.

So Scripture is infallible in the sense it is reliable – it can be trusted. It won't mislead you. Then they go on to say,

Similarly, inerrant signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.

That is to say, in the thing that it asserts, or as we've seen earlier, the things that it teaches. Inerrancy means Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in what it asserts or teaches.

They recognize that there may be things in Scripture that are not part of the assertions of Scripture or a part of the teachings of Scripture. They go on to say,

So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry,

*[That is important – poetry is not to be treated as history. Poetry is often non-literal and so isn't making literal assertions]*

hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor,

*[It would be a literary mistake to interpret passages that are hyperbolic or metaphorical as though they were making literal assertions]*

generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth.

*[There again, the point is you don't press the Scriptures for a precision or specificity that is alien to the author's intent when they mean to be speaking in generalities or approximate numbers or figures.]<sup>54</sup>*

Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days. We must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers.

The point there is that in certain literary types in the ancient world the author could be free to rearrange chronologically the events and to tell them in different order. This shouldn't be treated as though it were a modern day police report or historical account because it fits with the conventions that were at play in the ancient world. So it doesn't count as an error.

Similarly, they talk about imprecise citation. Sometimes the New Testament authors will cite Old Testament passages by paraphrasing them or perhaps citing them out of the Greek version of the Old Testament rather than the original Hebrew. Again, that was acceptable by the conventions of the day. Remember that when the New Testament was written they didn't even have the device of quotation marks and so often didn't distinguish between direct and indirect speech. So citation of another source could be imprecise, and it would be unfair to say that these are errors in the Bible when things are not cited precisely.

It goes on to say,



When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.

So it must be read according to the literary conventions and types and purposes of its original authors.

I think you can see that even in this statement on inerrancy, which is a very conservative statement adopted widely by evangelical churches, it is still a very nuanced understanding of what is meant by inerrancy and allows for a good deal of elements in Scripture that would not be literally true if pressed for precision.

The Scripture then, according to the doctrine of inerrancy, in virtue of being God's Word to us, is authoritative and therefore truthful in all that it teaches or means to affirm. As the Chicago Statement makes clear, this will mean that the Scriptures may exhibit things which modern readers might call errors but wouldn't be errors at that time. One illustration of this would be chronology. Remember they said that often things could be in different chronological order. That is true in the Gospels. The Gospels are closest to the genre – or literary type – called ancient biography. The so-called “lives” of famous Greeks and Romans. When you look at the conventions for ancient biography, the purpose wasn't to tell a chronological narrative of the hero from cradle to the grave but rather to tell anecdotes about the hero that would illustrate his salient character qualities so that we can understand him. Similarly, in the Gospels the authors will feel free to tell the events in different order. One of the most obvious examples of this is in Matthew, Mark, and Luke: the cleansing of the temple by Jesus. You'll remember the story when he makes a whip, he goes into the temple, and overturns the tables of the money changers and drives out those who were selling the animals. That cleansing of the temple takes place in the final week of Jesus' life during Passion Week when he is staying in Bethany and comes in to the temple and cleanses the temple just a couple days prior to his arrest and crucifixion. But if you read the Gospel of John, John has the story of the cleansing of the temple very early in Jesus' ministry. Right at the beginning he goes into Jerusalem and does this.<sup>55</sup> I once believed, as a younger Christian, that Jesus cleansed the temple twice. The way I harmonized this apparent inconsistency was to say that early in his ministry there was a cleansing of the temple, and then later on in his ministry, in the final week of his life, he did it again. But we don't have to have recourse to any such artificial harmonization which really doesn't do justice to the fact that the story is told in the same terms. It is the same story. It is not a second incident. Rather, we can simply say that the

evangelists didn't aim always to tell a chronology – in the same order – and therefore could move the events about as suited their literary purpose.

Even more nuanced and subtle is this claim that Scripture is inerrant in what it *teaches* because then one has to ask oneself the question: what is the teaching in this passage? What does this passage mean to teach us? Everybody recognizes this distinction between what the Bible simply says and what it means to teach. To turn to a non-controversial example first, Mark 4:30ff – the Parable of the Mustard Seed that Jesus gives. Jesus says,

With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? The Kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on Earth. Yet when it is grown, it grows up to be the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

This, I think, is a good example of hyperbole on Jesus' part. He is not trying to teach botany. Everybody recognizes that this isn't a botanical lesson on the size of seeds. So if there are seeds smaller than the mustard seed, which I am told there are, that is not an error in the Bible. It is not an error on Jesus' part when he says this is the smallest of seeds and it grows up to be the greatest of shrubs. That is to miss the point of the passage which is a point about the Kingdom of God and its marvelous growth from its insignificant beginnings to the great Kingdom that it will be when it fills all the Earth. Or when Jesus gives a similar parable about faith – the size of a mustard seed and being able to accomplish great things. Everyone, as I say, needs (and does) recognize that Scripture is inerrant not simply in what it says but in what it means to teach. This will require us to interpret the Scripture and discern what is the Scripture teaching?

That is enormously significant. To turn to more controversial examples, many theologians or biblical scholars think that the authors of Scripture presuppose a sort of three-decker cosmology. We live on the middle layer here on Earth and heaven is up there above the clouds and hell (or *Sheol*) is down there in the Earth. There are passages in the Scripture that seem to suggest this. Jesus ascends into heaven, right? Even today we talk in that way. Nobody says, "He went down to heaven." Right? That just seems totally inappropriate. We talk about somebody went up to heaven. Even today when we don't take this literally, nobody thinks that heaven is in outer space (at least no evangelical Christian does; Mormons maybe do). As evangelicals we don't think that hell is in the center of the Earth down there in the molten core of the Earth.

If the writers of Scripture do presuppose this sort of three-decker cosmology on occasion, I think one can say that they don't teach it. They are not teaching a three-decker

cosmology or any sort of cosmology. They are not telling us *Thus sayeth the Lord, the Word of God is that heaven is up there* even if that is what they might think.<sup>56</sup>

Or, to give another example, remember when we talked about the Second Coming of Christ. We dealt with the question of the delay of the *parousia* or the delay of the Second Coming. Some scholars believe that people like Paul and other early Christians expected the return of Christ within their own lifetime. I don't know if that is true or not. I think that depends on how you interpret what Paul says when he says, for example in 1 Corinthians 15, "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up to meet them in the clouds." Did he mean just we Christians in general who are left, or was he talking about his contemporary generation – that we, us here who are left, will be taken up to be with them in the clouds to meet Christ. It is not clear to me whether Paul was speaking about his contemporaries or just in more general terms. But in any case, I am confident that Paul never taught that the Second Coming of Christ would come in his own lifetime. Even if he believed it himself and hoped that that would happen, you will not find anywhere in his epistles where he teaches that Christ is going to return within his lifetime.

Another example – again a very controversial one: do you remember when we talked about in the doctrine of creation the existence of the historical Adam? Was there actually, biologically, literally, a human pair somewhere in prehistory from whom the entire human race is descended? Among evangelicals, this has become a flash point of controversy today, as we saw. Some scholars are saying even if people like Jesus and Paul thought that there was a literal Adam and Eve and so spoke in that way they don't teach that there was an original Adam and Eve. Others will say, no, no, wait a minute, they did teach this – Romans 5, Acts 17 – this is part of what Scripture affirms, what it means to teach. This would be a good example of where there is a great deal of controversy over what does the Scripture mean to teach. Does it teach that there was this original, literal human pair, or is that just something that is incidental to Scripture which has a different teaching?

I share these examples simply to give you a sense of the flexibility of an adequate doctrine of biblical inerrancy. This is not a wooden sort of doctrine that is imposed upon the text, but rather it is a nuanced and subtle doctrine that requires us to interpret and understand the original text and to ask ourselves, "What do the biblical authors really mean to affirm or teach here?"

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* This kind of goes back to last week. A question was raised with inspiration, but also would relate to inerrancy. If we prepare a sermon or a Bible study or whatever, are we not also inspired? I think God superintended the Scriptures and preserved them to be a standard. So in a sense when we prepare something and we are prayerful about it and so on that we can be inspired, but I guess we would be inspired but not necessarily inerrant.

*Dr. Craig:* This is the way I would put it. I think that inspiration properly defined is not primarily a property of the author. We shouldn't think that inspiration means someone was sort of filled with the Holy Spirit and like, "I'm inspired to become a singer" or something like that. I'm inspired to do this or that. Inspiration is the property of the end product. Remember that is what Warfield emphasized in the earlier lesson that I quoted. It is the end result that is God-breathed and inspired.<sup>57</sup> When I do a sermon or prepare a lesson and I sense the Lord's leading me, the Holy Spirit is "inspiring me," nevertheless the end product isn't inspired because that isn't God-breathed. That is not God's Word. So that doesn't share the property of inspiration in the way that Scripture does. Scripture is uniquely appropriated by God as his Word to us. That serves to distinguish the Scripture and its authority from other human writings.

*Student:* Why has inerrancy and infallibility been such an obstacle to people such as Bart Ehrman for affirming the Gospel?

*Dr. Craig:* This is a very interesting question. Thank you. Many of you have heard of Bart Ehrman. He is an ex-evangelical who is now Professor at the University of North Carolina. I am told by an editor at Oxford University Press that he is the best-selling religious author with Oxford University Press. He is writing popular book after popular book attempting to undermine the deity of Christ, the reliability of Scripture in many different ways. Even the existence of God. He pushes the problem of evil and so forth. I should say he became a Christian at about the age of 15 – about the same age I was when I became a Christian. He then went off to Moody Bible Institute and then he went to Wheaton College – the same school I went to – and studied under Gerald Hawthorne. He took Greek from the same professor that taught me Greek. Our biographies were so similar up to that point. I then went off to the University of Munich to do my doctorate in theology with Pannenberg. Ehrman went to the university of Princeton to do his doctorate in theology. While he was there he was working on a passage in the Gospel of Mark that seemed to be in conflict or inconsistent with other biblical passages in the Old Testament. It had to do with when Abiathar was the high priest. Ehrman was proposing all sorts of harmonizations and ways of getting around this. His professor said to him, *Maybe Mark just made a mistake*. Apparently for Ehrman this was just like the light dawning. He made a mistake. From that point on, he began to think the Scriptures aren't inerrant. The

whole house of cards just began to tumble for him. He was then on this slide that eventually led him into agnosticism.

What was the problem here for Ehrman that the admission of a single, trivial error in the Gospels would have such a devastating theological affect? I think this is very, very important. Our system of beliefs as Christians can be compared to a spider's web which radiates out from a central point. These strands of the web represent different doctrines or affirmations that we as Christians believe. Some of these doctrines are more central to the web of belief. If one of these doctrines were plucked out, the reverberations would be felt throughout the entire web and the web might even collapse. But if one of these peripheral strands were to be removed, there would be little reverberation in one's system of beliefs. It wouldn't have much impact.

What are some of these central doctrines that are at the core of the Christian web of beliefs? How about the existence of God? That is pretty central. If you remove that from the web of beliefs, surely our faith would utterly collapse. Also close and central would be the deity of Christ, I think, which is why those who have denied Christ's deity were condemned as heretics. Christ's death on the cross for our sins would be near to the center. That would be hard to give up.

Less central would be doctrines like the doctrine of original sin, for example.<sup>58</sup> Although that is affirmed by Catholics and Protestants, in Defenders Series 2 we saw that Eastern Orthodox Churches don't affirm the doctrine of original sin, and yet they are still Christians. The system still holds together. So if you were to remove that it would certainly cause some reverberations in the web of belief but it wouldn't collapse in the way it would if you removed one of these central beliefs. Beliefs about the tribulation and the rapture, contrary to what some of our Bible teachers might think, is very peripheral to your web of belief. It is unfortunate that when Christians so focus on things like the rapture and tribulation that that becomes almost central to their web of beliefs. Doctrines about the sacraments and baptism and the real presence in the Lord's supper are also nearer the periphery than the center.

The question is: where does the doctrine of inspiration lie? I think that the doctrine of inspiration lies somewhere out a ways from the center. If the Bible is not God's Word to us and inspired, it would certainly cause great reverberations because now you would have documents that would simply be human historically reliable accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus. Christianity wouldn't collapse. What C. S. Lewis called "mere Christianity" doesn't hinge upon belief in the inspiration of Scripture. That wouldn't show that God doesn't exist. It wouldn't show that Jesus Christ didn't rise from the dead or that he didn't die for your sins. If you gave up the inspiration of Scripture, that would

be theologically very significant but it wouldn't cause you to become a non-Christian. Christianity doesn't depend on the inspiration of the Bible.

Even less so would be a corollary of inspiration which is inerrancy. Inerrancy is a derivative or a corollary of inspiration. If the Scripture is inspired then it is authoritative in all that it teaches. But there are lots of Christians who don't believe in biblical inerrancy, and yet they are still Christians. The web doesn't collapse. So I would say that the doctrine of inspiration is some place out here [*pointing to a diagram on the whiteboard*] and the doctrine of inerrancy is even a little more peripheral.

What was Ehrman's mistake? Ehrman's mistake, like so many Christians, is that for him the belief in inerrancy lay at the very core of his web of beliefs so that when that single, trivial error was exposed to his thinking in the Gospels, his whole system of belief was threatened with collapse. I think that that is just a catastrophic misprioritizing of Christian doctrine. It is not true that biblical inerrancy is a doctrine that lies at the core of your beliefs so that if you gave it up it doesn't mean that you would give up belief in God, in the deity of Christ, in his death on the cross for your sins, even in the inspiration of Scripture.

I think that is the difficulty for Ehrman. I think it is tragic. It didn't have to happen. In the lives of many more scholars, I think often what happens is they begin to discover nuances, for example, in the way that I've described – “Wait a minute. This isn't an error. The Gospels don't need to be chronologically accurate in order to be inerrant.” Or “Paul didn't teach that Christ is coming again in his own lifetime even if he believed it. This isn't part of the teaching of Scripture.” You see what I mean? But for Ehrman, he had this wooden, brittle understanding of inerrancy that was misplaced in terms of its theological priority. The tragedy is that then it collapsed.

You meet ex-Christians like this all the time. I remember sitting over in the Dogwood Room with a man who came in who was once a strong Christian leader, had now lost his faith, and become an atheist. Someone wanted me to talk with him. So I said sure. I said to him, “OK, lay out for me why do you think God does not exist?” He began talking about Old Testament errors and trivialities, like the number of the horses in Solomon's stable. And I said, “Wait a minute. You are telling me you are an atheist because there are some discrepancies in these Old Testament documents? That doesn't follow logically at all!” It was so difficult in talking to this man because he just couldn't see that in order to believe in the existence of God and the resurrection of Christ, the deity of Christ, you don't have to believe that 2 Kings is right about the number of horses in Solomon's stable.

If any of you have been struggling with this sort of thing, or you know folks – children or grandchildren maybe – who have been, try to help them understand the place of biblical

inerrancy in our web of beliefs and also to understand its subtleness. It is not a brittle doctrine. It is a nuanced doctrine that can survive these kinds of shaking experiences.

### **END DISCUSSION**

What we will do the next time we meet is to look at difficulties with the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. This is a doctrine that faces significant challenges primarily of two types. We will talk about what those challenges are before offering some defense of why we ought to believe in the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.<sup>59</sup>

## Lecture 8: Difficulties with Biblical Inerrancy

The last time we met, we talked about a theory of biblical inspiration that would give us a verbal, plenary, and truly confluent Word of God that would make sense of the doctrine of inspiration found in the Bible. This raises the question of biblical authority and inerrancy. We saw that inerrancy is properly defined in terms, not simply of what the Bible says, but in terms of what the Bible teaches, and that the Bible therefore (in virtue of being God's Word) ought to be inerrant in all that it teaches.

This doctrine confronts difficulties of various sorts. These are principally three – there are two listed on the outline but I am going to add a third category that has recently come to more significance in my mind.

1. *Simple inconsistencies within Scripture* where the Scriptures seem to contradict themselves. A good example of this in the New Testament would be with respect to the accounts of the death of Judas Iscariot. In Matthew 27:5 we read what happens to Judas after he had betrayed Jesus: “And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.” So Judas committed suicide by hanging according to Matthew. But now when you turn over to the account that Luke gives in Acts 1 you find a different story. In Acts 1:18-19 Luke adds this parenthetical comment:

(Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

Here we have a different account of the death of Judas where Judas uses the money to buy a field and then falls and has this fatal injury that ends his life. This would be simply one example of apparent inconsistencies in the Bible that would challenge the doctrine that the Bible is inerrant.

2. *Factual mistakes*. These would not be inconsistencies within Scripture, but rather mistakes that other external sources would be inconsistent with. For example, in Luke 2:2 he talks about a man like Quirinius who he identifies as the governor of Syria during the time of the census that took Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. He says in Luke 2:2, “This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria.” This contradicts what we know about Syrian leaders in extra-biblical material. Quirinius was, in fact, a governor of Syria, but it wasn't until some years later that Quirinius governed Syria. Luke seems to have gotten the date wrong. This would be an example of what we might call a factual mistake in Scripture.



3. Recently, I've been impressed with the number of non-Christians who reject Scripture because of what we might call *ethical errors*. That is to say, they reject the moral teachings of Scripture as being mistaken. Sometimes, non-theists will incorrectly use these objections as an argument against the truth of Christianity or even against the truth of theism.<sup>60</sup> But clearly if there are mistakes in the Bible of an ethical nature, that doesn't mean that atheism is true. I don't know of any atheist philosopher who would use as his argument that God does not exist because there is some mistake of ethical teaching in the Bible. Similarly, it doesn't show that Jesus Christ wasn't the Son of God who died for your sins and was raised from the dead. Rather, what these would challenge – and this is why we are considering them here – is the biblical doctrine of inerrancy. The claim would be that this shows that these passages in Scripture are not, in fact, inspired by God or that the Bible isn't inerrant, if it is inspired by God, because it contains these ethical errors.

What am I thinking of here? Perhaps the most famous example is the slaughter of the Canaanites in the Old Testament where God is represented as commanding the Israeli armies to go into Canaan and to kill everybody, not only the men but also the women and even the little children. Very many people will say such a command could not possibly have been given by the good and loving God. This is inconsistent with the nature of God, and so these stories of the conquest of Canaan are either legends about the founding of Israel that never really happened or, if the events actually happened, the Israelites, carried away by their nationalistic fervor, thought that God had commanded them to do this when in fact he had not. In either case, I think you can see that what this objection properly challenges would be the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. It would say that these stories are not true.

Similarly, in the Old Testament, the institution of slavery or the subjugation of women is troubling to many people. If it is pointed out that, in fact, slavery in the Old Testament is not at all like slavery that we are familiar with that was in the American antebellum South, that in fact in ancient Israel slavery was really a kind of anti-poverty program. Since they didn't have government welfare programs, a man could keep his family together and preserve his dignity by selling himself into slavery until he worked off his debts and then could be freed so slavery was actually a kind of anti-poverty program that had the advantages of self-respect, hard work, and keeping the family together. But, as I say, if you point that out, they will say nevertheless the way slaves are treated, like the way women are treated in the Old Testament, indicates that they are not thought to be equal in moral value to men. The penalties for crimes that injured slaves are less than the penalties of those same crimes when they are done against a freed man. Or a woman will have to offer certain sacrifices or make certain observances that are greater than if a man

needed to do so. So these indicate a lower view of the personhood of slaves and women that we would find very troubling because we believe in the equal intrinsic value of all human beings.

It is not just the Old Testament. One of the major objections to people in our contemporary culture is the Bible's prohibition of homosexual activity. For many people, this is just deeply wrong; to say that persons who have a homosexual disposition that they did not choose and cannot get rid of cannot live happy and fulfilling lives but must be celibate for the rest of their existence through no fault of their own. Among non-believers, the Bible's prohibitions of homosexual activity are often regarded as teachings that could not genuinely be from God. These must represent ethical mistakes in the Bible.

Jesus himself isn't exempted from these objections.<sup>61</sup> For example, Jesus' teachings on divorce and remarriage go down very hard today. Look at what Jesus says in Mark 10:11: "And he said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'" Here Jesus prohibits divorce and also remarriage. This command is widely ignored in the Christian church today. It is not just non-Christians that find this hard to swallow. Very widely in the church there are Christian believers who once were married who have suffered a divorce but now have found someone else whom they believe God has for them, and they remarry. Sometimes, at least, those marriages are much happier and work out better. So it might be claimed this is an ethical mistake on Jesus' part. This teaching cannot be right, that it is wrong to divorce and then to remarry another.

I think you can see that these ethical errors, as well as factual mistakes and inconsistencies, would all be reasons, not for denying the existence of God or the person and work of Christ, but they would be reasons for calling into question biblical inerrancy. These would be seen as human mistakes that have worked their way into Scripture. So while Scripture is inspired by God, it is God's Word, nevertheless it does contain these sorts of mistakes.

I think we have to admit that anyone reading the Bible would not arrive at a doctrine of inerrancy inductively. He wouldn't read the Scriptures and finding no mistakes conclude that therefore the Bible is inerrant. He would, on the basis of difficulties like these and others, say it probably has these mistakes or errors in it. But I think the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is not based on inductive reasoning. Rather, it is a deductive argument based upon the attitude of Jesus to the Hebrew Scriptures – what we today call the Old Testament. When you look at Jesus' attitude toward the Hebrew Scriptures, he called them the Word of God, and he treated them as completely reliable and trustworthy and true. On the basis of Jesus' attitude toward the Scriptures we, as his disciples, also

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61 10:13

embrace that teaching. This argument might be summarized in the following way. There are two parts to this.

The first part is:

1. Whatever God teaches is true. (This is because God is morally perfect being; he is the greatest conceivable being and therefore no deceiver. God is not a deceiver, and so if he teaches you to believe something, that which he teaches you is true.)
2. Historical, prophetic, and other evidences show that Jesus is God. (This is where you would introduce your typical apologetic arguments and Christian evidences for the person of Christ.)
3. Therefore, whatever Jesus teaches is true. (If Jesus is God, and whatever God teaches is true, then what Jesus teaches us to believe is true.)

The second part of the argument then picks up as its first premise the conclusion of the first argument:

1. Whatever Jesus teaches is true.

Then the crucial premise:

2. Jesus taught that the Scriptures are the inerrant Word of God. (Here one would simply look at how Jesus regarded the Old Testament. If you are interested in exploring this in greater detail, let me recommend the book by John Wenham called *Christ and the Bible* where he does an extensive study of Jesus' attitude toward the Hebrew Scriptures.)<sup>62</sup>
3. Therefore, the Scriptures are the inerrant word of God.

So the belief in biblical inerrancy is not something arrived at inductively. It is a deductive inference based upon the person and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus regarded the Hebrew Scriptures as the inerrant Word of God, and he is our teacher, therefore we should follow him in his teaching.

John 10:34-36 gives a nice summary of Jesus' attitude toward the Hebrew Scriptures. Here Jesus is disputing with his Jewish opponents.

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be broken), do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

Here Jesus quotes from Psalms 82:6. He refers to it as the Word of God. His argument is based upon a single word – the word “gods” – which is found in that passage. And he

says Scripture cannot be broken. The sense seems to be here that it is reliable and can't be just annulled or set aside.

What that means is that we believe in a doctrine of biblical inerrancy on the basis of Christ's attitude toward the Old Testament. It has been said, I think quite rightly, that we don't believe in Christ because we believe in the Bible. Rather, we believe in the Bible because we believe in Christ. It's because we believe in Jesus and his divinity and Lordship that we believe what he taught about the Old Testament.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* My question was about the Acts 2 verse. I'm pretty sure that they (the priests) conferred together and they bought the field, and then he died in it. Or, in that realm of events, they bought the field with his money when he threw it back at them.

*Dr. Craig:* What about the hanging himself, and the falling down, and the bowels gushing out?

*Student:* I just wanted to ask you about that. What did you say? That he bought the field. So he bought the field indirectly. That is what my question was.

*Dr. Craig:* That would be, as I understand it, an attempt to harmonize the passage. Acts 1:18 says, "This man [Judas, that is to say] bought a field with the reward of his wickedness." Whereas the Matthew account says he took the money and threw it into the temple; he gave it back. He didn't want it. You could say that what happened, as you said, was it was done indirectly. They bought the field and so Luke is just using here a device of compression to say it was his money or something. I think that is a very legitimate approach to handling biblical difficulties.

We will talk about that next. How do we then deal with these sorts of difficulties. What I am wanting to first explore is why should we believe in inerrancy at all? Why not believe that the Bible is God's Word, it is inspired by God, but then not go the next step and say therefore I believe it is inerrant? I would say on the basis of what I just explained – Jesus' attitude toward the Scriptures that he himself had.<sup>63</sup>

*Student:* I think there are some situations that are reported where there are facets of it in one account and left out in others, other elements added. So there is harmonizations. I think we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bathwater; we should allow broadly for harmonization. In the case of Judas and his hanging, some have suggested he hung himself and because after a while the ropes deteriorated, he was bloated, and when this happened, he fell from the tree. We talked about other situations like the anointing at Bethany. In reading that, it seems like there is a harmonization that the argument assumes

the banquet took place immediately when he came to Bethany rather than maybe some days hence.

*Dr. Craig:* You are getting into the solution again to the difficulties. I am going to say something about that next. Notice this is why I called them difficulties. They are difficulties that we confront in the text, but then there may be ways, as you just explained, at dealing with these difficulties in a way that is consistent with Jesus' teaching. So the question will be: if we can't handle these difficulties – if they prove so recalcitrant that we think the Bible has an error in it – which premise in this argument then do we give up? I'll say something about that later because I don't think we are at that point. I think that this gives good deductive grounds for believing in biblical inerrancy. We'll have to deal with these difficulties in various ways, as both of you have already suggested.

*Student:* Along those lines, in 2 Peter 3 Peter actually calls Paul's writings "scripture." His letters are Scripture.

*Dr. Craig:* Let's have that verse. 2 Peter 3:15. I am going to talk about this passage when we get to the question of the canon of Scripture. But this is a remarkable verse. He says,

. . . our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters.

Here this author knows the Pauline epistles, right? He refers to the letters of Paul that he has written. Then he makes this interesting comment about Paul's letters:

There are some things in them hard to understand [Already in that day they were having a challenge!] which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, [and then this stunning phrase] as they do the other scriptures.

He is placing the epistles of Paul on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus said are the Word of God, and therefore absolutely trustworthy. Here we have at least an inner-biblical witness to very, very early acceptance of the letters of Paul as canonical – as Scripture inspired and therefore trustworthy.

*Student:* I saw an interview with Richard Swinburne on *Closer to Truth* about this. His comments were very interesting. He was asked about biblical inerrancy, and he said when it comes to the Muslim religion, Islam, he said the revelation is the book. The book is the revelation of God – the Qur'an. But he said with the Christian faith, the revelation is not the Bible, it is really Jesus Christ as taught by the church.<sup>64</sup> Then he said something I found interesting – he said that the early church fathers and some other later theologians agreed that there could be some things that early writers wrote down that factually we

know are wrong because they were an ignorant people about some things. So they got some things wrong. But that wouldn't make the Bible not authoritative. The real revelation is Jesus – he is really what is infallible. Is he saying the Bible is still the Word of God? Would he still agree with that? I didn't know what your thoughts were on that .

*Dr. Craig:* This is a common move among contemporary theologians, and it is one that I disagree with. I want to refer you back to an earlier lesson where we dealt with this topic where God's special revelation in his living Word is Jesus Christ who is called the Word of God in John 1:1. But then it seems to me there is also this propositional revelation in Scripture. So you have in 2 Timothy 3:16 where he says that the Scriptures are God-breathed, they are inspired of God, and that this is a property of the text. So we shouldn't escape the problem by saying that the Bible is not special revelation. It seems to me that that is the way Jesus regarded the Hebrew Scriptures. I think that is what the Scriptures teach about themselves. The fact that Jesus is the living Word of God doesn't mean there isn't also a written Word of God that is the Bible.

*Student:* Now I want to try and reconcile that when good Christians study the Word and they study areas which, in my opinion, the genre is historical, and they disagree with it, they call it myth and poetry and not truth. I just say Genesis 1.

*Dr. Craig:* Ah. Well, oh boy. *[laughter]* I don't want to open up that can of worms because we dealt with it in Defenders Series 2 in the doctrine of creation where you remember we spent months looking at Genesis 1 and asking ourselves what kind of literature is this, how is it to be interpreted, and so forth. I'll just refer you to those lectures, rather than, as I say, rehearse them again here. The question would be: are these people being dishonest in saying this is a genre of literature that isn't meant to be taken as history? I certainly think that is an open question with regard to Genesis 1.

## **END DISCUSSION**

How should we approach these biblical difficulties when we do encounter them? Obviously, we should first of all try to resolve the difficulty. We ought to try to see if there isn't some solution. Here crucial to the question will be the one just raised, namely, the literary genre of the literature we are dealing with as well as the techniques that were employed by ancient writers in, for example, the writing of history.

This is where Michael Licona has done such good work in comparing the Gospels to the *Lives* of Greek and Romans composed by Plutarch, an ancient historian. Mike has been able to show that many of the same techniques that ancient historians like Plutarch used in writing ancient *Lives* are also employed by the evangelists. Yet, they weren't errors or mistakes on Plutarch's part. These were accepted as part of that sort of writing. He mentions such things as compression where a narrative would be compacted. Sometimes this is called telescoping. You think of a telescope when it is extended, but then you can

collapse that telescope and it all folds up into just one segment. I think you see something like that, for example, in the Easter narratives in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>65</sup> If you read the Easter story in Luke, it looks as though it all happens on the same day. Luke doesn't even have evening and the next day come before he gets to the end of the account. Yet, when you turn the page and you read the first chapter of the book of Acts, you find that Jesus appeared to his disciples over forty days before the ascension. So Luke himself knows that this didn't all happen on Easter Sunday – it spread out over a period of forty days. But he compacts it. He telescopes it down. The person who is reading this in an unsympathetic way without understanding these literary devices might think Luke has erred here when Luke himself knows it happened over a long period of time.

Or displacement – I mentioned here the story of the cleansing of the temple in the Synoptics being during the passion week but in John early on. Transferal of sayings from one person to another. Simplification of a narrative. Spotighting certain persons. All of these are legitimate techniques that ancient historians used.

On top of these techniques, you have the flexibility of oral traditional, editorial redaction by an author for clarity's sake, paraphrasing. You will remember that in that day they didn't even have such things as quotation marks, so these red letter editions of the Gospels are utterly misleading in thinking that these are the very words uttered by Jesus. What we are reading, even in the Greek, is a translation of Aramaic that Jesus spoke. So these aren't the very words of Jesus, especially, as I say, they don't have direct speech and indirect speech. Very often they will blur into each other.

So in dealing with these sorts of inconsistencies, I think first of all we need to understand the type of literature we are dealing with and then the techniques that ancient authors used in writing. A lot of these difficulties will simply vanish when we do that. They turn out not to be errors at all.

Or, on top of that, we might try harmonization. This shouldn't be despised. I think sometimes harmonizations are proposed to deal with these other elements such as compression, displacement, simplification. There you do get brittle and artificial and implausible harmonizations. But that doesn't mean that harmonization is utterly out of account – that it can never work. Sometimes life is complicated and, in fact, harmonization may hold.

One very striking example of this was given by the former Dean of the seminary at which I taught – Dr. Kenneth Kantzer. He told the story of how he received a phone call one day from his brother that their mother had been hit by a bus in downtown Chicago and was being rushed to the hospital. Sometime later Dr. Kantzer received a call from the hospital

reporting that his mother had been killed immediately in an automobile crash. He thought, “What is this?” The brother was there. He knew what happened. Yet this was an official report from the hospital. But how could you reconcile these? They later found out that his mother had, in fact, been hit by a bus when she was crossing the street in downtown Chicago. She was picked up by the ambulance and was being rushed to the hospital when the ambulance was involved in an automobile collision, and she was immediately killed. So both stories turned out to be true! Yet, as Dr. Kantzer said, “If I were to propose this as a harmonization for dealing with some biblical inconsistency, I would be laughed out of the room.” It shows that sometimes life can be complicated. In fact, there may be a harmonization such as in the case of the death of Judas that was mentioned.

Finally, for dealing with these inconsistencies, we have to take into account remember that inerrancy is what the Bible teaches, and that doesn’t mean there can’t be elements in Scripture that are not accurate but they are not part of the teaching of Scripture.<sup>66</sup>

So those would be ways of dealing with inconsistencies. Whether or not that will be fully successful remains to be seen. I am suggesting that this is simply a technique for how you would then approach these sorts of difficulties.

What I will do next time is share how one might approach so-called factual mistakes and ethical errors in Scripture for the person who believes on the basis of Jesus’ teaching in biblical inerrancy.

To close the class today, I would like to read a benediction from the book of Romans and invite us all to bow our heads as I do so.

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen (Romans 16:25-27).<sup>67</sup>

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66 35:14

67 Total Running Time: 36:50 (Copyright © 2015 William Lane Craig)



## **Lecture 9: How to Respond to Biblical Difficulties**

Having offered a defense of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, we began to look last time at how we should respond to biblical difficulties that would call this doctrine into question.

We specified three different types of difficulties that one might confront. One would be inconsistencies among the biblical documents themselves. A second would be factual mistakes where the Scriptures affirm one thing but we know from secular history or other documents that this is not the case or we think it is not the case. Finally, what we might call ethical mistakes where the Scriptures teach things about our moral duties that just seem wrong – it seems ethically in error and therefore couldn't have been inspired by God.

Last time I suggested with respect to dealing with difficulties that are in the category of inconsistencies, these are very largely reconcilable by understanding the genre of ancient biography and the sort of latitude that historians had to use techniques like telescoping, paraphrase, displacement, transferal of dialogue, and so forth. When we understand these literary techniques that were common to ancient writing then we are not forced to brittle and artificial harmonizations of biblical accounts that seem to be at face value inconsistent with each other. Such techniques lay within the parameters of a truthful narrative.

I also suggested that harmonization can be used on occasion when it is not overly artificial or incredible.

Finally, in some cases, we may simply have to say that we don't know how two accounts are to be reconciled, but we simply hold the truth in tension and hope that perhaps with further information we would know how these accounts are to be reconciled with each other.

That brings us to factual mistakes. Again, I think our response here is somewhat similar. We should do the best that we can (insofar as we are able) to reconcile what the biblical text says with what we learn from secular history with regard to some fact and try to show that, in fact, the biblical narrative is not mistaken.

Let's take this example of Quirinius being the governor of Syria according to Luke during the census that took Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. With regard to Quirinius, many suggestions have been made. Although Quirinius may not have been governor of Syria at that time – that occurred later – nevertheless he could have been in charge of Syria's foreign affairs and therefore in charge of the census that was taken. Therefore,

even if he wasn't technically the governor, he was acting in a governing capacity with respect to Syria's foreign relations.

We know from Luke's accuracy in the book of Acts that he is incredibly careful with respect to the various officials that Paul meets on his missionary trips. This is precisely an area where Luke's accuracy has been demonstrated over and over again. So we should be, I think, rightly reluctant to think that he has erred when it comes to the person of Quirinius.

There was a very interesting note on this subject shared with me by Lee Strobel who was interviewing Dr. John McRay, a professor of New Testament and Archaeology at Wheaton College for his book on *The Case For Christ*.<sup>68</sup> In a taped interview for Lee's book, McRay said the following:

An eminent archaeologist named Jerry Vardaman has done a great deal of work in this regard. He found a coin with the name of Quirinius on it in very small writing or what we call micrographic letters. This places him as proconsul of Syria and Solicia from 11 BC until after the death of Herod.

So this would be exactly the time that Luke says that Quirinius had supervised this census and would be, in fact, the proconsul of Syria. This was apparently published in McRay's 1991 book *Archaeology & the New Testament* on page 154. Is Vardaman correct about this? I don't know. Maybe, maybe not. But I think what it illustrates is that it is at least possible that this is not an error on Luke's part but that this could very well be the case.

I think what the illustration underlines is the fact that our knowledge of the ancient world is extremely sketchy. Therefore it is not at all impossible that certain things just haven't come to light, either in secular literary sources or archaeologically. Therefore, when we see these sorts of factual discrepancies, we can hope that further archaeological exploration and discovery might help to reconcile these.

This isn't at all an irrational sort of faith commitment. This has been an ongoing pattern, in fact, with the biblical documents.

One of my favorite examples concerns a man who was identified in the Old Testament as an Assyrian king named Sargon II. This was widely regarded as an error in these Old Testament narratives because there was absolutely no trace in ancient history of any king of Assyria named Sargon II. No archaeological discoveries, no literary reference to such a man. The Bible seemed to have clearly gotten it wrong about Sargon II. Until archaeologists excavating in the region of Khorsabad unearthed the palace of one Sargon II! Now we know more about Sargon II than we do about any other ancient king of Assyria.

So when we run into these factual discrepancies, like the role of Quirinius, I think it is not at all unreasonable to hope that with future discovery and exploration these tensions could be resolved.

Finally, what about the ethical errors in the Bible? With respect to the so-called Slaughter of the Canaanites, which so many are understandably offended at, I've written fairly extensively on this subject on our Reasonable Faith website in the questions of the week in which I attempt to provide an ethical theory that would make sense and make it consistent that God would be all-loving and all-powerful and yet would issue this command to exterminate the Canaanite tribes that were inhabiting the land when he brought Israel out of Egypt and gave them the land of Canaan. I would refer you to those articles.<sup>69</sup>

It is important to understand that what is commanded here is not genocide. That is a loaded, emotionally tendentious term that unbelievers have used to describe this command. There was, in fact, no command given by God to chase down and pursue these people until they had all been killed off. Rather, the primary command that God gave was to drive them out of the land. These Canaanite tribes or clans that inhabited Canaan were being divested of their land. God had waited 400 years while Israel was held in slavery until the Canaanite culture had become so debased, so incredibly evil (and we know this from secular sources) that they were ripe for God's judgment. God used the armies of Israel to bring judgment upon these clans in exactly the same way that he would later use the pagan armies of Babylon to come in and judge Israel and remove them from the land. So what God does here is he divests these Canaanite clans of the land and delivers the land over to Israel.<sup>70</sup>

He says *drive them out of the land*. If they had all just left as they saw the advancing Israeli armies, nobody needed to be killed. This was not a command to commit genocide. Only those who chose to stay behind were to be utterly exterminated. As I've argued in the articles, I think that God in making so extraordinary command wronged no one, certainly not the adults who were incredibly evil and ripe for judgments – the Israeli armies were the instruments of God's wrath and judgment upon them. With respect to the really, really difficult question of the children that may have been killed, I think there, if you believe in the salvation of infants, their execution was actually their salvation. It saved them from growing up in an incredibly evil culture which would certainly have

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69 See Q&A articles #16 "Slaughter of the Canaanites" at <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/slaughter-of-the-canaanites>, #225 "The 'Slaughter' of the Canaanites Revisited" at <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-slaughter-of-the-canaanites-re-visited>, and #331 "Once More: The Slaughter of the Canaanites" at <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/once-more-the-slaughter-of-the-canaanites> (links accessed January 28, 2015).

resulted in their eternal destruction, whereas this resulted in their eternal salvation. So God did not wrong them in issuing this extraordinary command.

I think that it is quite possible to offer an ethical theory that would enable us to say that there is nothing inconsistent in this narrative between God's being all-loving and all-powerful and his issuing this command to drive the people out of the land and to exterminate anyone who chose to resist and stay behind.

What about the Old Testament laws which certainly, I think, strike us as, in many cases, bizarre and treat people unequally? Particularly, we talked about the treatment of slaves and women which seem to be regarded as second-class persons. We might think that this expresses their moral inferiority – that somehow they don't have the same moral worth as men do.

I think it is very important first of all to keep in mind that these Old Testament laws were provisional. They were case laws for the way Israel was to act at that time. Therefore, they may not have represented God's perfect will or ethical standards.

Take, for example, the Old Testament laws concerning divorce. Jesus was actually confronted with this question in Matthew 19:3ff:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He [Jesus] answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" [If this is God's will for the marriage relationship, the Pharisees naturally ask, then why do we have this law from Moses about giving a certificate of divorce to put your wife away?] He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

So what Jesus is saying here (and this is, by the way, one of the best verses for showing Jesus' incredible sense of divine authority), he revises the God-given Old Testament law of Moses on divorce and says this doesn't represent the perfect will of God.<sup>71</sup> These laws that Moses gave about divorce were because of your hardness of heart. But they don't really represent God's perfect will about these matters.

I wonder, what would Jesus have said – and I so wish this had happened – what if somebody had come to Jesus and said, "Is it permissible to own slaves?" What would Jesus have said if they had done that. Maybe he would have said something like this.

*Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him man and female. He created them and said when God created man he made him in the likeness of God. So they are equal. What therefore God has made equal, let not men make unequal.* We can imagine them saying to him, *Why then did Moses command how one ought to treat slaves? And Jesus said to them, 'For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to hold slaves. But from the beginning it was not so.'* I don't have any difficulty at all imagining that this is something like what Jesus of Nazareth might have responded to that question. You have in the creation narratives in Hebrew Scriptures the foundation, the basis, for the equality of all persons, including men and women, slave and free. Everyone is equal before God. Therefore these Old Testament laws allowing slavery or treating women in certain ways would not be perfect representations of God's will – the way God would really like it. These were concessions on God's part because of their hardness of heart.

So in view of the creation account, these Old Testament laws that imply a sort of second-rate status for women or for men may have been concessions to culture. Or they might have served some other purpose, say, in regulating society. This was a patriarchal culture and these regulations would be useful for regulating and ordering society. But they do not imply in any way less than full human value for slaves and women because that is grounded in the Hebrew creation narratives right in the very beginning.

I don't have any trouble in thinking of these Old Testament laws as, just as Jesus said about the laws of divorce, provisional concessionary laws on God's part and not necessarily representing his perfect will.

What about New Testament ethical teachings such as Jesus' teachings about divorce and prohibiting remarriage, which many have objected to and many Christians have ignored as I said last week? What about the New Testament teachings proscribing homosexual activities? Many people in our culture are deeply offended at that. Well, I think that when you come to these sorts of factors, it may be that we simply need to revise our moral intuitions about these things in light of God's commands to us. If God decrees that marriage is so sacred a union that you should not be remarried after experiencing a divorce, it seems to me that is entirely his prerogative. The marriage relationship as we know from Paul's teaching is a living symbol of the union of Christ and his church. If God wants to prohibit remarriage, that may be hard but I don't see why we would say that he doesn't have the moral right to regulate this institution as he wants. Or with regard to proscribing homosexual activity. The male-female union in marriage is a symbol of Christ's union with his church. So for two men to be engaged in anal intercourse is blasphemous in God's sight with respect to the union of Christ and his church. There is a

deeper significance here.<sup>72</sup> It seems to me, again, that God has the right to do this, however it may offend our modern sensibilities.

What God is asking persons who have homosexual tendencies to do, if they do not marry heterosexuals, is to simply do the same thing that he calls single men and women to do; namely, live a chaste life that honors God and abstains. Single people are called to do exactly the same thing that God would be calling a homosexual person to do.

In this case, I think that we don't need to compromise New Testament ethical teaching, but we need to school our own moral intuitions in light of the person that God is and his authority to be able to issue commands of this sort.

Suppose at the end of the day, however, in dealing with these biblical difficulties, we are convinced that the Bible does have an error in what it teaches. We just can't somehow make sense of it. We are convinced, in fact, that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is false. What would we have to give up in what we've said so far? Well, it seems to me that what we would give up would be premise (2) of part (B) of our defense of biblical inerrancy. That was the premise that said, "Jesus taught that the Scriptures are the inerrant Word of God." Therefore the conclusion was that they are therefore that. The evidence for this premise is not overwhelming or undeniable. Jesus says the Scripture cannot be broken. Perhaps he means there that the central spiritual truths of Scripture are infallible or must be preserved or something of that sort. But I think this is what we would reject. We would say we have not properly interpreted Jesus' attitude toward the Old Testament. We've taken it too strongly to say that there cannot be errors. But I would not give up the other premises. I would first sacrifice this premise.

That would enable you still to hold to the doctrine of inspiration (that the Bible is God's Word and inspired by God) as well as all the rest of Christian teaching that would be in place. What you would sacrifice would be the view that inspiration entails inerrancy. You would give up this premise of the argument for inerrancy. Obviously, I don't think we are at that point at all. I don't think we are pushed to that point. But I do want to say that clearly because some people, as we described the other day, convinced that there is a single error in the Bible, walk away from Christ and apostatize and go to these incredible extremes. Michael Licona was just telling me of a Facebook posting that he recently saw where a kid had become convinced on the basis of the writings of certain New Testament critics that the Bible or the Gospels do contain errors and therefore he had decided to cease to be a Christian and become a deist. This is just so heartbreaking: that a person would walk away from Christ because of something like this when it is so unnecessary. This is not a good argument for denying the deity of Christ or the resurrection of Jesus or his sacrificial atoning death for our sins. What this would mean is you would give up the

doctrine of inerrancy. But you don't have to give up anything more than that. That was why the other day, you remember, I described our system of Christian beliefs as like a web. Near the center of the web are these cardinal beliefs like the existence of God, the deity of Christ, the deity of the Holy Spirit, the atoning death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, our sinfulness before God. Then as you work your way out you get to these more peripheral doctrines related to, say, the sacraments or the Second Coming of Christ or church government. I think it will be out there on the periphery that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy lies. So it could be given up without causing tremendous reverberations in the rest of the web.<sup>73</sup>

I say that simply by way of precaution and concession lest there be anybody hearing my teaching on this subject who is tempted to give up Christianity because he or she thinks that there is an error somewhere in the Bible. That would be an overreaction.

But I don't think we are at that point yet. I think, as I said, we can deal with the difficulties whether inconsistencies, factual discrepancies, or supposed ethical mistakes along the lines that I've described and therefore can hold to a strong doctrine of biblical inerrancy that the Bible is truthful in all that it teaches.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I found that somewhat remarkable that someone would pick one or two things that they find where there is controversy and discard Christianity when 99.9% is found to be accurate, historical. What is even more amazing is that even the earliest transcripts discovered throughout many areas geographically somehow miraculously are the same. To me, one of the reasons that points to the reality of Christianity is the inerrancy of the Scripture. So to try to find one or two places as I know certain presenters and theists do to say *here, you can't trust this document, look, what is wrong?* is so not being open and honest. Because if they really did it would just do the opposite.

*Dr. Craig:* Let me say two things in response to that. I do think you are right in saying that there is a certain loss of perspective that often comes for folks who are struggling with doubts or difficulties. This is not just about errors in the Bible. It can be some other thing that maybe causes you to doubt. It becomes so dominant in their minds that they forget about all of the positive evidence. All they are focused on is the difficulty. It is kind of like a person who holds his thumb up in front of his face and it looks bigger than the Empire State Building in the distance. There is a loss of perspective. When we have one of these difficulties – and certainly they are there – we need to step back as you say and look at, for example, the incredible accuracy of Luke-Acts with respect to ancient

history. That will help us to be much more confident that this reference about Quirinius is not really a mistake after all if we had the full facts.

The other thing I would want to say is that a lot of Christians have been raised in churches that have a very wooden and central view of biblical inerrancy, and the pastor will often give the impression that if there is one niggling mistake in the Bible then Christianity is false, and you have to give it all up; you've got to abandon it completely. I think that we've actually fostered this in our churches often by a mistaken weighing of theological priorities and emphasis.

*Student:* I tend to question whether the inerrancy of Scripture is one of the more peripheral rather than a core doctrine because all of our doctrines we get by way of the written word, even the living Word is presented to us in the written word. I think by making it less than one of the core doctrines it could be a slippery slope.

*Dr. Craig:* That is the fear, of course, isn't it? That it would be a slippery slope. But it would seem to me that thinking that the sort of errors that we've described here exist wouldn't do anything to undermine the central teachings of the New Testament about God, about Jesus, his resurrection from the dead.<sup>74</sup> We have good reasons to believe all of those.

*Student:* I agree with you on those. I think there are reconcilable issues, as you've explained. I just think by labeling inerrancy of the original manuscripts and making that more peripheral than one of our core beliefs because the Scriptures are the source of every doctrine that we study. So I think it should be included.

*Dr. Craig:* OK, well, I guess I would disagree obviously from what I've said. What I would need to do is to try to prevent that slippery slope because we certainly don't want to be on that.

*Student:* That is my main concern.

*Dr. Craig:* I would think that the Scriptures can be true in their central message and core that God wants to communicate to us even if there would be what we might call "don't cares" where there are mistakes – like the number of horses in Solomon's stables or something like that. The "don't cares" it seems to me shouldn't be allowed to overrule these central, cardinal truths. But nevertheless you are raising a good point about the slippery slope. Let me say this in response to your concern. That is one of the reasons that I don't want to back away from this doctrine or give it up. I think that it is safer to have a strong doctrine of biblical inerrancy as a theological safeguard. Therefore, I do want to affirm it and stay with it because it is going to prevent these sorts of aberrations and errors much more readily by having such a teaching.



*Student:* I guess this gets to the point about the slippery slope. I appreciate you bringing up Matthew 19. I think you make a good point about the law in the Old Testament possibly being provisional in some cases. What I would wonder is how can we respond to someone today who might claim that the New Testament is provisional? To say, oh well, it is because of our hardness of heart that the New Testament proscribes homosexuality, for example. If you asked Jesus today he would say it is OK.

*Dr. Craig:* Wouldn't a difference be in Jesus being the Son of God and his teaching being absolutely normative and authoritative for Christians? These Old Testament laws were given, as I say, to just Israel at a certain time and place. We have Jesus teaching that this was provisional with respect to divorce that gives us grounds for that. I don't say this arbitrarily. It is because we have an explicit teaching by Jesus on this. But it seems inconceivable to me that Jesus' teachings about "from the beginning they were created man and woman and for this reason a man leaves his father and mother" that that could have been just provisional. That seems to me to be grounded in his authority and, therefore that is not something we would give up on our own sort of initiative. That would be to arrogate your own judgment above Jesus' which I just don't think we should do as disciples of Jesus. We follow what he teaches.

*Student:* I wanted to ask a question related to your original question about where do we place the doctrine of biblical inerrancy in the web. I wonder if it would be a fair statement to say that it is a central doctrine, but a strict interpretation is not necessary for that. The concept of the information is accurate over all is centrally important.

*Dr. Craig:* That is a very good point. That goes back to how we define the biblical doctrine of inerrancy. Some detractors of inerrancy say that this is just a peculiarity of the evangelical fundamentalist subculture, and that this is not the historic position of the Christian church.<sup>75</sup> But I think that that is a misrepresentation based precisely upon what you say. If we think of inerrancy as being the doctrine that the Bible is true in everything that it teaches then that gives you a very flexible doctrine. So if the Bible, say, has, as I indicated, stories in it that suggest a three-decker cosmology where hell is down there, we are here in the middle, and heaven is up there, the Bible isn't teaching cosmology even if the authors of the Scripture believed in such a thing. It is not teaching science with respect to these kinds of things. That would be a very flexible doctrine of inerrancy that would allow you to say – and this, I think, is the historic position of the Christian church – that the Bible is God's Word and is therefore truthful in all that it teaches and would have us believe. But, as I say, it wouldn't include things like what is the smallest seed or do we live in a three-decker universe, or things of that sort.

*Student:* A lot of good stuff, but I wanted to recommend a book on the Canaanite campaigns and so on. Paul Copan wrote a book about these various campaigns – *Is God a Moral Monster?* There is a lot of good stuff in that.

*Dr. Craig:* Let me just comment on that before you go on. Paul's book is excellent. It is especially good on the so-called institution of "slavery" in the Old Testament. I put that in quotation marks because we think in America of slavery in terms of the experience of the American South before the Civil War. As Paul shows, slavery in the Old Testament wasn't at all like that. What it was was an anti-poverty program because there weren't any sort of welfare states or societal safety nets. It was a way for a man to keep his family together, to sell himself as a slave to someone else, work off his debts, and maintain his self-respect. In many ways it was a superior anti-poverty program to the sort of dependency culture that the welfare state fosters. So that is in Paul's book. I found it to be very illuminating.

Paul, though, does take a different view of the Canaanite slaughter than I do. He says that these commands are examples of religious hyperbole that aren't literal. It is like when a high school basketball player says, "We slaughtered them last night" or "We killed them." It is hyperbole. Paul tries to show that in the ancient world military commanders would use this kind of religious hyperbole but it wasn't meant literally. I am not convinced of that. So I take the worst case scenario. Let's suppose that they are literal commands. Can we deal with them? You can see my defense as a kind of second line of defense. You can see Paul's as the first line if you want. It is not literal; it is hyperbole. Mine would be, well, but if it is, I still think there is an answer.

*Student:* In relation to the other point on the Levitical law, you have servants like in the case of Abraham where he didn't have the child coming and he's getting older and he says I am going to let my servant be my heir. So in many cases these were people that were members of the household and they would inherit and share in the household. Then behavior, for example, if the master of a household rapes his servant girl he was commanded to marry her and not divorce her for any reason. These were unheard of standards.

*Dr. Craig:* That is a very good point. We judge these laws through the rearview mirror of 2,000 years of Christian history in which our moral institutions and laws have been reshaped by the leavening effect of Christianity on our culture. But when you compare them to the ancient world and the sort of systems that existed then, as you said, these were elevated moral laws that are given in the Old Testament. They are so far above the crass systems that existed in the ancient world. That is entirely right.<sup>76</sup> As I suggested, when you look at the creation story of man and woman being created equal in God's

image, that just removes any basis for seeing these laws or interpreting these laws as teaching less than the full human worth and dignity of women and slaves and servants and so forth. They would be at best provisional regulations, as I said.

*Student:* I once read where, of the major religions, that Judeo-Christianity was the only one that had archaeological support throughout its history. Others could not lean upon archaeology to buttress what they claim in their canons. My question to you is: has there ever been a case where an archaeological find has debunked or refuted what is in our canon as opposed to supporting what was in them.

*Dr. Craig:* I wouldn't say refuted but there are certainly difficulties. One of the major questions that remains is the absence of archaeological evidence for a 400-year sojourn of Israel in Egypt. The whole story of the exodus. There is some trace of a tribal group called the Hyksos which could have been identified with the Hebrews. But for the most part, this evidence has either disappeared or not been excavated or whatever. So that would be a challenge that still remains.

*Student:* Right, but understand what I'm asking. I am not asking about the absence of information because, like you said, for years nothing about Sargon II was ever found. But then it was found. What I am asking is, has there been something in our Bible – in our canon – that has been postulated as a fact but then archaeological . . .

*Dr. Craig:* One example, again, might be the walls of Jericho. Again, this is a matter of big debate as to whether the archaeology of Jericho is consistent with the way the walls were supposed to have fallen down. There is some that claim that it is not. So that is one that is debated. It is not like archaeology just gives a completely clean slate to the Bible. There still are these difficulties. But for the most part it has been overwhelmingly confirmatory, and that is unique to Judaism and Christianity. Nelson Glueck, who was a very world famous archaeologist, said that he was prepared to go on record as saying that no archaeological finding in history has ever controverted the accuracy of the biblical narrative decisively.

## **END DISCUSSION**

We will bring it to a close with that. Next time we will take up a question that several of you have already alluded to. That is, how do we know which books have been inspired by God?<sup>77</sup>

## Lecture 10: Canonicity

Today we turn to the subject of canonicity.

If the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture is true, then there is automatically drawn a line between those books which are inspired and those which are not. There are inspired books, and there are books that are not inspired. So the doctrine of inspiration implies that there is an authoritative body of inspired literature with precise literary limits to it. This body of writings is inspired and is therefore the Word of God to us. These writings therefore belong to what is called the “canon of Scripture.”

What do we mean by the word “canon” with one “n” not two? “Canon” is a word that means *rule* or *standard*. When we talk about canonicity, we are talking about those literary limits to inspired books that are God’s Word to us. The canonicity of Scripture concerns the question of which writings belong to this inspired body of literature to which we give allegiance as authoritative. This is the question of the canon of Scripture – which books ought to be in the Bible?

Let’s treat this question with respect to the Old Testament and the New Testament separately.

With respect to the Old Testament, Jesus and the apostles accepted the Jewish canon of Scripture that existed at that time. The Hebrew Bible which was used by Jesus himself, as well as the apostles, is the same Bible that Protestants today call the Old Testament. So Jesus used the same Old Testament canon of Scripture that Protestants recognize today. The twenty-four books of the so-called Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible are the books which were recognized by Jesus to be inspired by God and to be God’s Word to us. This Masoretic Text is the same text that is recognized by rabbinical Judaism as the canon of the Hebrew Bible. It is the Bible that was used by Jesus.

There is, in addition to this Hebrew Bible, a Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. This is usually abbreviated by the Roman numeral LXX, for 70. The Septuagint was a translation of the Old Testament that was used in Egypt by Hellenized Jews. That is to say, Jews who were Greek-speaking and lived in a Greek culture. In this Greek version of the Old Testament, there are a number of books that are accepted as part of the Old Testament canon by Roman Catholic and also by Eastern Orthodox confessions. This is where these additional books of the Old Testament recognized by Catholic and Orthodox churches come from. They are part of the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. These are referred to as the Old Testament “apocryphal books” or the “deuterocanonical books.” These are not the same thing as the apocryphal books of the New Testament, which I’ll say something about

later. When people talk about the New Testament apocrypha, they are talking about books that were written hundreds of years later than the time of Jesus and are not recognized by any Christian confession as belonging to the canon of Scripture. But with respect to the Old Testament apocrypha, as I say, Catholic and Orthodox churches do recognize these additional books found in the Septuagint as part of the Old Testament canon.<sup>78</sup> These apocryphal books include things like Tobit, Judith, certain additions to the book of Esther, certain additions to the book of Daniel, a book called the Wisdom of Solomon, and 1st and 2nd Maccabees, among others. These are to be found in your Roman Catholic Bible today. The Greek Orthodox will also accept additional books like Psalm 151 and others. These would be part of the Orthodox church's canon.

The earliest list that we have in church history of the canon of the Old Testament comes from a man named Melito of Sardis who flourished around AD 175. He lists all of the Old Testament books that are recognized by Jews and Protestants except for the book of Esther. He includes all of the typical canonical books that we would recognize except Esther. He does also add the Wisdom of Solomon, which was one of those apocryphal books that I mentioned. That is the earliest list that we have among the church fathers for the Old Testament.

So with respect to the canon of the Old Testament, I think it is relatively uncontroversial when we say that we accept the same canon of Scripture that Jesus himself accepted, and are therefore on very solid grounds.

What about the New Testament? Since this comes after the time of Christ, this is somewhat more difficult to establish. With respect to the New Testament, Jesus promised his disciples that he would, through the Holy Spirit, bring to their remembrance everything that he had spoken to them and taught them. Look at the promises, for example, in John 14, 15, and 16. First, John 14:26. Jesus says, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." Then flipping over to John 15:26-27: "But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning." And then John 16:13: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." Here Jesus, in commissioning the disciples to be witnesses of what he has taught them and said to them because they were with him from the beginning, are promised the Holy Spirit to give them an accurate remembrance of what Jesus had said to them and taught them.

When you look at the remainder of the New Testament, you find that the apostles had a firm conviction that the Gospel which they were preaching was the Word of God. It is remarkable that they would refer to this message – this Gospel that they proclaimed – as God’s Word.

For example, look at 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13:

For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behavior to you believers; for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.<sup>79</sup>

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Here Paul speaks of the Gospel of God, which was preached to the Thessalonians, and commends them because they recognized it and received it, not as the word of men, but this was the very Word of God that was being proclaimed to them.

Also in Galatians 1:11-12: “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” Here, again, Paul says, *This isn’t man’s Gospel; this is a revelation from God – from Jesus Christ – and that is what I am proclaiming to you.*

Also in 1 Corinthians 14:36-37:

What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?

If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord.

Here Paul asserts his authority as an apostle and he says, *This is the Word of God that has come to you. It is a command of the Lord. Anyone who is spiritual should recognize it as such. This is not something that is merely human.*

So the apostles had this strong conviction that in the power of the Holy Spirit they were proclaiming the very Word of God.

This is all the more remarkable when you realize that by the time of the first century, it was widely believed in Judaism that prophecy had ceased – that there were no more prophets speaking the Word of God. 1 Maccabees 9:27, which is one of those apocryphal books from the intertestamental period, says, “There was great distress in Israel such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them.” Here Maccabees refers to the fact that prophets had ceased to appear in Israel.

In the first volume of his commentary on the book of Acts, Craig Keener makes the following observation,

Josephus [who was a first century Jewish historian] contends that there has been no exact succession of prophets since the time of Artaxerxes, which is why no books had been accorded canonical authority since that time. . . .

That is why there were no more books added to the Jewish canon – because, according to Josephus, prophets had ceased to appear.

Moreover, although prophecy continued, the title ‘prophet’ belongs only to the past and to the future.

There would come at the end of history – at the end time – another prophet. But until then, prophets belong only to the past, according to Josephus.

Josephus used the term ‘prophets’ for his time only when he spoke of false ‘prophets.’ . . . No one denied that revelatory experiences continued to be possible. But biblical prophecy was seen as different from postbiblical prophecy; thus, in Josephus and Philo [Philo is another first century writer in Alexandria, Egypt – one of those Hellenized Jews that I spoke of.<sup>80</sup>] ‘pneuma [or *spirit*, like the Holy Spirit] is confined to prophecy in the biblical period,’ giving a special role to the canon. . . .

So prophesy, through the Holy Spirit (which is what gave canonical status to these Old Testament books), is confined to the past according Philo and Josephus. Keener goes on to say,

even where prophecy continued, it was rarely seen in the same terms as OT prophecy. Josephus and Philo do not associate current inspiration with the Spirit; Qumran [this is the Dead Sea Scroll community – the Essenes that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls] documents associates prophecy and the Spirit only with the past. . . . The early Christians seem to be noteworthy in overcoming this reluctance to apply the designation to contemporary figures. (pp. 890-1, 894)

So the proclamation of the apostles that they were announcing the Word of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit really broke the mold for first century Judaism which believed that that type of prophesy had ceased. The apostles believed that in the power of the Holy Spirit they were proclaiming the very Word of God to their hearers. Thus they put their proclamation on the same level as the Old Testament canonical books.

The letters that were left behind by these apostles were very rapidly accepted as being on a par with Old Testament Scriptures. We see this in 2 Peter 3:15b-16. There we read,

So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. [Here he is speaking of the Pauline epistles which he identifies as being wisdom given from God to Paul.] There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

So by the time that the epistles of Peter were written we see that Paul's letters were already being accepted as being on a par with Old Testament Scriptures.

When you read the sub-apostolic church fathers, that is to say, those church fathers who wrote immediately after the apostles, we find them distinguishing very clearly between their own writings and the writings of the apostles that are found in the New Testament. They did not regard their own work as inspired, but they did treat the works that we today find in the New Testament as being authoritative. For example, Ignatius, who is one of the very earliest of the sub-apostolic fathers, much earlier than the canon of Scripture being established, already spoke of a collection of writings which he called "the Gospels and the apostles." These were evidently the four Gospels and certain epistles of the New Testament written by people like Paul. This would be the early evidence of the canon of Scripture already being accepted, including the four Gospels and various epistles.

From the very beginning, these four Gospels and the book of Acts were never doubted by anyone. Everyone recognized that the four Gospels and the book of Acts were part of authoritative Scripture. It wasn't the case that the church selected these books to be in the canon, or that they decreed that these books would be regarded as authoritative. Rather these books imposed themselves upon the early church.<sup>81</sup> It was never doubted that these were the correct record of the life of Jesus, and his teachings, and the history of the early church. These were not selected or declared to be authoritative. They simply imposed themselves upon the early church and were recognized right from the very beginning.

In fact, even those who doubted the canonicity of some books that are today included in the canon of the New Testament always accepted the four Gospels, the book of Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, 1 John, and 1 Peter. That is already a substantial enough canon to



establish fundamental Christian doctrine as authoritative. These books were accepted as authoritative Scripture even by persons who doubted some of the other books that were included eventually in the canon.

In the eastern part of the empire – that is to say, in the Greek-speaking eastern empire of Rome – there were doubts expressed about the book of Revelation, or (as it is sometimes called) The Apocalypse of John. Some doubted the book of Revelation was really authoritative Scripture. In the west (the Latin part of the empire), some church fathers expressed doubts about the book of Hebrews. They didn't think that that should be an authoritative book. So there was some doubt expressed about those two books. But the rest of those books that I mentioned were universally recognized.

In AD 175 we have the earliest list of canonical books belonging to the New Testament. This is a list that was discovered by an Italian scholar named Ludovico Antonio Muratori, and so it is called the Muratorian Canon. The Muratorian Canon dates from around AD 175, as I say. What belongs in this list? What is listed in the Muratorian Canon? It includes the four Gospels, the book of Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, the book of Jude, two letters of John, and the book of Revelation or the Apocalypse of John. It doesn't mention Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, or James. Interestingly enough, the Muratorian Canon does accept the Wisdom of Solomon as canonical. It also accepts the Apocalypse of Peter, which is not in our New Testament today. This Apocalypse of Peter is not the same thing as a Gnostic document that goes by a somewhat similar name; this is something different, and the Muratorian Canon includes it.

In the year AD 200 another church father named Caius provides a similar list of accepted books. He lists the same twenty-one canonical books that are found in the Muratorian Canon, so this shows that there was a pretty firm conviction about those books at that time.

I think you can see from the lists of New Testament books that I've provided that the issue of canonicity was never about the question, "Are there things outside the New Testament that should have been included in it?" Rather the doubts were, "Are there things in the New Testament that should have been left out?" There were some doubts expressed by certain church fathers about Hebrews and Revelation, for example. But, if anything, what we have in the canon would be too many books, but not too few! So we don't need to worry that there may be some inspired book that has been left out of the canon and that therefore we are deficient because we lack this book in our authoritative Bible.<sup>82</sup> Nobody was worried about that. The only concern was: Did something get in that should have been left out?

By the year AD 340, the church father Eusebius gives the list of the canonical books of the New Testament that we accept today by all Christian denominations whether Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox.

We might ask the question: what qualifies a book to be in the canon? The way Protestants answer this question is typically by saying that the canonical books have to come out of the apostolic circle. Either they were written directly by an apostle or they were written by those who were associates of the apostles. For example, Luke. Luke wasn't an apostle, but as an author of a Gospel and an associate of the apostles, he comes out of the early apostolic circle. Having an origin in the apostolic circle would be a necessary condition for being canonical. Also, consistency with the other books already recognized as canonical would be a necessary condition of being in the canon. You couldn't have something in the canon that was inconsistent with the other canonical books. And then, finally, frankly, Protestants trust in the Holy Spirit to guide the church in recognizing those books of Scripture in which we hear the Word of God spoken to us. This criterion is admittedly more subjective, but it is saying that through the words of the New Testament that have been assembled we sense that God speaks to us through these books, and therefore we believe that these are the limits of the canon.

I don't think, however, that we should think of the canon as something that is decided upon by men. I think it is rather the opposite, as we've seen. These books rather impose themselves upon the church. The church recognized them as being authoritative and therefore part of the canon. There was never any question that the apocryphal Gospels, for example, and other forgeries that were written centuries later should ever been included in the canon. Popularizers like Dan Brown in his book *The DaVinci Code*, who present the church as being some sort of a conspiratorial alliance to destroy these other Gospels and prevent them from becoming part of the Bible, is just a total fabrication and distortion of church history. Right from the very earliest time, the Gospels and Acts imposed themselves as the authoritative record of the life of Jesus, and everybody knew that these later so-called apocryphal gospels like the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Philip, and so forth were forgeries that arose decades, even centuries, after the death of Jesus and therefore were spurious.

The only question that the church really faced was with regard to certain books. There were some doubts expressed as to whether or not they should be in the canon. But here is what is critical, I think. Even if you rejected those books as canonical – say you didn't admit Hebrews or Revelation – nothing essential to Christian doctrine would be lost because there is no Christian doctrine that is taught uniquely by those books and depends solely upon those books. There is no harm in recognizing them as canonical since they are in harmony doctrinally with the indisputable books of the canon. I think we simply trust God in providentially ordering history such that these books which he has inspired

commended themselves to the early church fathers and imposed themselves upon the church from a very early date.<sup>83</sup>

### **START DISCUSSION**

**Student:** Wasn't it true there were people coming into the church bringing false doctrine, and these books were examples of these other attempts to bring false doctrine into the church?

**Dr. Craig:** Yes, you are correct. That's right. When you look at these apocryphal gospels, these are not really Christian documents. They are Gnostic documents. They come out of pagan philosophy and religion. Jesus is merely used as a convenient mouthpiece for spouting Gnostic doctrine. If you look at something like the Gospel of Thomas, for example, this isn't a life of Jesus. Jesus is just like the ventriloquist dummy that is then made to spout the Gnostic doctrine. You are quite right that there were certainly efforts to use Jesus and Christianity as a means of propagating pagan philosophical and religious thought. As I say, the church repudiated these.

**Student:** At Constantinople?

**Dr. Craig:** At the Council of Nicaea? That was where the Arian heresy was condemned, which said that Christ or Jesus is similar in essence to the Father but he is not the same in essence to the Father – that the Father alone is truly God, and Jesus is a kind of god with a lowercase “g.” He is the Father's charge, in effect; he is a creature. He is made by God. They said he was begotten but he was made or created by God, and therefore not really God, however exalted and elevated he may have been. The primary purpose of the Council of Nicaea was to condemn this Arian heresy and affirm the full equality of the Son and Father. We will talk about that in some detail when we get to the doctrine of the Trinity.

### **END DISCUSSION**

We are out of time. We can continue this discussion next time if you would like.

*[Closing prayer]*<sup>84</sup>

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83 30:01

84 Total Running Time: 35:26 (Copyright © 2015 William Lane Craig)